

Chapter 38: Return of the Victor

With Reinhard

“Good job, Lili.” I reached down to ruffle the Pallum’s hair, watching as the illusion of her disguise shimmered away, revealing her usual features.

“T-Thank you, Reinhard-sama,” she murmured, cheeks blooming pink as her fingers fidgeted at her sides.

“Regroup with Naaza and keep each other covered,” I told her, eyes already locked on the movement deeper inside the fortress. “I’ll finish this.”

“R-Right! You can do this, Reinhard-sama! Lili and everyone believe in you!” she answered, the shy smile shifting into determined focus before she sprinted toward Naaza’s position.

I stepped forward to meet the squad of adventurers rushing out of the corridor, blade humming at my side. In a few swift exchanges they were down, unconscious but alive. I only relaxed when I made sure that no opponents followed after Lili.

Turning toward the heart of the keep, I whispered, “Let’s end this,” and advanced on the inner halls. By my count, fewer than ten foes remained.

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With Hestia and Co. — Hestia POV

Everything was unfolding exactly as they’d planned, and Hestia couldn’t keep the giddy smile off her face, a grin Artemis and Hephaistos mirrored at her side.

Not everyone shared her mood though with how things were going by the War Game.

“How!?” Apollo screeched, springing up from his seat and pacing like a caged animal. “How do your children still have stamina and mind after fighting this long without a single break!?” His manic glare pinned Hestia.

“I’d understand Reinhard-kun, barely, being able to keep going as a level three, but the others? Impossible! Did you lie to the Guild about their levels, Hestia!?”

His tirade rippled through the chamber raising a few eyebrows. A murmur of doubt swept the gathered gods as they leveled Hestia with suspicious looks since there was truth to Apollo’s words.

“Hmm... Apollo does have a point.”

“Could they be cheating?”

“Loli Big-Boobs, a cheater? Didn’t expect that one.”

To the crowd, it was a fair question, Hestia’s Familia had been relentlessly on the attack, without pause. But rather than panic, Hestia crossed her arms and let a smug grin curl her lips, puffing out her chest.

“Cheat? Us? Of course not, you filthy pervert.” She planted her hands on her hips. “The answer’s been right in front of your eyes the whole time!”

Confusion rippled anew as gods craned toward one another, muttering.

"The potions," Hermes said, looking intently at the image, eyes glinting. "Every so often, Hestia's kids stop just long enough to drink two potions. That's your secret, isn't it, Hestia?" He asked looking back at her with a smile that made Hestia want to punch him in the face.

"Potions?"

"Now that he mentions it..."

Hestia tilted her chin proudly. "That's right. My Rein-kun isn't the only miracle worker here. Naaza just made a breakthrough, her Dual Potion restores both health and mind. Pair that with Rein-kun's own creation, Ambrosia, which restores stamina and even regenerates limbs and organs..." She trailed off with a superior smirk. "It's no wonder my children keep fighting without any break."

Whispers shifted from suspicion to greed; hungry eyes weighed the value of such an elixir. Apollo, however, only seethed, jaw tight, shooting Hestia a poisonous glare.

Hestia met it with a triumphant smile. *'The only thing left now is to finish this, Rein-kun.'*

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With Rem, Ram, Naaza and Lili

In the clearing where the rest of the Hestia Familia had fought, two small figures stood side by side amid a carpet of groaning or unconscious adventurers. Blue hair and pink hair, mirror images, their dresses flecked with dust and blood.

"That was easy," Ram said, voice dripping condescension as she gave a halfhearted kick to the nearest fallen opponent, drawing only a weak groan. "I've seen literal trash put up more of a fight. Right, bug-san?"

"Are all adventurers this weak?" Rem asked, tilting her head cutely with an almost childlike curiosity, though the crimson spatters across her sleeves painted a different picture.

"Those were all level ones," Naaza's dry voice came from behind, bow hanging loosely in her hand. "Of course they seem weak to you two."

"Rem-sama and Ram-sama are super strong as always, huh?" Lili chimed in as she emerged from cover, crossbow tucked under one arm.

"We're wasting time," Ram said abruptly, already turning toward the inner castle. Her tone leaving no room for debate. "I sense no more weaklings heading our way. The rest must be inside, probably hoping to catch Reinhard-sama off guard."

"Then let's go help him~" Rem sang as she hurried after her sister, curling a tiny fist and glaring toward the keep. "Reinhard-kun's already dealt with enough weaklings today."

Behind them, Lili and Naaza traded weary looks before following.

"Rem-sama is starting to act more like Ram-sama lately," Lili whispered, her voice somewhere between awe and apprehension.

Naaza gave a single, silent nod. "Mm."

"Lili sometimes wonders which of the two is scarier."

"Ram," Naaza replied instantly, eyes still forward. The answer made Lili blink before she glanced at Ram's calm, almost bored face, so unlike Rem's eager grin. "Definitely Ram."

"...Lili suddenly recalls Reinhard-sama once warning that if Ram-sama ever truly grew angry with her, she'd know." Lili muttered, shivering.

“Ram’s stronger than Reinhard currently, from what I’ve gathered,” Naaza added quietly. “Don’t let her usually lazy and snarky behavior fool you. She might be even more devoted to Reinhard than her own sister is if that tells you anything.”

“...Please remind Lili never to upset those two,” Lili said, shoulders tight.

“Only if you promise the same for me,” Naaza murmured.

“Hurry up, you two, or you’ll be left behind!” Rem’s voice rang out ahead, cutting the hushed exchange. The Chientrope and the Pallum quickened their pace to catch the twins.

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Back With Reinhard

Following the trail of presences deeper into the keep, I slowed at the heavy double-doors leading to the castle’s main hall. Beyond them I could feel the clustered presence of Apollo’s last fighters, a nervous heartbeat of steel and sweat.

My instincts whispered *ambush*.

Rather than oblige, I stepped back, braced, and lashed out with a single kick.

The oak panel exploded off its hinges, sailing inward to flatten four unlucky guards.

CRASH—thud!

Before their shouts could rise, I slipped through the splintered frame, blade flashing once, twice, thrice, three guards on the far side crumpled to the floor.

Only then did I stop, boots planted in the center of the chamber, gaze settling on the trio ahead: Daphne and Cassandra braced together with the latter looking resigned, and Hyakinthos half-risen from a gaudy throne, a sneer on his face.

“Let’s end this,” I said, leveling my temporary sword, voice even.

Daphne and Cassandra moved as one, stepping in front of their captain, weapon and staff half raised, resolve warring with wariness.

“So, you’ve finally come,” Hyakinthos spat, standing up from the throne and drawing a red-edged blade from his hip. “I can finally show Apollo-sama that you’re nothing special, that all your fame has been nothing more than dumb luck.”

I shook my head once, calm. “I have nothing to prove, neither to you, nor to your god. I’ll only say this once: surrender, and we end this peacefully.”

The offer only fanned his fury. “You arrogant brat!” he snarled, rushing at me with sword raised. “I’ll show you what it really means to be Level Three!”

But before Daphne and Cassandra could reinforce him, twin blurs knifed in from the side—Rem and Ram, swift as shadows—colliding with the women and sweeping them clean out of the fight.

The hall fell silent but for the echo of our steps as Hyakinthos and I squared off, the War Game boiling down to a single duel.

Hyakinthos roared and lunged, his crimson blade hissing toward my throat.

I raised my sword just enough—clang!—the impact slid harmlessly along my edge. His momentum carried him past, and I let the weight of his own strike pull him off balance before guiding it away with a lazy twist of the wrist.

He spun, furious. “Stand still!”

Another flurry, high cut, low sweep, thrust aimed for my ribs. I shifted half a step each time, steel sliding against steel, letting the rhythm of his anger telegraph every move. Sparks spat across the flagstones, but my breathing never quickened.

“Predictable,” I murmured as his next slash came wide. I caught it on the flat of my blade and flicked it aside, forcing him to stumble back.

Hyakinthos snarled and feinted left, only to spin into a savage overhead cleave. I tilted my wrist, angled my sword, and met him mid-arc—clang!—redirecting the strike so hard his weapon skidded across the stone.

“You dare mock me!?” he barked, charging bare-handed to grab my arm.

I pivoted, let his grasp brush empty air, and drove my shoulder into his chest, sending him staggering. His eyes widened, sweat beading along his brow.

I stepped forward, calm. “You’ve shown enough.”

He screamed and made one last desperate attempt. Calling on his magic, Aro Zephyros but before it could fully form, I was already inside his guard and brought the flat of my sword hard across his temple—thwack!

Hyakinthos dropped to a knee, breath ragged, eyes spinning and the short sword in his free hand clattering from his fingers.

I lowered my weapon, voice steady. “The War Game is over.”

A moment later his eyes rolled to the back of his head as he slumped, unconscious before he hit the floor.

Not a moment after that, a clear voice rang across Orario, echoing from every tower and plaza:

“The battle is over! The winners are the Hestia Familia!”

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With Hestia and Co. — Hestia POV

“N-No...” Apollo whispered, staring at the floating image of Reinhard standing triumphant over his defeated captain.

“Apollo...” Hestia said, a smile tugging at her lips as she rose from her seat. She turned to face the trembling god, hands on her hips. “You’re ready for what comes next, right?”

Behind her, Artemis and Hephaistos hid their smirks behind delicate hands, but the delight in their eyes was plain.

“W-Wait,” Apollo stammered, one hand raised as if to ward off doom. “I didn’t really mean it! Your child was just so, so cute, I—”

“Shut. Up.” Hestia cut him off, disgust curling at her lip. “Now, what were the terms again if we won?”

His shoulders sagged. Her grin widened.

“That’s right,” Hestia said, savoring every word. “Everything you own now belongs to us. Your Familia will disband, and you’ll agree to one thing of my choosing, which we’ll discuss in private later.” She jabbed a finger at him.

“Let this be a lesson: never mess with me or my children. Especially not my Rein-kun!”

“Wuooohhh...” Apollo groaned, sinking to his knees, fingers buried in his hair as if the world had ended.

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Loki Familia — Twilight Manor

"That bastard..." Bete growled, glaring at the screen as he looked at the way Reinhard had handled a level 3 adventurer as if they were children. "He's hidin something."

"Hey, hey~?" Tiona leaned forward, eyes sparkling as she rocked back and forth on her seat. "Doesn't this remind you of those old stories about those heroes of old who overcame all obstacles and quickly grew in strength and power?"

"This is real life, not a storybook, Tiona," Tione deadpanned, though her gaze stayed fixed on the image.

"Could he be on the verge of leveling again?" Finn murmured, thoughtful before he looked around his gathered friends and Familia members. "Does anyone know when he reached Level Three?"

"Six days ago," Ais answered at once, eyes never leaving Reinhard on the floating screen.

"Hmm if I'm not mistaken, he has been able to level up pretty consistently every week. If his pace holds then he should already have the stats to hit Level Four by now," Finn concluded.

"I guess we will find out very soon if what you said is true," Riveria said, a faint crease between her brows.

"Pretty soon, he'll catch up to us," Ais whispered, fists tightening at her sides. Bete and even Finn mirrored the gesture, each for their own reasons.

"Could those potions be the key to his strength?" Finn added under his breath.

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Back With Reinhard

Reuniting with my team outside the battered fortress, I let a genuine smile spread across my face.

"Thank you, everyone. Today's victory was only possible because of your effort."

Blushes and shy smiles answered me.

"Huhu, anything for you, Reinhard-kun~," Rem said, striking a cheesy pose with her sister. They hooked arms and flashed me matching thumbs-ups.

"As Rem said," Ram added with a tiny smile, "those fools deserved every bruise for daring to come after you."

"L-Lili is just glad she was of some use to you, Reinhard-sama," Lili mumbled, fidgeting and looking away.

"We couldn't let them take you from us," Naaza said at last, her tail swishing contentedly.

"I'm lucky to have such friends," I said, closing my eyes and letting the moment settle over me like warm sunlight.

Minutes later, we boarded a carriage bound for Orario, exchanging laughter and handshakes with passing adventurers who offered congratulations. By the time we rolled through the city gates an hour later, applause and cheers followed us like a tide.

Ahead, the familiar sign of the Hostess of Fertility swung in the breeze. Syr and Ryu were standing outside, clearly waiting.

"Tsk, that annoying waitress is back," Ram muttered, stepping closer and wrapping her arm possessively through my left.

"Rem doesn't like her either," Rem echoed, mirroring the gesture on my other side, her scowl aimed like a dagger.

"Naaza-sama," Lili whispered, bewildered, "why are they so hostile to a waitress?"

"You'll see," Naaza murmured, ears flicking in mild irritation.

I could only offer a strained smile. Est alone knew Syr's true identity; I'd kept the secret from the others. *'I wonder how they'll react when I finally tell them...'*

My thoughts shattered as Syr spotted us, her face lighting up in happiness. Without hesitation she sprinted forward, arms wide.

"Reinhard-kuuun~!" she cried, crouching mid-stride before launching herself at me. I barely had time to brace before she collided, arms winding tight around my neck.

"You were amazing~! I saw everything, my heart's still racing!" she whispered in my ear, oblivious to the lethal glare radiating from the twins.

"Th-Thank you for cheering for us, Syr," I managed, feeling Ram and Rem's grip tighten like storm clamps.

'Since when did she get this bold?' I thought, glancing down at Syr's unguarded, joyful smile.

"Alright, that's enough, you dumb maid! Let Reinhard-kun go!" Rem demanded with a scowl on her face.

"Still trying to butt in where you're not wanted huh?" Ram said next glaring daggers at Syr.

"Ara, ara did I just hear a bunch of brutes talking, Reinhard-kun?" Syr demurely asked me not even looking in the twin's direction only making them madder.

'Something is definitely off about Syr today.' I thought nervously since things could only escalate from here.