



琥珀之劍

Heroes of Amber

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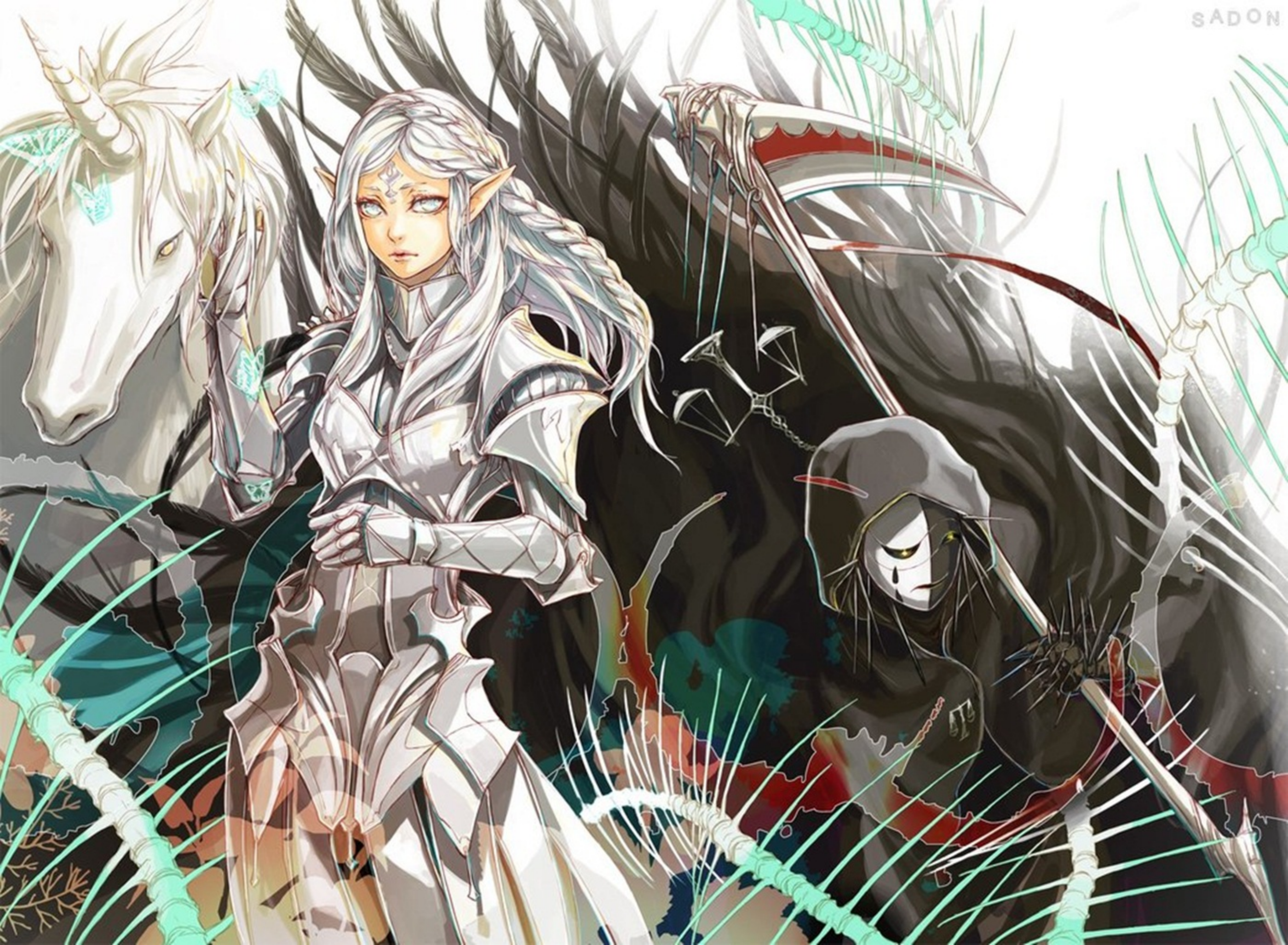
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**-Author-
Fei Yan**

**-Artist-
Sadon999**

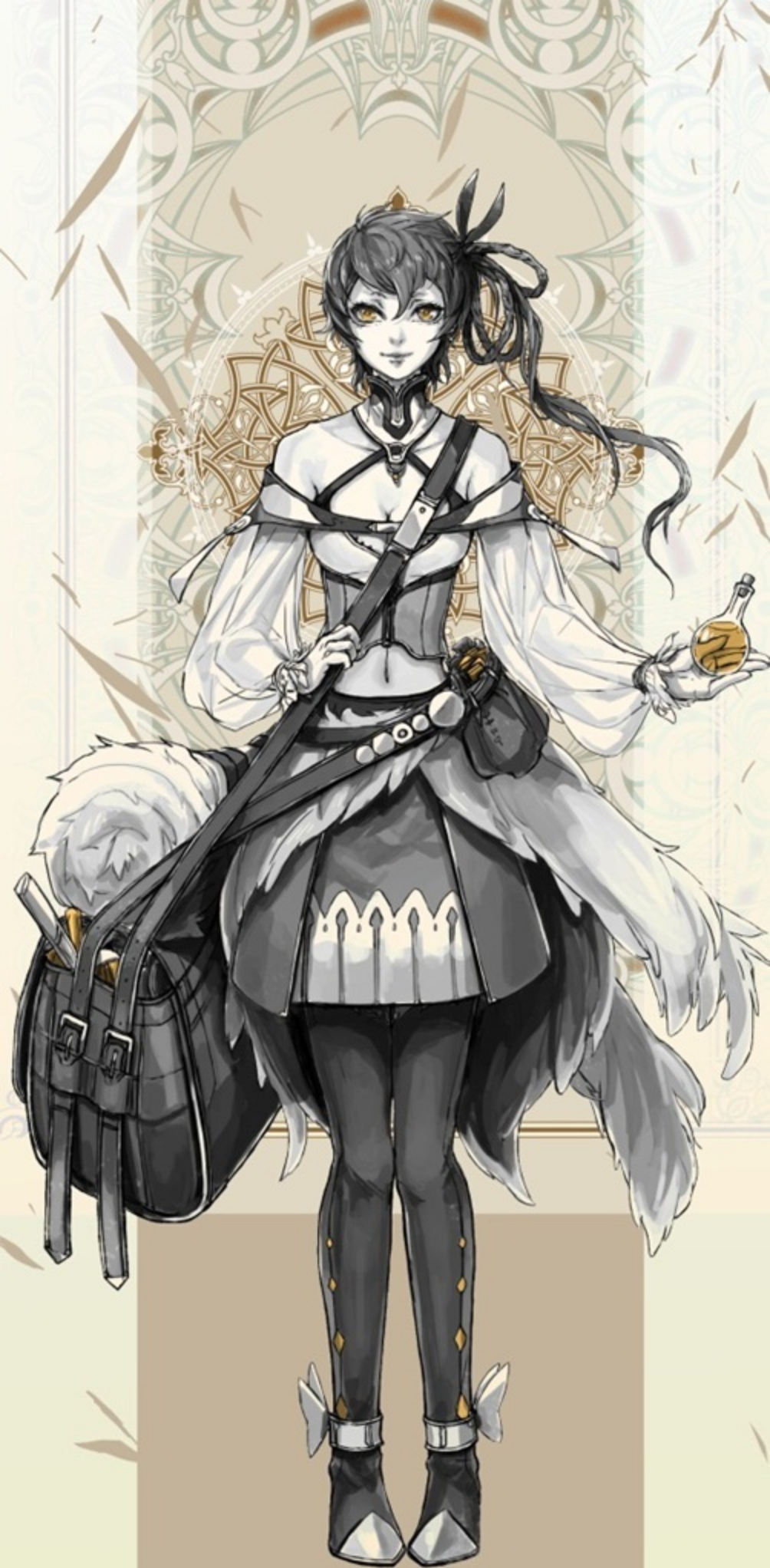
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Brendel



Romaine



Freya



Ciel



Princess Gryphine



Rauze



Amandina

Chapter 111

Planeswalker's Legacy (1)

"These... are?" Brendel's eyes looked a bit vacant.

"They like exactly what they are, my lord," The Nightsong Tiger's lips were formed into a straight line to show a sense of mystery and calmness, but his light brown irises were filled excitement: "These are all Cards of Fate!"

He opened the book, flipped the pages and pointed at the cards.

"I know what they are, but why are there so many cards?" Brendel's eyes were glued to the thick lambskin pages.

There seemed to be six cards in every page and Brendel guessed there were approximately nine thick pages in this book.

"Hmm," The Nightsong Tiger's eyebrow strained a little: "I think it's better to let Ciel answer my lord—"

"Ciel? You know him?" Brendel looked up at him with a questioning look.

"Yes. The cards in your deck are linked together. From a certain point of view, we exist in the same Dimensional Space that my lord created. If we are not summoned, we will stay in the lands that make up the space. The Land Card that you possess pays the Wealth and Element Points required for us. It goes without saying the higher the Card's rank is, the more wealth you need to pay." *(TL: I understand this as, Land Card is used to pay for summoning a creature, and when a creature goes into the graveyard, it goes back to that specific land.)*

"Right." Brendel took note of the Dimension Space, and checked the remaining resources he had.

– Nature Element: 6 points

– Water Element: 6 points

- Wealth: 67 points

- Reputation: 17 points

His bag also contained Element Crystals; half of them were Fire Crystals.

“You didn’t tell me these things before. Also for some reason, these words doesn’t sound like something you would say.”

The Nightsong Tiger laughed: “Haha. You’re indeed sharp, my lord. These are Ciel’s exact words. I’m simply acting as a messenger.”

“You can converse with him right now?”

The Nightsong Tiger nodded.

“I see,” Brendel said: “If that’s the case, ask him to tell me exactly how the Dark Bishop came to get hold of this collection. I remember that you told me that only Planewalkers, his summons and their permitted followers are able to see them for what they are. Why did this bastard have so many cards? Was he a Planeswalker or something similar, or did you get these cards from something else?”

“No, this is definitely taken from the Dark Bishop, but they are different from the normal cards, this is a Legacy-”

“Wait, what is a Legacy?” Brendel interrupted.

The Nightsong Tiger paused for a while as though he was waiting for an answer, then looked at Brendel and said: “Ciel says that a Planeswalker’s life is finite. When a Planeswalker reaches the end of his life, the cards that he collects will be sealed. Under this condition, the cards will materialize and turn solid. Even a normal person is able to see and touch them in this state. These cards would appear to be no different from a fortune teller’s tarot cards to them. However, to a Planeswalker, they are assets and wealth left behind from another Planeswalker. There are other reasons as to how a collection of cards can be discovered but this is the primary reason.”

“You mean to say that the Dark Bishop got them by chance, but he has no idea what they are?”

“Ciel says that possibility is very high, but he also says that it might be possible that my

lord's conjecture the Dark Bishop is a Planeswalker, is the correct answer."

Brendel shook his head, if it was true that the Dark Bishop was a Planeswalker, he would have used the cards on him. Ciel's reasoning was most likely the correct answer, but he was trying to flatter him.

"If that is the case, isn't it possible for Planeswalkers to steal each other's cards?" He asked after thinking for a short while.

"There's the possibility, but the majority of the Planeswalkers wouldn't fight to the death over them. Many of the cards are not unique and unless they are truly insane, very few will kill over these cards."

"What do you mean by unique?"

"There are many duplicate cards in a different location at any given time. Even a newly formed series like the Eversong Card can have similar cards. My lord is able to summon a Highland Squire, Ciel, to work for you. Other Planeswalkers are able to do the same and summon a Highland Squire, except they would summon other names and not specifically Ciel. There might be conditions and rules for their summons to appear, but once they do so, they will not change—" The Nightsong Tiger suddenly shrugged as he raised his hands: "If my lord wants to summon a female eye-candy mercenary commander, with golden flowing hair and azure eyes to work for you, that wouldn't be possible. Of course, the first half of my reply is from Ciel, the latter half is my humble addition."

[Are you telling me that I have a preference for older men?] The corner of Brendel's eyes twitched.

"Your input is unnecessary. You mentioned something about seals earlier, does that mean I'm unable to use these cards directly?"

The Nightsong Tiger nodded.

"And why is that?"

The cards were brought closer to Brendel.

"Hmm?"

“Take the collection, look at the cards and you will know.”

Brendel took over the book and touched one of the cards.

- 1400 Reputation

Words immediately popped up, and he focused on the card to get a better look.

- Platinum Angel

- (The Immortal Alliance XIX)

- Requirements: Willpower 40, Mana Points 50

- When Platinum Angel is on the battlefield, the Summoner will not die from injuries.

- Maintenance: When Platinum Angel is in the battlefield, pay 10 Willpower, 10 Gems every day.

- ‘The secret of immortality is buried in the Angel’s heart.’

- Conditions: Pay 1400 Reputation to unseal this card.

[1400 reputation?! Marsha above, I don’t think I can even steal that much, are you toying with me!]

Brendel nearly dropped the card from his hand. The Highland Squire Card gave 1 Reputation per day and he had got 17 reputation from it thus far. Ever since the card went into the grave, it stopped giving out resources.

He stared at the faceless Platinum Angel which was drawn in a painterly style wordlessly for a moment, then moved on to the next card subconsciously:

- Balm of Life

- (The Immortal Alliance X)

- Requirements: Light Element Points 10, Mana Points 50

- [Divine Equipment/Wondrous Artifact]

– Tap card and pay 5 Light EP. Restore half of your life points and shuffle Balm of Life and your graveyard into your deck.

– ‘The life stored in this bottle doesn’t suit my taste, neither does it taste fresh, but at least the effect is there.’ – Baron Cinder

– Conditions: Pay 2000 Wealth to unseal this card.

Brendel bit his lips to resist throwing the card onto the ground. There was a bit of wealth saved up by him, but it was definitely not 2000 wealth. He started to wonder if the Nightsong Tiger brought the book over in order to hurt his pride. The cards looked really powerful, but it was impossible for him to do anything with it. He glanced at him and thought for a while, but he did not recall anything that he did wrongly towards the mercenary. He flipped the pages with suspicion but discovered the quality of the cards became lower and lower, and at the same time the cost was much more acceptable.

[Lord of Holy Flames, Time Relapse, Iona’s judgment, Lion Nirya... White and Black Cards occupy half of this collection’s cards, then there’s a few red cards, as well as several Land cards.]

Brendel ignored the cards which required high amounts of Wealth and Reputation. A few cards had the requirement of the Planewalker to have a certain level, which he also ignored. He was still at level 1 and there did not seem to be anything in the cards that would raise his level. The Nightsong Tiger also expressed that he did not know anything about raising the Planeswalker’s levels.

Some of the cards required things or terms that Brendel had not seen or heard any hints about them. They were some strange resources needed, or he had to have specific lands and even barriers. The card ‘Time Relapse’, for example, required to have the profession ‘Wizard’ at level twenty. He flipped through the book and discovered there were ten cards that he could afford.

[Vanguards of Blood, Black Earth Lion, Hymn of Light, Loxar’s market, Rougen’s Swamp, Land of Eternity, etc, etc... Pristine Archangel. I can unseal three of them with what I have right now. The first thing I need to get is obviously the swamp for Dark Element Points.]

Brendel unsealed the card and paid 10 Wealth for it. When he inspected the card, he

realized that regardless of whether the card was tapped or not, he would still only get 1 Dark Element Point. It was much weaker than the other land card that he had.

(TL: That other card is the Land of the Holy Tree card. He killed the Golden Demonic Tree and got that. Only untapped Land Cards can be installed with certain things. There's a gold mine card installed on this card so he can't tap it, otherwise he can't get the Wealth. If he does tap the land card, he gains 2 Nature EP and 1 Water EP. Tapped cards reset every day.)

But it solved half of the requirements to maintain the Unicorn Knight, and it was a matter of Wealth points now.

Therefore he chose to unseal Loxar's market. It provided 2 Wealth points and 1 Earth EP per day, and if he tapped it and paid 2 Reputation, provided 6 Wealth. This unique Land Card required 50 Wealth which prevented anymore redemption of other Land cards. *(TL: Medissa requires 6 wealth and 1 Dark EP per day.)*

The third card he unsealed was the Pristine Archangel.

- Pristine Archangel
- (The Immortal Alliance III)
- Light Element Points 50
- [Angel creature/Knight, level 20 Elite]
- When Pristine Angel enters the battlefield, shuffle one non-black Card from the Graveyard into your deck.
- Pay 1 Light EP every day when Pristine Archangel is in the field.
- 'The light of mercy descends from the sky, the messenger of the Gods emerges forth from the light.'

Although Brendel was able to unseal the card, he had no related Land cards that paid Light EP, and he had no Light Crystals either, so it was still a dream to get Ciel or the Wind Spirit Spiders out from the graveyard. He patted the Nightsong Tiger's shoulders and told him to tell Ciel to wait a little longer.

“...Hold on, didn't you tell me the last time that only the Dark Element Cards are able to retrieve the cards in the graveyard?” Brendel suddenly looked suspiciously at him.

“...I was guessing.” The veteran mercenary hesitated for a long time before he answered.

Brendel felt tears forming in his mind from frustration.

Chapter 112

Planeswalker's Legacy (2)

[Creature cards like Vanguard of Blood and the Black Earth Lion, etc, all these are level 20-30 Elites, but they are only useful for short-term benefits. I should invest my points into redeeming the two Fire Land Cards and the only Wind Land Card in the book. It's common sense to have provision first in order for an army to be effective.]

Brendel gave a long sigh as he closed the book.

[After that, the next two targets would be the Ocean Gem at 60 Wealth, and the Silver Swallow-tailed Flag at 100 Wealth. The former card raises Wealth, and the latter raises Reputation. These cards will fulfill my basic needs and I can think about the higher grade cards next. Hmm... The Platinum Angel, a level 60 Elite. I would be able to go anywhere in Randner's southern region easily if I have that.]

He had only hoped to get Dark Crystals to summon Medissa for a short time. It was a terrible transaction if he had to spend 15 Dark EP just to summon her, and his Elemental Pool's limit was too small to sustain her too. Even though it could not be called the perfect reward because of the limitations, this result was beyond his expectations.

With the Land cards he had now, he would be able to maintain her in the battlefield for quite some time. With a Gold-ranked fighter at his side, the southern region and the outer lands that appeared risky to search in was less fraught with dangers now.

He even managed to get a card that could dig into his graveyard.

[Well, I'll ask the Nightsong Tiger to confirm with Ciel about the ease of getting another Land card later. The younger squire is much more adorable compared to this middle-aged dude who's not reliable.]

Brendel finally placed his focus back on the current situation. The explosions most likely alerted Conrad and Hewjil. Based from the information from the prisoners, Medissa's pendant was most likely on Hewjil, and the battle ahead was most likely going to be much worse than the battle that he had just now.

“Is there anything else?” Brendel put the book into his bag and looked back at the Nightsong Tiger.

“Anything else?” The Nightsong Tiger looked back blankly.

“Things like Dark Crystals.”

“Oh,” The Nightsong Commander showed a look of comprehension, “The Dark Bishop left behind quite a bit of them after he exploded himself, but it somehow fused together to the ground. I have already gotten my subordinates to knock them loose.”

Brendel nodded as he knew that there was no need to worry about the Dark EP any more. Gamers easily got forty to fifty crystals from killing a Dark Bishop, and the cheapest crystals around in the auctions were certainly the Dark Element Crystals. Fire Element Crystals were the next in line for the cheapest crystals.

“Is there anything else that you discovered?”

“Oh, yes, there’s something strange.” The Nightsong Tiger nodded and took out a black heavy-looking rock: “This was also found by Felaern.”

[A rock with blood-like spots on them... Right, this is the artifact that’s used to control a God Acolyte like Scarlett. Once she is completely turned, she’s no different from a monster and will have lost her original personality.]

There was the option to use this artifact to control Scarlett who would become something much stronger if she turned, but the youth felt great disdain to watch a person lose her soul bit by bit.

He took over the rock and crushed it with his hand—

“My lord?” The Nightsong Tiger jumped.

“Destroying this will allow the Blood of Gods to be dormant for a while. Instruct the Grey Wolves Mercenaries to tell that girl to look for me after she wakes up.”

The Nightsong Tiger nodded and prepared to leave, but Brendel called him back as he patted his hands to get rid of the rock’s residues: “Hold on.”

“What is it, my lord?”

“Ciel said that you and him are creations that are rooted in the Dimension Space created by my Land Cards?”

The Nightsong Tiger nodded.

Brendel inspected his Land Cards in his mind. He was like a giant in the air viewing all these areas. In that alternate world, he could see the edge of the Land of the Holy Tree constructed in his mind, with a bridge leading to a black swamp, and at both the edges of these lands was a small town. The town was most likely Loxar’s Market.

“Are you able to construct things in that area?” He pulled himself out from that world.

“Yes, but...” The Nightsong Tiger hesitated before explaining things in detail: “The core of these areas is certainly comprised of Land Cards, and Resource Cards attached to such Land Cards pay out Wealth and other Resources. While it is true that you can use summons to gather resources from the Land Cards, but my lord’s powers as a Planeswalker... is still too... unfamiliar.”

The Nightsong Tiger tried to find a word to describe Brendel’s insufficient abilities.

“Of course, my lord’s current cards are inadequate. Ciel is telling me that this Dimension Space can be seen as an entire world by itself. If my lord concentrates on collecting more cards, they would form the shape of this world, and allow it to become the Planeswalker’s strength. This world is ultimately formed because of the cards’ connection with each other.”

“I see.” Brendel muttered.

“Is there anything else, my lord?”

“Yes, inform the men to prepare to move out; we only attained one single victory and our battles are far from over—”

“As you command.”

===== Conrad POV =====

When Conrad met up with Hewjil again, it was afternoon on the second day. He had discovered something was wrong during midnight when he heard faint explosions, but Hewjil was so far ahead with his lack of caution that it was only till morning before

Conrad's dragoon riders under his command reached Hewjil.

On the other hand, the dragoon scouts that he sent to the Dark Bishop were still missing.

Conrad felt that the situation was becoming worse, and was even out of his predictions. He made sure the dragoons kept in contact with Hewjil all the time, while moving back in the Dark Bishop's path with full speed. He was afraid that Brendel and his men escaped with their successful assault on the Dark Bishop and completely left their area of control within this forest.

If that was the case, their actions were completely wasted, with the result of losing a leader and soldiers.

He did not even think for a moment that Brendel's plan was to completely wipe out all the Tree Shepherd's forces.

When he and Hewjil returned to their original point and saw the undisturbed Elven Ruins, they sighed with relief.

The ruins were still being patrolled with a considerable amount of Lizardmen. This meant that Brendel and his men did not reach this place yet—

Perhaps it could be said they had quick reactions to respond to this strange situation.

"Conrad, your plan, this is?" Hewjil's narrow face seemed to expand menacingly in an instant in front of the mercenary commander. His emerald eyes stared coldly at him: "Many men lost, when this is over, additional payment."

Conrad snorted coldly in response. He ignored the bastard who was infamous for his cold blooded actions. When did Hewjil gain a heart and cared about his men? It was all a chance for him to fleece Conrad.

[I don't have time for this. Something is wrong. The Dark Bishop is probably in grave danger, but based on the information, none of us should have any problems to take care of Eke. Did that white-haired bastard lie to me?]

Conrad shook his head as he believed in himself. The white-haired youth did not lie. The Lizardmen scouts confirmed the information. But as he tried to cast out these unknown factors out of his mind, someone else was staring in his direction not far

from the ruins.

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

Brendel's men hid behind the once-grand Elven walls' shadows.

Everyone looked at Brendel explained his final plan. Their goal was simple. Deal the first strike and made sure it counts enough to be fatal.

They were just waiting for a chance to them to slip up.

Chapter 113

The Final Battle (1)

Nalaethar, the Nightsong Tiger, Scarlett and Sanford stood quietly behind Brendel.

He supported himself against the Elven ruin's rugged wall, his hand holding on to a stone tile as he peeked out at the Lizardmen in the valley. His line of sight was blocked by the many trees and ruined walls, and the Lizardmen appeared in and out from the tiny holes approximately a mile away.

The stone tile in the youth's hand was the Sage Slate. It was the size of a fist, and on it was carved with rune letters, 'Eaam'. This word represented the land's life and wisdom.

Since he already got the Sage Slate, his goals were half completed. The only thing left to do was to get Medissa's pendant back from that Lizardman leader.

[Two large companies of Lizardmen, their numbers no smaller than three hundred. It seems like there are more of them at the back. Conrad and Hewjil must have met up already, they are pretty cautious, huh.]

Brendel had led a sneak attack into the heart of the Elven ruins with his men. With the aid of Medissa and Scarlet who were Gold-ranked fighters, he successfully routed the two hundred odd Lizardmen, which they ended up as Brendel's XP. He then moved on to the entrance of the ruins where he waited for Conrad and Hewjil's arrival.

He looked up at the clear sky that was in a shade of deep blue. The sun at noon was directly hitting the forest with its rays of light, causing the top of the trees to turn to a piercing green color.

He narrowed his eyes.

There was a faint scent of blood in the air. Even though he had ordered the men to clean the battlefield, there was still the remnants of a skirmish between his men and the Lizardmen.

When he was pondering on his next step, he suddenly heard a shuffling noise behind him. When he turned around, he saw the Elven princess tying her silver hair that reached her shoulders. She rode on her unicorn, wearing an ornate full plate armor that was painted in a saintly white color and complemented her regal appearance. Light shimmered on her legs as the layers of interlocking armor plates moved ever so slightly, and Sanford mistook it for a silver dress for a moment. Her eyes were so clear that they looked like crystals. She was so beautiful that he lost his breath when his eyes went up to her face.

Medissa's unicorn trotted over and she looked at Brendel with a smile.

[Thank you, my lord-] She spoke in Brendel's mind.

"It is my promise to help you." Brendel tore his eyes away from her with much difficulty and replied as he looked at the valley again.

Medissa's face turned a little red. His words made her recall what happened on that day. She was so afraid of disappearing that she cried in front of everyone and forgot about the Silver Elves' royal etiquette.

She turned her head a little out of embarrassment and suddenly saw Scarlett who was standing further away from the others.

Her eyes in the shade seemed like two burning embers, while she leaned slightly against her spear. Her head was tilted a little to the sides to look at the scenery.

Brendel told her about the things that happened so far. The Blood of Gods, the disbandment of the Grey Wolves Mercenaries, as well as the events that happened after that. After she finished listening to him, she had been quiet ever since and kept her distance away.

She did not show sadness or anger.

"What will happen to that lady?" Medissa asked in a soft voice.

"The Blood of Gods has been planted in her body. The corruption cannot be removed by any means that I know, and it is currently suppressed by her own will. If she fails to control it, she will turn into an 'Acolyte'. That word might sound nice, but you might as well call an Acolyte a monster instead."

[...The rules have been established with Medissa as the first Eversong card, and if Scarlett agrees I can seal her as a card. But that will be my last resort... Also, is it not naive to think that it will work every time without any side effects?]

Brendel had reservations towards the 'Planeswalker's system'. Sealing was a foreign concept to him and could have unknown results and problems, especially with the powerful influence of the Blood of Gods. What would happen if she was not under his control?

Medissa's brows frowned slightly upon hearing his words, but the quiet personality of her race made her say nothing at all.

Brendel did not continue speaking and checked the mercenaries at the opposite end. They had split up and hid themselves in the abandoned buildings that once stood tall, crafted by the Silver Elves' grandmaster artisans. Their crossbows were currently trained on the Lizardmen in front of them in order to make sure they did not regroup with the leaders.

These Lizardmen which guarded the entrance were left alone in order to make Conrad and Hewjil believe that everything was still fine in the ruins.

"Brendel." Another set of familiar footsteps, along with a voice filled with a little pride entered his ears. Brendel did not need to turn his head back to know who was calling him. He was even lazy enough not to turn around, and extended his palm behind his shoulders: "You're already done?"

Romaine placed three translucent white crystals the size of a thumb onto Brendel's hand. Amandina was a little bit behind her.

"Of course. The Great Merchant Romaine's efficiency is very high. Here are the crystals. I already distributed a batch to everyone, everything has been prepared and we're just waiting for your orders to attack."

"It's a shame that all my materials have been used up," Amandina barely managed to make a smile in spite of her exhaustion: "But I can make more of them in the future. The rest of the materials that I have now, including the Magicite, has been dismantled to make them."

Brendel nodded and carefully placed each Exploding Crystal into his pouch on his belt. He then signaled to the Nightsong Tiger and received a longsword from him. He

pointed the blade to the outside: “The enemies are very cautious and we can’t deceive them for long. Once they are within a certain distance, I’ll go out to distract them. Medissa and Scarlett, both of you follow me. Our goal is to distract Conrad and Hewjil. As for their subordinates, Nalaethar and the rest of the men should be enough to handle them.”

The Elven Commander looked over to Brendel and nodded.

“Don’t just nod, commander.” Brendel did not forget to remind him: “Don’t forget about your promise to me.” *(TL: In case anyone forgot, that promise is a taught skill if Brendel wins.)*

Nalaethar gave a faint smile: “I await with anticipation.”

Medissa also smiled as she looked at the two men.

“Scarlett, any problems with this order?” He asked.

“I have no problems.” She nodded.

“Nightsong Tiger, your mission is to provide cover for our Silver Elves allies.”

[Also make sure to care of the Grey Wolves Mercenaries, they can’t revive like you do.]
He added in his mind.

He turned to Sanford after seeing the Nightsong Tiger nod. “Make sure to protect yourselves, you can enjoy a victory only if you’re alive.”

“Understood, my lord.” Sanford nodded respectfully.

Brendel questioned them carefully to make sure they understood the orders. Other than Nalaethar and his men, the people here were his only available forces. Perhaps Leto could be counted as his men, but they were different because their reputation and status were actually higher than him.

The forces that he had here now were truly loyal to his cause, or at least Amandina and the Grey Wolves Mercenaries relied deeply on him because they had no one else to turn to.

It was not that he did not trust Leto, but it was good to have distance and time to be

placed between them. He had seen enough betrayals from NPCs and gamers who swore fealty to each other to be cautious.

Hewjil and Conrad did not seem to notice anything out of place yet. For some reason, the dragoons were not at the front of the Lizardmen and Brendel was tremendously pleased at that sight. The impact would be greater with the first strike.

[Seven hundred meters.] Brendel read the data.

The gradual noise from the Lizardmen became louder as they passed through the forest. It was as if a current of water flowed through the forest, and the countless ants that scurried through were becoming bigger. The mercenaries that were at the very forefront placed their hands on their pouch. The Exploding Crystals were 15 OZ worth, with the force of Iron-ranked magician's Mana Arrow.

[Five hundred meters.]

At this range, people with high perception like Nalaethar, Brendel, Medissa and Brendel were able to almost see the Lizardmen's expressions. They appeared to be extremely tired from the overnight march, to the point that they did not realize they were going to be ambushed.

Scarlett bent to her knees as she sought for Conrad's familiar figure, gripping her Spear of Lightning so hard that it was making noises.

The Lizardmen continued to march closer and closer, and at this point they suddenly felt something was wrong with the area they were in. They sniffed the air and chattered, continuing to march forward, but Brendel saw ten odd dragoons stopping in the west direction.

[Shit, we have been discovered! Damn it, the leaders Hewjil and Conrad still have not appeared yet but I can't delay any further.]

Brendel raised his hand and directed his ring into the forest. A dazzling red flash emitted from the ring and even seemed to dim the sun's rays for a moment. A huge fireball hurled itself through the forest and dragged countless burning leaves in its path, before a loud explosion struck the enemies, and a blast of hot wind came back to him and swept his hair upwards.

The impact from the fireball killed a total of twenty Lizardmen dragoons and

Lizardmen Warriors. It was certainly a surprising harvest and proof of their tight positions. This was the signal for his men to attack.

The mercenaries opposite from Brendel fired their crossbows immediately and killed the remaining guards at the Elven ruin's entrance, then reached for the Exploding Crystals and took it out.

They were approximately three hundred meters away, but they possessed enough strength as Iron-ranked fighters to toss them far enough into the enemies' midst. The crystals caught the sun rays and glittered as they flew in an arc before raining down onto the ground.

There was a moment of silence as the Lizardmen peered at the crystals.

It was the calm before the storm, as bright light poured through the crystals as they bounced on the ground and lit the forest. The bursts of light kept forming in succession before explosions rang out one after another; the exploding crystals' impact ruptured the ground and the shockwave sent debris everywhere.

When the mercenaries finally recovered from the scene, they discovered the landscape of the forest had changed permanently.

There were numerous craters that formed into a deep cavity in the ground. Giant trees were uprooted and splintered into large fragments, while hundreds of Lizardmen were turned into corpses with missing body parts. Blood and soil were caked together, along bloody innards and brain matter splattered on trees and bushes, dripping down freely onto the ground.

It was like living hell depicted in paintings.

Even Brendel dry-heaved once before he forced back the urge to puke, and concentrated on calculating the remaining enemies.

[Hewjil brought the largest share of Lizardmen with him. There are at least four hundred of them here right now. I doubt he will want to distribute his forces to Conrad and the Dark Bishop if it's not because of the search for us. Conrad has his own men... My guess is a total of more than seven hundred men that we need to deal with. That really isn't something to laugh about. Even though we cleared more than 10% of the enemies from that attack, we can't deal with so many enemies. We need to do thin the numbers again.]

Brendel knew that it was his time to strike at the enemy's formation. He signaled to Scarlett and Medissa, and they prepared themselves to attack.

Chapter 114

The Final Battle (2)

“Medissa!” Brendel pointed to the path where most of the Lizardmen could come in from.

The Silver Elf princess adjusted her helmet and lowered its flap to cover the upper half of her face, tapped the sides of her unicorn and answered clearly.

“Understood!” Her white chainmail gloves clinked against her long spear as she hoisted it up from the ground and pointed it to the sky. She pursed her faint pink lips, and there was an aura of determination that could be felt in an instant.

The unicorn took a large step forward, allowing the intricate heavy armor on it to clatter. The designs on it were complicated and elegant, but the defensive capability was unbelievably strong against slashing and piercing strikes. Beneath the armor was a set of white robes that prevented chafing, and it was carefully emblazoned with the Elven kingdom’s insignia which were designed with lilies.

“Charge!” The girl shouted and the unicorn sped forth.

The solitary figure ran out from the sides of the ruined walls and dashed down an unrestricted road littered with the Lizardmen that the mercenaries killed earlier.

The armor reflected the sunlight as she charged out, causing the mercenaries to perceive her as a legendary knight that flew out from a painting, and completed the image of a fable transforming into reality.

The road was once used by the Silver Elves to complete rituals, allowing the high priests to bring along the holy artifacts of their Elven Goddess across it. Centuries had passed and grass had covered the white Cloud Rocks that were used to pave this road.

History had not taken kindly to these solemn rituals as records were either lost or destroyed, but the unicorn blazed across the road once again with the Goddess’s will and etched forever in the eyes around her.

[A Silver Elf!]

Conrad's pupils dilated as he spotted her in the back lines. He whirled around and grabbed Hewjil's padded armor, yelling in his ears: "You fucking piece of shit, what the fuck did you do! That's a Silver Elf with the Royal Insignia! How did you provoke the Silver Elves to come out here!"

Hewjil was also shocked out of its senses. It had the idea to rob the Elven Kings' graves since a long time ago. It was initially careful in its actions, afraid that the legendary Elves sung in bards' songs and fables who fought against the Dark Armies of a hundred-thousand strong to appear in front of them, but nothing happened as they inched closer every day.

It seemed like the Silver Elves that hid from the world intended to keep their promise and never reappear in this continent again, and Hewjil even thought that the Silver Elves were wiped out for unknown reasons, and it was a lie that there was even an exodus in the past.

Yet the Silver Elves were reappearing before its very eyes. Even though its perception was not as good as Conrad who was a Gold-ranked fighter, it recognized that soldiers were charging to them dressed in exquisite silver armor. Their impressive designs and attractive crafted pieces were certainly the very craft of the Silver Elves.

It took a chilling breath and shouted as Conrad shook him back and forth: "Conrad, young man... over there, look at him!"

Conrad turned his head—

To see Brendel and Scarlett running together behind the Unicorn Knight. They were like a silver and red streak of flames that parted and shot straight into the battlefield, their speed so fast that the Lizardmen could not track them. When Conrad finally locked on their figures properly, he saw two weapons brandished out; a silver longsword and red spear that swiftly hacked off the Lizardmen's heads.

"Damn it..." Conrad immediately understood that Medissa and Scarlett were stronger than him by a tier within the Gold-ranks, while the youth who looked like he was in the Silver-ranked had skill proficiency beyond his class.

Even though he did not know where these strong enemies came from, he certainly recognized that girl with red eyes and hair. She was definitely the girl he killed and

later revived by the Dark Bishop.

[Isn't this girl supposed to be turned into an Acolyte with the Blood of Gods?]

Conrad exhaled once and calmed down. He could at least confirm that the Dark Bishop was most likely doomed. Only things that had no confirmation were frightening.

"I'll handle the three in front of us. You had better take back your nest before I solve this problem." He spat out the words as he looked coldly at Hewjil, then took out a heavy steel gauntlet and put it over his hands. The leader of the Lizardmen sat there without any response. It knew Conrad was at the edge of unleashing his fury at it. While it went against him in the past, there was no need to provoke him any further and risk his life.

But when Conrad turned around, it finally stuttered and asked: "...T-the Silver Elves?"

"Handle them yourself."

Conrad scoffed loudly. If the Silver Elves were really driven out of by the stupid Lizardmen, there was no need for him to deal with this mess. Even though the Tree Shepherds might not be necessarily afraid of the Silver Elves because of their numbers, it was not wise to go head to head with these legendary warriors.

The Lizardmen were pawns that could be thrown away anyways. He was more worried on explaining the Dark Bishop's 'sacrifice' to the Tree Shepherds. He had a sufficiently high position within the Tree Shepherds and worked under the Lord of Worms, Mayard, one of the twelve leaders.

And Mayard was considered to have more authority amongst the twelve leaders because he had a bigger force.

The deaths of the higher ranked disciples could be excused because the mission involved a duke, but losing a Bishop was something that had not happened within the organization for at least a decade. Conrad felt his head hurt when he thought about it.

The most important thing right now was to find the duke's son and take one step at a time.

“Drive these Lizardmen away from the center!” Brendel cut down a Lizardman warrior who rushed at him as he shouted loudly to Scarlett.

She nodded and twirled her body, her spear swinging wildly in arc with a trail of electricity following it. They immediately retreated backwards, and those of were slow were knocked backwards so hard that flesh and bones broke off when they hit the ground. Smoke could also be seen from their blackened wounds from the electricity.

“Well done!” Brendel praised her without any reservations.

Even though the Lizardmen were only level 20, they outnumbered him and his men nearly thirty times. Their five hundred odd Lizardmen were also aided by Conrad's mercenaries, and it would be a disaster if they managed to swarm his men.

He had no choice but to limit the numbers of the enemies attacking at any given time. If he was able to stop them here, then his men would have an advantage.

[The goal is simple. Medissa, Scarlett and I will hold down this path with all we've got. But I'm surprised at how good she is at working with me.]

What Brendel did not expect was the coordination that Scarlett had with him. It was as if she found the best spot every time he made a move.

“Why are you praising me? Are you trying to win me over?” Scarlett asked.

“...Is there any other reason than the fact you did great?”

Brendel grabbed one of the Lizardman's spear with his off-hand and jerked it towards him, while running through the Lizardman with his blade. He then exhaled and answered her.

“As you wish.” Scarlett glanced at him before she looked away. She fought for the Grey Wolves Mercenaries and treated them like her family. Now that it was disbanded, the only thing left was revenge. She did not talk much and preferred action over talking. She always thought that it was something she ought to do, and praise was never given to her actions.

Everyone's eyes were always on Eke or the commander, and she also did the same.

But Brendel had a different idea. He did not like to overthink complicated issues. Now that Scarlett had the abilities of a Gold-ranked fighter and her former home was gone, it would be really silly not to use this chance and recruit her. There were lines he did not cross, but he was not some righteous knight fixated with the word 'honor'.

The battle continued with the Lizardmen retreating backwards.

The three of them had ranged attacks with their weapons even before they unsealed their Elements, and their combined prowess in the battlefield was overwhelming. Scarlett was the weakest amongst them. Due to her Element Resonance with the Spear of Lightning, she was able to use Lightning Cleave repeatedly, but that was the only technique she had.

Medissa retained her abilities from a Spectral Knight, and was able to use Charge, Vortex Strike and Seismic Blast, making her look like a portable cannon each time she used her abilities.

Brendel was even more terrifying. Even though he just reached the Silver-ranked status, he had Charge, Power Break, White Raven Sword Arte and Frontal Assault, and his levels in these techniques were high. He even had two Magic rings and Planeswalker cards that affect the battlefield. Even pay-to-win warriors in the game could not outdo him at his level.

[We're doing quite well. With the three of us holding this section down, our battle capabilities go up by a hundred fold. It's good that the girls are gullible enough to listen to me completely. If I asked a handful of experienced soldiers to hold back these Lizardmen, they will certainly think that I'm crazy.]

Brendel was a charismatic person in his past life, and he also had years of experience in the game inviting famous gamers to his party, so it was easy for him to deceive the girls and board his pirate ship—

[That's wrong! I mean, it's an easy task for me to recruit them to my group... Putting that aside, our strategy should be obvious to the enemies. Why isn't Conrad appearing yet? The Lizardmen are already pushed to the sides, and Medissa alone can hold down this narrow path. We can even switch up to conserve our stamina.]

The enemies should be able to understand this point. But what were they doing?

He surveyed his surroundings and even looked up. He wondered if the opponents

were giving up because he was not Eke, or they had counter measures.

He received his answer when Scarlett and himself fought off the fifth wave of Lizardmen. Medissa suddenly warned both of them loudly as she guarded the left flank.

“Be careful behind you!”

The ground behind them suddenly opened up violently.

[Shit, there’s an enemy below us!] Brendel realized there was an enemy unaccounted for.

Chapter 115

The Final Battle (3)

Medissa was approximately forty meters away, charging straight into a group of Lizardmen wielding crossbows. When she turned around she spotted a disturbance on the ground and realized something was amiss. She immediately warned Brendel and Scarlett, while she urged her unicorn back towards them. The unicorn leapt into the air and she raised her lance and timed it together with the unicorn's descent—

“Vortex Strike!”

When Brendel turned back, he found Medissa making her move on the enemy with a loud yell. The air around her lance immediately manifested into a distortion which condensed the air and released it as a blast of wind, sweeping the Lizardmen off their feet like they were fallen leaves. When she thrust her lance forward, an invisible path immediately emerged in front of her, destroying all the obstacles in front of her. Wood splinters flew everywhere and the enemy that was behind Brendel immediately retreated to the side.

The shockwave caused a large fissure to appear on the ground.

Brendel looked at the deep scar and felt a sheen of cold sweat on his body.

[My lady Medissa, can you be a little more gentle? Even if the enemy was a Gold-ranked fighter trying to backstab me, I can still parry it, but receiving your boss attack means I might die from it...]

He felt himself trembling a little before he recomposed himself and observed the enemy. He already knew the identity of the monster.

A gigantic creature with the size of three fully grown adults was writhing in front of him. Despite the quick reactions against Medissa's attack, it did not escape unscathed. Its long left arm clutched its right shoulder as blood flowed freely from the wound.

It was a humanoid that looked partially like a worm, and there were three mismatched sections that seemed like they were sewn together. The head, the chest and the

abdomen were sections covered in a grayish-yellow carapace that were inches thick and fortified with the blessings that came from the Blood of Gods.

[It's definitely harder than steel. The rating from the system is giving it A+ in defense. The Acolyte of Earth is a level 55 boss, so that's going to add 15 defense to it. It's on par with a full tank class.]

Brendel groaned wistfully.

The limbs that it had were like an insect's appendages, although the hands that it had resembled a human. At the area on its abdomen was a pair of eyes and another set of appendages in the form of a scythe. Its long thighs were shaped weirdly and adorned with full of barbs. Any normal human that got swept by it would certainly have gashes big enough to see the bones. Its head was something of a cross of a beetle and ant, with a pair of long antennae and large mandibles, and there was a pair of huge eyes that could see in low light places and capture motion well.

Brendel was glad to see that it did not have wings as it meant that it did not have flight yet. This was the only good news.

[This is third boss in this world after Ebdon and the Golden Demonic Tree. Even though it's not at its final form, it's already level 55 and has an unsealed Element. Comparing it with the previous bosses I faced earlier won't be right.]

Brendel took a deep breath as he realized this was going to be the hardest battle yet. If Scarlett and Medissa were not here to help him, he would have pulled out of this area and left as far as he possibly could.

He did not have much time to think about it because there was a loud metallic clash somewhat far away. When he turned around, he saw Scarlett's spear pushing down on a steel gauntlet. When he traced the defending hand back to the owner's face, he discovered that it was a young man whom he had not seen before. Electricity danced around his hand, but was immediately pushed away from some unseen force and did not hurt him at all.

"Well, well, isn't this our lovely Scarlett? Did you seek a new lover and betrayed our organization so quickly? That Blood of Gods from that man can't be relied on after all. Don't worry my dear, I killed you once, I can kill you again and send you to meet up with your dead companions—" The unknown young man sneered loudly.

Scarlett's teeth were clenched so tightly that they were grating noises coming from her. She glared at him with incredible hatred and desired nothing more than to run her spear through him. That young man brushed off the spear and retreated a few steps, and she immediately chased after him.

However, it was a rash move and she immediately felt her feet sinking into the ground when she chased after him. Her heart skipped a beat as she lowered her head and saw a layer of black fog surrounding her feet, making it impossible to move.

"Magic!" Scarlett felt her blood ran cold as she realized he was some form of Magic Swordsman.

But her reaction was too late. Conrad's taunt to make her angry was for the sake of making her fall into a trap, and he would not let this opportunity slip by. He opened up his fingers into a claw shape and thrust them towards her heart. The vitality of an Acolyte was exceedingly high, but the Blood of Gods was contained within the heart. Once it was damaged, even if the Acolyte did not die in that instant, their strength would diminish greatly.

Conrad knew that he would have great difficulty to defend himself against two Gold-ranked fighters, so he did not hold himself back and used his full might from the start. His target was clear. Even though Scarlett had the strength of a Gold-ranked fighter, she did not possess any combat experience. She was not the weakest amongst the three enemies in front of him, but in his eyes she was the easiest to take down.

His lips twisted into a smile as his fingers inched closer to their target. Success was literally in his hand, but right at that moment, a longsword blocked his fingers' path with impeccable timing.

Brendel had thrown out his sword without any hesitation the moment he saw Scarlett trapped.

[I probably won't hesitate even if this sword is the former Thorn of Light, right?]
Brendel thought to himself as he threw out his common longsword.

During the battle, he saw much clearer as to what was happening than Scarlett did. Conrad was leading her into a magic trap.

[To think that the leader of the Paper Cards is a Mage Hunter. How peculiar, I rarely saw any NPCs in the game reaching above the Gold rank level in this profession.

Although it is quite true that the profession is quite formidable, the path to leveling it up is really tough. It's quite the PVP profession and unquestionably good for PK.]

He took a moment to admire Conrad's ability to set up the trap. It was rare for anyone to fool his eyes, and he nearly failed to spot Conrad's trap. Even having high proficiency in the skill alone would not be mislead him, so he thought that Conrad must have some form innate talent within him.

[This bastard must have combined his talent with some form of chantless ability as well to speed up the process. In addition to that, there's probably another passive ability attached to that trap... I'm sure it's a hypnotizing effect. He must have made Scarlett angry in order to hide it. Handling this bastard is a little tricky.]

Conrad's attack from the start was well executed, wasting no time in his attack for Scarlett's heart the moment she fell into the trap. When the sword blocked his attack, he swiped it away and attempted another thrust, but Brendel had ran up to her and dragged her away by the elbow, as Conrad's steel claws barely missed the front of her chest and drew a little blood from her.

"...Thank you." Scarlett said.

"Cut the crap, you're lucky that I was fast enough. What were you thinking to lose your head like that!" Brendel yelled at her, but did not lose his eyes on Conrad who was ready to attack again.

The latter realized Brendel must have somehow seen through his illusion-based magic trap. Scarlett could not move when she stepped into the trap, but it was nothing more than an illusion. The hypnotizing ability from Conrad was the real thing that immobilized her with a suggestion. This was the trick to the Mage Hunters but it was clear that Brendel saw through it with his reply to Scarlett.

There were very few Mage Hunters in Aouine, and Conrad was recognized by his peers as highly skilled in the profession and even attained the level of a Gold-rank. It was at his level where he realized the advantages of his profession. Not many knew about the Mage Hunters, and even fewer people understood how they fought. He had fought against many of his enemies that were stronger than he was, and emerged victorious with bizarre attack combinations. However, he did not expect—

To meet his match today.

[This bastard must die!]

Conrad's steel gauntlets swung in front of him, frightening Brendel so much that he immediately activated the Charge skill and retreated even further away.

Even if he activated Power Break to defend against Conrad's attack, that would be 50 OZ vs 80 OZ strength, and would certainly meet his maker if he tried to fight him directly.

Under the Charge ability, he reached over 132 OZ worth of agility and vanished from where he stood. At his speed, he could even outrun a speed based Gold-ranked fighter with the Electric Element.

Conrad's claws lashed out into empty air and a loud bang could be heard. The decayed leaves in a circular radius of ten meters in front of his claws were turned into dust, and the ground sank deeply to form a large depression. When Conrad raised his head up, he saw that Brendel was already twenty meters away.

[What... is that speed? Who the hell is this guy?!]

Conrad was so surprised that he forgot to chase after Brendel. Even though the latter had reach the Silver rank at such a young age, Conrad himself was a genius who reached the Gold rank and did not think much of him. His target, Eke, was also rumored to be a genius, but Brendel certainly fell short of the rumors he heard when he fought against the Lizardmen.

But that short exchange made Conrad realize that the Silver-ranked bastard in front of him had combat prowess that defied common sense. Each attack that he made was only a stalemate against his defensive maneuvers.

He felt his palms slightly sweaty. He had learned various skills and had a wealthy experience against many enemies, and was even confident he could fight peak Gold-rank fighters. But he did not even gain any advantage over a little Silver-rank fighter.

[That explosive speed... A Sun Knight?]

Chapter 116

The final battle (4)

During the time when Brendel and Conrad made their moves against each other, Hewjil had already separated his Lizardmen Warriors into two groups. They avoided the center path and attacked the ruins from the two side paths.

But the Silver Elves had already set up their positions. Nalaethar had also split up his warriors into two; one group was led personally by himself, while the other was given to the Nightsong Tiger to command, and they hid at the side entrances of the ruins.

The brutish and simple minded creatures screamed as they swarmed out from the forest. Their movements were nimble and they quickly stormed through the entrances, but what awaited them were the Silver Elves' shining blades. The ambush by the Silver Elves was highly effective and their greatswords easily cleaved through the enemies' throats, then quickly knocked the lifeless corpses back through the congested areas.

Because of that, the Lizardmen were sent tumbling through the narrow path and some of the Lizardmen who collided with the bodies lost their balance, and were sent flying down from the elevated height onto both the Paper Cards Mercenaries and their fellow Lizardmen.

Hewjil's planned attack was stifled right there at the entrance, and the Mercenaries of Lopes and the Grey Wolves Mercenaries did not miss that chance. They immediately shot volleys of their bolts into the enemies' formation from the higher grounds, causing even more obstructions for them, making it seem like they had crashed into an invisible wall and could not proceed any further.

A normal person who trained to use a crossbow was able to shoot six times in a minute, and these veteran mercenaries were even more experienced and agile, firing ten to fifteen shots in a minute.

The accurate bolts were fatal to their morale. Each time the steel rain of arrows fell onto them, the enemies felt like there was a death god who was swinging his scythe repeatedly to reap their lives.

There were indeed Lizardmen who wielded ranged weapons who could fight back, but Medissa strategically went after them in the beginning of her attack. But even if she did not, the ranged Lizardmen combatants were not as skilled as the mercenaries because they were a race not as evolved as the humans.

With the lack of cover and the ability to fight back, the Lizardmen were forced to retreat. When Nalaethar realized what they were doing, he took down his horn hanging from his belt and blew it. The rich blare of the horn echoed throughout the ruins, and the Silver Elves gathered in front of their commander and fell neatly into position, placing their greatswords at the right side of their chests—

“My fellow Elves, who are we!”

“The Eversong army, the swords of Arlen!”

Nalaethar nodded and pointed his sword forward, and the Silver Elves charged down with a loud roar. Their silver armor shimmered in the sun and appeared like a wave of mercury flooding the path down to the lower valley. The Lizardmen were quickly swept away without any means to stop the Silver Elves.

The bolts did not stop firing from the start of the battle and seven crossbows were already damaged from the overuse. When the final spare crossbow was taken, the mercenaries had no choice but to switch to their shortbows.

The Lizardmen who appeared to be an endless sea of dark green creatures were unable to break past that silver line, and were even pushed back by their charge.

When the Silver Elves chanted their battle creed, Sanford and the Grey Wolves Mercenaries felt that their blood was set aflame. They felt like their hair was standing up as though they had returned to that ancient era where the Silver Elves fought against the Dark forces.

The battles that took place in the Era of Darkness, were when all the races put everything they had against the Dark forces for the sake of freedom and pride. Sanford kept firing his bow and felt intoxicated by the feelings when he thought about the fact that they were fighting the Tree Shepherds’ minions.

score. Your companions who defiled the living's pride and desecrated the dead's eternal sleep, both of you must pay the price—”

Medissa placed her lance horizontally as her unicorn turned around to face the youth whose dark red cape was fluttering from the wind. Her voice was clear even amidst the din from the battlefield.

Conrad covertly gritted his teeth. He did not want to speak to the Elven knight at all. Brendel's orders had deepened his suspicion that he had confidence in his forces to defeat all of them. This was a trap.

Even though Conrad did not know what Brendel and his men had to do with Eke and the Grey Wolves Mercenaries, he was on his guard.

[Damn you, you Elven cunt!]

He cursed in his heart and ran in the opposite direction. But how was he going to outrun a unicorn? After a short run, he found that the Elven princess had blocked off his path again with an aloof expression.

Conrad tried three times and he was blocked off three times. He was starting to panic. If the opponent blocked him without any reservations, that would mean that she had the forces to overwhelm his own. Perhaps the highest ranking members of the Tree Shepherd would be able to fight against these arrogant tree sticks, but he definitely could not.

He did not think his Mage Slayer abilities would be able to deceive the Elven girl. In front of him was one of the races who were the most proficient fighters in the continent, only a fool would hope that this opponent would make a mistake.

[If this is the case, it looks I only have to use my final trump card.]

===== Brendel's POV =====

As Medissa blocked off Conrad, Brendel felt the sight in front in turning dark; a cold and dangerous air was rushing towards his face, and the youth immediately guessed it was the Avatar of Earth, Ekman.

The gigantic monster which was over five meters tall blocked off the sunlight and raised its arm, then swung it with a loud shriek.

The air vibrated and he felt the earth under his feet splitting apart and jutting up before it cracked.

[Earth Element, the power of boulders!]

He did not waste any time thinking further, grabbed Scarlett and jumped to his right. Both of them rolled a few times on the ground from his force, while Ekman's palm smashed onto the ground with a ear-splitting blast. The soil scattered everywhere, with two rows of long rock spikes sticking out from the ground and merging together at the top, forming into a rock cage.

The surrounding Lizardmen thought the monster's fingers had somehow extended through the ground to form the claw-like rock formation, but once its hand left the ground, the rocks immediately broke apart and turned into a pile of soil and dust.

Brendel gulped once when he saw that scene. Even though the guide mentioned Ekman's approximate stats and strategies it liked to use, he felt it was something entirely different to face it in reality.

He felt a little like he had gone back during the time when he was level 40+. At that time, the developers Torrential Rain released a new patch to the game, 'Knights of the Holy Cathedral'. He and his commander, a senior female classmate, and a few others went together to participate in a raid. It was the first time they faced a Boss with an unsealed Element, and the fight against the Boss left behind a deep impression.

This was the first time the gamers understood the Element powers, and what the Knight of the Holy Cathedral was.

It appeared that he was going to relive that memory of fighting a familiar Boss again.

Chapter 117

The Final Battle (5)

There were a few subtypes extensions of the Earth Element. While most of the Earth users were famed for heavy defense, Ekman controlled the power to shape the earth into striking boulders. Although it was truly powerful for its initial strength, its growth was severely limited and classified as a low grade Element subtype.

But this was enough for Brendel to get a headache—

When he used his hands to help himself up, he brushed across Scarlett's hands with his fingers. He paused for a moment, looked down, and saw the red-haired girl lying on the ground and looking up at him with her startling red irises. They looked at each other for a moment.

"My apologies." Brendel said.

"It's fine." Came Scarlett's reply.

Brendel quickly withdrew his hand and flipped his body over to get up, then drew out the dagger that was tied on his calf. The Acolyte of Earth turned over to them slowly. As a Boss that had a disproportionate amount of strength and defense, his agility was low. Because of its tremendous size there was even a penalty to its agility, and it moved clumsily, giving the youths a chance to recover.

"Can you move?" Brendel readied himself into a fighting stance and asked. Scarlett sat up, dusted the dust and soil off her armor. She merely nodded without saying anything.

"Be careful when you face this monster. Its attacks are very powerful. The Element it controls is the Power of Boulders, the attacks that it can form are—"

Before he could finish, Ekman roared and raised its front limb, almost as if to prove Brendel's words. Its limbs quickly solidified and turned into hard surfaces to form a tremendous boulder-like sword that was nearly ten meters high.

It lifted the sword and swung at the direction of the two as it continued to roar.

“Dodge it!”

Brendel and Scarlett dashed out to the left and right respectively. The boulder sword struck onto the ground and exploded in a large arc. The whole forest seemed to shake as the shockwaves chased up to the two of them. Scarlett made a sharp gasp of pain, while Brendel immediately threw up blood.

Green words filled his vision, and he realized he lost 30 HP. The attack was even stronger than what the Ring of the Wind Empress could do. At his level, the damage from his ring would have done at most two-thirds of what it normally did, and it showed how strong Ekman’s attack was.

“My lord, are you all right?”

The forest was filled with dust and Scarlett’s voice came from the other end.

“Not too bad.”

Brendel coughed one more time. He was on his utmost guard. Ekman also had abilities that were dangerous. In this environment, if he failed to be careful and allowed it to ambush him, then he would be in deep trouble.

[I’m still not sensing that monster. The cooldown for merging with the soil is ten minutes, how is it possible to lose sight of him so quickly? It hasn’t even been one minute.]

Suddenly, the two wary people heard a surprised scream from a distant area.

“Medissa!” Brendel was deeply alarmed.

===== Hewjil’s POV =====

When the dragon-like roar from the horn resounded through the battlefield, Hewjil was utterly dismayed. It was not as knowledgeable as Conrad who could discern that the horn’s bellow belonged to one of the strongest Silver Elves’ armies.

However, Hewjil made the same conclusion from where the position it was commanding at. It oversaw the battle from a high vantage point, and saw Elven warriors clad in silver armor, had prominent silver hair and wielded a greatsword. Surely even fools would recognize them for what they were; indeed, they were Silver

Elves.

The Lizardmen's attacks were quickly rebuffed and they retreated one-sidedly. The Elves' charge was impressive, cutting the Lizardmen down were like how knives cutting through butter, going in and out without stopping.

If Conrad's men did not enter the fray in time, the morale of the Lizardmen would have been broken completely. While the new addition did managed to stall the Elves' charge, they were unable to do any damage to the Silver Elves because of their unfamiliar teamwork.

At the end of the first exchange, Hewjil found it had lost a tenth of his men just on its left flank. It grabbed one of his men's dagger angrily and threw it violently onto the ground. As one who lived on the edge, this terrible loss raised its ire instead of making it discouraged. He clearly saw Conrad's guarded disposition towards the Silver Elves, but now that it saw them in battle, it was puzzled.

[Are they not just a bunch of Silver ranked fighters? The famed Silver Elves are not some undefeatable opponents. Even the second tier army of Kirrlutz have their level of might, and it's not as if I have not fought against them.]

Hewjil was an exile that escaped from the Empire's might, and he narrowed his eyes a little when he recalled some memories about the armies chasing him.

After a moment of, it calmed down and observed his enemies, he quickly discovered something interesting. It quickly beckoned its adjutant over and ordered him to lead a squadron to attack the backlines. It was a taboo to separate the army during the fight that was happening currently, but it discovered that the enemies constantly seemed to be the same thirty or forty men.

It decided to make a gamble to see if its guess was correct.

Unfortunately for him, the ally it believed in, Conrad, had already decided to escape.

The Lizardmen's crossbowmen finally regrouped and started shooting their volleys of bolts from a higher vantage point at a hill.

Because of the relatively small number of Silver Elves in the battlefield, they did not know how to aim at them and simply shot messily as to where they might possibly be. The rest of the Lizardmen chose to shoot at the Grey Wolves Mercenaries and the

Mercenaries of Lopes. Their haphazard attacks resulted in casualties of their own comrades as well.

The rain of bolts were obstructed by the trees while the remainder of the bolts struck where they were intended to. Nalaethar decisively made his signal to retreat to the entrance immediately after seeing the Lizardmen's crossbowmen had formed up.

Quite a few of the Mercenaries were struck by arrows. The sudden retreat had caused the Grey Wolves Mercenaries to be slow in doing so, and they were caught by a few daring Lizardmen who threw themselves at them. Sanford's artery was cut by a spear as he rescued a companion from their attacks, but the mercenaries quickly slayed the attackers in retaliation.

Nalaethar regrouped with them and led them to safety, who then treated Sanford's wounds.

Nalaethar ordered the mercenaries to make a simple stretcher and placed Sanford there. Even though the latter was in pain, he gritted his teeth to prevent himself from groaning. The Grey Wolves Mercenaries treated death as a sacred thing and did not fear death.

Suddenly there was an urgent set of footsteps that rushed to where Nalaethar was at.

Sanford turned his head to the side and discovered a familiar face.

[Isn't that someone from the Nightsong Tiger?] This thought came to his mind.

"Ser Nalaethar!" He said quickly: "Commander Nightsong Tiger saw a squadron of Lizardmen making their way to the back of the ruins. He asked for your views on this."

The Grey Wolves Mercenaries were surprised, and Sanford frowned deeply.

[Surrounding us? That's the worst situation that our lord said we would be in, and that we need to be act accordingly or else we would fall into a panic.]

The Silver Elves did not show any reactions to that statement, but the mercenaries were the opposite. Most of the mercenaries believed in the Twins of Destiny, and their beliefs were tied strongly to their mental state. Many had described mercenaries to be alike to gamblers. Right now, they did not take this situation well.

“Human, your commander has a clearer picture of the attackers. What are his thoughts?” Nalaethar asked.

“Our commander states that we would be attacked from the rear if we do not split our forces to intercept them. He said the Grey Wolves Mercenaries and the Mercenaries of Lopes should delay them.”

“That’s an acceptable strategy,” Nalaethar nodded: “But who is going to lead the mercenaries to intercept them? My men are unable to lead them because we are unfamiliar with their tactics and language.”

“Our commander thinks that Sanford should be...” The mercenary looked around to find Sanford and saw the conspicuous stretcher, and he suddenly lost the latter half of his words.

The most experienced commanders amongst Brendel were Nalaethar and the Nightsong Tiger, then Medissa and Scarlett. The four of them were already assigned to their roles, and Sanford was the only person left who had the best head amongst the mercenaries.

Brendel had mentioned giving Sanford such a role, but the situation was even worse than what their lord had described. The mercenaries glanced at each other in trepidation.

“Let me have a go at it, Ser Commander!” A bell-like sound suddenly came from their back. Everyone turned their eyes on them and saw Romaine dragging a sword behind her back with both her hands. She looked at them with big eager eyes and the words ‘Can I?’ was written in both of them.

Of course not.

Nalaethar shook his head. The Elven commander might have asked what training she had and considered her request, but the actions that this girl did last night were too shocking. He could not allow her to lead this battle and treat it like a game.

“Then let me go, Ser Nalaethar.” Another girl walked out behind Romaine. She clutched her collar and held onto her robes, looking calmly at them.

Nalaethar studied her.

“I have studied light infantry tactics from books. I believe I can be of use in stopping the enemy.”

Chapter 118

The Final Battle (6)

When Brendel and Scarlett rushed over to Medissa's direction, they saw she was pressing down on her left shoulder with her right hand. Blood drenched her white inner robes and leaked onto the silver armor. Her brows were bunched up together as she faced the monster in front of her.

Conrad was nowhere to be seen.

The Acolyte of Earth looked different from a while ago. The dull yellow colored carapace were cracked open, revealing a dark red light that pulsed slowly from the crevices, like magma flowing across the ground. The monster that had appeared like it was a carved statue was somehow turned into a molten boulder-like creature.

Brendel was shocked when he saw Ekman in that appearance. It was clearly in a Berserk mode, and going into such a state was usually a final desperate attempt. The aftermath of the Berserk mode was devolving back into an even weaker state than its already incomplete self, if it survived.

[What's going on? It's not like there's any threat to its life. The Acolytes will never willingly activate this mode to go on a rampage. Similar bosses would only go in a Berserk mode when they have 30% hp or less... It's not moving?]

Brendel's eyes went over the monster's state and realized there was an injury on Ekman's ribcage; the gash was deep enough for him to see the bones. He immediately understood it was from Medissa's Seismic Blast, but that was not the right explanation. Given how high Ekman's defense was, even if her attack was directly on its face, it would deal no more than 1/10 of its life. But the strangest thing was why it did not move at all.

[The last possibility is a command to make him go into a rampaging mode...]

Medissa saw Brendel from the corner of her eyes, and spoke through clenched teeth: "I apologize, my lord. I allowed Conrad to escape."

Brendel secretly felt ashamed as it was his mistake and did not expect Ekman's attack to be a diversion to get to Medissa. He had completely underestimated his opponent because he thought it was some sort of Wurm creature that got corrupted by the Blood of Gods, and did not possess that intelligence to outwit him. He failed to consider the fact that Conrad was holding on to the Control Orb to control the monster.

"This isn't your fault." Brendel and Scarlett regrouped with Medissa and form a line to face the rampaging monster. "What exactly happened?"

"That man tried to lure me into a trap but I managed to see through it. He then managed to summon this monster somehow and tried to escape by using it as cover..." Medissa covered her mouth as she coughed, and blood leaked through her fingers: "...I tried to use Seismic Blast to stop them, but the monster suddenly turned stronger and shrugged off the gravity binding from the Seismic Blast..."

"Your injury was caused by the monster?"

She nodded.

"Are you alright?" Brendel frowned. Ekman's strength was increased by 20% when it was in a berserk mode. If Medissa was directly struck by it, her injuries could be quite serious.

"It's not too much of a problem to continue fighting. It's a little scratch..." She coughed repeatedly: "But I feel like there's some Element damage done to my lungs."

[That's not a problem?] Brendel looked at her in utter disbelief, then suddenly recalled her status as a Heroic Spirit. Even though she appeared like she was coughing out blood like a real person, it was her Soul Fire that would affect her ability to fight. A normal person would have their fighting abilities greatly lowered if they received the same injury Medissa did.

"What should we do now?" Scarlett asked.

"I want to change our plans a little." Brendel stared at the monster that blocked their path. He really did not understand why Conrad was so eager to escape from them, to the point that he would waste a creature with the Blood of Gods and allow the three of them to fight it. Ekman would not stand a chance after the Berserk mode was over. Yet there was no time for them to wait for it to do so.

“Both of you need to go after that man right away. We have to stop him from messing up the tactical positions where the Silver Elves and the mercenaries are fighting the Lizardmen. Leave this monster to me.”

“You?” Scarlett looked back at him, forgetting her manners as she heard his incredulous words.

“My lord?” Medissa was also stunned. As someone who fought against him earlier, she knew clearly that he was a fighter who had just reached the Silver-rank tier. No matter much fighting experience he had, there was no chance to fight against a monster who had unsealed its Element power. Even delaying it seemed like a problem.

“Have you forgotten my true abilities, Medissa?” Brendel answered in his mind.

“Do you mean to say your abilities as a Planeswalker, my lord?” She also replied in her mind.

Brendel nodded.

“I’ll fight along with you.” Scarlett answered. She raised her halberd against the monster. It looked like it was dead because it did not move at all, but once they moved to chase Conrad, it would certainly attack them.

“If you die, my lord, Medissa and I have will also have no guarantee that we can face it. In order to protect everyone left from the Grey Wolves Mercenaries, your life is my life—”

Brendel raised his eyebrow at her.

“Scarlett is right, my lord.” Medissa also persuaded him: “As long as this monster is not guarding Conrad, he is not my match. I have fought many Miirna Mage Slayers in my life time.”

“Very well.” Brendel did not wish to waste any time to convince Scarlett, and it was true with the latter’s aid he would have a better chance against it. He took out the second Card of Fate that he had drawn for the day: “Let’s move out.”

Brendel flipped over his card—

– The Silver Horse

- The Legendary Light V, White
- Requirements: 10 MP
- Artifact Creature/Treasure, Level 7 Construct
- The Silver Horse has Flying.
- 'Made with Mithril'

(TL: This card is given by Tulman and not taken from the Dark Bishop.)

The Card of Fate floated up into the air and a Magic Formation was immediately drawn on the forest ground. A long neigh from a warhorse could be heard in the center of the Magic Formation

Brendel's actions immediately caused Ekman to launch an attack. Conrad had given a set of instructions to Ekman to wait at its spot in case Brendel and the others were somehow able to lure it away from guarding him. If it detected an enemy crossing a certain point to go after him or did something else, then the permission to attack would be given. Magic was amongst one of the conditions.

Scarlett and Medissa went up to intercept its attack and were able to guard successfully against its attack, although both of them struggled to breath as the air were knocked out of them from the impact.

[Interesting... Even though Medissa and Scarlett's levels are below 50, they are able to reach use their Element powers which are typically learned at level 50 to 51. If they did not utilize their powers they wouldn't have been able to stop the rampaging monster.]

The light in front of Brendel faded and a metallic warhorse with wings made from mithril trotted forward proudly. The creature's chiseled ruby eyes glanced at Brendel before it lowered its head.

The two girls looked looked at the horse in slight surprise, but they quickly understood his intention.

"Scarlett, get on the horse! Medissa, cover us!"

Ekman wanted to attack Brendel again but the Elven princess used Vortex Strike to force it back. Her abilities had a long cooldown, but the attacking strength was high enough to force Ekman to engage her carefully.

With the slight opening, Scarlett got onto the horse and immediately extended her hand out to Brendel. He got up onto the horse quickly but she felt a little embarrassed when they rode together. That thought quickly disappeared and she calmed down quickly.

“Ride behind its back. That creature is obeying Conrad’s order to guard this place with its life. Attract its attention and make it chase us. Medissa, stay here and make your move only after we leave this place!”

“Understood.” She nodded.

Scarlett urged the horse upwards, and the warhorse jumped into the sky, and flew over the angry creature’s head. That was not the only action she took. She reached for a compact crossbow that was behind her belt and shot at it.

The attack immediately caused it to fight back.

The creature roared and slammed its palm onto the ground, and a twenty meter rock spike shot up into the sky, reaching towards the two of them. Scarlett urged the horse to fly higher, but spikes continued to chase after them, each time higher than the last. The last spike nearly reached fifty meters high, and when they looked down onto the ground, they discovered that the ground below had turned into a forest filled with rock pillars.

When the Acolyte of Earth’s hand left the ground, the rock pillars immediately turned to soil and crumbled. It stared at the warhorse that flew further and further away, bellowed loudly, then slammed both of its hand into the ground and merged with the soil in an instant.

That was the last time Medissa saw the monster. She had seen how it attacked Brendel the first time, so she knew that it was performing the same feat again. She remained on guard and looked around for a while before she rode towards where Conrad escaped, urging her unicorn to move as quickly as possible.

Brendel also saw the same thing and asked Scarlett to lower their flying height. Even though the monster’s intelligence was not high, it would not keep on chasing a prey

that it could not reach. Luring a monster in the game was considered to be a precise skill, and it was the same in this world.

Brendel continued to remain on his guard as the speed and height of the mithril warhorse were quickly lowered.

“What are we going to do next?” Scarlett asked.

“Bring this monster around,” Brendel said: “It’s best to move towards the Elven Temple, since our plan is to regroup back there after the mercenaries and Silver Elves defeat the Lizardmen. We will be able to receive support from them.”

“Can we last that long?”

“That depends on our skill. Well, perhaps a little luck is needed as well.”

Scarlett suddenly stopped talking and swung her halberd at a certain direction. A streak of lightning shot out dozens of meters away and struck in between a few pine trees.

An explosion rang out and the Boss reappeared.

“Have the horse run on the ground in a zigzag manner.” Brendel put out his hand. “Give me your crossbow—”

She nodded and handed it over.

The warhorse’s direction changed once as a sharp spike reached for their backs. Brendel secretly nodded at Scarlett’s reactions. He might not have done as well as if he was the one leading the horse.

[This is the start of a dangerous game...]

Chapter 119

The Final Battle (7)

The scouts quickly reported their information.

The holy grounds of Baern Shyrltaesi was comprised of the Elves' Goddess Temple and two outer courtyards with walls, and was in the center of the Elven ruins, with other buildings surrounding arranged like an axis around it.

The grand hall of the Goddess Temple was where Hewjil had occupied previously. The back room led to an altar, while the front of hall's entrance was a corridor that led to the rooms where the Elven Priests stayed at. It also had stairways leading to the top of the Temple.

Amandina chose this place the very moment she saw it.

The mercenaries passed through the ruined walls of the buildings, accepting Amandina's command to enter the temple. The courtyard within the temple was once filled with Silver Elves who came to pray to their goddess, but now that beautiful and tranquil place was in shambles. The elegant white tiles in the corridors were broken and stained with dirt, and the only thing left intact was the pillars.

The wind blew softly from time to time, passing through the holes within the walls almost like whispers.

In this near silence, three of the Mercenaries of Lopes who set out early were the first to reach the place. They went up to the temple's rooftop to deposit a hastily made flag made with a spear and grey cloth torn from Brendel's robes, then went out to the second outer walls of the temple's courtyards to observe the Lizardmen.

Two outer walls that surrounded the courtyard were built by the Silver Elves in order to make defensive lines for the Holy Temple and prevent intruders. Many centuries later, these walls suffered harsh rain and winds, and were nearly gone. There was almost no cover left to stand behind and defend the area properly, and the Lizardmen had not repaired the walls when they occupied it.

The Lizardmen did not do so because of two reasons. The first reason was simply because they did not have the ability to repair the walls because of its intricate designs. The walls were built to lure in enemies at certain junctions which allowed the Silver Elves to ambush them, and with Hewjil's intelligence, he was never able to figure out how it was supposed to be done. The second reason was the Lizardmen had no need to do so because they had no enemies. In this forest, their worst enemies were themselves and wine, having a hundred deaths nearly every year because they killed each other.

The second batch of mercenaries set themselves up at another opening of the outer walls once they arrived.

'The Lizardmen have passed through the forest-'

'They are approaching the ruins.'

'Their numbers are no less than a hundred.'

'I spotted their commander.'

The mercenaries passed information around through signs, before it went back to the Elementalists' sisters who accompanied Amandina and informed her of the situation.

She lifted up her skirt as she crossed over the hall quickly, then climbed up the stairs to the rooftop where it was able to oversee the entire area of the temple.

The complex defense lines of the temple quickly became clear to her.

She looked down and compared the area to the map that was hurriedly drawn by Nalaethar. Her studies in the architecture knowledge was useful enough to recognize the important chokepoints, leading her to turn around and search the area.

She straightened the first flag vertically and placed it in the center.

As long as the flag was standing upright, it informed Nalaethar and the Nightsong Tiger that the backlines and defenses were not lost.

She then gave the orders to the Elementalist sisters, informing the Grey Wolves Mercenaries to defend the fourth chokepoint.

The Grey Wolves Mercenaries looked at each other with uncertainty, when they realized what the order was from a Mercenaries of Lopes' member accompanying them.

Amandina's location was quite prominent. If the Lizardmen broke through the chokepoints, they could easily enter the inner temple and climbed up the stairs to where Amandina was. Brendel had instructed them to protect her safety, but she had ordered them to move far away where she was.

"Miss Amandina?" One of the mercenaries yelled out in a loud voice.

"Follow my orders!" Her reply came back.

"But—"

Amandina flung her hand indignantly: "I'm your commander now. My orders are your utmost priorities, if there are any objections, you can bring it up to our lord after this is over!"

The mercenaries fell into silence.

Amandina suddenly spotted the Lizardmen rushing out of the forest. Their formation was almost non-existent, moving out quickly across the ground for the sake of speed rather than safety. This meant that the leader of the Lizardmen had indeed deduced of their smaller numbers. She was definitely in a great disadvantage, because she only had a total of fifteen mercenaries under her

Even though the mercenaries were much more experienced than the Lizardmen, the latter outnumbered them many times.

[Delaying them is the best I can do.]

Amandina gripped the flag tightly subconsciously with gritted teeth.

===== Brendel's POV =====

Brendel wiped the sweat of his head.

He had already lost count of how many times they escaped Ekman's attacks by mere inches. He could hear his heart pounding loudly because of the constant tension.

Scarlett's rate of breathing was also beginning to increase, indicating that her stamina was going down.

"How long did you say... that the warhorse can use charge again?" Scarlett asked with a panting voice.

"Another... twenty seconds." Brendel estimated in his mind. He had used this ability once earlier to cover half of the distance to his destination.

"No, if we... don't fly in the air... we can't hold on that long!" She shook her head right away.

Brendel turned his head to take a look.

He wished that Scarlett's answer was different from his own but he knew that was something impossible. He had predicted the same results from the start. Even though the monster was clumsy and slow in turning directions, the speed at which it charged in a straight line was shocking. Each time they turned to pull away from it ended up with the monster gaining back the distance after a few seconds.

If they kept changing directions all the time, they would not be able to lure the monster back to the intended location even if the sky turned dark.

Flying up to the sky was a temporary solution, but Brendel realized that it was becoming more and more accurate in sending the rock spikes at them. With the nearby trees being destroyed over and over again, the obstructions to the attacks were also becoming fewer. They might as well have a target painted behind their back.

"You can't fly up." Brendel gave his conclusion.

Scarlett rapped the warhorse's head in frustration.

He looked back again and saw Ekman getting closer and closer. He finally stopped hesitating and threw out an Exploding Crystal at it. The monster covered its head with both hands as the series of explosions happened right in front of it. However, the explosions did not seem to stop it even for a moment, as it charged right out of the smoke and dust.

Scarlett felt that threat and forced the warhorse to jump into the air. Ekman did not waste any time and shot the spikes out from the ground at them.

Even though Scarlett reacted to the attack as fast as she possibly could, the exhaustion from the long tension had caused her to be slower by a split second. The rock spikes accurately struck the warhorse's thigh and caused the entire body to topple, knocking it straight onto a tree.

The immense impact caused Brendel and Scarlett to be jerked out from the warhorse, and when they finally reacted from the attack, they realized they were already on the ground, dazed and injured.

Brendel almost felt like he was back at Bucca the first time he arrived there. That feeling of wrecking pain and confusion was almost like a bomb thrown into his mind. But his worry was not about what kind of damage he received from the impact, because the bastard was going to follow up with another attack.

[Fuck, this time we're in grave trouble!]

He grabbed the last Exploding Crystal and tried to get up while he shook his head to shrug his dizziness, but before he was able to do so, a hand pressed him down.

"Listen carefully."

Scarlett's voice sounded like it came from a near and far place at the same time. Even his vision appeared like there were two or three images overlapping each other when he tried to focus on her.

"I'm going to delay that monster and give you some time to escape."

"What are you trying to do?"

Brendel felt pangs of sharp pain in his spine, and he wondered if it was broken in several places.

"There's no need to worry about me. I'm also an Acolyte, the most damage that mindless creature would be able to do is injure me if I delayed it for a short while."

"I think I'm the one who told you about the characteristics of an Acolyte... Ouch." Brendel felt her help him up.

"Hmph."

The girl scoffed coldly in his ear and released him. “The horse is right behind you. Stop wasting time.”

She took up her halberd and turned around to face the monster. It had crashed into a few trees and destroyed them in its charge.

Scarlett took up a stance and placed her spear horizontal to her body and gritted her teeth.

Brendel looked at her back once more before he grabbed the reins of the mithril warhorse and mounted it. There was no time to waste and argue. Scarlett had made her choice and he could only cooperate with her.

This chance would be wasted if he hesitated.

He forced the horse into a furious gallop. There was a loud smacking noise, and when he looked back, he saw Scarlett flying backwards like a piece of rock, colliding into trees with audible snapping noises, before he lost all signs of her.

[Fuck! There’s no way she’s able to hold off a Boss-tier with an unsealed Element at all! This isn’t going to work—]

The monster turned to Scarlett’s direction for a few seconds, when a small crystal knocked onto its head. The explosions happened in front of its face, causing it to turn into Brendel’s direction again.

It was certain that the girl had lost her combat abilities, and thus set its target on the irritating fly. Without a proper order, the Berserk status that it had caused it to kill anything that still moved.

Scarlett’s delay had worked.

Brendel was ready to use his Charge ability. He made the horse run off in another direction and activated his ability, causing the speed of the warhorse to move over a thousand OZ, reaching the peak of his character’s speed in his previous world.

If someone was able to look at him from a hill, they would have seen a blurring silver line cutting through the entire forest.

Chapter 120

The Final Battle (8)

When Brendel activated his ability, he suddenly realized that he was unable to handle the air resistance as the warhorse charged through the area. Scarlett had taken the brunt of the first time he used it, but now that he was alone he reached his limits to handle it.

It was nearly impossible for a player in the game to get a pet that surpassed their own stats, but Brendel had gotten a mount that had an innate 132 OZ worth of agility. With the ability Charge added to it, he had completely broken the sound barrier so many times that he felt like he had turned into a fly that crashed onto a sheet of metal and was dragged through nearly fifteen kilometers with an insane speed.

When it finally stopped, Brendel could not stop himself from vomiting out the contents of his stomach. Blood was flowing from his eyes, nose and ears. His organs were completely damaged, and green words kept flashing in his eyes. The remaining life he had was literally a few pixels left on his HP bar.

[How did Scarlett managed to endure that? Did she use her spear or something to cut through air resistance?]

Brendel had twenty times the normal physique of a normal person and his defense and regeneration was just barely enough for him to survive that. If he was given enough time to rest, that physique would even allow him to recuperate without side effects.

[There's no time to rest and that monster definitely won't give me time to do so. Because it travels in a straight line at such a ridiculous speed, we couldn't outrun it earlier. Give it a minute and it would be next to me again. Should I sacrifice this card and let it go to the graveyard?]

He broke into another bout of cold sweat when he remembered how difficult it was to escape from Ekman.

This was a desperate move to have his mount lure the enemy away, but the closer he

was able to get to the meeting place, the stronger the Silver Elves would become when they joined up with him. Despite the numerous twists and turns, he was able to travel nearly forty kilometers from where he started and was close to where the Silver Elves fought Redi.

Twenty Silver Elves at level 50 would be enough to handle a level 50 Boss. When Nalaethar finished his battle, he would return to the meeting place with his full speed.

[The travel time for them to return is ten minutes. Once the Lizardmen fall below a certain number they will probably retreat. Perhaps twenty minutes for them to give up? Hewjil is one thing, but hopefully Medissa can kill Conrad.]

Brendel spent a few seconds to consider the outcomes and his options. He did not find any obvious shortcomings to his plans, so he got off the horse and patted its metallic head. This machine like artifact seemed like it was created by some factory in his previous world. It was intricately built and its toughness was extraordinary, appearing like it was never going to tire. Even that attack from Ekman only put a small scratch on it.

But losing this mount meant that he was gambling every token on the table. If the monster did not pursue the mount and came after him instead, then that would be the end of him. Brendel's heart beat rapidly and he could not suppress his tension. Even so, he made up his mind and yelled:

“SILVER BMW! RUN LIKE THE WIND!” He yelled out the name he gave to his pet horse at the last moment, and finished the details of his orders in his mind.

Since the warhorse was not a living creature, it would not have any fears when it faced the monster. It looked at Brendel once with its red gem-like eyes as if to confirm his orders before turning around and disappeared into the forest.

Brendel sighed and flinched in pain as he reached for the Silver Horse card. He took it out and began to move as quickly as he possibly could, while listening carefully for any signs of Ekman. It was not long before he heard of angry bellows getting further away from his back, while causing the critters in front of him to flee in terror.

===== Hewjil POV =====

As long as one had not fallen completely into a crazed bloodlust state, they would always recover their senses at some point.

Hewjil had poured almost all its Lizardmen into the ruins like an addicted gambler, but the place seemed like it was a black hole that sucked out the lives of its men.

At first the initial tactics that it played to get its men to attack the backlines worked, as the mercenaries did not appear again and the Silver Elves lost their ranged cover, while its own Lizardmen's crossbow users gathered up to give cover to the Lizardmen warriors. The situation had reversed, surely, before it quickly discovered that the Silver Elves gave up on attacking in the open and chose to retreat to the ruins.

They moved back into narrow streets and hidden corners, and all of a sudden Hewjil realized the Silver Elves were using the territory to perform hit and run tactics. However, what shocked it was not the loss of his men, but the fact that when one of the Silver Elves was caught out of position and killed, then turned into white light and shot back to the place where the Elven Kings were entombed.

This was the first time where Hewjil realized these Silver Elves were abnormal.

However, that thought was soon replaced by another problem. It had spotted a flag at the roof of the highest building. Even till now the mercenaries did not appear, but so did his men who were supposed to attack the backlines. The Lizardmen who fought against the Silver Elves in the frontlines were greatly demoralized, and the latter did not waste any time in launching another attack to take advantage of them.

This time, they managed to push the Lizardmen out and even took the control of the outer section. Hewjil was furious again, but it realized it just needed to gather all its men and surround that section. When he turned around to check the number of Lizardmen it had, its eyes bulged.

There was just a handful of Lizardmen behind him.

All of its tokens were already on the table, and yet the Silver Elves acted like it did not matter whether there a hundred Lizardmen or a thousand Lizardmen. Would the situation change even if it went in personally?

Hewjil felt the blood drain out of its face.

Unlike the other Lizardmen, it was intelligent enough to predict the conclusion of this battle. It called out another of its adjutant immediately.

“Tell the frontline commander to put more pressure and force the Silver Elves back.”

“Chief, are we going to launch a final attack?” The adjutant asked.

“No.” Hewjile shook its head: “We’re leaving. Only us.”

“What? But our brothers...”

“Ignore them. We can’t care about them anymore.” The leader of the Lizardmen shook its head regretfully. It held out its glittering pendant on its neck. “As long as this is with us, we can seek help from the Tree Shepherds and take back this area later. I know where these Silver Elves come from. The next time we are here I will be ready.”

“But do we not inform Conrad if we just leave?”

Hewjil hesitated for a moment before it shook its head. “Don’t worry, that bastard is an Emissary who controls members that have the Blood of Gods. Even without us, he can take care of himself.”

[It would be good if something happens to him anyway— But if that bastard dies in this area, I’m going to pay a hefty price as well. This is such a tricky problem.]

Hewjil observed the battlefiled again. Even though the Lizardmen in the battle still had the upper hand, it did not seem like the Silver Elves had any signs of defeat yet. If the battle took another twenty minutes or so, the total number of his Lizardmen lost would be more than half and the situation would change.

At that point, trying to escape would depend on whether the Silver Elves were willing to let them go.

The Lizardmen were treated as slaves in Kirrlutz, and the pockets of their resistance had gone on for centuries. Hewjil’s instinct was honed by the constant resistance it had against Kirrlutz and the Empire, and the long years of evading capture as a bandit made him sensitive to danger.

It was time to escape.

===== Nalaethar’s POV =====

Nalaethar discovered that the Lizardmen suddenly increased their resistance, but they appeared hesitant and reluctant to do so. With this opening, the Elven commander who had centuries of experience decisively grabbed the chance and blew

his horn. The Elven warriors immediately gathered into position and charged straight into the heart of the enemies. The Lizardmen crossbowmen shot out their bolts in a panic, but were hardly effective as they bounced off their armor.

The synergy of the Elven warriors was like a portable fortress that cut down the Lizardmen unerringly.

The waves of Lizardmen finally parted and completely fell into chaos. When they realized Hewjil was gone, they fell into confusion and screamed, scampering off to the forest in all directions.

Nalaethar let his men pursue them for a while, but they were like green cockroaches which fled so fast that even the Silver Elves felt impressed. Brendel would have made fun of the Lizardmen's excellent escape if he was there.

Chapter 121

The Final Battle (9)

The Elven commander took off his pointed helmet which had a few streaks of gold painted over it to distinguish him as a commander. He shook his head, and his beautiful silver hair fell down like a waterfall. He exhaled slowly, and looked coldly at the battlefield's messy appearance. The Lizardmen's corpses were strewn over over their Elven grounds with blood forming into moving streams. There was a piercing stench of blood in the air, which would have made normal people queasy in their stomachs, but it was the scent of victory to the Silver Elves.

[No. This is not victory yet.]

Hewjil had escaped. Nalaethar's men wanted to chase it but he stopped them from doing so. He flicked his sword once in the air to remove blood from it and placed it back into the sheath. The ornate design of the sword's hilt glittered in the sun as he signaled to his men to gather up and get ready for their next move, not wasting any time.

The Nightsong Tiger brought back the other team of Silver Elves. He frowned when he saw Nalaethar's appearance. The latter already appeared cold and distant, and the blood on his armor added on a disconcerting feeling to him. However, this somehow made him look seductive even to the Nightsong Tiger for some odd reason.

"Commander." The Nightsong Tiger's surprise only lasted for a short while: "I think our battle here is over."

"Yes." Nalaethar nodded.

The flag on the building was still upright, but no one knew how the battle between the mercenaries and the Lizardmen progressed.

"We can't call this a victory yet." Nalaethar said: "We must abide to our original plan and return to the agreed meeting place right now. I hope that your lord has fulfilled his promise instead of wasting his life."

“What?” The Nightsong Tiger interrupted him: “Our lord’s orders are different. We’re supposed to clear out the remaining lizardmen in the backlines if it came to that.”

Nalaethar looked at him with arrogant indifference.

“You saw that monster as well, and it is much stronger than what your lord had described in his plans. Even with our powers at their peak, we would need at least three of us in order to fight it to a standstill. Do you truly believe your lord can take it on by himself for so long? He is in grave danger.”

“But...”

“There is no time left for arguments. The choices before you are your lord or Amandina, and the importance of your lord outweighs her. Do you truly need to choose? In the battle against the Dragon of Darkness, there is no room for benevolence. The standards for judging the situation lies in the conclusion of the battle.”

The Nightsong Tiger could not help but look at Amandina’s direction. Brendel clearly ordered the mercenaries to protect her.

Nalaethar shook his head: “Very well, human, I will tell you a secret. I have already asked Amandina to place your lord’s safety as priority before she went off to command the mercenaries. I have no intention of going her aid. In our history, putting our lives before defeating the Dragon of Darkness was to give up hope for the continent’s future. This is why Medissa sacrificed herself for her sister, no matter how unthinkable of a choice it might appear to you.”

He straightened himself and raised his hand, and the Silver Elves gathered before him.

“Move out!”

===== Amandina’s POV =====

Nalaethar and the Nightsong Tiger understood Amandina’s situation.

The mercenaries and her were in dire straits. There were simply too many openings in the ruins for the Lizardmen to go through. The cover for the mercenaries was also inadequate and were easily in range of the Lizardmen’s crossbows. Even if they retaliated with their own ranged attacks, it was not effective in stopping the

Lizardmen warriors from pouring in.

However, this showed off the Mercenaries of Lopes' strong fighting will. The furthest three mercenaries faced off against the initial hundred Lizardmen, giving up their positions twice and took it back two times as well by using Exploding Crystals.

The reinforcements that Amandina sent out to help them were rebuffed by the enemies' numbers, and the three mercenaries were ultimately overwhelmed by the Lizardmen warriors who swarmed them angrily with weapons and shredded them into pieces. The last person waited till his final breath and detonated the last Exploding Crystal on himself, causing the largest damage to the Lizardmen's numbers since the start of the battle.

Almost twenty Lizardmen were taken out from that blast.

The battles after that were no less bloodier than the first one. The Mercenaries of Lopes were the ones in charge of defending the riskiest chokeholds, and almost every time they battled it was a melee fest that guaranteed corpses. After exchanging twenty two Lizardmen for another four mercenaries, the enemies finally broke through the outer positions and began to invade the ritual hall.

The remainder of the mercenaries retreated into the building and defended there, but it was not a plan they could hold on to because there was less and less room to defend against the enemies. If the defense lines were pushed back any further, they would have to retreat to the roof.

Amandina held on to the flag and continued to watch for changes in the battlefield, waiting for an opportunity to order the mercenaries to charge into the enemies' weak points. Each mercenary's death made her heart feel heavier. When Brendel was leading these men there was not even a single death, but it was just her mere ten odd minutes of commanding them had caused them to suffer serious injuries and even led them to their deaths

When the older Elven elemental sister, Felaern, used her own body to block off a fatal crossbow bolt attack, Amandina felt her eyes tear up uncontrollably. The Elven girl even suppressed her own voice in order to make sure Amandina did not panic.

Amandina understood what Falaern was doing and gritted her teeth as she laid her down onto the ground. The latter's body warmth lingered in Amandina's hands, and

she looked like she was just sleeping with her closed eyes.

A handkerchief appeared in front of Amandina.

She looked back in surprise and saw Deyna, the younger Elven sister.

“Wipe your tears, miss Amandina.”

“No, I’m fine...” Amandina took a deep breath and then stuttered: “S-sorry...”

Deyna’s lips moved once and wanted to say something, but she stopped herself. Brendel did not tell her about the secret of the Mercenaries of Lopes, and she did not have the permission to reveal it either.

“Please give me the flag, Miss Amandina. This place is too dangerous.” She said after a moment of hesitation.

Amandina shook her head.

“No, I have to be here.” She needed to do see this to the bitter end.

The Lizardmen had already broken the fourth defensive line, and the mercenaries retreated once again. They were close to the roof. From that distance, Deyna estimated there was less than fifty meters before they reached Amandina. She even saw the Lizardmen’s crossbows raising towards them. Even though they were not accurate shooters, their repeated attempts will reach the flag’s position soon.

Deyna creased her brows and stood in front of Amandina and reached for her sword. She was out of mana like her older sister. Still, she had to accomplish her task to defend Amandina.

“Deyna.”

“Yes?”

“Thank you.” Amandina said quietly.

The Elven girl smiled faintly, but quickly fell into a solemn expression when her eyes saw that the Lizardmen were chattering amongst themselves. All the crossbows were raised at the same time, and she was not certain whether she could defend against all

the crossbows' bolts. She gritted her teeth and pulled out her sword, gripping the hilt tightly.

The Lizardmen's fingers were on the triggers, waiting for the command to allow them to fire—

Amandina and Deyna held their breaths. No matter how much they prepared themselves for their deaths, there was a sense of despair when they faced it directly.

However, that moment never came. A small shining crystal suddenly fell onto the ground and in the midst of the Lizardmen. An explosion happened, and the walls were immediately painted with blood and rained across the stairs along with bits of flesh and bones.

Everyone was stunned.

Amandina was certain she gave all the crystals to the mercenaries at the outer wall!

A sudden clang could be heard from the edge, and she turned her head around to see a sword on the ground. Romaine climbed up onto the roof, appearing utterly exhausted and panting for breath. When she saw Amandina, she gave a smug smile: "Haa— I nearly got lost, haa... haa... It was hard to find a path... to the roof... Amandina, I learned how to use a sword, I can protect you... Haaaaa... I'm tired..."

"W-wait, aren't you supposed to go back and wait?! Were you the one who used the Exploding Crystal? Didn't you give it all to Brendel?"

Romaine's hands suddenly went to her small bag: "Well... I might have kept a few."

"Hold on... The reason why the explosion failed that night was because there were not enough to break an important section of the hill, causing the rocks to fall around us right! Damn it, didn't you say you used them all?"

Romaine jumped up when she heard Amandina curse for the first time. She shook her head repeatedly. "I-I promise I only have five, no, four left."

Chapter 122

The Final Battle (10)

Soon after Hewjil left the battlefield, he received a report from the Lizardmen under Conrad and discovered that he had escaped much earlier. It cursed loudly in front of the Lizardmen, but was secretly delighted. If it was the first person to escape and leave Conrad behind, there would be repercussions from the Tree Shepherds.

If Hewjil did not discover the secrets of the Elven kings' grave, it would not consider leaving its men behind. Telling the Tree Shepherds this secret would earn a great amount of goodwill and absolve his responsibility for leaving early.

As for Conrad who escaped like a coward, he would be treated as the scapegoat, while the Lizardmen would be seen as the ones who stayed behind to resist valiantly. The situation was unfortunate as the Silver Elves were ultimately drawn out from the graves by its actions, otherwise it would be free to complain to the Tree Shepherds about this bastard and land him into great trouble.

[This bloody bunch of sharp ears bastards.]

Hewjil's uplifted mood turned dark when he thought about the Elves again. All his stolen goods were placed in the ritual hall of the Elven temple. Giving them up like that made its teeth itchy. Suddenly, it knocked into its adjutant who was in front as it did not pay attention.

Hewjil did not have anything to vent its anger on, and this made it reach its boiling point: "You mindless bastard! Do you have no eyes—"

The leader of the Lizardmen suddenly realized something was wrong, it quickly snapped its head to the object that was obscuring the light in front of it.

There was a tall Silver Elf fully clad in a heavy-looking silver armor. A pair of silver eyes was behind a pointed helmet with two wings at its side, and at the tip of it was a long white tassel extending below his shoulders.

And he... was riding on a white unicorn.

Behind him were rows of Elves also riding unicorns. They looked almost like they were carved out of the same image; every one of them had the same body height and figure.

They stood quietly there in the forest, while the forest was completely silent—

The Elf in front of him looked down at Hewjil with expressionless eyes, yet they made it tremble. He spoke after a short moment, his voice gentle and low: “Hewjil, I presume?”

The Lizardman opened its mouth and wanted to deny it, but it found that it could not do so because from the intense gaze that seemed to pierce through any falsehoods.

“Good.” The Elf nodded: “We intended to slowly find our way to you ever since the Lizardmen invaded the ruins, but it was only until recently that we were forced to come because the kings’ graves were disturbed.”

Hewjil’s eyes narrowed in terror and felt faint. These Silver Elves were not the same as the ones they fought earlier.

The Silver Elves had truly reappeared on this continent—

===== Brendel’s POV =====

The card in Brendel’s hand turned grey after ten minutes passed. He threw it out and it burst into flames, and left nothing behind. The card had gone into the graveyard and he felt a little annoyed at that fact. Instead of reducing the number of cards inside his grave, it seemed like he needed to retrieve more of it. Knowing that the cards in his deck were limited made him feel even more frustrated.

He peered deeper into the silent forest. Ekman had a poor sense of smell, but it had strong vision and hearing senses. It was able to listen through all of its six limbs, and capable of capturing frequencies much more than a human could.

But the distance between them were nearly five kilometers apart. If he did not make any noise, the monster would probably have a difficult time finding him.

He considered for a while. Although he wanted to wait a little longer, he was afraid that it would turn around and go for Scarlett instead. If that was the case, that would be the end of her since she was unlikely to beat even a normal person in her condition.

He chose to raise his right hand and shot a Wind Bullet into the forest.

[The ring is almost useless against that monster anyway. Using it to attract the enemy is using its capabilities well enough.]

As expected, once the spell was released, sounds of trees being felled quickly could be heard. The monster's reaction was incredibly quick, almost rushing straight towards his directions.

Brendel did not feel tense at all. He took a deep breath to focus himself, took out a ruby from his pouch and counted the time in his mind.

Countless trees were being knocked down one after another in rapid succession, to the point where it sounded like an automatic gun being fired.

[Three, two, one... Here it comes.]

Brendel immediately squeezed the ruby in between his fingers and formed an 'okay' sign. He chanted the activation words and a red light was transmitted from it. The surroundings within ten meters of Brendel was instantly silenced. The rustling of leaves, the sound of his breath, his heartbeats; everything was silenced.

– Charge remaining: 6/10

Brendel saw the indication in his eyes.

The Acolyte of Earth immediately stopped in confusion and looked everywhere. It realized that the faint heartbeat it heard earlier had completely disappeared. While it was hesitating on whether it should go back to the girl, it saw an elegant white deer appearing in front of him.

The deer trotted slowly across the ground silently. It was truly like an open challenge to Ekman who was in a berserk state. It uttered a guttural roar and charged towards it. However, the white deer was nothing more than an illusion which was made out of light. Brendel could make it as fast and agile as he pleased, and Ekman could not do anything other than to be toyed with.

Brendel hid on the branches of an old tree, holding on the statue and playing with the monster like it was a game. Every time Ekman bellowed with frustration, he giggled without holding back. There was no sound from his laughter, of course. Each cast of

the Silence magic lasted for five minutes, and he had six charges left. With the addition of the ten minutes that the warhorse had given him, he gain a total of forty-five minutes.

The last option he had was the Unyielding talent, and Brendel believed that the Silver Elves would be done with the Lizardmen, even with the worst scenario where the Lizardmen attacked the backlines. Obviously, he would not gamble with his life if he did not have the means to delay the boss for that long.

The time passed by slowly—

When Brendel wanted to cast the Silence Magic for the fourth time, his heart suddenly skipped a beat. That was because he discovered the monster had suddenly stopped moving and was not paying anymore attention to the white deer.

It was making repeated growls that Brendel recognized as a warning.

[Someone's coming, who is it? Nalaethar?]

Countless thoughts passed through his mind, but he did not waste any time and recast the Silence spell again. However, he confirmed that there was something amiss as it did not look to the north but over to his direction.

[What the actual fuck?]

His heart suddenly tightened. He went through his actions in his mind once, but he did not believe he made a mistake.

And then he caught something in the corner of his eyes—

The bushes suddenly parted, presumably with a rustle, because the monster reacted by extending to its full height and roared. A familiar face emerged from the bushes, and the person was someone whom Brendel had seen before.

It was Eke Lantonrand Ophelon, the cause of this entire chain of events.

He was the only son of Duke Rhun, and the successor of the Lantonrand territory. But that was not the biggest problem. Eke was capable of seeing Brendel from his position while Ekman could not.

The first thing that Eke saw was certainly Ekman's body fully covered with the Element power that it had and he paled instantly. But when he looked around for a moment, he saw Brendel looking back with an incredulous expression.

[T—– This fucking wanker!]

Brendel wanted to strangle Eke for intruding into his plans. He truly did not foresee this person appearing in this desolate place.

Eke hesitated for a moment before he looked at the monster again. He pulled out his sword and ran further away from Brendel, while yelling at the monster: "What are you looking at, you monster, are you trying to pick a fight with me?"

[...Hah?]

Brendel watched the baby-faced youth try to lure the monster away. He understood what his intentions were. At that moment all his thoughts were replaced by something else.

[Holy shit! Is this kid Oskar Schindler?!]

Chapter 123

Sorry, I'm not a knight

Brendel thought he was an average human being in his past and present life. The difference between the two was that he knew the events that were to come in the future. With that basis, he had a larger ambition and desire to change Aouine's fate, and change that ending that he bitterly regretted.

That thought did not really have anything to do with the word 'selfless'. His wish was born out of his desires and feelings, and did not think he had become a noble person even if he saved many people in that path.

He would mete punishment equivalent to the evil deeds done, while answering with rewards to good deeds shown, and firmly believed in that principle. He had never bound himself with the responsibilities of a messiah or the likes, but at the same time he could not ignore Eke's situation.

[Mother Marsha, did I offend you or something—]

He looked up to the sky with a helpless expression as he canceled the Silence spell.

"Stop running and come back to where you were!" He shouted to Eke.

Eke stopped running after a short while, but the Acolyte of Earth was already in the middle of the two. It first stared at Eke, before looking back at Brendel, and recognized him as the one he had been chasing all along.

"Is it really a gentleman's behavior to steal the monster I'm hunting?" Brendel said as he looked at the monster's many eyes, feeling like his emotions were being tied into complicated knots. He really wanted to smack the youth on the head a few times, but the latter's actions invoked a sense of favorable impression towards him.

In the end he made a sarcastic remark.

"...Thanks." Eke looked back at him with a grateful smile and shouted. He knew if Brendel did not help in confronting the enemy, he would only last for a few seconds

before getting shredded into pieces. The monster seemed to exceed the strength of a Gold-ranked fighter, and handling it himself was an impossible task.

It was clear that this was his fault. When he saw Brendel removing a spell, he immediately knew that it was a Silence spell; a spell frequently used by mercenaries to either ambush or infiltrate, and he was familiar with it. This was the equivalent of pulling Brendel right into danger, especially when he was clearly hurt all over from the start.

He sighed lightly and became convinced that the man on the tree was a righteous knight. Ever since he was young, he was engrossed in reading novels about knights and even dreamed of becoming one. Becoming a mercenary meant that his dream was still a little far away, but his conviction had never changed. It was also the reason why the Grey Wolves Mercenaries liked him so much.

“Ser Knight, let us work together to defeat this monster!”

Eke shouted somewhat excitedly. He knew that even if the both of them fought together they were not be able to defeat it, but if they were going to die, then they should at least have heroic deaths. He even thought it was Mother Marsha granting him a chance to fight a monster together with a real knight in his last moments, instead of seeing viewing this encounter as bad luck.

“Huh?” Brendel obviously did not understand what he was talking about.

There was a flash of red that appeared in the monster’s eyes, and Brendel tensed up. It was a sign that it was about to attack, and he was on the verge of activating his Charge ability when he realized the monster did not move to attack him. He soon found out that it was because Eke had gone up and tried to attack it.

“Holy shit! Are you crazy?”

Brendel really wanted to cover his eyes at that moment. A level 30 idiot trying to hit a level 65 (+15) boss in a Berserk state. Indeed, the Boss had an increase in levels ever since it went berserk. Not only was it stronger, it even had the abilities of its added levels. Layers and layers of rock walls sprouted from the ground to form elaborate patterns that prevented him from advancing.

– Passive ability ‘Rock Bulwark’ activated.

Green words appeared in Brendel's eyes. Each layer of rock was six centimeters long and was formed with quartz, capable of resisting hardened steel swords. If anyone got close to it, the shield would automatically activate to defend it from harm. A normal physical attack was useless against it.

Eke did not know that and he struck at the walls, and the sword only penetrated a few centimeters before it was stopped. He immediately realized that it was a bad move but it was too late to retreat.

The monster swung its arm backwards, its hardened forelimb bringing about a sharp blade made of wind, cutting and breaking its own layers of rocks to reach Eke. At that moment, he thought he had taken his last breath, but someone knocked deeply onto him with a great impact, sending the air out of him and forcing him to roll on the ground uncontrollably. When he finally managed to open his eyes from the pain, he realized that the monster's attack had missed him.

When he turned his head to the side, he saw Brendel groaning as he got up and immediately understood what happened. After having a moment to allow his mind to function properly, he hurriedly spoke with gratitude: "Thanks ag—"

"Fuck!" Brendel punched the ground. The idiot had wasted his ability again. Even though Eke was better with his personality compared to the bastards Makarov and Buga, this was truly an idiot who did not think about consequences. No matter how he looked at Eke, it was clear that Makarov failed to teach him how to think ahead.

The so-called idiot youth jumped a little when he saw Brendel looking angry, but the latter did not say anything else and the monster was not going to wait for them, so he put his worries aside and bravely said: "Ser Knight, let me distract him and you can attack him—"

"Shut your god damned mouth! Stop your bullshit!" Brendel cut him off again with a roar.

"I'm sorry..."

"Forget it. Just stop your nonsense." Brendel's patience had ran out and his replies were curt. The monster began to charge towards them like a heavy tank and he immediately stood up. There was no time to waste when he had to face a boss with limited options. Since the monster had trouble turning around easily, he kicked

himself off the trees and launched himself to the sides and ran towards the monster's rear.

[I'll test out Frontal Assault first—]

What surprised him was how easy he managed to get behind him. Even if the monster turned slowly, it would not give up on defending itself. He was even prepared to suffer an attack if things went awry. But he suddenly thought of another possibility and stiffly turned his head to Eke, then broke out into a cold sweat.

Eke had placed his sword horizontally across his chest and faced the Acolyte of Earth directly where he was.

“What the fucking hell—-!”

Brendel stopped his motion to use Frontal assault and instead raised his hand to use the Flame Ring. The explosive fireball struck the monster's shoulder, disrupting its aim slightly. Instead of hitting Eke's chest the attack landed on his left shoulder instead. The latter cried out loudly and was knocked straight into the bushes. There was a loud crash as he slammed into a tree and there was no further sound.

Brendel quickly retreated, but when he looked at the monster that was turning towards him, he could only scream repeatedly by cursing Eke in his mind.

He was completely out of options now. He could only hope for Nalaethar to reach here as soon as possible, but it seemed like the wish was truly unlikely. Was Mother Marsha listening to his prayers?

Suddenly, he heard a light giggle that sounded like it came from a child. It sounded truly out of place in this forest —

===== Amandina's POV =====

After Romaine joined the battle the situation was quickly reversed. She did not want to tell her how many Exploding Crystals she had, and simply handed two over to the mercenaries who quickly used them against the Lizardmen, forcing them back from the roof. However, their commander ordered them to attack in a loose formation and once again pushed towards the roof.

Romaine took out another two Exploding crystals and indicated that she did not have

anymore left, but no one believed her. The horn from the battlefield suddenly sounded out for a long time. This was a signal to indicate the battle at the frontlines was over, and they were free to pull out of battle.

However, Amandina did not want this to end and she quickly issued an order.

“Deyna, get me Romaine’s bag—”

The Elven girl obeyed the order and resulted in Romaine staring at Amandina with teary eyes. The latter took her bag and poured it out onto the ground. She discovered there was another two Exploding Crystals in it, and she yelled angrily: “I told you these things are dangerous! How could you hide six Exploding Crystals from me!”

“I did make sure that I kept them carefully.” Romaine said in a pitiful voice.

“That isn’t the problem... Forget it. I’ll talk to you later.” Amandina sighed. “Deyna, distribute the remaining crystals. I want a counter attack.”

She nodded and left.

The conclusion of the battle was nearly over.

Chapter 124

The observer in the back (1)

The clear laughter pierced through the quiet forest.

Brendel and Ekman raised their heads to the source of the voice, and discovered a short girl sitting on top of a branch. She looked like she was fourteen or fifteen years old, and had twin ponytails that were slightly curled. She supported her round face with both hands and looked at Brendel with interest.

The girl's clear green eyes was also filled with mirth. She wore traditional leather armor and shook her boots subconsciously.

"Mister Brendel, do you need any help?" The girl asked with a big smile.

"Who are you?" Brendel asked after a moment and narrowed his eyes. The little girl was somehow familiar to him.

"Rauze." The girl said.

"Rauze?"

Ekman's bellow interrupted the both of them. It was clearly displeased with this newcomer, but there seemed to be something dangerous about her and was reluctant to move rashly. It looked at her cautiously while lowering its body and entered into a wary stance.

This action clearly grabbed Brendel's attention.

"How annoying, interrupting me when I'm speaking—" The little girl snapped her teeth lightly and jumped down, with a huge greatsword suddenly appearing in her hands. She did not waste any more lines and swung it. Ekman roared loudly and jumped back a little, placing both its hardened arms in front of him. There was a sharp snapping sound like twigs being snapped, as the sword's blade shattered the layers of the rock shield like it was made of glass before destroying the outer layer of the forefront limbs.

Copper-green blood immediately spurting out from the cracks, but the blade continued to travel its path without stopping, slicing off its limbs and biting into its chest. A loud explosion rang out as the sword knocked Ekman away, causing it to scream repeatedly from pain.

Bredel froze there on the spot.

The attack was done in the blink of an eye. She only took a split second to beat that scary monster Ekman into a pulp. He even asked himself if it was an illusion. How did she make it was even weaker than the low leveled grey wolves outside of Bucces?

“You are...” Before Brendel could finish his words, his mouth opened widely because the girl threw away the gigantic sword like it was a toothpick into Ekman’s direction. A loud crash could be heard as the sword struck it and the forest was silent once again.

“...” Brendel did not know what to say.

“Such a naughty little puppy. It needs to be taught a lesson before it’s quiet.” The little girl clapped her hands as if to get rid of the dust on them before she turned around. Because Brendel was much taller than her, she had to look up at him.

“What were you asking just now, mister Brendel?” She asked while raising her eyebrow in a mischievous manner.

“Erm... I have no questions. I have things to do, so I’m going to leave now.” It looked like the girl was someone violent, and he knew how many crazy NPCs there were in the game. Even though they had amazing hidden side quests, it would be better to leave them alone if he could not handle it.

There was no way he could revive in this world so he had to flee now before trouble got a hold on him.

Sadly, that trouble was looking specifically for him—

“Wait,” The little girl saw that Brendel really wanted to leave and pulled his sleeves, but she had hurriedly grabbed his leather armor with both hands and tore the seams off with a loud ripping sound. She stuck out her tongue: “Sorry, I think I used too much strength...”

Brendel said nothing as he took off his leather armor and threw it onto the ground

because it was not usable anymore. He sighed and turned around: “Do I know you, miss Rauze?”

“Of course you do, you even accepted such a precious gift from me.”

“Wait— I don’t understand what you mean. What precious gift did I accept from you?”

She pointed at his bag.

“You mean to say...”

The little girl nodded.

Brendel’s face darkened. The Golden Apple naturally would not find its way into his bag without rhyme or reason. He had suspected that someone did it on purpose, but he always lacked a target to point his finger at. He even thought that it was Romaine’s aunt that he had not met yet, especially after he met Tulman. However, he did not think it was... a little girl?

He looked at her. Her features were pretty like a doll and she was staring at him in a mischievous manner. He still felt it was a little difficult to believe her.

“So, you know what that is?”

“The Fairy’s Apple. Is it rare?”

[She really is that person.]

“That means you were at that place from the start?”

“Haaah~~~ I feel really hurt that you are so~~~ suspicious of me, mister Brendel! Of course I know what that place is. The Valley of the Holy Saints, that is the name you humans call it right?”

[You humans—?]

Brendel caught that two words. He tested her in order to confirm his suspicions and there was no mistaking it. At the very least, she was somehow related to the Golden Apple. Even he did not realize he was carrying it for a while, after the visit to the Valley of the Holy Saints.

“Why did you give this to me?” Brendel thought for a while before he retrieved the shining golden apple and asked the question he had that was on his mind ever since the day he found it. The Golden Apple was famous amongst folklore as the Golden Tree was grown from the River of Destiny, and had the ability to change the fate of a person. “I don’t believe I know you personally, miss Rauze?”

The short girl giggled again, her eyes turning into crescents. “Of course there’s a reason. Just treat it as a thank you gift.”

“A thank you gift?”

She nodded.

“Somehow I feel that it sounds like it’s big trouble.” Brendel could feel black manga lines creeping over his forehead and his face darkened slightly.

[A Golden Apple as a thank you gift. I can just imagine how much trouble it is.]

“That’s why I’m thanking you ahead with that gift, mister Brendel.”

“You saved me this time to thank me too?” Brendel was beginning to find what sort of trouble he got himself into but did not think he did anything crazy enough to attract her attention. He thought for a long time but was not able to figure it out. Rauze did not look like she was lying, and more to the point, did not need to give him a Golden Apple to make fun of him.

“Well, no actually.” Rauze shook her head, and her pair of golden twintails shook in a playful manner.

Brendel looked at her in silence.

“I wanted to ask you a question but I’m not sure if I want to ask you. If I ask you the question, then I can get the satisfaction of getting the answer, but if I don’t ask you I can get the satisfaction of guessing the answer. It’s so annoying and so conflicting. But if that naughty puppy killed you, wouldn’t I lose that satisfaction? No, no, no!”

[My god. Ekman died in such a horrible manner. Why does it sound like, ‘Well shit, I’m in a bad mood today, I’m doing whatever I want, so fuck you—’? No matter how I look at it, this girl sounds like the unwelcomed and unreasonable dragon race in the continent.]

“And?” Brendel said.

“I changed my mind. I thought about it enough, and I decided that I want to ask you this question—”

“So you’re going to lose your fun of guessing?”

“Didn’t I say I changed my mind.”

“Very well, what do you want to ask me?”

Rauze pointed at the Golden Apple.

“It has something to do with this?” Brendel looked at her incredulously.

“Mister Brendel, you should very well know the value of the Fairy’s apple, have you not thought about eating it?”

He shook his head. He had already planned his path ahead of him. However, the girl’s attitude had raised his suspicions. He looked at the apple in his hand and wondered if it was fake or if there was some other problem to it.

He never believed that something good would just happen out of nowhere.

“Are you worried that I’m lying to you? Don’t worry, there’s no poison to it this time, but I did add something interesting to it—” The girl answered.

Brendel felt his back grow cold with sweat. It was lucky that he was careful.

“What interesting thing?” He asked, but it seemed like Rauze did not wish to answer.

Instead, she parted the bushes and ran to Ekman’s corpse, then dragged the gigantic monster over like she was dragging a small animal. She knocked it around a few times, then suddenly discovered a longbow before throwing it to the sides.

“Strange, the mana around it is dissipating so quickly. And why is it carrying a longbow?”

[Shit, stop messing the body with your unlucky hands!]

Players discovered in the game that monsters' drops were affected by the rate of mana disappearing. A bound Magic Weapon could even be damaged from the disappearing mana, and it was dependent on luck as to how many items could be gotten.

Brendel was called the King of Luckless Hands because the monsters' mana usually disappeared quickly when he messed around with their bodies. The only person who had even worse luck was his female senior, and her level was at the instant evaporation of mana, leaving almost no items behind. He had the sensibility to leave the looting of corpses to other people, but she was really into looting as though she wanted to defeat the fate of being luckless.

In the end, she failed in her challenge.

But this time Brendel witnessed another person who was as luckless as she was.

A level 65 Boss in a berserk state that was killed perfectly when he was at level 25, yet the first item was a longbow at a Brass-rating (Magic) rarity as a reward.

– Shale Longbow, Brass-rating (magic).

[Please stop, please...! What happened to my promised pauldrons at the Gold-rating (Fantasy) rarity?!] Brendel's heart was bleeding with tears.

Chapter 125

The observer in the back (2)

The girl knelt beside the corpse that was almost like a small building. She flipped it around for quite some time but she did not seem to discover anything else, so she lifted the longbow by its string with her fingers, stood up and shook it in front of Brendel before placing it on the ground: “Do you want it?”

“How about you?”

Rauze naturally shook her head at the longbow which was taller than her. “It’s useless to me, I just want to see what it had—”

Brendel wanted to hit the ground.

[If you don’t need it stop messing with the body!]

He really wanted to destroy things with his bare hands so he could feel better, but the girl literally killed the Acolyte of Earth with one single blow for him so he had no rights to complain about it. He could only ask with the faintest of hope:

“That’s it?”

“What do you mean by ‘that’s it?’”

“You only discovered this longbow?”

“Of course not, there are quite a number of things on it, but they don’t fit my aesthetics so I didn’t want to touch them at all.”

[This is a reason?] Brendel grumbled, but he continued to ask the question he did not receive an answer to:

“You still haven’t told me what you added to the Golden Apple. If that’s a thank you gift, I think I have the right to know what it is, right?” He lifted up at the apple. He originally wanted to let Freya or Romaine eat it, but he found that it was fortunate that

he did not do so. Only the Gods would know what was on it.

He carefully placed it slightly further away from him, in case he somehow touched that 'interesting thing' on it.

"It's a secret." She giggled again.

"Secret..." His mouth twitched a little.

Brendel still wanted to get an answer but Rauze suddenly frowned a little and looked to a certain direction. She put her index finger to her lips and made an action to get him to be quiet.

"Someone's coming." Her expressions turned solemn. "Mister Brendel, your adventures were really exciting and I like them very much. I came to see you personally this time because there's a little trouble back in my clan. My friend and I need to return back there soon." *(TL: Friend's name is Phoral.)*

"Hold on." Brendel suddenly caught on to a number of things. The girl seemed to have followed him for a long time, but he caught onto something that practically confirmed his suspicion: "Clan? You are..."

Rauze nodded with a smile.

An explosion set off in his mind. The only race that liked to call itself 'clan' was the Dragon race. Everyone in the continent disliked them, even the Madara undead. They were arrogant and did crazy things, while being unreasonable all the time and were infamous for their deeds.

He really did not expect to be involved with a little girl dragon for so long, but it was fortunate that she did not become unhappy through the process and ate him for lunch. In fact, it seemed she seemed like she had a favorable opinion of him. Now he somehow felt a little lucky with a dragon covering his back.

Was this good karma for rescuing the refugees?

"All right, Mister Brendel, those men are about to reach here. I don't want these lowly stupid creatures to see me. Don't worry, I'll stay with you a little longer and not let them hurt you." She stood up on her toes and petted his shoulders, like she was his older godsister. Her body started to fade away, becoming transparent and disappeared

entirely.

[Hurt me? Why would Nalaethar and the Silver Elves need to do that?]

For the prideful Silver Elves to be called as lowly creatures by the dragon girl would likely cause their king to wake up from his grave and return to the world. At the same time, the dragons were the rare races who still held on the Golden Bloodlines. The dragons might not have large numbers because they conceived less compared to the other races, but any of their lineage had the ability to use the Element power from the time when they were born. It was the most recognizable sign of the Golden Bloodlines.

[Nalaethar is really slow... Hmm, did I forget something?]

A faint thought of something important passed through his mind, but he was instantly distracted by Ekman's body. Since a pair of unlucky hands already went through his body, then the items were probably set in stone. He first picked up the longbow in front of him and read the description from the system.

– Shale Longbow, Brass-rating (Magic).

– Piercing damage: 25-29, +4 agility, +2 strength

– Ability: Creates one Arrow of Petrification (1 week cooldown)

Brendel played with the longbow's string. He was barely satisfied with the stats. Even though it was merely at a Brass-rating with normal stats, the ability to create an Arrow of Petrification was very useful, as this type of arrow could not be replicated by spells. The arrow was completely effective on any Iron-rank fighters and below, but that would be a waste to use it on them. It would be a serious threat to peak Silver-rank fighters at level 40, and even affect gold-rank fighters at lvl 41-50.

The arrow itself can be kept like any other generated Magic arrows, and would retain its effectiveness even after a long time. This was something players loved to hoard, and many archers prepared this ammunition in advance. It also did not need special bows in order for it to be used too.

The Shale Longbow was not a terrible weapon but it was underwhelming if it was dropped from a level 65 boss with a perfect kill score. He eagerly went over to Ekman, even though Rauze was still at his side. Finding great equipment from a boss was still something that enticed him enough for him to ignore other problems.

He carefully placed the Golden Apple on the ground. He did not feel like putting back into his bag until he figured what the apple had on it. Then he went over and checked Ekman's body.

– Star of Flames, Brass-rating (Magic)

– Expands Fire Element Mana Pool by 50%, increase Fire Element by 10.

Brendel giggled three times when he saw this necklace.

He was a Planeswalker in this world and it was important to expand his Fire Element Mana Pool. This suddenly led him to consider finding and equipping equipment from the Elementalist's profession. He could find brooches and earrings, and expanding his Mana pool several times would be an easy task. Even if he had shitty innate talent, he could be a qualified user with great artifacts.

[Cheating with items in order to compensate for the lack of talent. Ha, ha, ha.]

Brendel chucked away the necklace before he suddenly heard a snap behind him. When he turned around, he saw a group of men walking out from the bushes. Brendel's eyes went wide when he saw them, and realized what that important thought was.

If Eke appeared, was it not possible that the bastards Makarov and Buga were nearby? Naturally there were more than the two of them. Seven or eight men accompanied them, but they did not like they were from the Grey Wolves Mercenaries.

Brendel concentrated on his eyes on the old man behind Makarov and Buga, frowning as he felt like he had seen him before from somewhere.

But compared to Brendel's surprise, Makarov and Buga were utterly shocked. They obviously recognized him, but Brendel looked like a hero depicted from some legendary fable. He was holding on to a short sword, with bloody wounds all over his fit body which were exposed to the air. The monstrous Acolyte of Earth, Ekman, was cut up with deep gashing wounds and laid dead with blood spewed everywhere. It was even dragged a sizable distance on the ground.

It did not seem wrong to say that the youth took the monster down all by himself after an incredible grueling fight.

Buga and Makarov fought against Ekman a few nights ago, and even at that time the level 50 Boss was equivalent to a level 65 normal monster, which already exceeded a Gold-rank fighter, and were completely outmatched. The worst thing was how Buga and Ekman had the same Element type, making it easy for everyone to see the difference between their strength. Once he realized that he was outmatched, Buga and Makarov made the decision to leave the Grey Wolves Mercenaries and left them to fend for themselves.

The two of them took a step back when they saw that corpse.

[This young man...] Makarov thought to himself.

“It’s you!” But it was Buga who spoke first.

“I was wonder who could it be.” Brendel answered lazily as he looked at them. He was laughing inside his mind. To think that karma happened so quickly.

[It looks like you have yourself to blame for your bad luck. What a fucking joke. If I don’t get my revenge, I won’t live up to my name as the Super Veteran, and should just retire somewhere to live life peacefully.]

His reply came with a pair of folded arms without any inflections to his voice. Buga’s sudden call out was followed by a long silence—

Chapter 126

With great power comes great responsibilities (1)

“Mister Brendel, do you need some help with your injuries?” As one would expect from the experienced cunning fox, Makarov smiled and asked in a well meaning way after overcoming his shock, as though he was not the cause of Brendel’s troubles: “We did not expect to meet you again after we got separated from the ambush.”

[You fucking bastard— You led the enemies to us and you dare to take zero responsibility for your shit? Are you really treating me like a naive kid?]

However, Brendel did not display his fury and even smiled back, patting the lifeless head of the Acolyte of Earth: “Nope. This enemy is not strong enough to cause me any trouble. It’s a pity that you fled so quickly last night, I couldn’t even react fast enough to lend you aid as allies. I sincerely apologize for that.”

Both of them exchanged barbs with each other. Their skills at spouting bullshit seemed like a stalemate, but Makarov was on his guard because he was not certain whether Brendel knew the whole truth or because he was angry at his actions at the night of the ambush. Brendel appeared like he had many facets to him in contrast to his youthful appearance, and Makarov felt it was difficult to deal with him in such a short notice.

Even to the point where he had to ignore Brendel’s sarcastic remarks.

Ultimately he was not there to argue with the youth. He frowned and looked at the area behind Brendel’s back. He hesitated for a while before he asked:

“Mister Brendel, did you see anyone else passing by here?”

“Perhaps you mean to find a young man?” Brendel asked innocently while suppressing his laughter.

“Yes, we are indeed looking for a young man!” Makarov answered as the people behind him also appeared anxious.

“Well if my guess isn’t wrong, that would be mister Eke you’re looking for?” Brendel asked.

Their expressions immediately turned serious.

“You know him?” Makarov took a step forward and his words left him before he could stopped himself. He realized he had overreacted and coughed once, before he returned to where he was. He looked at the Buga and the old man beside him. Buga was holding on his greatsword’s hilt with one hand and looked warily at the youth with a darkened expression, while the old man looked at him with a thoughtful face.

Makarov was certain that Brendel understood part of the situation by now, although he did not think that the latter knew of their identities, as the entire Grey Wolves Mercenaries and Eke were completely deceived by him.

“Mister Brendel, Eke is the son of my close friend. I promised him that I would take care of Eke, but I accidentally got separated from him. Please tell me where you saw him.” Makarov coughed again and asked.

[You got separated with not only Eke but the entire Grey Wolves Mercenaries right? You don’t even looked concerned with their well being, you piece of shit.]

“Close friend? The subordinate of Duke Rhun, Makarov, calling his lord with that title? Would your duke agree to that?”

The moment Brendel mentioned Duke Rhun, the followers behind Makarov immediately drew out their weapons, while he looked at them in amusement.

“Young man, who exactly are you.” Makarov finally cast off his friendly tone and questioned him in a demanding tone. He immediately wondered if Brendel was on Conrad’s side, but when he looked at the Acolyte of Earth, that did not seem likely.

[A third faction? Even though the possibility is there, who would be interested in this affair? It does feel more likely that it’s not a faction within the kingdom. Then from the outside? Madara or Kirrlutz?]

Brendel did not know what Makarov was thinking, but he waited for the old man to make his move. If he was standing beside Buga and Makarov, then his status would be high enough for him to do so. That was not Duke Rhun, and he would not make a mistake in recognizing that famous person and would not be fooled even if Duke Rhun

was to disguise himself.

The old finally spoke, but the question he asked surprised everyone.

“Young man, is that the Fairy’s Apple beside your feet?” The old man had spend all the time identifying it and asked.

[Crap!]

Brendel yelled in his mind and realized he did not keep the fruit in his bag. That mistake was partially caused by Rauze’s remarks on adding something to the Golden Apple, and also because he did not expect anyone else coming other than his allies.

At the same time, he finally recognized who the old man was when he spoke.

That was the head of the court wizards, the old minister who aided King Ansen the seventh, Fleetwood Deverra Gemmer.

[This person is the princess and prince’s teacher. So he’s involved in all of this. To think Makarov has this hidden card. No wonder he’s confident enough to leave Eke in town. He even fooled me into thinking his forces were stretched thin. Conrad must have sent part of his men to the town as well, and if Fleetwood is there... I see. The Grey Wolves Mercenaries was a bait all along. Makarov wanted to make sure that all of Conrad’s men are accounted for. Then—]

Brendel’s mind worked furiously as he looked suspiciously at the men in front of him and his hand subconsciously touched his sword’s hilt.

Even though he understood the motives of the nobles’ need for such merciless behavior in times where Madara was at their doorstep, but they had never acknowledged their feelings. Sanford, Scarlett and even Redi, had given up great sacrifices in order to work for Makarov, but were regarded as nothing more than mere pawns.

When they did not need these pawns anymore, they simply sent them out to die and destroyed their dreams, not even allowing them to resist. The worst thing was how they did not realize this point at all.

Brendel took a deep breath and gritted his teeth. He was determined to teach these vermins a lesson. It was not because he was honorable, but because he could no longer

tolerate his situation. He wanted them to pay for their actions.

“Grandmaster Fleetwood, right?”

Brendel took the Golden Apple and shook it in front of them.

His actions made Makarov and Buga’s expression change. They finally realized what Fleetwood meant by the Fairy’s Apple. That was the fruit of the Golden Tree. With that item, they had the ability to change everything. The dying king’s body, or even the prince’s feeble personality and luck, with the Golden Apple, everything would change.

Was this the chance that the Gods gave Aouine?

Everyone in front of Brendel thought of that.

Regardless of whether it was the two-faced Makarov or Fleetwood who had seen countless events, had their breaths quickened.

“Young man, the thing in your hands is important to us. May I know if you’re willing to sell it to us? We will fulfill your demands, regardless of whether it is money or power.”

Brendel felt two hands placed onto his shoulders, and a small voice in his ears: “Do you want to sell it? I permit you to do that, mister Brendel.”

Brendel merely gave a big smile while looking at them like they were rotting pigswill. “You want it?”

“Yes,” Makarov continued from Fleetwood with incredible charisma: “Mister Brendel, that item in your hand is incredibly important to us, to the point where it can change the fate of many people. Please believe me when we say that we’re not buying this for ourselves. We are also willing to pay and abide for a fair transaction. As long as you quote a price, we will do our best to fulfill it. Money, power, girls, or even boys, anything that you desire— we will grant it.”

Brendel chortled coldly: “Such bold claims, mister Makarov. What do you have to guarantee anything to say, or even let me trust you? Just because the royal family is behind you? You ask me what I want? Very well, I do want to ask you two questions—”

The three men in front of Brendel looked at each other in confusion. They did not

understand his request, but if that was all, this chance could not be squandered, so Makarov nodded: “Go ahead and ask.”

“The first question. I’m really curious and I don’t understand your plan quite a bit. If you had Grandmaster Fleetwood, why do you need mister Buga and yourself to risk your lives, and even throw away the Grey Wolves Mercenaries here.”

Makarov and Buga did not expect this question at all and looked blankly at him, but it was Fleetwood who answered: “Young man, these fights are not what they seem at all on the surface. I don’t know how much you know exactly, but we don’t want to the world to know that the royal family has interfered in this matter—”

He did not wish to reveal this information to a stranger, but Brendel had already recognized him, and the item in his hand was too important, so he lowered his status and explained for him.

“I see.” Brendel nodded.

“Then the second question. The fact that you came here, is it because you wanted to gather back the Grey Wolves Mercenaries?” Brendel lowered his head with a smile, hiding away his sinister eyes: “You see, I accepted your men into my group...”

Makarov and Fleetwood looked at each other before he shook his head: “No, you’re thinking too much Mr Brendel. We have no intention to come back for them at all. It was because Mister Eke insisted to find his companions and his betrothed.”

He felt a little awkward when he spoke about his betrothed. It was shameful that he allowed the only son of Duke Rhun to get engaged with someone under his watch. But he shook his head and continued his answer:

“The Grey Wolves Mercenaries are a thing of the past. It doesn’t exist any longer, and for the men that you accepted, I thank you.”

[As expected.] Brendel was grinding his teeth.

He heard a clanking sound on the ground, and everyone turned to the source of the sound. They found a red-haired girl covered in blood and holding on to her wound on her chest, standing blankly there. The spear in her hand had dropped onto the ground.

Chapter 127

With great power comes great responsibilities (2)

“Scarlett?” Makarov’s eyes bulged slightly, before he glanced at Brendel with a heavy heart, and understood why he had asked these two questions earlier.

However, at this critical juncture, Fleetwood would never allow him to anger the youth in front of him, even if the latter sowed discord in front of him. He tried to suppress his emotions, but the emotional blow to him was so strong that he could only look away, when his adopted daughter looked at him with disbelief and a tinge of sadness in her eyes.

Even if he had a thousand excuses, or at the very least one sentence which Scarlett hoped to even listen to, he could not speak of it.

“She’s a gold rank fighter...” Buga suddenly spoke.

Makarov looked at her again in surprise and realized it was true. He did not know what happened to her in just a few days, and thought it was her potential that came out from the dire situation she was in. They had completely failed to spot her talent, but the value of the Golden Apple in Brendel’s hand surpassed any gold-ranked fighters.

That was a source of the Golden Bloodline.

Once the person ate it, they would become a ‘Chosen’.

“Scarlet, you...” Makarov’s explanations turned into these two words.

But no further words came out from him, and the girl looked sadly to the man whom she looked up to as a father. It was not disappointment she had in her eyes, but a gaze of pleading, even if it was just a white lie, she would believe it.

She waited helplessly for her merciless leader to change his mind, hoping to hear the words “I’m sorry, welcome back...”

His words felt like he was concerned about her well-being, but his actions were clearly drawing a line that they were nothing more than strangers. The tall figure of Makarov instantly became blurry and far away from Scarlett and she clutched over her heart as tears spilled from her eyes.

“Why...” She sobbed out a single word before she fainted right onto the ground with a audible sound with her eyes closed.

Even with this scene appearing in front of Makarov, he chose to stay silent.

Brendel’s eyes were cold and furious. He felt a tap on his back, and he nodded. If Rauze did not alert him in advance, he would not have detected Scarlett’s presence. He wanted her to know the truth about Makarov because he could not allow Makarov to keep her like a pawn to be disposed of any time.

“I’m sorry.” Brendel sighed and muttered. It was not his intention to break her heart.

He walked over to her and held her in his arms, and cleaned off the mud from her face. Her tears could still be seen on her face and looked like she was still reliving a nightmare. He then carefully propped her against a tree, before turning back to Makarov and the others with a condescending gaze.

“Mister Brendel?” Fleetwood cut in as he felt Brendel’s fury.

“MAKAROV!” Brendel’s roar was unleashed with a burning fury from his chest, his voice so cold that it was like a blade at their throats. Everyone was startled, not knowing what exactly was his relationship with Scarlett was.

“Do you think me as a fool? I know all your fucking secrets! Ever since King Ansen the Seventh took the throne, Aouine has been on a decline, and this kingdom is shrouded from the light and became dark from corruption. Ten years, you staked everything on a comeback with all you’ve got. Your carefully laid out merciless plan seemed like it was meant for the greater good, but the truth is all of you just wanted to indict Duke Arreck and control the nobles after he’s gone. You lied to the whole kingdom into thinking Duke Lantonrand is a fool so you can become the victors at the end. Who else is assisting you? Lord Schwake?”

Brendel’s words were like daggers that lodged into their hearts. Makarov and Fleetwood paled immediately and even forgot to breath as they tried to guess who exactly the youth in front of them was.

He had pointed out the gist of their plans, and even knew that it was a gamble that was all or nothing. All sacrifices were worth the price, even if it meant their lives. The political exchange between the royal faction and the nobles had become something like a fantastical belief. There was only one chance to topple their target, and once they did so, the royal faction that was losing the battle would be able to turn the tide and sweep the darkness that was plaguing the kingdom.

This was the makings of a great legend, and it should rightly have legendary ending of good triumphing over evil. It was supposed to be flawless, but the youth who was a stranger who knew more than most of their members, even had the knowledge of when the plan started.

[Who is this bastard? What is he planning?] Makarov's forehead was glistening with cold sweat.

Brendel punched a nearby tree in explosive anger, causing it to splinter: "Under the banner of 'justice' from the royal faction, your sword points even at the men and women who are innocent! For the sake of the kingdom's future, you even tried to bribe me with Aouine's citizens. Girls?! Boys?! Your morals have been fed to the dogs! Your honor has been fucked away like whores! You sent men and women out to their deaths even if your plans fail completely and utterly!"

"Stop your insults." Fleetwood's wrinkles bunched up together as he also felt a wrath boiling in him. Even though the Golden Apple was something important to them, he could not allow him to insult the royal crown.

"Do you have nothing to say about your plans, Grandmaster Fleetwood?"

"Our plans have not failed—"

"Do you want to know the reasons why your failure is inevitable?" Brendel suddenly laughed in a pleasant voice. He took a deep breath as he recalled the past in his previous life. The memories of burning pillars and furniture in the castle. The kingdom was in ruins and destroyed by Madara, and everything was gone.

The Princess Regent's final wish.

The oath from the Goddess of War.

They made their vows as though they would be able to allow Aouine to rise from the

ashes, and every gamer in the kingdom poured their efforts into the war. But Madara poured in like a black sea and swept everything away. It was an ending that was destined for failure and tragedy.

The nobles who won against Duke Lantonrand were still seated in their high chairs and manipulating the scenes from behind. They thought that they were the final victors by ruining the royal family, but they were ultimately slayed. Countless lives were lost.

Even till the end, they did not take responsibility for their actions.

[These nobles are so high up on their horses that I don't know how to deal with them. They think their every action is sacred, putting in so much belief into their corrupted sense of 'justice' and 'kindness' or just plain 'I deserve this shit because I'm a fucking noble'.]

"How can I let you see the truth..." Brendel sighed tiredly. He shook his hand: "This Golden Apple. I know what kind of impact it has in your eyes, because this will make your 'game' shine ever brighter. You truly believe that the scales will tip in your favor. Sadly, and it's not because I wish to shock you, you are destined to fail."

"What are you talking about?" This time it was Buga who frowned.

"Young man, not everyone can become a seer." Fleetwood shook his head.

"The ones who use such lies are burned on a stake." Makarov added with a threatening glare.

"You don't believe?" Brendel merely laughed.

"Your reason?" Buga asked simply.

"I recall a story. During the Aouine's brightest era, the knights of Aouine would carry their horns and swallowtail flags. With their blades pointed forth, they would blow their horns and charge forth. The golden emblems from Corvado, Grinoires and Arreck were woven onto the swallowtail flags. The nobles in that era held on their oaths—"

Brendel took a pause.

"Do you still remember that oath?" Brendel smiled.

They looked at him with a dumbfounded look.

“Don’t recall it?” Brendel’s eyes were full of ridicule: “That’s fine. I can recite it for you.”

“I swear upon this sword and will stay true to this oath! I will lead my citizens away from wars and killings, to distance ourselves from the empire’s nobles’ arrogance and greed; I will never repeat the mistakes of the empire’s bloody history. I will ensure that the nobles will be faithful to the knights’ code of being fair and disciplined, brave and unflinching, generous and benevolent. I will enforce this oath to the end of my life!”

Brendel recited these words passionately and looked at the speechless men in front of him.

“Do you still recall the person who made this vow?” He said.

Fleetwood, Makarov and Buga exchanged glances. They felt a little hot on their faces. They obviously knew who made the oath, but they merely forgot who did it.

“Indeed,” Brendel nodded: “That is the source of your beliefs, the origin of Aouine’s nobles. Your ancestral king of the wise, the First King Erik who swore upon the Lionheart. Do you remember the words after the oath? When the day comes where the nobles of Aouine have forgotten their responsibilities, then this sword shall return to where it came from and not protect this kingdom any longer.”

“Do you not remember?” Brendel asked amidst the silence. “You don’t—”

“Such a pity.” Brendel spoke again after their replies still did not come.

He then sighed and cast his gaze into the distant forest. The afternoon sun seemed to shine a little brighter.

Chapter 128

The acknowledgement from the knights

The youth's voice seemed to linger in their minds.

They were silenced by his words, cutting through their excuses and beliefs, forcing them to lower their heads and ponder upon their actions. Even ardent supporters of the crown, Fleetwood and Makarov's minds were shaken in that moment. Was the origin of Aouine not the brightest era?

But they calmed down and reinforced their beliefs.

"The ancestral king's ideals are lofty and admirable, but the era now is different from the era of the past." The elderly scholar sighed: "To the very end, we cannot allow ourselves to abandon our plans because of the possibility of the Lionheart abandoning us."

"Ideals will not change reality!" Makarov added to Fleetwood's words with an indignant voice.

"Therefore you would answer the arrogant and ruthless nobles with your own coldblooded hubris. What is the difference between you and them?" Brendel answered with vehement displeasure. "The royal crown, the nobles, any of you, would not bring real change to Aouine, therefore your failure is assured. Even if you claim victory over Duke Arreck, are you capable of winning against Madara?"

"Stop your nonsense!" Makarov's voice was like the grinding of teeth: "How would a kingdom splintered into political factions be able to fight against the invaders! This matter has nothing to do with you, now please fulfill your promise and give the Golden Apple to us!"

Brendel's body shook though he was trying to suppress his laughter.

"The royal faction allowed Madara's invasion to come to pass! How would Aouine ever be able to repel the invaders? Your king betrayed Aouine! This Fairy's Apple that is capable of changing a person's destiny, but—" Brendel glanced sadly at Scarlett, before

he raised his voice: “It won’t change a kingdom’s destiny. Maybe that sickly king of yours can survive, or that cowardly prince of yours might finally grow a pair of balls, but your actions will only hinder her first step—” (*TL: Brendel is referring to the princess.*)

“So,” Brendel placed the fruit back into his bag: “You’re not getting it.”

“You bastard!” Makarov bellowed angrily, his chest full of rage after being played by Brendel. Even though he knew that it was a huge possibility that Brendel was toying with him, it was his condescending tone that truly enraged him. The advisor known as the ‘Cunning Fox’ lost his wits and regained that identity of the former Grey Wolves Mercenaries’ commander, drawing out his sword.

The metallic clang rang out as he rushed towards Brendel—

The latter did not retreat or move, staring at him without unflinching eyes. When the blade reached the youth’s nose, a barrier with hexagon-like plates lit up as lights, with magic runes appearing in between the plates, appearing and disappearing quickly.

Fleetwood’s wrinkled face paled as though he saw a ghost.

“Ancient magic!” He squeezed out the words from his throat as he looked at Brendel, not knowing what to do. The only known race that could use magic like this was the dragon race.

Brendel thanked Rauze in his mind and appreciated Makarov’s pallor without any injuries.

“What are you...” Makarov’s throat moved as he retreated in surprise.

“I—” Brendel wanted to mock him further but was cut short.

“Mister Brendel, that oath you just recited seemed to have resonated with something; this power, is really strange... I can’t suppress it any longer...” Rauze whispered urgently. “I can’t hold it any longer, I’m releasing the barrier...”

“Hey, wait!” Brendel wanted to ask her to hold the barrier a little longer, before he suddenly felt a tremor from inside his deepest self. That was definitely not Rauze’s prank or the resonance between the Planeswalkers’ cards; it was as if a spark had gone into his mind that was brilliant and gentle, then became a light that lit up the dark.

And within this light a door opened—

He seemed to walk through it, and he saw the human knights standing on both sides smiling and nodding at him, their eyes full of encouraging acknowledgement. He recognized two of them who were wielding familiar weapons. Ebdon and Gerard. Finally there was a grand-looking person standing in the center amongst the knights, who nodded to him as well. *(TL: You should know who Ebdon is. Gerard is that poor knight whose tomb got looted by Brendel, lol. Didn't he steal that sword Thorn of Light?)*

This illusion seemed to last for the briefest of seconds before it was gone. Brendel woke up from his stupor, found the source of the tremor, and subconsciously pressed down on his bag which contained the Sage Slate. He felt it shake uncontrollably as though it was alive, before a piercing shockwave above him separated the clouds above the entire Chablis region.

That afternoon, everyone from the nearby region, even the citizens from Bruglas, witnessed a miracle. Unending light poured down and seemed to disperse the white clouds, like a stone being thrown into a lake and cast ripples onto the surface.

When all the clouds and light disappeared from the region, the sky was like a pure blue gem with hints of purple in it, clean and pure. The citizens yelled at each other to look at it, while the traveling priests and adventurers rushed to their respective groups to observe this moment of intrigue. Even the seers from the Guild of Stars and Moon were alarmed.

The wizards living in Drora at the Sea of death recorded this sight. Monks came out from the palace in droves, suspecting the Lionheart had appeared. The Recorder in the Black Tower even lost hold of his precious Crystal Ball while he looked at the image in surprise. The priests in the Holy Cathedral knelt down and prayed.

One of the twelve representatives of the Archmage in Drora, William Pestle, held on to his magic scribe which was on a piece of lambskin paper filled with runes, causing a large black blot on it while he stared with an agape mouth into the sky.

Everyone looked at the peculiar circular sky void of clouds, but only the few there understood what exactly happened.

Divine Artifact Resonance —

The forest became brighter than before. Everyone in that area looked up into the azure

sky and saw hints of magical rune words that formed layers of circles that were miles long. The Law of Tiamat, created by Marsha to bind the Elements in a border.

Some of the men in front teared up at this intricate and beautiful sky, knowing how small they were in front of the Divine Magic and admired the beauty with all their heart.

Brendel gripped the Sage Slate tightly and looked up into the sky.

The Law of Tiamat was being invoked, and the layers of circles moved across hundred of miles, turning like cogs in a wheel, lining up to fit into sections like a jigsaw puzzle. Each layer kept moving and aligned above the forest.

The forest was completely silent.

The wind had stopped.

If this was in the game, Brendel would have been on his complete guard. This sight was like a legendary wizard that cast the highest class of spells that reached the fourteenth circles, or facing the Lords of Elements. This spells were legendary magic that was completely outside the scope any mortal understanding, and was the highest order of Laws that invoked destruction. The destructive force was akin to a nuclear bomb.

That tremor in his soul had reached its peak.

The center of this particular sky suddenly vibrated from a small point, then spread out everywhere with a pillar of white light descending from the sky, connecting the sky to the earth, and there was something silver in it.

“T-this... This is... King Erik’s Lionheart sword...” Fleetwood was completely stunned.

Suddenly another pillar of light shot out from the direction of the capital and shot into the sky’s circular borders, causing it to diffract and meet that pillar of light.

Fleetwood and the others stared blankly at this sight.

But Brendel wanted to knock his head onto a tree. He merely wanted to act cool by reciting that damned oath, and did not expect to receive the acknowledgement of King Erik. If he knew that this was going to happen he would not have done it.

That was simply because it was a Divine Artifact Resonance.

Suddenly Brendel shook his head.

[Hold on— Isn't the Lionheart a Fantasy-ranked weapon? When did it suddenly rank up to become a Divine-ranked weapon? The history of Aouine wouldn't make sense! Everyone would have attacked the kingdom to gain possession of it!]

That phenomenon lasted for five seconds before it waned; the Sage Slate that was held down by Brendel's hand stopped struggling. At the same time, Brendel felt that a mark was left in his mind, as though he could feel where the location of the weapon was now. The Lionheart and him was now connected to each other.

Of course, this meant that there were good and bad points—

The good point was that he was naturally one step closer to that legendary sword.

The bad point was how Fleetwood and Makarov were now staring at him...

TL: Ramblings.

This is some of the stuff I'm pulling out my head, not sure if there are more.

Royal faction

- Duke Rhun sent all his family members and men guarding into a trap to preserve his son's life.
- The current king probably worked with Madara and allowed them to invade Aouine, weakening the nobles.
- Makarov uses the Grey Wolves Mercenaries as pawns to get the nobles against the royal faction out in the open, and weakening their forces (the Tree Shepherds).
- Tries to get Brendel to sell the Golden Apple and willing to pay any price.

Nobles faction

- Corruption at Fortress Riedon, witnessed firsthand by Freya (imprisons the militia for bringing news of Madara's attack).
- Throws away Fortress Riedon and the three villages at the borders without sending aid.
- Buried the truth about the militia's contribution, made Freya a 'hero' to make the citizens happy.
- Also refused to allow the refugees into the cities.

Unifying Guild

- Tirste is a member of the Tree Shepherds and seeks to do their bidding. He wanted Brendel to create chaos, by inciting a rebel of sorts.
- Tirste forced Brendel in an agreement to create chaos in the city, but even without the latter's interference, the refugees will revolt (I think).
- That fake noble guy from Fortress Riedon wanted Brendel's girls.

Tree Shepherds

- Turned Scarlett into an Acolyte

Chapter 129

Reinforcements

The mood in the forest was turning awkward.

As a Grandmaster wizard in the royal court, Fleetwood understood many of the events that happened before his very eyes, but he did not know how to react to it.

[Divine Artifact Resonance, Ancient Magic, knowing all our plans...! Mother Marsha, what's going on?! If this is really a dragon before us, we won't be able to stop him from running even if he is at a young age.]

But Brendel was just as confused like them.

After that phenomenon, he had no desire to continue talking to them and wanted to leave. The biggest problem to him right now was the amount of people who had witnessed such the powerful magic that happened in the area. Anyone with common sense would believe that something wondrous appeared in this region. The southern region must be in a state of confusion right now, and adventurers from nearby, including the disliked wizards, would be rushing all over to this area very soon.

[Shit, this whole area is going to be in a state of chaos. I need to leave as soon as possible in case any idiots come after me.]

Brendel had considered many times as to how he would affect the history, but he did not expect to do just that after a few months he arrived in this world. He was not prepared for that and also not concerned about the Lionheart, but worried about the plan to take over the land he was targeting in the Randner region. He was even worried that it would change the princess's next move in the future.

[A butterfly effect that changes the entire future will be the worst outcome—]

Brendel was already having cold sweat on his forehead and the tips of his fingers were cold.

When Brendel was still considering this problem, there was a sudden applause in the

forest. He looked over to Fleetwood and Makarov immediately, but found they were initially confused as well, before they broke into a delighted smile.

Brendel immediately turned around and discovered a middle-aged man wearing a thick purple coat with an inner white shirt walking out from the forest. The latter was clapping with a large smile on his face.

“So this is Mister Brendel mentioned by the Cunning Fox? A young genius indeed. Your plan is really something that a normal person couldn’t come up with.”

[Another person with an Unsealed Element power?... Wait, I recognize this person.]

The corners of Brendel’s eyes twitched. He was Count Barre Deorwine, the right hand of Duke Rhun, and ruled over the fief Matthiola.

Brendel had conversed quite a few times in the game with him. Although he looked like he was someone who backstabbed people easily, he was actually a rare noble who was honest and upright to a fault. While he was considerably skilled, Buga turned out to be the greater warrior and reached over level eighty, approximately forty years later.

He ultimately met his demise against the Tree Shepherds, and was quite a considerable loss for Aouine.

Brendel turned towards him and smiled a little in spite of himself, his tone relaxing a little as he recalled these memories: “Plan?”

“Indeed.” Count Barre said: “According to my knowledge, the dragon race are mostly on their own under all circumstances. At most they would travel along with their mate, right? By pretending to be a dragon, you are free to do whatever you wish, including that stunt of summoning the Lionheart.”

Brendel immediately heard Rauze’s remarks.

“That man seems to understand us quite well.” She said.

[But you don’t know him. Barre Deorwine is very different from Fleetwood, Makarov and Buga. This man is a realist, and wouldn’t seek to initiate a conversation just to intimidate me. There is no doubt that he has taken measures here. This person is also someone who has unsealed his Element power... The entire situation has become

much more complicated than having the Tree Shepherds around.]

Brendel's mind was starting to give warning signals to his body to consider running away. He glanced around his surroundings.

[You're still just a loli dragon, facing these many Gold-ranked fighters would not be in your favor— Holy shit!]

When Count Barre appeared, Brendel had subconsciously recalled that he was a true holder of a fiefdom. After looking closely in the forest, he indeed discovered human figures in the vicinity, and the numbers were large enough to rival Conrad's army.

[Of course you had to bring an army in order to stop the damned Tree Shepherds! But this area isn't under your territory, bringing your soldiers into this area is practically asking to fight with Count Randner. Is this Duke Rhun's goal?]

Suddenly he recalled a certain land at the borders of the Randner's territory.

[No, that's not it... These are not Duke Rhun or Count Barre's men. That particular land at Rander's borders, doesn't it belong to the Princess? That's where the Royal Cavalry Academy is. Eke was most likely used as bait in order to lure out the political opponents, and with the troops from the princess—]

He hardly participated in Aouine's civil wars because he was busy raising his levels in the game world. Even though he roughly understood how the battles' conclusions were, he did not know the details of them. If his suspicions were correct, then the princess must have recruited soldiers from the very beginning, even before the Madara's invasion.

[Then it's no wonder why she was able to suppress the nobles with such little political clout for so long. I had never understood how she did it. So this is Makarov's contributions?]

He glanced at Makarov. This plan looked like something that the latter would conceive, but he did not understand the royal faction entirely. It somehow looked like there were separate tangents operating at the same time. The king colluded with Madara, while the princess gathered her own forces?

He shook his head slightly. Guessing what was going on with the royal faction was making his head spin.

“Which means,” Count Barre continued: “You’re not a dragon at all, right?”

“Miss Rauze, why didn’t you warn me about the men around us—” He turned his head away from their gazes and whispered to Rauze.

“The magic reaction was so strong that this little me was paying full attention to it. Plus, they are just some little insects buzzing around. What’s there to pay attention to? Well, that person who just came in is a little bit stronger.” She replied.

[Insects? That’s a whole army out there. In order to fight Conrad there must be more than a thousand men. Barre used to say his favorite pastimes were playing poker and commanding a large force to fight a smaller force. Even though it’s sort of a joke, but it goes to show how nasty his personality is. Also, what is he thinking? That Ancient Magic that Rauze cast is the real thing!]

Brendel did not believe her in the slightest. He had killed many dragons in the game and knew them well enough. Judging from her age, there was no possible way that she would be able to match them physically. With this thought in mind, he became even more careful in coming up with his response.

“But his Dragon Magic...” Makarov looked confused and asked, but Fleetwood interrupted him: “If I am not wrong, that magic came from a scroll. Since Mister Brendel is capable of acquiring the Golden Apple and invoking the Lionheart, then having a Dragon Scroll would not be a difficult task.”

Brendel looked incredulously at Fleetwood.

[Aren’t you a grandmaster wizard, how can you fail to differentiate between... T-that...]

If Fleetwood was not mistaken, then it meant the possibility was indeed there. He lowered his head deeply with his canines shown, and whispered urgently: “Miss Rauze, did you use a Dragon Scroll?”

“Yeah.”

“Why?”

“Well you see, that’s like the only way where they would lay their hands on you right?” Rauze’s voice was in a gleeful pitch: “I haven’t beaten people up in a long~~~ time.”

[Dear dragon boss, you're right in guessing that they would fight us because of that... But we might not win against them!]

Brendel was certain this problematic girl could not be relied on, so he took a deep breath and lifted his head: "Mister Barre, perhaps you're right. I'm not a dragon. But are you going to try and find out how many scrolls I have?"

Barre shook his head just like Brendel expected him to: "That's fine. No matter how many scrolls you have, are you confident that you can fight against an entire army? Mister Brendel, that would be folly, so please hand over the Golden Apple."

Brendel wanted to punch that incredibly fake smile off that irritating bastard's face, but he had to force himself to think of a proper response.

"Is that so? How about if you include us?" A clear voice rang out from the east direction.

The bushes were parted and revealed a group of approximately twenty Elven warriors covered in blood. Nalaethar took down his helmet and stared at Count Barre with an indifferent expression at him.

[[[Silver Elves...?!]]] Count Barre and the other men's eyes popped upon when they saw them. No one had seen them for centuries. He nearly choked when he saw them appear, and squeezed out his words after a long time with much difficulty.

"Our allies of the past, the Silver Elves, you were the only race who had never participated in any civil wars. Are you going to go to war with the humans over one person?" Barre clenched his fists; the Golden Apple was too important to let it slip by.

Nalaethar nodded as he looked at Brendel: "I owe him a promise."

"Very well." Barre sighed in exasperation as he tried again: "But do you really think that you can match our whole army with twenty men? We acknowledge your skill, but we vastly outnumber—"

His words quickly faltered. It was not only him, but the people beside him quickly held their breaths, including Brendel.

Everyone saw a large patch of blinding silver armor appear, as Elven Knights riding on unicorns came forward to join Nalaethar and his men...

The Eversong Army.

Chapter 130

Thou art my friend (1)

===== Princess Gryphine POV =====

“My lady, there are too many enemies, please move in a little deeper into the carriage.”

Knight Benninger pleaded sincerely outside the carriage, his voice a little urgent. Crossbow bolts from all directions struck onto the inner steel plates of the horse carriage, shaking and causing audible echoes within it. Princess Gryphine did not expect an assassination attempt within her own private lands.

“There’s no need, I’ll wait here for my knights to arrive. But the girl pursed her lips tightly and looked forward with her faint silver eyes.

“My lady—”

“Benninger.”

“Yes.”

“Say no more.” She answered simply. “...Thank you, Benninger.”

The sounds striking the carriage suddenly stopped, and the youth turned around with one hand on his sword, and had only courage in his heart as his aid.

Gryphine had worn her usual white gown like before and sat with both hands over each other on her knees. Even at her moment of danger, her sitting posture was as refined as any lady. She exuded the ancient royal family’s grace, and even the most austere of nobles would find that she was the brightest gem on the royal crown.

At the opposite of the princess’s eyes, was the only successor to Aouine’s throne. The boy, Haruze was looking at her with a pair of frightened eyes.

“Sister...” His voice was filled with dread.

She looked coldly at her brother.

“Haruze, pick up your sword and point it to the ground.”

The boy had always listened to her strict sister, and he did not disobey her this time. He overcame his jittery feelings and carefully pointed the sword onto the ground. The sheath of the sword was written with refined letters:

‘ Hark and know that my name is courage ‘

This was the motto of the Corvado’s royal family, and was renowned to be the half-Elven princess’s motto. However, it was a blinding irony on the boy. He stood up as held onto the sword and looked at his sister in utter confusion, with tears swimming in his eyes against the danger they were in.

Gryphine sighed when she saw his brother acting in this manner. She softened her features and spoke gently to him: “Don’t worry, your sister will definitely protect you.”

The boy wiped his tears with his sleeves and nodded with vigor at her words.

The forest had gone silent for quite some time. The interior of the carriage also fell into silence because of that. They tried to to pick up any signs of where the enemies were, but heard nothing other than their hearts beating rapidly.

===== Freya POV =====

Barsta, the Royal Cavalry Academy. Everyone in the courtyards, classrooms, corridors, any place with a window, looked up to the sky as the phenomenon happened.

Freya gazed at the blue sky with a central pillar of light connecting the sky and earth together. The clouds had been dispersed around the area, and the purity of the myriad glows in the sky made her gasp in awe of the beauty.

[What is that?]

The girl was wearing a set of armor meant for training, and she was combing her ponytail absentmindedly with her fingers before she subconsciously put it down. The lights on her face shimmered as smaller pillars of light in a circle suddenly lit up in the sky and connected to the center.

[Is Mother Marsha showing us a sign?]

The crowd in the training courtyard started to increase in numbers. They were screaming and shouting, telling everyone to look up at the sky, as though the end of the world was coming. They held their breaths as they watched it.

Whispers turned into murmurs, and the instructors joined in with their apprentice knights to discuss over what had happened. They shook their heads in disbelief almost as if to shake off what they saw.

“That’s an Artifact Resonance, right?” A man near Freya suddenly spoke.

“What did you say it was?” She turned around and asked.

The man watched Freya looked at him with a pair of light brown eyes. Sangany, the second son of a count, felt his heart skip a beat. It was an opportunity for him. The majority of the academy were males, and the few females that joined this batch were naturally targets of the nobles’ scions. Freya’s appearance was outstanding compared to the other girls, and it was even better for them because she did not have a notable background and was seen to be a delicious prey.

This game was circulated only amongst the seniors, and because she had just joined in recently she did not know the existence of this game. The only thing she did feel was the odd number of males around her, which made her slightly uneasy and anxious from her instincts. However, the boy with blonde hair in front of her had an answer to her question, so she took another look at him.

“It’s a type of Mana resonance, but for it to be so powerful... I have never seen or heard something like that before.” He immediately showed off his best side and answered with a patient smile.

“Mana Resonance?” Freya’s mind was slightly jolted, as she recalled a certain heroic image of someone’s back at the Valley of the Golden Demonic Tree. She immediately turned away in order to prevent her burning face to be seen by anyone else. She took another look at the sky as the lights disappeared. She took another deep breath and calmed herself down: “Where is that area?”

“Judging from that area, it should be Randner.”

Freya thought of Brendel and Romaine, and she felt her heart beat faster: “Is that the

doing from the two of you? I really miss you...”

Her uneasy and shy expressions made the youth behind her think that she was impressed. He thought of her as a country bumpkin from her looks, but he maintained his smile and took a closer step to her, wanting to say more, but the tolls from a bell rang throughout the courtyard and interrupted him. Everyone’s eyes reluctantly tore away from the sky and put their gaze into a certain direction.

The giant steel bell was placed in the tallest building and used only in festivals or emergency situations. Everyone wondered if that phenomenon had anything to do with it.

A squadron of knights urgently ran into the training courtyard, with the crowd separating to allow them through. The leader of the knights was a young woman wearing a purple swallow-tailed army uniform riding on a horse. She rode to the front, turned around and raised her chin up while looking at everyone.

“This order is meant for everyone in their respective years. I want all of you to gather in three minutes, fully equipped and ready for battle—”

The woman’s voice was a little low and gruff, but her strict bearings made everyone alert.

[We’re to wear our armors and swords?]

[Are we going out for a battle? A mock battle?]

[But this doesn’t seem like we’re close for any tests—]

“These are knight members in the Reserves...” Sangany muttered.

“What do you mean?” Freya looked at the leader whose straight black hair was tied behind her and weighted down behind her back like a straight spear, all the way down to her waist.

“The woman at the front is a senior apprentice knight of this academy but she’s special because she’s a Reserve. Their ranks are equivalent to the Black Knights, or the Royal Cavalry’s reserves. She’s a squire and a military officer at the same time. Her name is Maynild, daughter of Madame Ida. Perhaps this would be clearer, Madame Ida is Duke Rhun’s sister, she married to a knight who died in the Ten Years War, and lived alone

in her home ever since. This woman is her only daughter.” Sangany explained with a stern look: “She’s a genius in this academy, but anyone who is capable of entering the Reserves is naturally more capable than us trash.”

Freya committed the name Maynild to her memory, and looked gratefully back at the youth with a smile: “There’s no need to put yourself down. I think you’re capable because you know so much.”

Sangany looked back at her in surprise, and was slightly moved and grateful at her sincere gaze. But that lasted only for a moment.

[Once you try the sword on me, you will find how impressive I really am—] The youth laughed coldly in his heart as filthy thoughts washed over his mind.

===== Brendel’s POV =====

The Silver Elves stood quietly in opposition of Barre’s commanded men. No wind blew in the forest, and both the black and silver swallow-tailed flags stood limply where they were. The sun’s rays struck down harshly onto the forest, and showed off the Silver Elves’ lily emblems, while Barre’s men held onto the flags depicting direwolves as their symbol.

There was the occasional horse pants and suppressed sneezes, but other than it was an awkward silence.

Count Barre and the men beside him had dark expressions, in contrast of the taciturn Nalaethar as well as the commanding officer of the other Elven Knights who wore a full helmet and prevented any signs of his expressions from being seen.

Only Brendel sat peacefully and lazily on a tree trunk in between them. He knew Rauze was beside him, so he did not need to fear of any sudden attacks, and also believed that he would be fine even if a battle was to break out.

Count Barre and the others still did not know why the Silver Elves were willing to break their vow, and were unable to find a solution to this stalemate. On the other hand Brendel was reflecting on his mistakes and assumptions, and thought about the fact that the Silver Elves had appeared on the continent so quickly after the first Madara war.

[Is there going to be any major change in the future because of this incident?] He

rubbed his forehead.

It did not seem that the situation was going to change any time soon, so Brendel jumped down and went over the Acolyte of Earth's body in boredom. The remainder of the mana had already condensed into a highly pure Mana Crystal. It was a Level 65 Boss's drop, and even had the properties of the Blood of Gods. It was one of the best crafting and alchemy materials, only one rank below the items from a dragon's loot drop.

He suddenly looked over the the direction of Rauze, although it was just empty air he was looking at.

"Your expression is a little strange mister Brendel."

"Is that right?"

"But Rauze already has a mate. I'm also not really interested in humans. But— If it's mister Brendel, I don't mind trying it once."

Brendel coughed uncontrollably, choking his spit wrongly into his lungs when he heard the reply.

The two leaders looked over at him for a while, before Count Barre broke the silence:

"Let's negotiate."

Nalaethar nodded.

Chapter 131

Thou Art my Friend (2)

The ones who really participated in the negotiations were Count Barre, Fleetwood and the newly arrived Elven commander of the Unicorn Knights.

Buga and Makarov went over to the bushes with Brendel's directions, brought out a bloody Eke out from there with reluctant thanks, and lowered their glowering attitudes against him. The Silver Elves had clearly displayed their intentions to protect Brendel because he protected the graves of their old kings.

Brendel sat beside the Acolyte of Earth and watched the discussion. Even though he did not participate in the negotiation, he knew that Count Barre's core topic would now be about the Silver Elves instead of him. The Silver Elves had disappeared and gave up on this particular forest a long time ago. This land was now regarded to be part of the kingdom, and even the closest allies of the past may not easily enter this land anymore.

Aouine had the upper hand on the territory.

Brendel could see the Silver Elf commander was adamant in his attitude, almost refusing Count Barre and Fleetwood's every suggestion. He wondered what sort of agreement would the two increasingly annoyed men enter into.

"Are you able to guess why the Silver Elves have returned?" He suddenly asked.

"How should I know what these strange Elves are thinking about. They don't socialize with others." Rauze's voice was nonchalant at the start, before she suddenly grumbled. "And stop disturbing from doing my important stuff!"

"What are you doing?"

"I'm writing a script about the knight Ser Brendel. It's really hard for me to get good inspirations. Oh, I forgot to mention, I'm a bard—" Rauze's voice turned to one of pride.

[A bard...]

Brendel frowned from that revelation. It seemed like many of the dragons' professions were bards. He recalled a famous quest in the game: A dragon made a huge underground dungeon and captured a few strong monsters and put them inside, becoming the BOSS with his monster underlings. When the unsuspecting adventurers or gamers challenged him, he would record the results and turned them into stories. If they won, then the dragon awarded them part of his treasures. Some gamers investigated the whole affair and proved that the dragon actually made ten times more money than what the given treasure was worth.

The quest was meant for level 45 players and was disguised as a normal chain event, but gained notoriety when this secret was revealed. Many players were quite impressed with it and was a hot topic for quite a while.

Although it was clear that some of the dragons had bad hobbies, they were still much better than the ones who actually just directly robbed others.

"Ahh, stop bothering and annoying me." Her attitude quickly changed. "Never mind, I'm going some place else to write it—"

[Tsk.] He clicked his tongue sarcastically when he heard nothing more from her.

He suddenly heard a cracking sound behind him, and whipped his head around, thinking that it was Rauze but it was Nalaethar instead. The latter had taken off his helmet and looked solemnly at Brendel, then at the creature beside him; his eyes had a puzzled streak in them.

Brendel looked blankly at him, then gave a smile and said: "Hey, Nalaethar—"

The handsome Elf looked back at him, slightly startled at Brendel's strange tone.

"Could you wear your helmet?"

"Why?" His monotone reply came.

"You're so good looking that I feel great pressure looking at you." The youth sighed.

Nalaethar smiled for the first time. He thought about the request seriously before wearing back the helmet, leaving only a pair of eyes that looked at the youth. He

paused for a while before he spoke again.

“I’m leaving, Brendel.”

Brendel looked back with puzzled eyes. It was obvious that the Elf was going to leave when the mission was over. He wanted to say thankful words but suddenly realized that there was an empty feeling in his heart. Even though they did not exchange any wasted words along the way, he had trusted in this ally completely and he was now leaving.

He wondered where Nalaethar was going to go after this.

[Is he going back to the altar or take his final slumber? The Altar’s magic is growing weaker by the day and although I said I’ll bring back information of the outside world, is it really possible to do so? Maybe this is really like a quest, Nalaethar and I will only meet this one time and once I leave, the Altar will be nothing more than an abandoned building.]

The more he thought about it, the more he felt that possibility was very high. His heart fell when he realized that fact. After a long time, he could only find the greedy words inside of him.

“Are you going already? But you haven’t fulfilled your promise to teach me that skill. Are you trying to break it?”

“Breaking promises. That’s something you humans are fond of. Of course I will fulfill it.” He took out a scroll and handed it to Brendel as he spoke. “I have written the usage of the skill on it, my friend.”

That two words struck Brendel like a bolt of lightning and he looked stupidly back at him. Nalaethar squeezed the scroll into his hand and hugged him once, before releasing him with a smile: “I thank you for bringing us a battle. We had hoped to have one for a long time. The blood in me has once again been set aflame. You are exceptional. Your skills in battle impressed me and the others, but there comes a time where we have to go our separate ways. Now, you owe me a promise—”

Nalaethar closed his eyes:

“Remember to tell me the events of the future. Be it ten years, or a hundred years from now. I will wait for you to fulfill it, my friend.”

“I will. Yes.” Brendel wiped his eyes with his hand. “The wind is a little big.”

Nalaethar nodded with understanding.

“There is one other thing. We rushed over to your side because of the Acolyte of Earth. We do not know what has become of your mercenaries, you should ask the Nightsong Tiger for more details.”

His body was gradually disappearing, his helmet dissolving away to show his smile one last time. All the heroic Elven spirits then turned into white light and shot out into the sky, disappearing into a certain direction in the southern forest.

The other humans looked puzzledly at that display, while Brendel caught the Elven commander of the Eversong army nodding to him with respect from afar.

The youth felt slightly better at Nalaethar’s parting words, before he set off to the Nightsong Tiger’s location.

Count Barre went through the situation before him with suppressed anger. He could not allow his forces to fight against the Silver Elves: the Eversong army was renowned in the continent for their skill, and persisted in the lore for more than seven centuries. The only wise decision he could make was to retreat.

In the end, they negotiated a neutral standpoint, they each retreated three hundred meters away and set up camp, and the atmosphere in the forest finally lost some of its bloodlust.

The Elven knights nodded at Brendel with respect, and their commander walked over and gave him a silver fern leaf. It looked something like a bookmark, but Brendel knew that it was a sign of the Silver Elves’ greatest gratitude.

[Nice. If there’s some political bullshit in Aouine, I can apply for political asylum.] He joked to himself.

The silver leaf allowed him to redeem a boon from the Silver Elves, and anyone who brought it before them could seek help no matter how much time had passed. He did know that someone in the game world managed to borrow over a hundred heavy infantry from the Silver Elves and the loan period was a hundred years, although he did not know what favors could be sought exactly,

The Silver Elves' heavy infantry was just one or two ranks below the Eversong army, but they were definitely regarded as the top tier army to have. Brendel wanted to try and ask for that favor right away, but stopped after a moment of deliberation. This was an alternate parallel world which was different from a game. It would be much better to establish a proper relationship with the Silver Elves so that he could gain more in the future.

If he acted greedy, these prideful and distant race might look down on him and affect things in many subtle ways. It would be a loss.

Chapter 132

The end of Summer

Count Barre stood in Brendel's path.

[The hell?] Brendel gave him a wide berth as he walked past the smiling man.

"Ser Brendel?" Count Barre called out to him in a solemn voice when he realized Brendel was avoiding him.

"What is it?" Brendel snapped with a displeased tone. He was in a rush to find the Nightsong Tiger to get the details from him about Amandina.

"Even though our viewpoints differ our goals seem to align. At the very least, I am certain that you are not on the side of our enemies, are you not?" Count Barre spoke in a rush, not giving Brendel the chance to cut him off. "Naturally, we have our own thoughts on restoring the kingdom, but surely there is no need for us to draw our swords at each other's throats. I agree that Makarov's actions are a little overbearing, but he's a only a human who's acting with limited resources."

"What are you trying to say?"

"Would you be willing to join us? If you hate our actions, then why not take control of the situation? I hope to have an outstanding youth like yourself on our side." Barre invited Brendel with sincere words, as though he had forgotten the unpleasant exchange between them.

[That's something the Count Barre I know would do.]

Brendel had actually given them enough leeway on this issue and avoided having an all-out battle with them, precisely because they were on the same side. If these people were against the crown, then he would have redeemed the Silver Elves' promise and killed them immediately.

Because of Makarov's plans, he and his men were put into danger. Romaine and Amandina were still nowhere to be seen. If he lost his temper and waged a battle to

get Makarov's head as an act of revenge, then duke Arreck might take the opportunity to capture the princess's land in the nearby area. Freya might even be in danger because of that.

[It looks like he's smart enough not to talk about the Golden Apple anymore, so I'll put it aside. But joining your group is an absolute joke.]

"No," Brendel looked at the count and shook his head. His reply was cold and hard, surprising the count with his tone: "You will see me very soon, but believe me, it would not be here, and not the way any of you would like to see—"

"...Then I shall await to see your future." Count Barre's eyes were fretful as he stared at Brendel.

===== Freya POV =====

In truth, the battle that she was supposed to be in was undertaken by the senior squires in the academy, led by the reserve officers in the graduating class. When Freya and newer members like herself reached the battlefield in the forest, their task was taking care of the battle's aftermath.

She immediately noticed a carriage filled with bolts and arrows like a porcupine in the center of the road. There were cavalry equipped with silver armor riding near the carriage, with many of their comrades' dead bodies on the ground. They refused anyone from approaching the carriage, and insisted of taking care of their injuries as they cleaned up after their own.

There were two clear colors. Purple and silver. The bodies with these two colors were strewn everywhere. Heavy groans from the injured, mingled with low frightened murmurs from the newly arrived nobles' sons and daughters, could be heard everywhere. They were seeing this bloodied sight for the first time.

The reserved officers wanted to take prisoners, and gave the order for the older squires to intentionally maim the attackers, and had left many of them alive. However, once they took enough prisoners to be satisfied with, the remainder was ordered to be killed, and this task was also left to the new members of the academy.

Many of them found their weapons shaking, unable to swing it, and there were even a few who vomited as they saw the bloodied mess from the ones who were brave enough to attempt it.

Freya had fought enough in real battles not to be shaken by the sight and faithfully did her job. She had only paused in the beginning to guess the identity of the people within the carriage. Sangany followed behind with a sick face. He had expelled everything he had for his meals, and he could only heave weakly after that.

He held himself against up a tree, while being impressed by Freya's clean strikes to the enemies. She was certainly an admirable maiden.

"...Do you know who that is?" He asked after catching his breath.

"What?" Freya looked back at him with incomprehension.

"The carriage."

She took another look at the carriage, then shook her head, her clear eyes showing that she did not understand.

"The insignia on the carriage is a Holy Beetle. There is only one person within the kingdom who has this."

"And?"

[You don't even know this? How did you even manage to come to the academy— Wait, is she bluffing?]

The youth looked at Freya in incredulity, but he did not find any signs of deceit in her, so he shook his head and answered: "Grandmaster Fleetwood, the court's First Wizard of Aouine."

"What!" Freya was shocked.

But Sangany shook his head: "If that is truly Grandmaster Fleetwood, there is no need for us to go into battle. The person within the carriage is very likely to be someone else. And yet, Grandmaster Fleetwood has very few friends or people related to him. The people who could borrow his carriage, is either the king, or his student."

"Her royal highness?" Freya's eyes were wide. She still know this common knowledge even though she came from the borders.

The youth nodded.

Suddenly a black warhorse passed by them quickly. The rider swiftly rode through the forest, before the warhorse suddenly stopped, turned around in a trot and moved back the two of them.

Freya and Sangany looked up, and found a beautiful but cold face.

Her appearance was something like an artistic artifact, it was rare to find such perfectly shaped features. Her sharp chin was a strong arc that led into high cheekbones and deeply set eyes of a pure purple.

Her central parting of her fringe led down to her fine eyebrows, which was raised slightly before lowering in displeasure. Her straight nose bridge seemed to reflect her extremely strong character.

The two of them instantly thought of the bards' descriptions of the beautiful ladies of the north.

There was a slight scoff as Maynild looked down at them from the warhorse, first at Freya, then at Sangany.

“Your name is Freya?” She asked a question while she stared at the young man, making the latter feel like he was being targeted by a predator.

“Y-yes.” Freya answered.

“The results for your riding and sword skills are excellent.” She said in a low magnetic voice: “I have heard of your tale as well, but if you want to accomplish something, you had better leave scum — like this man here — behind.”

There was great disdain in her eyes as she spat out the last few words.

The two of them looked blankly at her.

Sangany's eyebrows frowned and he tried to refute subconsciously: “Miss Maynild, even though you are Madame's—”

But his words were cut off by a metallic screech, and felt his neck slightly colder. When the youth understood what happened, Maynild had actually jumped down from her horse and pulled out her sword, drawing it against his neck. Her actions were done in a single second, and he was left frozen with a gesture that he did halfway before it was

finished.

“Have I given you permission to speak?” Maynild spoke in a chilly voice.

Sangany’s back was cold from sweat, but he did not reply because of his confusion.

“S-Sangany...”

“Your rank?”

“M-Miss Maynild, I—”

The sword in her hand pressed ever so slightly against his neck: “Ser.”

“S-Ser Maynild.” Sangany swallowed and answered with a stutter. “I’m a second year squire, I have no rank yet—”

He did not waste any more words, and used all his strength in his body to squeeze out the answer.

Maynild’s sword was sheathed back so quickly that the two of them could not see it done properly. She glared coldly at the youth who was cursing in his heart, then gave an order: “Then, soldier, I’m ordering you to shut your mouth—”

She finally looked at Freya properly, then adjusted the latter’s collar which was a little crooked from cleaning up the battlefield. She patted her arms and said softly: “Remember my advice, it won’t harm you—”

Freya was also in a state of confusion with quick thoughts swirling through her head

[Should I thank her? She was really amazing with her sword. Can I be someone like her? Perhaps someday...]

===== Princess Gryphine POV =====

“Who is she?” The half-Elven princess asked the young man beside him. The scene where Maynild and Sangany exchanged words happened to fall into her eyes. She looked at Freya, finding that there was a sliver of familiarity.

“Madame Ida’s daughter. Duke Rhun is her uncle. She’s quite talented and an ardent

supporter of the royal crown. We should be able to trust her.” Ser Benninger looked over to her direction and said.

Gryphine laughed at the silly response: “Are you exhausted, Benninger? We both know who she is. You even know she’s my close friend.”

“I apologize, my lady.” Benninger answered in embarrassment.

“I’m talking about the other girl, do you recognize her? She looks familiar.”

“That’s Everton’s daughter—” A warm voice came from outside the carriage.

Gryphine was slightly surprised, but her light silver eyes immediately shone with delight.

“Oberbeck?” She spoke softly.

A laugh came from the outside. “Yes, your highness. It seems that I am late.”

Chapter 133

Romaine's second plan (1)

In the bountiful pastures of the northern highlands, the citizens who lived there circulated a famous legend, which depicted the soldiers left behind in the battlefield to be people who were watched by the God of Death.

Kren Norsdt had heard of this legend too. He was hired by the northern kingdom's Baltha region, and was born in a gentry family. He was considerably talented as a beast tamer, and enrolled in the Dragoon Knight's 34th wing and became a Dragoon. That particular platoon was part of the southern region's army, but it was defeated by Madara and their commander slain in battle. *(TL: Not sure how to use gentry in a sentence. Nobles > Gentry > Commoner, in terms of social ranking.)*

However, the squadron did not wait for a truce, and assaulted Madara harder each time the days went by. The nobles that were further away from the battles, used the ongoing negotiations at that time as an excuse not to provide any support for them.

The messengers that were sent out to the White-Mane Army and the other armies from Arreck did not return, and the situation grew more desperate, and the situation turned out like how the next highest ranking officer in the 34th wing predicted:

“The southern region's situation is becoming worse every day. We do not know where our brothers are after being separated, and the Madara army continues to attack from all directions. We are unable to contact anyone and it seems like all news have been sealed off. It is impossible to retreat. The nobles are acting on their own, and this land has completely fallen away from the kingdom's control by now. Marsha above, I pray that I will see this nightmare end while I still live—”

But it was all pointless to Kren right now.

He rode on his injured flying dragon and patrolled one of the villages destroyed by the undead. He tried taking to the sky when he was discovered, but the thick arrows managed to pierce the dragon's eye and brought it down shrieking in pain. When it finally crashed back down onto the ground, he found that it had succumbed to its injuries and was pinning him down. He looked at the surroundings with despondent

eyes and gritted teeth.

He became someone who received the gaze of the God of Death.

He tried getting his body out from but he immediately yelled out in pain. That crash had broken numerous bones in his body and realized there was no possible way for him to drag himself out. In the end, he sighed and reached for his light crossbow, loaded it with a bolt and shot at one of the skeletons.

The bolt had been blessed with Holy Water and shone brightly as it was fired towards the skeleton, making it hurl backwards, while setting it aflame before it turned into dust.

More of these white lights were fired into the air, but even more undead drowned out Kren's sight. The youth reminisced upon the time when he first heard of how Madara split up their armies into three different routes. Almost everyone in the army, regardless of whether they were nobles or commoners, held a light-hearted attitude towards their enemies. They believed that these barbaric Dark Lords were going to fight amongst themselves and fall apart because of their uncoordinated commanding, just like how they failed in history every single time.

The result was utterly beyond their expectations. The Madara's advancing army was swift and decisive, calmly taking every bit of advantage whenever a mistake was made. On the contrary, Aouine's army was like a slow and elderly man. They unable to defend at vital points because they were late to respond, and even when they went into battle, they were haggard soldiers fighting the tireless undead.

Aouine's days of glory were long gone, and the praise from the 17th pope of the Holy Cathedral of Flames three hundred years ago describing Aouine as 'The Fiery Blade that represents the shining glory of the Old Eras', was nothing more than history.

When Kren finally exhausted his supply of Holy Bolts, he gripped the pendant containing his wife's portrait and looked up. A giant skeleton had already blocked off the sunlight from reaching him—

The Soul Flames of its eyes jumped about.

"Farewell, my father, mother, and my lovely Vanessa. I wish you remember your son and husband, and the many others who fought to protect Aouine... This kingdom can no longer see hope..."

At the end of the tenth month, the scent of autumn was becoming denser. Trentheim's grasslands were dyed with a layer of pale yellow and had a picturesque scenery. But when Brendel and the others rode through the rural village's path, they could feel the war's aftermath.

After Rauze had ripped his leather armor apart, he decided not to replace it with another, and ordered a black comfortable robe and clothing set from a tailor during their journey. He was now sitting on the horse with a contrasting pair of white gloves, and a silver-plated sword at his waist, looking like a young noble.

But this was not because he wanted to enjoy being one. It was simply because it was easier for him to avoid any additional troubles. After leaving Chablis, the month-long journey was quite peaceful, but it was clear that public order was poor due to the war. Most of the bandits were formed by peasants whose livelihood were destroyed.

Brendel had resummoned his mercenaries and formed up into a group of twenty one men strong, and they were all well-equipped. These peasant-bandits hardly had the courage to rob them.

Brendel glanced at the empty villages along the way with unhappy eyes. He had been warned by Rauze that an army of Madara undead was marching towards Trentheim's southern area. This knowledge was no different from what he knew in the previous world. The 'Black Lord' Incirsta would stay in Randner's region for half a year after the truce, simply because he was greedy to gain more from Aouine. This kingdom at its current state was unable to fend him off anyways.

In accordance to Brendel's knowledge of the month's end, the upper echelons of Aouine were starting to act behind the shadows.

Oberg's first son, Hammil, would receive support from Queen Anna's faction.

Anna, sister of Duke Seifer, was a representative of the Seifer dynasty. The members who supported the Corvado royal family were against her from the start, but it was to no avail. She even committed adultery with Marquis Kluge, and they worked together to imprison the king and left behind a disastrous and splintered the court.

(TL: Kluge is the guy who advised the king back then, and he was most likely the culprit who told the king to invite Madara's invasion. Benninger, dude from the previous

chapter, is the son of Duke Seifer, but he's on the princess side because he likes her.)

In the beginning of the eleventh month, Hammil announced himself as king and attempted to seize the throne. This formally raised the curtains on the internal strife within the royal faction. Princess Gryphine with her strong personality naturally would not accept this silently, and denounced Hammil from within her territory to the nobles and knights of the whole kingdom, accusing him to be an usurper of the throne. The people who supported her were fierce opposers of the queen and backers of the Elven races.

In the middle of the eleventh month, duke Arreck formally announced his support for the First-prince Hammil, and the various regions either took their independence or placed their support to either side. The civil war of Aouine started from that moment. From that period onwards, the civil war lasted for two years and completely shook the foundation of the kingdom. It had a brief moment where it resurged, but it had spilled too much blood for it to regain its former past.

Aouine's demise was hastened because of this incident.

No one was able to notice what Incirsta did precisely because of the civil war. However, not noticing the Madara's presence did not mean that the influence was not there. Many cities and villages were completely empty and void of life, and there was a bleak feeling when Brendel and the others passed through the place.

As they reached further into Trentheim's region, that sight gradually changed. They finally discovered some presence of human life near the core city of Trentheim, Firburh. The lord of Trentheim's region was the third son of Duke Randner, Baron Graudin.

Brendel was not very familiar with him, but the majority of the nobles were arrogant and selfish. A lord was even worse, because they were merciless and cruel, heaping misery upon the citizens in their territory.

When Brendel and the others entered Firburgh, they quickly realized this fact, and their small expectations were lowered once again:

In front of them were the impoverished citizens of the city, their clothes tattered and torn, while their gaunt, pallid faces with sunken eyes showed how they had no hope for their future. The refugees were even more wretched as though the air of death was

about them, reduced to nothing more than bones and their cracked lips, indicating how hungry and thirsty they were.

The path to the city was dirty and foul smelling, as though excrement from livestock was everywhere in the dry air. The nobles from Bruglas seemed kind compared to this place, simply because the citizens of that place were still able to survive despite their commoner status.

This destitute land seemed to give birth to people filled with avarice. The poorer the land, the greedier they seemed to be. Brendel understood it was not because the nobles in Grinoires were kinder, it was simply because the lands of Trenheim were not bountiful, and their lives were in near shambles.

Amandina widened her eyes in shock and covered her lips in disbelief.

“My lord, the land you are inheriting... is this place?” Her tone was filled with disappointment.

She thought she was leaving the highlands for a richer place in Trenheim. The area was supposed to face the sea in the east, and it should be a place of wealth because it was easier to trade. It might not compare to Ampere Seale, but at least it should be on the same standard as Bruglas.

She did not expect this land to be in such a terrible state.

Brendel glanced back at her.

After discovering that he intended for the veteran mercenaries to protect her and the Grey Wolves Mercenaries, she had adopted a business-like attitude ever since they left Chablis. She would ignore him every time and only spoke when she was spoken to. Even after he explained that they were similar to heroic spirits like Medissa and brought them back, she did not relent on her attitude.

Brendel scratched his head at this situation and grumbled to himself about how a retainer should act in his mind, but he did not use his position to remind her on their status.

“Are you finally willing to talk to me?” He asked.

Chapter 134

Romaine's second plan (2)

Brendel looked at the natives in Trentheim with furrowed brows. Lives had no value here. There were black markets behind destitute places like this, and the price of getting a goat was equivalent to the price of getting a slave boy. In some cases, a slave girl was even lower than that of livestock. The settings in the game was now applied in the real world.

Anyone who possessed enough power or authority would be able to trample on these citizens. Bandits raped and murdered people. Lords did the same deed. The only difference was where it was done; either it was done outside the city, or it was done within the city.

Nobles could afford to pay these evil lords a little money to perform wicked deeds, and the latter even encouraged them to do so, simply because gold coins were much cuter than people who needed money.

Brendel wondered if he should explain to Amandina in advance before she found out on her own.

But Amandina thought that Brendel was displeased with her, and though she still felt frustrated over the mercenaries, she lowered her head and replied: "...I apologize, my lord! I should not have said that."

Brendel waved his hand: "Miss Amandina, you're mistaken. I'm not holding it against you at all."

Amandina looked up, as if to confirm whether Brendel was telling the truth. She quickly lowered her head again and did not say anything else.

"We still need to head south a little more to reach our land." Brendel continued as he looked to the south.

"Further south?" Amandina was completely stunned as she jerked her head back up: "If we leave Trentheim it would be wilderness—"

“Have you heard of a Pioneer Knight?”

“What—”

She blurted the word in spite of herself. She knew the term well. Young nobles or knights who had no land to inherit, would receive the authority from the Holy Cathedral of Flames to develop new land for the kingdom. They would bring along a few of their squires and head to the wilderness and develop new cities.

These stories sounded like children’s bedtime stories. She did not expect the legends to happen directly to her. She panicked for a moment. Even though it sounded like a great adventure, it was incredibly dangerous. No one in Aouine had tried to develop new lands for over a century, and for a moment she thought Brendel was a madman.

But she quickly calmed down. When she compared the days in Bruglas where she was hounded for her father’s debt to Brendel’s journey, she saw a glimmer of hope.

[...So what if it’s dangerous?]

She took a long look at Brendel. A Pioneer Knight. The title sounded like the classic heroes from the past who were full of eager to progress. Even though it was dangerous, there was an air of romance about it. No matter how she looked at him, be it bravery, wits and morals, he fulfilled her ideal standards completely.

He was even quite attractive when he dressed up as a noble.

[It’s a pity. He already has someone else.]

Amandina blinked rapidly as she found her heart beating a little faster, before she looked at Romaine beside her. After her actions of running in the dangerous battlefield twice, she was lectured by him for a long time and was currently kept in check.

Romaine was looking at something with interest and called out to him: “Hey Brendel, look over there—”

She seemed to have a magnetic pull to her; Brendel and the others looked over to where she pointed.

There were many travelers on the street that were not natives—

Because of Brendel's action a month ago, the news of the Divine Artifact Resonance in Randner had circulated to various bars and inns in the kingdom. The bards were carrying this news further north, and adventurers who wanted to try their luck started appearing. Mercenaries, merchants and bounty hunters were other groups like hyenas which had smelled the scent of blood, rushing and gathering around the region.

Nobles who concerned themselves with Aouine's brewing storm sent out their eyes and ears. Even the Association of Stars and Moon, as well as the Black Tower sent out their scouts. Within half a month, the population of Princess Gryhpine's territory actually doubled. If Trenheim was not under the threat of Madara's army, the cities' lords would have been delighted at receiving more taxes.

[The situation is becoming complicated.]

Brendel's eyes swept across them. It was clear that he did not fit in with these adventurers because of his attire, and the adventurers did not fit in with the local natives. This scene looked as though an artist deliberately painted the social differences.

The majority of these outsiders did not want to get involved with the locals, and the same goes for the latter who wanted to do with these likely lawless lot.

However, Romaine was pointing at something else. It was a small group of adventurers who were distributing food to the emaciated children. This sight made him feel there was an illusion where time was going backwards, as if he was in the game world, and these were the sympathetic gamers who were distributing food.

He quickly shook his head to get rid of that illusion. There were still young adventurers who pursued their dreams instead of profit.

[Four men and two women. All of them are indeed in their youths.]

Brendel could not help but reflect on the reality between fantasy and the real world. Adventurers were not the exciting and romantic life mentioned in fairy tales, and in truth it was bloody and difficult. They had to enter areas fraught with dangers and perils, and it was common for them to meet with their deaths just like mercenaries. Their compensation was a pittance compared to the danger they were in, and most of them ended up as bones in unknown places, although there was no lack of people who

became rich overnight.

Because of this, the majority of the adventurers had to become practical and work for profit. Only the youths who acted upon ideal dreams did something illogical, and he was certain this group of adventurers had just started their journey.

The other exceptions were them being the descendants of rich nobles or merchants.

“What did you want us to look at?” He turned his head back to ask.

He felt pangs of danger when he saw her pretty, dark brown eyes roll about as though she had thought of something creative.

“What are you thinking about?” Brendel asked while being on his guard against her crazy antics.

“Something like what they are doing.” Little Romaine replied as a matter-of-fact.

“The food that we brought along isn’t enough, Romaine.” Amandina reminded Romaine as she understood her thoughts immediately: “Our men and horses are draining our supplies quickly. If we’re going to purchase food supplies here, we would have to deal with the local lord. Have you forgotten what happened just a while ago?”

Amandina was referring to the incident when they passed by a low-ranking noble’s land. Brendel had gone with Scarlett to negotiate the price of procuring food supplies, but the noble became interested in Scarlett and sent out his personal guards to abduct her.

The end results were thirty-odd iron-ranked guards were soundly beaten by the youth, then forced the noble to compensate for his transgressions. However, this event served as a warning. Even though the royal crown still retained its power, the nobles were already abusing their powers.

Brendel gave a grateful glance to Amandina when she finished speaking. The previous lord they encountered was still fine, but this time they were going to face Baron Graudin. Even though he was insignificant in Aouine’s history, his father was Duke Randner. If he tried to blackmail Graudin or kill him outright, the duke would definitely send out his army out after his head.

[In the past, Duke Rhun’s army is able to freely move through Duke Randner’s territory

as they pleased. Perhaps the Princess's faction established some form of deal with him. Someday I'll deal with these parasites, but it will only be when my army is ready and I have enough speaking authority. Power, is still one of the most important rules in this world.]

Romaine shook her head upon listening to Amandina, gave a mysterious smile and replied: "Do you all not discover it yet?"

"About what?" Brendel said.

"The method to do business—"

"Huh?"

Brendel took off his glove and brought his hand to her forehead, wondering if she was having a fever, while Romaine swatted his hand away in annoyance. The younger Wild Elf sister asked curiously:

"Miss Romaine, my hometown has a saying. Poverty and merchants do not go along with each other. In such a poor place, is there really business to be done in such a poor place?"

"Tia!" Felaern said as she glared at her.

Tia was scared of her older sister's wrath, so she stuck out her tongue and swallowed her remaining words.

"You can't really say that. My aunt said that if there are places with transactions to be done, then there would be merchants." Romaine said.

"I don't disagree with your aunt," Amandina looked at the uneven roads. It was highly unsuitable for horse carriages to even pass through the streets at its state. Having commerce in this area was still a long way off: "But this place seems to lack even the basic conditions for transactions..."

"But are these adventurers not doing transactions right before our eyes?" The merchant girl looked at the young adventurers' actions with great interest.

Brendel's head snapped back to Romaine with incredulous eyes. A bold idea was forming in his head as he realized what she was thinking about.

Chapter 135

Romaine's second plan (3)

"Miss Romaine, I don't think you can call their actions a trade, it's actually a donation." Sangany answered behind her.

Romaine's face went up a little higher as she tapped her chin with her finger: "But that's obviously a trade. If you buy hope with food, isn't that a transaction?"

"Using food to buy hope? What does that mean?" Amandina looked strangely at her.

Everyone felt the same way about Romaine's replies. Brendel was the only exception as he wondered how Romaine's little mind actually worked. She seemed to always think of something that normal people could not.

"Amandina, how long do you need to make this place a self-sufficient economy if the region is governed by you?"

Amandina immediately felt there was an additional meaning to his words. She turned her attention to him, wondering if the youth had his eyes set on this territory, or simply to test her out.

Regardless of his intentions were, she took a serious look at the filthy citizens who had clothes that were patched up many times from different clothes like refugees, thought for a while before she answered with difficulty.

"The shortest time would be at least a year, two if things don't go well. There is no wealth amongst the citizens right now, and they lacks the basic requirements to convert into a commercial industry. Even if we did a tax reform and redistribute the land for cultivation, we need a certain amount of time to gather the resources to store up wealth... But I am confident that I can start paving the road of a commercial district in two years. But it would require a great sum of money..."

"Then we just need to distribute the wealth so the citizens are wealthy enough right?" Romaine interrupted her and said it like it was matter-of-fact.

“Is... there any meaning to it?” Amandina nearly choked on her indignance: “Are we going to be any different from the addicted gamblers if we lend our money to the poor? It’s the same as letting them gamble for us, and the money we win back is nothing but our own money with the real possibility of losing everything...”

She looked at Romaine like the latter was someone who was merely interested in dealing with risk.

“Didn’t you already say you’re ‘lending’ money? These cute gamblers won’t run away with our money and bring back even more to us. It’s cgoing to be clearly stated on promissory notes.”

“In the end we won’t receive anything because they are simply too poor and ignorant on how to earn money.”

Romaine shook her finger like she was a world-class banker, then pointed at the citizens in the city.

“You are not wrong. But these people are desperate to get out of poverty, right? Distributing our money is the same as buying hope for them. When we give them money, we can teach them on how to work in production lines and fulfill their wish on being self-sufficient, and when they do so, it naturally means they would be able to pay off what they owe in thier promissory notes. I would then gain many partners in the commerce game. This is different from gambling. If you bury your a gold coin in the ground here, the next year you would be able to gain two gold coins!”

She winked at Amandina mischeiviously.

“That... Maybe it’s true, but achieving it in reality is difficult...” Even though Amandina understood Romaine’s point of view, she was unable to accept this crazy logic.

“Indeed there’s a certain difficulty...” Brendel nodded, but he looked at Romaine with praise. Romaine’s ideas were not really transactions, but a form of redistribution. If they direct both capital and production materials to the citizens, they would be able to create high productivity. However, that idea will only work if the entire region’s wealth was under the territory’s lord. Still, it was remarkably ahead for this era in terms of economic policies.

While Brendel was capable in administering the financial structure, he was a layman when it came to building the finer details on infrastructure for a business.

He was confident he could set the foundations for the policy and free it from any outside interference, though.

“Rather than say you’re buying hope, you can think it as buying labor. By having a motivated workforce, there would be a difference in the speed of creating financial gains. If we are to do this, then the most important aspect of the policy is how the wealth is redistributed. Amandina, do you have any thoughts on this?” Brendel said.

“Repair the roads.” Amandina said.

Brendel nodded inwardly when her thoughts were the same as his own.

“...My lord, what exactly are you planning to do in this land?” Amandina hesitated for a while before she finally gathered her courage and whispered to him.

Amandina almost could not believe the words she was asking. It was the same as encouraging her lord to attack a legitimate lord. Usurping the land was the equivalent of betraying the kingdom. However, the royal crown was weakening as the days passed by, and witnessing the noble lords’ cruelty and decadent behaviors, she was greatly shaken in the kingdom’s future.

Brendel first nodded, then shook his head and rubbed his forehead.

[I certainly have ideas on this place. That bastard isn’t some decent noble in the game or this world. Just look at the plight of this place. Baron Graudin is just too close to my future lands, even if he doesn’t invade my territory, there would definitely be highly unfair trading happening in the future. There wouldn’t be any profit to speak off. But there are two things that I’m lacking in to take him down. Men and timing.]

He estimated that he should wait at least one to two months, when the various lords in their territories announced their independence, and no one would care about the fight between two lords in the southern border. By that time, he should be ready to deal with Baron Graudin.

[But this is a headache. Trentheim at this year is certainly one of the poorest regions in Aouine. I was afraid Romaine might have trouble creating commerce in this area, but it seems like she already have ideas in place. Should I get Amandina to start working on a plan? Money is the next concern, the first step would be blackmailing money from the nobles who skimmed profits from Bruglas’ routes as our startup capital, then start working on access to the rich southern mines. Any other sources

like overseas trading can be left to Amandina to work on—]

A loud snap from a horse whip suddenly broke his thoughts. He and his men immediately turned to the source of the noise, and saw a group of riders entering the city. Even though their equipment were all mixed all over, their emblems were clear.

Their flag was a pelican over a black-and-white checkmarked squares, which was clearly Randner's retainer's symbol. Brendel immediately knew these men belonged to Baron Graudin's personal troops.

They wrote through the uneven roads quickly and raised their whips in order to drive the citizens on the street to the sides. The citizens scattered like they were a bunch of livestock, but this scene seemed to be oddly humorous to the riders, and they laughed openly and loudly.

A few even had to correct their riding postures from their laughter.

Amandina instantly frowned. This was not an uncommon sight in Bruglas as the city's guards did the same thing. Scarlett scoffed coldly a little later after observing the riders.

"They seemed to be dragging something behind them." Sanford suddenly pointed at the ground behind the riders.

"Dead bodies." Brendel answered, but sighed as he finished as his words: "The nobles' private soldiers went out to kill bandits."

"Is there something wrong?" Amandina was puzzled over his reaction. Was it not a common thing?

But Brendel placed his palm up to stop her queries, then pointed at another direction. When she placed her focus in the area, she saw a group of women kneeling on the ground weeping as they covered their faces.

"...What's going on?" She asked.

"Rather than calling them bandits, you can call them peasants forced to flee from the lord's taxation. Many of them lived their lives out like common peasants and do not partake in thievery, but since they avoided taxes, they were classified and judged as outlaws." One of the Grey Wolves Mercenaries answered her question as he was

familiar with this practice: “My father also died in this manner, these fucking nobles...”

“Are there only men?” Amandina inhaled deeply and asked.

“Yes. It’s not exactly heaven living out in the open.” Brendel nodded.

At Brendel’s final comment, the city suddenly seemed to fall into an odd silence. Other than the private soldiers’ yells and curses, and the women’s quiet weeps, there was no one who spoke when they saw this sight.

(TL: I think I explained it before, but Feudalism has 3 concepts, Lords – Vassals – Fiefdom. Vassals answer to their sworn lords and may hold fiefs. For more information, go wikipedia. Too much info to summarize, honestly.)

The next thing is about redistribution of wealth. When I look at the information as a whole, it seems like Amandina/Brendel is either going for trading/production over agriculture.)

Chapter 136

Dispute

“Father!” A sudden childish outcry of anxiety and unease suddenly cut through the cavalry’s sneering laughter.

A haggard-looking woman covered her child’s mouth and looked at the riders with fearful eyes. Silence covered the entire street as the leader of the riders dismounted and walked slowly over to her. His gait had a certain threatening weight to it as he carried his large spear over his shoulders.

While his eyes were dyed with surprise from the cry earlier, it could not hide the disdain in them.

“This boy knows that wretched thing?” The stout man licked his lips as he pointed with his spear to the blood-stained corpse on the ground. His comrades came up as well and surrounded her like a pack of hyenas.

The woman hugged her son and shook her head with tears rolling across her cheeks.

“Let that boy go. I want to hear the answer directly from him.” The man used his spear to draw back the woman’s fringe as he said.

The woman hugged her child even tighter as she was afraid of losing him; the people around her looked on with sympathetic eyes but quickly drew back from her.

“Did you not hear what I just said?”

“Ser Knight, he’s still young, please have mercy on my boy!” She begged him as she wept.

“You wretched whore.” The man said as he quickly raised his spear to strike her, he immediately found a young woman carrying a longbow spreading her arms out and stood in his way.

“Hmm?” The man looked at the unexpected interference in front of him.

Brendel relaxed his fingers that were on his sword a while ago. He recognized the daring girl from the group of youths who distributed food earlier.

“That’s enough, do you have no shame in bullying a helpless woman?” The woman with the longbow shouted angrily: “I’m a daughter of a Baronet, and I command you to stop this immediately!”

“Oh?” The burly man looked blankly at her for a moment, before he turned back to his comrades and said: “Boys, this lass here is an aristocrat’s daughter! What should we do?”

Rude laughter came in reply.

“And which land is your noble father from?” The man turned back to the baronet’s daughter and asked in a blank tone.

“Fenna, be careful!”

A man wearing heavy armor burst out from the crowd, his hand on the greatsword behind his back, but it was too late, the leader of the cavalry had already stabbed through her stomach with his spear.

That outcome suddenly came from nowhere, and the woman named Fenna looked down in disbelief as she uttered a soft gasp. Pain drowned her when the leader pulled his weapon, and she staggered back a few steps before she fell forward onto the ground. Blood pooled around her as she repeatedly opened and closed her mouth, shuddering repeatedly before she finally laid still.

The leader casually placed the spear back across his shoulders like it nothing had happened, flinging drops of blood across the ground. The cavalry behind him quickly took out their longbows and shot at the adventurers and civilians alike. Ten-odd men were instantly killed as screams broke out from the crowd.

The cavalry did not care whether they hurt the innocent and efficiently drove the crowd away to prevent any sudden retaliation.

“Fenna!” That swordsman cried out again and swept away the arrows with his sword, but before his cry ended, another member in his party collapsed to the ground as an arrow struck him. “You fucking bastards!”

He roared as he pushed away the panicking crowd and rushed straight to the leader with his greatsword. The latter intercepted his attack with his spear and bellowed: "Whoever interferes will be the enemies of Lord Trenheim!" (*TL: Baron Graudin = Lord Trenheim.*)

The provoked crowd of adventurers quickly abated their tempers.

The swordsman continued to attack regardless of the leader's threat, but the latter easily deflected the strikes, accurately bashed the swordsman's fingers with the base of the spear and knocked away the greatsword with a sweep. He then followed up with a strike from the spear's body to the swordsman's face before he finally thrust the blade into his neck.

While both of them were perceived as Iron-ranked fighters, it was clear that the cavalry's leader was several grades above the swordsman.

But the spear never reached the swordsman's neck. A tremendous force had struck against it and caused a metallic clash to ring out. It inched away from the latter's neck, and caused the cavalry's leader to wobble unsteadily. His hands were numb from the impact.

"Who dares!" The leader roared in fury and turned around, and his eyes laid on a youth wearing a jet-black cloak over an alabaster shirt with fancy patterns stitched across his collar. His cashmere gloves were dyed in a startling red and were connected to a heavy longbow.

That youth was gazing back at him as though he was filth.

The old and new Brendel were aligned perfectly with each other right at that moment. They did not allow unjust actions to defile their sanctuary.

Amandina, Sanford and Scarlett looked at the youth in utter surprise. They did not think that Brendel would interfere with this situation so openly. Romaine was looking at him with sparkles in her eyes, feeling that this was his true personality.

The different faces that he showed were many; his courageous expression, his resolute appearance, his air of violent bloodthirst when he fought against his enemies, and even the one when he was angry with her.

She liked every one of those faces.

A moment of silence came about as everyone in the streets turned their attention to the youth.

The cavalry's leader narrowed his eyes as he studied the men around Brendel. He was secretly shocked at the display of strength that the youth had.

The aristocrat's daughter was stupid enough to go against him here. There was nothing her lowly ranking noble father could do if he did not have any land under his name. Would he dare to address his grievances directly to a Baron who had a duke as his backing forces?

But the youth in front of him was different. No common man would be able to bring so many guards along with him, and they looked like they had the abilities of the kingdom's elite forces.

[This man probably isn't some common aristocrat's offspring.]

He quickly put away his spear and came to attention and cautiously greeted him.

"May I inquire who you are, Messere?"

The cavalry's arrows that were focused on Brendel, lowered as soon as they heard their commander speak politely. They quickly cooled their heads as they realized the situation was changing.

"Let them go." Brendel said, his voice void of any warmth.

He did not even take a look at the archers. With Scarlett and Medissa around, it would be a joke if the people around him got hurt by any arrows. However, he started investing his bonus XP for completing the quest in Baern Shyrltaesi.

[200000 XP in total. There's no telling what will happen here. If I threaten this bastard he's most likely to back down, but I don't want any mistakes here... There, I placed everything into the Mercenary profession. It's at level 25 now, and my overall character level is 32. Strength and dexterity is at 70 and 40, respectively, putting me on par with the stats of Silver-ranked fighter at a higher tier...]

Suddenly, there was an odd feeling in his mind. When he fired that arrow at the cavalry's leader, he was suddenly reminded of the time when he lost his temper at Makarov over Scarlett. He shook off that feeling in a hurry.

[...Regardless, I need to raise my level as soon as possible to unseal my Element. Once my perception is raised I should be able to make sense of the type of Element I have. The situation might go out of hand anytime and I need every bit of power available to me.]

Brendel was easily able to kill every one of the bastards in front of him, and would gladly do so if Baron Graudin was not in the picture.

“Messere, we will be in trouble if we do as you say,” The attitude of the riders’ leader changed to a polite tone as Brendel’s haughty reaction confirmed his suspicions: “These people who fought back might be conspiring with the bandits. We can’t answer to our lord if we let them go—“

But he chose to resist. He did kill a noble, and if he let the survivors escape then there would still be trouble for him if rumors came about.

Brendel’s laughter echoed in the street when he heard the leader’s answer.

“Who the fuck do you think you’re talking to?” The youth’s hand went to his sword: “Killing you is as easy as killing a rat, and I just need to apologize to Graudin after the deed is done— But I’m going to give him my respect by not cutting your head off on the spot despite your insolence. However, my patience has its limits—“

He pulled out his sword and caused the riders in front of him to shiver slightly.

The world was simply that practical. If the nobility’s status did not work in negotiations, then violence and power were the answers. The price of being naive was too high, and all too easily understood with Fenna’s still-warm body.

The riders’ leader considered for a while before he finally agreed and stepped away from the swordsman.

The swordsman still wanted to grab his greatsword and cut down the bastard in front of him, but another adventurer dashed out from the crowd to restrain him. Brendel watched him whisper into the swordsman’s ears before the latter finally calmed down.

– Don’t cause trouble for others.

Brendel sighed inwardly. The group of adventurers were truly naive. To the point where it was as rare as precious gems.

Tears streaked down the swordsman's eyes as he gently carried Fenna's body. The crowd parted as the two men walked towards Brendel.

"Thank you, kind sir."

The person who thanked him was a skinny-looking youth around Brendel's age. He had a pale face and long light-grey hair, and wore a monocle which was chained back behind his ear. He wore a grey set of long robes which had runic patterns on his sleeves, and Brendel realized that he was an apprenticing wizard.

Unlike the swordsman who displayed his anger and sorrow openly, the youth appeared composed and polite, although his slightly red eyes betrayed the fury in him.

"Do you want to take revenge?" Brendel asked after studying the wizard for a moment.

The young wizard looked up at Brendel in suspicion before he quietly shook his head and pulled the surprised swordsman away.

Brendel's eyes followed his back. That young wizard was just as angry as the swordsman and would never forget about this incident, but contrary to his partner, he was cautious and showed restraint.

[I thought that everyone in that group is naive but that youth is quite intriguing...]

"Messere, I have done what you asked of me. Would you kindly follow us and explain to our superiors?" The riders' leader carefully asked.

Brendel gave a derisive scoff, but he nodded after a moment.

"My lord?" Amandina whispered.

Since he interfered with this matter it would be necessary for him to meet Baron Graudin. It was folly to use force here, and he thought it would be better for him to make the first move and fool the latter.

Chapter 137

Gift

Brendel proclaimed himself as 'Viscount Gunston', a noble who traveled south from the north. The papers he had on him were given by the cripple Roen, and the craftsmanship on them was as perfect as the papers handed down straight from the capital's parliament. Even the original Viscount Gunston would wonder if his papers were fake if he ever saw them.

When the riders' leader received the papers and read them, he bowed politely and said: "My lord, my name is Colton. I will report to my superiors so they can arrange a meeting between you and Lord Trentheim. Would you allow one of my men to accompany you and let him direct you to the best inn in the city?"

Brendel nodded, and Colton quickly gave orders to his men to clean up the street, and got one of the younger riders to escort Brendel.

The capital of Trentheim was called Fohre. Its streets spread out like spiderwebs, narrow and many, and the roofs of the buildings were a spectacular crimson due to the red soil used. Colton's subordinate lead them to an inn called The Brave Fist, a unique building that was high enough to allow its guests to look at the city's grey outer walls.

With such close borders to the wilderness that was outside Mother's Marsha protection, humans had to rely on the city walls to defend against magical creatures, beasts and demi-races.

Brendel and the others only had to wait a few hours after their meals at the inn before Baron Graudin's invitation arrived. Although it was only a small group of Graudin's men who escorted them, when they arrived at Graudin's manor, he found two rows of elite soldiers standing at the gates. They wore heavy armor, equipped with lances, and were neatly lined up and without expressions on their faces.

[A grand entrance indeed. It looks like Graudin is trying to threaten me. It might even frighten a real viscount—]

The youth ignored them and walked past the gates. There was a massive man who immediately blocked his path and tried to grab his shoulders. However, before he could even touch Brendel a girl with fiery red hair grabbed his wrist and jerked it away. Her eyes looked like she was locking on to her prey.

“Get lost.” She said simply.

She took a step forward and rammed into him, causing him to crash into the wall of soldiers. There was immediate wailing after a loud crash.

“Cease your actions!” The soldiers were surprised and immediately tried to block Brendel from progressing any further, but they were hurled backwards by the youth the moment they touched him.

It was as if they were facing a dragon and not a refined noble.

[70 OZ in the strength stats. Even in king Ansen’s era, I would qualify for a spot in the kingdom’s cavalry. Just a little more and I can be in the elite group. In this era, I am even on par with a captain...]

Brendel continued to advance quickly, and there were constant metallic crashing noises as the soldiers were thrown at each other like bags of flour. He never looked back and finally stopped at the second gate.

It was shut tight. Perhaps the person who was meant to open it was lying on the ground, so he did not waste any time, and kicked down the door just like how he had done it countless times in the game.

The door crashed onto the ground with an impressive bang, and the empty hall was presented before Brendel.

===== Graudin’s POV =====

“My god, this man is such a brute!”

Somewhere in the mansion behind an arch window, was a middle-aged man who was peeking through the curtains with piqued interest. Even though he sounded impressed, his eyes were cold and discerning. He was holding onto a goblet with bright red liquid in it. He shook his hand and allowed the viscous liquid to bob up and down.

Brendel would recognize that man in a heartbeat if he saw him. It was all too easy to recognize Graudin's prominent eagle-like hook nose. His eye sockets were deeply inset and his skin was pale as though he was sick with malaise, giving him the uniquely sinister look which was prevalent within the Randner's family. The only thing that seemed alive was his bushy moustache that ended in a curl.

"A youth of twenty years and barely qualifies as a Silver-rank fighter." Graudin stroked his moustache: "What do you think?"

The lanky man behind him shook his head: "He did not use his full strength. That girl with red hair isn't simple either. If we were to fight, the odds will be split in both ways. I do not suggest fighting."

"Of course I won't," Graudin laid his goblet down onto the windowsill with some annoyance, causing it to give out a light clink: "He must have some considerable backing if he dares to openly challenge me in my own territory. But even if I don't find fault with this matter, I need to show him a lesson."

He lowered the curtains and turned around: "What of the task that I instructed you to do?"

"The men have been sent out. If there are no problems, they would be back this very evening." The man bowed slightly.

"Good." Graudin threw his goblet away with a fling on his hand, and it landed next to a dead woman. The red liquid immediately splashed everywhere, causing a foul stench to spread throughout the room. The dull-brown carpet slowly turned to a red hue once again.

"This matter is requested by my father. Make sure everything is perfect."

Graudin wondered when his damned father would choose his successor. What disappointed him was how his father became sharper every year, or he would have poisoned all his brothers to their deaths.

[A bunch of fools blocking my path.] (TL: I made a pretty huge mistake. It's not duke Randner, it's count Randner. I'll make sure to change it one day.)

===== Brendel's POV =====

The grand hall was decorated with a crystal chandelier, an excessive luxury with intricate craftsmanship. There were sigils within the crystals, indicating that it was an magic artifact. The design dated to the early era of king Ansen, and was crafted to tell the story of the Treatise of the Holy Men, depicting one hundred and eighty star constellations of the Gods.

Brendel and Graudin met under that artifact, separated by a long rectangular table on each end. The supposedly empty hall was soon filled with people. Besides Graudin's knights, there were many local nobles who were also invited to the meeting.

[Looks like his real followers are not here.]

Brendel was certain that Graudin's confidants were not in the room after studying everyone. Trentheim's territory was not considered large, but there were at least twenty-odd districts ruled by Graudin's loyal retainers.

After the superficial pleasantries were exchanged, the baron formally announced the banquet's opening, in the name of welcoming 'Viscount Gunston'.

The food that the servants brought had a wide variety but they were wasted on Brendel's men. Having a meal in the heart of the enemy's territory was too stifling for them. Amandina's heart was racing all the time, frowning at the table as she looked across at the two exceptions.

Brendel and Romaine were sampling each dish with delight.

Baron Graudin noticed Amandina's expression and spoke after a moment of thinking: "What's wrong, does my lady feel that there's something not satisfactory to your taste?"

The grand hall was suddenly silenced.

Amandina secretly panicked but she raised her head and nodded:

"My Lord Brendel and Lady Romaine are too polite and would not speak badly of this banquet. However as their retainer, I would have to protest at your treatment. Do you view us as nobles below your rank?—"

The other nobles went still.

[Good job! You saw through that bastard's ploy.]

Brendel secretly raised both of his thumbs up at Amandina's impressive remark. It was truly a slap to Graudin's face and he was unable to find a retort at her criticism. One could hardly imagine a city's lord to quarrel with someone's subordinate, and a woman at that.

But Graudin merely smiled at her remark, before he cast his slightly clouded eyeballs at Brendel. The latter also gazed back at him without any fear. He was acting as an arrogant noble who did not care who or what was in front of him, even more so than the typical young nobles in the kingdom.

"Viscount Gunston." Graudin said after a pause. He had a warm smile.

"Baron Graudin." Brendel nodded.

"Since Lord Gunston came from the north, does the weather in the south cause any discomfort to you?"

"As a knight of the kingdom, there is no difference whether the weather changes or not. The frail idiots who can't even withstand such changes are not worth being called as nobles in my eyes." Brendel's mouth fired back with conceit, and he wondered for a moment if he was actually a talented noble in the arts of arrogance.

The air in the grand hall continued became even more unbearable. This was another attempt to slap Graudin's face, and the nobles wondered who exactly the youth was.

"A young man like yourself should not bring us old bones into the discussion. If you find that the food is not to your taste, I have a gift prepared for you as an apology." Graudin's smile was ever polite and even appeared sincere.

[Gift? What the fuck is he up to?]

Brendel narrowed his eyes. He was trying to get the idiot to back down and get him to let them leave. It was more important to get his own territory, and coming back to pick a fight with him could come later.

Chapter 138

Element

Graudin snapped his fingers with a loud snap, and servants appeared to clear the dishes in front of Brendel. After it was cleared, two servants came up bearing a box each and placed them in front of him. They bowed slightly and left the area.

The baron stood up and extended his hand to prompt Brendel to open the box.

Brendel was certain that the bastard in front of him was not giving him gifts. Even though he was a viscount, there was no need for Graduin to bootlick him. If the latter actually chose to do that, even the word shameless would not be enough to describe his character.

He hesitated for a while before nodding to Amandina, indicating for her to open up the box and she did. However, her actions immediately froze when it was slightly ajar.

From Brendel's point of view, she was clenching her teeth so hard that she seemed to be trembling but it was to prevent herself from screaming in terror.

She stood vacantly in front of the box for a while as though there was some magic restraining her. Her throat shifted slightly as she swallowed and took a deep breath before she opened it fully.

A fork dropped onto the plate. Romaine's hand stayed in mid-air as she stared at the contents in the box.

Brendel's expression immediately changed as well.

That was because a human head was placed in it—

To be precise, it was the swordsman he saw earlier. The decapitated head's eyes were shut tightly and the skin had turned white because blood had been completely drained from it.

Brendel did not utter a word.

Amandina glanced at him for a moment before her hands slowly reached for the next box. Her heart was beating so fast that she felt faint, but she was determined to act her role. Her trembling fingers touched the box's wooden frame, stopped for a second then slowly lifted it up.

It was another head — The baronet's daughter Fenna.

Blood drained from Amandina's face.

"The taste of that woman's blood is quite good," Baron Graudin had a pleasant smile as he spoke: "But a gentleman wouldn't steal someone's else belongings. I have heard that the skull of a young girl used as a wine glass makes the wine even better. Lord Brendel, you ought to try it sometime. The other head is a complimentary gift—"

Before he finished his words, there was a light humming sound in the hall.

Everyone's eyes went to the source of the noise and discovered Brendel's sword drawing itself halfway out from its sheath. It was vibrating so fast that it caused the hum they heard earlier, and it looked like it was about to fly out.

The youth had both of his hands planted onto the table with tightly pursed lips.

Everyone felt a cold air emitting from him as though there was a palpable killing intent about him.

The nobles near Brendel dropped their utensils and even fell out of their seats as they watched in horror. That murderous aura intensified and the knights around Graudin drew out their weapon to protect him, while the latter continued to look on as he enjoyed Brendel's fury.

But that smile immediately went stiff.

That was because that cold air manifested into white frost and covered the table, starting from Brendel's hands. Silver knives and folks twisted into horrific shapes, while the porcelain plates and bowls cracked into pieces, then shattering once more to turn into white powder. That faint mist of cold air suddenly traveled rapidly across the table as though a raging beast was trying to stampede across to strike Graudin.

The two knights who were directly in front of Graudin grunted as they felt their swords' blades break into pieces, before they suddenly screamed and covered their

eyes; blood was oozing down between their fingers.

But the injuries from the knights did not register the people's minds. It was because the only words that came into their minds were —

Unsealed Element.

Brendel felt his thoughts plunge into an endless darkness that seemed to freeze everything. The commotion he caused in the streets had caused Graudin's retaliation and killed the innocent man he thought he had saved.

Utter disgust rose from within Brendel's heart as he stared at Graudin with piercing eyes. The latter was worse than any of the nobles he had met so far. The baron was truly made of utter filth. His fake smile seemed to twist into some strange abstract art that looked like it came from hell.

A sobering rage was born from his heart, wanting every bit of this filth to be gone from this world, and this emotion swept every other useless thought in his mind. Time seemed to stop and his eyes perceived everything with absolute clarity.

His rage, the fear of the nobles around him, Amandina's discomfort from being so near his unraveling rage, and Graudin's surprised eyes.

It was as though he was watching everything somewhere from above.

[I can't believe I reached that so early... That barrier that prevents me from using my Element.]

He felt his strength increasing by leaps and bounds, and together with the experience gained from the battle against his grandfather, he found himself pounding on the wall in front of him.

When he did so, he felt his mind describing the Element power in front of him with words. Frozen. Stability. However, that barrier knocked him back mercilessly:

You wish to break this barrier? You are not qualified yet!

The illusion disappeared and the world of darkness fragmented and scattered everywhere. Time resumed, and he was brought back to reality.

Brendel then heard the shattering noises. Everything was breaking in front of him. The temperature of the hall dropped over several tens of degrees and the walls were covered in a thick layer of frost.

Brendel's next reaction was to place his hand on his sword, and this action alone forced Graudin and the twenty-odd knights behind him to take a big step back, while the furniture behind them exploded into countless splinters.

"Protect me!" Graudin screamed.

The knights beside him received a great amount of pressure as though an invisible wall was pushing them back, but they forced themselves forward and pulled out their swords against Brendel.

What awaited them was a seemingly ordinary swing across the table—

Brendel held the sword with both hands and used the muscles across his body. From the legs, chest, shoulders, wrists and hands. The sword sailed through the air in a straight line.

[White Raven Sword Rave, Power Break!!!]

Anyone could see that it was a standard swing of the sword. Any beginner who started training would use the same stance and posture as Brendel did. The path was clear and his intention was easily understood; anyone with the slightest amount of experience could understand how it was done.

But none of the twenty Iron-ranked knights was able to evade the attack.

That swing seemed to slice through the air like a visible shockwave of white light, chilling everything as it went across the hall and reached towards the knights' bodies. Frost spread everywhere like uncontrollable wildfire and turned them into ice statues.

That line continued to sweep across the hall, cutting just above Graudin's hair and freezing it before it finally ended against the walls. Over Twenty heads were hurled backwards as they were lopped off from the slash.

The nobles were completely terrified and escaped from the table, some of them stumbling onto the ground, backing away from the frightening youth as quickly as possible.

The deaths of Graudin's knights were displayed before Graudin's eyes. He had controlled the fates of other men, women and even children since his birth, but it was only at this moment that he realized that he was as helpless as the people he had tortured and killed over the years.

[F-fuck! H-he's not a Silver-ranked swordsman, he— No, this *monster* has reached its way to its Element power!]

Graudin had thought the youth was someone he could stand toe to toe with, and the confrontation between them would get each other to back down through underhanded means.

The table suddenly split into half with a light tapping noise and crashed onto the ground. No one saw how the youth cut the table into two, and he advanced towards the baron with no obstacles between them. Brendel's sword was raised once again.

"I'm a feudal baron!" Graudin shrieked pitifully as he glanced around in a panic, hoping for someone to rescue him.

However, there was no one who did so. None of them expected a banquet to end as a fight, and certainly did not expect a powerful wielder of an unsealed Element to come to such a remote location.

Brendel's eyes only saw Graudin's neck. He gripped his sword tightly and was determined to end him.

But a hand suddenly reached out to his sword arm and lowered it. He turned his head around and discovered Scarlett in a battle stance, her eyes looking straight ahead to the second floor.

Brendel peered into the direction to where she was glaring in an instant.

(TL: Feudal Baron – The highest degree of feudal land tenure. It means he's directly under the king's employment.)

Chapter 139

Warm words of hope (1)

There was a dark figure on the second floor of the hall. When Brendel focused his eyes, he found it was a gigantic skeleton covered in a weathered set of brass armor of an ancient design and wielded a battle-axe. The top of the skull had a horizontal crevice, as though someone had tried to cut across its forehead with a sword when it was still alive. Its jaw was slightly unhinged and it looked like it was looking at the scene below with a mocking smile.

[...That's Kabias!] Brendel identified what the dark figure was at once.

“Viscount Gaston, is it?” Kabias’s voice was dry like sandpaper, “How have you been after you left Fortress Riedon?”

It had seen this young man from afar when the undead surrounded the fortress. That youth had caught its eye for some unknown reason.

“Madara.” Brendel said through clenched teeth. He turned around and glared at Graudin: “When did the Madara became so close to Aouine’s nobles?”

“All life turns into dust with time. The only thing that does not change is profit, Viscount.” Kabias said.

[Graudin has actually colluded with the Madara undead, but for what purpose? It seems like I’m free to kill Graudin at this distance, but...]

Although the Skeleton Lord in front of him was a full-fledged Gold-ranked fighter, there was a considerable distance between them. It should at least jump down in between him and Graudin to prevent the latter from being killed but it did not do so. In fact, it appeared almost smug—

He started to search the hall for any oddities, and finally discovered a pale man wearing long grey robes hiding behind a few shivering nobles.

[That’s Rothko, I think. This bastard got me good the first time I got to this world. Two

purple flame sigils on his collars. Huh. He upgraded to a mid-tier necromancer from an acolyte the first time I saw him.]

Brendel rubbed his forehead and looked back at Graudin. The latter had seemed to regain some of his composure. His hand was resting against a wooden pillar as support, while his face had that fake smile once again on it. Only his bloodshot eyes revealed the anxiety and fear in him.

Brendel purposely placed his sword horizontally across his chest, causing light to reflect into Graudin's eyes and caused him to flinch with a rat-like squeak emitting from his throat. The latter realized a few moments later that Brendel was toying with him. Fury was set ablaze in his heart but he did not show it in his face.

"I truly did not expect you to sell your soul to the undead." Brendel's voice was one of murder as he spoke to Graudin. He cast his eyes on Kabias again and said: "The fact that your rotten bones are here would mean that you want to preserve this worm's life, right?"

Graudin seemed to have gotten back his courage from the support of his allies. He ground his teeth menacingly with hatred from his eyes.

"Young man, you can go ahead and bark like a dog if you so desire, but you do know I'm a Randner that even if I don't rely on my Madara allies. Do you truly intend to go against the entire Randner family? Are you going to bring on a war between two retainers just because of a disagreement? Viscount Gaston, I think even your family wouldn't allow you—"

Brendel's scoff turned the temperature of the hall down by several degrees, and cold mist even appeared from Graudin's lips. Almost everyone shivered from the cold as the latter's words died in his throat. He did not understand how he was wrong from the very start; Brendel was a complete fake.

His swung his sword like a quick draw, drawing a line towards Graudin's throat—

Two shockwaves collided in the air. Rothko was ready for Brendel's attack because he had seen the attack before; Kabias kicked against the ledge and propelled down to intercept Brendel's next attack as he activated his Charge ability. The baron looked on stupidly at the blade inching closer towards him, completely flabbergasted by Brendel's actions which went against common sense.

But the long battleaxe had successfully parried his longsword. If the Skeleton Lord was one second late, the sword would have pierced through Graudin's heart.

"I have said before," Kabias looked down at the youth as he towered over him: "Baron Graudin is an important ally to us. We will not hand him over so easily to you."

"I'm sorry to tell you that you didn't!" Brendel yelled as he unleashed a flurry of blows of which the Skeleton Lord deflected them with ease. He activated Power Break in an overhead slash, while Kabias took a step back and sent the battle-axe in a vertical upper slash to meet the blade.

A thunderous metallic crash echoed throughout the hall and both of them took three steps back from the impact, neither gaining an advantage over each other.

"Young man, you should back down," Kabias stopped his momentum by using the battle-axe as a support on the ground, raised his head and said: "Aouine and Madara has called for a truce. Is it necessary to cause a war over your quarrel with the baron? The commotion in the hall has probably alarmed the guards in the fortress as well, are you not worried about your servants whom you left behind in the courtyard—"

Brendel's face darkened and his chipped sword was raised again.

"Mister Brendel!" Scarlett grabbed his wrist.

Sanford and the other Grey Wolves Mercenaries were still outside and she could not allow him to continue in his rampage.

"Miss Amandina, do you think I should let this worm off as well?"

Amandina took a short moment to recover from the sudden chain of events after Brendel called out to her. She looked at Graudin who had fallen to his rear in fear. She wanted to kick that face repeatedly until it was no longer recognizable as a 'human face'. But she took a deep breath and answered despite her desire to do so:

"My lord, this bastard is still a Feudal Baron assigned by the kingdom."

She pointed out to Brendel about Graudin's status, but she was implying something else. The real trouble was the people who assigned Graudin's title.

While Feudal Barons were assigned directly by the king, it was actually the Randner

family who handled Graudin's territory and rank. From the two prior generations before King Oberg, the family with a long history started to raise their private army in order to combat the monsters at the border. Today, almost all the soldiers in the Randner's territory belonged to their private army.

Even if there were those within the royal family who did not view these 'barbarians' as important, the count's forces were abnormal for someone his rank. Also, because of Madara's invasion the situation in the capital had become chaotic; the royal crown could hardly care about two families waging wars at the borders.

Finally, the crafted lie about Brendel being the Viscount Gaston would be revealed.

There was no possible way for him to set up his new territory if the Randner family poured their full rage onto him. Amandina tried to squeeze every intention to a single line, requesting him to think of the consequences, while limiting her words to a single sentence in order to make sure their weakness was not revealed.

She believed that the youth in front of him would understand her intentions.

Brendel spat onto the ground.

"Observe the situation in front of you and act prudently, young man." Kabias's jaw unhinged and appeared like it was smiling.

The youth's sword slowly lowered to the ground and he glared at Graudin with disgusted eyes as though he was looking at a dead animal covered with maggots.

Graudin gained his wits about him when he felt Brendel's expression turn to something else. Perhaps Kabias gave him enough courage to threaten Brendel at that moment:

"If you don't kill me today, Viscount Brendel, I'll make certain today's insult would be doubly returned—"

The baron's voice was dripping with anger and humiliation. He had invited the local nobles only to have them witness his shameful display. That sense of failure had caused him to feel like there was an undying rage lit up in him. He wanted to find new ways to anger Brendel in order to goad him into a fight with Kabias to ensure mutual destruction, but his hand was suddenly raised.

“Oss!”

Brendel fired a wind bullet towards Rothko who cast a counter-spell in a fluster, while his sword drew a silver line across Graudin’s cheek.

Graudin’s expression went blank as he felt his hair fall onto the ground on the side where Brendel cut. Throbbing pain spread across his face, and the nobles saw a visible wound on his cheeks. He used his hand to feel the area in a daze, then put it before his eyes. Striking red blood covered all over his fingers, and he started screaming like a pig being slaughtered.

Kabias did not react to Brendel’s attack. It saw from his position what damage the attack would do; it was not Graudin’s guard and there was no need to act there. It was also good to have the latter receive a lesson to understand their exact relationship.

“I’ll leave your head on your body for now. I’ll come back and take it the next time—” He said, then glared at the nobles around him and they stepped back in fright. He glanced at Amandina and Scarlett, sheathed his sword and walked out of the hall with angry footsteps.

When he reached the entrance, the heavily armored soldiers and guards who arrived and watched the fight between Kabias and him, immediately parted and stood on each side. Some of them even saw how he cut down twenty-odd knights with a single slash, and none of them wanted to stand in his path.

Graudin was still screaming. He wanted to order his men to cut Brendel down as he left the building, but the pain remained in his mind and the words never came.

Chapter 140

Warm words of hope

When Brendel walked out of Graudin's manor, he clenched his sword's hilt till his fingers were white. The men who waited in the courtyard were confused as to why their lord looked so angry as the people who were in the mansion did not explain what happened in there.

[In the end, I chose to compromise...]

Brendel wanted to swing his sword and destroy the landscape.

It was not because he was afraid of Madara and Graudin's combined forces, but because Scarlett's pleading eyes had moved him. Just like how he could never become someone like Makarov, he would never allow his anger to affect his men who were still waiting in the courtyard.

The Grey Wolves Mercenaries were her last kin, and she had the right to stop him from killing Graudin to make sure no retribution was going to happen to them.

He had tried to resist Aouine's decadent politics ever since he came to this world but he soon realized he did not have the power to go against the nobles. His heart was especially heavy because Amandina had subtly objected to his actions, and was disappointed that she tried to make him play the game that all nobles did. Even though she did not state it directly to him, she did not hide her intentions either.

[Yes, this might be a better choice for me but is this worth it? This is the first time I abandoned on my decision that I made. I didn't even think there would be a day like this. No, there's no way I can let this fucking go. Even if the entire kingdom is backing Graudin I'll definitely cut him down. Just give me some time...]

Brendel's thoughts were interrupted when he detected a piercing rust-like stench in the air. The slight wind picked up and made it stronger, while a sudden scream from Amandina occurred behind him. He wanted to turn behind and asked her what was wrong, but he caught a glimpse of an oddity on the path back to the city.

That familiar path had rows of human-sized crosses on each side, leading back to the city's streets below. There was no one walking in the streets—

Because they were crucified to the crosses.

From their appearances, it seemed that they were adventurers, hired mercenaries and the citizens in the city. Men and women were not spared; everyone had their throats slit, leaving behind lifeless corpses.

This was an old practice in the continent. Lords would crucify the bandits onto to a cross as a warning to those who would turn to robbing.

Who was Baron Graudin warning with this display?

No, it was not just him. He was warning all the angry adventurers and foreign mercenaries in the city, that he was the lord of this territory.

A bloody warning indeed.

“Well done—” Brendel said through clenched teeth. His legs nearly turned around but he resisted doing so.

Scarlett and Amandina glanced at him when they saw the display in the streets, but Brendel's footsteps started once again without saying anything else. The rest of them followed his back in silence. When they were near their inn, he suddenly saw a human figure hesitating in a corner before he slipped away into an alley.

[It's him?]

He immediately chased after that figure and followed him into the alley.

“My lord?” A few of his men called after him in surprise.

When he entered the alley, he immediately saw a young man with a monocle on his right eye. The latter stopped walking when he heard Brendel's footsteps, and slowly turned around.

“Lord... Brendel, is it?” The youth said with a dour expression.

It was the same young man whom Brendel recognized as an apprentice wizard, and

also a party member of the swordsman's group this morning.

Brendel nodded but the young wizard did not continue speaking, and both of them fell into an uneasy silence. He saw that the latter's eyes were bloodshot with rage even though he did not show it in his face.

"...My lord, my name is Alistair. I remember you asked me this morning if I wanted revenge? If I told you I want to—" The wizard gritted his teeth as he took a pause: "My lord, can you show me the way to do so?"

Brendel did not answer.

"The mercenaries and adventurers in the city have the same thought. The blood feud between Graudin and us has been set in stone." Alistair stared at him: "If my lord agrees to help us, we will work for you—"

But Brendel shook his head, and Alistair's face fell.

"Are you absolutely certain that you want revenge?" Brendel said after a long pause, rubbing his forehead.

Life went back into Alistair's eyes, but he took time to think about Brendel's words before he nodded resolutely.

"Then make sure you stay low and don't get into any further trouble with Graudin." Brendel's fist went to his heart: "I promise I will help you take revenge but now is not the time. I will send word to you when I'm ready."

"Wait, my lord!" Alistair called out after Brendel as the latter turned around and left the alley.

Brendel's men were waiting at the entrance of the alley. They had guessed a little as to what had happened when they saw the crucified bodies and Alistair.

"Brendel." Romaine called out to him. She went in front of him and stared at his eyes. "Are you sad?"

The youth finally stopped and looked at her in surprise. When he heard her words he felt that he realized that his fury was overwhelming the pain in his heart. He almost teared up as he lightly patted her head.

“Thanks.” He said in a wistful voice.

“Eh,” Romaine frowned as she moved away his hand and asked curiously: “But I haven’t even done anything yet—”

“...Did Amandina ask you to come over to talk to me?”

“How did you know?”

Brendel sighed and shook his head. When he turned around, he saw Amandina rushing over with her fingers raising her dress.

“Are you angry with me, my lord?” Amandina stopped in front of him and asked.

“You did nothing wrong.” Brendel rubbed his forehead as he spoke.

“But you’re still angry with me?”

“Yes.”

“Why is that?”

“Miss Amandina, as you very well know, this world isn’t black or white nor is it simple. I know you meant to tell me that Count Randner is the highest authority in the southern borders of Aouine. His forces are no smaller than that of any dukes, and his private army is powerful enough to make anyone who dares to resist him shiver in fright. Even dukes will only act against him in the shadows.”

He took a deep breath and brushed his hair back: “Not to mention our small group who is nothing more like ants to him. You might even say that a single order from him is enough to kill us all.”

“But?” Amandina asked solemnly.

“This is not a reason for me to back down. If you ask me to choose between duplicity or violence, I will choose the later. I will not accept Graudin’s ‘Gift’ with a hypocritical smile; I will choose a path of steel and blood.” Brendel unsheathed his sword and pointed it to Graudin’s manor: “You asked me the reason why. The reason is simple, miss Amandina. It’s simply because I am Brendel.”

He looked back at Romaine: “Brendel, who came from Bucce.”

Romaine immediately winked at him mischievously and gave a curtsy.

Amandina was slightly awed by his words but she quickly regained her sense: “But there’s possibly a better choice. I understand your thoughts, my lord, but the dead has no power to speak amongst the nobles! We are not just facing Baron Graudin and his family, there’s also Madara to worry about—”

There was a fire that was stoked within her heart from Brendel’s words but her eyes were also full of worry.

“That would be my problem, miss Amandina. Regardless of Graudin, count Randner, or even the entire Madara army.” He looked back at Graudin’s large manor. “Since we’re going to face each other sooner or later, I’ll be ready for them.”

He said, and continued to walk back to the inn.

Scarlett tightened her grip on her long spear when she heard Brendel’s speech as she followed him.

Amandina’s eyes followed his back with worry but there was a newfound respect for him in her heart. At the same time, she began to think about the number of enemies they were going to face. No matter how she looked at it, there was no way for a small group of men to go against the hundreds and even thousands of soldiers Graudin had at his disposal.

===== Graudin’s POV =====

There was a loud smash and crazed yelling. Pieces of white porcelain were shattered across the ground.

Graudin was throwing his belongings in his study in absolute fury regardless of how valuable it was after Brendel and his men left.

Rothko and Kabias had already left the manor. At this point of time, even if count Randner was found to have an alliance with Madara, there would not be any repercussions to him because of the chaos in the capital. However, his reputation would fall beyond unsavory if people found out he worked with the undead.

The people left beside him were his two male lovers. This was the reason why he could openly vent all his anger.

“Viscount Gaston, Viscount Gaston, god fucking Viscount Gaston, damned these fucking Northern bastards!” He yelled at the top of his lungs.

If Brendel’s forces did not appear to be as strong as he was, he would have ordered all his men to attack him and cut off his head. He did not care even if he had to go to war with another family.

One of the male lovers saw an opportunity to come up to him when Graudin was taking a respite to gain his breath: “My lord, since they already left the manor, do you want to gather your soldiers and kill him—”

Chapter 141

Warm words of Hope (3)

The other male lover lowered his voice and added: “He might be a viscount, but surely their family’s influence has limited reach over the south. I had sent men out to investigate his family name and he comes from Baltha, the furthest northern region in the kingdom.”

“Are you stupid?” Graudin said. Even though he was in a rage his mind was unaffected by it. “Who do you think we can send after him? That skeleton said that bastard is at least a Gold-ranked swordsman, and the red-haired woman by her side most likely has the same strength as well. Do you think my troubles are still not enough?”

“I apologize, my lord. I had failed to consider his strength.”

“Then perhaps we can close the city gates and force them to stay here while we send word to the assassins in the capital?” His other lover said.

Graudin took in a deep breath before he kicked him: “Halfwit! Should I send you out to close the gates? Perhaps he would cut you down as well!”

The latter screamed in pain and shook his head.

“Perhaps we can try to get the Skeleton Lord and his undead army to attack him? Are they not our allies?” The other lover who was still standing said.

“They won’t act on this matter. Aouine and Madara had just signed a treaty, and they won’t risk a war with any noble families at this point of time. Even though I don’t know what their undead commander is doing here, I don’t think they will leave the city easily.” Graudin said.

There were other words that did not leave his lips. His family and Madara were both using each other. This alliance in the dark would never see action in the open. Randner was allowing Madara to attack the other southern regions in order to bolster their own forces.

This was the secret between them.

He did not tell his kept lovers about this. He looked at them and shook his head, touching the injury on his cheeks and said bitterly: “But I’m not going to let this matter slide. I will absolutely get my revenge on that bastard. My father might not be willing to go to war with another family, but I’m going to see if he’s capable of protecting his companions—”

His smile was a twisted curl of his lips: “Get me a pen and some paper, I’m writing a letter to the count.”

“Understood, my lord.”

Both of his lovers bowed and prepared to leave, but at that moment the door opened and a dark figure entered the room like a snake.

“My lord, the matter you assigned to Kerri is finished. I have just received their message—”

Graudin took a moment to understand the figure’s words because of his anger, but he quickly nodded and said through clenched teeth: “Good, then bring that thing and my letter over to my father. I don’t think he will refuse this small request of mine.”

When he saw that the figure was still there he spoke again: “What else do you have to report?”

“My lord, the situation within the city looks unstable, I’m afraid those mercenaries will...” He said in a low voice.

“Ignore them. Even though the Madara undead monsters won’t help me with the viscount they won’t let these rebels get to me. I know this point better than you do.” Graudin waved his hand: “Take a rest. If the mercenaries are still rowdy I’ll teach them a lesson again—”

The figure nodded and left the room quietly.

===== Brendel’s POV =====

Amandina wanted the rest of the day to pass by quietly, but it seemed like the world was not going to let her wish come true. The situation kept spiraling out of control and

beyond her calculations.

Firbugh was no longer safe to stay when they fought with the city's lord. Even though Brendel was not afraid of Graudin he still had to consider the possibility of Madara backstabbing him. They had most likely realized he was the one who had led the refugees out. He was probably on Incirsta's kill list.

Kabias might hold back for now because of his status as a viscount, but that identity was ultimately fake and would not last forever.

Leaving Trentheim as soon as possible was the best decision. However, just three hours after they left the city, they met with a group of cavalry directly under Graudin—

Kerri was surprised at the group of people in front of him. His face was angular, had a pointed chin, with prominent cheekbones. His cunning eyes were spaced apart and set under a faint pair of slightly raised brows, looking almost like a hyena. He looked at the women within the group with lustful eyes.

[Marsha above, these woman are beautiful! Even the lord's women are not as good-looking as them.]

The man who was widely known as the Jackal, rubbed his eyes and pinched himself in order to test whether he was dreaming. The women he saw in the territory were mostly weathered and thin, or were whores who lurked nearby the inns. This was the first time he saw so many women with such beauty and elegance.

[If I can send them all to my lord, wait, maybe keep one secretly for myself—]

He licked his lips and checked out the group of mercenaries who were following a young man. This was not the first time he attempted something like this, and he had previously sent the sister of the group's leader to Graudin.

[Even though these ten-odd mercenaries look like they are Iron-ranked fighters, they should be doable with my riders. The fools who resisted me the last time had even more...]

The hundred-odd men behind him perked up their heads when he lifted his morning star.

[It looks like that young man has pretty good clothes on him, probably a small-ranking

noble. These nobles who travel to Trentheim are really fools. Do you really think that a 'noble' title is going to help when you come to the desolate borders of Aouine?]

"Boys, let's go greet our prey." He said and rode out.

The men behind him snickered with leering faces and followed him. Before long, they reached Brendel and the Jackal yelled at him.

"Who are you lot?" His voice was as grating as the bellows used in a forge: "Do you not know whose territory you are in? If you dare to carry your weapons so openly, are you—"

He wanted to say 'bandits', but the word suddenly stuck in his throat. The young man in front of him was looking at him strangely as though he was looking at an idiot.

"All of you came over from the Viridien village?" Brendel asked, acting like he had not heard the Jackal's question.

Kerri recovered from his daze and immediately roared with anger.

"You bastard, who the fuck do you think you are talking to? Do you even know who we are? Lord Graudin's personal city guards. I suspect you are bandits outside Firbugh, and I order you to lay down your weapons and come with us! If I give my order to my men to attack, there won't be any mercy!"

"So?" Brendel said.

"How dare you speak back..." The Jackal did not hear the suppressed killing intent that was leaking out from Brendel's lips. Perhaps he did not expect the group of Iron-ranked mercenaries would resist him, and there was also the fact behind him were blood-thirsty mercenaries who were paid handsomely for their skill. "I'm giving you a final chance. If you offer me your women right now, I might be kind enough to just let the rest of you go."

His men laughed when they heard their commander's words.

Amandina did not feel the slightest bit of anger. It was the complete opposite. She had seen enough of the nobles' private troops acting to what the man in front of her did, but she still sighed as she looked at Brendel.

That youth was about to unleash the anger he suppressed in the baron's manor. His right hand was released from his sword's hilt, clenched and unclenched once before it hung loosely beside him. He tilted his head and said one word at a time: "You asked me who I am, right?"

The Jackal paused and wondered if the man in front of him was crazy, but he subconsciously gripped his morning star tighter as he felt something was amissed.

"I wonder if you have heard of this story before." The youth said.

"Story?"

"The story of an idiot and an unhappy person."

Everyone looked at him with furrowed brows. Brendel was looking so serious they thought that there was something to his words, but they realized he was mocking the man in front of him after a moment.

"In the story that unhappy person takes off the idiot's head." Brendel said. His hand suddenly reached for his sword and a flash of light suddenly appeared and disappeared. "Like so."

"You fucking—" The Jackal wanted to order his men to attack but he suddenly froze.

He had a shocked expression on his face before his head slid off his body and fell down from the horse.

Chapter 142

Warm words of hope (4)

The battle was over quickly.

Even though the enemy riders fought Brendel's mercenaries on equal grounds in the beginning, the situation quickly turned to a one-sided slaughter when Brendel and Scarlett joined in the battle.

Silver and red flashes shot into the riders' formation as Element powers were fired repeatedly, and from the sky it looked like an ice dragon and lightning dragon were gobbling up the riders.

When they realized they could not defeat Brendel and his men, they quickly yelled in terror and fled in all directions. However, they were unable to escape Brendel and Scarlett's pursuit. Thirty minutes later, all the riders were killed and their corpses were scattered all over the plains.

Brendel did not summon Medissa because he wanted to hide his true strength or the battle would have been over much quicker. There was no telling if there were Madara scouts following him.

He sat at a distance away from his men, regained his composure after the battle while they cleaned up the battlefield. He realized that his newfound strength was not something temporary and had lasted all throughout the battle. There was no doubt that he had gained enough stats to be on par with a level 40+ Gold-ranked fighter.

[The duel with my grandfather increased the skill of my swordsmanship before. I had wondered if this was how a NPC leveled up their skill or was it a quest reward? I initially thought I needed to do some related quests to unseal my Element but it seemed like it's not necessary now. Typically most NPCs are stuck at the Gold-ranked tier because they are unable to unseal their Element powers... I'll open up the Stats Window to be sure—]

His eyes went wide when he saw the information displayed in front of him.

[I'm still level 32— but my stats have increased by thirty percent?! What happened?]

He immediately switched the menus rapidly before he suddenly froze and went back a few pages.

– Brendel (Level 32 Human Male Elite NPC, Strength-type: Physical, Close combat)

He looked at his name for a few moments and blinked stupidly. He finally realized that he possessed both the special quality reserved for a NPC as well as a system for gamers. He could raise his skill proficiency by points or increase it by 'special events'.

[Are you serious? What would the next title would be? Unique NPC? Boss NPC? Elite Boss NPC?]

He complained to himself when he realized he was becoming something like a monster who had special attributes. One day he might have some crazy 'Final Boss Form' while changing three or four times to get there...

He suddenly jerked his head left and right; perhaps there was going to be a 25 men raid party that was going to appear out of nowhere in the future. The entire thing was too surreal.

[...Well, is there any stat resistances or elite skills available?]

He changed the menu once again and discovered three new ability slots under his character sheet.

– ??? (Level 45)

– ??? (Level 47)

– ??? (Level 60)

He immediately guessed that these abilities were locked until he reached the appropriate level, and it was probably necessary to add skill points into them before he could use the skills.

[The skills of an Elite are not that impressive. Even the stat resistance bonuses are about the same as wearing a cloak or something. Maybe if I get a Boss NPC title and above... Then things would be different.]

His eyes were so focused and cross-eyed on his new title that he looked silly.

[If I gained the title 'World Boss'...Then he would go beyond any gamer could possibly go. N-no. The probability of a NPC entering a gold rank and unsealing their Element power is low enough. Reaching the peak of the pyramid is impossible, otherwise gamers wouldn't have controlled the continent in the end game of The Amber Sword.]

It was a possibility regardless of how small it was, a voice inside his head said, but he quickly regained his senses and checked his Element menu instead.

Two words described his Element powers.

– Frozen. Stability.

There will be more words to describe his Element power when he had more power to try and break the barrier down. After the barrier was broken he would be capable of using the Laws of his Element power.

Element Points, Element Abilities and Aura. A fighter with an unsealed Element power would possess these three qualities, and he would be perceived as someone who was beyond a normal human.

[In the game, a low tier Gold-ranked NPC must possess two conditions: Their overall power rating must cross over 100 and they must be able to sense their Element power. It's not too difficult to clear the first condition and most people with some talent is capable of achieving it, but they would stop and end as the highest tier Silver-ranked NPC if they are unable to sense their Element power. An Element is based on the Laws of this world. If one is unable to see and manipulate the lines that connect them to the Laws, then they will never be able to reach the barrier of their Element Power.]

Brendel reflected on his NPC body. Wizards, Priests and even Knights NPCs had a much easier time to find the lines connecting to the Laws of their Element powers. A NPC with a warrior profession and unsealed Element Power was almost non-existent. Buga was amongst the rare few who naturally gained his unsealed Element as his level increased.

[I can't even think of any warrior NPC who's able to sense his Element Power with an event at such low levels. And the description of my Element is strange. If the words describing my Element is Cold or Ice, or even Northern Wind or water, I won't be so puzzled. The appearance of my Element might look like it has something to do with

Ice, but no matter how I think about these two words in the game, it's actually related to Time and Space.]

Was it an Ice Element or Time and Space Element?

Even though the Ice Element was one of the four highly prized Elements in the game, the Time and Space Element was rated Legendary.

When he was still pondering, he caught the figures of Amandina and Romaine behind his stats window walking towards him. He dismissed the system and paused for a moment when he saw them holding hands with a timid little girl looking at him—

She appeared to be no older than ten and had braided green hair.

[A Senia citizen?]

He frowned slightly. The Viridien village was the only southern village in the Trentheim region, and these Senia citizens who lived there were short humans who descended from the Forest Wildlings. They were quite friendly with the druids in the forest, but because of their wild nature they were perceived as barbarians.

These Senia citizens were isolationists and stayed at the very edge of the forest, refusing to submit to Aouine. Most of the local lords ignored them, but there were a few who tried to use violent and bloody means to make them submit.

Graudin was amongst the latter.

[But why did that bastard want to capture a little girl like her? The nobles hate to have anything to do with the Senia citizens; it is considered a grave insult if the citizens even touch their clothes. Commoners look down on them. But it is true that the Viridien village is my next stop.]

The youth rubbed his head subconsciously.

Chapter 143

Warm words of Hope (5)

The little's girl clouded emerald eyes seemed to bring forth a certain vigor in her body. She wore a grey flaxen dress but was barefooted, while her thin arms looked almost like they were malnourished. Each of her hands were linked to Amandina and Romaine's hands as they walked side-by-side. When she walked towards Brendel she bit her lips nervously and looked up at him.

Her green hair were like newly sprouted vines covering her dusty face. Even though her eyes were weak and timid, she did not shy away from his gaze, rather, she was studying him carefully.

“And who might this be?” He said.

[Emerald-like eyes only belong to Forest Elves and pure-blooded Senia citizens, but her green waist-long hair is remarkably striking— The only NPC I have ever seen with such green hair is the Avatar of Forest.]

“Scarlett rescued her from the riders. She might have been kidnapped from the nearby village.” Amandina answered as he lowered her head and carefully combed the little girl's hair.

“Do you know she's a Senia citizen?” He suddenly said.

“What's a Senia citizen, Brendel?” Romaine asked with blinking eyes.

“A Senia citizen?” Amandina's hand drew back momentarily and hesitated, but eventually went back to comb her hair. The little girl looked up at her and saw the latter had complicated expressions.

There were many rumors about these 'Green Folks'. One of the highly circulated rumors was this: The Senia citizens carried a disease that turned people into beasts. Most humans did not want to come into contact with them, and nobles were even more loathed to go near them. In certain areas, some extremists even support burning these pagans in order to prevent these supposed disease from spreading.

“What’s your name?” Brendel ignored Amandina’s reaction, softened his tone and asked the little girl.

He was indifferent to the different races. The Senia fled to the south in the forest some seven or eight hundred years ago to avoid the Dragon of Darkness while the other races participated in the battle to fight for their freedom. Civilization progressed while the Senia lagged behind because of their isolation.

The various races thought they deserved the discrimination they had.

The little girl did not respond.

“She doesn’t understand our language.” Amandina answered.

Brendel was not surprised. He nodded and straightened up his body: “That’s fine, I can roughly guess where she’s from, but I’m a little puzzled.”

Amandina nodded to agree with him. Graudin’s private soldiers must have realized the little girl was a Senia, and it must have been great mercy to spare her from death. Even if this was some other land outside Trentheim, it was legal for the army to execute a Senia citizen.

Brendel took a few steps forward and surveyed the land around him.

“We’re sending her to the Viridien village.” He said.

“The Viridien village? Where’s that?”

“It’s a Senia village. It’s the south of here, approximately half a day’s journey.” Brendel took up a sword from one of the riders. He pulled the sword out, inspected it and replaced his sword which had been damaged during the fight at Graudin’s manor.

“What are we going there for?” Amandina frowned and lowered her voice to the point where it was out of the little girl’s reach: “My lord, we should just send someone to escort her back—”

Brendel waved her off.

“My lord! Do you really intend to go to their village? If anyone knows that we went to their land,” She lost her composure and blurted out. “Your reputation...”

She suddenly realized what she did and glanced at the little girl beside her. Even though she knew that the latter did not understand her words, she chose to stop talking.

“That’s enough, Miss Amandina. That’s where we’re going in the first place.” He said.

“What?” Amandina was completely shocked.

Valhalla. That was the place he was searching for. It was tremendous help to him that Mother Marsha had delivered the little girl to his hands. The Senia might be isolationists but they treated their true friends with great sincerity.

[Getting Valhalla’s location requires the Druids. This particular race chose to retire around the same time as the Silver Elves, and their presence have completely disappeared some three hundred and fifty years ago. The only possible way to get to them is have the Senia to contact them.]

“Brendel, who are the Senia?” Romaine asked again since she did not receive an answer.

“It’s a long story,” Brendel smiled and flipped her nose, causing her to scowl angrily as she retreated backwards. “The Elves called them At’zon, The Forest’s Children.”

“Lycanthropes?” Romaine’s eyes turned wide with curiosity: “I heard of this term before!”

The young man suddenly felt a gaze on him and turned around. The little girl had an obvious reaction when he mentioned the word at’zon. He pondered for a while to ensure he did not make any mistakes in his plans before he ordered his men to set out.

The Viridien village was a foreign name to numerous regions and even local mapmakers. The latest edition of the political map made by the order of King Oberg listed a total of four hundred and fifty locations, but it did not mention the name either.

In the game, adventurers made their way to Karanjar’s mountainous region from their village and Brendel was one of them, but the sight he saw that day was different from today—

“These fucking bastards.” One of the Grey Wolves Mercenaries muttered under his breath.

They rode through abandoned farmlands with damaged fences. Gardening tools were broken and strewn everywhere, while the planted vegetables were trampled and ruined by the riders' warhorses. It was quite easy to see how much effort and time the Senia had spent to clear the verdant forest in order to create arable land, only to have them completely ruined by Graudin's men.

[When I came here in the game there wasn't anything like this. It was a place that had dense foliage and trees with no signs of anyone living here at all.]

Brendel's eyes glanced across the farmlands, almost able to see the nearby river there. He had a difficult time cross the forest back then because it was full of level thirty plant-type monsters.

The Grey Wolves Mercenaries glowered unhappily as they continued to ride. Their backgrounds were either hunters or farmers, and they regarded farming as something sacred because it was everything their families had.

"Stop advancing. Let's enter this area and check for villagers." Brendel suddenly said. He heard sounds coming from the inner farmlands.

His men followed his instructions and went around the damaged fence. They finally saw a woman wearing a tattered dress, covering her face and sobbing in front of the damaged vegetables.

Another man, perhaps her husband, was carrying a rake over his shoulders with a sullen look as he inspected the damage. When he saw Brendel's men coming around the fence, he was initially startled before he placed the rake horizontally across his chest and yelled:

"Jora, get up and run! They're back!"

He lunged at the young man in front of him with a bellow. However, Scarlett urged her horse forward and used her lance to sweep across the enemy's legs. He immediately stumbled and fell forward onto his face almost comically. She frowned and instantly realized the man in front of her was just a simple farmer. She quickly dismounted in order to help him up, but the woman behind him ran up and blocked his body with her own.

"Please, have mercy and spare my husband. Yol, run away!"

But the man did not have the intention to do so. He pulled Jasa back and tried to attack Scarlett with another savage yell and bloodshot eyes. However, before he even took a step forward he found a lance already at his throat. He stared at the girl's cold amber eyes and shivered subconsciously.

His movements faltered and stopped.

"Fool." Scarlett's voice was cold. "You can't even discern the difference between us."

She lowered her lance slowly before she suddenly swung it to the sides. There was a flash of lightning that seemed to dim the surroundings because of its brilliance, and when it was over a black pine tree was sent crashing to the ground.

Brendel's men merely watched the scene unfold. They did not have a good impression of the Senia, and Romaine was about the only person who looked at them with curiosity and neutral feelings.

The man named Yol finally seemed to understand their difference in strength. He did not understand why Scarlett did not kill him, but strength left his legs and he wanted to fall backwards and sit down. A voice suddenly rang out in the midst of the mercenaries.

"(Uncle Ulf!)" The little girl spoke in a different language.

His head jerked towards the direction of the voice, almost disbelieving his ears. When he turned around, he saw the little girl in the embrace of a pretty woman looking curiously at him.

"Sifrid, w-why are you here, didn't they take you away...?" It was Jasa who spoke in astonishment.

"(Uncle Ulf, these people saved me.)" The little girl's voice were like crystal bells that rang in the wind.

Chapter 144

Warm words of hope (6)

The bodies of the dead were covered with a layer of leaves, and were lined up in the village's square in front of Goddess Nia's statue. A crowd observed in silence while an elderly priest performed a rite for the dead.

The difficulty of life had become part of Senia's citizens dating from a few centuries back. The weak race was powerless to resist the forces around them, and they could only choose to retreat further into the dark forest. Cold, hunger and monstrous creatures greeted them and brought about the threat of death everyday.

Everyone looked to the oldest elder amongst them, one whom they regarded as the most experienced in life and the best leader they could have in trying times. The leaders had always managed to lead the citizens of Senia out of difficult situations in history. However, their wise elder was now hunched in defeat with melancholic eyes.

The old man leaned against the cane in his hand, with each wrinkle in his face seemingly casting a dark shadow over him. His sigh of lament was just loud enough for the dark-skinned middle-aged man with a short beard beside him to walk off with a huff.

"Uncle Brynjar, where are you going?" A tall youth beside the old man immediately yelled after him.

"I'm going to take Sifrid back by force!"

"Please calm down!" The youth urged: "Uncle Brynjar, what can you possibly do by yourself? Are you trying to head to your death?"

"I promised Sassa to take care of her... Even if I'm heading to my death I still have to go and rescue her!" The middle-aged man was stubborn.

But he also knew that it was a remark made out of anger. He turned away with clenched fists, and every muscle on his body was taut with anger.

“Brynjar, restrain yourself,” The elderly leader finally spoke, and sighed: “Sassa is my daughter. Sifrid is also my granddaughter. I am just as upset as you are... Once the winter is over, we’re moving to the forest.”

“And what about Sifrid? How about the others? Are we not going to take revenge?” He whirled around to the elderly man with bloodshot eyes.

The villagers were silent with bowed heads.

He scoffed at them and left. The elderly leader sighed deeply again as he looked at Brynjar’s back. He knew that the latter was not going to find the nobles and seek revenge. None of the male villagers would turn their backs for the greater good of this tribe. It was their responsibility.

However, Brynjar’s departure still caused a deafening silence amongst the gathered crowd. There was nothing they could really do. Their greatest warrior was a mere Silver-ranked brawler, and one man was no match for the army of the terrifying Baron Graudin.

The silence did not last for long as the priest started his ritual rites again but was soon interrupted by a man running in with clumsy footsteps—

It was Ulf who was in charge of guarding the outer areas of the village.

The crowd tensed up when they recognized him, wondering if the vicious soldiers were back to attack them again. They already took Sifrid, were they back for more of them?

“Ulf, what’s wrong?” The old man said when the panting Ulf stopped in front of him. Even though he maintained his calm demeanor for the sake of his tribe, his fingers gripped his cane tightly to the point it was trembling slightly.

“S-Sifrid... She’s...” Ulf’s words came in breaks as he forced air into his lungs. His pale face looked as though he saw a ghost.

“Sifrid?” The elderly leader’s expression turned grim and immediately demanded for an answer: “What happened to her?”

“She has been rescued...”

“What?”

===== Brendel’s POV =====

The news of the little girl being rescued were quickly spread throughout the village.

But Brendel felt a little awkward from the villagers’ treatment.

He did not expect them to give him a cold shoulder. Even though he didn’t hope to get gratitude, he did save the little girl after all. The gazes that he received from them were of suspicion and fear. They felt such eyes upon them at every moment ever since he and his men arrived in the village.

The man named Ulf returned to receive them and brought them to the biggest house in the village. He explained to them the Elder was going to come over very soon, and cast a complicated and nervous glance at them before he left the house and shut the doors.

Once he left, the Grey Wolves Mercenaries were the first to be vocal about their discontent.

“They are insulting us with their attitudes!”

“Indeed, we should not have come here if this is supposed to be our treatment.”

“There’s no reasoning with these barbarians!”

They complained bitterly but they did not go overboard with their words. Their lord had already stated that their original destination was this village. However, they did not understand why they were here in this remote area, and glanced at Brendel with puzzled looks from time to time. Even Amandina did the same thing, but with the addition of resentment in her eyes.

Brendel had a wry smile.

“You would feel much more better if you are less biased to them.” The youth sighed and had no choice but try and soothe them.

“But my lord these are the people who fled during *that* war.” The younger Wild Elf sister blurted out with a clear voice. She had been following him closely because she

discovered he seemed to have limitless capability to handle problems.

“Dia!” Her older sister yelled. She had cautioned her younger sister multiple times not to interfere with the living world multiple times but she never seemed to listen. She glanced at her lord’s expressions but it seemed like he did not care.

“I care little about their sentiments to us, my lord, but...” Amandina shook her head.

“Yes, I know. My reputation.” Brendel said.

“If you understand this point, my lord...”

“And it means little to me.”

“My lord!”

A knock interrupted Amandina’s protest. Brendel nodded to a mercenary nearest to the door, indicating for him to open it. The latter straightened up and placed his hand over his sword as he walked cautiously over to the door to open it—

The door was opened but there was no one outside. The mercenary looked surprised.

“What’s wrong?” Brendel asked.

That mercenary turned around with a strange expression and stood aside from the door. There was a basket of fruits outside. It looked like they were freshly plucked as there were still green leaves and dew on them.

The mercenaries looked at the fruits in surprise, before their faces turned to awkward expressions. Did the person who delivered the fruits overhear their words?

Brendel sighed again in his mind. The Senia might have been suspicious of them but they were definitely grateful for bringing back the little girl. The problem here was how deep the feud between the citizens of Aouine and Senia was.

“What should I do with the fruits, my lord?” The mercenary at the door asked.

“Bring it in.” Brendel said. His gaze went outside the house. The memories of the Viridien village in his memories were different; the Senia had completely abandoned this place a long time ago and it was overgrown with wild plants and trees.

But in this world, they were still here, despite the signs of fights and bloodshed that happened not long ago.

The statue of the Goddess of Hunting and Harvest, Nia, was present in the center of the village and undamaged. She wore a long leather coat and carried a shortbow over her back, while her hands held a basket of hunted game and fruits over her head.

Brendel shifted his eyes to their cottages made out of stone and wood with a reed thatch over the roofs. These were unlike the rumors where they lived in tents like barbarians. However, their old culture was mostly lost and their title of 'Hunters of the Night' was nothing more than a legend now.

But their ties with the Druids were still there and as close as it had ever been even from a few centuries ago.

When the door was closed, the Grey Wolves Mercenaries' grumbles were silenced and they started reconsidering the difference between the Senia and the rumors about them.

Brendel did not have to wait very long as there was a knock on the door once again. This time it was the man he had been waiting for—

An elderly man who held onto a cane entered the house. Brendel immediately figured he was the leader of the village. Sifrid was standing beside a dark-skinned middle-aged man, most likely her father, and they came in together with the elderly man.

"My guests from faraway, I thank you humbly." The elderly man bowed deeply and said.

"Please refrain from thanking us. This is something that we happened to solve in our journey," Brendel did not have the chance to even get up when the elderly man spoke quickly. He frowned slightly and replied: "We have our own request to trouble you..."

The old man exchanged glances with the Sifrid's father and he nodded: "Ulf has told me of your requests to enter the forest, my lord. It isn't a troublesome thing for us."

Brendel's frown became a grimace.

[This Elder is starting off with a lie. Why is that?]

Entering the Dark Forest here was a dangerous thing. Even if his men were to enter it

they had to be extremely careful and prepared. If the Senia went in deeper to the forest it would be no different from heading to their deaths.

“Who are you sending?” He asked with a raised eyebrow.

“I’m going.” The middle-aged man took a look at her daughter and at Brendel and his men, and said with resolution.

“(Father?)” The little girl raised her head and asked in surprise at once.

[Are you leaving your daughter behind...?] Brendel’s surprise was palpable. He realized why the Elder said it was no trouble for them.

Chapter 145

Warm words of Hope (7)

“Is the little girl your daughter?” Brendel said to the middle-aged man.

“She is indeed Brynjar’s daughter, my lord, but I’ll be taking care of her. Her mother is my adopted daughter.” It was the Elder who replied: “He has volunteered to be your guide because he’s grateful that you brought her back.”

(TL: I searched for a while, but I’m not finding any medieval equivalent for “in-laws”. That term seems to be relatively new. So instead of Bro.-in-law X, it’s just Brother X. I’ll assume that a father/mother calls his son-in-law by name without any addressing term.)

He took a moment to stroke Sifrid’s head.

“I would gladly guide you through the Dark Forest myself but I hope my lord understands I have to lead the village, even though I’m more familiar with it...”

The mercenaries were silent the entire time. The rumors about the Dark Forest were more several times worse than the bedtime stories used to frighten the children in Aouine to sleep.

“What of her mother?” Amandina asked with furrowed brows.

The Elder sighed and his eyes appeared distant as he recalled old memories: “Sifrid’s mother shares half the blood of an Elf and was the loveliest girl in our village. She was also the happiest girl when she married Brynjar, but regrettably, she died to protect the other villagers during the previous ‘Hunt’...”

Brendel’s throat went dry. Memories of the crucified men and women came flooding back to him once more.

A Hunt was something that the nobles did to subjugate the fearsome barbarians. This practice was supposedly eliminated during the first Holy War as they stopped invading civilized kingdoms by then. Graudin’s supposed Hunt against the Senia’s citizens was nothing more to fulfill his perverse bloodlust.

[That fucking bastard must have deepened the feud between the locals and the Senia through some ridiculous reasoning...]

“...I see.” Brendel chose to move forward: “Let’s move on to the next topic. I won’t object to your choice since you have already decided. I don’t believe going into the forest is a simple matter, so how much time do you need?”

His eyes went briefly to Brynjar before it went to the little girl. It should be fine to at least preserve his life with three Gold-ranked fighters in his group but he was troubled about the villagers.

“We will be ready in a few days, but my lord, I wish to warn you about the Dark Forest. It will become dangerous when autumn sets in fully. It is especially so just before winter, because the starving beasts in it will become extremely aggressive. And the powerful monsters—”

“That is fine,” Brendel interrupted him. “We only wish to cross the forest and we can handle anything that comes along our way.”

The Elder looked surprised; his mouth opened and shut a few times but no words came out.

He did not know Brendel was looking for the druids. They had been gone for nearly four centuries and had no ties with the outside world.

The youth was familiar with their territorial ways, and once he entered the forest, he was certain he was able to bait their ‘Beasts’ out. With his experience, he would be able to discern the druids’ locations if they ran back to their hideouts.

[The only problem I have is convincing the druids to find the legendary Lost Sanctuary, Vahalla, for me. These hidden race is neutral and holds no interest in humans’ affairs. The alliance between the druids and humans have been broken even before they chose to hide themselves. A Senia with me should help... But there’s also the issue of my enemies are piling up before me. I probably need to find quicker solutions because I’m running out of time.]

He could only take one step at a time. The druids were slightly different from the Silver Elves. In a way, they were slightly better in comparison to the Silver Elves because they did not sever their ties to the outside world. The druids having a good relationship with the Senia was proof that he could strike up a relationship with them.

The Elder did not suspect Brendel's motives. If they wanted to destroy the village they could have done so easily. One could only imagine how powerful they were when they took back Sifrid without any injuries with the amount of people they had.

But he was fearful of the aftermath. His experience told him that Baron Graudin would never let this feud go, and his wrath will reach this village very quickly.

[This village is unable to defend against Graudin. I originally wanted this young man and his mercenaries to stay here until this winter but he has flatly refused me... They are not interested in our lives and only want a trade between us.]

The Elder had measured this in his heart. He felt that he had no excuses or rights to refuse Brendel. He could only sign deeply inside in his heart.

"I understand, my lord." The old man bowed and said. "We will make arrangements for you as soon as possible."

Brendel merely nodded.

When the Senia left he felt he could finally relax. He understood the worries of the Elder, but there was not enough time for him to stay the entire winter. And even if he did it might not be of use—

[Even if I march right up to Graudin's face and tell him I did it, that crazy bastard would just vent his anger on them regardless.]

"Brendel, can we help them out?" Romaine tugged at his sleeves.

"I can lead them into the forest, but there's no way for us to provide enough food to last them through winter. The only place we can purchase additional food is within Graudin's territory, but do you think they would sell to us?" The youth spoke slowly.

Romaine's eyes flickered sadly.

"I'll stay behind." Scarlett walked up to him and placed her lance over her shoulders, staring at Brendel with her amber eyes.

"Let me check your forehead." He said after a short moment.

He got up with a heavy heart and pushed away the hair which was covering her

forehead. A black flower-like pattern had spread across it. He had heard reports about how she had nightmares every night to the point she could not breathe but she had not made any complaints about it.

“You can’t stay behind.” He sighed. “The truth is, I don’t want you to leave too far away from me. Staying here for even one month is too dangerous for you or for these villagers. You know what I mean.”

She gritted her teeth and acknowledged his reply with a soft assent. His words plunged into her heart like daggers as she realized he was right. Once she became fully corrupted, these villagers’ fates will most likely be sealed if she stayed behind.

Amandina stood quietly at one corner without saying anything. She was not fond of the Senia villagers, but she clenched her fist at her inability to protect them.

Brendel tidied his shirt and looked at all of them: “I’m going out for a walk—”

Everyone looked surprised. Their lord was not someone who took random trips. The Nightsong Tiger and Scarlett walked up to him, but his hands were raised up: “The two of you stay behind. I’m taking a walk to clear my mind. The rest of you should take a good rest and prepare for our journey ahead.”

===== Sifrid’s POV =====

There was a tradition amongst the Senia; they believed that the dead will stay amongst the living for some time and bless them for their journeys ahead of them. Thus they built a Longhouse specifically for them and held the most important meetings in it.

This was to allow the souls of the dead to accompany the living to tide over the village’s most perilous junctures.

Now, there was an altercation that broke out in this holy grounds.

“I refuse!” The youth who stopped Brynjar yelled, his spittle flying across the table. “Goddess Nia will never hope to see this happen. It’s a miracle that Sifrid got rescued but we’re going to send her back?! Fuck your cowardly suggestions!”

“If we don’t send her back, every single head of the villagers heads will roll,” A thin man spoke in a low menacing voice: “None of us here want this to happen to Sifrid but we have no choice. Don’t you think we have seen enough deaths? Sifrid’s mother died

resisting them for the sake of our lives. This is a sacred oath to let us survive the odds!”

He glared at the young man: “I’ll gladly offer my worthless life if the village requires me to sacrifice it. What we need now is our rational thoughts and not reckless emotions. We survived till this day because of that— Brynjar, Sifrid’s your daughter, tell us of your opinions.”

He turned to the middle-aged man. The latter was folding his arms and said nothing.

“Is there no other choice?” The young man said through clenched teeth: “Are we supposed to hand our own to the enemies just like that?”

“Perhaps we can enter the forest?” Someone said.

“We have no food for the harsh winter.” The Elder shook his head. They had not collected the food from their farms, and hiding the forest now would only mean they would starve and freeze to their deaths.

“Are we supposed to just send her to her death?”

“Your words aren’t right. The baron said he was taking her as a foster daughter right? Didn’t he say that if we bring her over there would be no need for us to hide in the forest and we can become real citizens...”

A small voice in the crowd pierced through the room.

Everyone fell into complete silence. That was a lie which could not even deceive a child. A local lord will never look to the Senia citizens kindly, even if Sifrid had Elven blood in her. The nobles in Graudin’s land were twisted and immoral.

“Have you no shame? I cannot believe you are even capable of uttering these pathetic words. Why don’t you offer yourself and beg the Baron to fuck your arse?” The young man spat at the man who spoke earlier, the latter flushing red with shame.

“Elder, perhaps we should take up our weapons and fight these bastards off?” Another man said angrily.

The quarrels in the Longhouse became louder and louder and spilled out into the streets. Brendel was listening quietly on a boulder while he looked at the little girl squatting beside him. She was looking at the ants crawling on the ground peacefully,

as though she did not hear the quarrels in the Longhouse...

“Sifrid,” The youth finally said: “You understand what our language, don’t you?”

She raised her head up with a surprised look.

“I’m... Sorry.” She spoke in Brendel’s native tongue with difficulty.

“That’s fine,” Brendel shook his head. “I know that you needed to protect yourself during that time. It seems like you’re a smart little girl. You can call me Brother Brendel—”

The little girl’s smile was endearing. She paused for a moment.

“Brother... Brendel, can I, take you to the forest, instead of my father? I too, know the forest. My mother, taught me.”

Brendel felt his heart melting, but he shook his head at the end.

“(Sifrid, even if you bring us to the forest and you are not in this village, that baron will still be here?)” This time the youth spoke in the Elven language.

Sifrid was taken aback for a moment and her face quickly fell.

“I’m sorry.” Brendel whispered.

The little girl bit her lips.

Suddenly, he heard crashes within the Longhouse with intensified yells.

Chapter 146

Warm words of hope (8)

There was a loud bang as the young man pounded on the desk with both of his hands. The veins on his arms were visible.

“I will never agree to it!” He retorted with bloodshot eyes. “Sifrid is still a child, and she’s Lady Sassa’s daughter. Are the men in our village going to trade a child’s life in order to survive? Can you really do it? Can you!”

His roars echoed throughout the Longhouse. Most of the men glanced at each other without answering the youth. Brynjar rocked his body back and forth with folded arms and said nothing. The Elder gave a soft sigh and raised his head, blinking his old clouded eyes.

“Who was that?” Brendel asked as his eyes went over to the direction of the Longhouse.

“Brother Thor.” The little girl said with her bell-like voice.

He nodded to acknowledge her words, and there was a short moment where no one spoke.

“...That’s enough,” The thin middle-aged man shook his head and sighed: “You said too much, Thor.”

“Uncle Klarr!” The youth protested with clenched fists.

“Enough! We understand your point all too well— But we’re Senia’s citizens. Do you understand? This is the destiny we carry and the choices of life and death are not for us to choose. Do you not recall the villagers who froze to their deaths in the forest?”

The young man’s eyes widened slightly and he bit his lips. He trembled a few times before he blinked his red eyes: “Of course, my father...”

“He sacrificed his life for yours.” The Elder sighed.

“I know.”

“Every one of us survived till this day because of the villagers’ sacrifices. You need to consider our circumstances, as well as the dead. They sacrificed their lives so we can live on, and we must not waste their efforts. Our folklore has a song dedicated to describe how our ancestors fought against the Dark Forest over generations, shedding blood and flesh and their lives for the sake of the Senia’s future. They did not sacrifice themselves to let us throw it all away for one reckless moment.”

Klarr paused for a moment, before he uttered the next few words one at a time. “Do you understand?”

A few men started tearing up upon hearing his words.

“I... understand. But are we going to live on like this forever as cowards? Goddess Nia said we should not live just for the sake of living—” Thor wiped his eyes with chokes in between his words: “Should we throw away everything so we can live on?”

“At the very least we still have hope while we are alive,” Klarr shook his head: “If we are not able to see that day happen, then I hope your generation would be able to see it—”

“Elder, please make your decision.” He turned his head to the oldest man.

“...Very well. We have reached a consensus to this discussion. However, none of us have the authority to send one of us to their deaths. I hope to ask for Sifrid’s opinions.” The Elder’s eyes were dyed with sadness.

“But there’s no precedent to ask for one’s permission.”

“That is because the people before us have been adult men or the elderly. They have made their decisions through their judgments and understood what they were doing.” The Elder’s head was bowed as he spoke.

“But Sifrid’s a child. What would she know about our customs? Are we handing our entire village’s fate to a child? This is a foolhardy decision!” Someone objected.

Most of the men’s glares were cold.

“And do you not feel any shame on relying a child to save yourself, even if we have no

choice?”

“Your words are not wrong but it is also true we have no precedent for this, and Sifrid’s also the Elder’s granddaughter...” That small voice filled the room again.

The men took a moment to absorb his words. When Thor realized what that bastard implied, he walked over to him, grabbed his shirt and forced him to stand up.

“Yes, she’s not your daughter, so you can fucking send her off like it’s none of your concern. You cowardly bastard, you’re not fit to call yourself a Senia, get the fuck out of this sacred building now!”

He threw him across the floor like a sack of potatoes. The men near the injured person retreated away from him.

“W-what are you talking about, I’m just stating it as a possibility, that doesn’t mean it’s true...” That man stuttered and groaned in pain: “And who’s to say there’s no possibility of that? Can you assure us that the Elder isn’t favoring his own kind? Are you the Elder?”

The old man stared at the cowardly man backing away from the ground as Thor lumbered angrily over to him. His fist was raised and ready to strike the bastard in front of him—

“Stop fighting!” A child’s voice pierced through the coward’s distressed whining and filled the room.

The front door had been pushed open without anyone realizing it. Sifrid’s had balled her hands into fists and shouted with her eyes closed, pouring every ounce of effort to raise her voice—

“Stop fighting, everyone...” She opened her eyes and tears quickly filled them before they spilled over. Her vision was blurry as she pleaded with pained eyes: “I’m sorry, father, grandfather... It’s all Sifrid’s fault...”

The room was silenced and only Sifrid’s soft crying remained.

Klarr got up at once and walked over to hug her: “We’re the ones who’re sorry! Sifrid, we should be cursed and abandoned by Goddess Nia for our actions—”

Brynjar suddenly hugged his head as he bawled loudly while the others looked at the situation in bewilderment.

But the Elder's eyes went to the scenery outside of the house—

“I have allowed you to see something shameful, my lord.” He stood up and bowed slightly at Brendel.

Brendel's trembling hand was on his sword. He had to grip it tightly in order to stop himself from making a rash decision.

The Elder made his way before the youth, his cane striking against the ground with each step. He looked solemnly at him as though he made a difficult decision: He knelt down and bowed with his head on the ground.

“My lord, I beg you to help us! I know we shouldn't force this trouble onto you, but...” He said.

The youth looked at the weak before him.

Sifrid was mewling with stifled sobs, while Brynjar was half-crying and bemoaning his uselessness. Lament filled Brendel's heart and he licked his dry lips, preparing to open them. But a hand grabbed his own all of a sudden. The youth turned around in surprise and saw a pair of dark eyes staring at him.

Amandina's expression was determined and hurt at the same time—

She glanced at the sight before her and hesitated. She was almost swept away by the emotions until she nearly forgot what she was supposed to here.

“My lord.” She shook her head. The words and her actions stabbed through her heart like daggers.

“Are you here to persuade me?” Brendel asked.

Amandina did not reply and merely looked at him.

“Do you really have the heart to hold me back?”

Amandina bit her lips and glanced at the scene before her. Each second she took, made

her face paler as though blood had left it entirely. But her fingers grabbed onto Brendel's wrists till they were white.

"Resent me for all you desire, my lord." The dignified aristocrat's daughter said: "I cannot allow you— I will not allow you to do this; *My Lord*, you know who you will face. Graudin, Madara, Randner, possibly the entire Aouine's kingdom. Your enemies are nearly endless. If you agree to help them, the only conclusion for you is death—"

"I know that my lord doesn't care about the foes before you. You are the bravest and most honorable knight I have ever seen, and I feel like I'm bearing witness to the birth of the high nobles described in the legends again. I once thought that they were mere fiction, but my lord has shown me that they all ring true..."

"But I care about your fate!" She shouted.

"Because of that, I will not watch you head to your death. Even if I am to bear all the hatred from the entire village and your men, I don't care—" She raised her head and stared at him: "But I must stop you."

Brendel stared back at her for a long while. This was the first time she spoke her mind so freely. He bowed his head.

"Thank you." He said.

He closed his eyes and exhaled once before opening them again. He then gently removed her fingers, walked over to Sifrid, patted her head and left.

"My lord?" Amandina looked on in surprise.

The villagers were slightly dejected as well. They had observed his back and had their hopes diminished with every passing second after his shoulders sagged. Amandina's words had pointed out of the dangers he would face, and they had no right to have a stranger become their sacrifice.

They were even thankful for the youth's anger and sadness. He truly cared about them, and it was not sympathy or altruism, but empathy.

[Mother Marsha, Goddess Nia, have you not punished the Senia enough?]

"Let's go, Amandina" He called out to her in a low voice without turning back.

She finally gave a small sigh of relief but when she looked at his back she found herself at a loss, as though she had buried something important with her own hands. She lowered her head and felt her chest throbbing.

Behind her was Sifrid's soft sobs—

Chapter 147

Warm words of hope (9)

The night sky of Senia's village was quiet and peaceful. Bright stars filled the cloudless sky like paint on an empty canvas with an aurora highlighting it. The forest was quiet enough for one to appreciate the majestic painting.

The village had once again went back to its peaceful self after the quarrels in the Longhouse ended. But at the darker corners of the courtyard which was lit up by the campfire, a small shadow quietly slipped into a warehouse located at the village's edge.

Sifrid was quietly taking in breaths as she looked carefully to her left and right. Her green eyes were dyed with anxiety as she slowly pushed against the building's door with her tiny hands. She successfully infiltrated the building and closed it gently from the inside.

The interior was pitch-black, save for the sky-window located at the top which cast a tiny beam of moonlight onto the ground.

However, the buried bloodlines of the Lycanthropes within the Senia's citizens would awaken in the dark. Her pupils expanded and captured every detail in the dark.

Sifrid took a moment before she found what she came for. She moved towards a vase which contained water and stood on her tiptoes to fill her waterbag. Once she was done she stashed it away and surveyed her surroundings again.

In the end there was no resolution to the quarrels earlier, but Sifrid had made up her mind and decided to travel alone to the Baron.

[The adults said I can save everyone if I present myself before the Lord Baron. If I do so, Father and Grandfather wouldn't need to fight with them anymore.]

She prayed for everyone to live on properly and not end up like her mother who left her behind for all eternity.

“Mother...”

Sifrid sniffled and stopped herself from having her tears from falling. She knew that she would never see her father and grandfather and everyone else ever again if she left.

(Sifrid, you should quickly grow up and stop crying. You’re a citizen of the forest, a true Senia— Mother told me this all the time.)

She wiped her eyes and felt she needed to become strong. But when she thought of her mother’s final moments covered in blood and smiling warmly at her, her tears still fell down like a stream of stars.

“Sifrid, you idiot...” She rubbed her eyes angrily and bit her lips as she whispered.

After taking a short moment to recompose herself, she went before the storage boxes stored with the clothes worn only at festivals.

She rummaged through the boxes before she found her red dress and leather shoes, She held them up and twirled around, almost in a little dance. She loved their designs and the feel of the material and started to wear them with rapid heartbeats. She was unsure what she was about to meet but she still wanted to fulfill her selfish little wish at this final moment—

She thought that the others would not blame for her wearing the clothes. But even if they did, she was going to do so anyway. She grinned with slight glee at the thought of her little mischief; her earlier tears glittering because her eyes were narrowed with mirth.

[What else have I forgotten? Ah, Mother’s flute.]

The little girl paused for a slight moment before she reluctantly took it down from her neck. She stared it over and over again, rubbing against the wooden grains with her fingertips, before she finally set it aside gently.

“I’ll leave this behind for father,” She muttered: “So Father will remember Mother and me.”

She blinked a few times and parted ways with it. As she walked away, she turned around a few times and looked back at it, before she finally clenched her tiny fists and

ran to the door, stopping there. She made sure she did not forget anything before she pushed the door slightly open, peeking outside to ensure no one was there.

Once outside, she started to move towards the village's entrance. However, after taking a few steps, the little girl felt something cold pressing on her right arm.

She trembled.

She turned around like a small frightened animal, her wide green eyes catching the glimpse of a silver sheathe. She raised her head and saw a familiar pair of warm eyes along with a confident smile.

“Ah... Brother... Bre—” She said and carefully took a step back.

It was Brendel.

“If you're heading out, you need to remember to bring something to defend yourself with.” He said with an encouraging voice.

He slowly walked over and knelt down before her. He raised her right hand and pressed the short sword he was carrying onto her palms, before closing her fingers.

Sifrid looked at him in confusion.

“In the end, you decided to go to the Baron by yourself?” He said.

The little girl lowered her head and did not reply. He nodded in response and took a long breath.

“Lady Sifrid, will you allow this knight to accompany you on your journey?” Brendel lowered his head and placed his fist across his heart.

Sifrid's head rose up in surprise and stared at him. Perhaps he was escorting her to keep her safe along the journey? In the end, she blushed and extended her other empty hand before him. Brendel grasped her hand firmly and stood up.

“Well then, let us take a look what kind of man Lord Baron is.” He said, his soft voice belied the threat behind his words.

She looked at him in confusion once again before comprehension dawned on her.

“But Brother Brendel, y-you will be killed!” She stammered.

“Don’t worry. Just as the Senia desires to have hope for themselves, I too yearn for it—”

He cast an unwavering gaze towards the direction of Trentheim. He raised his left hand and stretched it out before he formed his fingers into a tight fist; he pictured himself swallowing up Graudin’s manor as he said:

“Even if the entire world is against me, *I swear I will show you victory before your very eyes, Sifrid—*”

===== Graudin’s POV =====

Even though it was deep within the night the Baron’s manor was still lit up with candles. The hallway had people walking through to and fro noisily, but Graudin stood quietly in his room and looked out the arched stone window with a cold gaze out to the night sky.

The land below were similarly filled lit up with countless torches.

Seven administrative officers stood behind the cruel baron. Their mouths constantly moved like worms, but none of them dared to speak up. In the end it was Graudin’s right hand who bowed at his waist and spoke in his low growling voice:

“My lord, the mercenaries have gathered outside the city in force, I’m worried that our men are not going to be able to suppress them and—”

Graudin’s glare swept across his face and forced his remaining words to remain stuck in his throat.

Graudin whirled around and marched towards the table and swept the top filled with luxurious food with his right arm, causing plates and bowls to crash loudly and spectacularly to the ground. Metallic spoons and forks danced about as everyone got startled. The servants immediately retreated as far as they possibly could to the edge of the room, afraid of their lord’s wrath and getting crucified because of a whim.

The blood of the mercenaries and adventurers had not dried yet—

“You fools.” Graudin’s icy words filled the room: “Let me ask you, why do you think

Kerri and his men are not back yet?”

His right hand swallowed and answered: “...That’s probably because they are blocked outside by the mercenaries.”

“Probably?” Graudin’s eyes narrowed.

“I apologize, my lord, our men are unable to leave the city because of the mercenaries’ blockade. We are unable to receive any news for now...”

“Mercenaries, mercenaries, and still these fucking mercenaries, can’t any of you think of a solution?” He threw a fork at his right hand’s face, causing it to bleed slightly, as he roared: “Why can’t you kill all of them?”

“This...”

[There are ten large squadrons of mercenaries outside the city, and that’s not counting the adventurers yet. Mother Marsha is already looking out for us because they haven’t launched an attack. We simply don’t have the forces to kill everyone. I even fucking told you not to kill so many of them during the day. It was good enough to teach them a lesson, but you refused to listen and relied on the fact that you have Madara’s army. You stupid arrogant piece of shit. Because of your inability to think of the consequences the situation has gotten out control!]

Graudin’s right hand insulted his lord in his mind, but he did not show any of his discontent on his face, and merely lowered his head as he waited for Graudin to change his mind.

The latter was silent for a while as he realized what the problem was, but he was not too worried.

“Where are the Madara undead?”

“Are you calling them?” His right hand’s head immediately raised up.

“Of course. This problem is partly because of them. Go to them and tell them the truth about our situation. I only want one result; I don’t want to see any of these filthy mercenaries in my lands by tomorrow’s dawn.” Graudin waved his hand to dismiss them.

[You're really killing them all?]

The expressions of Graudin's men changed. This was not a small matter to gloss over.

===== Mercenaries' POV =====

The mercenaries were indeed gathered outside the city, but not all of them were interested in getting justice from a Feudal Baron.

The bonfire burned with a fiery rage, causing everyone's faces to be visible near it.

Alistair looked at everyone of them coldly. The people in front of him were mixed with the mercenaries' leaders and adventurers' representatives. Some were sellswords who did not belong to any faction. While their faces held angry looks at the same time, the majority of them were hiding their thoughts on what they could gain from this.

The young Acolyte sighed and knew that it was impossible to seek revenge today. But the rage in him continued to burn because so many of his comrades died. He clenched his teeth as he questioned the crowd with full of disdain:

"Do you truly not want to fight Baron Graudin? So many lives have been taken away today and yet you choose to be cowards and stay silent. Has anyone thought about how much they look down on us? Are our lives really worthless and to be wantonly trampled upon?"

Everyone glanced at each other but no one responded.

"Your comrades, friends and companions, their bodies are still crucified in public display; have you resigned yourself to watch them rot?" He tried again.

"Do we just let the baron's transgression against us go on?" Someone in the crowd whispered.

"What else can we do? That fucking Graudin is directly under the king, A Feudal Baron."

"And that gives him the right to kill us?" Alistair retorted in fury when he heard the whispers: "I don't see any laws that allow him to do so!"

Chapter 148

Breaking dawn (1)

===== Alistair's POV =====

“Rage does not feed our stomachs, boy.” An old mercenary almost did not have the heart to lecture him: “You can bring up the laws of the kingdom all you want, but what use does it have if the sword is mightier than the pen? We have gathered in front of the city gates but they act as if we’re invisible. Why? Because they are not afraid of us in the least.”

“Even if we attacked the city, are we capable of penetrating their defense lines and into the heart of the city? You should stop thinking of the impossible. Don’t forget that bastard has a full army that is no smaller than our numbers.” Another mercenary leader said.

Alistair gritted his teeth and could not think of a way to refute these words, but he tried appealing to their pride.

“Are we not capable of having a full-fledged battle against them, even if for just one day? Yes, we are adventurers and mercenaries, but do we not have the dignity and pride to defend our own? If we throw these away, are we nothing more than barbarians?”

Silence greeted him, as the leaders were still hesitant even after Alistair’s attempt to rouse their anger. No one was willing to bend their knees, but if they chose to fight today, then it was very likely they would have no future standing in this kingdom.

It was a path all too hard to cross.

The young man sighed when he observed their faces: “My apologies. It seems that I have demanded too much from you. Very well, I know the positions you are in and I won’t force your hand. But the victims on the crosses demand an answer. If there is someone who needs to die fighting today, let it be my companions and I. The only thing I ask of you is not to forget this day when the baron took away your comrades’ lives and your dignity.”

He took a few steps away from them before someone called out to him: “Young man! Have you forgotten what that lord told you? He will bring justice to us one day—”

“And you believe him?” Alistair interrupted him, turning back with an incredulous voice: “Do you believe his perfunctory words? These nobles and lords are all—”

He stopped talking.

There was a strange commotion nearby them. The leaders immediately became alert and spurred towards the source while yelling at their men:

“What are you lot doing! Stop your sniveling and get back into position!”

“Captain, there seem to be more people coming up to the walls, they are being reinforced!” The mercenaries near the city’s gates yelled in response.

The leaders frowned when they heard this reply.

“Damn. They still have more men?” One of them made a face.

“Aye, I understand why they are unafraid of us.”

===== Madara’s POV =====

When Rothko brought his men up the walls, he discovered the black patches of something in the darkness interspersed with camp fires were all humans—

The youth with pale skin and a grey undertone under it, scoffed loudly.

He turned back to the rows of soldiers covered in black robes behind him. Underneath the robes were skeleton soldiers, the basic unit of Madara’s merciless troops in the frontline. His eyes went back to the plains with irritation, but maintained a restrained tone when he spoke to the noble next to him:

“Give the order, tell these mercenaries they have half an hour to leave this place, or be prepared to be killed without quarter.”

His words were sharp like a blade.

The noble looked carefully at him and affirmed quickly with a bowed head. Even

though he was puzzled over where the strange army came from, he understood it was Graudin who sent them. He did not dare to ask the man in front of him if he was Graudin's retainer.

He did not suspect the mysterious soldiers beside him were Madara's undead soldiers.

Rothko hated the fact he was standing there. He would rather return to his study and analyze the research materials he stole from the human libraries.

The noble walked to the center of the city walls. He was secretly delighted. The mercenaries who surrounded the city had caused him to be exceedingly displeased.

[These commoners had the galls to stand up to us.]

He never thought he would see the day where the mercenaries revolted. It was a loss of dignity, even if they did not attack the city. He raised his hand, and ordered one of the nearby acolyte wizard to come over: "Get your crystal ready."

The acolyte wizard did not waste any time and immediately activated the spell, Great Shout, on the crystal.

The noble officer nodded with satisfaction, acting like a commander of a thousand-strong Aouine cavalry unit. He cleared his throat before he roared at the city below:

"You wretched commoners, listen well!"

The mercenaries' heads rose up and they stopped what they were doing. They cast their gaze up on Firbugh's walls and waited for the noble's speech.

But he did not continue his words—

Shortly after the commander opened his mouth, he froze what he was doing and the crystal he was holding on to fell onto the ground. He stared blankly into to the distance.

The mercenaries near the city wall who listened attentively to him, created a commotion filled with insults when he suddenly stopped talking, but they abruptly ceased talking and parted away to the sides; it was as though a giant monster was walking on the road and forced them to move away.

The strange, invisible monster seemed to move towards the gate quietly.

[What's happening?]

Rothko narrowed his eyes and looked to the distance like a statue.

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

The crowd was being parted by force. The campfire dimmed as the air around it started to cool rapidly. White frost visibly grew on the ground.

Alistair had detected the commotion made from the back and diverted his attention there. He gasped when he saw the figures there.

A youth was carrying a little girl and cantered towards the city walls. The aura around him was an invisible barrier of frost that forbade anyone from approaching him. Those who were slow to retreat from the cold air found it difficult to breathe.

No one blocked his path, and an empty passage was extended between him and the southern Firbugh's gate.

The mercenaries who were trying to catch a glimpse of him, rallied behind Brendel from a fixed distance, almost appearing as if they had the relationship of a king and his knights.

The youth dismounted and carried the little girl down. They walked before the city gates and stopped there.

Everyone watched them silently.

Sifrid looked up to him; her eyes were full of trust. He had led her across the dark passageway and wilderness during the night, his embrace chasing away the cold, and she felt nothing but warmth and peace.

Brendel raised his head up and glared at the pale noble officer.

"What did you want me to listen to," The youth's voice was not loud, but the silence in the area allowed them to hear what he said clearly: "Pawn?"

The noble's eyes saw near darkness. The youth had merely cast a lazy eye at him but he felt like he was stabbed in the chest and could not breathe. He turned his head around to Rothko's direction, trying to beg for help, but he could not find his presence.

Because of Brendel's staggering pressure, he had no choice but to stutter: "I... I want to t-t-tell you, that... you are t-t-to leave, or... you will be s-s-shown... no mercy."

The mercenaries immediately caused a commotion. They knew the cold-blooded baron will not joke with them. With this threat, many of them wavered in their conviction.

Brendel merely nodded.

"Is that all?" He said.

"T-t-that's all..." The noble's palms were sweaty. Even though the youth before him was far away, he felt that he was going to be cut down any moment.

Brendel nodded again.

"Now, it's my turn to speak—"

He took a step forward, his left hand raising his sword's sheath, while his right hand drew out the blade; a vertical silver line seemed to be drawn in thin air—

Except it was not a line but was a sword's path, and it sliced the air apart in a silver shockwave that expanded from the silver line. Before the air rushed in the fill the void, the city gate was already dented inwards and shattered into dust in an instant. The rippling shockwave continued to travel upwards from the path, tearing apart the stone walls and grinding the rocks into dust—

Brendel's sword traveled over his head before he took a step back and returned the sword to the sheath, but once he did so, the sword broke into four pieces. The strength of a Gold-tier swordsman had caused the ordinary blade to break!

Chapter 149

Breaking dawn (2)

Brendel raised his sword and glanced at it when he realized the blade had broken, before throwing it away.

The youth turned around and said:

“I have returned to fulfill my promise — Do you still remember the words you promised?”

His voice was even, but it was like a sharpened blade that pierced through everyone’s heart.

The mercenaries glanced at each other but they did not answer. The reinforcements on the wall had caused them to hesitate.

“I remember...” Alistair exhaled audibly and walked out with big steps: “I await your command, my lord...” *(TL: The mercenaries promised to work for Brendel if he leads them.)*

Brendel eyed him for a second before it went back to the other mercenaries.

“What of the others?” He said.

But no reply came.

“You...” Alistair glared at them angrily and wanted to punch these cowards for breaking their oaths.

Brendel’s lips curled into a faint smile while his head lowered a little, and his face appeared slightly darker: “If I am you, I wouldn’t choose to offend two lords—”

Suddenly there was a cacophony of clacking noises in the rubble of the destroyed city gates. A group of soldiers covered in black robes were running stiffly towards Brendel with raised swords.

Brendel turned around with furrowed brows. The first skeleton soldier was immediately kicked into the air when it approached him, shattering into pieces before a shower of bones hit the ground. The upper half was not destroyed yet, and clawed around in confusion.

The soldiers on the city wall looked on in shock from Brendel's strength and the revelation that their reinforcements were undead soldiers.

The second skeleton had reached into striking distance of Brendel, but the youth grabbed its wrist with his right hand and pulled it down, while disarming its Blacksteel Longsword with his left hand. He then threw the off-balance soldier over his head and smashed it onto the ground, shattering it into multiple pieces as well.

His left hand swung the Blacksteel Longsword in a curve without any hesitation. A line of white line cut across a dozen over skeletons cleanly, spreading out in a crescent, and they quickly ceased to move. He glanced at the pile of shattered bones to make sure they posed no threat, before he raised his head and looked inside the city.

"I'll give you a chance to redeem the regrets in your hearts!" He pointed his sword into the streets ahead: "The dead who have been crucified in this street, are now looking at your powerless selves, but I swear I shall lead you and have them bear witness your victory against the unjust! Fight with me so this wrong can be redressed!"

Everyone gasped when Brendel unleashed a torrent of cold gales in a circle around him, forcing them to take several steps back. His strength somehow blew their doubts away; his figure appearing like a legendary hero that brought about miracles.

A few averted their heads; some blinked their puffy eyes; the rest silently gripped their weapons. This was the final time the departed would see them battle.

They wept inside their hearts and implored the victims in the city to watch their backs.

Without wasting more time, the mercenaries withdrew their weapons and fell into position behind their leaders. They raised their weapons solemnly in front of them in salutation before lowering them in front of Brendel.

An oath of allegiance to fight for their commander.

Alistair looked at the change with bulging eyes. He could not believe what he was seeing.

Brendel turned back with clenched teeth as he felt fire raging in his chest. But he shut his eyes for a second and recomposed himself: “The commanders of the three major mercenary groups, approach—”

Three people amongst the crowd eyed each other briefly before they walked out.

“Your names.” He said, after the three gathered in front of him.

“Cornelius at your service, my lord. I am the commander of Rosewine Mercenaries.” An attractive middle-aged man with silver hair bowed slightly and answered.

“Raban, the commander of Firebrand Mercenaries.” A towering man with dark-skin crossed his arms while he observed Brendel.

“Jana, I am the person-in-charge for Mountain Swallows Company. My lord, forgive me for being blunt. Even though my men and I agree to participate in the battle, it does not mean we will obey all your orders and I will judge our course of actions accordingly.” A red-haired woman with a tempting body answered.

Her green eyes stared at the youth as if to taunt him.

“I do not know the composition of your men,” Brendel merely smiled in response without minding her remarks, and returned her glare: “But my order is simple. Ser Raban and you are to organize your mercenaries to guard the south gate and assault the west gate. There is only one condition. Three hours, before the dawn rises, I want to see your mercenaries’ flags on the city walls and control them—”

He turned his gaze to Cornelius: “Ser Cornelius, your mission is to lead your mercenaries and the remaining sellswords to attack the heart of Firburh with me.”

“I await to hear the details of your plan.” Cornelius bowed again and answered in an unhurried tone.

“Wait,” Jana interrupted with furious brows: “The west gate? Why are we attacking the west gate? Isn’t our target supposed to be Graudin’s manor so we can kill that damned worm?”

“I’ll be open with you. The enemies you are going to face are Madara’s undead army.”

“What?”

The three of them subconsciously looked at the pile of shattered bones behind Brendel and realized the strange situation before them.

“Graudin has colluded with Madara. The entirety of Madara’s undead army isn’t in the city— Perhaps there would be a small portion in it, but the majority of their army is definitely hiding nearby. My guess is the south-western forest. Your mission is to prevent them from entering the city until we are done with killing Graudin.” He said.

Jana and Raban looked at each other with uncertain eyes, before the latter spoke: “The inner walls of Firburh are no weaker than a fortress. If Graudin colluded with Madara then there must be powerful enemies in there as well. The mission of assaulting Graudin must be more difficult than guarding the walls, so why doesn’t my lord choose us, the Firebrand Mercenaries? Are we that weak in your eyes?”

Cornelius frowned when he heard his words. But Brendel shook his head: “Did I just not mention I don’t know the composition of your men? The number of mercenaries behind the three of you are close enough for me to pick any one of your groups. Time is of the essence because this is a surprise attack, so obey my orders—”

The naked threat in his voice made the three commanders’ hearts skip a beat.

“We have to kill Graudin as soon as possible. Madara will retreat if he is killed. If anyone of you is thinking about running away now, be prepared for hell. If we fail to take Graudin down he will definitely hunt you down. Your actions on surrounding Firburh have already caused things to go beyond a path of no return. Inform your men of our plans on our respective missions along the way. Now move out!”

Brendel turned around and carried Sifrid. He walked across the rubble and entered the city.

“Brother Brendel, you don’t need to fight for me. I heard Grandfather said if I go before Graudin, everything will be fine.” Sifrid said.

“Sifrid, you don’t understand, this isn’t only your fight—” Brendel answered softly as he glanced at the crosses extending into the darkness, his voice trailing off a little. “I chose to carve a bloody path for myself— that is all.”

In the end he chose to face everything. The road before him would now become difficult and thorny, straight into a fiery path filled with blood—

His anger in the afternoon held on to hesitation, but Sifrid and the Senia's plight caused him to realize one thing; if he still chose to avoid conflict here, then he would have failed himself and the people before him.

[I might find victory through other means by finding Valhalla, conquer everything later by hiding in the shadows and ignoring everything else along the way. But is this really something that I want? Gaining power, but losing everything else?]

Brendel laughed.

In the end, he chose the most complicated plan yet again. He had tried countless ways to avoid involving himself from playing this game of roulette like a gambler, but every time he moved away from it, he found himself coming back to this plan.

He really wished to follow Amandina's suggestions. It was so easy, so logical and so safe.

[But, *we* are still Brendel at the very end...]

He mocked himself, but his expression was filled with resolution. Since he had chosen this path, he would charge forward against all odds to victory—

Or death.

Brendel stopped moving and turned around. Alistair had been following him closely. The latter took a moment to recompose himself and his expression was one of neutrality again.

"My lord?" Alistair said.

"Do you hear it?" Brendel asked.

"What?"

"The sounds of battle. Take care of Sifrid—" Brendel let the little girl down and took out a silver card.

The next instant, the cavalry under Graudin rushed out from the corner of a street—

Chapter 150

Breaking Dawn (3)

The trampling sounds of horses' hooves shook the cold air in the night.

The loud robes of the nobles' cavalry fluttered about as they charged out from the corner of an alley. Their lances were lowered at the same time and pointed towards Brendel.

The earth trembled.

Brendel glared at them coldly, raised the silver card to the air before throwing it out in front of him.

[Unicorn Knight, Enter the Battlefield—]

The card flew down in an elegant arc and landed onto the ground.

White light poured forth as magic circles were drawn from the ground. Everyone saw an ethereal gate forming in the air before their very eyes. A female knight wielding a lance on top of a proud unicorn slowly cantered out from the gate and stood in the middle of the street.

[[[Summoner?!]]]

The enemy's cavalry slowed down in astonishment, while the voices mercenaries behind Brendel rose to a clamor.

"My lord," The Elven princess's voice was almost a whisper: "Thank you."

Brendel knew she was talking about the pendant. He shook his head: "I have already told you that you should thank your own Elven race."

"The process isn't quite as important, my lord. You were the reason why they acted on this. What are your orders for me this time?"

“Advance forward and attack.”

Alistair was confused. The spell that Brendel appeared to cast appeared to be similar to ‘Silver Knight’. It was certainly a higher level summon, but the ‘Silver Knight’ was better used as a defensive role instead of attacking.

The nobles’ cavalry had once again sped up and was merely a few feet away.

Alistair hurriedly started to prepare a defensive spell, but when his hands were up, he froze completely with his mouth wide open.

The female knight who was clad in silver had raised her lance to the sky. When she swung it, the distance between the approaching cavalry seemed to stretch further and further away.

Time and space were distorted. Soul Energy materialized in thin air, and it was clear it was a form of Element power.

“Seismic—”

“Blast!”

Her voice echoed in her helmet as she pierced through the cavalry’s formation in a flash of silver light. Her charge completely broke through the ranks and files, sweeping them up into the air.

Neither men nor beasts were spared.

[[[Gold-Ranked— There’s another one!]]]

The three commanders of the mercenaries and their men felt their breaths expelled out of their lungs. It was rare for them to see even one Gold-ranked fighter in this remote land, but they saw two today.

However, the greatest shock still came from the fact the youth himself was a Gold-ranked swordsman and summoned a Gold-ranked knight. Would that not mean he had two Gold-ranked classes?

The three commanders felt a chill on their back as they wondered who exactly the youth was. They were secretly glad to choose Brendel’s side. Graudin might have the

power to put up wanted papers for their heads, but Brendel could easily take them down anytime with his own hands.

Cornelius's blue eyes were filled with resolution. He clenched his teeth and drew out his longsword, pointing it to the front: "Members of the Rosewine Mercenaries, stand at attention! For our fallen comrades, to battle!"

"To battle!!!"

The mercenaries under the middle-aged commander assented and rush forward, went past Brendel and joined in the fray between Medissa and the enemy's cavalry. The enemy was in disarray and was forced back to where they came from.

[This is only one point where the enemy is able to attack. Graudin's men will keep on coming from other areas.]

Brendel thought as he turned to Cornelius who approached and bowed.

"My lord, the Rosewine Mercenaries will fight with you. We await your command and hope to have you lead us to victory."

Brendel did not reply and smiled. Despite Cornelius's polite manners from the start, there were slight traces of discontent in his eyes.

[I can understand why he's not happy with me since I practically forced his arm. But since you chose to take my hand and walk on this bloody road, I shall have you continue on it without straying. There is no turning back.]

Brendel's first move on the chessboard had been placed. The fight would begin now.

"Ser Cornelius." He said.

"Yes, my lord?"

Brendel pointed to the inner gates of the city. "Let's reach that spot first before we discuss our next step. We are in a particularly bad position, and I'm referring to our standing in Aouine. All outcomes are pointless if we do not take down Graudin."

"Are you really going to kill him, my lord?" Cornelius felt his lips a little dry: "Graudin is a Feudal Baron and count Randner's son. I think it's sufficient... to teach him a

lesson..."

Brendel glanced at him before shaking his head.

[Aouine's divide between a noble and commoner is so strong that he is still unable to commit fully.]

"It's not because I want to kill him. It's because the laws demand his head, Ser Cornelius." He said after a moment.

The silver-haired man looked stunned. He clenched his fists.

Jana watched the scene unfold before looking back at Raban: "That indecisive fool Cornelius, he looks like he's about to commit fully. That's rare."

"Hmph," The huge man threw his derisive gaze at him as well: "He's just a fox."

There was a low rumble of hooves from the distance, seemingly the reinforcements of Graudin's men.

"Stay here, Raban. I'll assist the lord, as for the west gate, leave it to me and my men." A glint of danger came to her eyes.

"Why am I the one defending?" Raban took a moment to respond with furrowed brows: "The Firebrand Mercenaries are not weaker than any of you."

"Oh, and you would fight with a weak woman like myself? I thought you were a knight in the past, shouldn't you allow me to have the honors?"

Raban scoffed and ignored her by turning his body away. He lunged his greatsword onto the ground with a loud crack. He faced his mercenaries and ordered with a yell: "No undead is to be allowed in the city before the dawn breaks. Anyone who dares to retreat will get his balls busted by me!"

He raised his right fist.

And a wave of weapons raised with determination was their response.

Jana had her smile of victory spread across her face. But when she turned to face her own mercenaries, it was gone and replaced by a chilling expression.

“Men, come with me—” Her voice was like a cold blade.

Raban caught a glimpse of her out from the corners of his eyes. The etiquettes of a knight demanded them to prevent women and children from participating in a battle. He did not refuse her because Jana’s only sister was killed in the slaughter.

All the mercenaries had chosen to be silent on Graudin’s atrocities. Even though their hearts were filled with rage and hatred, they did not choose to walk the bloody path of revenge. But the youth had forced them to march on it and made them choose what was truly in their hearts.

[The dawn breaks only if the first ray of light comes. But where is the ray of light?]

Raban sighed as he cast his gaze on the starry sky.

If the battlefield was a large chessboard, then it was certainly an exciting exchange between Brendel and Graudin.

The nobles’ cavalry were not able to stop Brendel’s advance, but the rear army of crossbowmen quickly set themselves up in an attacking position. They were the core unit for fighting against the monsters at the borders. They wore heavy armor, wielded fortified heavy crossbows, and were well-trained with a good amount of experience behind them. All of them were Iron-ranked marksmen or higher.

[Arm your crossbows, take aim—- Fire!] Their commanding officer shouted.

A hail of black projectiles shot across from their crossbows and onto the frontmost mercenaries. The first line was instantly felled. Cornelius struck away the bolts fired at him with his sword. The death of his men made him pale in anger.

Brendel swung his right arm and his sword unleashed the White Raven Sword Arte and the violent tempest of wind knocked back the bolts onto the wall, protecting Alistair and Sifrid.

The second defense line made by the defending army was starting to deform. Two Silver-ranked knight commanders meted out orders one after another, but they discovered that they were facing against an abnormal Gold-Ranked fighter.

Before them was a true Elven knight.

The Elven princess had centuries of fighting techniques in her arsenal and her battle sense exceeded most men. Her indomitable charge penetrated the defense and met their commanders in combat. The two enemy knights raised their lances and thrust at her, but she skillfully avoided them and knocked them off their horses, before ending their lives with an accurate jab to their throats each.

The crossbowmen quickly realized the differences in the strength between their commanders and the heavily armored Elven knight. There were no obstacles blocking her anymore.

The lance in Medissa's hands was raised again as she glared at them coldly—

It was a complete defeat for the defending army.

Chapter 151

Breaking dawn (4)

===== Graudin's POV =====

Graudin concentrated on the countless torches that were gathering to a single point in the city. His expression was a rigid mixture of regret and fear. He should have surrounded "Viscount Gaston" and killed him at all costs before he left the city in the afternoon.

But he felt more fear than regret. Even though he knew that Madara's undead army was in the city and understood the Skeleton Lord would not let him die here, he felt his fingertips cold and numb, while his heart palpitated quickly and loudly. He even felt a chill on the tip of his head, as though there was a sword was hovering over it.

He subconsciously felt the injury on his face. He appeared calm in front of his subordinates, but he was secretly panicking. He could not forget Brendel's cold eyes as the latter spat out this line:

"I'll leave your head on your body for now. I'll come and take it the next time—"

He did not expect his threat to come true only after one day.

He turned back. Behind him was a mysterious guest who wore a suit of black chain armor. He was covered with a black robe with winged patterns on it, wore a dark mask that hid most of his features, and only revealed a pair of golden eyes.

He held on to a huge scythe with his right hand; a sharp golden-clawed glove was worn on it. He was looking at the battlefield over Graudin's shoulders silently.

The Black Knight, the Scales of Justice, Iamas, one of the four knights of Madara— *(TL: This is the first time this character is introduced.)*

But he was different from the Pale knight Ebdon or the Red Knight Ladios, as Iamas was already highly ranked as Tarkas's right hand.

There were many legends about him, and it was rumored that anyone who saw him without his mask would be dead. No living or dead had ever seen his real face.

“Lord Baron. There’s no need to worry, our great army will be here momentarily—” The Black Knight’s voice was pleasant enough to make one think he was smiling under his mask, despite his slightly cold tone. “I have heard from the reports that the viscount is moving on his own. Even though I laud him for his bravery, he clearly lacks the wisdom to see his position. Kabias will have no problems fighting someone who just reached the prowess of a Gold-ranked fighter.”

Even though his words assured Graudin, he thought about the youth that Medes had mentioned before. He paused for a moment as he felt the interest to meet the latter, before he continued speaking: “We will leave the decision to you if you wish to torture or kill him.”

(TL: Medes was the one who led the undead surrounding Fortress Riedon.)

Graudin scoffed. He knew Madara was still uninterested to interfere with the nobles’ fights in Aouine, but he was still delighted with his answer.

When he thought about the trouble which Brendel had given him, he ground his teeth in fury and was prepared to give the viscount an elaborate feast. *(TL: Graudin drank human blood.)*

Death was not going to be a simple thing for him.

===== Brendel’s POV =====

The battles within the city intensified as the mercenaries assaulted the alleys to pick at the enemy’s defense.

Medissa led the charge, while Brendel followed leisurely behind as he led Sifrid along. The sight of him and the little girl was almost bizarre and the nobles’ cavalry looked on in confusion as to how defenseless they appeared to be.

Those enemies who recklessly charged in found their answers.

With a swing of his sword, all their weapons were either knocked away or shattered into metallic pieces, and it took no more than a second. Their gaping injuries ought to bleed heavily but they were quickly covered in frost. They looked on in disbelief and

fell forward as their hearts stopped beating due to the cold.

Brendel mercilessly pushed their bodies away and continued forward. Sifrid's face was pale, but she did not stop moving and held on to his hand tightly.

During the time where Brendel and his men killed the Jackal, she had seen his cold and angry expressions from a distance. His gaze had caused her to tremble a little, but she came to the conclusion that they were good people when they led her back to the village.

[Enemies of Brother Brendel must be bad people.]

She thought to herself, her hands gripping onto his hands tightly.

Brendel glanced at her in response and discovered the flecks of blood on Sifrid's forehead. He frowned and wiped them away with his sleeve, wondering if it was a bad idea to bring her along to witness the carnage in the city.

They were very near the inner gates of the city and reaching the path towards Graudin's manor. While they had made considerable progress in the time frame of thirty minutes, he held no illusion they were ahead of the Madara's defensive setups.

[—There. Not skeleton soldiers or White Knights, but Zombie Outlanders.]

He managed to discover them hiding within Graudin's private soldiers. They were moving silently and quickly towards them. Medissa and the mercenaries did not discover the hidden dangers because of a certain spell over them, but it was impossible for him to miss it. The green flames in Zombie Outlanders' eyes sockets flickered as they were ready to attack the mercenaries.

[Less than 10 meters away.]

“Take care of her.” Brendel passed Sifrid over to Alistair, and leaped into the air.

His Charge ability was activated.

The people near Brendel barely saw a shadow flying over the ground, and witnessed seven continuous flashes of a sword as it sliced through the air. They heard seven combined cracking sounds at the same time before the shadow finally stopped moving and reappeared as Brendel.

The sight before them seemed to distort as body parts of the Zombie Outlanders suddenly appeared and blown away, causing the enemy soldiers to fall backward due to the impact.

His attack ended with his longsword out in the open, while he stood before the mercenaries who gasped lightly. Even though they realized that the youth was a Gold-ranked swordsman the skill he had shown still surprised them greatly. The enemy soldiers were also flabbergasted.

But this momentary silence was broken as an undead Crusader Executioner six meters tall emerged from the inner city's gates, and made its way through the enemy soldiers, causing them to either be crushed or knocked away with its clumsy movements. The huge axe it dragged across the ground caused stone tiles to crumble loudly and a cloud of dust to form, causing almost everyone to panic.

Both factions watched in horror as they saw the gigantic skeleton in front of them. Even though they knew the Madara's undead was within the city, they still felt terror to see the creatures only described in legends appearing in the city.

Brendel watched it run before him. He recalled the damned thing caused him to crawl about in Bruglas's underground auction, but facing it now made him feel like he was watching a slow-motion video.

[Surely one strike is enough to break it into pieces now?]

He mused to himself, but he did not move despite the axe swinging towards him.

A long lance had gone past his shoulder to intercept the huge axe in the blink of an eye. There was a tremendous crash as the lance's blade cut through the axe's metallic body and causing it to fall in the midst of the enemy soldiers. Shrieks and yells could be heard almost immediately.

The Crusader Executioner looked at the broken axe in confusion before it looked at the Unicorn Knight guarding the young human in front of it. The Soul Flames in its dark sockets flared.

"My lord." Medissa was frowning. Even though she was supposedly an undead as well and was used to their presence, the pure bloodlust the Crusader Executioner was emitting caused her to feel uneasy.

Brendel did not reply.

He suddenly turned his head to a specific direction. A small flinch in the shadows caused him to scoff coldly, and he hurled his Blacksteel Longsword there—

A screaming clash of metals assailed everyone's ears.

The Blacksteel Longsword seemed to crash into a wall of air. Sparks flew as it was smashed away violently. It struck against the ground three times and skidded a long way before it stopped.

Brendel's eyes never left the spot. The air shimmered and a black shroud seemed to dissipate in the area.

A tall skeleton wearing brass armor and wielding a battle axe appeared. Pale yellow flames darted about in Kabias's sockets as it glared at Brendel.

It then raised the battleaxe and inspected the damage caused to it. A large gouge could be seen where it deflected the Blacksteel Longsword. Brendel also saw the damage and raised one eyebrow in surprise. He did not think a vice-captain like Kabias was using an ordinary battleaxe.

Every mercenary and soldier stopped moving, and the only sounds in the battlefield were the injured's cries. The infamous 'Death God' Kabias had spread throughout the southern region. The Kirrlutz's brass armor forged three centuries ago made the skeleton all too conspicuous, while the battles against him made the Aouine commanders give him a description of 'Devious'.

"K-Kabias...?"

"...Madara's undead general..."

"Why is it here..."

Whispers started to sweep across the battlefield, but they were quickly silenced when Kabias spoke.

"The rumor is true," Kabias ignored the whispers as it observed Brendel and said: "You're well-versed in Black Magic..."

“A mere Shadow Shroud, nothing more than a mere cantrip spell. “Brendel sneered coldly.

[That spell doesn’t look like a normal necromancer’s work. I’m almost certain Rothko is nearby.]

He secretly paid attention to his surroundings.

“Who exactly are you, young man?” It said with a low raspy voice. “The little act about the Red Bronze Dragon, Leto, might have deceived the foolish nobles, but not me—”

There was a short pause.

“*You* are the true leader of that band of mercenaries, are you not? And the person who led Fortress Riedon’s refugees out to safety from our attack is also you.” Kabias laughed once: “I have wanted to meet you on the battlefield, since a long time ago—”

Upon this revelation, shocking murmurs broke out once again as the soldiers and mercenaries’ eyes turned to the youth with awe.

Chapter 152

Breaking Dawn (5)

===== Citizens of Firbugh's POV =====

The Year of Bustling Summer Leaves and Flowers. This year marked the first Black Rose War.

The regions near Karsuk were invaded and defeated by Madara, while Vieiro went into immediate alert. When the side flanks of the White-mane army were crushed, the Grinoires region went into a state of shock and withdrew themselves into their cities.

The Black Lord Incirsta marched his undead armies straight into Aouine's territory, and Randner was in grave danger.

The news of Aouine's defeat was not unexpected, but citizens of Bucces and the regions citizens could not help but ask:

'Where is Aouine's Army?'

'Where is the sight of our victory?'

'Where are our glory and honor?'

The reply came in the form of a paper stating that Bucces's region no longer belonged to the Aouine kingdom and there would be no aid provided.

Silence came after that.

But a voice emerged from this silence, as though it was just there to answer the cries for help.

Within Fortress Riedon.

A flame that lit up the darkness.

The huge number of refugees broke through Medes and Ladios's siege under his command, and slew Incirsta's right hand, 'The Pale Knight, Ebdon', all in a single night. It was something out of a legendary tale when they appeared before Bruglas's city gates.

The name that led them was The Bronze Dragon, Leto.

The citizens' questions in Bruglas rose to a clamor, demanding to know who he was. Rumors spread throughout the southern region, and traveled far to the north, entering the nobles' ears in the capital, and his identity was the discussions of the citizens.

He was supposedly the man who brought a miracle.

But the undead general Kabias known as the Reaper of Death and led the attack on Fortress Riedon spoke of a different truth. It was someone else who stood behind Leto and led the refugees. His gravelly voice was dyed with admiration and expectation. The flames in his eye sockets flickered wildly, as though they were looking at the youth in front of it with respect.

There was no need to lie to the men and women here, and thus everyone's eyes were on the silent youth.

They wondered why he stood behind the scenes. If Kabias did not speak of his deeds, would his name not be known forever?

They did not understand why he rejected honor and glory. They did not understand how he had the courage to lead the refugees out of that situation when it was far easier to flee on his own.

And the reaction he had was a mere smile on his face, neither rejection or disdain at the truth that was revealed.

Some of them swallowed, a few gripped their weapons tightly, and the others inhaled deeply.

Neither fame or repute mattered to him. This mysterious air started to clad around him.

The only thought they had in their mind was, 'Who is this youth?'

The silence in the battlefield continued, with the exception of Medissa fighting off the Crusader Executioner.

===== Brendel's POV =====

[What the f—. You mean to say I'm being targeted by the upper echelons of the entire fucking Madara army!?!]

Brendel was screaming loudly in his mind. He did not know what the others around him were thinking at that moment, but when Kabias revealed the truth, he was unable to find a proper response and had to resort to a commercial smile in order to hide his confusion.

“Cornelius, what are you waiting for?” He roared after a pause.

The mercenaries stiffened before they regained their senses.

Medissa was charging across the enemy's left flank and the Unicorn Knight leapt into the air like an arrow straight into the Crusader Executioner's chest. Panic and confusion rose again amongst the city's soldiers as the gigantic skeleton fell over in their midst, forcing them to withdraw even further.

Kabias knew that Graudin's army was no match for the mercenaries. The former worked for money, while the latter was out for revenge and blood. The degree of conviction was too different, and it was not hard to predict the conclusion of the battle.

The outer city was lost and they needed time to retreat into the inner gates. This was the reason why it was here; to defend the inner city gates.

The undead within the city was limited and it had to focus their numbers on the most important area.

But Brendel also knew this point. He understood both Aouine and Madara's tactics and was prepared to face both of them here. He would not allow Graudin's private army to fall back to the inner city to set up their defensive lines.

Although he was perturbed by Kabias's words, he knew about its plans like an open book.

The two of them faced each other without moving.

He was able to wait for Kabias to make its first move because Medissa was able to lead the mercenaries forward without any problems. He gazed smugly at his enemy with his folded arms, waiting for the moment where it could no longer hold itself back.

The Soul Flames within Kabias's eyes flickered again.

The battles within the city ought to be complicated, but Brendel had targeted critical positions and broke through strong defensive lines one after another with unbelievable speed, as though he was looking down at the city like a chessboard.

This made Kabias cautious.

[This youth isn't a simple opponent. When did Aouine gain such a formidable commander? It is no wonder Medes said he should be captured alive. His intuition in battle rivals Lord Incirsta. If he is under Madara, then the Emperor would have ushered him under his direct command.]

When he thought of the Emperor who wielded the Mercury Staff, he felt his Soul Fire trembling, as though blood was flowing through his body once again. It was as though he had returned to the glorious battles of the past.

These memories pained it when it thought about the past, but they also gave it the desire to battle.

Brendel's gaze followed Kabias when it raised its battleaxe, but made no further movement.

[You dare to fight me alone without the Unicorn Knight?]

Slight fury grew within it when it saw Brendel's arrogance. The exchange yesterday made it certain that he had just become a Gold-ranked swordsman.

"I know you are capable of the Aouine's royal swordsmanship; the White Raven Sword Arte. But do you really believe a mere mid-tier sword skill is capable of defeating an Element power?"

Brendel gave a smirk when he heard the comment, almost bursting out in laughter when he heard the skeleton's words. There was hardly anyone in the continent who could teach him anything about fighting.

He activated the skill 'Evaluation' and the color of Kabias's skeletal body changed. His torso and limbs turned into a deep red, while the joints and waist turned into a light red. The Soul Energy in his skull appeared to be translucent.

White lines from its body lined up to the surroundings; these were indicative of where Kabias was able to attack. Brendel had little use of this skill because his attacks were focused on killing multiple groups of enemies and not on a single duel. But he was free to concentrate and use it now.

[Physique and Strength are at certainly higher than average for a Gold-ranked tier. His agility is slightly lower, while his Will and Intelligence stats are at an average for a Silver-ranked—]

Kabias shifted its center of gravity. The extending white lines gradually reduced to three lines that focused onto his path.

Brendel knew its stance well. It was a basic combat stance for Madara's Black Knight, and his judgment was the same as the skill 'Evaluation'; three paths of attacks were available to Kabias.

He sliced through the air with a palm, activating the White Rave Sword Arte. The violent wind created by the skill caused a steel Longsword on the ground to fly up into the sky.

It landed smoothly into his hand.

"No matter how much you brag about your Element powers winning against my abilities, the only outcome necessary is the one based on reality!" Brendel said.

Kabias scoffed loudly.

"Then let me see what abilities you have, young human." It prepared itself for an attack on Brendel's torso, and the attacking lines reduced to a single line—

Brendel had already charged straight into its path before it was at an optimal stance.

Kabias froze in surprise.

Chapter 153

Breaking Dawn (6)

A metallic scream exploded in everyone's ears. Brendel's longsword smashed into Kabias's battleaxe, forcing the Skeleton Lord back several steps before it managed to shrug away the attack. In order to balance itself, the battleaxe's pommel was thrust deeply into the ground's stone tile, while Brendel continued his charge into the crowd—

"What ability is that!?" The giant skeleton finally regained his balance after his body was arched backward, and roared with fury and surprise. The way how Brendel reacted to its defensive maneuver felt almost like he was seeing through everything; it was unlikely to anything else other than an ability.

"Something that will take your life away!" Brendel also regained his footing and yelled as he rushed back with his sword to attack Kabias's flank.

But no matter how quick Brendel's blade appeared to be like a flash of lightning which had descended onto earth, it was much too slow in Kabias's eyes. It waited until the final moment when the longsword could no longer deviate from its path before Kabias's torso slipped away. The latter's foot landed onto the side heavily, sending dust and cracked stone fragments upward, its body rotating once with a heavy swing of its battleaxe towards Brendel's body as a counterattack.

The single white line from Kabias completely changed in a single moment, weaving into an inescapable net.

"My lord!" The Elven Princess who was putting half of her attention realized the danger he was in.

Brendel had also realized the sword's failed attack; it was too late for him to dodge the battleaxe—

But a miracle happened.

A slender figure of blazing flame streaked across the ground and burned into the

crowd's eyes.

A reverberation rattled everyone's eardrums as metal met each other. The Spear of Lightning extended before the two fighters and cut across Kabias's black battleaxe. The snaking fiery flame soon emerged as a girl with a red-haired ponytail trailing behind her. Her arms were trembling a little as she knocked away the enemy's weapon, before falling into a stable stance with her hands gripping her halberd tightly.

Scarlett's amber eyes were steady and calm.

Another thunderous clash rang out.

As its time was frozen in its place, Brendel's sword had accurately struck across Kabias's right chest; the rush of power erupting from Power Break extending itself into the blade and seeping into the ancient armor. The whirlpool of air in the skeleton's chest broke its weak Aura Barrier, and cracking sounds echoed repeatedly in there.

Kabias felt three of its ribcage's bones break before it was completely launched into the air from the impact.

[[[Impossible!]]]

Kabias, Scarlett and Medissa had this word in their mind when they saw this scene. The blade had clearly missed its mark because Kabias's body slithered away, yet when the blade swung into its designated path—

Kabias's body was still in its original position.

Brendel had swung with everything in his body to take advantage of Kabias's momentary distraction. A line of white frost had followed the blade's path and continued to assail Kabias even in mid-air, hurling it uncontrollably with countless rotations onto the ground. Meters of dust and soil were agitated as the ancient armor collided violently several times against the street's pavement, before it finally stopped against a thick wall with a tremendous boom. A cloud of dust prevented visibility of its fate.

Brendel's longsword cracked into multiple fragments and dropped onto the floor. He had forgotten about going after Kabias as he looked on with slight disbelief.

[I did not make a mistake by seeing things wrongly in this low-level 'brawl'. I really did

miss that attack, meaning there's another reason why I managed to strike Kabias?]

He discarded the sword hilt and randomly took another sword out from a nearby fallen soldier. The ordinary swords were unable to handle his current power. He missed the Thorn of Light. Even though it was also a low-level weapon it was still a magic artifact. He sent a signal to Scarlett who nodded and they began to run towards Kabias.

The Skeleton Lord got up shakily from the wreckage. That attack could not be said to have given it a fatal strike, but its condition was far from optimal. Brendel had used Power Break on his attack, and there was no one in the Gold-ranked tier who could receive it directly on the chest.

It felt the armor's dent with its hand.

Before the Skeleton Lord had a chance to complain about the ridiculous attack, it saw two figures approaching it; one red and one black.

[A good strategy, but you're too slow to make it work.]

Kabias lightly tapped his feet forward a few steps before it leaped forward with the battleaxe rising into an uppercut to meet his opponents. The screeching metallic din pierced through the battlefield when it collided against two weapons, causing the nearby men to cover their ears subconsciously.

[Power Break!]

Brendel did not expect the Skeleton Lord to know this ability as well. When he reacted, Scarlett had uttered a groan and was hurled backward. The sudden shockwave reached him and he was also slightly knocked off his feet.

The ordinary longsword, as well as Kabias's battleaxe, turned into countless metal fragments.

The youth immediately used both of his hands to cover his eyes. The fragments had scattered with a frightening impact that shot at both Kabias and him. Merciless pain struck him as his entire body received the shrapnel attack.

[My strength isn't much higher than Scarlett, so why did she get blasted off and I knocked off my feet?... Kabias did this intentionally—!]

The corner of his eyes glanced in front of him and indeed discovered throwing away his battleaxe. At the same time, a glittering gold sheen appeared in his skeletal claws. Short laughter gurgled in its throat, and the glitter turned out to be a short spear. Red mist accompanied the weapon as it launched forward in a bloody line with Kabias's full strength towards his shoulders.

[Magic weapon, shit, it's too fast—]

He was unable to avoid it. Kabias could almost imagine the youth's unfortunate shrill scream of pain but—

It did not strike true.

The Skeleton Lord looked at the empty ground before it subconsciously raised its skull up, and saw Brendel appearing in mid-air with his right thumb pointing towards the ground. He was wearing a victory smile.

What Brendel did was to flip his body around and use the Ring of the Wind Empress to launch himself up into the air. No matter how many times he thought about it, he found it odd that Kabias used an ordinary battleaxe as his main weapon. When he saw it taking out a spear, he reacted immediately.

The Wind Bullet did not hurt him much, and it helped him in escaping this critical situation and even turned it around.

Brendel took out a dagger from his boots as he spun in the air and sliced towards Kabias with the aid of gravity.

The Skeleton Lord's reaction was quick enough, and prepared to dodge and counterattack. However, the situation that happened earlier repeated itself.

Kabias was completely certain it had dodged it, but the dagger cut through the air and struck accurately onto its skull.

Impossible—

It wanted to roar out in fury, but a loud slam forced its rage back as it was sent flying away.

Brendel carefully landed on his feet with the aid of that attack, and pounced towards

Kabias. He had no time to confirm the strange feeling and chose not to use Power Break in order not to ruin the weapon in his hands.

Kabias was cursing with rage, trying to dodge the incoming blade and find an opportunity to counterattack. However, the same thing happened yet again. It had clearly avoided the attack but the dagger still managed to hit it.

The battlefield had most of its men stopping their actions and looking at this unforgettable sight:

The youth, Lord Gaston, the true hero of Fortress Riedon was using a dagger to strike at Kabias's body, and the latter somehow seemed to have rehearsed with him a fancy dance. No matter how hard the Skeleton Lord tried to dodge the attacks, Brendel easily cut him over and over again with the dagger clanking away on his armor and bones.

The speed of the attacks was a blurry mess, and a few started to wonder if the skeleton was truly deserving the name of Reaper. Even more thought the youth was a secret Knight from the Holy Cathedral of Flames. *(TL: It has been mentioned before, but anyone who has an Element power needs to register in the Holy Cathedral and they are recognized as Knights.)*

A twenty-years old Knight?

More and more people started to believe in that notion as the strikes kept landing on the undead general. The morale of Graudin's men was completely gone when they saw Brendel's 'frightening prowess'. A Gold-tier fighter without an Element Power could still be taken down using numbers, but once they unsealed their Element power, they would become an inhuman existence.

Nobody wanted to fight this hopeless battle, and become cannon fodder for delaying these monsters, especially when they are just soldiers who came for merely money and authority.

Brendel's dagger finally broke with his final attack as he watched Kabias fly into a building like a punching bag. He exhaled with relief and threw away the hilt.

He was careful to distribute the stress to every part of the blade, but it merely lasted twenty-odd attacks before it finally broke. He finally had the time to reflect on the odd attacks. Every single one of them had supposedly missed its mark but it still somehow landed on the skeleton.

His thoughts were interrupted as Kabias bellowed: “What kind of fucking Element power is this, you damned living creature!”

Brendel gave a thoughtful nod as he picked up another sword as he agreed with Kabias’s words.

Chapter 154

Breaking Dawn (7)

Brendel had not seen or heard of his Element power before as described in his Character Sheet.

[Causality Reversal, Time Retrace or Space Distortion, these three Element Powers might achieve the same results. I know the description of the Casualty Reversal is 'Sequence', that alone proves that it could not be my Element Power. Time Retrace has to be related to the material I'm touching. My attacks need to first hit Kabias for it to work.]

The way of how an Element Power worked at the Gold-ranked tier was entirely autonomous. It had to be an interaction between 'self' and 'target'. Any Time-Element related power was surely incorrect.

[There are many definitions of Space. It could interact greatly with Time Element. Order and Stability can be used to describe Space Distortion, but Vectors, Movement, Physical, Mind and Displacement are also possible attributes. The only thing that's missing is Frozen, and that has nothing to with Space Distortion. The lower ranked Element Powers: Sure-strike, Refraction, Curved Route, Illusion, all of them are unable to lower the temperature or have anything to do with the description Stability.]

Brendel's thoughts were interrupted as he felt someone approaching him. A scent of Aouine's summer mountain entered his nostrils, as though he had crossed a bridge toward verdant greenery. When he turned around, he found Scarlett taking out her personal longsword she hardly used and handing it over to him.

"Here." She said.

"Thank you."

Brendel dropped the sword he was holding and received her sword, and saw Kabias's large body separating from the debris dropping loudly onto the broken rocks. The Skeleton Lord stood up and glared hatefully over to his direction, wary of his Element power.

Its Element power was Soul Energy strengthening its attack and defense. It was able to fend off Brendel's Power Break even without resorting to Power Break, but the bizarre Element power the youth possessed had nearly suppressed the Skeleton Lord all the time.

The mercenaries had already proceeded to the inner city gates under Medissa's leadership, but it did not dare to react carelessly and had to wait for an opportunity where it stood.

Its bony fingers went across the dents and cuts on its ancient armor. It was certain of its victory earlier, but the mysterious youth's attacks made it uncertain whether it was able to truly defend against him now.

The situation was not going to change but it had to at least stall him here.

"Do we defeat it here?" Scarlett readied her halberd and asked.

Brendel shook his head. He had an unknown Element Power that he had never heard or seen before. The grasp on his Element power was fleeting and distant, while Kabias's true strength far surpassed him. The Skeleton Lord was able to withstand punishment but he could not. Once he made a mistake with his Element power, a counterstrike from Kabias was not something he could withstand.

He had readied himself for his own death, but he was holding on to countless lives in his position.

Death was easy, but that was an utterly unacceptable outcome.

"His earlier attack was to force you out. I thought you were able to discern that." Brendel said, referring to the initial moment where she intercepted Kabias's battleaxe.

"Sorry—" Scarlett said subconsciously before she whipped her head to his direction: "You... You know I was there?"

She was surprised. She had been following him alone from a distant place in the forest. She had experience in tracking and erasing her tracks, and he had never once turned his head back when he led Sifrid. She suddenly closed her mouth and looked suspiciously at Brendel.

Perhaps he was lying to her.

“When you went out of the village I already realized,” Brendel said: “The Control Key for the Blood of Gods.”

“Ah.”

She lowered her head. The young lord in front of her seemed to like controlling every aspect of his plans and preferred to do everything his way. Even Romaine with her quirky charm got yelled at by him. The fact that she took impulsive action on her own even though he specifically warned her not to do so was sure to invite rebuke. But she was ready to accept responsibility, as she had gotten used to not being taken seriously by Makarov.

She suddenly took in a light breath. She had thought of another possibility: What if Brendel wanted to shift the blame to Sanford and the others?

The more the young girl thought, the more that possibility seemed plausible. She looked at him with guarded eyes.

“What is it?” Brendel sensed an apparent distrust from her from the slight pause, as he stared at the motionless Kabias.

“My actions, my responsibility.” She said with furrowed brows.

“Responsibility?” Brendel parroted her.

[Come now. Let’s see if you can afford to wait longer than I do. I’m not in a rush.]

He was cavalier in his attitude with Scarlett’s conversation as he paid full attention to Kabias. However, this made her certain that he would cast his anger onto the Grey Wolves Mercenaries. She began to fret as she did not expect her actions to cause trouble for the others.

“Any punishment is fine!” She suddenly raised her voice.

Even though she was an orphan and a naive girl in the mercenaries, rumors of the nobles had already filled her ears.

Brendel was startled and looked at her, perplexed. Her face was red, and even the tips of her ears, as though she was squeezing every bit of her strength to speak up: “Any punishment to me is fine... My lord, but please don’t cast your anger on them.”

“Hah?”

“Is it insufficient?” She said through gritted teeth.

“What?” Brendel was confused: “Them? Who are you talking about?”

“Sanford, and the others.”

“Cast my anger on them? Why?”

Her eyes went blank as she stared into Brendel’s eyes as if to check whether they hid any lies in them.

“Because—” She suddenly realized she made a blunder and shut her mouth.

Brendel’s expression turned inscrutable as he realized what she was thinking about, and he broke into an awkward smile: “I would find it strange if you didn’t follow me.”

“Is that so?” Her voice was so soft that Brendel nearly failed to hear it. She turned her head away: “You say it like I’m some reckless fool...”

“Of course not,” Brendel shook his head solemnly: “I’m merely respecting your decision.”

“What about the others?”

“Everyone has their obligations and responsibilities. Anyone can have their willful moments, but that doesn’t mean they would do it all the time. I respect their decisions, but once they made their choice they would have to bear the consequences. A moment of impulse can govern someone’s fate, but there is a clear difference between ideals and naivety. One who is the former will understand what price he is paying for, as well as whether he’s willing to pay that kind of price.”

He paused for a moment: “You are here because you did not choose to run away, right?”

She nodded and looked at the outline of the Firbugh’s manor which was lit up slightly in the darkness: “The truth is I would rather die than retreat before that scum—”

“Then our position is one and the same, and we stand on the same line. Why would I blame you?”

“Because I’m an outsider at the very end.”

He obviously wanted her to join him. A Gold-ranked fighter would be viewed importantly anywhere. It was good that she was starting to integrate into his group and become more loyal. He had never intended on giving up on her, but the idea of having the Grey Wolves Mercenaries as the reason why she had to follow him was not particularly a pleasant one.

The only reaction he could give was a smile at her reply, before his eyes went back to Kabias.

Kabias’s supposedly short spear was in contrast with its huge body. An average human wielding it would find it to be a suitable length. The Soul Flames continued to burn the Skeleton Lord’s eye sockets, even though it did not move even a little. He knew that it was going to make sure he stayed here at all costs.

He cast a glance at the surroundings. “Scarlett.”

“Yes, my lord.”

“Would you kindly lend your aid to Medissa? You can leave this place to me.”

She quickly nodded and walked away with her halberd raised over her shoulders. She looked at Kabias, who was somewhat in the fog, before she took another two steps and stopped.

“You can just give the order to me.” She said.

He raised his eyebrow and looked at her, but she had already run off into the streets and disappeared amidst the wafting smoke from the flames. He pleasantly smiled as he thrust his longsword onto the ground and folded his arms.

Kabias and Brendel glared at each other without moving.

===== Medissa’s POV =====

Medissa had encountered a problem. The mercenaries had continued to push Graudin’s army into the inner gates with high morale and overall combat ability, but the last line of defense to the path leading to Graudin’s manor consisted of Graudin’s elite soldiers and an entire army of skeletons.

These undead skeletons had imposing figures to them, their white bones almost marble-like as they gleamed brightly under the moonlight. They were different from the usual skeletons, wearing flexible leather armor, wielding spears with a buckler, and a backup sword at their waist. They even had three to four Bone Javelins on their back.

They were now standing quietly at the backlines, but they had previously met the mercenaries in battle just a moment ago, causing extensive damage to them. They were Madara's Elite Skeletons known as 'Bonethorns'. They were Tarkus's main infantry, a 'higher existence' amongst the low-tier shock troops.

It was also a fact that their existence meant a high-level general could also be somewhere nearby.

And standing before the Elven Princess was an undead Knight. One of the Four Horsemen of Revelations, the Black Knight and the Scales of Justice, the most dreaded and mysterious out of the four.

She could see the golden mask clearly; half of it was a crying expression while the other half was a smiling expression. It was a creepy symbol.

The golden eyes behind the mask were now staring at Medissa.

"Who are you?" Medissa's eyebrows were slightly contorted. The earlier exchange between them made her realize her opponent's power.

"Silver Elf" The Black Knight was surprised. His voice was full of appeal: "Are you also with that man? How intriguing. He is surely not Viscount Gaston, nor Bucc'e's Brendel with a claim of Highland Knight. Even the Black Tower's wizards would not be so knowledgeable about Madara. In my judgment, he's more of an Ancestral Citizen—"

"Ancestral Citizen?" Medissa looked blankly at him.

He raised his head suddenly. In his eyes were the reflection of a bright fire in the south; a magic signal was raised into the sky.

Chapter 155

Breaking Dawn (8)

===== Raban's POV =====

A bright light shot straight into the air and illuminated the vast land, originating from the ruins near the southern inner gate. The varying intensity of the light made it appear ethereal.

Raban, the commander of the Firebrand Mercenaries, wore an aloof expression. His rippling muscles gave him a hard rigid outline that kept dancing from the light. He was a massive man who wielded a greatsword with a carved devil for a hilt, standing motionlessly in the night. His gaze was not on the light but the scenery outside the city.

The darkness seemed to form a black line over the horizon, and the night fog had created a thin mist in between the city and the forest. It seemed like nothing was out of the ordinary, but there was a constant shuffling sound of leaves being swept up by thousands of footsteps moving rhythmically.

The oddity of the inhuman noises was terrifying enough for one to feel like they came from hell.

A large army was moving towards the city.

Raban was not Aouine's knight. He was formerly part of Karsuk's forces; a retired cavalryman who had fought against Madara, but he acted like a knight to gain an advantage over the other mercenaries.

When he listened to the sounds with his eyes closed, he was almost certain they were Madara's army. An endless amount of skeletons like a sea, shuffling across the ground row after row. The noise wormed into his ears and heart.

Fire torches began to emerge in the darkness like stars coming out during the night. They shimmered in the fog like ghost-fire, causing the mercenaries to grip their weapons subconsciously with solemn expressions.

They got into a formation and stood atop the city walls in silence, and held their breaths as the skeletons' shuffling noises became louder.

Madara's undead army finally appeared one by one, emerging past the swirling fog.

A few of Raban's close subordinates stood behind him, including a few wizards. They were the 'brains' of the mercenaries, in charge of handling the strategies and tactics used. They were hesitant whether this battle was worth fighting for. The largest reason was not to offend the young noble, but when they saw the skeletons appearing like a tidal wave, they drew in a cold breath.

Madara. A blooming rose with all its brilliance and thorns in the darkness. It was an irresistible aura like the scent of death visiting upon one's eventual demise—

"Commander?" A wizard with a pale-looking face asked quietly under his hood.

Raban did not answer.

"Commander, the number of undead enemies appears to be at least a few thousands," He said: "Our total numbers with the stray sellswords around us are less than two hundred. These sellswords are also men who can hardly be trusted, even more so for that noble. Are we truly going to fight to our deaths for a single promise made to him? Even if all our brothers are to meet their demise?"

"And where are we to run to if we flee?" Raban turned around and glanced coolly at him: "I am far more familiar with the undead than you are. This city is already beset with the undead. I have learned my lesson in Karsuk. Never guess how many undead there are because their numbers far surpass your imagination."

His eyes went back to the scenery: "However, while their numbers are indeed numerous, they are skeletons which are raised from the graves recently. If we hold our position till daylight comes they will fall back."

"But—"

Raban raised his hand and interrupted the wizard: "Our only hope lies with that young noble. Two Gold-ranked fighters are enough to lead us out of this siege. Prepare your magic signals. Tell him he has two hours, the Firebrand mercenaries will not retreat even unto our deaths—"

He yelled to another person: “Raise our Warflags, even if we are going to face death itself, I want to see them flying in the dawn—”

He spat onto the ground. He was confident of what he knew about Brendel’s plan: “Since that young noble wants me to defend this position till dawn breaks, it means that he has a miracle up his sleeves. I want to see how the first light of dawn breaks this impossible darkness.”

[If he’s capable of doing it I don’t even mind giving up my position.]

The wizards glanced at each other with troubled looks. There were two hours left before dawn broke.

===== Medissa’s POV =====

[Ancestral Citizen?]

Medissa’s movements have stopped moving. Her brows were knitted together as she shifted the lance in her hands. Every nerve in her body was on alert as she glared at the undead general. There was a pair of silver-colored scales woven onto his black robes, and his body gave out a chilling dread about him.

She did not know what he meant exactly by the two words. Before the Wise Kings ruled in the old eras, there was a mythical legend of a heroic knight leading a group of men and women out of Mother Marsha’s protection, defeated the entity known as the ‘Final Calamity,’ The Twilight Dragon, which marked the beginning of the Era of Chaos.

Ancestral Citizens— this title was given to the men and women of varying races who fought the Twilight Dragon.

The Golden Lineage had all but died out, with the exception of the Dragon race, becoming mere legends. The Silver Lineage was the proud existences in the Era of Chaos, but they were nearly wiped out in the battle against the the Dragon of Darkness. Most of these races had already disappeared or became obscure existences.

How could an Ancestral Citizen, an existence as old as the Golden Lineage still be around?

[Unless my Lord is a dragon.]

The Elven Princess immediately shook her head. Even a new-born dragon would not be as weak as her Lord, she thought, before she suddenly blushed and felt as though she had slighted him. She quickly apologized in her heart and refuted his words: “What nonsense are you spouting?”

Iamas’s eyes suddenly lit up with golden flames behind his mask. He was holding on to his scythe without moving but that strange glint made her feel slightly odd, and she hurriedly blinked. She was afraid she was being charmed, but his response was an echoing laughter:

“My words are exactly what they meant, and you understand it well.”

“Stop your lies!” Medissa glanced at her surroundings. The strength of the Undead General in front of her was far beyond her imagination, and she had to act carefully.

However, once she stopped moving, the mercenaries’ assault had also started to stagnate. She could not make a decision whether she should ask Brendel for reinforcements. There was a thick layer of smoke and dust forming over the location where Kabias and Brendel had fought, and she did not know what was happening there.

She was afraid of distracting him in his fight.

But this stalemate would not be in her favor if the undead general fought back against the mercenaries. She bit her faint silver lips and tried to delay for time: “The Golden Lineage is lost to the ages. There are no Ancestral Citizens, save for the dragons, left walking in this continent.”

Iamas gave a faint smile with a calm reply: “Indeed. The citizens of the Golden Lineage are considered Ancestral Citizens, but young Elven child, you forget there is the existence of the ‘Great Fool.’”

She could not help but laugh at the impossible idea: “The Dragon of Darkness? That’s far too funny. You believe my Lord is the Dragon of Darkness? Is there a point to that lie? No one will believe it—”

“No at all,” Iamas shook his head: “But a legend runs in Madara. ‘The Master of Darkness will return, its eyes sees through hearts, its mind knowing all things.’ Surely you have heard of that legend? It’s the Black Prophecy of Miirna’s citizens after all. They are a sworn enemy of your race, is it not?”

“And what of it?”

“I have merely met a certain witch in Fortress Riedon,” Iamas said nonchalantly: “As you well know, the witches are sensitive to the Powers of Darkness compared to ordinary people.”

“And you have forgotten that the Dragon of Darkness is the greatest enemy of our race. Compared to the witches, we are far more familiar with the scent of Darkness. The Black Prophecy also has this passage: ‘The Darkness will be born from no mortals, and the Glorious Races will expire amongst the flames.’ My Lord is a human, a descendant of the King of Flames, Gatel. He is a descendant of the Glorious Races, do you deny that point?”

“That is true.” Iamas raised his scythe and placed it over his shoulder, nodding.

“Stop trying to sow discord between us, undead. Who exactly are you?” Her opponent seemed to be satisfied with her attempts to delay the battle, and she started to become restless. Perhaps it was a trap after all, and he was waiting for reinforcements. She decided to attack him, and if she did not gain an advantage, she would request aid from Brendel.

“I already told you my name, Iamas. I am the Scales of War and the Judge of Fairness—”

The undead general placed one hand on his chest and bowed slightly.

“The inciter and instigator, you meant to say,” Medissa shouted as she raised her lance, but her opponent was even faster than she was. She had barely begun to urge her unicorn forward when he had already swung his scythe forward.

A dark beam of energy shot towards her.

She immediately shifted her unicorn’s direction, but the edge of the blast had reached her. Her armor pieces immediately exploded with light as they fended off the blow, causing a blast of powerful wind to spread in all directions. The mercenaries near her stumbled backward.

She released a soft groan as she received considerable damage from it.

“Your Soul Energy is very impressive. As expected from an Elven Spirit—”

Iamas raised his hand as he spoke. The squadron of Bonethorn Skeletons took out their bone spears and entered into an attacking stance. The mercenaries who had lost their footings were in no condition to defend against their strikes properly. Medissa, who was still trying to recover from the damage, instantly panicked when she realized the situation they were in.

“Stop—” She said through gritted teeth.

Iamas’s hand lowered mercilessly.

The air vibrated and whistled as rows of bone spears flew towards them, the noise echoing through the vicinity.

Her panic turned into determination.

“Ptyoona!” She roared in ancient Elven, as she released the spell ‘Spirit Wings.’

Her voice pierced through the entire battlefield, creating countless Soul Fire to emerge around her before it spread out with blinding speed into a gigantic pair of wings. A translucent web of crystalline hexagons filled up the entire street in the blink of an eye. The bone spears fell like rain from the sky smashed into the shield, reverberating loudly as they tried to force their way through, but it continued to hold up and ultimately turned them into ashes.

The mercenaries looked up in shock as the light brightened their faces, but they quickly realized they were saved.

Iamas looked on calmly, his golden irises shimmering: “An ancient technique from the Silver Elves—”

He smiled as he laid his scythe horizontally across his mount.

Medissa had no protection once the Soul Fire extended outwards—

Chapter 156

Breaking Dawn (9)

Medissa did not hesitate to use her ability and protected the mercenaries. However, when she saw the undead general staring at her with an extended right arm holding onto his scythe, she realized her mistake. He gripped onto his scythe with his metallic spiked gloves and shifted it slightly.

Iamas disappeared from her sight in an instant.

She raised her lance in instinct, but she was too late. The brilliance of the Spirit Wings immediately dimmed as the scythe's swing came from the sky. Iamas's swing had sundered the weaker protection and cleaved through her silver armor easily; the chain links holding them split apart and scattered like leaves covered in glitter.

Silver blood quickly dyed her inner shirt as she looked at the gaping injury from her shoulders to her abdomen in disbelief.

Iamas's cloak gracefully fluttered as he landed on the unicorn. He reached for her throat with his right hand, effortlessly lifted her up, before he hurled her towards the ground.

The Elven Princess had lost all her strength and was unable to resist. She crashed onto the ground with a loud blast, causing a cloud of dust to fly up.

Iamas leaped into the air again when the mercenaries rushed to her aid. He swung the scythe in a perfect arc, a black crescent of energy swept across the mercenaries, spilling blood as they were mowed down like grass. Screams quickly filled the area.

He landed near Medissa's location.

Her unicorn quickly blocked his path, but he casually struck it down with a swing of his fist. He walked slowly towards her, and lowered his head to observe the bleeding girl; her eyes were unfocused as she coughed with bloody splutters. The blade had cut deeply into her body, and blood dyed it silver.

She had almost no feeling left in her body other than pain invading her every nerve. Fatigue gripped her mind, and her consciousness was leaving her. Iamas grabbed her throat again and lifted her up into the air in her dimming vision.

“Medissa, why are you so immature—” Iamas said with a mocking voice, mimicking someone from her past.

Her feeble eyes widened slightly.

“Y-you—” She squeezed her words out before coughing out blood. Iamas had closed one eye while his other blazed with golden flames, staring into her eyes.

[Mind-reading!]

“Damn you—” She concentrated and sealed off her mind with her remaining Soul Energy by flooding around it like water. The Mind-reading skill was only able to retrieve surface thoughts, but it was still considered despicable, and only deplorable wizards would use it.

However, it was widely circulated amongst the Madara’s nobles. The Elven girl trembled with rage and felt humiliated by how she fell for his trick so easily.

[I can’t escape...] She tried to get away from his vice-like grip, but her consciousness was getting fainter, even with the metal spikes from his gloves piercing painfully through her neck. She wanted to warn Brendel, but an invisible wall seemed to shut down her connection to Brendel.

“Y-you... bastard...” She coughed

“There are many ways to use the Soul Element Power. Madara’s undead have put in considerable effort to research this Element Power, and I am no exception. The barrier I created severs your mental connection to the material world.”

Iamas’s voice suddenly stopped, and he turned around.

He raised his scythe in a certain direction and blocked off a blade infused with visible lightning electricity. The explosive sound came a moment later, as he grunted with effort to shake off the electrical spirals.

Scarlett had struck a blow to him before she retreated quickly.

“Another Gold-ranked existence.” He looked at the red-haired girl standing a short distance away in a readied stance: “That youth has quite the number of skilled people.”

“Release her!” Scarlett roared through clenched teeth.

He scoffed once and threw away Medissa, and his scythe had already swung towards Scarlett. She was momentarily startled as she suddenly lost track of him. The cold blade was nearing her neck with a piercing pain like a needle.

Her blood turned into ice. She saw glimpses of the battle between Iamas and Medissa, but he had actually held back against her. His abilities had far surpassed what he had shown earlier. He was at least at the highest peak of a Gold-ranked fighter, one who had started to master his Element Power fully.

Scarlett immediately twisted her body to avoid injuries to vital areas. The scythe’s sharp blade struck across her back, and she uttered a guttural sound as she was knocked into a nearby wall, completely destroying it.

The attack was far stronger than what Medissa had received, but Scarlett quickly got up.

The Blood of Gods offered a robust defense and regeneration, and it was incomparable to the frail Elves’ constitution.

“What?” Iamas was surprised. He had put in considerable strength into his attack and should have killed her outright, but she got up as if nothing had happened.

Scarlett was glaring angrily at the mercenaries. Iamas and her were a fair distance away from Medissa, and it was the best timing for them to rescue her. However, they had become fearful of his attack and made no attempts to move.

Cornelis was greatly hesitant. His forehead was full of perspiration because of the fear gripping him. The enemy was beyond anything he had seen before in his life and was as terrifying as the monsters appearing in mythical legends. His closest aides had started persuading him to flee from the city, but the youth was just as troublesome to handle. He was not only a viscount in rank; he was also someone who had multiple Gold-ranked fighters under his command.

He had to have an incredible background. Abandoning the two women here would certainly doom him and his men in the future.

The Bonethorn Skeletons suddenly started to move. Iamas had given them the order to surround Medissa and kill her.

Cornelis made his decision with clenched teeth. Going against Brendel might cost them their lives later, but they had an immediate threat here. That undead general was clearly stronger than what they had here; he injured both the newly-arrived Gold-ranked fighter and Medissa in a single strike.

He returned his sword to his sheath and prepared to give the order to retreat, but when he was about to do so, a small pair of hands grabbed onto his sleeve. He looked down to see who it was.

It was the little girl Brendel brought into battle.

“Messere Cornelis?” Sifrid was looking up at him with a frightened pair of deep green eyes. Her voice was a whisper.

Cornelis obviously knew what her question was.

[How should I answer to this little girl? Should I tell her we’re leaving?]

He opened his mouth and tried to find the words to gently tell her the truth. But he quickly discovered he was unable to do so. Sifrid’s terrified face reminded of his own daughter.

His wife and daughter had died in the borders of this accursed land against Madara’s forces. Almost everyone living in this damned place had suffered the hardships of war. Leaving this city meant it was doomed to Graudin’s torturing ways.

He closed his eyes.

“Commander?” One of his aides asked again for his command.

Cornelis’s eyes opened again, bloodshot vessels signaling his madness: “I’m betting everything here.”

Everyone in the vicinity was startled.

“Our fates are left to Marsha’s hands! Form up!” Cornelis bellowed.

“““Our fates are left to Marsha’s hands!!!””” The mercenaries roared in return.

The mercenaries did not waste any time the moment he gave his order. Indecisiveness was the biggest mistake in a battlefield. They quickly formed up to get into a formation and pushed forward against the rows of skeletons. The nearest mercenaries to the Elven Princess picked her up and formed a human wall.

Medissa shook her head to shrug off her blurring senses. There was still a chance to turn this situation around. She gritted her teeth and took a deep breath and whispered feebly to the mercenaries around her

Scarlett was trying hard to fend off Iamas’s attacks, but she received another injury for the third time. She wiped off the blood off her lips when the mercenaries suddenly yelled at her: “Use all your strength to give a blow to that undead fucker!”

[What? Use all my strength?]

She was puzzled, but she suddenly caught a glimpse of the Elven princess amidst the mercenaries. Hope flared up in her heart and understood that it was Medissa’s advice.

“A strike with all I got, you say?” She raised her halberd in the air like she was claiming victory. Lightning gathered to her halberd and lit up the area as though the sun had appeared in the sky.

The blinding light forced Iamas to partially hide his eyes behind his hands.

Countless streaks of electricity danced across her body as she leveled her weapon to his body. The static energy was so intense that it forced her tied up ponytail to break apart and raise up into the air. She grinned at him with her fangs shown.

“Seventh chord—”

“Resounding Thunderclap!”

A star descended onto the battlefield. It pierced through the barrier made of Soul Energy and shook the entire ground. The roaring peals of thunder nearly deafened everyone as lightning flooded the area where Iamas stood—

Chapter 157

Breaking Dawn (10)

The peals of thunder interrupted Brendel and Kabias's glares at each other.

The youth felt a strange sensation on him and looked at his clothes; the fabric of his clothes was standing up. When he looked up, he found flashes of lightning continuing to descend in the inner city with continued tremors to the ground.

Brendel was immediately on the alert.

Nothing happened after that. After the sudden show of noise and light, there was nothing but silence. Brendel finally made his move to go forward to the inner city gates with his sword in hand, but when he did so, Kabias immediately walked forward with great strides and blocked his path.

Brendel sighed as he looked up to the giant skeleton: "Why, Kabias, have you not received enough punishment?"

Kabias's jaw unhinged itself with a laugh: "I don't mind trying."

Brendel's expression darkened. The sword in his hand was lighter than the others he had so far. When he raised his sword against Kabias; it took a step back, wary of his Element Power but had every intention of making him stay where he was.

He frowned. Kabias was a cunning individual who had several surprises during their battle. Without knowing what exactly happened in the inner city, he dared not advance carelessly.

[Use the White Deer Statue? No, Rothko is hiding somewhere in the dark. His ability in magic is much higher than me. Playing this game in front of him is unlikely to go anywhere. And why isn't Medissa reporting the situation to me?]

Brendel's tried sending his thoughts into the city gates several times, but there was no reply. Just when he sighed out of frustration, a feeble voice finally echoed in his mind:

“My lord, time is limited. There’s a powerful undead general—” Medissa said between coughs and growing weaker with each word, “called Iam—”

Medissa’s voice ended. There was a chilling realization when he felt the connection to her was completely severed. Her card had entered the Planeswalker’s graveyard, and he felt a pain in his heart for failing her.

[Iam— Iamas? Fuck, why is that bastard here! Why is Tarkus’s right hand here and not fighting alongside him in the southern-east region!?!]

That name set off an explosion in his mind. The thought of the chilling golden mask made his hair stand on end.

[Even if it’s to sign an alliance with Randner himself, why would Tarkus send out such an important general out here? Damn it, what are these undead planning?]

Countless thoughts ran through his mind. Iamas’s name and Medissa’s death had shocked him, but he maintained a poker face all the time. He glared at Kabias before he walked closer to it. The latter stared at him, puzzled. It did not understand why he suddenly became impatient, but its sole mission was to stop the youth in front of him.

The Skeleton Lord readied itself into a stance, gripping the short spear tightly.

Brendel clenched his teeth. There was no time to deal with a troublesome foe here.

“Kabias, I’m going to give you this one last chance to back down. If you still wish to go back to the Mountain of the Dead to rule over your land, now is the time to do so.”

He could no longer waste any more time. He revealed knowledge about what only the undead would know.

“You seem to be very familiar with us.” The flames in Kabias’s eye sockets flickered warily as it spoke.

He ignored the question and stabbed his sword into the ground with a metallic clang. He folded his arms and looked at Kabias like it was already defeated.

“What, young human, are you trying to surrender?” Kabias said with a mocking smile.

“Kabias, you fool, watch out—” Rothko’s voice appeared from the streets.

“What?”

“There’s mana activity coming from him!”

Kabias pointed its finger at Brendel while being on its guard: “You mean to tell me this twenty years old youth is not only a Gold-ranked swordsman, he’s also a wizard on the side? Have you become stupid from experimenting too much?”

Rothko’s voice was silenced. He too thought it was impossible. Even one who was blessed by Marsha could not become an all-rounded person. Someone who possessed dual identities of both a Gold-ranked swordsman and a wizard was something out from legends. Only Saints from the Holy War possessed that power.

The King of Flames, Gatel.

The Grand Priest, Farnezain.

The Empress of Wind, Osor.

The Paragon Apostle, Eirelannt.

The four saints led the various races to war against the Dragon of Darkness and triumphed against it. Even their great leader, the Emperor of Eternal Death, Loptr was no match for any of them, both in abilities or reputation.

They were not wrong to discern the flow of mana coming out from Brendel, but the mana ripple from him was not from a wizard—

But a Planeswalker.

Brendel’s glare seemed to focus on Kabias, but he was actually inspecting his Elemental Pool from the Character Sheet. *(TL: Elemental Pool)*

[Ten Fire Elemental Points, Eight Elemental Points for the other Basic Elements, no Light or Dark Elemental Points. No matter how many times I look at it, I’m disappointed. It’s an utter mess now with Medissa gone, and I can’t change the situation with my abilities. This means I have no choice but to use my last trump card.]

He sighed deeply and closed his eyes.

Kabias retreated slightly. Brendel did not take the initiative and even closed his eyes. The bizarre sight made him even more cautious.

“Mana is gathering around him, Kabias!” Rothko warned it again. The mana gathering around Brendel was the entire Mana Pool of a Silver-ranked wizard.

“I can see that for myself, there’s no need to worry—” Kabias said. There was indeed no need to worry about a Silver-ranked wizard.

[I-I’m watching someone as talented as the Holy Saints in the legends...]

Rothko had no words for the situation in front of him. He started to wonder if it was a mistake to attack the youth. His potential was out of this world!

When Brendel opened his eyes, the chill aura in them which was affected by his Element Power was replaced by something else.

“The fourth hour in the morning. Matteya calls this hour ‘The Slumbering Darkness’. It is the period where the living is in their deepest sleep.” Brendel glanced at Kabias: “If I did not recall wrongly, the undead calls this the Midnight Morning. It is the time where the Dark Energy is at its peak. Am I right, Kabias?”

“What?”

Kabias tightened its short spear in response.

“I just want to say this. It is true that the world is shrouded in darkness before the sunrise—” Brendel raised his hand and threw out a Card of Fate: “But the Darkness is also in my favor!”

The card landed on the ground.

“Card of Fates: Mercenaries of Lopes, Reshuffled into deck, Resummoned into field!” He said as his Wind Elemental Points drained instantly.

Twelve mercenaries appeared in the streets on top of the summoning circle with their weapons ready in front of Kabias and Rothko’s shocked eyes. The mercenaries looked at each other in confusion, not understanding what happened. The Nightsong Tiger was first to respond as he asked in his mind:

[My Lord, what happened here, did you reset our card?]

Brendel nodded in response.

Kabias's eyes went across the mercenaries. The Soul Fire in his eyes flickered slightly.

“To think you're a summoner as well, young human. A Silver-ranked wizard capable of summoning twelve Iron-ranked living creatures. I have not seen or heard of a spell like that. You are certainly no common man, Brendel or Viscount Gaston.” The Skeleton Lord looked at Brendel once it was done scrutinizing the new enemies: “But would the situation change if you add numbers to your side?”

Kabias shook his head in mocking laughter.

Brendel did not seem to hear his words. He looked at the twin Wild Elves sisters.

Chapter 158

Planeswalker's battle (1)

In the Laws of this World —

During the day's second hour to the sixth hour, the Matteya race described these hours as 'The Slumbering Darkness,' representing the world's torpor during this time.

But the Planeswalkers called this period 'Realignment Phase'. This was the ending phase for them to shuffle any cards in the battlefield, and reconfigure their mana to use new strategies in the battlefield—

"Felaern." He said to the older Elementalist.

"My Lord, what is your command?" Felaern responded after a short pause. Her guarded eyes were lukewarm without much trust in them. He often asked her to do incomprehensible things in the past month.

"Create an Elemental Resonance with Dia."

"What?"

"Create an Elemental Resonance with Dia." He repeated himself, his face utterly serious.

"My Lord, what..."

Rothko, who was eavesdropping in the dark street, wore an incredulous expression on him. An Elemental Resonance was used to teach Elementalist's students to sense the various harmonious notes of the six basic element types.

But that was it; an Elemental Resonance had no other uses. The only answer was—

[[[He's trying to become an Elementalist right now?]]]]

Felaern, Dia and Rothko's eyes popped out as they had this thought in this mind. It was

undoubtedly a crazy notion. An Elementalist had to be acknowledged by the Six Basic Elements, and it was a system that required long years of study like a wizard. There was simply no shortcut to it.

Felaern looked at Brendel with exceedingly troubled eyes. Her younger sister was even more forthright, her bell-like voice twinkling with rage: “My Lord, your idea is a little unrealistic!”

“Dia—” Felaern gritted her teeth as she stopped her younger sister’s complaint.

“Now. Felaern.” Brendel ordered her as he watched Kabias in a readied stance. There was no time to explain things to them.

Felaern finally nodded with difficulty. She closed her eyes and dived into her Elemental Pool. To create an Elemental Resonance meant she had to evaporate her stored mana, and no one would choose to do something like this on the battlefield. However, this was her lord’s command, and she had no choice.

Immediately—

Brendel’s eyes had two lines of green words:

– Detected a Mentor, do you wish to receive tutelage?

[Stats window.]

Brendel brought up his Character Sheet.

– XP: 64420 (Commoner: Level 1 ; Militia: Level 6, 0/200 ; Mercenary: Level 26, 475/55537)

[There’s no choice but to use all the XP I got from solving Makarov’s quest. I had planned to save this for my second profession. Damn it, that quest also had a Perfect Clear bonus XP reward. I can’t even imagine how many months I have to work to get this amount of XP again... Raise side-profession Scholar to level 15.]

– Scholar’s level has been raised to level 15. You have unlocked a free slot for a new profession class, attached to the Scholar’s profession.

[Accept Felaern’s tutelage.]

– You may learn the profession Elementalist. Do you use your slot?

[Yes.]

The moment Brendel answered, the twin Elementalists beside him widened their emerald eyes in utter shock. Felaern took a step back in surprise, while Dia’s jaw was unhinged like Kabias, the latter looking at him like he was a monster. The young undead wizard hiding in the shadows repeatedly coughed as he choked on his saliva.

“What’s wrong? Rothko, what the fuck is happening?” Kabias bellowed as he sensed several things happened at once. Something was trembling in the air, but it was not a wizard after all and had no idea what was going on.

The Six Basic Elements started to surround Brendel with restless delight. The chaotic whirlpool continued to swirl around at Brendel, exulting the birth of a new Elementalist in the continent.

Elementalists, the controllers of the natural Elements, allies of the four Great Spirit Kings—

– You have established a contract with the Elements.

– The Elemental Resonance has caused a change within you.

– You have gained affinity to the Elements. Your innate potential has merged with the surrounding Elements.

– You have become an Elementalist.

When the words disappeared, Brendel was pulled back into reality and saw the sisters’ expressions. Felaern opened and closed her mouth several times with a complicated expression as she looked at Brendel. After a long struggle she squeezed a few words out:

“Congratulations, my lord... We welcome you the Elementalists’ world.”

“That’s utterly amazing, my Lord!” Dia was looking at him with blind adoration and curiosity.

“Wait!” The Nightsong Tiger interrupted them: “Do you mean to say...”

He looked at Brendel with a look of disbelief. Felaern merely nodded.

A momentary silence filled the area.

“Impossible!” Kabias yelled and broke the silence. It smashed the short spear into the ground so hard that the ground cracked beneath him.

“Rothko, is this some kind of ploy from them? No one can become an Elementalist just because they sensed the Elements, not unless he’s the reincarnation of the Elementalist Emperor Tulman!”

“Lord Kabias, he has truly become an Elementalist! But...” Rothko rubbed his temples. If he did not witness the entire thing with his own eyes, he could not believe how it happened.

Kabias stopped moving for a long time and stared at the youth in front of him. It managed to squeeze out a response to fight back against the reality in front of it: “Perhaps it’s an unbelievable feat. But young human, what exactly do you think you are achieving here? Are you thinking you can frighten me into allowing you to pass through? What can a fledgling Elementalist do?”

But despite the numerous counters, there was already a small lack of confidence in his tone. Who knew if this damned youth had other things up his sleeves?

Brendel’s eyes turned to Kabias for a second.

He then brought up the Character Sheet once more and checked his data. All Elemental Points had been increased by two points, with the Fire Element increasing by three points.

[As expected, this is much lower than what a gamer would receive. So much for my Elite status. Whatever, this is the first step anyways.]

– Elementalist level 1 requires 6 XP. Allocate XP?

Brendel began allocating his XP into the profession.

– Elementalist level 2 requires 10 XP. Allocate XP?

– Elementalist level 10 requires 610 XP. Allocate XP?

“I—Impossible!” Felaern’s expression changed again, and a word escaped from her lips. She had to be dreaming.

The Elements around Brendel were gathering around him like a thick wall. The speed of how fast he gathered so much Elemental Power was something that she had never seen before. No— this was not a problem of speed. It was as if he was being blessed by the Spirit King!

Nay, perhaps all the Spirit Kings were blessing him!

Brendel did not care about the events around him as he quickly added the XP to his level until he reached level 22 in the Elementalist’s profession. He sighed when he saw the three hundred over XP left.

The main stats for an Elementalist were Willpower, Perception and Health Points. If the side-profession added to his main stats for Strength, Agility, and Physique, he might be able to break his Element Barrier and unseal his Element completely.

[But this doesn’t mean there isn’t any gain from this. 37 Fire EP, 24 Light and Dark EP each, the rest of my other EPs is at 32.]

“The peak of an Iron-ranked Elementalist...” Kabias repeated Rothko’s words: “Is that it?”

“That’s it.”

Kabias finally sighed. It was afraid that the youth would somehow break his Element Barrier and unseal his Element Power entirely. Even though it was an impossible task, he had already accomplished multiple things that were supposedly impossible. But the world was still grounded in reality, and it thanked Mother Marsha gratefully.

“Remember what I said earlier?”

“What?”

“I said I was going to give you one last chance to back down if you retreat.”

Kabias looked at him in confusion, before urgent footsteps moving away from the area interrupted its thoughts.

It realized Rothko was running away.

“Rothko, you useless coward! What the fuck are you doing!?” The Skeleton Lord looked over to his direction before it suddenly snapped back to Brendel. Its instinct was screaming at it and had to ignore Rothko.

The latter had taken out a book from his leather pouch attached to his belt. A book with dark leather skin.

“Pity. You ran out chances, Kabias,” Brendel said with a snarl.

Chapter 159

Planeswalker's battle (2)

Brendel opened the book, his finger landing to a particular page.

[Seventh page, second row.]

– Unlocking this Card requires 100 Wealth.

The image of the Card centered in his eyes.

[Unlock it.]

The 381 Wealth that he had gathered from not summoning Medissa in the past month dwindled instantly.

[The stars in heaven shall cast its shadows upon the chaotic mysteries. Display Card of Fate: Eternity Orb.]

He held the card up with his thumb and index finger as he spoke in his mind.

– Eternity Orb

– (Visionary Artifact IX)

– Costs 10 Will, 10 Mana Points

– Artifact/Fantasy-ranked rarity

– Pay 5 Will and Tap the card. Choose a Card that has entered the field and copy it.

– The Eternity Globe can copy only one card in the field when used.

Brendel paid 10 Fire EP as Mana to cast the card. It floated into the air and turned into a mysterious Magic Formation. A moment later, an orb the size of a fist appeared with seventeen smaller mercury spheres revolving around it appeared and hovered around

Brendel's shoulder.

Kabias was taken aback by the appearance of the artifact. The moment it appeared, it suppressed the Soul Fire in the Skeleton Lord's eye sockets.

[A Fantasy-ranked artifact? Impossible, a mere Silver-ranked summoner and an Iron-ranked Elementalist summoning a Fantasy-ranked artifact! I can't let him cast any more spells—]

It was the first time the Skeleton Lord felt Brendel's threat to be true. It let out a guttural roar and rushed forward to attack him.

Brendel also felt the same pressure from the lack of time. He smoothly slid out the second card and placed it down, while spending 5 Fire EP to activate the Eternity Orb and put it into a tapped phase:

[The light of mercy descends from the sky, the messenger of the Gods emerges forth from the light.]

– Pristine Archangel

– (The Immortal Alliance III)

– Costs 5 Light Element Points

– [Angel creature/Knight, level 20 Elite]

– When Pristine Angel enters the battlefield, shuffle one non-black Card from the Graveyard into your Deck.

– Pay 1 Light Element Point every day when Pristine Archangel is in the field.

– 'The light of mercy descends from the sky, the messenger of the Gods emerges forth from the light.'

Kabias's short spear was mere meters away when Brendel pointed his finger at it. A bright light burst forth, and white feathers decorated the air. Four pairs of wings guarded Brendel's flanks and intercepted the short spear's thrust with two sharp metallic screams.

Kabias's Soul Fire shook when it realized it was being blocked by something strong enough to stop its charge. Two swords had crossed their paths against the short spear. Complex runes and patterns were carved from the hilt to the bright swords' beveled grooves. Few would be to identify them as the heaven's ancient language, derived from the Gate of Order's sacred words. The only ones who were able to understand them were the proud citizens of light.

The two angels made of light forced back Kabias's spear and took to the skies. They raised their chins proudly with scornful expressions. Their swords were placed together in an angled cross that would stand in its path if it tried attacking again. Brendel continued to flip his book while he looked at Kabias calmly.

"Two Silver-ranked creatures will not be able to block me!" The Skeleton Lord spat out each word.

Brendel's response was a short chortle, causing Kabias to go insane from fury and it started charging towards him again. He wasted no time and summoned one of the two cards he had retrieved from the graveyard.

[Highland's courage.]

Amidst the white light from the Magic Formation, came the bumbling youth who rubbed his hair vigorously as he charged out from it with his familiar voice: "Marsha above! My lord! I didn't expect you to get me out so quickly; you're truly the wisest Highland Knight from— Gaaah!"

He emitted a strange yell as an angel was knocked over his head and crashed into the nearby ruins.

Ciel was frightened enough to be at a loss for words. The defense from the angels did not last very long against Kabias's Power Break.

[Ninth page, third row: Bitter Ordeal.]

- Unlocking this card requires 80 Wealth.

[Unlock it.]

The image of the card centered in his eyes like the previous card.

- Bitter Ordeal
- The Wolf's Den II
- Earth 10
- Event/Search
- Target summoned Creature receives 250,000 XP.
- 'To a Lornian, the Wolf Den's altar was more of a safe harbor for the souls.'
- State which Creature to bind to.

[Ciel.]

Brendel tossed the card towards Ciel who was still clutching his head and running about like a headless chicken.

The image of the card disappeared, and another card appeared in front of Brendel in physical form:

- Highland Wizard
- Knight IX
- Costs 5 Water Element Points
- Living human/Wizard, Level 45 creature
- When Highland Wizard is in play, you gain 5 Reputation Points.
- Pay 2 Earth Element Points per day when this card is in play.
- 'Highland's courage.'

Brendel took a moment to read the effects before his eyes instinctively went to Ciel. He looked up and saw a light shining onto Ciel, standing there in confusion when his simple long robes suddenly changed to a new shinier robe. Two long mysterious flower patterns were woven into it, while three white circular patterns decorated the

sleeves, signifying that he was a Wizard of the Seventh Circle. Ciel looked at himself in a daze when a short golden staff suddenly appeared onto his hand.

“This is...” Ciel was still in a state of a shock when he somehow felt a disturbance in the air. The second angel was knocked back into his direction. The youth who had become a Master Wizard immediately reacted without thinking and created a soft cushion of air, gently bringing the angel up.

“I’m a Gold-ranked Master Wizard!” Ciel looked at Brendel in utter surprise and delight.

“Ciel, Time-stop Barrier.” Brendel nodded and gave his next order.

The wizard immediately pointed at the charging skeleton with his staff, shaking his head and disapproving of its reckless charge: “Laws of Time: Stagnate and Imprison—”

A transparent barrier formed around Kabias, and it realized its actions were slowing down. It turned to the source of magic and realized there was a wizard behind Brendel.

[A Highland Master Wizard of the Seventh Circle!!! Does this bastard have an endless supply of reinforcements, how many Gold-ranked subordinates does he have?!!]

Kabias’s Soul Fire shook and dimmed as he saw yet another summoned creature. He felt the signs of failure shrouding over him. A wizard did not have the prowess of a warrior, but their offensive spells were incredibly powerful. A Highland Wizard’s spells were mysterious and nearly impossible to avoid.

Even if Kabias had a higher level, it was no match for Ciel once it got trapped in his magic. The fact that it had charged straight into his Seventh Circle spell meant that it was already doomed.

The only possible way it could think of was to reach Ciel before he cast an offensive spell, but Brendel was standing behind him with that accursed book, and it shut down the Skeleton Lord’s final delusion.

“Farewell and good riddance, Kabias.” Brendel shook his head in utter annoyance.

His expression at the Skeleton Lord was akin to looking at a piece of filth, causing it to roar out in a fury. However, the barrier seemed to cast layer upon layer of magical

restraints upon him, causing him to move as slow as a snail.

[Wind Spider Spirits.]

Brendel had far more mana compared to the time when he used it in the auction. He summoned fifty of them, and they landed across the streets. Everyone looked at Brendel in confusion when they saw the low-level creatures that were weaker than an Iron-ranked militia.

The spiders were existences that could deal with said Iron-ranked militia because of their numbers, but it was utterly useless here. Even if they were used for scouting, the angels that Brendel had summoned were far more efficient and effective. Thus his action was suspect of wasting mana.

But Brendel went about in his own world, calling up the cards he had left.

[Display Holy Swords, Sun Blade, and Golden Battle Flag—]

Brendel picked out the Holy Swords card after a moment, paid for the cost and attached them to the Wind Spider Spirits card.

In that instant—

Everyone saw numerous swords hovering high up in the air, and when they looked down across the floor, they saw a corresponding spider below it. But when Brendel smiled and raised his hands, they realized the spiders were somehow controlling the swords when they gathered behind him to form a huge formation.

“This...” Ciel looked at the sight before him at a loss for words.

“I’ll give this move a name—” Brendel glanced at him before turning back to Kabias who was still trapped in the barrier: “The Dragon Knights Formation.”

He cast his hand forth—

“Dragon Knights, attack!”

Chapter 160

Planeswalker's Battle (3)

Fifty golden pillars of flames shot out from every direction of Kabias's body. They burned and melted its ancient armor as waves of wind exploded from its body. The temperature continued to rise until the air was hot enough to twist the light and distort Kabias's appearance. The ancient armor disintegrated completely.

"For Madara!!!" The Skeleton Lord's angry roars echoed in the night sky. The pillars of light had flashed three times before it finally dissipated—

"Marsha above, that fool—"

Rothko's Soul Fire in his eyes danced when it saw the remnants of the beautiful flames. He cursed once through his teeth before he slid weakly against the wall.

He shook his head. To think he once thought himself as a genius.

===== Iamas's POV =====

Iamas's eyes narrowed as he threw down a mercenary's corpse. His stable Soul Barrier was quivering widely. Scarlett's earlier technique had managed to pierce through his barrier just for a few moments before he restored it and made it even stronger.

[Something is causing my barrier to shake— But there shouldn't be an existence that's more powerful than me.]

Suddenly everyone in the inner city felt their souls shake, almost as if something screamed at them. It first spread from the mercenaries nearest to the city gates, to the skeleton soldiers which had their Soul Fire dimming as though a wind had threatened to extinguish them.

The battle stopped momentarily.

Scarlett got up slowly. Blood was streaming down all over her injuries, and she wiped her the blood on her chin with her fist. Her amber eyes still held an obstinate glare,

but momentarily looked up to the sky. She had felt her soul tremble as well.

Something cracked loudly, and she reacted immediately by looking for the source of the sound.

She discovered black fragments falling over her head before it disappeared into thin air. More cracking sounds spread across the battlefield, and she saw fragments raining across the streets.

Iamas grunted in pain.

[Someone has forcefully broken apart my barrier?! How is this possible!]

His Soul Fire felt like it had been turned to ice when it held the possibility that there was something out there that could defeat him. Suddenly a shining orb of light streaked across the sky, like an impossibly bright firefly.

More of them quickly appeared and moved across the battlefield in a disorderly manner. Everyone's confused gazes followed them as they streaked across their heads. The lights suddenly became dazzling like stars.

A Holy Aura was gathering in the vicinity.

"Dragon Knights, attack!" Someone yelled.

The first beam of light suddenly descended from the sky, piercing through the darkness and illuminating the ground. The nearest mercenaries were just in time to see it penetrating through three skeletons as the beam of light moved in sudden and impossible angles.

Skull, ribs, and pelvis.

They looked on with agape mouths as the three skeletons scattered onto the ground with broken bones, before they started burning up and turned into ashes.

The second beam of light started to pierce through the air, the third—

The night turned into day as lights continued to flash across the battlefield, raining down onto the undead like they were being commanded by a divine entity. In the blink of an eye, the Bonethorn Skeletons were turned into grey ashes one by one. Two

rounds of the attacking beams had decimated the skeleton army, leaving but scant few unharmed.

“Marsha above!!! Quickly, destroy these remaining filthy existences!”

The mercenaries immediately cheered after a stunned moment.

Cornelius watched the attacking beams in a daze. He was guarding Sifrid by her side. While he was delighted with the sudden turn of events, he could not help but wipe his sweaty palms and glance at his pale adjutant beside him. They recognized the youth’s voice.

They truly did not expect him to have this power.

But he quickly understood what he needed to do and decisively gave out his command:

“My brothers, break through the enemies’ line of defense! Do not waste this chance!”

The furious roar marked the change of the battlefield’s tide.

Iamas recomposed himself upon hearing the roar. His eyes turned to a particular alley shrouded in smoke and fog. Two angels abruptly appeared and flew into the air before descending onto him in a split second. Their swords were nearly upon him, but he calmly swung at each attacker once, knocking them back and causing their glowing feathers to flutter in the air.

He did not relax.

A significant amount of mana was gathering in the sky; magic formations were swiftly forming and converging into a giant sphere. Without any warning, it rapidly turned into an immense boulder that shot towards Iamas with blinding speed. His pupils quickly shrunk as he realized he could not avoid it in time—

[Laws of Magic that materializes into physical objects, there’s a Master Wizard who’s able to cast high-level Circle Spells here!]

The earth shook when the massive boulder crashed onto the ground, causing a cloud of dust to spread everywhere.

He had tried to sunder the projectile with his scythe, but the impact forced him off his

steed. He fell flat on his face and had to push himself off the ground. After the cloud of dust had been dispelled caused by his body's impact, the mercenaries had already suppressed Graudin's army.

The undead general watched the city's cowardly soldiers escape from his side. The battle was over. The air was stifling and painful to breathe in, and not simply because it was filled with dust and smoke.

There was one final chance. He finally saw Brendel appearing in the streets.

In order to win the battle he had to destroy the orbs of light, but there was no time to go after them individually. He was certain that Brendel was the one controlling these bizarre objects, and if he killed the youth everything would be solved, and the scales in this battle would turn towards him.

He scoffed coldly and placed his scythe horizontally across his chest.

Brendel had found Iamas earlier and commanded Ciel to attack him. It was an old opponent in the game, and he had not changed at all.

[Bleah. He's still wearing that ridiculous get-up with a pretentious mask. He even has the same old strategy of capturing the enemy's leader. He probably hasn't gotten the Blood of the Evil Dragon, so it's easier to handle him though...]

But Iamas did not know that his intentions were seen through by Brendel. Ciel and the Mercenaries of Lopes were participating in the battle, leaving only the two angels who were guarding him. He had never seen or heard the citizens of heaven guarding a mortal before. He concluded they were quite strong from the earlier exchange, but it was not as if he had no chance in bypassing them.

He moved in a blur, darting across the battlefield three times like an elusive shadow. Each time he did so, he ran across hundreds of meters. Brendel simply reacted by calling back every single Dragon Knight to form multiple rows and fired into a sector at the same time.

The chaotic golden pillars of light pierced through the ground, and for a single moment, it appeared as though a golden forest had suddenly sprung up in the streets. The Dragon Knight Formation had no need for accuracy as the numbers alone made up for the deficit.

Each single strike from the beams of light was the equivalent of a Silver-ranked spell, and even someone as powerful as Iamas was not able to openly show himself under the barrage of ten-odd strikes happening in a second.

He swung his scythe and tried to strike the beams of light with his own dark beam of energy, successfully wiping out seven Wind Spider Spirits.

The Holy Sword Card was able to provide the attacking strength of a Silver-ranked spell if it was attached to something, but it did not affect anything else. The Wind Spider Spirits' defenses were as weak as paper against his attack.

When he realized his strike was effective, he tried chasing them, but the orbs of light immediately scattered everywhere and shot at him from a distant range. When he moved at high speed with his ability, he found they had gathered once again and suppressed him with heavy firepower.

[The enemy seems to predict every single move that I make!]

Other than the first strike which managed to get a lucky hit, he found that he was unable to gain any advantage at all. He had to slow them significantly in order to evade the attacks.

Brendel divided the spiders into eight groups and commanded the angels to take the skies. When he discovered Iamas's location, he quickly directed six groups of spiders to fire quick separate shots to steer him, while the remaining two groups shot concentrated beams of fire to deal a powerful blow o him.

It proved nearly impossible to hit him, but Brendel slowly cornered Iamas into a dead alley, while the two groups of spiders waited there in ambush and fired through the wall. The intense power of the beams demolished the flimsy bricks and blasted against Iamas, but the latter managed to direct his Soul Element to form a thick barrier against it and defended him.

Before the beams were able to melt his barrier, he managed to escape the corner and the game repeated itself.

The Mercenaries of Lopes watched the battle between Brendel and Iamas unfold in absolute shock. Ciel was earnestly explaining to them with a dignified expression as though he understood everything:

“...To be clear, a game always have three rules. Techniques, equipment, and stats. As you can see for yourself, the techniques of our Lord and his excellent equipment are giving the result you see now. He once taught me that any one of them will be effective, and I thank him for teaching me.”

He nodded, bragging all the way without really understanding what was happening: “Now that I have become a Master Wizard, I am very grateful to our Lord for teaching me this secret.”

Dia could not suppress her giggles.

“Ciel,” Brendel’s teeth were grinding against each other before he yelled at him: “You had better join this fight right now—-”

“Of course, my lord. I am already preparing a spell,” Ciel immediately gave a reply: “But I’m seeing a lot of soldiers with their symbols somehow related to the Randner’s house?”

“They are indeed under Count Randner’s house.”

“My Lord, you offended another house?” The young wizard was shocked: “Marsha above, you must have offended many people in your previous life too.”

“Shut it. Based on your theory, we should have been hung the previous time we went against a noble,” Brendel constantly changed the positions of the Dragon Knights and replied with amused annoyance: “At most, we will get hung again.”

“You are quite right.” Ciel raised his eyebrow.

Chapter 161

Planeswalker's battle (4)

Ciel completed his spell.

When Iamas finally forced his way through the endless arrays of golden pillars of light and knocked away the angels in his path, he found Brendel behind a Magic Wall. Countless lines of light had weaved into walls that extended before Brendel on four sides. He rushed forward and tried to cut through the wall, sending a shower of sparks.

His pupils contracted, and he made the decision to retreat. The wall had turned into a physical wall made of Laws cast by a master wizard. The youth was a Golden-ranked swordsman as well, and it was impossible to end things quickly. He thought he could rely on his proud speed to gain victory, but his opponent had decisively abandoned supporting the entire battlefield by summoning all the strange orbs just to slow him down.

It was a failure.

[The fact that he used his entire formation of Light Orbs and called back his Master Wizard... Either he's someone who's utterly afraid of getting injured, or he has incredible judgment. Regardless, he has definitely won.]

When he looked back at Brendel's light brown eyes as he retreated, he saw his opponent staring back at him without any signs of emotion, appearing like an enemy who had fought against him for many years.

Brendel was exactly what he had thought of. The battles he had fought against Iamas in the Kingdom of Knights, Glace, were no less than ten times over the years in the game. Iamas had attained the Blood of Evil Dragon and was even more formidable than he appeared now, but be it in the game or the world here; he had not changed in the slightest.

Therefore Brendel's strategies on him were effective and served only to confuse Iamas, who found it more and more bizarre.

“Stop him from escaping!” Brendel bellowed when he found Iamas had the desire to retreat. Several of the mercenaries jumped up as they were startled at his ear-splitting roar.

[This fucker is the commander who completely broke through Bruglas in the game, I can't let him escape!]

Even though Iamas did not improve as much over the ages, he remained as the best tactician amongst the Four Knights. If he were killed, it would be the equivalent of cutting of Tarkus's right arm, and governing the southern region of Aouine would be less stressful, not to mention that he was going to face the House of Randner's fury.

Iamas scoffed furiously at Brendel's words. Even though he was unable to get to Brendel quickly, he felt that victory would not be on the latter's side so easily if he went all-out. However, he had to ensure Graudin's safety and had to retreat to reform the city's soldiers into a defensive line. He was ultimately a general who looked at the bigger picture at all times.

His entire body was a blur, easily stopping before Ciel's Time-stop barrier and evading it. The two Pristine Angels came at him again, but with a leap into the air, he had easily dodged them. Scarlett barely caught a glimpse of him as she swung her halberd, and it missed him by meters.

“Damn it—” She glared at his disappearing figure.

Brendel was also disappointed and surprised. He had hoped to anger Iamas into staying by letting the entire battlefield know about his decision to flee.

[This opponent is truly one of the worst I can face here. Even from the beginning, this bastard is already a level-headed general. So much for hoping that he's still immature—]

He immediately thought of the reason why Iamas had to escape.

“Ciel, find a good-looking middle-aged man called Cornelius. He's the commander of the mercenaries here. The undead bastard might probably take away Graudin—”

“What exactly should I do, my lord?”

“Are you the wizard or I'm the wizard? React as the situation comes,” Brendel replied:

“If that dunce Freya can become the Goddess of War, I’m sure she will be fine as well.”

“What?”

“Nothing. I’m just planning her future.”

“I see,” Ciel bowed: “I am pleased to follow your command.”

“Go.” Brendel nodded.

When Scarlett hobbled over, Ciel muttered to himself.

“She really does look quite like Miss Freya. I see, so my Lord likes this type of—”

Ciel quickly closed his lips; Brendel was looking at him with a sour expression, while Scarlett glared at him with gritted teeth while she passed him by.

“Scarlett, are you alright?” Brendel asked Scarlett.

“Yes?” She was slightly surprised.

“I’m fine, my lord.” She wiped away her blood: “But Medissa is...”

“I know.” Brendel’s face was strangely composed as he nodded. Since he had enough Light EP, resummoning Medissa was not a problem after all.

Scarlett’s glance was curious. She had heard of the relationship between the Elven Princess and the youth. She found it strange that Brendel’s reaction was so small upon hearing her death, but it was not her place to know what he was thinking.

The mercenaries had begun to push on the path towards Graudin’s manor. Iamas had issued an order to retreat further and create a new defensive line. However, even though he was an accomplished undead general who knew the humans well, he was simply not confident in leading them. The mercenaries crushed the skeletons’ bones beneath their feet and marched towards the soldiers, pushing them to the brink of destruction.

Their morale was already shaken, and when they received the order to retreat yet again, made them feel like they were at the end of their roads. They were almost like a bunch of livestock waiting to be slaughtered.

Brendel had specifically ordered the mercenaries not to kill them. Otherwise, there would not be many of them left—

Graudin's manor was somewhat of a small fortress; the building was located on higher grounds, with a fortified gate and extended stone walls with a moat at the base. There was also a winding path that was difficult for a large army to pass through quickly.

When Iamas created a new line of defense near the gate, the soldiers were already losing their formations and being pried open by Brendel's mercenaries. Graudin's army was no longer fit for command.

"These fools!" Iamas muttered angrily to himself.

The Light Orbs were still flying in the air shooting down from above at pockets of stiff resistance from a few of Graudin's brave soldiers, while destroying any remaining skeletons. That was when Iamas suddenly saw a dark shadow flittering across the streets.

[A spider? It's... somehow controlling an Orb of light. Then that youth is a summoner? I see— So my first strike back then killed a bunch of them. But a frail creature is controlling a Silver-ranked magic spell. I have never seen such a strange summon before. Perhaps it's ancient magic?]

He was again surprised by the youth. The magic system in the Era of Chaos was different from the current generation, just like how the Dragon race wielded ancient Chord Magic and vastly different from the generation now.

[If Lord Tarkus's main force is here, they would easily be able to counter these damned creatures. Wraiths and high-level necromancers are more than a match for them.]

But that was just a mere wish that would never come true. Lord Incirsta was leading an important mission in the southern-east region and was using Tarkus's forces to deal with the remnants there. It was impossible for them to appear here. Even allowing him to command a battalion of Bonethorn skeletons was the very limits for stretching out Madara's undead forces.

[A tenth of my Bonethorn Skeletons were wiped out almost instantly when that youth attacked. Fortunately, these are mere ranged units.]

The manor's guards consist of Graudin's personal knights. Relying on them might

allow him to hold on for a while, but the best answer in this situation was to take away the Baron immediately, instead of waiting for Madara's army outside the city to arrive.

After a short moment, he cast his gaze back to the western direction.

"Young human, this battle isn't over yet." He said.

His Nightmare mount quickly charged towards the manor, after giving the knights an order to close the gates and raise the drawbridge.

He chose to give up on commanding the soldiers; their lives were not important to him after all. The youth would not give him a chance to rally them, and there was also the possibility of a smaller force infiltrating the manor.

When Iamas reached the room where Graudin was overseeing the battle, he realized that Brendel had already reached the fortified gates. The remaining soldiers were fleeing to the city's side gates like rats on a burning ship.

Graudin was wearing a set of velvet robes, his face completely pale.

"Lord Iamas?" He asked.

"This defense point is unable to stop them," He continued to observe the situation and replied coldly: "Come with me if you want to live."

The baron looked at him with a shocked expression.

"What about my men?" He asked in a small quivering voice.

"And you still wish to care about them?" Iamas's golden pair of eyes pierced through him with a chilling glare.

Graudin's voice died within him.

Suddenly there was a loud commotion outside, and the two men turned their attention back there. They chanced upon a young man who had destroyed the fortified gates with a powerful spell.

His long robes fluttered against a rising wind, and his two golden intricate flower patterns shimmered before their eyes. He raised his staff and snapped his fingers, and

a resounding blast emitted from him. Six golden Magic Formations formed across the ground.

“Stop that Master Wizard! Fire your arrows at him!” Iamas bellowed, hoping his voice would reach Graudin’s knights.

But it was too late. Six pillars of light formed and extended across the moat and reached the winding path.

“I invoke the Laws of Exchange: Material Conversion— ‘Iazu.’” The gem on his staff shone brightly as mana filled and converted into physical properties. Six huge bridges made of rocks had materialized out of thin air.

Silence temporarily filled the place—

Chapter 162

Planeswalker's battle (5)

As the six bridges smashed onto the ground, the knights lurched forward and fell as though an earthquake had happened.

The young wizard smiled as he lowered his staff. The sounds of horses' hooves echoed behind him as the riders amongst the mercenaries dashed past him. The young lord who was just behind them drew out his sword, reflecting the stars' light as it issued a signal:

'Attack and destroy the enemy before us!'

The knights quickly got up as they saw the approaching mercenaries. Brendel had resummoned his Pristine Angels again, retrieving Medissa's card from the graveyard, and restoring the angels' health as though they had never been injured.

The angels flew up and descended upon the knights with their swords. They were no match for Kabias or Iamas, but it was the same for the knights when they tried to attack them. Heads were lopped off one after another, and they ultimately chose to retreat into the manor's square.

Iamas did not wait any longer and began to drag Graudin away from the window. As long as he was fine, it did not even matter if Firburh was razed to the ground.

Brendel who managed to spot Iamas and Graudin at an arched window, gave a cackling laugh when he saw Iamas pulling Graudin away.

He beckoned to Cornelius and gave instructions to him, who in turn relayed his instructions to his mercenaries.

"Baron Graudin has fled Firburh!"

"Baron Graudin is no longer in Firburh!"

When the knights heard the mercenaries' cries, they stopped moving and turned to

look for Graudin's location. When they were unable to find him, they tossed down their weapons and put their hands up and gave up. When Brendel's men flooded the huge mansion, they were unable to find any traces of the wretched noble.

Brendel himself had made a guess as to where they were and entered together with Ciel and Scarlett into a secret passage. It led to a set of spiral staircase that descended deep down.

When he exited the area, he found himself in a hall, not unlike the first time where he and Graudin met, decorated with the same set of crystal chandeliers above him. Two sets of footsteps echoed hurriedly through another corridor, and two figures finally emerged, they found Brendel waiting for them with Ciel lighting up the area with his staff.

Graudin's eyes nearly popped out when he saw three people waiting for him, wondering if he had somehow gotten betrayed. This place was only known to him.

The same atmosphere was also similar when Brendel gained his Element Power. His eyes glinted dangerously in the dimly lit hall, and could not help but laugh at the familiar sight before him. He had promised to cut off Graudin's head, and this setting was just too similar to where he threatened him.

Iamas calmly looked at him, almost like he was not surprised. He pushed Graudin back behind him and raised his scythe with his right hand.

"Human, you are far more capable than I imagine. I am surprised to see Aouine have a noble like yourself—" His voice was like rusted iron, unlike the pleasant voice he once had.

"Stop wasting time, Iamas." Brendel shook his head and cut off the topic: "I am sure you know whose life I am here for. I am unable to stop you from escaping, but don't even think for a fucking moment you can bring Aouine's Lord Baron away."

He put emphasis in the last few words.

"I don't know who you are exactly, but I guess I shall recognize you as a viscount. At the very least, Lord Viscount, I do remember the rules between the nobles are quite different. Behind me is a legitimate lord directly under the king himself. His house carries a bloodline directly back to the former kingdom. Are you telling me that you wish to lay your hands on such a prestigious House? You would become the precedent

of a bloody war between two noble Houses,” Iamas said.

He shrugged. “I can step aside, but even if I do so, are you certain you want to kill him?”

Graudin’s face darkened behind the undead general.

“The glory of the kingdom does not extend to a traitor,” Brendel said.

“But it is still not a reason to break the rules of the nobles, and certainly not a reason to set two Houses at each other till one is beyond saving.”

Brendel’s laughter echoed in the hall: “If a single Baron from Randner is capable of ending my House, why the fuck would I come here?”

Iamas was at a loss for words.

“Your arrogance!” Graudin’s teeth ground furiously at each other when he listened to Brendel’s words: “I don’t know where your confidence comes from, Viscount Gaston—”

“Did I allow you to speak?” Brendel’s voice was so cold that it chilled Graudin’s blood, causing a great fear to spread within him. The latter’s pupils contracted, and he immediately stopped talking.

Iamas clapped his hands.

“Your spirit is commendable. But the Lornians, native citizens of the Kingdom of Knights, have said the wise should learn to seek a balance. Lord Viscount, a noble like yourself should understand that Graudin has received his due punishment. Why not stop here and allow everyone to have a chance to reconcile?”

“The Lornians have said this as well, blood for blood, tooth for tooth,” Ciel added with a warm smile.

“But the blood that was shed does not belong to Lord Viscount,” Iamas countered.

“Indeed. But the noble’s honor demands retribution,” Brendel replied coldly.

Iamas was once again silent.

Brendel was secretly frowning. Iamas was not someone who wasted his time on words. He and Ebdon were famous for being decisive and practical. He doubted it was due to some unknown event in the future that somehow changed his personality.

[Is Graudin this important to Madara? What exactly is the promise between the Randner House and Madara?! No, there's still another possibility—]

The best way to avoid any trap is to act upon it.

Brendel stopped talking and walked forward towards Graudin. His right glove made of comfortable white leather reached for his sword. A freezing aura immediately extended to half the hall.

Iamas did not move, but Graudin took three steps back in fright, nearly falling onto the ground. His face flushed with anger and fear, his heart full of disbelief as he gnashed his teeth.

Even though he was a mere Iron-ranked swordsman, he realized Brendel's power had increased so much that it could not be compared to the day before!

Naturally, he could not have guessed that the new source of power came from Brendel's newly gained levels from his Elementalist's profession. The only possibility he could think of was that Brendel hid his real strength.

He immediately went up to Iamas and whispered to him. The undead general nodded and looked at Brendel in amusement.

Kabias's report could not be wrong. But he had sensed Brendel's strength for himself. There was no change in his demeanor, however, as he thought about this problem.

"Lord Viscount, why not reconsider?" Iamas said.

"There are no advantages for you when you interfere with us humans. You already know that you can't bring Graudin away, and it a meaningless battle for both of us. Step aside, I know this is not something you would do—" Brendel said.

Iamas shook his head as he watched Brendel get closer with every step. He pushed Graudin slightly back with his scythe.

"This battle might mean nothing to you, Lord Viscount, but Madara takes it seriously

and therefore has a different meaning for me. While we have never allied with the living in our history, there is a first for everything, and abandoning our first ally would cast doubt upon our reputation.”

He gave a short laugh under his mask: “But you are not wrong. Protecting the Lord Baron here against three Gold-ranked fighters is certainly difficult—”

“Lord Iamas!” Graudin jolted in fright, his face paling quickly.

Chapter 163

Planeswalker's battle (6)

The only person Graudin rely on for his safety was Iamas. If the latter was unable to ensure his safety, then the barbarian-like youth would really run him through his sword.

Iamas ignored the mewling man behind him: "But I still have some confidence in holding out for thirty minutes."

"Thirty minutes? So that your undead army can march in through the city?" Brendel's smile spread across his face, getting straight to the point.

"Truly, if you are not my enemy, I would suspect that you were some close friend of mine when I was still living. Even my personal maid doesn't know me as well as you do."

Brendel merely smiled at his provocation. This character coincided with the knowledge he had of him in the game. His pride extended all the way to his speech and had offended many people in Madara. Because of that, he was sent to work under Incirsta's command.

His feet had not stopped moving, and he was less than ten meters away from Iamas. Ciel was right behind him, ready with a spell.

"Lord Viscount, have you received a response from the city's west gate? I do recall the mercenary commander's to have quite the pretty features for a woman. But fret not, the forces under my command here are not many and was merely sent out to delay them from setting up a foothold in the west."

Brendel stopped and listened silently.

"I do believe my kind has breached the city. Of course, they are low-level skeletons led by useless fledging necromancers, but even so, if you don't rush to that lovely woman's aid, I'm afraid the situation might turn out to be quite troublesome?"

The youth resisted from wanting to smash his fist onto Iamas's mask. There was a level of smugness from him that grated on his nerves, but he was quite aware that Iamas had no need to lie to him because the latter already did it.

[If the situation is just as Iamas had stated, then it wouldn't be just a troublesome situation, forget the damage done to the city, everyone is in danger. Even now I have received no news from the west gate. The fact that I had Ciel create so many bridges ended up as a terrible decision! Shit, this bastard dared to separate his troops from the start of this battle. Does he really care about Graudin's life— No, that's not it, the Iamas I know will never do that, he intended to bring Graudin out of here from the very start!]

Brendel's heart sank.

He had been worried about Jana's situation since he had not received any news, and now he finally received an answer. He asked himself why Madara had to keep Graudin safe at all cost. He was not even the eldest son, and merely one of many—

He took a deep breath. Iamas attack had indeed struck into one of his weak points. It was fortunate that he did not waste any more time talking and forced him to reveal his secret. There was still room for a choice to be made.

[Damn it. As expected from the Scales of War. If it's possible, I really want to cut off his head right here, even more so than Graudin's.]

It was the start of the Black Rose War, but Iamas was already exhibiting the same intelligence and brilliance in predicting the future. If he managed to get the Blood of the Evil Dragon, he would be impossibly hard to kill.

Perhaps the undead general in front of him might even know of his plan?

“Thirty minutes remain. Perhaps we can make a deal instead?” Iamas smiled, golden flames igniting in his eyes.

Graudin sighed with relief, showing an ugly smile from his rigid face. He chortled a few times, delighted at Brendel's misery. The latter seemed to be caught in two places. He looked like he did not care the undead razed his entire city to the ground. The lowly commoners were like cockroaches after all, and even the city could be rebuilt.

The most important thing was to enjoy how Brendel felt. He could not help but speak

with a triumphant smile.

“Young man, you have to pay the price for being rash—” Graudin suddenly recalled the price he paid for trying to taunt him, and hurriedly stopped what he was doing: “But I admit you are powerful. Strength deserves to be respected. If you let things go as it is, I can make a promise on behalf of my father... To stop our feud.”

He started to relax and continued: “As you very well know, we nobles typically dislike wars that hurt each other so we should make peace. But there is one other thing; I received reports that my adopted daughter is amongst the mercenaries—”

Suddenly Iamas turned around and glared at him. Graudin’s heart beat loudly and realized he had committed an error. He quickly stopped talking.

“Do you mean to give up on the mercenaries and everyone else in the city? I know the skeletons are unable to stop you, and it is no matter to me of might turn out to be their fates. But this is where you are different from me.” Iamas returned his gaze back to Brendel.

Graudin put on a sinister smile. Iamas was using the same trick he had used a few days ago by threatening the men under Brendel. Watching Brendel entering the same trap again filled his heart with malicious glee.

Everyone looked at Brendel and waited for his response—

“Iamas, there is an ancient saying where I came from.” Brendel’s hand loosened its grip on the sword he was carrying. For a moment he looked almost defeated before he continued speaking: “No man ever steps in the same river twice, for it’s not the same river and he’s not the same man!”

Iamas’s mind froze when he peered into Brendel’s clear and indomitable eyes. Brendel’s right hand flickered, and the longsword was thrown straight into Graudin’s path in a straight line. The undead general barely regained his senses at the whistling blade piercing through the air and lifted up his scythe. It barely glanced the sword and changed the path of the sword ever so slightly, and it went past Graudin’s neck.

The blade nailed into an oil painting not far away from Graudin’s back, its hilt trembling repeatedly.

Iamas turned around.

Graudin was pressing down on his wound on the neck. He stared at Brendel with a face void of color. Mixed emotions of fear, confusion and fury washed over his heart. He did not understand why the youth was so fixated in killing him.

“Give up cutting Graudin’s head, offer a truce, and surrender Sifrid over? Are you treating me like a complete fool, Iamas?” Frost was literally coming out from Brendel’s lips.

“..Was that necessary, Lord Viscount? A momentary pause, please, I am quite interested to know what exactly your quote meant.” Iamas realized that he was tricked into lowering his guard just for an instant. The long string of words had taken away his concentration, and also realized Brendel was completely unaffected by his ability.

“There are many explanations to that,” Brendel replied: “But my favorite answer is how someone wouldn’t commit the same mistake; the same trap wouldn’t apply twice and he is no longer the naive person he once was.”

“That would mean you are choosing to do battle with me?”

“Indeed.”

The undead general gripped his scythe tightly. He stared at Brendel: “Then go ahead and try. I wait with bated breath to see if you are faster than I am—”

He expanded his Element Power and formed into a silver wall that almost appeared in tangible form.

“Are you mistaking something, Iamas?”

“What do you mean by that?”

“The truth is— I have already gone past you.”

The youth said with a tranquil expression. His gaze went past Iamas’s shoulder and onto the longsword stuck onto wall painting. A card was pinned onto to the oil painting, not seen by anyone else other than Brendel.

A card with the illustration of a Unicorn Knight—

[The flag of the Elves are raised proudly, with her heart and sword shining brightly in

darkness.]

“Come forth, Medissa!”

There was a loud scream—

Iamas turned around just in time to witness a silver lance stabbing through Graudin’s chest. The latter had a look of utter disbelief. He tried turning back to Iamas for help with every bit of strength he had left, but the lance was withdrawn easily and caused a spurt of blood to be sprayed across the floor. Graudin staggered a few steps forward before he collapsed onto the ground into a heap.

“She— How can this be, I have already gravely injured her, why is she free of injuries!” He bellowed at Brendel.

“I’m a summoner,” Brendel’s eyes had a condescending look to them. “She’s a summon.”

Ciel’s body immediately trembled as he refuted this statement with every bit of his mind.

“Impossible, a summoner cannot summon anything past my Soul Barrier!” He roared again.

Brendel’s grin under the dim light seemed almost mysterious and terrifying.

“Have you not realized it? I am quite the extraordinary individual.”

Chapter 164

Gambler's roulette (1)

A thin blade pierced through a skull, and the final Zombie Outlander lost its strength and fell to the ground heavily.

The female commander with fiery red hair gripped her sword with a single hand and looked at her surroundings. The reflection in her emerald eyes showed many skeletal bones and mercenaries' corpses. The battle had finally ended. Even though they paid a hefty price, they had managed to fight the attackers off.

Jana exhaled slowly and returned her rapier into a sheath covered with black leather.

"Commander!" A shout came from behind her. She turned back and saw one of her youngest mercenaries run over.

"Leave your protests for later. Get some men to stay behind and take care of our injured, while the rest advance. We have wasted too much time, and we need to control the west gate before Madara arrives!"

"Wait!" The boy bent over and held on to his knees in support while he tried to catch his breath.

"What?" She frowned and said with impatience.

"It's too late," The youth's voice was surprisingly loud: "Sometime after we began fighting the monsters, group Mouse caught a glimpse of a magic signal from the south. Commander, it's too late, the undead has already reached the western city gates. If we head over there, we will just meet against countless undead."

"What else did Mouse say?" She stopped moving and turned around with her full attention.

"They also said our only option is to retreat right now. We should break through from the north and leave the Firburh. When the undead pours in, every one of us will die."

“If we leave now, what will happen to the citizens here?”

“Commander, can we change anything by staying here?!” The boy refuted anxiously.

“Shut up!” She punched the nearby wall with her full strength, causing the bricks to crack in a radial direction: “Get our men ready. Have the groups ready; Owls, Wolves, and Bears. Get these three groups to advance in the streets! If we can’t stop them from entering the city, we’ll intercept them here!”

“Commander!” He said: “We have less than three hundred men. The undead skeletons could easily reach ten thousand! If we don’t rely on the city’s stone walls we cannot stop them!”

“We have to do it even if we can’t! Are you trying to make me break my promise! Follow my orders, now!”

“Commander, does a noble deserve to have your promise? That young man is leading us only because he has a quarrel with Graudin in the first place. He’s a stranger and even stands on the same line on Graudin’s side, why should we fight for someone like him! Your parents and sister died at the damned nobles! Most of us here have the same background like you, and w-w-we followed you because we respect you! Why should we die for someone like him, let them kill each other!”

Jana was momentarily silent. She sighed and wanted to respond gently when a sudden bang could be heard from the inner city. A pure pillar of white light shot into the sky, vanishing the darkness and lighting up the sky. It was as though Mother Marsha had shed her first tear in the darkness, just like how it was described in Kirrlutz’s poems of the world’s creation.

The light was born in the darkness, bestowing blessed wisdom, spirit and resplendence to the creatures.

Jana and the mercenaries around her looked to the sky in rapt wonder. A Magic Formation began to expand in the sky, reaching a span of hundred meters before it exploded and blasted the clouds apart, and the final form of the magic was—

“Graudin is dead.”

Words burned in the sky like fire.

Her voice was flat in tone.

“My Lord is asking us to respond to him.” She said.

“My... lord?” The youth replied in shock.

“That idiot Cornelius has chosen to stick that young noble, so why would I not dare to? Graudin is dead, and Lord Gaston has given me his answer. From now onwards, I shall follow him.” She lowered her head and laughed before she shook her head: “Unfortunately, it seems that time has run out.”

“But...”

“There is no ‘but.’ Are we able to send a signal?”

“...The necromancers have used Black Magic and shrouded the streets with a spell. Only the Light and Dark elements can be utilized. Trying to use other Elements end up fizzling. We don’t have a priest or wizard in our group, and our strongest Elementalist is an Iron-ranked; he’s not able to use any magic at all.” He shook his head.

“How about Signalling Arrows?”

“Mouse said that stuff requires Elemental Mana.”

“Then we have to use our own means to buy some time for Lord Gaston.” She gritted her teeth once while she looked into the dark alleys before her.

“Commander?”

She wore a solemn look, taking a moment to herself before she raised her head and turned around. Her rapier was pointed to the right: “Everyone here, listen up! A certain someone has given an answer to us through the biggest way possible, but we have failed to answer in return. I am now giving you the order to advance to the west gate. Either we stop the damned undead here, or they can walk past us by stepping over our dead bodies!”

The large street was silent for a moment, with Jana’s strict order echoing for several moments. Everyone stopped what they were doing as they looked at their commander.

“Answer me, are there any cowards in my army?”

“There are none!” The mercenaries raised their weapons and roared.

“Commander, why would you do this much for a noble—” The boy said through clenched teeth.

Jana laughed again and patted the boy’s head, while she got closer to his ear and whispered:

“Little boy, I know more about nobles than you do. If that young man is truly a proper noble, he wouldn’t have killed Graudin. The rules between the nobles are sacrosanct, and no one has broken them for the past few centuries—”

She took a few steps back and looked at the moon.

“Regardless of who he is, our deals between him and I are concluded.”

The boy looked at her in shock.

===== Raban’s POV =====

The fierce battle continued in the south gate. With the Firebrand’s commander careful watch, the mercenaries kept up a rhythmical approach of engaging the undead carefully, losing almost none of their own.

The battle in the darkness repeatedly continued as though it was never going to end. Everyone was exhausted. Before their eyes were countless skeletons and undead creatures stacked up like a small hill.

The defensive line was maintained at the gates.

The earlier destruction from Brendel’s sword had caused a considerable amount of damage to the nearby city walls. The majority of the mercenaries were Iron-ranked fighters, and barely held up against the assault by limiting the number of undead that was able to enter the city.

In truth, the mercenaries were willing to sacrifice as many bodies as possible to prevent the undead from entering the city before them. One could hardly describe this as a battle, but a bone grinder that crushed and cut the skeletons into tiny bits every time they entered.

Both commanders continued to send their forces to contest this hole mercilessly. However, the necromancers had unlimited stakes to gamble their troops with, and they continued to send countless attempts to break through a victory on the table.

It was one of the reasons why the living feared the undead—

“Crossbowmen, ready yourselves—”

“Reload your blunt bolts—”

One of the squadron’s captain took up the position of calling the timings for the ranged mercenaries on the walls. The veteran men once again pulled upon their bottles of Blessed water and poured them all over their bundles of crossbow bolts. They felt somewhat pained and reluctant to do so, as they rarely spent this much coin to use in a normal battle.

“Aim—”

They raised their fortified crossbows and aimed at the skeletons marching in droves into the hole.

“Fire!”

Sharp twangs resounded in a single moment, and the whistling bolts seemed to form an invisible barrier, striking the skeletons down and turned into ashes with burning flames.

Raban was nearby that hole, crushing a skeleton below with his feet. He carried his greatsword shoulder with one hand. He had just swapped the first squadron of exhausted mercenaries with the second squadron. He quickly barked out his next order and ordered a few sellswords to bring down the injured men from the city walls. The battle was slow and unending, just like the battles he had experienced in Karsuk.

He did not waver against the endless number of undead, knowing quite well what he was capable of, as well as knowing what Madara’s undead was capable of.

When the pillar of light shot into the sky, he laughed heartily: “A noble killing another noble. It seems like I received an appropriate compensation. It’s the first time I have seen them kill each other than poison or assassinations or political scheming. This young man is more than a brute that I expected.”

“What things are these nobles not capable of?” His adjutant replied.

Raban cast an amused glance at him.

“You don’t understand,” he said before he put his focus back onto the battlefield: “How long more?”

“Thirty minutes.”

Raban raised his hand: “Go and make sure to place our Warflags higher. After this wave of undead, the necromancers will be coming out. Since that brutish noble has given me an answer, I need to have a reply ready as well.”

“Dawn...” The commander of Firebrand’s mercenary looked out to the horizons: “It’s coming soon enough. That’s the completion of the Head’s first order.”

“Head?”

“Let’s call him by that title,” Raban muttered to himself.

Chapter 165

Gambler's roulette (2)

Brendel had brought out an incredibly large map which had dust gathering on it from the secret basement and returned to manor's hall. He placed it onto to a long table. All his subordinates were beside him, while Cornelius's mercenaries shuffled in and out.

When the map was fully extended out onto the table, everyone gave an impressed sigh.

"My lord, how did you know that horrible man has a secret basement and map?" Dia asked while she cast furtive glances at her older sister. It was fortunate that the latter did not get angry at her and only received an exasperated glare.

Felaern was truthfully not feeling well. When Brendel became an Elementalist, she felt her world crashing before her very eyes.

The once arrogant Graudin was now lying outside the manor's courtyard. There was perhaps some use for his body in the future. The mercenaries were flushing out the remaining enemies and to report any traces of Iamas. Brendel was certain that he had completely left the city.

[He's not one to stay behind and vent his anger or create trouble to get revenge on me. That's his habit. If it's the Red Knight Ladios, then that might happen. The reason why Iamas is so hard to deal with is that his nature always avoided putting himself into a dangerous position. It's hard to latch onto his mistakes.]

"Most nobles have similar habits, Dia," Brendel answered as he thought about the overall situation. "But this thing might not be Graudin's handiwork. I suspect he has no real wish to govern this region."

His mixed his words with half-truths. Nobles' habits had nothing to do with hidden basements and maps. The only truth here was how he knew gamers turned this place upside-down by overthrowing Graudin.

He took a few moments to study the map and concluded that it was not from Graudin, but generations before him who designed and built Firburh.

“This map has decades behind it,” Ciel coughed a few times from the dust. He looked at it with a frown: “Does that stupid fool not care about his land? In the Black Tower’s region, the Wizards would redraw a map every year.”

Brendel nearly snorted with laughter. Trenheim was the most barbaric region and furthest away at Aouine’s borders. The citizens here were clearly not wizards.

“In this era, it’s quite common for a small city to reuse their maps for several decades. It’s good enough to rely on it as a guide, and we don’t need a detailed map.”

“In this era?” Ciel looked at him strangely.

“It’s a lisp.” Brendel glared at him: “You have a problem?”

“No,” The young wizard hurriedly shook his head: “It’s just the moment my Lord speak that few words, I felt a heavy sense of richness like I have experienced history before my very eyes. I feel like my Lord has somehow stood at a very high place, almost like a God of War, no, truly a God of War.”

The corners of Brendel’s eyes twitched while the corners of his lips stiffened: “Cut the crap out.”

He suddenly thought of something and turned towards the older Elementalist sister: “Ah, lucky babe... no, I mean, Felaern, where are the equipment I asked you to sort out?”

“Yes?” She answered like she was in a stupor before she asked back: “What?”

“Clearing up the battlefield?”

“Oh,” Felaern answered after a short pause: “You mean that Skeleton Lord? I found something strange on him, and I wanted to ask my Lord about it—”

[Something strange? Kabias is a high-level general. There should be goodies from him.]

There were many odd types of equipment in the game, and Fantasy-ranked artifacts were almost deemed as ‘Mini Cheats’. His ears perked up in curiosity, but Cornelius walked in with a forehead full of perspiration, alongside with Alistair in his dark green robe fluttering urgently from his large strides. Brendel immediately raised his hand

up and stopped Felaern from speaking.

“Are you ready?” He asked in a hasty tone.

“We are ready, my lord, we can proceed to move any time—” Cornelius eyed him carefully and answered.

His words were like a signal. Brendel’s men stood up with their weapons ready. Scarlett who had been talking to Sifrid all this time stood up and patted the latter’s head.

“Then let’s move out! I’ll leave you to aid Raban, Ser Cornelius. I’ll have Medissa aid you too. Do you have any news of the west gate?”

Medissa nodded to Cornelius when she heard his order.

But the silver-haired middle-aged man frowned and shook his head: “We have been looking out for a signal, but there still isn’t any news. I have sent scouts to contact them, but I don’t believe they will be able to report back soon.”

“There’s no time for that,” Brendel shook his head: “We have to set out immediately.”

“My lord, I understand Jana well enough. Even if she did not reach the west gate in time, she would definitely choose to delay the Madara’s undead. My lord, there’s no need for you to worry—”

“Pointless. They won’t be able to hold it. I understand Madara’s tactics far better than you do. One has to guard against them with a fortified position. Under the sea of skeletons, three hundred mercenaries are nothing more than a rock thrown into the sea. They will be wiped out almost instantly.”

His hands laid on the table as he studied the map quickly: “And that’s not counting in the Dark Warriors and Necromancers.”

He straightened up and took up Scarlett’s longsword: “The only thing we can do is to set out immediately. We can only hope that Miss Jana is able to reach the west gate in time, or else we have one real ending—”

While everyone glanced at each other, Brendel already left his seat and went outside. His men left one by one after watching his back for a few seconds.

“So the worst outcome for you, my Lord, is to give up on Firburh, right?” Ciel quickly ran out and walked beside Brendel, keeping pace with his quick strides.

“What have you thought of?” Brendel looked at him with a raised eyebrow.

“I’m just thinking about how my Lord is as bold as before—

Brendel’s teeth were shown slightly when he gave a smile.

“The price for Graudin’s head is too high,” he said: “Thus I have to choose the most rewarding choice in order not to lose out. The risk is certainly too high, but like I said before, would a dead man care if one or two nooses were tied around his neck?”

“You are right, but I now realize that my Lord is indeed a great match for Miss Romaine.”

“My lord?” Cornelius who also followed him was confused over how the direction of the conversation went to.

“To be clear, Ciel is right about his guess.” Brendel nodded: “It doesn’t end with Graudin’s death, I’m also going to usurp Trentheim’s ownership. Count Randner is going to take revenge for his son; then I’m going to take his lands in return. Victory doesn’t rely on strength alone; wisdom is also part of it— After all, is there a rule that says a newly promoted noble is allowed to have one piece of land?” He said.

[No one can defeat the future after all—]

Brendel’s smile at Cornelius was so wide that his eyes were half-closed: “What do you think, Ser Cornelius?”

The handsome middle-aged man looked at him with his eyes shrinking to the size of a dot.

[Is this young man crazy! He’s challenging this old kingdom’s traditions and mocking the rules between the nobles! Marsha above!]

He lowered his head and dared not answer. If the youth actually succeeded he would have overturned everything about Aouine. The other possibility was this; he was insane.

Ciel had other thoughts. “But the risk does appear to be big. The undead is right outside the city. If you give up on Firburh, then you would have lost the reason to usurp Trentheim. What exactly do you plan to do, my lord? Are you going to prepare yourself by retreating to the forest and attack as threats come alone? Ah, what was did my Lord mentioned about something the previous time?”

[Is Firburh able to hold on against the undead...?]

Brendel walked through the manor’s square and to the large arched gate. It was still dark, but dawn was about to break. The sun was going to be up soon.

“Homo proponit, sed Deus disponit.” Brendel said: “Since we chose to gamble, we should calmly enjoy the thrill that comes along with it—”

“As for performing guerrilla tactics in the forest,” he said: “Don’t worry, I studied under some of the finest Grandmasters.”

Chapter 166

Gambler's Roulette (3)

"I'm not seeing any enemies."

"The left street has no enemies too."

"This alley has none of the damned skeletons either!" The yell echoed in the empty street.

Jana's anxious eyes glinted under the dim light. Her fingers were on her rapier; her doubts in her heart were growing so deeply that she felt she was drowning. Everyone was under the same state as they searched around the streets for the undead.

When the mercenaries did not discover their presence, they regrouped and advanced in the darkness. Their hurried footsteps were not curtailed and shuffled against the soil loudly. Under the unknown presence that threatened to lurk at every corner, they felt a chill entering their soul. Fear gripped their throats as every shadow in the vicinity seemed to move.

They strained their ears to listen for the faintest hint of noise, afraid that the undead would suddenly gush out from a random alley and surround them completely.

They crossed than half of the distance required to go to the west gate and found nothing. The undead supposedly overwhelming the city was not there.

[Did that young noble judge wrongly?]

The scrawny boy was recently recruited by Jana, and he still had signs of malnourished because of his previous impoverished life. His face held a terrible pallor, mostly because of the terrible atmosphere around him.

"Commander?" The boy said.

"What is it?"

“Has that noble judged wrongly? Is the undead moving towards the north instead?”

“Impossible,” Jana immediately rejected this suggestion: “Timing is everything in a war, and undead commanders are not fools.”

“But...” The boy wanted to say more, but he was interrupted a shout.

“Commander, we found something.” One of the mercenaries ahead of them shouted: “Come over and take a look!”

Jana exchanged glances with the boy before she nodded and ran over. When she got onto the crossroads, she was stunned—

The entire road had turned into something unrecognizable, and skeletons and human bodies were found everywhere.

It was as if a terrible battle had happened there. When she looked into the distance, there were almost no stone tiles that were intact. The pavements were filled with large holes as though they had been dug out. Boulders were strewn all over the ground, and the nearby buildings were smashed full of holes as though something huge had gone through it.

Some of them looked lopsided as though the ground had sunk; when she looked closer, she discovered wooden splinters leading to smashed wooden supports destroyed with a single punch each. The damage appeared to have been caused by a Silver-ranked fighter.

If it was not for the fact that they were unable to find even a trace of the Element powers disrupting the mana in the vicinity, they would have thought it was a situation where two Golden-ranked fighters fought each other.

“Who are these people?”

When she looked at them, she discovered their clothes were no different from the citizens living outside the city, but it did not explain the destroyed skeletons. She briefly counted the number of skeletons to a body.

It was in the ratio five to one.

[If this ratio is right, that would mean the citizens have a ridiculous amount of fighting

prowess. How is it possible for Graudin to live until this day?]

The mercenaries were shaking their heads in disbelief.

“Do you see their weapons?” She suddenly realized something odd.

“We didn’t find any,” said the mercenary who shouted earlier.

“You didn’t find any?” Jana took a deep breath: “Are you trying to tell me these humans used their bare fists to fight with the undead? Are you telling me these citizens are from the Silver Lineage?”

“Commander, I’m not sure if you are joking by that last remark, but the armors’ dents on the skeletons looked like they are smashed by fists—” He said in a small voice.

Jana’s eyes narrowed. The events that happened tonight were a little out of her understanding. Before long, they heard a few sets of horse hooves cantering in the street. Three riders dashed through the swirling fog. The scouts sent out earlier by her had returned.

“What did you discover at the city gates?” She broke off from her thoughts and asked.

“Commander,” the rider greeted her before he answered: “There is a fight breaking out at the city gates between what looks to be undead skeletons and humans.”

[[[What?! Are you trying to say the city’s citizens managed to push back the undead?]]]]

The mercenaries who heard this answer glanced at each other and had this thought in their mind.

===== Amandina’s POV =====

A light in the dark felt like it represented hope. Even though it was nothing more than an illusion in their minds, people were still willing to walk forward towards the light.

A fire torch was flickering in the darkness.

A young woman was kneeling on her knees in front of the light. The red hue emitted from it colored her cheeks and body. In the midst of the unsteady intensity of the brightness when it flickered, the beautiful lines of her body were repeatedly drawn.

Her lips were pursed together with a relaxed expression, and she placed both her hands on her knees without moving a muscle. Her black eyes seemed to have a light dancing in them as the fire burned unsteadily.

The sights before her eyes did not affect her at all as if she cared nothing about them.

A tremendous bang echoed in front of her. Three impossibly huge vines which needed two men to hug it emerged violently from the ground, bringing stone fragments and soil up in the air, before they whipped across the gleaming white skeletons in the darkness.

The ten-odd meters long vines easily crushed and swept across the sea of skeletons, causing a cacophony of cracking noises as the crushed skeletons were knocked high up into the air before it smashed onto the ground.

Three tall, stoic men who wore long animal hides covering their backs stood on the city wall commanded the vines. They cleared the skeletons which kept rushing in repeatedly like they were sweeping away snow. Standing near them were even taller figures with slightly hunched bodies. They were transformed Lycanthropes and stared at the sea of undead with their gleaming pupils, ready to fight off any Dark Warriors and Necromancers lurking nearby.

The battle had already lasted a full hour—

“Miss Amandina, it seems there are ally reinforcements from the city.” A gigantic Lycanthrope walked over with surprisingly stealthy footsteps and bowed to her. “They appear to be mercenaries.”

She got up and looked down from the city walls. She nodded after a moment and glanced at Romaine who was clutching her precious bag. Half her body was lying against a battlement as she slept soundly. She would have appeared quite a charming lady if it was not her drooling and half opened mouth and mutterings from her dreams.

Amandina walked over with a sigh and patted her cheeks.

Romaine immediately made a face and made a loud sound of displeasure with her tongue, waving her hands with small protests of complaints: “If you wish to kill Romaine, please wait till I’m done with my sleep—”

Amandina suddenly felt she needed to lie down, but not for the reason of being

fatigued.

“Romaine.”

“Yes, yes,” She frowned with her eyebrows as she spoke in her dreams: “Get your queue number, next—”

When Amandina finally brought Romaine over, she found the female commander Jana in a grimace.

The latter was observing the Lycanthropes and Druids suppressing the undead with considerable ease.

Even if her mercenaries did not come, the results in the west gate would not change. Their strange appearances had led them to wonder what exactly they were and whether they worked for the young noble. If they were, did it mean that he had never trusted her in the first place?

[Perhaps that youth had also made countermeasures for Raban as well?]

She inhaled with displeasure. Even though she knew it was a common thing to do, she felt a sliver of discomfort. It was as if her determination to risk her life was denied by someone else. Despite her maturity, she had looked forward to achieving a miracle after witnessing the proof that the youth had killed Graudin. Her band of mercenaries thought the same way.

In this chaotic region, she and her mercenaries led a nomadic life. She had hoped that the young man was someone worth following, and at least allowed her followers to feel like they could swear loyalty to.

[He’s just like them. No matter how outstanding he appears to be, he’s only looking at us like pieces on a chessboard. He doesn’t trust us and sent additional forces to guard against the undead.]

Jana swung her hair back to her ears and looked silently at Amandina. The latter returned her gaze and stood calmly with showing any signs of being intimidated. For some strange reason, she found Jana and her mercenaries was staring oddly at her and the men here. She quickly came to a conclusion on what had transpired between Brendel and the mercenaries.

“May I know who you are?” Amandina was the first to speak.

Jana felt like she was being suppressed even though the person in front of her was much younger.

[Another damned aristocrat wench.]

“Jana, commander of the Mountain Swallows Company. We are sent here by Lord Gaston’s order, and who might you be, little girl?” She asked with a ridiculing tone, despite knowing who the girl possibly was.

Amandina’s expressions did not change, although she was smirking in her mind.

“I am also Lord Gaston’s subordinate. To be exact, I’m his chief advisor.” She said, and extended out a hand: “This is Lady Romaine, Lord Gaston’s fiancée.”

The merchant girl yawned as she rubbed her eyes sleepily.

A streak of disgust and disappointment flashed in Jana’s eyes. Amandina did not miss her expressions, and she felt the same feeling in her own heart.

“Although, I wish to be clear,” Amandina’s expression turned cold, her voice with slight disdain creeping in: “I might have introduced myself as his advisor, but that does not mean I agree with his methods. Tell Lord Gaston this, miss Jana, if he thinks he can avoid hurting others by acting on his own, he should cast off that naivety. I don’t know what he’s trying to become, but a hero isn’t a saint who doesn’t commit mistakes, but one who takes up responsibility!

Even if he chooses to commit a mistake, he carries not only his life but our hopes and love for him as well. I might respect his choice today, but I will never forgive the act where he abandoned his subordinates— Finally, tell him in this world, freedom, and hope cannot be obtained without going to war and shedding blood.”

The Lycanthropes who had impossibly sharp ears of hearing turned towards Amandina with emotional gazes.

Jana looked at the Lycanthropes who reacted strangely before she asked: “What does that mean?”

Amandina did not reply.

Jana cast her gaze at Romaine for answers, but the latter merely smiled sweetly in response.

“Erm Miss J—, *whatsyournameagain...*” Romaine muttered under her breath before she continued: “Miss Dame, may I ask if you have Magic Signalling arrows?”

The corners of Jana’s eyes twitched.

===== Brendel’s POV =====

A signal rose from the west gate. The bright fire from the arrow sailed across the sky and lit up the city brightly.

Brendel and his men stopped running when they saw it. The light felt almost like a congratulatory note, informing them they had won.

Brendel sighed heavily.

[If I’m a gambler, then I must be one of the luckiest one around. The roulette has stopped and pointed to the biggest door possible to the future. The fact that the west gate is held means that the Viridien Village has set out to defend it. Since the Lycanthropes didn’t go looking for Sifrid, it must have been Amandina or Romaine’s idea to guard the west gate. Perhaps somewhere along the way, they probably spotted the undead moving... Regardless of how it came to this conclusion, I have won the day.]

He did not know what the future lied beyond that door, or at least he could not see that far ahead, but the chess piece he placed down had survived Graudin and Madara’s resistance.

“My lord, does this mean Dawn is finally here?” Ciel asked with a smile.

“No, not yet,” Brendel shook his head while he looked at the light: “But— I can finally see Firburh’s ending.”



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