

Chapter 373:

The combined might of Derek's and Silvi's auras first fell over the small group of nobles and top brass of Astrus. Derek and Silvi made sure to control the aura and focus it directly on those in front of them—careful not to let it spill over. He wanted it to be as concentrated as possible for the former king's group.

All was quiet when they first unleashed their auras—the only exception was the collective audible gulp that sounded out from a few of the opposing force. A number of the group slowly backed away with shaky legs, though, he believed that those of the group who were on shaky footing were only like that due to shock, not their ability to withstand his aura—surely they wouldn't be in such a group if they were that weak.

As the others gawked and reached for their weapons, the former king—as quick to the draw as he was—swiftly fired out another one of his ice spikes. This time, it was directed at Derek's forehead instead of the old elf's.

Derek still wasn't into letting an attack crash into his head—he wasn't sure how his vitality and endurance would affect his brain, after all—so, he raised his ungloved hand up quickly and managed to bring his palm up in front of the spike's flight path just before it hit. The sharp point drove into his palm and spun almost like a drill—he felt it when it broke his skin. Derek quickly reached over with his free hand and clutched it until all movement from the spike ceased.

After that, he took the cold spike and held it in front of his eyes—examining it. The tip of the spike was tinted slightly with blood. Then, in front of everyone, he held the palm he used to shield his head from the attack in front of his face to see what kind of damage the ice spike had done. It turned out that it was not much at all. A small droplet of blood had rolled down a part of his hand, but that was it.

The spot where the ice spike had punctured his skin was already almost healed, and the signs of frostbite—bluish skin and some tingling—were on the verge of completely clearing. In fact, after Derek balled his hand into a fist and opened it a couple of times, all signs of any damage other than the small streak of blood were completely gone. And with a quick cast of his Cleaning skill, even the blood disappeared.

Derek had felt safe using his hand to block the attack. He'd seen dozens of the ice spikes being used as attacks from Tevarian and Terrin before, when they were fighting against the transformed Alanah, and Derek believed his defenses were at least as good, if not better than her defense.

In that moment, the only thing he felt he had to be cautious about was if the former king turned his arm into ice and tried to grab hold of him. He'd already experienced that once, and he didn't want to make a habit out of having to regrow limbs and fingers—even if he could do it.

All through the attack and Derek's successful block of it, he and Silvi had never wavered with their auras. Slowly, Derek turned his head to look over his shoulder and he found the already

fully hooded Marrick looking his way. After a grin and a wink back at the old man, Derek focused back on the happenings in front of him.

“Dammit, man,” Derek said, speaking to the former King of Astrus. “You really are trigger-happy, aren’t you? First you attack Marrick after he says a few words, then you attack me when all I did was show everyone what they’re getting themselves into. It’s no wonder everyone hates Astrus. You bunch of royals aren’t doing anything to help yourselves out at this point.”

Before anyone could speak, Derek sent to Silvi, *‘Active Void Shift to in front of the army with me and hit them with your aura.’*

Without waiting for a reply from his companion or anyone else, Derek withdrew his aura and disappeared from in front of everyone before reappearing directly above the army. Being only a dozen or so feet above the army, he unleashed his aura once again as soon as he felt the light pressure of Silvi appearing back on his shoulder. In order for the auras to encompass the whole army, Derek and Silvi weren’t able to concentrate it, so by the time it reached the edges of the army, it had diluted somewhat.

Even with the wider range of their auras, the army didn’t fare as well as the other group had. While the majority of the former king’s group—other than the few who backed away on shaky legs—had managed to keep their positions and only give away their true feelings by the looks on their faces when they were hit with the aura, the army was not as lucky or as prepared.

It was easily shown that the army that Traven and the others had gathered was not the cream of the crop. In fact, it looked to be more diluted than his and Silvi’s auras were by the time they reached the edges of it. It seemed that for every two competent, high-leveled soldiers, there was one that was either a rookie or was just hastily added to bolster the numbers. Like that, an entire third of the opposing army was sprawled out on the ground, either unconscious or just without any will left to get back up.

There’s no way that those soldiers are over level 150, Derek thought. Another large group of the army had fallen to one knee, but managed to keep conscious, and the final group, the group that Derek now regarded as the strong group—who he figured were mostly the private guards of those dozens of nobles and high-ranking members of Astrus—managed to remain standing. Some were on shaking legs, and some remained stoic, just as the former king had.

“And you want to fight? For people who wouldn’t think twice about throwing you at me?” Derek spoke loudly, for all to hear—except for those who were unconscious, but he didn’t think they were the ones he needed to worry about. “Silvi,” he said. “Your turn.”

With that, the weight from his shoulder disappeared along with Silvi’s aura. Derek also withdrew his own aura and shifted back to his place beside Edward. The crown prince and King Osian both looked at him with questioning gazes, but instead of answering, he pointed into the air.

Immediately after he pointed, the raging dragon flames crashed down onto the ground. With the wisdom and intelligence stat both through the third threshold, Silvi had no problems finely controlling the fire. Silvi drew a line of flames in the ground—separating the army from the top ranking people in Astrus.

It never ceased to amaze Derek how hot the dragon fire was, and it was only becoming more and more terrifying as Silvi leveled the ability. *I wonder if her fire is considered part of a cooking affinity.* He could feel the blistering heat from where he was. In fact, it was so bad that he actually feared that some of the weaker soldiers might even be done in by just the heat, but he hadn't yet received a notification for a kill.

'That's enough,' Derek sent his companion. *'You don't want to waste all of your mana at once. You may need it later. We were going for shock and awe, and I think we've accomplished that.'*

The stream of fire dissipated at once and the weight of Silvi appeared back on Derek's shoulder. The ground separating the army from the others continued to burn on—the fire was not willing to be tamed so quickly, even after most of the fuel was burned away. To the army's credit, less than half seemed to have had enough of the proceedings and began to flee. However, when some of the unconscious ones woke up due to the intense heat caused by Silvi's flames, they soon followed suit.

That's what I figured, Derek thought. *The majority of the army were just bodies, and weren't even contracted to be part of anything. They probably weren't under any contracts other than basic city guard contracts, so fleeing right now wouldn't hurt them at all.* That was pretty much what Derek was hoping for when he unleashed his aura and had Silvi unleash her flame.

If things went the way he believed they would, he would much rather fight against the strong than the weak. At least that way, nobody could say he was picking on the weak... *Well... At least not picking on the super weak. If you're level 250 and still weak, that's just bad luck and bad training. And if someone is like that, they have no business being here, anyway.*

As Derek looked over the small group in front of him, he found that they were much more divided than they had been before. It seemed that he and Silvi's display of their aura, then her 'drawing a line in the sand' with her dragon flame, really left a mark on everyone. The nervousness in everyone's eyes was running rampant.

"So, you see what you're up against now?" Derek asked those behind the former king and current queen. "Usually, it's enough if you have the numbers. You can wear down whoever you're fighting, and eventually, if you throw enough people at the problem, you'll come out victorious. However, I'm sure that most of you have realized by now that I'm one of the exceptions. You can throw your entire kingdom at me and still lose.

"I'm not saying this because I'm cocky... well, not only because I'm cocky. I'm confident. Edward and Osian are trying to end this with the least amount of bloodshed possible. I would suggest you listen to them." With that, Derek turned around and began his walk back to where he and Alanah were to begin with.

"That was some show and a riveting speech," Marrick whispered as Derek walked past him.

"I do what I can," Derek whispered back, and continued on his way.

"So much for staying back and not getting involved until they needed you," Alanah said as Derek returned by her side.

“Well, Edward asked, so technically, he needed me,” he replied. “Besides, it felt good to stretch my legs a little after being couped up on wyvern-back all that time.”

“And I’m sure that showing off in front of an entire capital city’s worth of people had nothing to do with it.” Alanah rolled her eyes.

“You’re just jealous he asked me instead of you,” Derek laughed.

“If I’d have gone up there, there wouldn’t have been any talking,” Alanah said. “Queen Cassandra has been eyeing me since we arrived. I am the person who killed her son, after all. She’s doing what she can to hold back, I can tell, but as soon as the fighting starts, she’ll be coming after me. Just look at her.”

Derek did look at the woman. She was having a very hard time keeping her eyes away from Alanah, just like she had said. “That’s rough,” Derek said. “First, her son was killed in front of an army, then, her husband was killed by a very small bunny with a cooking addiction, now, if she attacks you first, she’s going to be throwing her life away without even the slimmest chance of getting any revenge...” Derek shook his head.

‘I’m not addicted!’ Silvi sent to Derek, but he ignored her and focused back on the proceedings in front.

He and Silvi had done a great job of setting things up. Now it was up to Edward and Osian to decide how much blood they were going to have on their hands by the end of the war.