



Even if he was beloved and revered, his request had initially drawn a sceptical response, especially from the master shipbuilders. Yuuki had asked of them to fill the bottom of their ocean-faring vessels with tonnes of sand, though had refused to elaborate. And surely such a thing was not necessary. He was the supreme ruler of the continent of Oblus, so his word was law, but the shipbuilders were haughty and arrogant.

In the end, he had asked a simple question: “Are you afraid your masterfully-crafted ships will not survive the journey with a bellyful of sand?”

The eighteen shipbuilding masters had fallen into a stunned silence, for to deny him now was tantamount to admitting their designs, passed down through countless generations and honed to perfection, were flawed.

Kamo had stood by Yuuki’s side, where he towered over them all thanks to his powerful build, but he was, like many times before, dwarfed by his Lord’s cunning.

“Excellently argued, Milord,” he fawned after the shipbuilders had left. “But why make such a request?”

“A wise man prepares for the worst,” he philosophised, “Though, in truth, my main concern is to be separated from the soil that fuels my powers.”

The tall warrior-turned-advisor had a stupefied look on his face, his slate-grey skin seeming to turn a dark shade of crimson at his embarrassment. “I cannot believe I did not realise this. Forgive my incompetence, Milord!”

Yuuki nodded vaguely, the subtle movement hardly visible thanks to the living armour that covered his entire body from scalp to sole. “Every mistake is a lesson. So long as your mistakes do not prove fatal, you will continue to grow wiser.”

“I will persevere to not fail you again, Milord!”

Yuuki brushed him off with a simple gesture, before saying, “I would like to tour the harbour. It is clear that my aid will be needed if we are to fill the vessels with sand before the end of the week.”

Already, the shipbuilders had set their workers loose on the task he had given them, and gangs of menial labourers hurried back-and-forth. Once, whipped and overworked slaves would have filled their roles, but Yuuki had established a more egalitarian society in the wake of his conquest of the continent. But now he was leaving all his extensive work behind to expand his empire.

He was well aware that taking the heart of his army to the southern continent to wage a war on the Daemon King would leave a power vacuum behind, one which greedy and prideful men might wish to fill. His title of the Patient Saint was well-earned in this regard however, for he had carefully plotted to elect such individuals to high posts of governance already, and pitted them all against each other, by linking the economies of their nations together. This effectively ensured that it would be impossible for any one man to rise above his station without getting the other elected heads onboard, which, given their personalities, would never happen.

The armies at their disposal were headed by different types of men, the ones who were rare in this world, but which Yuuki had carefully combed through the populace to find: those who were loyal to a fault and inspired loyalty in their own men. As such, those who might wish to return Oblus to a fractured continent with warring nations were removed from the hard power represented by the armies, while those very same swords held them in check. They were therefore forced to wield the soft power of commerce and culture as their only means of elevating their nations, which, given the structure of interlaced economies, only ensured that all nations rose together.

It had taken many years to set up such a carefully-balanced system, but it was the exact thing that Yuuki excelled at, however, he was glad to have a new foe to challenge him. For years, he had received reports and requests for aid from the southern continent of Mournhal, where the Kingdom of Helmsgarten had pitted itself against all nations bordering it.

It had begun with the death of a long-reigning and fiercely-cunning King at the hands of his son, who had fallen to some corruption that quickly spread to overrun the city. A Usurper, said to be a foul spawn of Demons soon after became the Kingdom's liberator and new Ruler, but refused to form a truce with the neighbouring nations, opting to instead double the war efforts. The reports that Yuuki had received grew more-and-more pleading as time wore on, despite it seeming as though the Usurper King had not accomplished much, and it culminated in a formal summons by the Ruler of Heimdal, who informed that the Demon Spawn had brought ultimate ruin to the small former Principality of Octland.

For a King to request aid directly from another Ruler was the equivalent to them admitting they wielded not the power to thwart their enemy. Though Yuuki believed an alliance had existed between Heimdal, Octland, and Lleman, the Heimdal King had written that Yuuki may take the lands of Octland and Lleman along with that of Helmsgarten, as recompense for cleansing the world of the Usurper King.

It had not been written in the letter what specific cause had brought about this formal request, after years of minor nobles and influential figures like the Pope of the Eight Saints being the only ones to seek his intervention, but Yuuki knew that something had sparked this sudden change in attitude. His Wardens had felt the aftermath of a powerful spell, and so had he. His element was that of the earth, and it had spoken to him through vibrations of what had transpired in the south.

Those few Scryers he possessed in his retinue were incapable of viewing the ruin caused by the spell without suffering severe consequences, and, one of them, a talented young woman who saw the world through the eyes of the birds, only managed to relay that a vile taint was visible before the backlash of her invocation had killed her.

Yuuki was looking forward to meeting the monster responsible for such a spell.

By the time the sun rose to mark the dawn of the following day, the great ships were loaded full of sand as per the Patient Saint’s orders, though he had performed the lion’s share of the labour, by manipulating the millions of grains with his awesome power.

As he beheld these ocean-faring vessels with the grains of earth in their bellies, he was reminded of images from stories in his childhood, before he had been transported to this world. They were like leviathans of carefully-nurtured timber and riveted steel, with great sails adorning towering spires, and compact ballistae lining the decks to fell any foe that might harass them on the waves. Already, the first of eight were being moved towards the open sea from the colossal workshops of the port city.

His advisor stood beside him to observe the grand undertaking.

“The armies are ready to board.”

“Give the word. Once all ships are to sea, we ride the waves towards the southern shores.”

“Understood, Milord.”