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## [031] [Safety]

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Dawn broke to the sound of beating drums, a sound that had become louder by the hour, as the Wildling tribe had marched from over the horizon all the way to Sinco's walls. Leading it were the fighters, a force barely two hundred maidens strong, a number that could've been dismissed had it been anything other than Orcs.

Each one was imposing in their own right, standing at two meters in height and built by rock-solid muscles. And none of them as imposing as the two maidens leading the attack force. Two maidens that stood closer to three meters, one an Orc, broad as a house and rough in the sharpness of her figure. The other a feline, her musculature slick, and her skin marked by the scars of a thousand battles won.

Both walked within their own rhythm. The tall Orc matched the thundering beat of the drum. The feline slinked silently forward.

Between the two was a woman of almost ethereal beauty, a face carved with immaculate perfection, blue hair braided into a ponytail and showing her naked throat. Her skin was a healthy pink, skin softer than silk, and honey eyes piercing in their intensity. The maiden disguising as a human being no less lethal than the other two.

And standing right in the center of this was a man that regretted they didn't have armor available for him to use. The notion was silly in a way. Rick knew logically he was at the safest he could've ever hoped to be right where he stood. The trio of maidens represented a threat that he doubted could be matched, and Eva was in his shadow just as an added precaution.

Yet before them stood Sinco, and Rick felt like he should have more than just a sword at his hip and some studded leather.

It was a city with a humble fishing port and an exorbitant wall. The construction had to be at least twenty meters tall, the dark stonework marred with scratches, mud, and dried blood. A wall topped with spikes pointed outwards and downwards. There were some corpses hanging from the spikes, dried up and half-rotten.

There was a stench in the air that carried more than just death.

"Stinky." Monica snorted, rubbing her nose.

“The stink is sulfur. There is some volcanic activity further east.” Eva commented casually. “The elemental stones from Sinco are good for fire enchantments.”

“You’ve been here before?” Kiara asked with a sing-song, pretending to be focused on the spikes on the wall.

“Once.” Eva said no more, going quiet.

Rick could sense the discomfort through the bond, so he left the subject as it was. His mind wandered over the idea of having a supply of sulfur in the area. Maybe he could use it to create some fertilizer?

“It is still a surprise to see them this weak. It will be an easy conquest.”

Urtha chuckled darkly as she looked over Sinco’s defenses. Rick didn’t comment, unsure in what way the fortification appeared ‘weak’, but trusting the super-naturally empowered creature to not be needlessly boastful about such things.

Still, it was a head-scratcher how she’d see overcoming the walls as “easy”.

“Empty,” Monica reacted to his apparent dubiousness, making a vague nod in the direction of the top of the wall.

There were a grand total of four guards standing there. To their merit, those four became seven, and then twelve. And Rick wondered whether there was something else going on they weren’t privy of.

“This is close enough,” he said, making a gesture at the tribe and waiting for his command to spread back through the other gathered forces. The beat of the drum slowed and stopped.

“We should attack, while they are still unprepared,” Urtha declared with a savage smirk.

Rick dismissed the idea. “If we can get them to take us in, we don’t need to fight. Besides, a fight would only piss everyone off.”

“Not us.” She snapped.

Kiara snorted, shaking her head in amusement. There was a look in her eye as she glanced from him to the city, as if gauging something only she could see.

With the halt of the drums, Rick left the tribe behind and made his way toward the gates of the city, flanked by the three maidens. The small group weaved through the handful of

abandoned buildings as they approached, eyes peeled for potential threats hiding amongst the rubble. Behind them, the rest of the tribe was catching up and gathered along the Orcs. It multiplied their numbers with the weaker but more numerous maidens and magnified their force.

They began work to set up some rudimentary defenses in case Sinco opted to charge their location.

“The feral rush has been harsh on them,” Rick muttered under his breath, glancing at the abandoned farmland, the deep gouges of unearthed soil and the burn marks that littered every other area.

It looked like a war zone had rolled through the place, leaving nothing but destruction in its wake. How many fights had been made against individual or small groups of ferals? How often had this continued until they opted to just abandon the safety of the farm and bunker in the tiny city?

Monica made a gesture with her head at something to the side. Movement within the rubble of another structure that was further off. Within the shadows of crumbled stone and wood, Rick spotted movement.

Hungry eyes watched them.

“Feral?”

Monica sniffed, then growled, rubbing her nose and letting out a growl. The figure dashed away, vanishing into the debris. “Scared.”

He paused, glancing at the city and the guards on the walls, then at the pair of dark red eyes that were now peeking at them from further away. “Ignore her unless she tries to attack or something.” Turning to the imposing wall, he grimaced, craning his neck. “Call the Lord! I wish to speak! We come to help!”

“This is a waste of our time.” The Orc dropped her metal club, crossing her arms in resignation. “They knew we were coming. Why is the human not here yet?”

“Politics.” Kiara and Rick shared the shrug.

“If they delay and we have to attack, it’s better for the tribe if the sun is higher in the sky,” he added.

There was no more to be said. Just wait. The wind blew, shifting directions and mercifully taking away the scent of sulfur. Monica raised her head to sniff around a bit, glancing at the forest to the north with a frown.

Rick, mostly, focused on observing those atop the walls.

Their numbers had been growing, but the more there were, the worse their state. By the time there were a hundred, they weren't even wearing the washed out blue uniforms the first handful sported; the weapons turning from metal spears into little more than sharpened wooden sticks.

Rick couldn't help but feel like there had to be more somewhere else. A spear was useful against only the weaker maidens, if that. Was this a trap?

Shouldn't the soldiers have better equipment? A city should be able to spare the resources at least for this many people. What of the other soldiers? The questions boiled as he glanced, waiting for something to pop.

Kiara's hand gripped his, a grasp that was soft but unshaken.

"A king does not need to fear his meal."

The conviction in the words startled him, but it did its job, the tension easing out. "I'm no king."

Something about that amused her. Yet the sharp ambition in her eyes didn't really vanish, merely hiding behind a mask of placid enjoyment of just being there. She looked upon the city like a wolf did a wounded lamb.

After about an hour of wait, a man decked in silver armor stood above the very gate of the city, hoisted into a more visible position by some small ladder. The man's features were hidden behind the glimmering metal.

"I could shoot him down with a lance from this distance." Urtha muttered.

"Shush." Rick scowled, stepping forward, arms wide and following the cordial bow he'd been practicing. Kiara mimicked it right beside him. "We greet Lord Thorley Darkton. I am the Father of this tribe, and come to offer aid! My name is Richard Cross."

"And you may call me Miss Kiara." The Succubus claimed, ignoring the roll of the eyes she got from Urtha.

"It's not him," Eva whispered from the shadows. "Not tall enough."

There was a slight rattling in the armor. The man glancing down at him. “To help!?” The voice was amplified in some way, as if he were using a megaphone of some sort.

“There is some rudimentary truth detection in place,” the Succubus whispered under her breath.

Rick didn’t react. “We heard Sinco was in dire straits because of the ferals. It is only natural to offer protection! We wish to settle down, and bolster the city however we can.”

“Truly!?”

“Is metal-man deaf?” Monica asked.

He kept his customer-service smile plastered on his face as he nodded. “Indeed!”

The one wearing the silver armor stepped down from the ladder, hiding back behind the wall and vanishing from sight. Rick shared a glance with the maidens accompanying him. There was an unspoken question hanging in the air.

“This is probably the last decent opportunity to attack.”

He glared at her. The Orc glared back, or rather, stared back. Her face allowed for a natural scowl to emerge out of even an otherwise neutral expression. Rick could almost feel the bond tickling with the urge to fight. But she wasn’t annoyed enough to be glaring.

“The tribe will be responsible for damages incurred.” He spoke calmly. “Especially if the assault happens while there is room for a peaceful resolution.”

Her motivation popped like a balloon, turning into frustration and anger, the glare deepening. “That Lord will sacrifice anyone he can to protect himself.”

“She has a point.” Kiara nodded. “Only a fool would open their doors to us just like that.”

Rick just shrugged. “It’s the principle of the thing. And who knows, maybe he’ll think he can trick us into working as new simple peons or something.” He gestured at the ruined farmland. “Probably something about keeping the tribe outside to ward off ferals while they rebuild.”

He didn’t much like the thought of it, but there was an inconvenient truth that the ferals would need to be dealt with until their numbers finally receded. Victory over Sinco or merely annexing it, the city wouldn’t be able to survive the bump in population without regaining their farms. How many resources did they have available? How easily could

he set up a lab? The ideas were churning, an attempt to distract himself from the immediate metaphorical blade that hung in the air.

It was easy to forget the potential to start a fight when looking forward to finally being able to stop traveling and start building something on his own.

“When he tries to kill you, I will take his head.”

Urtha snarled, picking up the club and leaning it against her shoulder as if it weighed nothing. As always, maidens considered the laws of physics little more than a suggestion, and Rick was curious whether he could unravel any of it under laboratory conditions.

One day, maybe.

“Has this guy messed with the tribe at some point?”

“Something like that.”

She didn’t elaborate, clenching the club and grinning up at the city in a predatory glint.

Rick glared. “He dies, the tribe is fucked.” He spoke slowly, calmly. “Walls or not, we can’t survive the entire kingdom getting that level of pissed at us. And they’ll be pissed plenty.”

“And if he wanted to negotiate, he would not make us wait.” Urtha flashed her tusks, making a gesture at the gate.

“Something smells awry.” Kiara commented, glancing at the guards atop the wall.

“Can’t sense their emotions?”

“Not from this far, and not while trying to pretend to be a meek human.” She whispered. “The best I can sense is the vague shape of a truth detection enchantment that’s been overcharged, and... something broken.”

“Broken?”

“An alarm system, probably.”

“If intruder detection enchantments have broken, they are truly standing on their last leg.” Eva’s voice wavered as she spoke from under Rick, hidden in his shadow. “Only a matter of time before some predatorial feral makes their way through a gap in the guards and begins claiming lives.”

“Think you can fix it?” Rick muttered.

“I... I’d need to guide someone through the process.”

He frowned. “You can’t do it yourself?”

She became quiet.

“Ask a Mouse to clean, to cook, to weave, but not to fly.” Kiara shook her head, a gesture Urtha mimicked, both of them oozing some disappointment. “A Fledgling’s power is at its strongest when applied to fresh blood, not the stone and mortar of a wall.”

“Like how you can’t handle a couple of feral Angels?” Urtha’s question caused Kiara’s mouth to snap shut, the Succubus’ eyes glinting dangerously at the chuckling Orc.

Rick took a step back, putting himself between the two maidens and shooting each of them a quick look. It was enough to defuse the murderous tension in the air, Kiara turning away and glancing at the wall. “He’s back.”

That snapped them to attention.

Someone new had shown up.

“It’s not him.” Eva declared right away.

A man stumbled forward, followed by four heavily armored maidens. The man was tall, his clothes a vibrant combination of blue and yellow dyed clothes that made him look like he’d just escaped a YMCA studio.

His face was flush, the man winded and sweaty, his thick mustache bobbing up and down with every heave. “I... I am the Lord’s constable, sir Dean Whitney.” The man declared as the knights took defensive positions on either side of him.

It appeared the constable had run over from wherever he’d been hiding.

“We greet sir Rick and his... notable force.” The man spoke with a cordial smile, wiping away at his forehead with a handkerchief. “Are these all Wildlings?”

Well, the answer was a no-brainer. “I found them to be under the sway of a Vampire, and after freeing them, I quickly took control of the tribe.” His lips quirked slightly. “I am their leader. These are Monica and Urtha, Chieftess and Spear of the tribe, both bonded to me.”

The man glanced at some object he was holding, waiting for a heartbeat before his face relaxed in clear relief. "As is proper! These are good tidings!" He hesitated slightly. "Tell me, good sir, what would your purpose be upon visiting this lone corner of the kingdom?"

Again?

Kiara stepped forward. "It is my partner's wish to settle down and take to a boring life surrounded by books and ink. He is a scholar, of purest blood."

He frowned a little at her, twirling his mustache as he checked the device again. This time, his eyes roamed to Rick for a long second. "Purest blood? And what would your stance be on the... duties of a ruler?"

That was a curveball neither had expected. Kiara and Rick shared a glance. "May I ask why this philosophical question?" He wondered out loud.

Dean glanced at him, then back at the tribe, and then back down at him. The nervousness only grew, the twirling intensifying. "It is important, good sir, to know of matters of honor when there is an army at the gates."

Kiara shrugged at him.

Rick shook his head. "I think a ruler's biggest duty is to their people."

A massive wave of relief washed over the man, nearly crumbling on the spot, sighing loudly and nodding along. "Indeed, it is." The man made a gesture, talking in hushed tones with the others and gesturing wildly.

"Think they're going to attack?" He asked in a hushed breath.

"I hope so," Urtha grinned.

And with a series of shouts, the gates opened.

"We invite you and the maidens under your leadership, sir Rick," the constable said with a slight bow. "We are in dire need of help."

They didn't move from the spot, tension coursing through his body like a current. "I suspect you mean something more than just the ferals."

The man nodded. "We are having a bit of a complicated situation, you see."

"What sort of situation?" he asked hesitantly, not moving towards the open gate.

He squirmed. “The city has found itself in an unfortunate dispute with the Lord.”

“It’s treason, then.” Kiara smiled like she’d just been declared the queen of the ball.

Rick swore under his breath.

“There goes the kingdom not being pissed.”

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## [032] [Fortress]

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Though the name “Feral Rush” brought the idea of a stampede, more often than not such events caused a sharp increase in feral presence. At its core, this threat typically presents itself in a form closer to being under siege. Day in and day out, increasingly desperate ferals would attempt to scavenge for whatever food they might find, attacking anyone that they encounter if driven into desperation.

A desperation that had pushed Sinco into rebellion, apparently.

Rick understood the broad stroke concepts involved, but there was one aspect he couldn't comprehend. He could only stare at the state the city was in, the crumbling street, the smell of filth and rot, how some houses were outright little more than cinders... those that stood contained mold, black and eating away at the chipped paint and wood, not a hint of green anywhere to be seen, even in the cleared out available spaces.

“Where are the farmers? Where are the maidens that can grow the crops? The ones that tend the soil?”

The constable, Whitneye, kept his smile polite, eyes darting between Kiara and Urtha. “The Lord's resources were stretched thin. They were the hardest hit at the start of these... unfortunate events. What few remained tried to use the soil within the walls, but it did not take long for it to foul.” He flashed yellowed teeth in a crooked smile. “Our attempts to grow more outside will typically result in ferals having eaten it up before it had the chance to grow.”

Rick leveled a glare at him, causing the four armored guards to tense. They were the only well-equipped members of the guard-squad that had met them at the gates. Everyone else sported rags, worn down equipment, and the pale gaunt faces of starvation.

“I can see why you attacked the Lord's place if he's stockpiling food.”

Whitneye almost jumped at that. “We do not wish harm upon the Lord!” He declared, waving his hands wildly as the surrounding maidens were suddenly very wary of Rick's company. “Fishing and some algae have allowed us to subsist, but it is running out.”

He'd seen enough.

"Tell me about the Lord. What's the situation?"

The shift in tone only caused the maidens to tense. Weapons weren't drawn, but all too quickly, everyone's focus was on the other side's fighters. Rick ignored that, keeping his focus on the thick-mustachioed man, tried to gauge him. It looked like the guy was just about as happy to be there as they were.

"He has locked himself in the Lightning-vault with the knights. We have been attempting to negotiate the release of the food for the city before things turn sour and an attempt to break through is made."

Rick had to give points for being succinct. Some part of him wondered whether this was because there was no actual option left for them. "What's the Lightning-vault?"

"It is where the electricity is generated." Whitneye quickly gestured at his guards to calm down. "We do not wish to harm our Lord, merely to help the city."

"What are his forces?"

"The Lord's knights are-"

"We are going to be potentially seen as invaders, sir Whitneye," Kiara spoke smoothly, smiling as she gave a slight bob of her head. "You understand our precaution. We wish for no blood-shed if it can be avoided. But we would rather not walk into what might be an ambush."

Whitneye glanced at the silver disk he'd been holding with a white-knuckled grip, relaxing with a slight nod. "I understand." The voice trembled as he spoke. "The Lord has twenty knights currently, as well as accompanying guards."

With a simple nod, Rick turned to Urtha. "Call the tribe. Coordinate with Dia and Yasir, I want at least one plantation set up and protected." He paused for a moment, looking at Whitneye. "The merchant Yasir and his wife were rescued and are part of the tribe. Do you know of his two children?"

The name sent a wave of relief over the crowd. Nods were shared. "Yasir is a good friend," Whitneye declared with a more enthusiastic nod. "His children are well, but they've been troublesome, as young ones are."

"Talk with Yasir. The tribe can help set-up some farmland to grow whatever can be grown in short order."

“I am not letting you go to that Lord unprotected.” Urtha stated.

“The Lord is going nowhere,” he said. “Set up a defensive perimeter around the gate and have the Elves grow something next to the walls. Once that’s established, we’ll bring the best fighters over to have a presentable face when we greet Thorley.” Turning back to the man with the mustache, he frowned. “I take it there is no problem with this?”

“You do not mean harm to the city or its inhabitants?” He repeated the question, wrinkled fingers tightening around the medallion.

“I do not want blood to be spilled.” Rick stepped forward, gesturing the others not to follow, outstretching his hand to Whitneye. “And I will protect what is mine, as is proper, that much I promise.”

The man looked at his hand, then at the open gates, at the Orcs that were already entered, uncontested. Then at his rag-tag of haggard maidens, at the four armored knights, and then at Urtha and Monica. His eyes fell down to the disk, and with a sigh, he took Rick’s hand.

“We are in your care.”

And just like that, the man had surrendered the fate of the city. Not that there had been much of an option, just one look around and it was clear the Lord had hoarded not just the food but the fighters. Taking over would have been a question of ‘when’, not ‘if’.

“Could you gather whoever can help? Though I hope the Lord will freely release what he’s stored, I’d rather have our own alternative in place.”

“It...” He paused for a second, looking from his maidens down to the silver disk, fingers caressing its surface. “I would need to speak with Yasir, if possible?”

“Sure.” Rick looked over at the gates and the stream of Orcs that were passing through. “I will tend to my forces and reconvene in an hour.”

The man took the words as the dismissal that they were, giving a bow and turning to leave, the maidens following close behind. Not that it gave peace of mind to the maidens. Curious and horrified eyes were emerging from every corner, and the tribe was looked upon with wary silence.

A city holding its breath, waiting to see whether they should scream for help, run, or fight.

“And you said you were no king.” Kiara chuckled, caressing his shoulder. “I will investigate the city while you prepare. Mind sharing two burly Orcs and some supplies?”

“Sure.”

Something about the smile she held didn't sit well with Rick, but he could guess at what she was going to do. If there were any traps waiting for them, she was the perfect bait. A 'harmless' human woman with food and just two Orcs? That was just begging for someone to attack.

“Get some of your fighters on the wall.” He warned Urtha, turning to glance at the gate. “No looting, no killing. Anything happens, pin down unless there's no alternative.”

She did not answer, eyes hard as she gazed at the city. The bond wasn't powerful enough for Rick to sense what was going on, but he could sense she was overall displeased.

“Is there a problem?”

“Gifts are not earned.”

Rick chuckled, patting her arm. “We have nothing yet, just the gate.”

He helped the Orc in coordinating the parts of the tribe while Monica hovered over his shoulder like a muscular guardian angel.

While the Orcs set up defensive arrangements with reinforced wooden spikes and small walls, the rest of the tribe quickly secured the area closest to the gate that might be usable for farming. They cleared out the rubble within a matter of minutes, and while some started plowing it, others were using their powers to purify the earth in preparation.

Hopefully, it would have something harvestable within the next day or so. The goal was to start something fast. The ground might run out of nutrients if pushed hard, but they'd worry about that after the situation had stabilized.

For now, the primary concern was whether the situation was really as Whitneye had described it. They set up shop expecting a potential attack from the forest, thus being able to retreat into the city and close the gate. While if the attack came from the city, they'd use the walls and their improvised fortifications.

“I want to confirm the condition of the citizens.” Dia approached Rick as he'd been checking up on the reports from the flyers. They'd not spotted any forces, not yet at least.

“It will have to wait until we have control of the city.” He replied, sending the Neigix off to keep watch over the city.

“There are likely people in critical condition.”

He leveled a hard stare. “I need you at your best.”

She preened a little, nodding and putting her hand against her shoulder. “Yes, sir.”

Had she been fishing for his response? He pushed the thought aside, turning back to the city. He’d seen Yasir and his wife rushing past the gates not that long ago. Though he didn’t see them when he stepped through and inside.

There was only the man with the mustache and a lone guard. Whitney’s spirits had improved monumentally during the absence, now sporting what someone might actually consider a grimly neutral expression. One that only hardened when looking at the Orcs as they kept adding to the defenses within the city.

The older man didn’t speak, only quietly staring as one would a fire.

“How did you conquer them? You did not have any force to fight them.”

“You don’t think it was my manly charm?” Rick chuckled. “I offered them the chance to look for a home where they won’t be persecuted.” With a slight shrug, he turned to the city. “You keep twirling that medallion. What is it?”

“It was a gift from the Viscount, the Lord’s uncle.” The man’s voice softened, a touch of melancholy hovering at the edge of his lips.

And one apparently enchanted to tell if someone was lying. “He sounds like a good man.”

“He was.”

There was another silence. Rick didn’t bother to break it. Eyes kept on the city and trying to put together the answer for “what now” that kept looping through his head.

Fortunately, the thoughts came to a halt when he spotted the one he’d been waiting for.

“Hello dearest.” Kiara was all smiles, there was a lack of food. The blue-haired maiden clung to his arm. “Unless you have anything else that needs to be done, we can set forth to the Lightning-vault.”

Rick ignored the silent glare Dia was shooting at the Succubus. “Heard anything worth sharing?”

“Oh, just this and that.” She squeezed his arm twice as she said this, leading them towards the city.

She’d found something else, but couldn’t share it with Whitneye nearby to hear. Rick nodded, turning to look at Urtha. “Gather some warriors. It’s time to meet the Lord.”

“How many?”

“At least fifty Orcs and all the Hobgoblins,” Kiara said. “Preferably everything that can be spared. I will remain here to help.” She winked, giving them the look of someone who had several plans she didn’t want to share.

Dia leaned closer to speak. “We should bring as much food as we can spare, sir.”

“Agreed.”

Urtha’s tusks glinted as she straightened up, immediately barking orders to the tribe. Rick did his best to ignore Whitneye’s nervousness, and once all was prepared, they began their march deeper into the city. Sunken eyes stared at them from within darkened homes, tucked away and peeking at them. They were nervous and cautious, not that it wasn’t expected, but there was a slightly lessened undertone of hostility now that Whitneye was walking with the group.

The breeze carried with it the scent of the sea, washing away the heaviness in the air, yet left other smells in their wake. Monica kept sniffing this way and that, seeming more preoccupied with finding whatever had caught her attention than any actual threat.

“Spread the word!” Dia proclaimed, voice booming. “We bring food and medicine! To be shared in front of the Lightning-vault!”

None moved to leave, not that Rick expected them to. As much as this was going to be a publicity stunt, it was also nothing that could be rushed. The city had clearly gone through some rough things, and they were little more than an invader.

But it didn’t matter.

The propaganda was only a concern if they won.

The Lightning-vault was a fortress tucked away and hidden at the very center of the city. It was a fang of white stone, jutting out of the ground as if having risen from deep

underground. The structure was almost twice the height as it was wide, with its peak being capped by a crown of steel and gold. Upon this crown sat five figures, each armored and sporting the same blues as the guards' uniforms.

The fortification was surrounded by a flat space currently littered with wood and stone, making up small fortifications behind which the citizens hid. There was a nervous ferocity about the people, clenching spears and shields and just standing there, waiting.

As soon as Rick stepped into the plaza, one knight above the fortress leapt off, plunging to the ground at meteoric speed. The maiden opened pearly wings only at the last second, turning her fall into a soft landing right in front of Monica.

"You betray your oath, Whitneye?"

"I am Richard Cross, Father of the tribe." He spoke before the man could jump at the accusation. "I am here to talk to the Lord."

She hesitated, watching as Whitneye nodded. "For what purpose?"

"Negotiations," he said, not missing a beat. "The tribe seeks shelter, and we offer protection and food."

The maiden thumbed the metal glaive she held. "You are not showing proper manners, are you a wildling?"

"If you don't wish to deliver the message, then we will." Rick didn't miss a beat, stepping towards the fortification, ignoring the cold sweat running down his spine.

The tribe did not wait, following his steps, a reassuring gesture, but one that didn't make the winged maiden any less dangerous. Said knight moved to block his way, spreading her wings wide and blocking his way. "Wait!"

"Move, or be moved."

Urtha took his left, Monica his right.

"I will inform the Lord." The maiden didn't miss a beat, turned towards the fortification and flew off, beating her wings as if chased by hellish flames.

"You have ten minutes!" He shouted, watched her go and sighed, finally able to relax even if only marginally. "Start distributing the food," he ordered, gesturing at the maidens that had set up and spread around the plaza. "They go first, and if anyone else shows up, then let them eat too."

“Ten minutes, huh?” Urtha had a sly smile on her face, tapping the cobblestone with her metal club, making it crack. “And if they delay, we knock?”

Whitneye and his knight glanced at Rick.

He shrugged. “It’ll be just a little knock.”