

"So... the demons have made their move at last," Kain said, worriedly wringing his hands together.

We explained everything as soon as we got back to Ash'tar. Obviously, this wasn't good news for anyone. Especially not for Kain and Loraine, who wanted to protect their kingdoms and the people within them. Well, I didn't blame them. Even I used to get on edge when someone tried to fuck with my turf. It used to be that Chika cushioned me in Japan from the other punks. Now, Chika was the very threat that wanted to break everything.

Scantly-dressed attendants from Owyn's personal dancers entered the room to deliver food and pour drinks.

"What's the move?" I asked. When a dancer came by with a glass, I snatched the whole bottle of wine from her hand instead. "We pulling back to deal with the demons or keep going? I'm fine with either as long as I get to make something cry."

"We have no choice but to finish the war first. If our forces are spread too thin fighting Sultan Yusef, Queen Ririko, and the demons, then we will have already lost," Kain explained.

Kaoru nodded. "I agree. We should dethrone the sultan. That way, Loraine may become the sultana of Amarith to bolster our efforts against Ashura."

"You keep referring to her as Ashura. What does that mean?" Pino asked.

"Ironically, it means demon god," she said, causing everyone in the room to fall silent.

Demon in both worlds. Chika sure knew how to make a name for herself.

"Forget Chika for now. We still got the sultan to fuck up." I jumped to my feet, eager to get my hands around his neck.

The others around the table quickly downed their drinks. Kain beckoned for me, Loraine, and Pino aside to speak in private.

"A bulk of our forces will stay here to keep Ash'tar from being retaken. Cavalry captain Pino will take command and remain here," Kain said.

"Well, damn. Guess we ain't riding the rest of the way together. Kaoru's gonna be disappointed, too." I punched him lightly on the shoulder.

Pino rubbed where I hit him and smiled. "Where you're going next will be out of my realm of expertise. I'll be staying in Ash'tar to look after the city and the surrounding villages in Loraine's place. No demon monolith will be taking anyone while I'm in charge!"

"Wait, what the hell do you mean by out of your realm of expertise? Where the fuck are we going then?"

No one answered me.

Instead, I found out after we traveled for an entire day and stood on a plateau overlooking a giant body of water.

"Holy fucking fuck. That's a fucking ocean, man. Where's the city?" I squinted as a salty breeze blew in.

"Kajar, the Oasis Throne, lies on an island in the middle of this lake. In order to get to it, we will have to travel by ship," Kain said, loosening his cloak to feel the winds.

At least now I knew what Pino meant by this being out of his realm of expertise. The lake shimmered like there were crystals in the water. Below the plateau we were on was a large harbor city. A lot of ships were moored. Some were as small as fishing dinghy, and others as big as galleons.

"I remember the Jewelled Lake. I haven't seen it since I was little... with my father," Loraine uttered in awe.

"Amarinth belongs to you. We're taking it back from the sultan," I promised her.

"We should hurry. Guild Master Yui claimed the port city Ramatarj a week ago. She should be expecting us," Kain said, turning his horse away from the plateau.

"Yui's here?" I stopped walking.

"ANEEEGOOOO! I MISSED YOU!" Yui's shrill voice rang out.

A shiver ran up my spine. I scanned across the desert and couldn't find her anywhere. It wasn't until a shadow started growing bigger and bigger underneath me did I finally look up—and saw Yui.

Everyone backed away just as Yui grand slammed me into the ground. The impact kicked up a cloud of dust and left us both inside a foot-deep crater.

"Hehe! We're finally together again!" Yui beamed, rubbing her cheek against mine.

"Alright, you idiot. Get off me already!" I picked Yui up by the scruff and kept her at an arm's length. She continued staring as if expecting me to say it back, and I finally gave in. "Okay, fine. I missed you, too. *Idiot.*"

"Anego, you do care about me!" she cried as her arms flailed about to try and grab me.

"Aren't you glad to be reunited?" Loraine smiled from the side.

I avoided looking her in the eyes. "Shut up..."

Our forces descended from the plateau and entered Ramatarj. Yui's detachment occupied the city from within and was mostly concentrated at the harbor. Her force of two-hundred Scoth soldiers did work, that was for sure.

"Boss Micchi, we're at your command!" a group of officers that served as the welcoming party boomed.

"I'm the prince and Supreme Commander here! Where's my welcome?" Kain complained.

Although the reception from UKD soldiers was warm, the citizens of Ramatarj were ice cold. Some people slammed their windows and doors shut as we passed. City guards whispered amongst each other in the alleys.

"Yui, you make sure to put the fear of getting beaten up into these people?" I asked.

"I knocked some rowdy ones around and the rest piped down. Why?" Yui tilted her head sideways.

I must be overthinking things.

The smell of the sea was all around us when we got to the harbor. Sailors and soldiers alike were moving cargo around, hurrying to their stations, and barking orders to make sure operations were going smoothly. A familiar cat-eared woman was furiously scribbling into her clipboard.

"They got you working numbers even out here?" I smirked.

Frey's tail straightened up. She whipped around and sighed.

"It's so much work making sure everything is in place! Several of the ships haven't been maintained and aren't seaworthy. One of them hasn't replaced its sails in almost a hundred years! There are harpy poop stains for gods' sakes!" Frey clenched the keyboard and pencil so hard, she threatened to snap them.

"Frey, how many ships suited for warfare are currently seaworthy?" Kain asked.

"Two now. Four next week. Seven by next month if we're lucky. You probably already suspect this, but I'm very certain many were sabotaged before Ramatarj's forces withdrew to Kajar." She glanced over her shoulder to the ships and frowned.

Kaoru folded her arms and scoffed. "I see. The sultan very well could have destroyed the ships outright. He is baiting us to use the damaged ships instead. I expect he intends to fight us at sea."

So, the Jewelled Lake was just one giant fucking moat for Kajar. No one put warships on waters that were landlocked by their own territory. That bastard Yusef. He planned all this pretty far ahead.

"Why don't I just freeze the whole goddamn lake for us to march through?"

"Don't be stupid, Micchi. That would make us sitting ducks out there for anyone attacking us," Kaoru said.

"Hahh? You calling me stupid again?" I growled.

"Hahh? You been calling Anego stupid?" Yui joined to size Kaoru up.

"Please, we're allies! By the gods, this is exhausting..." Kain buried his face into both hands and sighed.

The three of us backed away from each other.

"Fine. Put me, Yui, and Kaoru on one of those ships. We'll test the waters. The rest of you can stay here," I said.

Kain nodded. "A sound plan. In that case, I'll have Frey assign a capable crew to—"

"Half the sailors got to be from Amarinth. That's my condition."

They looked at me like I was crazy. Even the dock workers stopped what they were doing to stare.

"Micchi..." Kain pulled me away from the group to speak quietly. "By bringing Amarinthian soldiers, you risk a mutiny. Or worse! We *should* command the ships ourselves."

I patted him on the shoulder. "I know what I'm doing. If we take a chunk of possible traitors away from Ramatarj, that's less you have to worry about getting stabbed in the back. Trust me. I know opportunistic vultures when I see 'em. I used to deal with those kinds of punks by dragging them into the frontlines with me. Put them in the crossfire, hnow what I'm saying?"

"I... do... and it frightens me that you can come up with something so sinister. Very well, Lady Micchi. I trust you," he said.

"And I trust you to protect Loraine and Kawa while I'm gone. Let's not let each other down."

Kain and Frey quickly put together a ragtag crew of 100 soldiers, dock workers, and sailors. They went to work on the galleon right away, checking the sails and cannons. It was obvious right away that Amarinthians had a bone to pick with those from Scoth and Jinwa, but they were quiet about it.

"Empress!" A male harpy soldier from Jinwa landed next to us at the helm and kneeled. "We're ready to sail. The winds and waters are calm. We'll need to use magic to push the ship."

"Do so," Kaoru ordered.

"Yes, Empress!" He returned to the crew to hand out tasks.

Four mages from Cynderace channeled wind magic to blow against the sails. Thanks to them, the ship groaned and creaked to life as it moved forward.

I walked to the edge of the ship. Loraine, Kawa, and Frey waved to us as we left the harbor.

"Hahaha! Look at me. I'm the captain now!" Yui cackled from the helm. She had found a tricorne hat to wear, and the power was already getting to her head.

"Where did you even find that?" I asked.

"It was in the captain's quarters! Finder's keepers, and whoever has this hat is the captain! Obey me!" she exclaimed.

I snatched the hat from her head and tossed it overboard.

"Aahhh! My captain's hat!" Yui ran to the edge all teary-eyed.

"Listen up!" I shouted to the sailors on board. All over the ship, everyone's eyes turned to us on the quarterdeck. "You're probably wondering what the fuck we're doing, sailing towards Kajar on a single ship. To tell you the truth, I don't fucking know!"

They began murmuring amongst themselves. It was mostly complaints and disbelief that we didn't know what we were doing.

"Why are we here then?"

"W-We should turn back..."

"The only way you're going back is to swim back. Now, full sail ahead! We're sinking every one of the sultan's ships that we see!" I ordered.

"Captain, two ships flying the Amarith colors dead ahead!" the Jinwan harpy shouted from the crow's nest.

An elven crew member rushed up and handed Kaoru a spyglass.

"Looks like they know we're enemies. Both of them are sailing towards us at full speed," Kaoru said.

"I wanna see!" Yui bounced excitedly for her turn until Kaoru handed it over.

"They're spreading out," the shotacon empress warned. "If they sandwich us on both sides, we're as good as dead from cannon fire."

"Get the mages on deck! I want a shield up ten minutes ago! Every cannon better be manned in the next five minutes or anyone slacking is going overboard!" I shouted.

A magical barrier draped over the entire galleon. The two other ships that were closing in fast brought up shields of their own. As they got closer, however, our barrier fizzled out.

On the deck, the Amarith sailors drew their weapons on our people. It happened too fast for Scoth and Jinwan soldiers to mount a counterattack. By the time any of them realized what was going on, the tide had already turned. Several of them had cutlasses against my mages' throats. The mutiny was in full swing.

Just like I had hoped.

"It's over!" a shirtless dark elf with a red bandana yelled to us. "Raise the white flag and surrender. None of ya has to die!"

Kaoru took one step forward with a piercing glare and made them flinch.

"Don't come any closer or it's to the sea with them!" His blade pinched the mage's neck and drew blood, causing Kaoru to forfeit her advance.

"Well, shit. Guess we got no other choice, huh? No other choice but to sick Yui on you. Get 'em!" I yelled.

They tensed up but nothing happened.

Kaoru and I glanced over our shoulders to find Yui, vomiting off the side of the ship.

"Uu... I hate this... I hate it so much... Get me off this nightmare." Yui groaned.

"Oh, come on. Now ain't the time to get seasick!" I threw my hands in the air.

The mutineers began to snicker.

"Heh. Looks like you're outta—"

A bolt of lightning zipped through the deck of the ship. A few of the mutineers were thrown off the ship. Many dropped to the ground, charred and crispy. Yui pinned the last one, the loudmouth elf, to the ground.

"What? H-How?!"

"Ugh... I'm gonna barf again..." Yui's cheeks bloated up.

"No, wait! Throw me overboard instead— aaaahhhhhh!" he screamed for help until a fountain of vomit splashed his face.

The crew cheered and whooped. With the mutineers dealt with, now we could turn back to the enemy ships.

"Commander, Empress! The ships are right on—!"

Cannon fire exploded all around us. A barrier rose just in time to block the volley. Spells and cannonballs pounded the shield instead of the ship. We were getting bombarded all over the place, and the mages who raised the barrier were struggling to keep it up.

"Why the fuck aren't we firing back?" I jumped down from the quarterdeck to check on the situation.

"The cannons are inoperable!" an elven sailor, who was ducked behind the base of the mast, answered in panic. "The Amarithians musta sabotaged 'em before we boarded!"

There was a break in the fire. They were probably replenishing their mana and reloading the cannons.

"Drop the barrier!" I yelled.

"But Captain—"

"Just fucking do it!"

As soon as the barrier vanished, I picked up one of the cannons and chucked it into the other ship off our starboard. It shattered their magical barrier and crashed through one of the gunports on the side of the ship. Several appalled cannoneers peeked out of the hole with their mouths agape. Even their captain, a decorated dark elven captain, couldn't believe what he was seeing.

"How do you fuckers like that?" I smirked.

"Maybe your ideas aren't so stupid after all." Kaoru descended from the helm and picked up a cannonball on the other side.

A commotion on both ships was enough to tell me they were panicking. Their sails turned to put distance away from us.

"Retreating already?" I asked, picking up a cannonball just like Kaoru did. "Stick around and let's play some dodgeball!"