

Chapter 378:

Derek noticed a significant decrease in the number of soldiers trying to fight against him when he felt the icy aura that was emanating from the former king Traven disappear. He had done his best to see what caused the change, but when he found the old elven elder, the other man was nowhere to be seen. It didn't take a rocket scientist to put together that the former king had died already, and that those who were directly under his command took that change to get out of the dire situation that they found themselves in by going up against he and Silvi.

More soldiers fled from the battle not long after, and he found the reason was because Queen Cassandra had also met her demise. It didn't seem like Alanah had gone easy on the queen. Though Derek was surprised that her fight actually lasted longer than Marrick's.

When he noticed the odd reactions from the soldiers—and the glee they had in their eyes when they realized that it was no longer their fight—Derek had quickly looked around to find out who had died. There, he saw a cloud of putrid smoke or something surrounding a silhouette. For a moment, he was actually worried that something bad had happened to Alanah, but then, the cloud dissipated and he saw the half-elf standing next to the corpse of Queen Cassandra and realized that he had been worrying for nothing.

With his focus back on the remnants of the army in front of him, Derek sliced out with another Sweeping Slashed enhanced by Multi-Strike. He aimed the skill low, only a foot or two above the ground. This was so that when the skill hit, it would hit his enemies' legs instead of anywhere that could cause fatal damage. He had gotten the idea from Silvi earlier in the fight. There were plenty of healers around, and since they were completely destroying the limbs, it wouldn't be hard to reattach them.

It also took soldiers out of the fight for far longer than a normal wound. His Void Lightning Bolt to a man's chest, then another to a woman's stomach, had caused massive damage to both of them, but it let them keep their mobility and it didn't take long for the healers to fix them up.

So, though extremely bloody and quite terrifyingly, he had chosen the same option as Silvi. He felt a little bad about it, but they were soldiers and guard—he was sure they'd experienced moderate to severe pain before. If they hadn't, then that was just bad luck. It was his best course of action that halted the army from joining in the fight against the leadership while creating as few casualties as possible.

Unfortunately, even after his announcement that those who tried to get past him to join that fight would die, multiple soldiers still did so. He didn't go easy on those soldiers. He had warned them before, so he would feel no remorse over their deaths. Seven people had chosen that route, and seven bodies lay dead between his battle and the one with the leadership.

"You've... gone with an interesting strategy," a female voice sounded out from behind Derek as the soldiers in front of him scattered to do their best to avoid the giant arc of energy from Sweeping Slash.

Derek turned his head to see Alanah standing there with a half smile on her face. He shrugged. "It was the quickest and easiest method I could think of to stop the army from advancing."

“And the dirtiest,” she commented.

“Well, we all weren’t able to have an easy one-on-one fight against a member of the royal family, now were we?” he asked with a snort.

“Nope,” Alanah laughed. “I’m going to go join in on the fun,” she said. “It looks like we may be able to get out of this without any casualties.”

“You better hurry, then,” Derek replied. With that, Alanah disappeared. “I pity whoever she goes after first…” he spoke to no one before getting back to his own battle.

One by one, minute by minute, the soldiers that Derek was facing either threw down their weapons or ran away—some did both. Alanah, joining the fight on the other end, had given Cydaria and Indria an overwhelming advantage.

Soon, another soldier fell in front of Derek. When he looked up from the soldier, he realized that there weren’t any more coming at him or trying to get around. Silvi must have recognized the same thing, as Derek quickly felt the light pressure on his shoulder signifying Silvi’s return to her usual resting place.

Derek looked out over the destruction he and Silvi caused over the army. Everywhere he looked was a mess. Fortunately, there were still plenty of soldiers that hadn’t been injured—they were lucky in the sense that the leadership they had contracts or oaths with had fallen before they reached Derek or before Silvi reached them.

Letting out a deep breath, Derek turned to look at everyone else. Marrick never actually joined the fight again after taking care of Traven. The old man still floated above the battlefield on his cloud of sand. He looked like a wise old sage with his robe on and hands behind his back while looking down at the battle from above—like he was studying the battlefield.

Derek rolled his eyes and focused on the rest. If Derek and Silvi’s fighting area was messy, then the one that Osian and Ryven had made was downright gruesome. He couldn’t even count how many people they had been fighting against because of how bad things were.

It’s definitely not their first time fighting together, Derek thought. Every person that was between them was completely crushed flat. *So that’s what they try to do when using those shield barriers.* Derek shivered just thinking about what their enemies felt—the invisible walls closing in until there was no room between each other, then, the walls closing in even more. It must have been agony—both the pain and the slow realization that they were going to be slowly crushed.

Avery, on the other hand, was standing with three men fallen at his feet. The archer covered his yawning mouth with his hand, then noticed Derek looking at him and winked. *I guess I should have guessed that...* The archer didn’t have a single wound or even a scratch on his leather armor. Unfortunately for the three enemies who chose to fight him after seeing him shoot an arrow through another person, Avery was just as deadly up close as he was at a distance.

Edgar had taken out his fair share of the Astrus leadership, too. Charred bodies and detached heads laid around the young prince. However, unlike Avery, Edgar had taken a couple of hits and his gleaming

silver armor showed damage. There were scorch marks and even a couple of dents on his armor. It didn't look like any attack actually made it to his body, though.

Edwin and Edward looked like they were still standing in the same position as before. Edwin had a proud look on his face as he stood behind Edward and looked at Edgar.

As for everyone else, it looked like there had only been one casualty on Cydaria and Indria's side. An elf lay dead where a big battle happened between everyone. He was one of the older elves who was riding beside Marrick on the way to Astrus. Derek never got the man's name. The fact that Alanah had joined the fight rather quickly, and Marrick had ended his fight even faster, meant that the one casualty on their side must have happened very early on in the fighting.

From there, Derek gazed over where the battles had happened and his eyes finally found the dragonkin, Tara, and Duke Terrin. The duke looked distraught as he kneeled on the ground—he had emotion on his face that he'd never shown before, not even when he was captured. He'd just recently lost his brother, and now, in such a short amount of time, he also lost his father. The realization that he'd also lost his kingdom was probably hitting him at the moment as well.

As he was about to join everyone else to celebrate their victory and figure out what to do next, Derek noticed Terrin stand. To his surprise, the duke's hands, which were supposed to be in a pair of bracelets that had runes to dampen his power, were free. From the tips of his fingers, the dark blue ice began to slowly move up his hands, then his face started to transform. The next instant, he jumped at Tara, who was not paying any attention to the prisoner beside her.

Derek made to use Active Void Shift to swoop in and save Tara, but before he could, a massive tail blindsided the duke and he was launched flying through the air. Tara may have taken her eye off their prisoner, but Lyra had not. Lyra didn't move to continue her attack—keeping Tara safe was good enough. Lyra was probably one of the most patient and smartest beings there at the moment. She knew that the one tail whip was all that was needed.

As everyone else turned to look at the commotion, Derek finally used Active Void Shift. The next instant, he appeared in the flight path of Duke Terrin, who had already sprouted wings on his back and was working on using his momentum to escape. Derek couldn't have that.

With as much void as he could pump into Harbinger in such a short amount of time, Derek swung down vertically with Sweeping Slashed enhanced with Multi-Strike. Terrin saw the attack coming, and his eyes widened as he tried to avoid it. Unfortunately for the duke, Derek wasn't finished.

With another swipe of his glaive, Derek activated Spatial Rend. Derek couldn't really see the effects as he had aimed the skill to attack the duke from behind, but he did see the signs of space tearing open, then, the duke let out a gasp and his right wing fell limp. Derek had hoped to hit Terrin directly between the shoulder blades—sending him forward—and had somewhat accomplished his goal. He still didn't have the best aim with his new skill.

The attack didn't end up pushing the man towards Derek's other attack, instead, it crippled his movement for a short time. That was all his main attack needed to land vertically on the man's chest. Now, from his experience, Derek knew that his attack wouldn't do any damage to the man's head, as it was transformed. However, also from experience, he knew that his organs were still normal.

For the second time, the duke's wings shattered, and he fell to the ground like a puppet with no strings. This time, however, the duke wasn't as lucky. The first time he'd been hit by Derek's attack was without him adding Sweeping Slash to it, and it was on the side. Even then, the duke had entered a dying state, forcing Alanah to waste one of her precious potions to keep him alive.

This time, Derek received the notification of his death before he even hit the ground. Shortly after, Derek moved to the ground and stored the duke's corpse in his storage bracelet before moving back to where everyone else was. When he arrived beside Alanah and Avery, he dumped the body out with the rest of Astrus's dead leadership. He also noted that there was no sign of former king Traven.

Just what did that old coot do to that man? Derek wondered, but didn't voice his question. "So... uh... we don't still need the duke alive or anything like that, do we?" Derek ran his hand over the back of his neck. He hadn't thought about it when he saw the man attack Tara then try to escape, but the plan had been to hold a public execution of the duke.

"No... I don't think that would be necessary anymore," Osian said as he walked up with his brother. "We have the soldiers, a couple of nobles who opted not to fight, and whoever was watching from the city to spread the news. We should be fine without a public execution. It is good that his corpse is easily recognizable, though." Osian glanced up at Marrick, who was slowly floating down. "It is good to have it if it is needed."

"Good," Derek said. "What now?" he asked to nobody in particular.

"Now," Marrick's almost fragile, but excited, voice sounded out as he landed beside Derek and stepped off of his cloud of sand. "We take the capital... then Astrus is no more."