

"Normal speech"

'Thought'

(Silent magic)

[Normal magic]

{Change of location, time or POV}

Not gonna lie guys, I am a day late only because of Renner, that little devil... I just couldn't figure out her POV for the life of me, I think I rewrote most of it like 3 times... it has been a while since I had such a hard time with one POV.

Oh well, it is done now.

Without further ado, I leave you to the chapter!

Chapter 104: Rearranging the Chessboard

Renner stared daggers at her beloved, not that she was mad at him for the most part, but, for the first time in her life, she could not figure out his angle. She had no idea of why he had decided to take over these lands, nor did she understand why he didn't simply exterminate the demi-humans.

She very much doubted it was due to Lakyus' presence. Satoru was one to indulge and endorse her, that was for sure, but he would still do things his way regardless of anyone's opinion, unless they could present a better alternative, which was seldom the case.

She didn't like this, she didn't like this at all. There was something she was missing, and her Satoru has not been forthcoming with it.

not that she asked directly, she really didn't want to come across as lagging behind... would he think less of her for it? for all she knew the answer to that was no, as Satoru was too gentle a being for that, she still could not help herself but refrain from admitting her deficiencies.

She looked on, trying to push such thoughts out of her mind, as her first and only friend energetically discussed with these Zern things they now had an alliance with.

Renner has never been one to judge from appearances, though, among all the demi-humans she encountered, these were certainly the most physically unpleasant to look at. Insects never bothered her much, but there was something about seeing one larger than her that quite unnerved her instinctively. Though, Lakyus didn't seem to share her feelings seeing how eagerly she engaged in cultural exchange with them. It was indeed a lucky thing that they could hardly read human expressions seeing how Lakyus was hardly managing to keep in her laughter every time one of them introduced themselves. Apparently, the girl found their naming convention particularly hilarious even though Renner could not understand why.

She was honestly bored out of her mind. Lakyus was busy being... well, Lakyus. And Satoru was still organizing with these demi-human rulers, something she might have been helped him with, if only she knew what he wanted to begin with.

The princess of Re-Estize moved away from her tent. Normally a young girl such as her should not move alone through a camp of unscrupulous soldiers, but she wasn't just any young girl she was Renner, third princess of Re-Estize, no one would even dare breath in her direction. And in the worst case scenario, she always

had her beloved's gifts protecting her wherever she was, a true token of his love for her, which she sported with great delight.

The camp was utterly unremarkable, as she expected. Though, before she could resign herself to a boring afternoon, something caught her attention.

Two figures standing against each other not far from the camp, as she neared their battlefield, she recognized one as Riyuro, the former king of the Quagoa, while the other was an unknown blonde boy similar in age to Lakyus. The boy was panting and bruised all over. Quite the contrast to the Quagoa, who just seemed untouched by it all and completely unbothered.

“Give it up boy, you are getting nowhere with this.”

The mole demi-human said backhanding the boy and sending him to the ground without even putting much effort into it, Renner would know, she saw the same demi-human fight dozens of times by now, and it was clear he wasn't serious in the slightest.

“Your movements are pretty good, and you know how to handle that blade of yours... but, your lack of speed and strength make all that effort go down the drain immediately.”

The demi-human said as he groomed his fur with his claws.

“You asked if you will ever be able to beat someone like me... the answer is no, I can see the effort you put into bettering yourself... but if after all that effort, you are still so weak, it just proves you are not cut for a life of battles.”

The former king continued before moving away from the scene, sparing Renner just a glance but without addressing her, which fit her just fine, this was Lakyus' friend after all.

She was about to leave the scene when something caught her attention. The boy... the boy was crying, but not any crying due to pain or sadness, that was not the expression someone in pain or sad made.

That... that was the face of someone who was ready to murder anyone in their way, that twisted expression of mad rage. She would normally not bother at all... but she was bored, and this turn was intriguing enough to entertain her for an afternoon.

She slowly moved toward the boy on his hand and knees before kneeling to his level.

“You should have those bruises seen to avoid any kind of infection... I can see to it, Gods only know I am used to it by now.”

Those cerulean eyes snapped in her direction like a gazelle that just spotted a lion.

“You... you are...”

The boy clearly was observant enough to recognize her at first sight, which wasn't a too common occurrence outside the capital. Even more surprising considering she was wearing Satoru's gifts which, while certainly powerful, were not nearly elaborated or decorated as much as her royal robes. Something which she actually preferred since they gave her far more mobility to use her hidden blade if needed.

“It seems like you needed a hand there... I know some of Lakys' friends can be pretty rough but-“

“You can drop the act.”

The boy spat out actually stopping Renner in her tracks, leaving her speechless for a moment, something that didn't happen in quite a while.

“Pardon?”

She managed to ask on autopilot, as no one ever called her out in such a direct manner before.

“I can see it in your eyes... I saw too many dead people's eyes to ever mistaken that empty gaze... you don't actually give a damn about me, so spare me your fake concern!”

Well, well... color her more than intrigued now... this one was no ordinary peasant.

“Is that the way you talk to a Royal Princess?”

She pushed, switching up her act to see if the boy was indeed an oddity or someone worth keeping an eye on.

“Spare me your bullshit... I saw real contempt and the look of those who really look at you like a cockroach... you don't give a damn about how I talk to you.”

The boy did not lose his venomous tone.

Really a mad one, gambling with his life like this... she was fascinated by the oddball she had just come across. Truly a singularity, there were few who could read through her acts, and most of them came to the conclusion after an extended observation of her.

This one... figured her out immediately.

“Uhm... you intrigue me, come... I wish to speak with you more.”

She stood up, turning away without waiting for him to even move.

“Why... why should I even listen to you?”

Oh? Maybe not as smart as she thought. He may have good observation skills, but he certainly possessed a terrible survival instinct.

“Well, two main reasons come to mind, first, I could have you killed with a few words... second, you should never pass up the chance of expanding your social network, you never know when a good chance might present itself... and third, even if I am not concerned about your wounds, that doesn’t change the fact they must be looked after.”

She answered without turning, though, she didn’t miss the sound of rustling nor the sound of limping footsteps following behind her.

“It seems like you have come to your senses, little mice.”

Her provocation was only answered by a grumble.

She smiled.

She could work with this.

An intriguing afternoon awaited her.

{Neia’s P.O.V.}

It was Neia’s turn to stand as a bodyguard for her Master... she doubted she would ever get used to thinking of the magic caster as that with the same nonchalance her colleagues used.

She tried not to squirm in place, she kind of felt a bit naked in such a thin... and tight armor. As a squire she got used to seeing bulky and heavy armors, even wearing some lighter variants

during the war. This one, made her feel kind of naked, even though it was no different from what the triplet of assassins wore.

Another thing she would need to get used to... a trend of her life as of late.

“Neia, my seal if you would...”

She was brought back to reality by the calling of her name from the dark robed magic caster who just presented her his gloved empty hand.

The blond newbie assassin immediately darted for the cabinet inside the tent to retrieve what was requested. She immediately brought the implement to her Lord who used it to stamp the document and its copies before offering one each to the demi-human rulers sitting?... laying, in front of him.

Her Master’s seal was quite strange but admittedly also cool looking in Neia’s eyes. It looked like a stylized dragon’s skull staring you down, but also, the central part of the skull from top to bottom looked almost like a sword, though Neia thought that it must have only been her imagination playing with the image as it would make no sense for a blade to be on the seal of a magic caster.

“As we agreed, the contract is sealed, all clauses included as previously discussed.”

The masked magic caster laid back on his seat. If Neia didn’t know any better, she would have thought him exhausted, but that could not possibly be the case for someone such as himself.

“We will mobilize immediately Lord Satoru, with no longer fearing scavenging for food even in the daylight, we will have many more of our kind to designate to the task you wish of us.”

Neia almost jumped in place as the black robed man snapped forward.

“That just won’t do then... to waste precious workforce on such mundane tasks... tell me, what do your kind eat?”

The caster asked, seemingly displeased at the notion of having some of the Zern and Pandex scavenge for food.

“We appreciate the concern, but my kind feeds mostly on specific plants and our own deceased.”

Neia could not help but flinch at that the explanation. It sounded.. vile, the bile in her stomach twisted as the memories she had tried to repress as nothing more than a nightmare resurged. She felt the ravenous hunger she had been subjected to in her captivity bite at her, as did the taste of flesh... the flesh of her comrades.

She felt like she could not breath, the stench, so disgustingly tempting assaulted her, her vision was blurring and she was starting to experience vertigo.

Someone grasped her shoulder with enough strength to seemingly ground her.

“Hang in there...”

She heard a familiar whisper reach her ear as she was dragged back while one of the twins took her place by the magic caster’s side.

She barely realized she was dragged out of the tent when she felt her knees give out and she felt herself fall on all fours violently hurling the content of her stomach right there on the ground. She continued to push out wave after wave of half-digested food left her body till she had nothing left. She left tears prick at the corner

of her eyes, her entire body shaking and she could almost hear that throaty laugh ring in her ears.

“He... is dead... he’s gone...” she tried to calm herself, taking deep breaths as her entire body shook less and less till only some spasmodic twitching remained.

She felt two arms wrap around her, helping her lay back in a sitting position.

“You are lucky you didn’t get any of it on your uniform, I was not going to help you there.”

The twin, that she now had enough mental capabilities to recognized as Tia, said as she kicked some dirt to cover the mess Neia just caused.

“So... what happened there, you were all fine, then all of a sudden you go as white as a corpse... had me and sister scared half to death for a moment.”

Somehow Neia very much doubted that last part since the assassin girl’s expression and tone didn’t change in the slightest from her usual one.

Though, she could not call her bullshit, as her jaw was clenched, fearing that the disgusting deluge would restart the moment she opened her mouth.

“Here, take some small sips.”

Neia’s eyes focused on the offered leather water flask, curtesy of the blonde assassin.

She accepted it in her hands and, with more difficulty than expected, managed to slightly open her mouth. Reassured by the fact nothing else came out she slowly brought the flask to her lips

taking a small sip of water. Even though the water could hardly be called fresh, it was enough to wash away the terrible taste in her mouth, prompting her to take another sip to help her along.

“So... mind telling me what all that was about?”

The former squire averted her gaze, this was not something she wished to talk about, she would rather forget it all or simply remember it as a nightmare.

“Why do you care...”

Her throaty response made her words sound harsher than they were really meant to be.

She felt a hand grab her face and fix her in place as she felt a cloth cleaning her lips and drag away her sweat.

“Stay still... you are in training now, a fourth sister... the youngest one and adopted, of course.”

She felt something warm blossom inside her. Neia never had any siblings, something between her father and mother never worked out after she was born, maybe it was natural, or maybe she was the cause. Nonetheless, she never imagined someone would ever consider her a sister, even less any of those three assassins.

“I don’t know how I should take that.”

The sandy blonde said honestly as Tia finished cleaning off her face.

“Well, that is a good thing, it means we didn’t have to kick each other while sharing a womb... and, most importantly, we don’t share the same piece of shit of a mother.”

For once Neia thought she heard the girl’s tone shift from her usual monotone to something with a darker edge to it.

“My mother... wasn’t that great too...”

Neia had no idea why she felt compelled to say that, but she did nonetheless and it felt good to finally say it aloud. Everything told her that speaking ill of the dead was unbecoming of her, but that was probably her paladin training talking. That version of her died in that tent with Buser, now she was an assassin, or one in training at least.

“See, sisters from two different shitty mothers.”

Tia said patting her head. It was such a small gesture, the kind of which she received countless times from her father, but still, she could not help but feel safe.

“I... I ate another human being...”

Neia admitted in a whisper. There! She said it! She admitted her greatest shame! Her deepest secret she didn’t even reveal to her father! Now... now for sure, she would be... she would be...

“Oh, that’s it?”

Neia didn’t even notice when her gaze fell to the ground, but those words made her head snap up and have her gaze meet the coral eyes of her self-proclaimed sister who was just looking at her without any judgment to be seen, her only show of emotion was the slight tilting of her head as if she was observing some curiosity.

“W-what do you mean... that’s it?...”

Neia found her voice, surely, she must have misheard or misunderstood something. It was impossible for someone to just dismiss something so... so... vile, like that!

“Don’t get me wrong, that’s pretty disgusting, but consider that me, Tina, and Tira had to hide inside a demi-human’s corpse for a whole day during our first mission... and there wasn’t anything else really to eat in there... yeah, that was nasty, wouldn’t you say?”

Even if delivered with her usual monotone, the scene those words depicted made Neia quite sick, so she tried to banish them from her mind.

“H-how do you live with that?”

She asked, genuinely curious, as Tia must have experienced that when she was even younger than her, possibly a child... that, that was not something you could get over.

“It’s because I am alive.”

Neia blinked at that explanation , noticing her confusion the blonde assassin continued her explanation.

“I lived through that... I survived that, I did not take my own life after that... I am strong... you... Neia, you are strong too.”

No one in her life ever told her that before.

Her? Strong? Two words that never seemed to belong in the same phrase, the blaze in her heart blossomed into a fire which managed to warm up her still aching body.

“Yes, I am alive... I... I am strong...”

She repeated as if in a trance and, it might just have been her imagination, but she could swear she saw those coral eyes soften for a moment.

“Now that I know your secret...”

Neia felt a slight tingle on her back as those words left Tia's lips. The assassin's body moving to give Neia her back while still looking at her, with a swift movement Tia's raised her loincloth, exposing her, admittedly large, bottom to the former squire.

"Feel free to eat me out whenever you want..."

Neia's felt all her body's blood surge to her face. She might not know what that meant exactly, but she could imagine given the context... a very perverse and dirty context...

But... weren't they having a moment right now?

That damn minx!

But... she was one of them now... yes! She should just bite back!

"O-oh? D-do you proposition your sisters often?"

Damn her stutter! She had clearly taken the girl aback given the fact her coral eyes went as wide as plates for a moment. She could only imagine the result if she had managed to deliver that with more confidence.

"Only the adopted ones..."

The girl rebutted turning around to face Neia once more before bowing down and bringing their faces closer as she used one finger to raise Neia's so the two could stare each other down directly.

"...and only the cute ones..."

Damn it! Neia was sure that her whole body was about to go limp from blood deprivation and her face would catch fire any moment now!

"What the hell are you two doing..."

The two were interrupted by a familiar monotone voice, prompting both of them to turn and meet the deadpan gaze of a very much not amused Tina.

“I was about to take this one’s purity... before you interrupted.”

Tia’s words as she released Neia almost made this last one faint.

“Really? Here in the open? You might be just as much of a freak as evil big sister.”

Tina rebutted making the blue assassin flip her the bird as a response.

“Unless you two plan to start stripping, we should reunite with the Master now.”

That caught both of the girls attention.

“Why?”

Tia asked.

“He said he was going to fix the demi-humans’ food problem.”

Tia and Tina shared a look that Neia did not understand at all.

“So, you think...”

“Yes, that might be the case.”

After that quick exchange between the sisters, Neia felt Tia’s hand wrap around her arm as she forced her up, dragging the stumbling squire right behind her with a strength the sandy blonde would have never attributed to the thin girl.

“So, this is the plants you usually eat?”

They arrived just in time to see the dark magic caster inquire as one of the demi-humans handed him some greenery.

“Then, it should be no problem...”

The Marquis of the east said as he threw the plants on the ground, though, before they could touch the ground a light blue magic circle appeared under them and then...

Neia had no actual words to describe what happened as the earth seemed to rise up as if some enormous creature was trying to break through from underground. It took her a moment to understand that was not at all what was happening... instead, a green hill was rising, a green hill composed of the very same plant her Master was handed a few seconds before. So tall that its shadow began to cover a considerable part of the camp.

Neia's jaw was hanging open. Since when was magic capable of such a thing? Why did farmers even farm at all? What was the point of producing anything if it could just be multiplied like that in an instant?

Then she remembered who was before her. A 6th tier magic caster of untold power... whose limits seemed to be boundless for, every time Neia thought she saw it all, he just turned around to prove her wrong.

The only thing that comforted her was the fact that everyone around them was just as shocked as she was.

“Well? Will this be enough for you to dedicate your entire workforce to the agreed goal?”

He turned toward a very much gawking group of demi-humans using the tone of someone who just did the bare minimum and asked if it was a satisfactory result.

Not for the first, and probably not the last, time Neia wondered what had possessed her former kingdom's rulers to make an enemy out of this being.

{The next day}

{Satoru's P.O.V.}

Satoru was in a pretty good mood all considered. They were on the move again after just a few days of negotiation and he had acquired his first, and probably most useful, demi-human vassals. The Goddess of Luck had truly shined his way with this one. He was just starting his campaign, and he already started working on his secret project, using time efficiently was one of his favorite things...

“So, Lord Satoru, may I ask a few questions on magic?”

The one to address him was none other than the Zern Prince lying in front of him on the moving carriage. This one was a strange case, a prodigy among his race, capable of using magic up to the 4th tier, and yet, every time he talked, Satoru could not help but feel like he was talking with Rayne, they even had a similar sounding voice. He had no idea if that thought was insulting for the human boy since he was comparing him with a larva-like heteromorph, but also a 4th tier caster larva-like heteromorph.

“Lord Beebeezee, I would be happy to answer your questions at the best of my abilities, though, forgive me for I have little to no knowledge on your kind's usage of magic, so anything I tell you might be only useful for human and humanoid creatures.”

And once again he used the sacred art of finding an excuse just in case he said something totally wrong or useless..

As a vassal, one of the clauses was for the Zern royalty to lose their Royal status, at least in foreign relations, after all he could not risk creating a scandal by using the royal address for someone who wasn't the King of Re-Estize, let alone a vassal. The same went for the Pandex, though, that really didn't mean much as the title of Grand Mother did not really translate to anything in human society, so it could be kept.

He gently stroked the golden locks of the princess currently taking a nap on his lap, after all, it was all thanks to her that he managed to avoid all these future problems. The usage of titles was something he really had no clue about, even after being made a noble, he mostly went with the flow, addressing others by the same honorific others already used.

He was just a simple Japanese salaryman. Addresses and noble status were more in the field belonging to someone like Punitto or even Ulbert.

“Please Prince Beebeezee, contain your tone, the younglings are resting.”

The Pandex ruler gently chastised the young prince who immediately apologized profusely.

He honestly didn't mind the pair. For all they were quite unpleasant to look at, these two and the Zern King might be some of the most reasonable and approachable beings he had encountered in this world. Something that made him wonder what that said about himself if he found such kinship with literal giant maggots.

He shook his head to disperse such utterly useless questioning and instead focused on the near future. The Zern King might have

remained behind to oversee the project, but he had assured Satoru that his son was perfectly capable of representing his race. The magic caster hoped so, as in a week or so they would reach the territory occupied by the alliance created for opposing the most belligerent races.

Between a bunch of demi-humans who wanted to devour their neighbors to extinction and a bunch who wanted to be left in peace, there was really no contest on which he should choose. At the very least, to avoid any future headaches if nothing else.

“I... I just wanted to ask how many years it took you to reach the 5th tier, and if you had any advices.”

His train of thought was interrupted by the question of the Zern prince, who had lowered the volume of his voice considerably after the Grand Mother’s scolding.

“Umu, it was... well, you should not really take me as an example, you see, I possess a Talent... a Talent that allows me to immediately learn and utilize any spell used on me, as long as I possess enough mana... so really, I might have studied magic a lot, but I did not nearly work as hard as others did.

No one spoke for a good minute, the only sound was the carriage moving across the land, their lack of facial expression made it impossible for him to see if they bought his excuse or if they were skeptical.

“Wow... that is quite amazing!”

The amethyst colored maggot whispered, sounding more like a giddy fangirl than a prince.

“In all my years and all my kind’s legends, we never heard of a Talent remotely similar to that... it must truly be a blessing of some kind.”

The Grand Mother added, seeming quite shocked by the revelation.

“It has indeed been a major factor in how my life has evolved so far... but if there is an advice even I can give, it would be that even with so many powerful spells at your disposal, what matters most is being capable of mastering the use of them... a higher tier spell might be a great advantage in a battle, but if the one using it is incompetent and is fighting someone who knows his fair share of spells, they might exhaust themselves without achieving anything of note... and a caster without mana is just a soldier without armor.”

He ended up giving some basic PvP advice. After all it was just common sense back in Yggdrasil, skill was what separated 10th tier spells spammers from the real PvP masters who actually could understand the game and not use the same combo over and over hoping it would work. Back in the days he had crushed many a fool who thought that creating a broken build was enough to achieve victory, without realizing that the so called broken builds were also the ones everyone knew everything about and learnt to counter easily while keeping their own trump cards hidden.

The game would not have survived as long as it did if creating a broken build was all you needed to dominate PvP, creating a repetitive environment with plenty mirror matches, like so many other MMORPGs before. For all the devs were shitty people, they had a stroke of genius when they made knowledge the key factor to victory instead of stats or abilities.

“I will keep your words to heart Lord Satoru, thank you for your wisdom... I will endeavor to master my spells and learn more before trying to push for the next tier.”

The undead nodded in the direction of the prince who indeed seemed to have taken his words as an advice to be treasured.

“You remind me greatly of one of my apprentices Lord Beebeezee, I am sure you will grow to be a fine ruler, and even a finer caster.”

The maggot seemed to inflate at his words, like a child puffing up with pride.

“Your words honor me Lord Satoru, and I didn’t know you had apprentices under your guidance... I must say, I only heard one advice from you, and I am already quite envious of them for having such a teacher... I would very much like to meet them.”

Satoru mentally chuckled at the idea of the giant maggot meeting his apprentices. He didn’t know about Rayne, but he had the strange certainty that Arche would scream in fear at the sight of the Zern prince.

“Maybe some day...”

He said noncommittally to the prince.

“Now, I would really be interested in learning about the races we will be meeting, please give me all the information you have, no matter how inconsequential they might seem... you never know when something could turn out to be useful after all...”

{Ro-Lente}

{Hilma’s P.O.V.}

The young woman was working deep into the night, that was not anything unusual for her. She found out pretty early in life that the moments when she was more active were during the late afternoon and night, how much of that was due to her upbringing, she could not say.

But the fact was that she really wasn't feeling it as of late. Everything sounded like a chore far more bothersome than before, even though nothing had really changed. No, maybe her load had been even lightened due to Satoru leaving with his expedition and not needing her help in organizing it anymore.

Yet, she felt utterly exhausted all the time.

She was no fool, she knew exactly what her problem was, she had been left alone... something she had not been used to for years by now.

No matter what or how, she always had either Satoru or Evileye, or even both, by her side. Not helping her necessarily, but sharing a room, having their presence, it really made a difference, and she didn't notice till that presence was taken from her.

She couldn't wait for either of them to be done with their assignments and come back to her.

Wow... where did that come from? Was she turning in some kind of wife longing for her beloveds return? No, that was a bit much even for her, she was no wife material.

But everyone needed someone they could call friends in their life.

In the silence of this oppressive solitude she found herself wondering at times... wondering what would have become of her if Satoru never came to this world, if she never met Evileye... how would she have turned out?

Would she have become one of the Fingers? An utterly empty existence she had chased after for most of her life... would she have even been satisfied by such a worthless thing?

As depressing as it sounded, the answer to that was probably yes. For someone who never felt the rays of light caress their skin would never find themselves missing the sun in the first place.

But she had met her sun, and she would not be satisfied with living in a world without it. And if that meant working to bring down an ancient Dragon Lord and his little group of wannabe heroes... well, she would do what she musts.

She blinked a few times at the report she had just picked up from the pile.

It was not often she received a report from that Silviette girl that wasn't just a balance of their trading with the Lizardmen Alliance. The usual balance was there... but the girl had highlighted to her attention the fact the lizardmen had put in a bulk order for magic scrolls... and not any normal magic scrolls, the same ones they usually sent to the Draconic Kingdom.

Or, in other words, the lizardmen were preparing for something needed a lot of magic firepower.

It wasn't like she had any real reason to deny them, and they certainly would not try and attack the kingdom. That would be suicidal on its own even without Satoru, and they knew well the power of the masked undead.

So, the real question was, what were they after? And was this something she should bother Satoru with at the moment considering he had far more pressing matters to take care of?

Decisions, decisions...

A.N.

A bit of an assessment chapter. Got out of the way a large chunk of character development for some of them, now we are getting closer to what is the main conflict of the arc... or is it?

Kek, nothing much to say really, I once suffered a panic attack in my life, and I hope my portrayal and description through Neia was as impactful as I wanted it to be.

Tia best girl who loves girls?

And Renner and Climb finally met, on chapter 104... now we can finally start the main love story.

And yes, the English dub voice of Beebeezee is similar to what I imagine Rayne sounding like if anyone wondered.

Well, nothing else to say, every comment / review will be greatly appreciated as always.

Till next time! Stay safe!

PS: Hilma best housewife that will even file your taxes?