

《The Forest Spirit who sought the Gods》

Chapter 74 - The captain (2)

"Welcome, dear audience, to the arena! For your viewing p.l.e.a.s.u.r.e today, let us admire a game of Kings where every contestant fights for supremacy in a ring! You may place get details on star contestants and place bets through our personnel throughout the seating areas. And now, please cheer for the entrance of our fighters!"

The announcer hyping up the crowd outside and the ovation in response to his cries prevented Thani and Alice from hearing the monetary briefing of the contestants fully, but the general idea was to win consecutive matches. It seemed like people knew the noise would be a problem, so a summary had been put upon an enormous sign close to the opening gate:

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POINTS

10 X max streak

more blessings - 2

same blessings - 3

less blessings - 5

Top score - 50 gold

Popularity vote - 25 gold

King at the end - 10 gold

Total dominance - 1 gold per fight.

max streak - gold

total points – silver

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As soon as they crossed into the dust floor, Thani was dragged to a ring as one of the first eight Kings of the event while Alice and Oakbud followed the rest of the fighters. Seen from the bottom, the audience seats didn't seem full but people were still moving around a lot. Everyone's focus though was on the eight dust rings, each with a diameter of ten metres, and the fighters slowly accumulating in front of each. Since everyone couldn't come up at once, each ring had an arena attendant working as both a judge and as a lot-drawer to determine who would fight next.

In a matter of minutes, each king had his first opponent, and under the crowd's cheer the signal to begin was given. Alice and Oakbud hadn't pulled a number to be in the first round of fights, but Thani immediately cut the top of her back with her dagger in a flourish. With a sigh, the Blood Angel's wings revealed themselves to the world, far more majestic than they were the last time. In fact, if she didn't restrain herself they would be covering her whole ring with size to spare.

Her first opponent was obviously weaker than her; she could feel the man's fear and only lament that except maybe one of the other Kings, not one opponent would score her more than two points. In fact, as one of the star contestants, everyone knew her latest recorded status as four blessings while she knew nothing of her opponents. Effectively this deterred the vast majority of contestants, only leaving the more daring ones to rise up to challenge her. But this one looked like he hadn't done his homework.

Thani ended the fight instantly, rushing into the man's body head-first and tackling him to the ground. His reaction was on the slower side. His half-hearted swing of the sword bounced powerlessly on Thani's armour and the next second, he was thrown out of the ring. Ten seconds later, he was successfully kept outside by Thani and set on the bench for 30 minutes while she earned her first "total dominance" fight without having to strike with her weapon. Still in perfect shape, she went back to the circle's centre and signed the judge to send the next challenger.

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It was close to noon and her score was still low. At least she had managed to pull off a surprise knockout on the previous King to steal his place. Alice swore under her breath. Her turn to fight had come late, and now she had just seen her next opponent switch place with someone else. This one had a mace and shield.

Luckily for her, the man was as slow as he was strong so the matchup wasn't the worst. All it took was a couple of misleading materialized shadows in front of his face, and she was at his back with one of her daggers at his throat. During her time waiting, she had observed the other fighters around her and had decided to go full-on speed to fight without minding the exhaustion. She would also materialize some shadows to hide her movements or try to blind her foes and kept her shadow jump as an ace card that

would let her score that one more victory before standing down. She was a bit disgruntled at being classified as a three-blessing contestant since [break] couldn't be used reliably in a head-on fight, but she was not the only one with that kind of trouble.

Her foe had to give up, and Alice immediately sat down to recuperate for the five minutes allotted. She gave a regretful glance at her bow in the judge's care, which was too unwieldy and lethal in such a tight space, and checked her armour over once again. Everything was in place; she c.a.r.e.s.s.ed her pair of daggers and prepared herself mentally for the next fight.

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Oakbud didn't care for the tactics of opportunity fights, observation, and score maths that came with the time-out rules. He only waited for his turn to bring his golem in the ring. With Liezel and Talia's warnings in mind, he would only fight with his magic to control his construct and cast some support magic on the side. He wasn't sure if Thani held the same reservations, though. She probably wouldn't need it since she had her dagger serving as a secondary spellcasting nexus already.

Since it was his first fight, Oakbud only had the right to build or repair a basic humanoid golem for the sake of fairness. To change its shape and build it further, the rules stated that he could do it in-between matches as a King.

The judge had explained the special rule for Oakbud's loss to the man, but fighting a human and a golem was quite different. The current King wasn't prepared for the ambling wall of rock and dirt coming at him. His weapon of choice was a sword, close to the worst pick possible against solid rock. If it were normal rock, advanced raw magic manipulation could allow him to cut it anyway, but facing him was Oakbud's own magic to defend against that possibility.

The little spirit dropped his defence long enough to trade one of the golem's arms to grab the man's ankle with a spell, and swiftly proceeded to order his golem to end the fight with a clean hit to the face. From a certain point on, brute force was enough to clear away the opposition; his next objective was to build his golem up to a state similar to the time he copied the Granite in Ocean's Guard.

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"And the unstoppable Blood Angel scores her fifth consecutive win! Will she manage to equal the all-time record of seven? That's right dear audience, seven! And I've been informed that her current score is no less than sixty-one, with two dominations in the mix!"

Thani didn't hear the announcer, too focused on the unconscious woman in front of her

to take notice that she'd won. This last fight had been a nightmare for her. Thani's opponent only wore thin clothes but had goggles and a pair of strange weapons heavily secured to her arms. The dissonance resolved itself once Thani found out that her foe was a follower of Eludia, and that she was one of the other seven first Kings that had come to try to end her win streak; with equally four blessings.

Some bands on her armour had snapped, she had tripped, dropped her dagger, been blinded by flying dust or her falling hair... all "by chance", while her opponent was obviously prepared for every possible hazard and could fight at full capacity. The sensation of fighting against the worst odds being real was frightening to say the least. Her healing capabilities couldn't match the rate at which she received grievous injuries, and if not for her dagger allowing her to double-cast she would be the one laying flat on the ground instead. The most incredible was that contrary to popular belief, luck had not turned its tide during the fight at all, staying securely in favour of the challenger.

And now she only had five minutes to fix everything wrong on herself. She wouldn't be able to and she knew it, instead choosing to use the same stratagem as her last opponent: since she couldn't continue her own streak, she'd throw the next fight and go end the other Kings' instead to prevent them from catching up in score!

While people shouted in disappointment, Thani finally had enough time to truly rest, fix her equipment and look at other fights. Her next target had a streak of three and was on his way to four already. Oakbud was currently flattening his second challenger as a King. Alice just stood down like she did after giving a last hurrah and ending things with a streak of three. Fighting different people consecutively was hard; winning with enough energy for the next even more so. While Thani had the capacity to get back in fighting shape before the end of the event, Alice didn't.

As time went on, the fights got shorter and bloodier and the most thoughtful contestants were catching on the dynamic shift, ready to try their luck. Oakbud lost by default after his golem destroyed the border of the ring and stepped out too long by accident. The king in Thani's sights lost, giving her more time to rest and pick another target. Alice tried to fight once more and stood as King again, but got beaten back right away without scoring anymore points. More than half the fighters had retired for good from injury and fatigue, only leaving about fifty people spread over the eight arenas out of the hundred and thirty-seven at the start.

Thani was startled when a hand landed on her shoulder. Even with her blessings degenerating, she could still feel instinctual emotions from people around her; but she hadn't sensed this man's approach. Either he had a way of shielding himself, or he wasn't human. At least not a living one, she thought when turning to face the newcomer's burning blue eyes.

"You're ready again. Fight me now."

"Who are you?" Thani asked. "What is an undead doing here?"

"Who I am was lost generations ago, but the living refer to me as the Captain these days. You probably haven't heard of me, but I certainly have heard of you, Thani of the Blood." His voice was calm and composed, but his stance exuded strength and an insatiable will to fight. The strangely rational undead unsheathed his bastard longsword, pointing it straight at her throat.

"Now fight me, God-candidate." He whispered to her only, "or is a mere mortal not good enough of an opponent?"