

"Normal speech"

'Thought'

(Silent magic)

[Normal magic]

{Change of location, time or POV}

**And we are back in this new year 2026! Happy new year everyone! I hope this will be as productive a year as 2025 was (writing wise of course, we don't wanna a repeat of 2025 in real life for sure...)**

**Not really much on my end if not that I am currently bashing my head to give a satisfying conclusion to a commissioned project I hinted at.**

**Well, enjoy!**

Chapter 93: Song of the Sky-Riders and the Black Rose (part 3)

Lakyus winced as the slightly older girl in front of her scowled in displeasure. Ever since they met, there had been some weird tension between the two, or at least Lakyus felt like that was the case. The scrutiny in those violet eyes reminded her a bit of Hilma's glare, which she suffered too many a time while she had been busting her ass in Satoru's shop. She couldn't say if that was due to the eye-color reminding her of the woman, or the intensity of in her look.

“So, for the sake of brevity, you have come here because you have... reason... to believe a certain legendary blade has been hidden for the gods only know how long in these lands?”

Lakyus did not miss the emphasis the young woman put on their motive. Well, it wasn't like the blonde could say that an old witch told her to do so... she had to come up with some random motive, like ancient maps found in weird places... maybe she should have left this to Arche, she was far better at improvisation.

“Well, that sounds like total nonsense to me, there is nothing to be found in this cursed land, begone and never return.”

Lakyus winced again, that was not the first time she heard that line and she was honestly getting more and more curious about why exactly they claimed this to be a cursed land. It was harsh for sure, but if they considered it so unpleasant, they certainly did not lack the means to leave it.

“Well, I guess the climate is not the best around here but the scenery certainly makes up for it, what is so bad about this place?”

She indulged her curiosity much to the chagrin of the black-haired woman.

“Mind your own business, your treasure is not here, so begone!”

Lakyus' right eye twitched at the harsh tone of the girl.

“Your hospitality is kind of lacking.”

She bit her tongue to avoid saying anything worst, this one was getting under her skin, which was kind of a hard thing to do if she could say so herself.

“One more reason for you to turn around and go back from whence you came.”

The black-haired young woman suggested with a smug look making Lakyus start fuming inside.

“I guess we will be on our way and out of your hair by tomorrow, continuing on our way, deeper in the mountain range.”

This time it was Kaelin’s turn to bite her tongue.

“Why should you? I told you there is nothing there.”

Kaelin seemed to be starting to lose her temper.

“Why shouldn’t I? As an adventurer the thrill of exploring the unknown is a given.”

This time around it was Lakyus dawning a smug smile as she got her opponent on the backfoot.

“I would advice you to rethink your actions.”

The stern tone did not deter Lakyus in the slightest, if anything, she knew she was onto something.

“I would advice you to better your hospitality.”

The face of the black-haired woman suddenly grew closer to Lakyus’.

“Go. Away. It is better for your and your friends’ safety to stay away.”

The dead serious tone of the older girl was a clear sign of this discussion being over.

Lakyus’ gaze hardened as she did not back down and instead brought her face right in front of Kaelin’s. Mere centimeters from each other, they kept glaring, none of them willing to step back.

“Kali!”

Before any of them could make a move the booming voice made them jump back from each other as a large figure flapped the tent open as they entered.

The man was tall, Lakyus could bet he was at least the same height as the Warrior Captain if not higher, a long and thick beard the likes she only saw in the Dwarven Kingdom decorated his face making his violet eyes shine ever brighter thanks to the contrast.

“Father!”

The black-haired young woman immediately greeted standing up from her seated position.

“I was just-“

She tried to continue only to be silenced by one glare from her father who then turned his piercing eyes on Lakyus who, in the meantime, stood up and approached the father-daughter duo.

“Hi sir, I am Lakyus, leader of the adventurer team Seven Own Goal.”

She greeted, offering her gloved hand to the man who remained silent and immovable.

“You need to leave.”

When he finally decided to speak it was brief and to the point. Lakyus would have grimaced if her previous experience had been any better.

“Sir, with all due respect, we will leave the next day and proceed further in the mountain range.”

The man stilled at her words, his eyes moving from Lakyus to his daughter who shook her head as if she wanted to convey a message.

“No, you will not.”

The man finally said.

“With all due respect, I don’t think you have the authority to decide that.”

Lakyus challenged again, she had not come so far just to turn tail and run.

“You were owed a life debt, I listened to you as you requested, and I deny the request.”

Lakyus really was starting to get annoyed. These ones were far too full of themselves for her liking. She was glad she had kept her blade outside, otherwise she might have been tempted to use it to make her next point crystal clear.

“Mine was no request, it was a fact.”

The blonde insisted taking a step closer and coming face to face, or it would be better to say, face to chest, with the older man. Their eyes interlocked in a glaring war.

Silence persisted as the two of them kept sizing up each other, not even blinking.

“Very well then.”

The man’s gruff voice sounded out, making Lakyus’ lips rise a tad in a satisfied smile.

“If you insist in your folly, I, the current Stormclaw of the Arashi Tribe challenge you to a Stormbound Trial!”

Lakyus blinked, all her previous satisfaction gone in an instant, blown away like dust in the wind.

“Huh?”

For all it went against all the noble lessons in her life, she could not help but answer that challenge with a confused mumble.

“We shall ride for the skies and finish this the old way.”

The man declared before marching out of the tent without any explanation, leaving a confused Lakyus behind.

{Vulmitar’s P.O.V.}

The frost dragon was laying down among the snow, he could hardly feel the cold and his father would probably turn back alive just to smack him if that was the case.

He was honestly just bored out of his mind. He would have liked to keep on studying that interesting book their master gave them before they departed. With his extremely large mana pool he was certainly the most adapt among the three of them for that type of magical reinforcement. And he wasn’t just boasting right now, even his two fellow casters said as such.

Normally, being hit by one of Arche’s fireballs directly would cause him serious damage if not shielded properly, but that thing she conjured when they were escaping? He could feel the scorching heat on his back when she conjured it, he was sure that just a couple of those would have him out of commission permanently.

The three of them had been also working on Rayne’s personal project on how to use magic without limiting the output to catalysts or hands. Something he did naturally and so was hard

for him to explain in a satisfactory manner. They were still making progresses nonetheless.

But all of that was a mute point since the two human casters where refusing to even cross eyes with each other.

He hardly understood humans sometimes. As a frost dragon he had no qualms with taking multiple mates. His was a race where power equaled attractiveness on both male and female sides. So, while he long ago understood Rayne and Arche had chosen each other as mates, he could also easily see why they would attract others with their promising and constantly growing power.

And yet, the mere interest of another in Rayne had Arche go on a rampage. Emotionally that is. Maybe his vision was just skewered though, with his father around he was used to seeing males taking on multiple females, he doubted his father would have been okay with other males approaching his wives.

But then again, there was a power imbalance in there as his father was certainly the strongest and had earned one of his wives through violent submission. On the other hand Rayne and Arche were fairly equal... so would that change once one of them took the lead in strength? For some reason he highly doubted that... the more he was around humans, the more he understood how much of their psychology had very little to do with strength and perceived power and much more to do with feelings and mood.

He was about to doze off when he felt someone calling his name.

Vulmitar whined as he opened one eye, his gaze meeting the nervously smiling face of their leader. He knew that face, she had somehow screwed up and dragged him into her mess.

“What have you done?”

He asked in resignation at his fate. The human girl blushed to the root of her hair in embarrassment at his disheartened tone.

“Hey! Why does it sound like you are accusing me of doing something?! Can’t I just be checking up on you?!”

The frost dragon did not dignify her outburst with an answer, limiting himself to continuing to stare at her.

“W-well... in this case something happened... but it wasn’t my fault!”

The girl got flustered at the admission prompting Vulmitar to huff as he stood from his prone position stretching the muscles in his limbs in a similar fashion to the animals humans called cats. The first time they made the comparison he felt curious to see what animal that was, only to be greatly disappointed and slightly offended later on, even though he himself could not deny the similarity.

“What’s going on boss?”

The Quagoa asked as the rest of their group approached the two of them.

“Ah... well...”

Lakyus seemed even more hesitant than before now that her whole team was present.

“I... got a bit carried away...”

The blonde started sheepishly.

“Augh! What did you do?”

Arche lamented as she massaged her forehead in preparation for a headache-inducing problem.

“Hey! I did nothing!”

The swordswoman went on the defensive, raising both her hands to symbolize her lack of intent.

“I very much doubt that.”

Rayne muttered under his breath loudly enough to be heard.

“Don’t be mean to Lady Lakys.”

The only adult human interjected in their leader’s defense.

“You pamper her too much, Leinas, one day that will come back to bite you in the ass.”

An annoyed Arche dismissed Leinas’ words with an elegant wave of her hand, a quite jarring contrast to the crude language used.

“I believe Lakys has her reasons.”

Zaryusu the lizardman tried to interject to smooth things over.

They all turned toward the blonde knight, waiting for an explanation.

“I... They were vehemently denying us passage in the inner parts of the mountain range... without an explanation... I insisted on the matter... till their leader challenged me to a duel over it.”

Their leader explained hesitantly and clearly embarrassed at the fumbled outcome.

“Well, that isn’t good.”

Even the usually optimistic lizardman had to backtrack at Lakys’ explanation, which said much since he was quite ready to go along with anything she said.

“I saw the guy when he arrived boss, let me deal with it, he stands no chance.”

As usual, Riyuro was the first to get in line when it comes to battling. Vulmitar was pretty sure his Quagoa blood was to blame for that, those rock-diggers have always been eager to use their claws.

“I don’t doubt that Riyuro, and I am glad for the offer, but this is not something I can leave to anyone else.”

Lakyus interjected finally getting back her usual confidence.

“For starters, I was challenged as a leader to a leader, it would be pretty bad-looking for me to send one of my companions, you know, looking like a coward... and also...”

The explanation seemed to pacify the rock-digger demi-human, though Vulmitar did not like the glances Lakyus was sending his way while she hesitated.

“The duel is a rite of theirs, we could say, the Stormbound Trial they call it... well, in short, it consists in a aerial duel between two riders and two wyverns... though, in my case, dragon would be more appropriate... if that is okay with you, of course, Vulmitar.”

The blonde knight admitted with renewed embarrassment at having dragged someone else in her mess. Though, Vulmitar might not be as battle-hungry as some of his sibling, nor as the former Quagoa king, but he was no coward either.

“Let us do this then, I shall show them why dragons are considered to be the rulers of the sky.”

His words were accompanied by him opening his wingspan to its maximum.

“Thanks, Vulmitar.”

Lakyus whispered loud enough for him to hear as she climbed atop him with the swiftness gained by doing it so often.

The dragon felt something warm forming in his chest at the very tender words and selfless gratitude emanated in every syllable.

For all he spent most of his time with Rayne and Arche, Lakyus remained the only one who could make him feel such tranquility and self-assurance. Foreign feelings that came to make his self-deprecation, envy, and suppressed rage look like things from a nearly forgotten past.

Rayne and Arche have made him feel right and accepted, validating his interests that have always been deemed foolish for his entire life. But it was Lakyus who drove away the whisper of inadequacy and weakness that cursed him for a hundred years, ever since he came in existence thinner and frailer than all his siblings. Lakyus was not one to judge based on appearances, nor one to hold a grudge even when he tried to kill her when they first met, that kindness was something he unknowingly came to wish to protect, not for any altruistic reason, but just because it was something he needed in his life and never realized it till the revelation of his newfound confidence and its source dawned on him.

So, when she asked him to fly with her and engage in glorious battle, he could only have one answer to give.

He turned around, marching toward the point where most of the tribe of wyvern riders was gathering.

“I see you have indeed come to face me, youngling.”

The man, who Vulmitar assumed to be the tribe’s chief, addressed Lakyus. The rest of the tribe had created a large circle around him, as if something was meant to occupy all that empty space.

A loud beating of winds, something breaking through the clouds as it obscured the sun as a darting shadow descended landing with fierce elegance behind the chief. Dark purple scales seemed to almost absorb the light of the sun rather than shine under it.

The beast was not particularly large, at least not to Vulmitar’s standards, it was still smaller than him, two thirds of his size if he had to estimate. Though, the fierceness in those crimson eyes was far too similar to the one in some of his siblings’ own eyes, and the calculating gaze they held was not dissimilar to his father’s when he didn’t let himself go to his draconic temper.

“Let’s get customs out of the way then... I am Kael, Stormclaw of the Arashi Tribe and rider of the mighty Nyxia.”

The man announced as the wyvern let out a roar as if to answer the introduction of her rider. Vulmitar narrowed his eyes, he did feel some kind of energy wash over him, did the roar have some type of power? He couldn’t say for sure as he did not feel any different than before.

He felt Lakyus reach for one of the protrusions on the back of his head as she stood up.

“I am Lakyus, knight of the third princess of Re-Estize, and my companion is the frost dragon Vulmitar.”

Silence ensued till the now named Kael mounted his wyvern.

“I am surprised you are familiar with our customs, this is the first time in our history that a foreigner is challenged to a Stormbound Trial.”

The man seemed almost impressed under his flat and serious tone. In response, Lakyus just waved her hands, clearly agitated by the man’s words.

“No! No! I am not really familiar! I just felt like it was the right thing to do since you introduced yourself and your companion!”

The man seemed almost taken aback by Lakyus’ honesty and spontaneousness. Vulmitar knew for a fact it was quite endearing. The man soon recomposed himself.

“I must say, I am surprised... I have heard of adventurers and their hatred for anything not human, to think you could understand the nature of my bond with Nyxia with no more than a glance is quite astonishing.”

This time around, the man seemed to legitimately compliment the blonde adventurer.

“Ah, it wasn’t hard, you two are completely at ease and complementary to each other... you just give me that vibe about your bond, I can tell you two must deeply care for each other, and consider yourselves equals... I understand that, half my group is made up of non-humans”

Lakyus responded. Even if he couldn’t see her, Vulmitar was pretty much sure the girl was slightly flustered at the compliment.

“You have a good eye adventurer, we have heard of your nations barbarism of enslaving other races, and I initially thought you were one such individual, but it seems I was mistaken.”

Oh, he went and did it. He touched that subject no one should ever touch around Lakyus... Vulmitar felt the grip of the girl tighten.

“That is a vile practice I would never indulge in! Every last of my friends and companions are willing members of my team! I might have an edge over Zaryusu, but Riyuro is a former demi-human king and could probably kick my ass to the kingdom and back, not to talk about Vulmitar, and I would deserve it if I even tried to do something as vile! We are just friends who chose to pursue a common goal!”

Vulmitar felt pride swell in his chest at the praise, for all he knew Lakyus could certainly hold her own even against him with that blade, he was glad she had such a great opinion of him.

Silence reigned in the snowy land for a good minute. The mna’s violet eyes scanning them both with great scrutiny.

“You are not what I expected, and I am glad of that... but still, I cannot let you go any further, regardless of your virtues.”

He finally spoke, clearly putting a final point to the exchange and returning to why they were here in the first place.

“Since you are a foreigner, I will explain the rules of the Trial... we shall battle across the skies... from the moment we leave the ground landing will be regarded as an admission of defeat... if one of the riders is knocked off their companion that will be an admission of defeat as well... no spell will be allowed during the Trial.”

The rules seemed quite straight forward to him. He felt quite confident in not being brought down, and he had confidence Lakyus could hold her own.

“I should also inform you that since I am the Stormclaw, a victory against me would mean the passage of the title to the victor, but since you are a foreigner, such a thing shall not happen... not that you stand a chance in the first place.”

Even through his thick beard, Vulmitar could imagine the smug expression the man produced at that last bit.

“Oh, thanks the gods! I certainly am glad of that...”

Lakyus answered, clearly relieved at the explanation. Vulmitar had heard of her debacle with the lizardmen and was sure Lakyus must feel glad she would not be put in such a position again.

With that last exchange the wyvern spread her wings and soared through the skies in a bolt of purple. For all Vulmitar felt assured in being superior in every other department, he would certainly need to look out for that speed of hers which might turn out to be troublesome.

Preparing himself mentally for battle, he spread his own wings and launched himself off the ground, soon managing to reach the same altitude as the purple wyvern which seemed to be waiting in place for them.

No more words were exchanged nor needed, with a roar the wyvern sped toward him. This one had guts, trying to ram a dragon larger than her. Vulmitar did not back down instead raising his front limbs and blocking the charging beast.

He felt the blow push him back and unbalance him for a moment. He would lie if he said he expected the wyvern to be this physically strong. Still, now that he blocked her with his claws, she was undefended and he intended to capitalize on her bold opening.

He opened his maw and let a wave of Frost Breath erupt right in the wyvern's face.

The purple beast howled in pain and rage as his enhanced breath tore through her scales, but instead of trying to get away as he expected, she instead pushed even more forward, her opened maw lashing toward Vulmitar's gullet, forcing him to interrupt his own attack and back off to avoid the snap of her jaw.

This one fought with reckless abandon, an equally advantageous and dangerous thing for him. Her disregard for defenses made his powerful hits easy to land, but if he wasn't careful he risked being completely overwhelmed by a blur of attacks that would easily tear through his not-so-great defenses.

"Everything okay?"

He heard the human atop him ask in a worried tone.

"Yes, but that was a close one... this one is dangerous, regardless of her size, her speed and brazen ferocity are a problem... but also her weak point."

Vulmitar muttered under his breath while observing his foe. The purple wyvern now had trickles of blood flowing down her muzzle, the result of tanking his Frost Breath. Though, to give her credit, the wyvern only seemed more enraged at the injuries rather than wary.

He ducked as one of those strange projectiles that looked like Leinas' lance but not really, passed over his head, curtesy of the tribe chief.

He had little time to react before he felt something sharp cut through his scales. Vulmitar grunted in pain as he tried to get away to no avail, the wyvern was already upon him with her unrelenting

claws. Luckily they could barely manage to pierce his scales making the damage to his actual flesh quite minimal and superficial, but if he gave her the chance to tear off some of his scales, he would be exposed to more severe injury, not counting that his eyes were naturally exposed.

“Damn it!”

He roared as he tried to push her away with another wave of Frost Breath, unfortunately, now that he wasn’t aiming at her face, the wyvern seemed content enough to keep going regardless of the injuries she was sustaining.

Oh, how much he wanted to shoot an Icelance right now! Or even use Invisibility and Silence! He had gone through the trouble of having Arche bring him book about those spells from the empire, and yet he was prohibited from using them!

His frustration was all it took for him to miss one of the claws of the beast, the next second he howled in pain as his vision in his left eye became foggy as pain shot through his skull.

“Stay away from him! [Dark Blade Mega Impact]!”

He heard Lakyus roar from atop him as a wave of darkness obscure the sun for an instant before the purple wyvern was sent flying back like a pigeon that got hit by a Magic Arrow. The hit was so powerful that the beast completely lost its aerial balance and started plummeting to the ground while spinning on itself.

The wyvern only managed to regain control halfway down toward the snowy ground, but Vulmitar knew it was already over. No matter how skilled, there was no way the human atop her could have latched to her through the fall. And, in fact, Vulmitar could see no trace of the tribe chief on the purple beast.

His eye hurt like hell, so it was a good thing this was over. Damn it! Why did he always have to be disadvantaged somehow?! If he could have used magic, the battle would have ended far sooner and he would have hardly been scratched.

It took him more than he would have liked to admit to notice that something was wrong. He expected Lakys to be jubilant, or at least vocalize their victory, but he could hear nothing, no, instead all he could feel was someone running on his back... no, there was more than one moving on his back!

Vulmitar's draconic eyes widened in realization at what probably happened while he was locked in that struggle with the wyvern. But there was no use now, he could do nothing to help Lakys, he just needed to believe in her capabilities.

The wyvern seemed to be of his own opinion seeing how she didn't move an inch from her position. But maybe that was also because he had shredded her claws and front with his Frost Breath, he doubted she could take much more of him before going down for good, even less after directly suffering Lakys' trump card.

{Lakys' P.O.V.}

She managed to avoid the lunge that would have skewered her by a hair.

This was madness!

She considered herself pretty damn brazen as a warrior, all her teachers said so one way or another, and yet, she would not have ever jumped off a flying wyvern to land on another flying beast and then stand up like nothing happened and proceed to impale the other rider!

And to top this all off, he was also damn good! To the point she was constantly on the defensive.

She blocked another slash of that weirdly shaped spear with her blade, the strength of the blow making her lose her balance. Though, she hardly blamed herself, seeing how she was not at all used to fighting on a moving terrain, while her opponent seemed to have no problem fighting as if this wasn't a weird situation which, in his case, might really not be the case.

She could have tried to even the scale by using her martial arts, but she risked injuring Vulmitar in the process, or even miscalculating her strength and speed and falling off.

It didn't help that her style of fighting was particularly weak to a lance-wielding opponent. Even with her constant sparring with Leinas, and developing strategies around it, she was still no match for a master of the art.

The man, Kael, jumped around and moved with the fluidity of a snake as he tried to probe her for an opening. And, she knew, that sooner or later he will find one capable of putting her in serious harm.

Lakyus gritted her teeth. She was no foreign to defeat, that much was for sure, nor was she resentful of those who managed to best her. But this was not a battle she could afford to lose!

An idea made its way to her mind, a very risky, mad, and completely dishonorable idea. But she could not afford to be picky! She could face judgment and the blow to her self-esteem later!

She slowly moved back, making sure to not give the man any openings as she retreated toward the head of her draconic friend.

“Vulmitar, I want you to open your mouth!”

She hoped she was close enough to be heard, the confused noise she received from the frost dragon was all she needed to hear.

“Just do it!”

She said as she swung her sword making the man step back and wait for a desperate last stand that would never come. Lakyus used that bluff to turn around and jump on Vulmitar’s head before slipping down inside his mouth.

She heard the frost dragon try to yell something but it came out as nonsense since, well, her inferior body was laying on his tongue.

“NOW SPIN!”

She yelled as she held as tight as she could to his muzzle. To his credit, Vulmitar immediately understood her plan and tightened his teeth just enough to block her in place and not bite into her before starting to spin his whole body.

The masculine scream that followed was the signal for the dragon to stop. Lakyus felt dizzy but she forced her eyes to focus, looking down at the falling man. As expected, the purple wyvern dived to try and reach her rider, something she managed without problems seeing how she was already halfway to the ground. But that was all she had to see before giving the final signal.

“Vulmitar! Now dive!”

The frost dragon did not hesitate, as he immediately tilted his body, aiming it directly at the wyvern and rider duo, gaining ever more speed thanks to gravity as he dived like a arrow toward its target.

Before the two below could even realize what was happening, Vulmitar was already upon them, using his four limbs to push the smaller wyvern downward much to the pained screams of this last one.

The purple beast tried futilely to stop the free fall by spreading her wings, but all she managed was just slowing the inevitable. As they neared the ground, Vulmiatr gave one final kick with all his limbs sending the wyvern slamming onto the snow below. Lakyus hoped the snow had served as a cushion for the fallen duo.

Either way, she stood victorious!

Though, seeing her current position, standing was maybe not the right verb.

Vulmitar landed more gently before lowering his head and spitting her out in the snow.

“Hey! You could have been a bit more dignified!”

Lakyus lamented but only received a glare from the dragon.

“Don’t you ever do that again... You taste filthy! Augh! It’s all over my mouth now!”

The frost dragon lamented as he took in a mouthful of snow, trying to somehow clean off whatever taste lingered.

Lakyus had no idea if she should be offended or not by the assessment of her taste, but the choice was taken from her when she was grabbed by the collar and set up straight by force.

“You are one mad fucker boss!”

She couldn’t understand if the booming voice of Riyuro was meant to convey worry, anger, admiration, or a mixture of the three.

“Lady Lakyus...”

The young blonde felt shivers go down her spine at Leinas’ dangerous tone. It would seem she was in for a long and admonishing lecture.

“Only you could come up with something like this...”

It was Zaryusu’s turn to express his astonishment in the form of a facepalm.

“I am kinda curious though! I noticed Vulmitar always has a fresh breath without brushing his teeth... considering he recently ate a lot of fish, did it actually smell in there?”

The young male caster asked before receiving a staff upside his head, curtesy of Arche.

“Augh! That’s disgusting! Don’t ask that!”

She complained making an appalled expression.

“That’s because I use [Clean] every time after eating... you two have no idea how bad a dragon’s breath could get till you smell one.”

The dragon half rebutted half complained as he used the spell in that exact moment, probably still trying to get Lakyus’ taste out of his mouth.

Lakyus was finally about to give him a piece of her mind when the words died in her throat. Now that all the dirt was cleaned off his face, she could clearly see the various claw wounds marking the dragon’s muzzle, a particularly bad one going across his left eye, which was leaking some fluid.

“Damn it! Fuck! Vulmitar!”

She was not one to curse, but she could not help herself after seeing the state her friend was in... the state he was reduced to after she brought him into this.

With a shove,, she freed herself from Riyuro's grasp and limped through the snow, trying to reach her friend as quickly as possible, her hand already tinkering under her armor to get a hold of her potions.

"Come down here!"

She ordered, the dragon obliged with a lack of hurry, as if his wounds were nothing to be worried about.

Lakyus almost shattered the vials as she uncorked them, ripping off the cap and splashing the blue liquid over every mark, giving particular care to his eye injury. She really hoped his eye would heal, even though she was pretty sure the claw mark would scar.

If only she could use her divine spells, she could have healed him for sure! But ever since she had started doubting the words of the sacred texts, her spells' effectiveness had started deteriorating, and after the temples of the four had revealed themselves for the traitors they were... well, she had been unable to cast any divine spell ever since.

She felt extremely conflicted about this. On one part her lack of faith didn't allow her to help her friends anymore, forcing them to rely on less effective methods like potions. On the other hand, following the teachings of the four gods would mean condemning her friends for their mere existence and nature.

"I'm sorry, it's all my fault."

She whispered as she continued to tend to the wounds her own stubbornness caused.

“Bah, I would have slaughtered her if it wasn’t for the fact I was banned from using magic.”

The dragon rebutted pridefully making a small sad smile blossom on Lakyus’ face. She felt even more guilt rise at the thought she had not even protested against the ban in the first place since it didn’t affect her, she completely missed how that would be extremely detrimental to her friend. Seeing how he was a dragon, she often forgot his greater strength lied in his magic rather than his body.

“Behind you.”

The dragon growled, taking her out of her self-deprecating tirade, and forcing her head to snap back.

The thick bearded man known as Kael was coming her way, using one of those strangely shaped spears to help cover his limp, it might have fooled most but Lakyus passed half her life studying movements of warriors and trying to replicate her, and the weird movement of his ankle did not escape her eyes.

Though, she was also quite interested in that piece of armament which almost looking like a spiral of hooks rather than any kind of spear or lance. It seemed like a wicked instrument of torture more than a weapon, she could almost shiver at imagining what would happen if it latched on to someone’s flesh. It would not only be almost impossible to tear off, but if you actually managed to, the following deep wounds would have you bleed out in less than a minute.

The man stopped a few meters from her before throwing his weapon at her feet.

“You passed the Trial, you are the first foreigner to ever do so... and the first one to defeat me since I became Stormclaw of the Tribe.”

There was no congratulations in his frigid tone, nor that she expected any seeing her, admittedly not so honorable, strategy.

“Come with me.”

He didn't wait for an answer as he turned and left the scene, expecting her to comply. She almost didn't want to, not after the attitude displayed. But she had to choose between what was right and what was wise, and she chose the latter, following the man without making a scene, not before instructing her companions to look after Vulmitar's wounds.

She was again led to the large tent where she had first discussed with the young woman before her father arrived.

Lakyus was surprised to see the violet-eyed girl still there, and with an older woman no less by her side. The two were a mirror of each other if not for their eyes, one pair violet and the other cerulean, and the difference in age of course.

The man sat down on the strangely comfortable carpet with a slight wince as his right leg bent. None of the two women reacted at that, making Lakyus wonder if the even noticed before she was gestured to sit down too.

She obliged the request, seeing no reason to be difficult.

“Tell me... who the hell are you really? And why are you here?”

The chief asked, dead serious.

“I told you, I am an adventurer that came to search for an artifact.”

The man did not hide his scoff at her words.

“You speak nonsense! There is no adventurer that would willingly partner up with demi-humans! Not with those foolish gods’ influence still weathering the mind of humanity! And no adventurer would possess such a blade as yours! That is an artifact could come from only one place... admit it, you are one of the lackeys of the usurper!”

The man almost yelled as he lost his cool for the first time since she met him.

Lakyus was quite lost by now, she had no idea what he was talking about.

“I don’t know what you are talking about, this blade was given to me by an old witch... the same one who sent me here to retrieve another blade, much similar to this...”

She tried to explain, hoping to clarify whatever misunderstanding might have occurred, though, that didn’t seem to work, as the man’s eyes were blazing by now.

“Another?! There is only one place where such a relic could be hidden! Do you mean to draw the ire of S’hiraihyo?! Are you mad?!”

Well, that was a mouthful, and considering the almost fearful reverence the man showed, whoever this was seemed someone to not be trifled with.

“I have no clue who that is.”

She voiced her ignorance.

“And that is why you should not move toward the inner part of the Frostfang!”

The man vehemently rebutted.

The older of the women placed a hand on the man shoulder causing him to immediately calm down.

“She does not understand Kael, let it go... calm yourself and start over.”

The voice was melodic and gentle, nothing like the gruff tone of the man, it was like comparing the tranquil sound of gently flowing water to the harsh howling of mountain wind.

“If you go further in we will all pay the price, invade the land of the one who slumbers and we all shall pay the price for your foolishness.”

The one to interject was none other than Kaelin, who spoke as if her words were more a dead est fact rather than a simple assessment. As if she knew with absolute clarity the end result, which kind of irked Lakys something fierce, as if she was being underestimated alongside her perfect team.

“Well, you don’t know that! I would ask on what basis you say such when you haven’t even seen what I am capable of! Vulmitar would have won singlehandedly that battle if he was allowed to use his magic! Riyuro is a former demi-human king who can easily beat anyone here! Leinas is not far behind! Rayne and Arche are both magic caster capable of using 3<sup>rd</sup> tier spells! And Zaryusu is great at both defending and assisting any of us!”

She boasted about her team’s capability. One thing was offending her, which she could let go, another was insulting her team without even having seen what they are capable of.

The young woman did not seem to be affected by her rebuttal nor the challenge in Lakys’ tone who dared for anyone to contradict her.

The black-haired woman just shook her head as if nothing of what Lakyus said even mattered in the slightest.

“No matter who you are, or how strong you are, or how many you are... there can exist no victory against Elemental King S’hiraihyo... only death... for he was the steed of the God of Annihilation Thanatia”

**A.N.**

**Wow, that ended up being quite longer than I expected, but I don’t feel like cutting any of it. We are finally getting some proper lore and don’t worry, I am carefully treading the canon lore we have so to not contradict what was established by Maru himself.**

**Little trivia, the ‘weird spears’ are just harpoons, but since Lakyus never saw any (and I don’t think they are ever mentioned to be used/known in the NW) she just mistakes them for lances or spears.**

**Another trivia, Nyxia is actually pretty strong, standing around level 30, but dragons are just built different (as Satoru said, their stats are kinda insane even back in Yggdrasil) so, while she could contend physically with a physically weaker dragon, once Vulmitar starts using magic, it is over.**

**That said, I am as always interested in your opinions, theories, and ideas. So let me know with a comment / review!**

**Stay safe! Till next time!**