

"Normal speech"

'Thought'

Status/written text

(Silent magic)

[Normal magic]

{Change of location, time or POV}

Gate: Thus the Witch brought Doom There

Chapter 5: Masquerade of Madness

Folt Titus Meridius never thought he would grace the battlefield again. Not after what he witnessed at Alnus and the Gate, nowadays known as the Gate toward Hell.

He loved his homeland, like any good imperial citizen should, but even his resolve and love could not help but falter in the wake of the Doom.

He had been fortunate once, no, blessed would be a better word. He had escaped Alnus mostly unharmed even if the mental anguish was a toll he was still paying for today. Any sane man valuing themselves would have never returned, not to a battlefield against those hellspawns. But Folt had a reason to justify his insane choices in life. A wife, two sons, and a daughter, did he really need anything else to justify his insanity?

It was quite a miracle this march had not been cursed by mass desertion, he was sure the widespread rumor of the Doom not being present in Alnus' vicinity was a great contributor to the general mental health of the troops, not counting the fact the military was the only institution that will assure you a full meal a day, which was

quite the rare thing as of late seeing the famine that was ravaging the empire from within.

He looked on, toward the city of commerce, one of the empire's pillars, Italica. Now reduced to a stronghold of the enemy, as symbolized by the new banners hanging from the walls.

Already many thought the empire had been cursed by the Gods for their hubris, but Titus knew best, this was no curse of the Gods. This was a hell all of its own, and the empire should have never set foot on that cursed land.

The fourth and fifth legions paid the price of that foolish move. And now the second, third, and sixth were about to risk the same fate.

Three legions sent to reclaim a city not even half the capital. On paper it sounded ridiculous, and yet Titus would have wished the first and seventh were with them too. For all he knew the first legion was never mobilized, serving as the pride and last defense of the empire, and the seventh being little more than peasants not knowing the difference between their dicks and a sword. He still would have liked having their numbers bolstering their lines.

The air was silent and filled with tension. One-hundred thousand men surrounded the commercial city ready for a siege. Normally that would have the representative of the city come out for a parlay, or even a surrender, and yet they had not received any envoys since their arrival yesterday.

Titus once would have called such an action idiotic and arrogant, a product of unearned and bloated pride. But he could not come to think of them as such right now.

On the contrary, he dreaded what the lack of a parlay meant. Did the enemy think such numbers were not even worth negotiating with, even when they were surrounded?

If he was the commander, he would have had sent an envoy of their own to try and at least understand what the enemy was thinking. Unfortunately for him, his previous disastrous results had him demoted to a mere platoon commander with barely a thousand man to his name. The price of politics... fools! The lot of them! Those fat senators had no idea what they were dealing with!

The air was suddenly filled with the sound of countless horns intoning a familiar rhythm for every soldier. Advance. That was the given order, Titus looked in trepidation as his fellow soldiers rushed on toward the walls of Italica, stairs in hand. They entered the archers' range, but no arrows flew their way, they continued to advance and the enemy soldiers on the walls did not move an inch. Something was wrong, terribly wrong, but Titus could not put a finger on it yet.

“Commander, is it fine for us to stay put?”

Fobius, his second in command, asked. The man has been loyal, and one of the few who escaped the hell that was Alnus alongside Titus. Most of his troops were, meaning that few grumbles were heard when he did not order them to advance. In the past he would have rather died than showing such a sign of cowardice, but the Doom had his own way of breaking a man and all his core believes.

Before he could answer Fobius, the raging cries of his charging compatriots were drowned by an even louder sound. From his superior position Titus had a clear view of the events transpiring below. One moment a platoon of man was charging the walls, and the following moment a wave of flames and smoke engulfed the men snuffing out their voices.

Even atop his horse so far away, Titus could not stop the shiver crawling up his spine. Seeing a bunch of men and their equipment being reduced to ashes in the wind in a mere instant made memories of the slaughter of Alnus return to his mind, not that they ever

stopped crawling into his nightmares, but he thought he was safe while still awake... but that was apparently just a fool's hope.

He looked on as more and more men suffered the same fate. It was as baffling as it was horrifying... mages were supposed to cast spells, but these pillars of flames did not rain down from the walls, no, they just surged from the ground in the exact moment Saderan soldiers passed upon it.

Did they bury their mages underground? He could not help but wonder for, as insane as that sounded, he could not come up with any other explanation for what he was witnessing.

Each explosion reduced to ashes tens of men and fatally injured just as many. For all this was supposed to be a siege of the city, Titus could not help but feel like they were the ones trapped in this situation.

He continued to look in some sort of mixture between despair, horror, and resignation at the fate of so many sent toward their inevitable doom.

Was he already dead? Did he die on Alnus? Was this one of the hells he was experiencing right now? He could not help but ask himself if anything he was witnessing was even real to begin with.

It was useless, all useless... there was no winning against this... he could hardly call this war... the same way ants could not call war a human foot stepping upon their nest and destroying it in one fell swoop.

“Ahah... ahahahah... AHAHAHAHAHAH...”

Someone was laughing, as absurd as that sounded, someone was laughing at the absurdity and senselessness of it all... even his men seemed taken aback by the sound... which seemed quite familiar.

It took him a while to realize that the one laughing was none other than himself. But it was only natural to laugh, wasn't it? What else could they do in the face of such calamity? It was just the natural outcome... to ever think otherwise was madness itself!

“Commander...”

Fobius called out hesitantly as he looked at Titus as if he was witnessing something strange, or looking at someone he had not known for the last ten years.

“What Fobius? What else can we do but laugh? Look at this! The Gods demanded a feast from the empire! And we foolishly came into their platter swinging our sticks as if it may change the outcome... and what a feast it is... Emroy and Hardy must be bursting full by now... they allowed the empire to mature and fatten... only to turn around and slaughter us to make a feast... like any farmer would nurture and fatten a pig to reap its meat.”

The smell of ashes and burned humans began to fill the air. The fact they could smell it in an open field from so far away was a testament to the massacre taking place. A massacre that saw their enemies not even making a move... what a joke this was... to think these poor fools still believed something was salvageable.

No, the empire was done for. And he had no intention of taking part in the slaughter, he had already paid his toll on Alnus.

He was about to order his platoon to retreat even though most of the legions were still intact, when something attracted his attention from his superior position.

A group of unknown riders, barely a tenth of his own platoon, were approaching the infantry rear lines at an unheard of speed, almost blurring his vision.

He would have called this a suicide charge to create a distraction, but even if that was the explanation that made more sense, there still was the fact the enemy needed no distraction at all seeing how the imperial soldiers were marching to their doom all on their own.

Yet, he looked in a sort of ill-born fascination as the barely hundred men soon reached the rear lines of the third legion before they could even be noticed. A sharp, almost blinding, light was all that followed and, after the moment his eyes took to adjust, he saw the riders cut through the imperial lines composed of thousands of men the same way a flame dragon's fire would cut through the wooden houses of a farming village.

Normally, a charge would be halted after slamming into the enemy lines, that was what common sense and centuries of battles dictated as a rule. But whatever the enemy was riding seemed to have no intention of slowing down, trampling the imperial lines as if they were running on a free grass plain and not a sea of corpses.

Titus saw how the riders busted through the front line from behind, cutting their positioning, perfected by centuries of battles, in two, the same as a sharp knife would open a wound on unprotected skin. Only for the riders to turn around and prepare another charge immediately on their tireless steeds.

He was sure that no matter how hardened the imperial soldiers might have become, that vision would have broken even the most bloodthirsty and loyal of men.

And the funny thing was, the Doom never appeared even once in this battle, and yet, one of their legion was on the verge of breaking apart and deserting altogether.

They never stood a chance, Doom or not, the Gods already decided on their banquet it seemed.

If anything, that at least made his next move easy enough.

“Commander Titus... should we give support or charge?!”

His vice in command asked him, clearly distressed at the lack of orders.

“Do whatever you want, go die or run away, hells, stay put if you want, I don’t care...”

Titus said much to the astonishment of his soldiers. He turned his horse around as panicked protests and questions bounced off him like the inconsequential waste of breath they were.

“I am going home, I advise you to do the same.”

He said before he kicked his horse, leaving behind everything he had ever been, his honor, his pride, his loyalty, none of them mattered anymore when you were faced with the end of days. He would rather have his family at his side when the time came and not rot away into a slaughterhouse in a meaningless pursuit guided by the foolish hubris of humanity.

{Alnus Hill}

{Arche’s P.O.V.}

The blonde imperial noble scowled as she watched her fellow student and a certain weird hair-colored girl discuss magic application and how it differed between their two worlds. Normally, that would be a subject worth her time and energy, but for some reason she didn’t felt like joining in.

That was a lie, she knew exactly the reason. Rayne’s clear infatuation with the slightly older girl really irked at her nerves. And the worst thing was, she didn’t know why that was at all.

Apart from him being a bit more flustered and shyer around the girl, not much changed. And yet, she felt like something was amiss, something so obvious she felt annoyed by the sole fact she couldn't apparently point it out.

She turned around hoping that, by not being the center of her attention, the strange feeling would soon vanish. In doing that she risked coming into collision with the dark-skinned elven beauty known as Yao Ha Dushi, now self-renamed Yao Sa Dushi.

The customs of this world were weird, using their middle name to indicate which god they worshipped was a practice that bordered on fanaticism in her view. But more baffling than the custom, was the change itself.

Since the god the dark elves worshipped turned out to be the same god who orchestrated the dragons awakening, almost all of them chose to change their middle name. That would have been fine and logical, until Yao and some others decided to change their worship toward master Satoru.

While Arche herself held great respect and admiration for the master under which she had grown so much in such little time, considering him a god felt... like a step too far even for the most devoted toward the man.

Their master, as Arche noticed he was often prone to do, did not comment on the choice since it really did not affect him, which was certainly a baffling choice if it came from anyone else than her master.

If she learned something about the man after more than a year under his tutelage, it was that he was neither humble nor arrogant, simply holding himself to the level he believed he was at. So, in a strange way, his lack of acknowledgement or dismissal of the perception of others on him felt very much in character with what she knew.

“Lady Arche, may I be of assistance?”

Arche was not unused to being addressed as such, so she did not flinch or sputter as Rayne did, though knowing that said title was given more over religious motives rather than lineage was still unnerving.

For you see, if Satoru was considered a god, the two currently studying under him could be considered his soon to be Apostles.

For all she didn't lack confidence, being turned into a religious figure from one day to another was a bit too much even for her. Luckily, the only one even acknowledging such a thing was just Yao herself, so she could follow in her master's example and just ignore it.

“No, I was just wandering if you saw Lakyus anywhere.”

She asked the dark elf who just blinked once before a flash of realization passed through her eyes.

“I think Lady Lakyus is in the company of the third princess Renner right now, finishing the preparations for their departure beyond the Gate.”

Oh, yes, with everything that happened, she almost forgot that crimson-haired princess of Sadera wished to speak with the Re-Estize King. Seeing how Lord Satoru was a part of the court he would certainly attend, but he had already informed her and Rayne that they would stay behind... for once, he gave them a task other than just theoretical work.

They had to discover eventual magical properties of the eggshells they had procured during their trip in the Schwarzt Forest. A tall task, considering the fact detection spells were few and neither of them knew any. But maybe this was a way for him to test them and

see how they would think outside the box when not presented with an easy and immediate solution.

She would have to discuss it with Rayne.

Arche immediately shook her head. She had wondered away exactly to not have to think about that dolt! So it would all be useless if her mind ended up at the starting point!

She tried to focus on something else, anything really.

“Have the dragons already been transported?”

She asked the dark elf hoping to stir the conversation elsewhere, only to realize her lack of tact, so uncommon on her part, a second after. This woman had a great quantity of her friends roasted and eaten alive by the beast, she should not have been so casual in address-

“Yes, Lady Giselle already transported them through the Gate.”

If the woman found her questioning insensitive, she did not show it in her answer.

Though, speaking of which, Arche could not still believe the outcome of their trip. Not the capture of the dragons, as she expected nothing less from Master Satoru, but the complete and utter subjugation, if it could even be called that, of one of these so called Apostles, basically fledgling gods awaiting ascension if Rory’s words were to be believed.

For her master to so easily prevail over such an existence, even though his methods have been... unconventional.

Still, now that she thought about it, maybe Yao’s assessment of her master’s divinity was not so farfetched if contextualized like that.

Augh! She rather not think about this right now!

What even was all of this?!

She just wanted to learn some magic and keep her family safe... was that too much to ask?

{Renner's P.O.V.}

The princess had to use all her will to avert her gaze from the man she considered her beloved. For maybe the first time in her life she was seriously cross with him.

It was already bad enough that he had that skimpily dressed whore fawning after him, to not talk about the flock of headless chickens trying to get into his bed... and now... now he brings back another one?!

Enough was enough! She didn't care about the fact this last one apparently managed to control the dragons he captured! She was still attached to his hip like a maiden in love! That was HER place damn it!

“Humph!”

She huffed as she moved away as soon as she noticed the hand of the caster coming to ruffle her hair. For all she wished for his touch, she would not let him get away with this! Not this time!

She crossed her arms on her chest and turned her back on him, she would not be swayed. The act had the unforeseen consequences of putting her face to face with a very much confused Lakys who kept glancing from her to Satoru while saying nothing.

“I am sorry.”

Renner never heard him sound so defeated, nor apologize so sincerely ever before. And while that served to endear him to her even more, she was not ready to back down from her stance.

“You better be.”

She rebutted, still unwilling to look at him, which elicited a deep sigh from the man.

“I know you already have your plate full... it was foolish of me to add another problem to the list, I will make sure to deal with it myself.”

Well, that did not sound good to her ears, or maybe she was just assuming the worst case scenario... because, at this point, she only saw one way he could deal with it on his own.

“Absolutely not! That is exactly what I don’t want to see! I won’t allow you and her to get more alone time!”

She turned around, giving the towering caster her fiercest glare.

Silence descended between the two, blue meeting blue.

“Umu, so that is the problem... I understand, it seems like I misunderstood the matter on my side.”

The mutter was probably not meant to reach her ears but she still heard it nonetheless in the silence of the room. She had no idea what he had initially misunderstood, but she was satisfied her feelings were now fully conveyed.

“You made me a promise.”

Damn it! She didn’t mean to sound that pathetic and desperate.

She could feel her emotions getting out of hand as her traitorous young body began to wet her eyes. Damn it all! She could not cry like a child now!

She glared in silence even as the man crouched down to her height and did not move as he placed his large, gloved hands on her shoulders.

“I apologize for not taking in account your feelings on this... Once this is over, I promise we will go on a well deserved vacation, just you me and Lakyus, okay?”

Damn him and his soothing tone! For all she was a being of logic, she seemed incapable of saying no to him! Or staying mad at him for the matter!

That was infuriating, but at the same time showed why his was a unique existence, much like herself... and even Lakyus to a degree.

“Humph! I guess I can forgive you because you have recognized your errors! But! I won’t forgive anymore transgressions from now on!”

She tried to sound as stern as possible even though, even to her own ears, her words sounded painfully insecure.

In all response she received a light chuckle from the caster who proceeded to ruffle her hair like he always used to.

“Thank you, princess, though, if you want to sound stern in the future, I would suggest not looking so adorable while scolding someone.”

She could feel her cheeks heat up at his words. Damn it! She couldn’t stay mad at him! Even more when he gave her a rare compliment such as that...

‘You are unfair, my Satoru’ she protested as she felt her previous frustration toward the man evaporate like water in a desert.

“If I have to go through all this trouble, I at least deserve some compensation!”

She demanded. If she couldn't stay mad at him, she would at least try to get as much as she could out of it.

She spread her short arms, the gesture didn't need words to be understood as she soon found herself in a velvety embrace. Though, she didn't notice it at first, but she was not the only one wrapped in her beloved arms as, at some point, Lakyus decided to join in.

If it had been anyone else she might have been mad, but seeing how it was Lakyus, and she was mostly hugging the princess and not the marquis, she would let it slide this time.

She closed her eyes, feeling her body relaxing like it didn't in a long time. Not having Satoru by her side as of late has taken its toll on her. Only now she realized, how much she missed this, and how those little problems now seemed like trifling things indeed.

What if another woman was after her Satoru? None of them could even come close to what she had with him, so there was no way he would be even tempted to come close to them.

They only had their looks on their side, while she had a far deeper connection with the man currently busy pampering her.

Yes, indeed, soon this whole mess will be over. Even with Raeven trying to play his games, it won't matter.

Did he want Satoru to be forced to reveal himself? Who cares?! It was already too late for this foolish empire anyway, even if the pretense fell apart right now, there was no way for them to avert the inevitable. If nothing else, the realization of how much they were fooled might actually be helpful in stripping away any hopes they might have left.

Yes, that sounded rather nice... She couldn't wait to see their stupid faces gawking like fish gasping on dry land as the realization sank in.

A smile made its way to her lips, hidden behind the velvet gown of her first and only love.

She will show them, oh, she will show them all.

{Hours Later}

{Pina's P.O.V.}

The princes of Sadera gulped down nothing but air as her throat has been drying since morning.

This was the day, the day that would decide the future of not only her and her order, but the empire as a whole. The day she would cross the Gate toward a completely different world.

She has been allowed two guards, quite a small number for a foreign dignitary, but considering the enemy could have her killed, order or not, it really meant little. The choice has been easy, Hamilton was the more politically savvy among her order, and Bozes was the better blade. With the two of them at her side, she should be fine for both brains and brawns.

“Are you nervous, your highness?”

She stilled at the by now familiar dark tone that could only be owned by the scourge that came upon this world, the Doom himself, Satoru. The man she was sent to recruit and seduce.

That notion sounded so ridiculous right now. After all she had witnessed... the absolute dominance over any battlefield with the bare minimum of efforts, the power to bring down the mightiest of creatures making it look like a parent disciplining his own children,

the brains to make an Apostle, a demi-God, turn away from their sworn deity.

How could she, a miserable human, ever hope to sway such a man? No, calling him as such was an insult, he was more than a man, the dark elves, long-lived race that they were saw it. They bowed down in worship as if such an existence belonged among the pantheon of her world... and who was she to say otherwise?

Gods could not incarnate as mortals, that was something known by all, their forms and powers too great to be contained by mere bone, skin, and muscle. But who could say if bone, skin, and muscle hid under that dark cloak? For all she knew something far greater and terrible could hide there, its exterior only a protection for those who surrounded him, so that they would not descend into madness by witnessing his true self.

The elbow nudging her ribs, curtesy of Hamilton, shook her awake from her train of thought regarding the being who addressed her and which she did not wish to displease in any way.

“I would lie if I said no, Lord Satoru, after all there is much at stake.”

There was no point in trying to fool the one addressing her, so all there was left was just the plain truth.

“You carry a great burden upon yourself, at such a young age, it is commendable... however this may end, I hope you will find pride in what you managed to accomplish, far more than any of your peers would in a lifetime.”

Pina had no idea how he did it, for only he could take such foreboding words and yet manage to make them sound like a praise that eased her mind.

“Come on, Satoru, don’t waste your time with this... you promised me a tour of your world... you wouldn’t go back on your word, now, would you?”

For all Pina would not dare voice hostility toward any Apostle, even less one belonging to Emroy, her eyebrow still twitched in irritation as the black haired demi-god appeared from seemingly nowhere and melted herself against the right arm of the masked mage while dismissing their discussion as if Pina was just a common tavern wench.

“You forget yourself sister! I am the one who asked Satoru first! Before you decided to intrude yourself in our private conversation!”

A second blue-skinned Apostle, draconic in nature, appeared from nowhere latching on Satoru’s left arm like a jealous nubile girl whose lover was approached by a street girl.

“You are still here Giselle, my, I didn’t notice you... why don’t you go back to Hardy already?”

The crimson eyed Apostle retorted with feign indifference, much to the grinding of her opponent’s fangs.

“You are lucky Satoru was so graceful in interrupting our duel, or you would be little more than dragon dung by now!”

For all the two of them were supposed to be demi-gods, Pina could not help but be reminded of some senator’s daughters she often saw arguing over men. She had no idea if she should be disheartened at the comparison or impressed that Satoru could make future goddesses behave like teenage girls fighting over him.

“I will find some time for both of you, just... don’t create a scene in the meantime... and no fighting.”

Pina blinked as this was the first time she heard him sound so defeated. The irony of such tone being used to pacify two girls, demi-gods they may be, instead of the ongoing war, was not lost on her, but she rather not lose anymore sanity than she already had by dwelling on such thoughts she might have once entertained.

Even more baffling than that, his words were seemingly enough to pacify the two walking catastrophes, that were about to come to blows, who limited themselves to scowling at each other before proceeding to ignore the other's presence.

“I think, it should be about time...”

The masked mage had no time to finish his words that the column of soldiers and men began moving, marching straight through the all-enveloping darkness of the Gate.

Pina tried to remain as calm as possible as that impossibly thick darkness seemed to absorb all her senses. She just knew she needed to continue walking forward, whatever happened, she just needed to keep walking.

And as it came, the pressure was gone in an instant as the new light of an unfamiliar sun blessed her eyes.

The princess blinked a couple of times as her vision was trying to adjust to the sudden change of luminosity. As vague forms became objects and people, she took in her surroundings, they were in what seemed to be a giant square like the ones that could be found in the imperial capital. The building surrounding it were familiar and unfamiliar at the same time, she could easily distinguish a shop from a simple residence, but the architecture was quite different even though the materials were recognizable. Still, something felt off about all of this as if she was witnessing something already seen but with just a wrong detail she could not point out.

Luckily for her Hamilton had no such issue in identifying what was putting her off.

“It’s all so... perfect.”

The younger noble knight muttered under her breath, finally placing in order the princess’ thoughts.

Indeed, it was all perfect, too perfect. The walls of the houses were perfectly smooth, all the roofs were perfectly angled, as were the forms of the windows. Even the stones making up the square were perfect doubles of each other with no space between them, like a perfect mosaic.

The whole picture looked extremely artificial, more than a city should be. A perfection that should not be. Humans were flawed creatures after all, so aspiring and reaching such perfection was quite... off putting.

She continued looking around noticing more and more details, and the fact that, for how perfect it all seemed, part of the square was being reconstructed in this very moment, which was quite jarring compared to the perfection surrounding the busy workers. She watched in fascination as carpenters placed block after perfect block next to each other. She followed the chain to see where the stones originated from, since she could clearly see no cart in sight.

Her eyes almost bulged out of her eyes as she saw a robed man at the very end of the line. A mage if she had to judge by appearance alone. Someone who had no place in such an environment. And yet she saw him place his hands on a perfectly cut stone and, after a flash of light, make a perfect double of said stone appear out of thin air.

Pina would not lie and say she knew much about magic or its applications, but never in her life had she heard of magic being

capable of such engineering miracles. All she heard was tales of powerful mages and Apostles who used it for fighting or solving people's problems, but never something so... revolutionary.

"This way, your highness."

She heard the deep voice of Satoru bring her out of her trance.

Pina immediately turned toward the robed man who still had the two Apostles latching on his arms even while looking around with curious expressions.

"Welcome to Re-Estize's eastern commercial hub, E-Libera, name still pending after... recent events, but I digress... we will make our way to the capital, Ro-Lente, to meet the king in a few minutes after finishing proper protocol. This is, after all, the first time we receive citizens from beyond the Gate of our own volition."

What the words implied was enough to remind the princess of her dire circumstances and what her country had caused... and probably the reason behind the square being partially destroyed still.

"I would suggest not giving your identity away to anyone right now... only the king and court are aware of your presence right now, if the common folk of this city learned who you are... saying that they would make you experience hell for what your countrymen did to their friends and family would be an understatement... I would prefer not having to intervene."

For all she had already gathered as much, the warning was a welcomed one nonetheless, since it reminded her of his neutrality in this conflict and his acting as a mercenary.

She again steelled her resolve. She would put an end to this conflict once and for all.

She had to.

{Italica's outskirts}

{Climb's P.O.V.}

Red, grey, and brown, those were all his world now, those color and rage.

The red of the blood he was spilling upon himself and the ground, grey for the armors he was slashing open effortlessly with his blade, brown for the mud that would be the grave of the men unfortunate enough to stand in his way, and rage... rage was what made sense of the world and those colors.

When he was pulled away from the city he knew was to be sieged he was extremely disappointed, to the point of being mutinous. Only when he was told of his new task, his frustration was turned into glee at the prospect.

Oh, he wanted to make them all suffer, to see them crawl on the ground like limbless maggots spilling their filthy insides, each living second an agony all of its own, till they would breathe their last.

Seeing the Warrior Troop carve through lines of men like a hot knife through butter was not enough punishment in his eyes. They got off easy, those ones, unfortunately for the rest, who started to flee the battlefield once they realized the siege was a lost cause, he and the Black Hand were the one waiting for them.

Master Satoru has been very clear. Seeing how soldiers fleeing the battlefield would only turn into problems, they were given the task to make sure none of them left the battlefield in the first place.

And between the stubborn units who still kept on the siege, the ones being trampled by the Warrior Troop, and the fools who tried to

escape only to end up crying their last in the mud, he was doing a pretty good job.

He kept slashing bellies open, that was all he wished, for the world to be painted red, grey, and brown. The ache of his arms didn't matter, the grunts of pain didn't matter, his injuries he gained by launching himself at the enemy with reckless abandon did not matter.

All that mattered was that he could keep on killing. Killing made him unable to think about the one girl he wished to save but was unable to, about the friend he failed, and the woman lying on a bed in an endless sleep no one could cure.

Kill them and feed them to the worms. That was all he needed to do.

His skull rattled as the opponent before him slammed his iron tower shield against the boy's head. The confusion lasted a moment before he regained his senses and split the shield in half with a slash of his short sword.

"The fuck?!"

The man cursed in confusion as he discarded his now useless shield as he gripped his long sword with both hands.

"What the fuck are you, brat?! Some kind of hellspawn?!"

Climb was not interested in answering anything, he just wanted to see the man crawling in the mud like the rest, though he noted the difference attire, if not for the different style of armor, certainly for the different color. Gold like his own hair, which were probably completely dyed crimson by now.

He slashed his blade, aiming at the man's belly, only for his slash to be parried, unfortunately for the man, when steel met a magic blade there was only one possible outcome and, while the man's life

was prolonged by a few seconds, his sword was reduced to a third of its length.

Climb did not waste time and went again for the man's guts, though he did not see coming the man dropping his useless weapon and going for a punch which rattled his skull and sent him flying backwards.

His vision was blurry as he no longer felt the hilt of his blade between his fingers. He tried to stand up, but before his vision could clear up, he was slammed against the ground by a great weight as two iron-gloved hands closed around his throat, trying to suffocate him.

The man was atop him, though that answered the mystery of Climb's disappeared blade, not buried in the man's guts.

The young boy struggled uselessly against the man as his survival instinct kicked in and, as he was trying to pry the man's hands open, it was one of those panicking kicks that saved him. His foot landing on the hilt of the blade still lodged into the man's guts, eliciting a pained scream from him as his grip around Climb's throat lost some of its strength, an action he took advantage of by finally managing to pry the man's hands off him.

But instead of scurrying away like a rat, he let his rage take over as he used his full body to slam against the still agonizing man who fell on one side with the young man now atop him, having reversed their previous positions.

He let his instinct guide him as he immediately descended upon the man's throat, latching on it with a bite, tearing through flesh and muscle with his teeth like a rabid bloodthirsty dog ignoring the screams of the man or the hands trying to push him away. He continued to bite and bite.

Deeper and deeper.

Uncaring of the blood flooding his mouth.

Or the screams.

Or the fingers poking his eyes.

Or the hard sensation when his teeth met bone.

He did not stop till the screams where silenced by sounds of chocking.

Till the fingers stopped moving.

Till the hard bone was all his teeth could clench, having bitten through everything else.

He continued to bite some more after that, to make sure.

He unlatched himself from the corpse only after being satisfied. Copious amount of blood still flowing from his mouth and making a mess of his already messy light armor.

The beast reclaimed his fang from the man's corpse.

And as the monster looked down upon the eviscerated man.

Climb smiled like he didn't in a long time.

There were still many to kill.

{Ro-Lente's Castle}

{Satoru's P.O.V.}

The marquis strolled through the halls of the royal palace, escorting a nervous princess he soon hopes to get rid off. He already sent the two pesky apostles away, sending them Hilma's way with the

excuse of him having to attend his duties. He really did not like the fact they took such liberties with approaching his personal space like that.

Though, that was an uncomfortable but small price to pay for the great amount of information Rory was willing to divulge on herself, her kind, and even her god. And Giselle was the one keeping the dragons at peace and not cause a ruckus every time he was not there to subdue them. Those two advantages were the only reason he did not protest their behavior.

Yet, he would need to be more careful in the future. He did not mean to hurt Renner that way. The poor girl felt left aside with all that happened recently, and he felt guilty for it. It would be a different matter if she was an adult, but the princess was not even a teenager, he could certainly not fault her for feeling down that someone she cherished and spent a lot of time with, suddenly did not have any time for her.

She might be mature for her age, but a child still needed the attention of the adults around her. He often forgot such a thing, seeing how much she was capable of making those around her look incompetent compared to her. He more often than not considered her a fully functioning adult.

Much to his shame, he only noticed when she got upset with him after his last getaway which was prompted by a selfish whim on his part.

He would need to make it up to her. so he would have to play his part well in the upcoming meeting, so to finally put an end to this idiotic one-sided conflict, once and for all.

Maybe another flight through the night sky? No! He already promised her a trip only him, her, and Lakyus... He could ask Hilma for places worth visiting for a while for a peaceful vacation.

Before he could make up his mind, they reached their destination. Truly, using [Mass Teleportation] to get around as of late was starting to mess up with his internal understanding of distances. But without it, it would have been a hassle traveling a week just to from E-Libera to Ro-Lente. Something that would just have prolonged this senseless ordeal.

Better to get it over with. It wasn't like he didn't display the spell before anyway, and knowing how limited knowledge on high tier magic was in the New World, he had no doubt he could pass it as a 6th tier spell rather than the 7th tier it was.

“Announcing Princess Pina Co Lada of the Saderan Empire! And her aides, Lady Hamilton and Lady Bozes!”

He heard the announcer call out for them to enter the throne room. He was grateful for the fact he was left out, certainly thanks to Renner. He would hate to cause a scene before he was meant to.

He let the three girls go before him, after all, he was not supposed to be the star of this show.

The throne room was packed full, higher and lower nobility arranged as their station demanded, with the old king taking a central stage with his throne.

The three girls advanced with what he could only define as dedicated bravery, even while standing among enemies who could have them killed, which was as commendable as it was stupid.

The three stopped at a certain distance before offering a bow toward the throne, their knee never touching the ground, probably because this was not their liege but still a ruler of a foreign nation which demanded respect.

“Hail King Rmapossa III, King of the Kingdom of Re-Estize, my name is Pina Co Lada, fifth child of Emperor Molt, ruler of the Saderan Empire.”

The princess’ voice did not waver as she stood while introducing herself to the ruler of Re-Estize.

“Princess Pina Co Lada, your request for a meeting has been acknowledged and accepted, you stand here before my court to appeal to me, I presume.”

The king did not give away any particular emotion as he acknowledged the princess. Though Satoru noticed the first prince sitting next to him giving quite a nasty grin in the Saderan Princess’ direction, while Renner remained as stoic as ever.

“Not to appeal, Your Majesty, but to negotiate for peace, and a prosperous future cooperation.”

Some mumbles could be heard at the princess’ proclamation, even though the only ones who had some value in the room remained silent.

“Peace, you say? I am not averted to the idea of peace in itself... but you understand my own perplexities when it comes to such a matter, taking in account your country’s rather rude actions and reckless violence displayed.”

The king raised an eyebrow as his only sign of confusion, even though the princess didn’t seem disheartened in the slightest.

“Yes, I understand Your Majesty’s perplexities well... I should first offer an apology on the Empire’s behalf, after all the 4th legion was sent with strict orders to explore the lands beyond the Gate... I find their lack of self-control at finding themselves in between your domain’s border as a mark of shame upon our Great Empire... we could certainly discuss compensations in the peace treaty.”

A loud scoff could be heard as the princess finished talking, which attracted the king's gaze toward a certain Marquis.

“Lord Blumrush, do you find something displeasing with the princess' words?”

Even after being addressed directly by the king, the great noble did not back down and instead raised from his seat, taking central stage in the discussion.

“With all respect Your Majesty, I find this an utter waste of time and ridiculous situation... almost a mockery, this so called empire invades our lands, enslave our people, and when we rise and beat them at their own game they crawl back feigning ignorance on their crimes... does this princess even hold the right to negotiate in the name of her empire? She is not even the heir, just a fifth child whose playing at games she does not understand.”

Satoru saw as many minor lords nodded, or muttered agreements, with the marquis of the north.

The king did not reply as he just returned his gaze to the princess, certainly waiting for her to address the matters.

“My Lord, I can assure you that I do not lie, our soldiers showed an unjustifiable lack of restraint, and from there the situation only degenerated when your response reached our national soil... as for my political standing among the empire, I was personally given leeway from my father, the Emperor, to negotiate in his stead... our Empire is based on a senate, a court of lords if you would, and to even bring a matter to the attention of our senators so they may vote on the matter we need Imperial Recognition... I would say that having the recognition of the Emperor is an optimal first step toward a solution.”

The princess, while not as assured as before, still managed to deliver her answer flawlessly and calmly.

“A uselessly complicated and wordy explanation is all I hear, devoid of any substance... I apologize Your Majesty, I will abstain from commenting any further, though, if I may be allowed one last word, I would suggest not falling for such deceptions of a snake who hold no real power to keep her promises.”

Blumrush spat out before sitting back on his chair, returning the central stage to the king.

“I acknowledge your words Marquis, still, I would hear what the princess has to say since we have gone through the trouble of summoning the whole court for this occasion.”

The king waved toward the foreign princess, inviting her to continue.

“I thank you for your trust Your Majesty, I will start from our conditions for peace then-“

“Conditions?! You think you have any say on this! Father! This is outrageous! We should just throw this mummer in a cell!”

The Saderan princess was interrupted by the infuriated crown prince of Re-Estize, Barbro. Though, Satoru could not help but slightly agree with the man, not on his comment but rather on the fact that the princess was starting off with demands rather than concessions... that showed a certain foolish pride of someone who have been used to be on top their entire life.

“Peace, Barbro, I already said I wish to hear the princess’ words, haven’t I?”

The old king calmly said as he pierced his son with his gaze, which prompted the younger man to sit down while mumbling something under his breath.

“I apologize for my son’s outburst, please continue.”

The king addressed once more the foreign princess.

“No need for apologies Your Majesty, I can understand the rage of someone who has been wronged greatly by our actions... as I was saying, the main condition my father would have for a peace negotiation to take place would certainly be the release of Italica and its surrounding lands... of course we understand that this is not something we can demand without giving nothing in return, we are ready to concede land around the Gate and its surroundings for a hundred leagues and recognize them as Re-Estize’s territory... I am sure that any type of compensation for damages could be discussed and agreed upon with the senate after we have reached an agreement on an armistice.”

The princess’ proposal was not a bad one in Satoru’s eyes, even though slightly presumptuous to think Re-Estize would give up such an important asset just for some land... but like any respectable negotiation, the first party was meant to make an advantageous starting proposal.

“Your Majesty, if I may?”

The one to address the king was none other than the marquis of the west, Raeven.

“You may, Marquis Raeven.”

Ramposa gave his assent to the blonde noble who turned toward the crimson princess.

“We currently hold Italica, one of your major trading centers and food producers... to give it for as little as a meager piece of empty land would be a robbery, I just wished to inform my king, who did not personally witness the offered land, to hear about it from a faithful follower... in my opinion, if we are to relinquish the city, a monetary compensation would need to be issued... I think an appropriate number would be 50 million Suwani, which would translate in around 100 thousand platinum coins... and that would still be a loss on our part, but at least a more equal exchange.”

The Marquis proposed before retreating from the stage and returning to his seat.

“Thank you, Marquis, your insight has proven eye-opening for all of us who did not witness the offer with our own eyes... then, what say you, Princess Pina?”

The king returned his gaze toward the princess, who was visibly paler than before.

“Your Majesty, I will not lie, that is a grievous sum I do not possess the power to promise, but I will make sure to present it to the Emperor and endorse it as a fair and gracious exchange.”

For once Satoru was feeling like a spectator rather than the center of attention, which was kind of nice, since he did not get that privilege anymore now that he officially was one of the Four Great Nobles. Not that any of this really interested him, he had his dragons and that was reason enough to be satisfied, city or no city.

“Father, may I speak?”

The melodic voice of a certain blonde princess sounded out before the king could answer one way or another the Saderan princess’ proposal.

“Of course, Renner, do you have something to add?”

All attention was now on the young princess as her father gave her his blessing.

“Pardon my words father, but I find this whole discussion rather ill-born and based on deception.”

The words, spoken with absolute calm, had the opposite reaction on the court whose voices raised more than ever before in bafflement at the princess’ words. Though, she paid them no mind as she continued.

“We are here, negotiating about armistice and talking peace... and yet, I have received no less than a day ago a message from Marquis Pespea who reported that an army of no less than a hundred thousand has surrounded Italica and was about to start a siege.”

If the previous words of the princess caused an outburst, these one caused an uproar as tens of voices rose proclaiming traitorous accusations and claims of deception.

Peace was only restored when the guards intervened to pacify the shouting nobles.

In the meantime, Satoru had noticed how the crimson princess did not receive the news well, resembling more a corpse by now than the girl she had been this morning.

“I find myself baffled then, my court cries accusations against you Princess Pina, and my own daughter proclaims your empire’s willingness to fight still, even though you are here under the blessing of your father to negotiate a truce... What am I to think?”

The eyes of the old king pierced the crimson princess who on her part did not speak for a good minute.

“I-I apologize, I was not informed of any such plans... it must have been someone else... no... possibly-“

The princess was losing it. It didn't take a genius to see that the rug has been basically uprooted from under her feet, leaving her grasping for anything. Satoru almost pitied the girl, almost being the keyword.

“Father, I should also add that I have received another message before this meeting... the siege has been broken thanks to the intervention of the Warrior Troop you sent as reinforcements for holding the city in the first place, stragglers were dealt with by Marquis Satoru's men... my apologies, I think my tongue slipped, though I think this farce has gone long enough.”

The third princess continued, though Satoru could say she did not mean the apology. This was the best way to go about it. Letting them know they stood no chance, now that their armies laid broken. They might get an unconditional surrender.

The masked undead saw how the Saderan princess slowly moved her gaze from Renner, to Rampossa, and then to him. The poor girl seemed as confused as one could get.

“Do not worry yourself Renner, I think I heard enough... Princess Pina.”

The princess' head snapped back as she was addressed by the king once more.

“Seeing how your empire behaves I should not issue one... but I will still apologize to you for the deception.”

The king said sternly.

“Deception...?”

The whisper was barely hearable coming from the stunned crimson princess.

“Indeed, the one standing behind you is no mercenary at all, he is one of the Great Four Nobles of Re-Estize, Marquis Satoru of the East, the man whose territory was invaded by your empire, and the man betrothed to my second daughter Alysanne.”

As the lie was finally revealed as such, and the heavy truth descended on the princess, the masked caster could only look in pity as the girl’s legs trembled before giving out and letting her fall on her knees in absolute defeat at the revelation.

If he was still human, he might have felt bad for her, but given the circumstances, he was still pondering what the better option could be to make Renner forgive him.

Even as the princess seemed to faint much to the worry and panic of her attendants, he could only bring a hand under his chin.

Maybe a weeklong trip on a beach would do. He heard that it was something the rich used to agonize over since it was one of the few things they could never do back in his old world.

Yes, that sounded rather nice.

{Hilma’s P.O.V.}

The blonde woman’s eyebrow twitched.

She will certainly give Satoru a piece of her mind when he returns, if not handing over her resignation directly.

The nerve of that man, to drop these two on her all of a sudden...

She placed down her cup of chamomile as the two demi-gods before her were about to come to blows once again, probably killing her in the process.

“What of it? I just asked her how good Satoru is in bed... You are curious too, right?”

The black-haired one, dressed like some of the prostitutes Hilma saw back in Eight Fingers, teased the blue-skinned draconic woman whose blush was tinging her cheeks purple.

“My apologies miss Rory, I think you misunderstood my relationship with Satoru... for all I hold great admiration for him, we have never had romantic feelings for each other, nor do I see the presence of men in my future romantic life.”

That answer seemed to calm down the draconic apostle while amusing the red-eyed one.

“Oh my, heard that Giselle, she is like Hardy... maybe you should take her to your goddess and leave me alone? Maybe she would forgive you with an offering as good as this.”

Hilma could already hear the clash of weapons as she immediately intervened.

“Miss Giselle, you were saying Satoru had you bring a couple dragons over the Gate, I am no expert but them, being animals, they would not exactly be clean, if it is fine with you, I could show you the bath while you wait for Satoru’s return? Maybe even try a few different dresses? I must say we have a similar build, and I have quite a collection...”

The offer seemed to entice the apostle who was about to reach for her scythe.

“Yes! I should get clean before my date- I mean! The tour!”

The draconic apostle said blushing at her gaffe as she stood up.

Hilma sighed in relief, dividing the two seemed like the only safe way to avert disaster.

“Careful Giselle, she is trying to get you naked... don’t forget she is like Hardy... or maybe she just wants to entice you in getting the three of us in a single bed with Satoru tonight.”

Rory commented with a mischievous and seductive smirk as she licked her lips, causing Giselle to blush to the root of her hair.

“You are kind of a bore, but I wouldn’t pass up the chance.”

And here they went again.

Hilma swore on everything she held dear. Undead or no undead, she was going to strangle Satoru.

A.N.

Merry Christmas everyone! Hope your day is going as well as mine! Just got back from the very long lunch-dinner with my family... exhausting business.

But enough about me.

I hope you enjoyed the chapter. I tried to stir up as much trouble as possible in 10k words, which included giving Pina a stroke (not really, more like passing out from brain going into shock).

I would remind for anyone who has forgotten that this is taking place before Arc III of TWTS, so we got no Lakyus development and Arche and Rayne aren’t a thing. God, this whole sidestory started so long ago. It is weird to having to write these character in stages they already surpassed in the main story.

Well, I had a lot of fun writing Climb if I have to be honest, this is kind of a teaser of what would happen to a Climb who lost everyone he holds dear, but I will say no more.

A couple of notes, Gazef and the Warrior Troop were using golem horses provided by Satoru, so they could charge without worrying about stamina or injuring their steeds.

Pina being stunned by the perfection was a little detail the historical nerd in me brought out, since romans, for all they were geniuses, favored durability and efficiency over looks. Sure, they had great art, but a statue was a statue and a road a road, the first was made to look beautiful and the second to be functional. Only in the renaissance we westerners started trying to put perfection in everything we did.

Okay history lesson over XD

Again, let me know your thoughts with a Comment / Review.

And merry Christmas! Or just good day to anyone who may not celebrate it!

Stay safe! Till next time!