

## **Darkness 571**

### **Chapter 571 Attracting Attention**

3 days later, the Church of Hetrax sent their Paladins Commander and two Archbishops to meet with Throk Oakenshield. After a day of long pretentious conversations and how they felt sorry as well as responsible for Throk... They officially declared their support to Oakenshield throughout the empire.

Throk reluctantly accepted the deal after Kahn's approval because their support came with the benefits of giving tenders and consignments for arms and many other accessories that they used in the churches and their settlements throughout the empire.

The already super-ultra-mega rich Oakenshield company now had more added wealth with beneficial terms just like they had arranged with Hector and Venessa after Throk settled the deals with them.

To the first prince and third princess, this also opened a new door because they were now allies with the church and their people under the table like different parties sharing stocks of a company in a way.

As for Throk and Kahn... their total earnings from these deals already surpassed the mark of Quadrillion Harlens and by their estimations... their personal earnings after paying for processing of products, salaries of the employees and maintenance of their facilities would be above 50 quadrillions in just a year.

Which was too much just for a company that wasn't even a corporation or a business organization.

The two weeks went with a lot of work because Kahn himself had to get involved to manage the business and hire over 500 thousand new employees and open 15 new production facilities in other sectors of capital Arkensan.

All that was just to meet the demand of their new allied forces and manage the flow of products and shipments while creating ways for keeping the business afloat.

And now... even he was gaining reputation and recognition as a capable person by the top business leaders of the empire and people of the church since he appeared as Throk's official representative to them while the old dwarf only supervised the deals and signed papers.

This also aided in Kahn being able to cement his background in the Vulcan empire as Throk's disciple and thus, nobody asked any questions about his origin either. And now...

In a way, Throk became the most popular and backed-up dwarven blacksmith in the history of the empire in just a matter of months after he had a beef with Rogis, the second prince and then met Kahn.

But the way things were overblown out of proportion because the church itself was involved at this point... attracted the full attention of another powerful group of the empire. Namely called as...

The Dwarven Council.

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In the Vulcan empire... the dwarves were the most prominent race after the Firebornes because they had the biggest share while reforming the empire after the Firebornes took over and killed the previous rulers.

And ever since then... a council of dwarven that officially represented the entirety of the will of their people was formed seven hundred years ago.

Whether it was laws, rights, businesses, legislation, sanctions and ethnic representation... they spoke for it all.

To someone from Rakos Empire, it would appear like only the top brass of nobility or influential figures would rule this organization but unlike how things worked in Rakos... the Dwarven Council didn't care about someone's origin or backing.

panda novel They only allowed people with skills and devotion to the race and were elected by a democratic consensus. However, the administration itself had to follow protocols that benefited their race in the empire and no form of compromise for personal gain was allowed.

And now, Throk Oakenshield and his company had attracted their full attention as soon as the church got involved.

Before this... he was but a single individual who was just a victim of Rogis and his tantrums. They even used his name to pressure the imperial clan.

But never did any of them personally visit him or treated him with importance because he was a single individual who had no sway in the council or impact on their race.

However... things were different now thanks to Kahn's plans leading from one thing to another.

Hence, the Dwarven Council decided to step in. But since this issue was related to a single individual and not the entire race... they couldn't openly get involved either.

Thus, the leaders decided to use a different pretext to deal with this matter.

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One week later, the Oakenshield company was done with its capital level expansion and now had become one of the biggest companies thanks to Kahn's management team and the resources and

money being freely poured by the imperial heirs and the church.

"How much are we expecting?" asked Kahn to Ronin and Ceril.

"The way things are going and even if we embezzle a few chunks here and there...

Our earnings should exceed 17 quadrillion harlen in just the next 4 months." reported Ceril who was in charge of accounting just like before in Rakos Empire when they managed the Bloodborne company in Rukon district of the capital Rathna.

"Good. At this rate... we won't have to worry about everything even after I'm done with that blacksmithing challenge.

We will still be big fishes and won't have to worry about anything in this empire as long as my identity is hidden.

I don't plan to get involved in the affairs of the ruling powers here. We will just stay as someone barely worth noticing." said Kahn with a content smile.

"But master... isn't getting involved with the church bad for us? They could still have means to find about your identity." said Ronin with a worried expression.

"If they did... they already would've found me.

It's been close to 3 months since we arrived here now. And even so, no harm came our way and even you guys are thought of as people who are only protecting the old man." elaborate Kahn.

"How about Hero of Fire then? Do you think he knows anything?" asked Omega.

"I don't think the church would let that guy get involved with us here after the scene his party caused.

Both us and Venessa have that recording on our hands so I don't think they're stupid enough to let the matter escalate.

Because causing us any harm or even trying to pressure us for something means the imperial heirs also acting out in their own way.

That is a type of trouble the church would prefer to avoid at all cost." clarified Kahn.

Little did Kahn know that his current peaceful situation...

Was just a calm before the storm.

**Chapter 572The Dwarven Council**

Kahn rejoiced in the fact that the aftereffects of their plans were exceeding his expectations by manyfolds and now even without causing a big scene or making out an enemy of some local force or top figures. Just their income through embezzling the company's funds was going to make them filthy rich without extra effort or any life-threatening risks.

[And yet... nobody thanked me.] complained Rathnaar in a grumpy voice.

"Yes, yes... you were the mastermind of this all.

I guess I can learn a thing or two from you." said Kahn as he acknowledged the fact.

Because this was something beyond his capabilities and experience when it came to elaborate planning.

In Rakos Empire, he could mess with three noble factions because of the public support and since he was the sovereign of Verlassen.

But here... even him being a human was a problem.

"Only if I had the complete dwarven bloodline... I could've avoided a lot of problems." said Kahn as he sighed.

[Then why don't you get it?] questioned Rathnaar.

"What do you want me to do? Kill some innocent dwarves for the sake of it?

I can't even afford to go and kill some criminals or underworld organizations here because that's too big of a risk. After all, it would attract the attention of imperial rule.

I have absolutely no authority here and I don't plan to take unnecessary risks that would blow my cover.

Just that blacksmithing challenge is more than enough because it was beneficial for me to set up a perfect background." he rebuked.

"Now, I will focus only on perfecting my skills and abilities.

Being able to calmly focus on myself without having to worry about money and resources is something I needed the most to rank up quietly.

So let's keep it that way." he said.

The next week, however... the peace they had wavered after a particular envoy visited the company.

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Throk had a somber expression on his face while Kahn was standing behind his seat like an advisor of a king as they both faced five people that had ancient dwarven texts as sigils on their uniforms.

"And what does the council suddenly want to do with me?"

It's been nearly 3 months since the incident and only now do they want to have a conversation with me?"

If the council truly cared about my well-being as you say... then why didn't anyone send a word when I appealed them to interfere three months ago?" he questioned with a grumbling voice.

"Please attend the meeting tomorrow, master Oakenshield. Many important people will be visiting it tomorrow.

If you're not present, then Tawerik might use that against you saying that you don't put the council in high regards." spoke a semi-saint rank dwarven official.

"Tch! Fine! I'll visit tomorrow. But don't expect me to be respectful or treat the council like some gods.

Tell them that I have no intentions to parley with Tawerik either." spoke Throk in a discontent tone.

panda novel The members from the council nodded their heads and after some irrelevant talks to drag the conversation, they left the office.

"What do you think is going to happen?" asked Kahn.

"Nothing bothersome... I hope." replied Throk with a serious expression.

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The next day, both Throk and Kahn visited the main headquarters of the Dwarven Council in a city situated at another sector of capital Arkensan named Dvalin.

After visiting through a giant wooden flying ship with an appearance matching that of a submarine, their duo landed close to the main Council House in Dvalin city.

Soon, a flying vehicle that came to pick them up escorted their duo to the Council House situated at the western end of the city.

After entering the vast building filled with nothing but dwarves, whether they worked here or were only visitors... Kahn followed Throk under thousands of surprised and suspicious gazes on him since he was

the only human in the whole building.

Half an hour later, Throk and Kahn were seated in a court hall... the old blacksmith had no problem but Kahn felt like sitting on a toddler's chair because the whole building had the furniture made solely for the dwarven race.

But he couldn't complain either and sat... funnily.

Soon, 5 distinguished members of the dwarven race, each adorned in high-ranking official attires entered the hall and everyone stood up until these 5 individuals took their seats.

All of these dwarves seemed to be very old based on their appearance... even older than Throk who was already 154 years old himself. Yet their eyes emitted an aura of wisdom just by looking at them.

"The High Elders of the Dwarven Council will commence the official hearing regarding the dispute between Throk Oakenshield and Bifur Tawerik." announced an official.

This was the reason why they were called here in the first place. Although the dwarven council didn't want to directly involve themselves publicly... Tawerik had filed an appeal against Oakenshield.

Saying that his company had intentionally spread rumors against him and his franchise throughout the empire and thus, it resulted in him and all of his people suffering major losses because now they had a bad reputation in the entire Vulcan empire.

And seeing the Defamation case, the Dwarven Council was using this as an excuse to make a contact with Throk.

To them, it was just a first step to improve their relationship with the blacksmith using this dispute if they favored him.

Because of which, Throk himself had no choice but to appear here because his reputation was on the line and being absent would also signify that he could be the guilty party instead of being a victim.

Kahn and Throk looked at the other side of the hall where Tawerik, the old dwarf who made a scene in the Oakenshield company building and Helsi, the old dwarf's former top disciple who chose to abandon his master when the calamity struck were seated with furious gazes.

The atmosphere in the entire hall was full of tension as if there would be a battle very soon.

Just then, the Dwarven Elder seated at the center announced in a loud voice.

"The Dwarven Council will officially start the hearing!"

## **Chapter 573The Dispute**

Soon, the council's hearing began and the High Elders signaled both sides to present their arguments regarding the allegations and the defamation case like some sort of court of law.

Bifur Tawerik, the old dwarf blacksmith who Kahn had met before started his statement.

"I appeal to the Dwarven Council to bring justice for me and my people.

Because of this person in front of me... my company is getting a bad reputation and losing many clients ever since the issue with the former second prince became public and he got one of the imperial scions as his backer.

As you might have heard in many rumors... I'm portrayed as someone who intentionally stole his people, distributors and his disciples after his fight with Rogis Hos Sigfreed.

And now, I'm being vilified by the entire Vulcan empire and many people have stopped doing business with me. And I believe Throk Oakenshield to be the mastermind behind these rumors because he sees me as his enemy from decades." spoke master Tawerik, one of the top 5 saint blacksmiths of the empire in a tone as if he was wronged.

[What a lying bastard. He intentionally targeted Throk when he was dealt with a low blow and now he's acting as if he is the victim.] thought Kahn as he looked at the bald dwarf donned in black and yellow attire.

"Lies! You're nothing but a scum who stole the carpet under me when I was shunned because of that Rogis blacklisting me.

And now you want to act as if you did it out of your generosity to protect my people who were affected?

At least try to make up a believable lie!" rebuked Throk from his seat and claimed the allegations to be a lie.

Soon, both sides started their version of the story and even Kahn gave his testimony as a witness. But unlike how normally things worked...

The whole case turned into a huge fight and Throk and Bivur almost started a brawl while cursing each other.

panda novel "Why is the council suddenly interested in my life?

The last time I appealed to the High Elders to intervene... not a single one of you responded to my call.

And now that the storm is gone, you want to come in and claim that you all actually cared?

Even a child can see through your pretense!" shouted Throk as he openly disrespected the High Elders in his infuriated state.

Even the heads of the blacksmith association of the empire had a helpless expression. Because Throk was no longer a figure they could oppress or try to make him submit to them under the name of respecting the Dwarven Council or following their people's laws.

Previously, they didn't even bother providing him a helping hand in time of need and now, he was someone whose word had a lot more weight to it. They couldn't even shun him in the race because that would result in making an enemy of the imperial clan and the church at this point.

Just then... three more figures entered the hall and the entire room turned dead silent.

The aura given by these three elderly dwarves was of 4th stage saints and almost everyone including Oakenshield and Tawerik quickly bowed in respect.

"What are you doing, kid? Bow quickly." commanded Throk to Kahn in a hushed tone.

[Who are they?] asked Kahn to Throk using their telepathic communication artifact while bowing.

[The Trinity.] replied the old dwarf.

[Batman, Superman & Wonder Woman?]

Kahn asked in a befuddled tone.

[What?! These are the top 3 blacksmiths of the whole empire, you idiots!] berated Throk.

Soon, the three figures were also got seated and took a stance of visitors.

"May I ask why the three of you here?

We didn't send any summon for you." spoke the elderly dwarf among the five high elders.

"This issue reached our ears long ago. The three of us believe that it affects all of the blacksmiths of the dwarven race as well.

The conduct that caused this dispute between Oakenshield and Tawerik is... questionable." spoke the eldest of the three dwarfs.

"Master Ivaldi... We appreciate your concern but the dwarven council can take care of the issue." said one of the high elders.



Just then, the second 4th stage blacksmith spoke.

"Tch! How? Do any of you even know what it means to be a blacksmith? Or how our race's heritage is imbued in this craft?"

"Master Druvagar... this dispute shall be solved with a proper procedure using the laws of the council. There's no need for either of you three to worry." said the fifth high elder from the far left side.

[Boy, master Ivaldi is the number one saint blacksmith of the entire empire.

Even the previous and the current emperor's weapons and armors are made by him.

There was a time when even I and that cunt Tawerik trained under him. So be respectful when you look at him.] warned Throk.

Just then, master Ivaldi who had a long white beard spoke in an authoritative tone.

"The way you did things, Tawerik... That was against the honor of us dwarven blacksmiths.

You stole his people and even his disciples as soon as he hit rock bottom.

If that is your way of becoming a renowned blacksmith and rise in reputation and popularity... then I for one will never support someone like you." he said with a look of disappointment towards the bald dwarf.

But before Throk could rejoice in the fact that the number one blacksmith of the empire just took his side... Master Druvagar chimed in.

"What's wrong with it? All of us are aware of how big-mouthed Oakenshield is. That he always loses his mind when he is angry over some issues.

Tawerik only extended a helping hand and spared the students of the bleak future they were going to have because of this loud mouth who messed with the imperial prince himself." he said and displayed his intentions to back up the bald dwarf blacksmith.

"But to make matters worse; Throk Oakenshield..." he spoke in an infuriated tone.

"Has committed a taboo of the dwarven race!"

## **Chapter 574The Verdict**

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Right in front of the High Elders, hundreds of reputed as well as influential figures, officials and the top individuals of the blacksmithing profession... Master Druvagar, one of the top 3 saint blacksmiths of the Vulcan empire declared that Throk had committed a taboo.

"For the sake of his pride and in the fit of anger... Oakenshield has committed an unspoken taboo of our craft and the dwarven race." said the second-ranked blacksmith of the empire.

Druvagar then continued as he pointed his finger towards Kahn while his stern voice resounded in the entire hall.

"He took a human as his disciple!"

His loud announcement took Kahn by surprise.

[What's the meaning of this? Was there such a rule?] asked Kahn in a befuddled tone.

[Not really. But you see... the previous rulers of the empire were humans.

They had enslaved the entire dwarven race back then and thus... the ancestral history between the two races even after the Firebornes took over and reformed this empire hasn't been on good terms.

This doesn't include any of the previous restrictions placed on the human race. The bad blood between dwarves and humans exists from more than 700 years in this empire.] replied Throk.

[Fuck! Means I'm basically inside the enemy territory.] said Kahn with an alarmed expression.

[Let me do the talking.] said Throk and spoke loudly.

"With all due respect, master Druvagar... our ancestors never made such a rule.

Besides, my disciple wasn't the one to spill any of our people's blood.

Before the incident with the imperial decree... we all know how humans have lived in our empire.

And me selecting him as my disciple is between myself and Tawerik. This has nothing to do with customs of our race or the blacksmithing craft." rebutted Throk, yet in a respectful tone.

"You really have hit the bottom now, Oakenshield. Where is your pride as a member of the dwarven race?"

What's next... you'll name him as your successor too?" asked Druvagar in a mocking tone. Then he looked around the members of the council and the crowd.

"Tell me! Should our dwarven race's techniques and forging methods be taught to a human?"

From what I heard, he used to be a handyman before Oakenshield made that bet with Tawerik.

Someone with no talent, skills and heritage now gets to know the secrets of our ancestors even though he can't even forge a common rank sword properly." he said and tried to rile up the crowd.

From his words, Kahn understood that Druvagar was one of those people who hated humans in the empire. The blacksmithing techniques and methods, the heritage and pride of the dwarven race were just an excuse to discredit Throk.

At this moment, Kahn wanted to rebuke but he couldn't... because strength didn't matter here; rather the skills.

And he was indeed lacking in them at the moment because his training hadn't reached a level of forging so far.

Throk had only taught him how to perfect his hammering skills to form desired shapes from metal ingots.

The actual forging procedure was much more complicated and time-consuming than just hammering a sheet of metal. Thus, he did not have any right to retort among the true experts here.

Plus if he spoke anything disrespectful, it would make things difficult for their side as offending one of the top 3 would earn him the ire of many dwarves here.

"Master Fili, what is your stand on this?" asked one of the elders to the last saint blacksmith of the trio.

"I only came here to see the verdict. I don't wish to side with either of the parties." replied Fili who had a dark red beard and braided mohawk as he took a neutral stand.

Soon, master Ivaldi also interjected and emphasized how unethical and disgraceful it was to bring down Throk when that maniac called Rogis targeted him just because he was a dwarf. He too voiced his misgivings about how the Dwarven Council intentionally ignored the situation back then.

After another hour of heated arguments and rebuttals... the whole mood of the hearing became clear to Kahn.

Half the members present were on Throk's side because they felt that Tawerik was wrong to steal the former's students when he was in a pinch.

Others just hated Throk because he was teaching a human their techniques and skills for the sake of his pride and the challenge as an excuse.

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TWO HOURS LATER.

In a separate chamber of their own... The High Elders were discussing stuff between themselves after they adjourned the hearing to give their final verdict.

"The issue is truly bigger. Because both sides have half the people of the council divided. Any verdict wouldn't go unopposed." said one of the high elders with a somber expression.

"Plus there is the Church and Imperial heirs involved. Thus, we can't make any decisions that would be unfavorable to Oakenshield either. Otherwise, we will end up souring the relationship between the dwarven race and these two powers." said an elderly dwarf.

"Tawerik is also a well-connected oaf. His corporation holds a lot of sway in the blacksmithing business and does a lot of deals with the nobles of our species throughout the empire.

Although his claims are without proof... we can't just outright give a verdict beneficial to Oakenshield.

There's no way we won't get dragged into the mud if we favor either side." said the third high elder.

"Plus Master Ivaldi and Master Druvagar are very reputable figures themselves. They also have a lot of prestige within our race, the council, nobles and imperial clan.

In the end... It will be us taking the biggest hit as a result." said the fourth elder with an ashen white braid.

Just then, the main leader of the high elders, the one who sat in the middle during the hearing, spoke with a thoughtful look...

"Then we'll let them fight in a brawl and keep our hands clean." he proposed.

"What do you mean?"

Soon, he told everyone a scheme that would help them keep their integrity intact as the highest authority of the dwarven race and avoid appearing like they were favoring or abandoning either of the sides.

After an hour, the hearing resumed and everyone gathered to hear the conclusion.

"The council has made a decision." spoke the figurehead of high elders and continued in a righteous tone.

"Since the dispute started between the two parties in the name of displaying their skills and credibility

as dwarven blacksmiths to uphold their reputation and honor...

The council thinks that it is just and right to let both parties decide the fate of their companies and corporations with their skills alone as it is the only thing acknowledged by the entire dwarven race and those who work in the blacksmithing craft." he declared.

"And to settle their dispute..." he said with a benign smile on his face.

"Dwarven Council itself will organize and conduct the challenge between their disciples next year in front of the whole Vulcan empire."

## **Chapter 575The Decision**

The High Elders of the Dwarven Council, which represented the entire dwarven species in the whole Vulcan empire gave their conclusion regarding the dispute between Throk Oakenshield and Bifur Tawerik, two of the top 5 saint blacksmiths of the empire.

However... both Kahn and Throk were left bamboozled after the elders declared that they'd organize an event in front of the eyes of the whole empire and carry out the challenge between Throk and Bifur.

And their respective students, Kahn and Helsi would represent their masters and compete against each other to prove who was the better teacher and a skilled blacksmith among the former two figures.

But the main reason why Kahn turned speechless was because this whole arrangement completely thwarted his expectations and future plans.

Prior to this decision by the council, it was supposed to be a challenge held only between the two saint blacksmiths and the amount of audience would be limited.

But now... if the Dwarven Council was to make it an empire-wide event... there was simply too much at stake and too much attention would be paid to this faceoff than it was needed.

Kahn only wanted the challenge to use as an excuse to learn the skills from Throk after the latter made a bet with Tawerik. His intentions were only to learn the blacksmithing skills and even he didn't take the challenge seriously at all.

And once he was done... he'd either carry on with managing the Oakenshield company as it was a safe source of income and resources and planned to make breakthroughs to higher saint stages quietly.

Even if he lost the challenge... only certain individuals would know of it and Throk's reputation could be recovered in the future.

But if the challenge becomes something that attracted the attention of the whole empire... then Kahn was going to get into everyone's eyes even if he didn't want to. This included even the church, and the imperial clan itself. The two of them were the forces he was trying to avoid and only revealed himself as Throk's disciple till this point.

The competition that was supposed to happen behind closed doors was now going to become a public exhibition because of this verdict.

In a way, the Dwarven Council had fucked over Throk and Kahn big time.

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"I refuse!" bellowed Throk with eyes full of disagreement.

"This is between me and Tawerik, why is the council trying to make it a big deal and intervene more than they need to?"

"Who even asked you to organize an empire-wide event?"

panda novel Not only I am falsely accused, but now you're dragging me into bigger troubles just to show your authority.

Looks like the council is very desperate to appear relevant at this point." rebutted Throk without a shred of respect in his tone.

Because he too was well aware of the consequences. In a way, the council had cornered him in an unfavorable situation.

"Ha ha!"

Why? What happened, Oakenshield?"

Didn't you say that day that you could even turn this human into one of the best blacksmiths in the empire?" asked Tawerik, the bald blacksmith with an exhilarated expression.

Because as things stood, this was indeed a blessing for him. Not only he'd get to clear up the bad reputation that he currently had and on top of it... he'd be able to publicly shame Oakenshield as well as raise his reputation to the point where he'd become a behemoth of the blacksmithing industry.

To him, the victory was already in his grasp because Helsi himself was a semi-saint blacksmith already.

"Don't tell me that you were just bluffing that day and you don't actually have the skills to do anything than barking around."

If you're going to chicken out... then admit that I'm better than you in front of everyone and maybe then I'll rethink." he said with a smug smile on his face.

"And don't forget that you still have signed that contract. It can't be unless both sides agree.

So if you don't accept the decision by the council... it can be considered as my win and I will take your whole company and all of its assets as per our contract." reminded Tawerik.

Kahn remembered the day when he got mixed into their fight. It was indeed Throk running his mouth aloud and shamelessly boasted that he could even make a normal human from the street one of the top blacksmiths of the empire.

And now, his words came back to bite them in the ass.

"You!... You just want to look good when you're the one who should be scrutinized and not me." retorted Throk.

Because Throk also felt that if the challenge was indeed displayed across the empire, he was going to lose everything he had since Kahn was most likely to lose anyway.

And then, his entire life's reputation, as well as the company will be gone. Just because the issue had been overblown out of proportion... he couldn't hand out a husk of his company like they planned before and would eventually have to give Tawerik everything they owned as per their contract.

At this moment... both Kahn and Throk were indeed in a pinch. This time, even others who backed Throk didn't speak up.

Because often, this was how things were settled between the famous blacksmiths of the empire even in the past.

The skills and talent was what their entire species acknowledged as per the old customs.

And if Throk backed out from this... then they'd all feel stupid to take the side of this dwarf without a backbone.

Even Throk could also feel the judgemental and expectant gazes on him without even looking.

[Kid... what do you say? I'll lose everything at this point.] he spoke with Kahn.

Kahn then started contemplating many things. Because till now... everything he learned was due to curiosity and his will to learn and perfect his blacksmithing skill set for future gains.

But now... the issue was bigger than himself and involved Throk, his company and also the people who chose to support him in the hearing. This time... it was for a bigger cause.

And after a lot of thinking... Kahn spoke in a loud voice that resounded in the entire council hall and declared...

"We will accept the challenge!"

#### Chapter 577 Hard Mode

The early morning of the next day started as a military drill for both Kahn and Blackwall while Throk was their drill sergeant who woke them up by releasing his killing intent on both the disciples.

"Get into your working clothes you useless shits!

Is that how you want to become a blacksmith?

By sleeping instead of training?!" bellowed the old dwarf.

Yawn!

"What's this? Since when did you start working so early?" asked Kahn who looked like a walking corpse in his half-asleep state.

BANG!

Before he could even react, Throk leaped in the air and punched Kahn in the head.

Crack!

His head was buried in the floor as the tiles were cracked open.

"Inside the forging room, you only address me as Master!" shouted Throk with a visible fire coming out of his eyes.

He then looked at Blackwall with his fiery eyes and the abyss knight general instantly stood straight and rearranged his posture like a wooden pole. Otherwise, he too was going to receive the same wake-up call.

"Hey, why did you..."

BANG!!

"Argh!"

Another fist hit Kahn's head as he was buried even deeper.

"Hey? What 'hey'? What did I tell you to call me?" asked Throk as he released all of his orange-colored pressure full of world energy belonging to a second stage saint.

"This is going too far! This is..."

BANG!!



This time, Throk hit him even harder and Kahn's head was thoroughly buried in the flooring like an ostrich.

"So... what did I say again?" asked the saint blacksmith.

"I will wake up early from now on... Master." spoke Kahn like an obedient child as two swollen mountains appeared on his head.

"Good. Now both of you will start the forge and show me how you two perform smelting and then casting." he said in a domineering tone.

Both Kahn and Blackwall instantly went into alert mode as they felt a sense of foreboding that involved them getting beaten to death by the old dwarf if they missed a single step or made a slight mistake.

Kahn and Blackwall quickly brought in metal ores weighing around a kilo and rearranged everything in the foundry.

In the Vulcan empire, the top blacksmiths used A Rank mana cores to power the magic furnaces just like how Albestros used to do in Rakos Empire. But the equipments here were far too advanced and directly let them know of the temperature of the furnace and how close were the ores to the melting point.

Soon, the metal ores that varied in shapes started melting and they prepared cylindrical casts to pour in the liquid metal. After clearing out the slag that surfaced at the top and putting it in the crucible, Kahn tilted the furnace using a leveling level while Blackwall held onto the mold where they were to pour in this molten liquid.

Although this was just normal casting procedure, the duo felt like their life was hanging on a thread because Throk was intensely staring at them... just waiting to see a slight mistake in the process.

After carefully pouring out the molten liquid in the mold and successfully performing the casting... Kahn then started a magic cooling equipment surrounding the mold that cooled down the liquid while it took the shape of the mold without affecting the inner composition of the metal or forming cracks on the shape since it needed to naturally lose the temperature.

If this was earth... this equipment would save the professionals hours of time that they had to waste just to have the liquid cool down.

In just 30 minutes, the whole casting procedure was over and they took out the sample from the mold and presented it to the old dwarf.

"Hmm... not bad. There are no bubbles or any cracks.

I would've broken your arms if there was even a slight amount of slag." said Throk as he looked at a perfectly cast cylindrical-shaped sample.

"I guess you two have learned enough to be done with smelting and casting.

Now show me how you do hammering and quenching." he commanded.

"What shape?" asked Blackwall.

"Perfect rectangular ingot." he said.

"What?! This is cylindrical. And you want us to make it in a flat rectangular shape without smelting it? Do you know how hard that is?" questioned Kahn.

"He he! Of course, I do.

But I didn't say your training was going to be easy using the conventional methods.

If you can't make me a perfectly rectangular ingot in the dimensions I order you to...

Then you both are already failures as a blacksmith." spoke Throk with a condescending look on his face as if he was looking down on Kahn and Blackwall's entire existence.

But to no avail... the duo had to follow the orders and the entire morning hammering and sweltering the casted samples into the shape.

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At night, Kahn was finally free after spending 15 hours of training without a break while Throk berated him and Blackwall and beat the shit out of them while they made many mistakes.

Although he had learned hammering skills a while ago... the rank was still lower and so was his mastery. Thus, he screwed up more than 20 times and had the old dwarf physically and physically torture them.

Kahn now stood in his new bedroom in the company quarters.

Swoosh!

Ronin appeared out of the shadows and handed Kahn a space ring.

"Enough for two months." he said and disappeared from the spot.

Kahn then quickly activated his Dimensional Domain and poured out the content of this space ring.

And one by one, he started creating doppelgangers, all of whom possessed 70% of his physical stats and all his skills except for the divine abilities and the blessings.

After 5 doppelgangers were created and received enough SS Rank cores with their separate space rings, enough to supply them with mana to sustain themselves for months...

Kahn distributed the heap among the 5 and spoke in a resolute voice since this was only the beginning.

"Alright everyone... it's time to start the hard grind."

Chapter 578 Hiatus Announcement

Majority of the tendons and veins have swollen up to the point I can barely move my fingers and today, I had to visit a doctor because it kept swelling even more.

The cause being the obvious... writing daily and that too from months without any break has caused a lot of strain on my muscles, veins, ligaments and tendons.

Meanwhile, the left-hand thumb is going through the same type of pain.

And now, I'm advised to give the work at least a week's break and some medicines to ease the pain, use ice packs, and add fish oil capsules in my routine along with some restrictions on diet to reduce the inflammation to make a proper recovery with time.

Well... I kind of saw this coming because it has been a couple of weeks since the pain and muscle straining started but I didn't even take a day off and kept on with the work while my hands didn't get the necessary rest.

Hence, I have been carrying on despite the mental and physical health issues and burnout that I've been facing for quite some time. And now...

"I'm tired of this Earth, these people. I'm tired of being caught in the tangle of their lives."

Jokes aside... my hands are forced to take a break (literally) and now, I barely have any will to live... I mean to 'write'.

So I will be on a one week break.

Otherwise, I'll end up worsening the pain to the point it becomes self-inflicted injury and results in me getting decommissioned for weeks or even a month (something I've experienced in the past with back/waist pain a few months ago).

So I hope you all can forgive me once and I'll try to make up for the break next month after I'm properly healed... both in body and mind.

Even when I'm writing this... it hurts like hell and my right arm is becoming dysfunctional these days.

So see you all next month. And thanks for your understanding. And remember...

Nothing is true; everything is permitted.

The early morning of the next day started as a military drill for both Kahn and Blackwall while Throk was their drill sergeant who woke them up by releasing his killing intent on both the disciples.

"Get into your working clothes you useless shits!

Is that how you want to become a blacksmith?

By sleeping instead of training?!" bellowed the old dwarf.

Yawn!

"What's this? Since when did you start working so early?" asked Kahn who looked like a walking corpse in his half-asleep state.

BANG!

Before he could even react, Throk leaped in the air and punched Kahn in the head.

Crack!

His head was buried in the floor as the tiles were cracked open.

"Inside the forging room, you only address me as Master!" shouted Throk with a visible fire coming out of his eyes.

He then looked at Blackwall with his fiery eyes and the abyss knight general instantly stood straight and rearranged his posture like a wooden pole. Otherwise, he too was going to receive the same wake-up call.

"Hey, why did you..."

BANG!!

"Argh!"

Another fist hit Kahn's head as he was buried even deeper.

"Hey? What 'hey'? What did I tell you to call me?" asked Throk as he released all of his orange-colored pressure full of world energy belonging to a second stage saint.

"This is going too far! This is..."

BANG!!

This time, Throk hit him even harder and Kahn's head was thoroughly buried in the flooring like an ostrich.

"So... what did I say again?" asked the saint blacksmith.

"I will wake up early from now on... Master." spoke Kahn like an obedient child as two swollen mountains appeared on his head.

"Good. Now both of you will start the forge and show me how you two perform smelting and then casting." he said in a domineering tone.

Both Kahn and Blackwall instantly went into alert mode as they felt a sense of foreboding that involved them getting beaten to death by the old dwarf if they missed a single step or made a slight mistake.

Kahn and Blackwall quickly brought in metal ores weighing around a kilo and rearranged everything in the foundry.

In the Vulcan empire, the top blacksmiths used A Rank mana cores to power the magic furnaces just like how Albestros used to do in Rakos Empire. But the equipments here were far too advanced and directly let them know of the temperature of the furnace and how close were the ores to the melting point.

Soon, the metal ores that varied in shapes started melting and they prepared cylindrical casts to pour in the liquid metal. After clearing out the slag that surfaced at the top and putting it in the crucible, Kahn tilted the furnace using a leveling level while Blackwall held onto the mold where they were to pour in this molten liquid.

Chapter 579 Honest Work

Kahn and his doppelgangers stood inside the Dimensional Domain, his separate space that spanned for 5 kilometers while from the outside, it didn't even span for 5 meters. And right in front of them, were various tools, equipment, metal ingots, forging materials and furnaces placed in order.

These were the forging materials and equipment Ronin stole from the company warehouses and Ceril covered up the expenses in the logbooks so there was no trace to track the purchase.

This was time for Kahn to practice his skills and techniques and as he planned before... the doppelgangers were going to become his cheats.

Currently, he only had an F rank blacksmithing skill even after weeks of training. And he unlocked this one on his own and not directly absorbed it from someone else.

Contrary to what one would expect from an isekai or reincarnation fantasy novel... people didn't awaken or learned such skills just by making repeated movements or performing a certain type of attack patterns in Vantrea.

Even fighting skills required understanding and physical compatibility to unlock them while magic spells and skills demanded control over mana and different elements of nature.

As for crafts like Blacksmithing... it had rules of its own. Even someone like Kahn who the blessings from a Demi-God, wasn't an exception to them.

First, he had to make himself get used to the movements of smithing techniques, then he had to perfect his control over the physical force with which he was performing the forging. Aside from that, he also needed the perfect understanding of the properties of the metal or alloy being forged.

Then how best to shape them while having perfect control of the tools and equipment he was using in the procedure. And while doing so, Kahn needed to pay attention to every single hit was making to shape the sample at hand.

Spacing out or just hammering without thought would end up sacrificing the end product. Something he and Blackwall learned after making over 30 pieces of steel armors and gauntlets.

Some of them had uneven layers. And some portions were thinner than the others. This caused the weight imbalance and also defensive strength was weaker in these parts.

If it was just some blacksmith apprentice working in a local smithy... the masters would be proud of them to succeed up to this level of the finished product in such a short time. But the master Kahn and Blackwall had... was one of the top 5 in the entire empire.

Throk scolded and beat both of his students to a pulp because even a slight mistake or uneven weight distribution could restrict the fighting prowess of the wearer and even cost them their lives in a life and death battle.

The smallest mistake meant a complete failure in his eyes. And thus... Kahn and Blackwall were forced to keep up with the same training for days until they made a perfect product that was passable in the eyes of their master.

Although this constant berating and beating for screw-ups pissed him off a lot, Kahn also understood that Throk wasn't just doing it for kinks or wasting effort... instead, he was building a solid foundation for both of them where they could progress and learn new skills after mastering the basic ones first.

Because even the tallest building, no matter how big of a marvel in terms of architecture or design it was or no matter how amazing it looked... would be decimated to the ground if the foundation itself was weak.

Thus, Kahn and Blackwall were working tirelessly throughout the day while working with different materials and types of tools as soon as the morning sun rose and stopped only when it was dinner time.

And inside the Dimensional Domain, his 5 doppelgangers were helping Kahn to increase his mastery and experience over the skills he had already unlocked. Thus, compared to others... he was training six times harder and also improving at a drastic pace.

Days and then weeks passed by and finally, the Blacksmith's Hammering skill rose to B rank as he kept crossing the 100% mastery and proficiency threshold one by one and ranked up the skill with the help of the other 5 doppelgangers.

Meanwhile, the rest 10 doppelgangers were allowed to do tasks of their own.

5 of them were left with fighting and perfecting the newly gained skills that he gained after becoming a saint and the ones that were upgraded to Saint Rank after his breakthrough. Kahn was at a stage where any skill below the SSS Rank was hardly useful for him because his playing field was now elevated to Saints and Legendary rank creatures.

One of his doppelgangers transformed into a Titan while the other one attacked it using the newly upgraded Dragon Strike skill.

3rd one intervened and used Lucid Reality skill on both to throw them off balance in a battle while the 4th one used the Gravity Law skills to suppress the others.

And lastly, the 5 one was using Darkness Elemental skills and attack infused in skills such as Dark Lightning Strike while using Spiritual Replica skill which allowed Kahn to create a separate entity made of world energy that was no different than his version of Susano.

All the doppelgangers used a particular set of skills and fought a battle to the death on the original body's orders.

Because of this way, Kahn would naturally find flaws in himself, his techniques and combat capabilities as well as learn how to counter different types of enemies with varying abilities and skills.

The Kahn of now could kill a semi-saint individual just by releasing his War Dominance aura alone if he willed it. So the new skills he got from killing those legendary rank monsters, Skoll & Hati as well as the Guardian Dragon were what he needed to pay attention to the most.

Because being ignorant or putting off his training was no longer an option for him. He had to be prepared for the day when somehow others found out about his real identity as Hero of Darkness.

As for the last 5...

They were going to be his trump cards.

### **Chapter 580 The Price to Pay**

After distributing the tasks his first 10 doppelgangers had to do... Kahn then moved to the last 5. Unlike the others... these didn't have any form of physical training to do, rather... it was going to test their minds to the limit.

Kahn wanted to resume his Magic and also the Dimensional Law study for a while and after nearly half a year later... he finally got the chance because now he had peace and wasn't burdened with the responsibilities of a Sovereign or had to hunt for legendary monsters to protect the borders and the lives of his subjects.

Each one was studying two to three different elements and performing spells, barriers and formations, including the dark magic element ones. Because even now, he was only an Intermediate Rank Magician and hadn't even surpassed someone like Solomon Elfenheim, the elven mage whose innate abilities he acquired.

Kahn had no genius or experienced master to teach him magic skills or help correct his doubts. Even someone like Ceril wasn't that big of an expert compared to other saint mages because he too had limited knowledge just like Kahn. Just that he could use multiple elements without any restrictions while others could use 3 to 4 at best.

So all Kahn could do was learn and perfect them through trial and error while figuring out things on his own.

However... the books left by the elven semi-saint mage related to magic and the space law itself were his biggest source of knowledge and guidance, making them adequate for his current situation.

So the remaining five of the doppelgangers were also swarmed with work.

Before becoming a saint, the doppelganger skill was only a SS Rank skill and didn't allow Kahn to share the mastery and proficiency of any of these skills.

Only after he became a saint did the skill itself reach Saint Rank and because of the world energy Kahn now had access to, this shared connection evolved and now he could use them as his cheat codes.

So it was the time to reap the maximum rewards while covering all important fields and without wasting any more time like he was forced to do before becoming a saint.

At the same time... all these doppelgangers needed a generous amount of mana and world energy to carry out their work. Because whether it was the fighting skills or the magic spells; whether it was the transformation abilities or using the gravity law and the dimension law abilities... they all needed a lot of world energy and mana to perform.

All the doppelgangers only had 70% of Kahn's physical stats and abilities. But none of them had their own reserves of mana and world energy because they were part of an ability and Kahn was the actual source.

The SS Rank cores he gave them were only useful to extend their activation time but didn't work as the source of their strength. And even with his current capacity which was double that of a normal saint... Kahn didn't have even 10% of the quantity that was required.

This was one of the biggest shortcomings of the hack he was using. But thanks to a certain shameless almighty being who didn't like to leave plotheoles... Kahn already had an alternate source available.

Rathnaar's Core.

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Since the First Emperor of Rakos Empire aka Rathnaar Whitlock's core was bound to his soul already... the doppelgangers could automatically harness the required mana and world energy directly from the Peak Saint's core.

Hence, it was providing them with inexhaustible reserves so even if they all were not legit saints, practicing these skills was no problem.

Again, the Peak Saint's core proved itself to be one of Kahn's biggest assets and helped him bypass many restrictions that would be impossible unless one was at least a 5th stage saint mage.

When Kahn asked the old emperor about how strong his core was and how much energy it held... Rathnaar only scoffed at Kahn as if he was entertaining a newborn.

'Even if your doppelgangers used it as a source every single day for the next 10 years, they still wouldn't manage to deplete 30% of the original quantity stored in the core.'

Those were his words. And the hard-to-digest fact was... Kahn could feel through his soul connection with the core that he indeed hadn't even scratched the surface.

[Just how powerful was a Peak Saint?] wondered Kahn with his mouth agape.

All he knew was that Rathnaar could travel a couple of thousand kilometers of distance in a single second at his peak. And a Demi-God could travel ten thousand kilometers.

Meanwhile Kahn... a First Stage Saint could travel one kilometer distance in a second and that too when he used his several speed-enhancing skills and abilities such as Quicksilver, Jetstream, Sky Overlord and Gravity Law skills such as Attraction and Repulsion to enhance his momentum.

The world was truly vast and Kahn had just come out of the little well he was living in. Even the Vulcan Empire wasn't comparable to the vast sea of wonders and powerful beings called Vantrea.

After letting out a defeated sigh, Kahn carried on with this arrangement while all the 15 doppelgangers trained and perfected themselves at different corners of this dimensional domain.

And the biggest surprising fact about this whole arrangement was... that all the fifteen doppelgangers shared the same mind as Kahn.

They weren't some mindless subordinates or proxy replicas. All of them were the real Kahn including the original body and as they practiced everything whether it was fighting moves, magic, space law or the blacksmithing skills...



They were all connected to each other mentally and physically while collectively... they experienced everything at the same time.

One just focused on the particular task while putting everything and everyone else in the background of their mind while performing the given responsibility individually.

But like how nature or energy worked on the law of conservation and equivalent exchange... he too had to play by the same rule.

As for the price Kahn had to pay was something that would...

Completely destroy him.