

Anrosh

Anrosh released a long breath as the doors of the throne room closed. She didn't know why Emberhorn had a room such as this, it was a thing of kingdoms and empires, not sects. Still, the room and the throne had served their purpose, they had made it easier for her to pretend.

Now that the emissary was out of the room, she looked down at her hands, the fingers that were clutching the sides of the thrones hard enough that they had gone white.

She couldn't help but wonder if the emissary had seen right through her. Had he seen her barely managing not to shake, did he hear the strain in her voice, had he seen her stiffness, her weakness. She had tried to be like other Sect Heads she had seen, that she had learned from. She had tried to be confident, to project power like Eerv used to do. To seem disinterested the same way that Ryun often was. She didn't know if she had succeeded.

A touch on her shoulder startled her, and Anrosh turned to see Nayra standing just next to her, squeezing her shoulder. The redheaded woman gave her a supporting smile, and Anrosh returned it as she raised her hand and squeezed hers in return. Nayra's reassuring look made Anrosh relax and calm down. She was thankful for the support, because while she might try to be like Eerv and Ryun, she was not them. She couldn't keep calm as her words decided the fate of all those beneath her. And she and Nayra had grown close over the last year.

"Was that wise?" Embesh asked.

Anrosh turned and met the man's eyes. She saw him shifting uneasily from foot to foot, his tail moving from side to side. He was afraid, and Anrosh understood that fear.

"The alternative was to surrender the sect to another," Anrosh answered.

"Would that truly be so bad?" Embesh asked, his eyes shifting from hers to Nayra's. "They are a core sect, they could help us grow."

"No, Embesh," Anrosh shook her head. "They could not. Our sect doesn't operate in the same way that others do. Once they realized that we teach our warriors, that we guide their Cultivation, they would've had to put

a stop to that. Otherwise, they would risk their own people wanting the same thing.”

Embesh sighed, his head bowing in defeat. “You are right, but you know how such sects are. They are not just going to let us be.”

“We are stronger than they think,” Nayra interjected. “Every warrior in the sect had survived the monster swarm and had spent the last year training, hunting. They cycled, and they advanced. The swarm had brought a lot of wealth to the sect.”

Anrosh nodded her head. What Nayra was saying was true. The sect had recovered, their warriors had advanced, even if they didn’t have any beyond the Monarch Realm, they were stronger than they used to be. But it wasn’t just the warriors that had advanced, the crafters had as well. The sect had started producing more advanced items, from gear to potions, that they had begun selling to other sects on the frontier and further toward the core.

The Twilight Melody Sect was growing and earning more.

Still, she didn’t know what the core sect knew about the Twilight Melody Sect. And they were without their Sect Head, their deterrent. Anrosh knew that she was nowhere near strong enough to hold of another sect. Perhaps not even with Nayra’s help. But they had to try. She wasn’t going to betray the trust she had been given in running the sect.

The Twilight Melody Sect had one thing going for it, loyalty. She knew that the trust they had given them had been returned in full. The people of the sect had been rewarded, even those who had stayed over from the Emberhorn’s sect.

She needed to be worthy of that loyalty.

“Are the people in place?” Anrosh asked.

Nayra nodded her head. “I had our best stealth expert put on the job, I think that it should be enough.”

Anrosh nodded her head. “Good, I’m sure that the emissary will send a message to his people. I want to know where they are holding ours, if they are still alive.”

Anrosh knew that usually sects avoided killing during raids. Killing was easy, to capture without death was seen as a greater feat of strength. It brought more honor to the sect.

If she could retrieve her people, before they were released for political gain, she would've reversed the scales. She doubted that it would be enough, but it would let her at least gain some type of leverage. She needed to convince the Green Rain sect that this issue was not worth pursuing.

She stood up and took a few steps down the platform before turning around to look at the other Sect Leaders. "I'm sure that the Emissary will be looking around for more information now, don't reveal anything that can give them an upper hand."

* * *

Nayra

Nayra crawled behind a large rock, peering around it to look at the camp. Their people were bound by ropes, and not power suppressing manacles. It seemed almost insane to Nayra, but she had learned a lot about how sects worked. The eight people, four per hunting team that went missing, were bound next to a large wagon. And they were held prisoner by their own honor more than the ropes.

At least all of them were alive. She still didn't quite understand everything that had to do with sects, and in fact, she had started to suspect that the sects themselves didn't really know the rules. Still, this was the path that she had chosen and she had a job to do.

The Green Rain Monarchs were sitting around the fire. Only three of them were present, as the one that had unknowingly led Nayra's people here had returned to Consequence to be with the Emissary, and another had left, probably to the core to relay the Emissary's message back to the Sect.

So three Monarchs, against Nayra's eight warriors, four Peak Lords, two Early Monarchs, and two Mid Monarchs. They outnumbered them, but she didn't let that make her arrogant. She had learned from her past mistakes, she didn't know how powerful those three Monarchs were.

She was confident in her own power, for the first time in her life. She had grown more powerful in the Twilight Melody Sect than she had ever back with her own people. She had even started to cultivate properly, and had improved her techniques under the guidance of the Twilight Melody Sect's

resident master, Tali. What her instructors had always meant for her was for her skills to be her secondary focus, eventually. The Cultivation was there simply to give her more versatility in her attacks, but now... She knew that her skills were advancing slowly, she had never been all that much talented at them, not like Reyla was. Still, she had managed to get a few levels in them over the last year, but not enough. And she was a part of a sect, one that shared its knowledge and instructed other people. It was a waste not to take advantage of that.

She had raised her Cultivation to Peak Foundation, and had managed to improve two of her techniques. It wasn't much, but it was still power. Over the last year, she had trained nearly daily. Instructing other warriors, training with them, and then sparring with Anrosh. And she had been going out on hunts, had led the hunting trips against the remnants of the swarm. She had even been going to the Twilight Melody's dungeon. Coupled with what she gained from her monthly contributions, she had gained a lot of Essence. Enough that she had also leveled to level 225, and gained three new Class perks.

She was very confident in her own power, but there was no need to be arrogant. She waited until the three Monarchs were busy with their meal before she gave the order. She gave the signal with her hand and then jumped out of the cover, leading the charge.

She activated her new perk, **Dawnfire Blink**, and crossed the distance between them in an instant. The moment she arrived, a blast of dawnfire exploded out of her startling everyone in the camp. She had targeted the blast carefully, so that only the edge of it hit the three Monarchs.

The mission was not to kill them, it was to defeat them. Killing even one of them would mean failure. They had to demonstrate that they had enough power to take them down without killing. It would've been better if they could've done it without drawing blood, but neither Nayra nor Anrosh had wanted to risk quite that much.

Two of the Monarchs managed to get out of the way of the blast, while the last one, the one that had been the closest to Nayra, a demasi, had a blast of dawnfire set his clothes on fire. He rolled over the ground as the other two pulled out their weapon of out of their storage rings.

Nayra raised her shield as she summoned **Er'ishi**, her awakened spear. *"They are well trained, be careful,"* **Er'ishi** spoke inside her mind, and Nayra silently thanked him.

One of the Monarchs, a human, had a long chain with two metal balls attached on both ends as his weapon. While the other, a drake, carried a large broadaxe. Nayra heard her people jumping behind her, spreading around the Monarchs. She heard someone curse and fighting erupted as they engaged with the Monarch that she had set on fire.

Before the two in front of her could get an upper hand, she acted. Qi filled her as she activated **{Burst Haste}**, the technique now gave her a sudden increase in speed that tapered off quickly. With it she twisted her hips and **|Throw|**—ed her spear. The chain wielding Monarch was surprised as her awakened spear flew through the air and he twisted to avoid it. His chains snapping up to deflect, but still **Er'ishi** nicked his shoulder. Nayra was already half way across the distance between them.

She activated **Valkyrie's Might** and **Valkyrie's Swiftness**, increasing her strength and speed, then she used **Valkyrie's Shout**, and her powerful shout stunned the two monarchs as she activated **[Dawn Dash]** and crossed the remaining distance in an instant. She saw the axe wielding Monarchs glow with green light, his mouth opening but she was too fast. She kicked with her legs and jumped at the chain wielding Monarch, her hands above her head and her shield in front. She smashed into him with her shield, heard him grunt and bone cracking as she sent him tumbling back. She fell to the ground and rolled immediately, knowing that the other Monarch would take advantage. A loud hiss filled her ears as something that sounded like liquid fell to the ground where she used to be, and as she got back to her feet she saw a green substance coating the ground and eating through it.

She dismissed then summoned back her spear as she raised her shield, looking straight at the axe wielder. Her **|Heat Sense|** told her that her people were charging at the downed chain user, taking advantage of her attack.

Four were fighting with the one that she had burned, and four with the chain user. Both had been weakened by her first, giving them an advantage. Leaving only the axe wielder for her.

The Monarch was the first to react. He opened his mouth and she saw two tubes inside his cheeks, and saw them flex then expel green liquid in her direction. Nayra used her **[Shimmering Burst]** leaving a shimmer in her wake as she dodged.

The Monarch blurred toward her, his axe dripping with green Qi. He swiped, and Nayra used her **|Block|** to intercept. The axe rebounded and she jumped back, moving her Qi around as she activated **{Mesmerizing Flow}**. Her movements became fluid, but also beautiful in a way that made people almost forget that they were fighting. **Eri'shi** managed to score a cut on the Monarch's leg and upper arm before he snapped out of it and jumped back out of the range of her great spear. She followed, attacking while he blocked and counter attacked. Nayra was getting frustrated by the way he was deflecting her attacks, he was faster than her, and a good fighter. Attacks that should draw blood instead were deflected only enough to miss his body.

Her boosts were close to running out, so she decided to press further. She activated **[Dawnfire Mirage]** and stabbed forward. A mirage made out of Dawnfire stabbed forward, forcing the man to evade or catch on fire. Nayra followed his movements with her **|Heat Sense|** and moved behind her mirage. As the Monarch evaded, she stabbed her spear to the side where he was going to be. He seemed to have sensed her attack, but there was not much that he could do. His axe came down, a moment to slow, but not entirely. He managed to deflect what would've been a clear stab through the leg to be only a grazing hit. Still, his blood was spilled and her two passive effects, **Thousand Cuts** and **Vaporizing Cuts**, activated. She saw him grimace and his body blurred into a back flip as he got more distance between them. But Eri'shi had already siphoned some of the man's Qi, enough to activate his ability.

Nayra pressed forward, but the man twisted around just as a sphere of green Qi appeared around her opponent. She stepped forward and it moved, heading straight for her legs. Nayra put her shield down and blocked, but she felt and heard it splash across her entire shield, a sizzling sound coming from it immediately. She stepped back as the Qi tried to move around her shield and get to her arm.

A few jumps back and she was out of the range. She looked at her opponent, who held his axe in two hands while the Qi orb orbited around him.

She knew that that orb would make it hard for her to reach him, if she got in range it could just hit her from behind. Still, she had a few options. She didn't want to kill the man, but the man was good.

She activated [**Dawnfire Immolation**] and as her other abilities came off cooldown she prepared her attack. She moved her Qi, preparing her fruit technique even as she moved her shoulder back. She threw her spear, surprising the Monarch and then she jumped forward after it.

The man deflected the spear, but Nayra was already in the air, using her **Valkyrie's Descent** she summoned back Eri'shi just as she started her fall. The man's orb flew close to her as he moved to evade, but the fire around her protected her. She still felt the Qi eat through her armor slightly, as she slammed into the ground. The shockwave hit the man while he was mid step, and made him stumble back. Nayra activated {**Falling Petals**} as she stabbed forward. Eri'shi stabbed into his shoulder and the technique activated. Hundreds of blue petals, formed out of **Sharpness** Qi, flowed over the man. He screamed as hundreds of small wounds opened up all over his body. His clothes were shredded and blood flowed freely. Her **Thousand Cuts** and her **Vaporizing Cuts**, made the wounds that much worse. She saw him stagger, then drop to his knees, breathing heavily as blood loss hit him in an instant.

She dashed forward and placed her spear over his throat.

The man turned his head up, his eyes foggy, but then they focused.

"I surrender," he managed to say.

Nayra glanced around, seeing that the other two Monarchs were both on the ground and her people standing over them. She took in the injuries on both sides and saw that her people looked like they got the worst end of those exchanges. Still, they had won. She pulled her spear back and called for her people to bring the other two Monarchs next to her.

"Do I have your surrender?" Nayra asked.

All three looked at her with angry looks on their faces, but the two others nodded just like the first. Nayra turned to her people and spoke.

“Give them health potions, and tie them up, with rope,” Nayra said. “Release our people.”

The prisoners looked at the ground in shame, while her people now in the process of being liberated cheered. She gathered her people and they placed the three Monarchs in their wagon, which they would be taking with them. Taking all the spoils was, after all, the sect way. Before they left, Nayra pulled out a large wooden placard that Anrosh had made, and stabbed it into the ground in the center of the camp. On it was written only one word.

Consequence.

Nayra grinned at the message and then turned around, heading back toward the city of Consequence with her prisoners and a new wagon in tow.