

## CHAPTER 16

Sora stood in fear of the sight that played out before him. Why were trolls attacking the country? Were they tired of waiting? Did the King do something to make them attack?

He didn't take the time to reason it out though, and he hurried back to rejoin the others in the catacombs.

Thankfully, due to the tremors, Spike and his gang had stayed put.

"Sora!"

Aoko flew over to him.

"What's going on?"

"\*huff\* Trolls. Hundreds of them."

Aoko was taken aback.

"Have they given up waiting? But why attack us directly when they have a hostage?"

"I don't know, but we need to do something. Murasako!"

"Y-yes?"

"You any good with attack magic?"

"U-um, a little..."

"Good, we'll need all the help we can get if we're going to save the kingdom."

He walked over to the group of construction workers cowering by the exit path.

"What about you guys?"

About a third of them stood. Each claiming they had decent use of attack magic.

"Alright, come with us if you care about the kingdom."

They hesitantly saluted him.

"Oh, and tie him up so he doesn't do anything while we're gone."

Spike jumped and began to make a run for it.

"H-hey!"

Aoko tapped Sora's shoulder.

"Let me handle this."

She aimed a small fireball at the back of his head. Aaand, Bullseye.

With Spike tied up next to the house, Sora's group of impromptu soldiers was ready to move out.

"Alright team, let's go!"

As they marched towards certain doom, Sora questioned Aoko on the specifics of fighting a troll.

"How exactly are they so tough? I would think a fighter as skilled as yourself would be able to defeat a bunch of them easily."

"Well, trolls have a naturally magic resistant component in their skin that also makes their physical defenses higher. So it's not really that they're so much stronger than us, but a combination of barbaric strength and heightened defenses that makes them so difficult to fight. I haven't fought any personally, but I studied the strengths and weaknesses of various races during my royal knight training. I still can't figure out what would have made them kidnap the Princess in the first place."

"Hmm, so do you think reinforcement magic might stand a better chance of beating them?"

Aoko seemed to think really hard about this.

"It could be. If their defenses are a combination of physical and magic, then an attack of the same caliber might do it!"

The group was in sight of the exit, and they could see the trolls running around.

A bunch of the workers who had joined Sora bailed on him out of fear once they saw this, and Sora's group was down to a measly 12 people.

"Well, here we go. Attack!"

They rushed out and immediately started fighting whichever troll was nearest.

The construction workers all banded together to take on one at a time, while Aoko and Sora donned their armor and each took on trolls separately.

"Hyah!"

Sora threw one of his stronger punches, blowing the troll back against a building.

He ran over to see the effect it had.

The troll was out, but he had to check, so he put his hand by its throat. There was a pulse. It had just knocked it out.

"Good, I don't want to have to kill any of them if I don't have to. But at least my hunch about the reinforcement magic seems to be right. If I can take them out in one hit, I'll be fine!"

Aoko was having a slightly harder time, simply because of the size difference. She could hit hard, but delivering the type of blow Sora had was difficult for her.

She decided she needed her sword to do any real damage, and swung it down on her foe's head. With a reverberating clang it struck the troll, knocking it out.

She held her sword with confusion.

"I seriously wonder sometimes if this thing is sharp."

Sora and Aoko continued their victory streak while the construction crew were doing their best against their opponents, which was going well, just much slower than Sora and Aoko.

Murasako, on the other hand, was hiding behind a barrel.

"Come on, Murasako. You have to help. This is your chance to prove yourself. Why would you apply for the royal knights so many times if you couldn't handle a simple battle like this? ...Though this isn't exactly very simple. Come on! Rrgh..."

She saw a troll stop in front of her barrel to wipe its nose.

"Ick... Hmm."

She created shackles of water around the troll's feet without it noticing.

As it began to run again the cuffs tripped it, knocking it out as it fell over.

"I guess the bigger they are, the harder they fall." She said with a grin.

The battle was going quite well, when Sora saw that no trolls were directly near Aoko, he shouted a suggestion to her.

"Hey, Aoko! Fly up and see if anywhere else is being attacked!"

"Got it!"

She flew straight up and saw exactly what was happening.

The entire western half of the capital was under attack, from wood street to stone street to ice street, trolls were everywhere west of the castle, which was obviously their target.

She returned to Sora to report.

"That bad, huh?"

He saw the rest of them had finished their fights, and there weren't any conscious trolls left in the immediate area.

"Everyone!"

They gathered around him.

"Captain Koyosei here scouted from the sky, and reports that everything west of the castle is under attack. Therefore, we'll need to split up to cover more ground."

He pointed at Aoko and himself.

"I believe Captain Koyosei and myself can handle ourselves, so we'll take separate routes. You guys can go together."

He looked around for Murasako, who was hiding beside the construction crew.

"And you can go with them, Murasako."

"O-okay..."

"Help them out. Maybe you'll get done faster than us that way."

He shot a fist to the sky.

"Let's do this!"

The ragtag army cheered.

Back at the castle, the royal family was in turmoil.

The King was scrambling to send out the available royal knights to fight off the troll invasion, but he was missing one of his captains.

He walked down the hallway to the throne room with the Prince at his side.

"Where is Koyosei?!"

Prince Apex thought of a good possibility.

"It's quite possible she was with that Sora boy when they started the assault, so she could be fighting them as we speak."

King Radius took a moment and caught his breath.

"Yes, yes, that is certainly a good possibility. Thank you Apex."

"But what on earth could have happened to make them so hostile all of a sudden?"

"I'm not sure, we've been keeping in touch so we could negotiate the time limit, so they should have told us if they were finished waiting. I thought they had enough decency for that."

"I guess it shouldn't come as much of a surprise, they are barbarians after all."

The King stopped in his tracks.

"Apex."

"Y-yes, father?"

"I've been King of this country a long time, and I've seen a lot of people. Trolls may not be the brightest bunch of brutes, but they are no savages. I may be worried to death for my daughter, but that doesn't mean I get to stop respecting them as a people."

Apex was not used to seeing his father like this. It frightened him.

"O-of course, I apologize father."

"Very good. Now, I've noticed something rather peculiar about this whole business that I'd like to discuss with you."

They continued walking.

"What might that be?"

"You remember the battle of the great scan, correct?"

"Of course, how could I forget. We sent that whole army of royal knights combined with the strongest citizens of Nogard, and they were annihilated."

"Yes, but how many casualties did we have?"

Apex thought for a moment.

"Come to think of it, I never heard how many we lost."

"None."

Prince Apex blinked rapidly.

"I'm sorry, what?"

"Exactly as you heard, the total casualties of our raid on Vanishing Cave was 0 people. Doesn't that strike you as odd?"

"Almost as if they weren't trying to hurt us very badly."

"Just as I began to think, except then we got ambushed by them where we live! I don't know what to think anymore."

"Hmm..."

Apex started piecing some puzzles together.

"Father, do you still have that note the trolls left us?"

"I wouldn't dare get rid of it! What do you need it for?"

"A Hunch."

Rejoining the battle outside, Sora and Aoko had started down light and ice streets in north Nogard respectively, while Murasako and the construction crew took on stone street.

Murasako's group had lost a few fighters due to injuries, so they were sent back to the catacombs to recover. But Murasako's skillful use of water magic was just what her group needed to speed up their victories.

She was glad they were winning, but something puzzled her.

"How in the world did our warriors at the cave lose to these guys? These trolls are tough, but we're definitely weaker than those guys at the cave were."

Sora and Aoko cleared their way through their posts, and converged down lightning street, which connected both ice and light streets, to meet up.

"How's it going on your end?"

"Not too bad, some of 'em even seemed to be scared of fire, so that helped."

They took a minute to catch their breath, but another wave of trolls was incoming.

As Sora returned to light street, he also noticed something odd.

As he scanned the road, he saw all the destruction the trolls were causing, but the storefronts and houses were nearly untouched.

He ran back to Aoko on ice street to tell her.

"What?"

She looked around at her street and saw the same thing.

"So their only real goal is the castle. Sora, can you manage here?"

"I think so."

"Good, I'm going to the castle."

"Okay!"

Aoko left for the castle and Sora continued fighting off the invaders.

Reaching the castle, which was being attacked more heavily than before when they passed by and cleared out what was there, Aoko made a beeline for the throne room to report on their progress.

The King was overjoyed to see her.

"Wonderful! Just wonderful! We might just have to make the big three captains the big four after this!"

She saluted.

"You're too kind, sir."

She finished up and headed to her other destination.

"Maybe this is what they need to repair things."

The fairy common room was packed full of the castle's fairies, as most of them were not battle savvy.

Aoko flew in and needed quick answers.

"Where's Ginko?"

Midoriko, the one who'd given Ginko the magic encyclopedia, pointed to her room.

"S-she still hasn't come out of her room."

Aoko flew straight for the door and bashed on it with her fist.

"Ginko! Come out now!"

The tone of her voice must've registered with Ginko, as she finally responded by opening the door.

"What is it, \*sniff\* Aoko?"

"Stop crying and get outside! We're under attack by trolls!"

"W-what?!"

"Sora's out there, fighting alone."

She, of course, left out the part about her leaving him to fight on his own, and the fact that he had been in no current danger when she left him.

"W-why should I care what happens to a jerk like him..."

Aoko facepalmed.

"If you ever cared anything about him, you'd get out there and fight with him!"

Ginko scratched her head in turmoil over the choice she had to make.

"Fine, I'm going!"

She changed into her battle gear and took off for ice street where Aoko had told her Sora was, while Aoko stayed to defend the castle.

Apex Enclavius stood in his father's office, staring deeply at two pieces of paper, identical down to the handwriting, except for what was written on them.

The first read:

Dear King Radius of Nogard, the Trolls of Tenretni have taken your daughter to Vanishing Cave just west of Nogard. If you want her back, have 20 million keel brought to the cave by the first of the month.

While the second read:

Dear daddy, just letting you know, I'll be going out with some of my friends today to air street for some shopping. Don't worry, I'll be back before nightfall!

Apex fell back into his father's chair with a scowl on his face.

"It can't be..."

Sora was steadily clearing out ice street, and it seemed as though that was where

their forces were being focused, as more and more powerful trolls were coming his way.

His training was being put to good use, but even he had his limits. And they began to hit home right when one troll took him by surprise and swung its club at the back of his head.

"Oh no!"

\*CLANG\*

"H-huh?"

Sora looked up to see his savior. Ginko had blocked the swing with a fully operative barrier.

"Don't worry, I'm here to help!"

Sora smiled.

"Thanks!"

The two of them worked in perfect harmony, Sora attacking with abandon, and Ginko guarding his blind spots.

They had just about finished off the current group when they heard an angry voice coming from down the street.

A carriage pulled by two trolls came towards them. The seating area was covered by a dark curtain so you couldn't see inside.

"Haven't we found him yet?!"

The trolls pulling the cart responded in dull, slightly dopey voices.

"I'm sorry mistress, we haven't seen anybody like that. Uhh, wait, is this him?"

An eye peeked out from behind the curtain.

"Eeeeeee!" the voice behind the curtain squealed.

"It's him, heheheheh. Quick, do your jobs."

"Uhh, right. Let's go, Sam."

"Okay, Steve."

The trolls began kicking the carriage, and beating it with their clubs.

"Kyaaaaa! Somebody save me!"

Sora and Ginko stayed frozen where they were, completely befuddled by the spectacle they were seeing.

END OF CHAPTER 16