

CLEAVER OF SIN

#Chapter 21: Physical Conditioning - Read CLEAVER OF SIN Chapter 21: Physical Conditioning

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Asher followed Harold with measured steps, his demeanor calm and composed. Upon reaching the gathered trainees, Harold gestured silently to a spot on the ground, indicating where Asher should sit.

"The Tenth Sun will now be joining the First Training Ground," Harold announced curtly before turning away. He had granted the trainees a brief respite, five minutes to catch their breath. Once that time passed, training would resume without delay.

The trainees murmured among themselves. There was no need to introduce Asher, his reputation had long preceded him. The disgrace of the Duke's family was a well-known tale within the estate.

Everyone present knew he shouldn't be here. By all rights, Asher belonged in the Third Training Ground. Yet, not a single voice rose to question his presence.

And why would they? No one was foolish enough to speak out. Asher might be a disgrace, his awakening delayed until the third attempt, but none of that changed the fact that he was a Sun. A direct descendant of the Wargrave bloodline. The son of a Duke. With a single word, he could make their lives far more difficult than they dared imagine.

They cast fleeting glances at him from the corners of their eyes, breaths still labored, their gazes drawn to his flawless features. Some didn't bother to look at all, opting instead to sit cross-legged in a lotus position, using every second of the five-minute reprieve to recover their strength.

Asher remained silent. He knew none of them, and his gaze seemed distant, unfocused. But, through his Omni Perception, he observed some of them without turning his head.

They were uniformly dressed in form-fitting compressed black shirts and trousers, men and women alike, just like the one he wore.

As the final moments of rest slipped away, Harold's voice rang out from the sidelines.

"On your feet. Begin."

Without hesitation, the trainees rose and resumed their drills, not a single complaint uttered. Feet pounded rhythmically against the ground as they jogged, the sound echoing across the training field. Their breathing had steadied, if only slightly and even those who had previously collapsed were now pushing forward, their bodies moving, if only barely.

Asher moved with quiet precision, his footsteps falling in a steady rhythm against the ground. His body automatically adjusted effortlessly into a more perfect form as he jogged.

He kept pace at the front alongside the other trainees, matching their stride with mechanical ease. This wasn't a race, nor was he trying to outshine anyone. The lingering stares at his back were of no concern to him, he simply mirrored their movements, focused and composed.

"Don't just jog, control your breathing. Inhale and exhale at steady, measured intervals,"

Harold's voice called out once more, sharp and brisk.

Without warning, he appeared beside a trainee, his gaze piercing.

"Why are you gasping like you've been running since birth?" he snapped. "Hold your breath for a few seconds, then begin breathing again, slowly and with control. I've told you before, regulating your breath helps condition and strengthen the body."

After several more grueling minutes, Harold finally gave the command to stop. Many of the trainees collapsed to the ground without hesitation, gasping for air as they struggled to steady their breathing.

Asher came to a smooth halt. He wasn't panting, nor did a single bead of sweat grace his skin. The duration had been far too short to challenge him.

Without pause, they moved into the next series of physical conditioning drills. Harold offered no further rest, he had already granted them five minutes, and that was more than enough in his eyes.

Yet none voiced a complaint, what right did they have? They were no strangers to the First Training Ground; every drill, every demand, was familiar.

These exercises weren't just for discipline, they were designed to strengthen the Astra veins, increasing their capacity to channel Astra while simultaneously developing the body to its limits.

'Everyone in this world is born with a naturally strong body. Then there is the passive benefit of the Astra veins. There's no such thing as a 'fragile fire mage' who dies from a single strike.'

Asher thought as he moved through the drills, his motions controlled and efficient.

But that didn't mean Asher had it easy. The physical conditioning was designed to push every trainee to their limits, and Harold made no exception.

Noticing Asher's superior physique, he silently increased the intensity of his drills, pushing him harder than the rest. It didn't matter that Asher was a Sun; Harold had no intention of showing favoritism.

Sweat began to roll down Asher's skin, his muscles burning and straining with each movement. His breathing instinctively adjusted, his body adapting under the pressure as he forced himself to keep going.

Time wore on, and eventually, the sun reached its peak, marking the arrival of noon. The moment the session concluded, Harold vanished without a word, leaving behind only the fading echo of his demands.

No one moved at first. The trainees remained where they were, seated together in silence, each one catching their breath and bracing themselves for the next round of training.

Minutes slipped by in stillness, until, without a single command, everyone rose in unison and began walking toward a secondary door along the side of the field. Asher stood as well, wordless and composed, falling into step behind them.

They passed through the door, and another training field unfolded before Asher's eyes. At its center stood a towering structure built from an assortment of woods and reinforced planks, rising sharply toward the sky like a monument of discipline and pain.

Boris had already briefed Asher on the nature of the First Training Ground. He knew the second phase of training focused on movement.

The instructor appeared in a blurry frame of motion. Her sharp gaze swept across the assembled trainees, her presence commanding immediate attention.

"Since we have a new face among us," she began, her voice calm but firm, "I'll go over the principles of movement training once more."

Everyone knew who she meant. The unspoken consensus was clear; the new face was Asher.

"The purpose of this movement training," she began, her voice loud and crisp "is to stop you from swinging your weapons around like idiots. Countless people have died in battle not because they lacked power, but because their movement was trash."

Her eyes narrowed as she continued, "Too many rush into learning advanced techniques without building a proper foundation. Some don't bother learning at all."

She paused, letting the weight of her words settle over them like a silent warning.

"When your hands and feet don't move in harmony, you're no better than a bird waiting to be slaughtered. I'm here to keep you from dying. I'll demonstrate once. Only once."

Without another word, she turned and walked toward the towering structure.

The instructor hadn't spared Asher so much as a greeting, nor was it expected.

Once training began, even Suns and Moons were bound by the authority of their instructors. Rank and status held no weight within the boundaries of the training grounds. Discipline ruled, and formality had no place in the pursuit of strength.

Harold's earlier acknowledgment of Asher had only occurred because he arrived alongside Boris. Had Asher come alone, Harold wouldn't have wasted a breath on pleasantries, he would've gone straight into the drills, as always.

Chapter 22: Back Flip

Upon reaching the structure, the instructor wasted no time. With a fluid motion, she leapt onto one of the poles, then began moving swiftly from one to the next, her strides precise and effortless, like a dancer gliding through choreography. Suddenly, a wooden arrow shot from within the structure.

Without hesitation, her shoulder twisted, her body flowing in a seamless motion as she stepped onto the next pole, evading the projectile with elegant precision.

More arrows rained down from the sides, but they posed no threat to her. She moved like a phantom, untethered by the chaos around her.

To her, the poles were no different from solid ground, each step executed with uncanny ease. Suddenly, as her foot touched one of the poles, it wobbled beneath her, destabilizing as though attempting to break her rhythm.

But she reacted instantly, springing off with practiced grace, landing lightly on the edge of another pole before leaping once more to the surface of the next. Arrows sliced through the air, each one missing her by mere inches, but never once touching her.

Massive wooden logs and beams followed in swift succession, but none found their mark. Within seconds, she emerged at the far end of the structure, untouched, unbothered.

She didn't turn back to them. She simply vanished, disappearing from sight without a sound. No words were needed; the trainees, understanding the message with perfect clarity, immediately began their own movement training.

'This training focuses on movement and balance,' Asher noted, his gaze fixed on a structure positioned off to the side as he began walking toward it.

His mind effortlessly replayed every motion the instructor had performed, as though each step, twist, and leap had been ingrained in his mind.

'The battle intuition granted by the Absolute Physique it's absurdly overpowered.' He mused inwardly.

Then, with a controlled motion, Asher leapt upward, landing firmly atop the first pole. He drew in a deep breath and slowly exhaled, steadying himself.

Not long ago, he had been just an ordinary person, but all of that had changed. And he had come to terms with it. Whatever trials lay ahead, he would face them head-on.

With that resolve, he stepped forward.

His mind and body moved in perfect harmony, instinctively mirroring the instructor's earlier movements. Pole by pole, he advanced, each step more fluid than the last. His speed began to build, not from force, but from refinement, as his body adapted and adjusted with every motion.

His breathing remained calm and rhythmic as he moved, steady, focused. But then, without warning, a wooden arrow shot out from the side.

The moment shattered his composure.

A flicker of panic surged through him. Rationally, he knew the arrow wouldn't harm him, not with his current physique.

But fear wasn't always rational.

In truth, he had never been shot at before. In his past life, he had been just an ordinary person, someone who had never even been in a fight, let alone faced an arrow flying at him.

His mind swirled with instinct and memory, yet his body moved on its own, mirroring the motion he had seen from the instructor just moments before.

His shoulder twisted fluidly, his body following in perfect synchrony. With a seamless step onto the next pole, he evaded the arrow effortlessly, as though he had done it a hundred times before.

A smile tugged at his lips, he couldn't deny it; he was enjoying this. The wind whipped against his skin, cool and alive, and every movement felt effortless. There was a liberating rhythm to it all. He had never felt so free. It was as if the world itself bent around his motion, responding to his intent.

Such grace, such speed, these movements had no place in his former world. Even if they existed, no one there could perform them with this level of precision.

More arrows flashed from the sides and above, but Asher remained unshaken. That first arrow had been a turning point, after dodging it, something within him had clicked.

Now, he simply moved. Each step flowed into the next, fluid and controlled, his balance perfect.

He heard the wind split behind him, a sharp whistle that only meant one thing; something was coming. Within seconds, a wooden beam entered his Omni Perception range: five meters.

Asher didn't hesitate.

Without a moment's pause, he back flipped, his body arcing through the air with practiced grace. His purple eyes tracked the beam as it swept beneath him, the world slowing for just a breath.

Then, as if the moment were made for him, he descended, landing lightly atop the moving beam. Using it as a foothold, he propelled himself forward, his movements swift and spectral.

A grin spread across his face.

He moved like a ghost, untouched, untraceable, and within moments, he was already at the far end of the structure.

Asher came to a halt, his expression blank, but beneath the stillness, a quiet awe stirred. He was savoring the sensation, the fluidity of his movements, and the startling ease with which he had accomplished it all.

"That was... fun," he murmured under his breath, a trace of wonder in his voice. He had never experienced anything like that.

A sudden voice broke the moment.

"Have you done this before?" came the calm yet curious tone of the female instructor behind him.

Asher turned, his purple eyes meeting hers. "I haven't," he replied simply.

The instructor already knew the answer.

No training facilities were ever allocated to the Suns and Moons before their awakening. Until then, they were left to strengthen their bodies alone, using whatever crude means they could find. No assistance. No resources. No guidance.

And yet, the ease with which Asher had moved had compelled her to ask. It wasn't something someone who just awakened could, or should, be capable of. Not without prior experience. Not without training.

There was a calm certainty in his movements, a fluid confidence that spoke of something deeper, something unnatural.

But she could also tell that Asher had mirrored her own movement.

"It seems the Tenth Sun is indeed a genius," the instructor said with a faint smile, a hint of intrigue in her eyes.

"It seems I am," Asher replied, the smile returning to his face.

He had no intention of wearing a constant mask of indifference or acting distant, as if he were above everyone else. Accepting that he was Asher didn't mean he had to become someone he wasn't.

He was still himself, and he would live, speak, and move in a way that reflected exactly that.

'Seeing a Sun smile is indeed strange,' the instructor mused silently. Among the children of the Primarch, only the First Sun had ever been known to smile. The rest carried expressions that ranged from cold to utterly unreadable, never warmth, never lightness.

"Let's raise the tempo and the difficulty, then," she said aloud, her voice calm, but laced with challenge. And in the next instant, she vanished.

Asher gave a small nod and stepped forward once more, reentering the structure without hesitation.

Each attempt grew more intense. The difficulty scaled rapidly, forcing him to adapt in real time. Poles destabilized in quick succession, sometimes more than two at once, while a barrage of arrows threatened to knock him down.

But Asher didn't falter. He didn't overthink, he simply moved.

With every stride, his body responded with instinctual precision, turning into a blur of motion as the instructor continued to escalate the trial.

Time slipped by unnoticed.

When the movement training finally came to an end, Asher stood tall. Though he had danced through the chaos with uncanny grace, sweat clung to his skin, proof of the physical toll.

At times, up to ten poles had collapsed beneath him simultaneously, forcing him to land sideways or rebound mid-air.

And yet, through it all, he hadn't fallen once.

Chapter 23: Astra Sphere

After completing the movement and balance training, Asher trailed behind the other trainees. Unfamiliar with the layout of the First Training Ground, he had no choice but to follow their lead throughout the day.

They passed through several doors before arriving at a chamber. Though it opened up into a new space, it was noticeably smaller than the expansive areas designated for physical conditioning and movement training.

Asher's gaze drifted upward, and froze. A man stood effortlessly on the ceiling, upside down, a book resting casually in his hand.

As if sensing the weight of Asher's stare, the man's eyes lifted from the pages and met his.

'How is he standing like that?' Asher wondered, his thoughts swirling with various possibilities.

The man snapped the book shut with a quiet thud, then stepped off the ceiling. He descended gracefully, landing as if gravity itself bent to his will. Without preamble, he began to speak.

"The purpose of this training is singular, to enhance your control over Astra. Nothing more. I will teach only the fundamentals; the rest you will discover on the journey that is your life."

He paused briefly, letting his words settle, then continued.

"Now, as is customary, begin by attempting to form a small sphere with your Astra. Those of you who have already mastered this should focus your efforts on learning to walk on walls, or any other surface, using Astra alone."

At his command, the trainees dispersed into groups. Some remained standing, concentrating intently as they channeled Astra above their palms, attempting to form a

small, stable sphere. Others moved toward the walls, channeling Astra into their feet as they began to ascend, each step a test of balance and focus.

The man turned to Asher, his gaze calm yet expectant.

"Since you're new," he said, "begin with the Astra sphere."

Asher gave a silent nod to the instructor, then raised his hand, focusing inward. He felt the Astra stir within him, flowing through his veins before surging just above his palm. Though invisible to the naked eye, Astra could be sensed, its presence tangible, like pressure in the air.

He focused, shaping it with intent. But it was unstable. Each time he managed to mold it into the semblance of a sphere, it unraveled the next moment, dissolving into nothing. Still, he could feel something shifting, subtle adjustments, his control refining in real time. With every failed attempt, he improved.

Minute by minute, his control sharpened.

And after three steady minutes, the energy above his palm solidified, delicate, precise. A perfect Astra sphere floated in place, stable and balanced.

The instructor's gaze shifted to Asher, his eyes narrowing slightly in appraisal.

"You've managed to form it," he said, voice calm but firm. "Now do it again, faster this time. Repeat it until it becomes effortless, until you no longer have to think."

With that, he turned his attention to the other trainees, offering no further words.

Asher could feel their eyes on him, curious, perhaps envious. It was hard to ignore. In just three minutes, he had accomplished something many of them still struggled to master.

The Astra sphere above his palm dissipated into the air, fading without a sound. Without hesitation, Asher channeled Astra once more, guiding it through his veins and into his palm. This time, the sphere formed instantly, clean, stable.

He raised his other hand, channeling the same invisible force through his body, and a second Astra sphere materialized just as swiftly.

'Too easy,' Asher thought, eyes fixed on the spheres floating above his hands.

With a thought, he dispelled them both and repeated the process. Again and again. And with each cycle, his control sharpened. He began to notice the subtle inefficiencies, tiny traces of Astra leaking into the air during formation. Gradually, instinctively, he refined his technique, minimizing the loss and maximizing precision.

The process, once fragile and uncontrolled, was quickly becoming second nature.

Asher's gaze shifted toward the trainees attempting to scale the walls. Some managed a few steps before slipping, landing awkwardly on the ground. Others couldn't even lift themselves off the floor, their feet trembling with effort as they tried, and failed, to channel Astra properly.

His eyes then moved to the instructor.

Unlike the struggling students, the man stood effortlessly on the vertical surface, as if gravity had no claim on him. Asher's mind began to turn, analyzing every subtle movement.

He watched closely, the posture, the calm breath, the way the instructor channeled Astra down through his legs, concentrating it into his feet to maintain contact and balance.

Sensing the weight of Asher's gaze, the instructor turned his head. His eyes landed on the two Astra spheres hovering steadily above Asher's palms, stable, refined, and flawlessly formed.

There was no flicker of surprise in the instructor's expression.

Forming an Astra ball was, after all, the most fundamental of fundamentals. Geniuses often required an hour or two to perfect it. True prodigies, monsters, needed only minutes.

He had trained Suns and Moons before, individuals of extraordinary talent, and they, too, had achieved this feat in mere minutes. Asher had simply done it faster.

That alone wasn't enough to surprise him.

Not yet.

"You may begin climbing the wall," the instructor said, his tone composed and unhurried.

Asher responded with a simple nod, stepping forward with steady, confident strides. Astra surged through him, flowing to the soles of his feet. He adjusted it with careful precision, replicating the method he had observed from the instructor moments earlier.

Then, without hesitation, he placed one foot against the wall.

His body lifted effortlessly as his second foot followed, locking smoothly into place. For a brief moment, Asher stood still, completely vertical, his body aligned with the wall as though gravity itself had shifted to accommodate him.

A small smile curved his lips.

Then he began to walk.

Step after step, smooth and unbroken, as if he were strolling across flat ground. He moved past several trainees who wobbled, slipped, or clung tightly for balance, each struggling to maintain their footing where he now moved with ease.

All eyes turned to Asher, stunned into silence as he strode past the instructor himself, still walking upright along the wall with perfect balance, as if defying gravity was as natural as breathing.

'How?'

The question echoed through every trainee's mind like a thunderclap.

None of them could comprehend it. Walking on walls was supposed to be difficult, an advanced feat requiring both instruction and intense focus. The instructor hadn't even explained the technique to Asher, yet here he was, moving with casual ease, untouched by hesitation or strain.

What unsettled them even more was the speed. Forming the Astra ball had taken him three minutes, an already remarkable feat. But this? He had accomplished it in seconds.

No misstep. No falter. Just effortless mastery.

What the others didn't realize was that the reason Asher had taken three minutes to form the Astra ball was simply because he had done it without guidance. He had figured it out on his own.

Had he seen someone perform it just once, he would have replicated it instantly.

That was the kind of talent he possessed.

His ease in climbing the wall was no different. He had observed the instructor's subtle control over Astra, how it was concentrated, directed, balanced. That single glance had been more than enough.

But Asher wasn't the only one blessed with exceptional talent.

Above, three trainees stood upside down on the ceiling, arms folded across their chests, silently observing the scene below. There was no struggle in their stance, no effort in their posture, only quiet composure and superiority.

Asher had noticed them from the very beginning, during the physical fitness training, where their physiques were clearly above average. During the movement and balance drills, they had moved with precision, struck by fewer arrows than anyone else.

Now, even in Astra control, they maintained that same quiet dominance.

Chapter 24: Flow

Hours passed as the other trainees continued their relentless efforts, honing their control with unwavering focus. As the session neared its end and the group prepared to disperse, Asher dropped down from the ceiling, his body descending in freefall before twisting midair and landing with flawless precision on his feet.

'Weren't those who awakened on the third try supposed to be hopeless?' the instructor mused, silently watching Asher blend in with the departing crowd.

"You can stop sneaking around now," the instructor said calmly, his gaze never shifting.

In response, two figures emerged beside him, Harold and the female instructor.

"What are you doing here?" asked Virek, the Astra control instructor, turning toward the pair with a raised brow.

"I came to see how the Tenth Sun would fare," Elowen replied, her tone light. "He breezed through my movement training like it was child's play."

"Yeah," Harold added, folding his arms. "And now he's waltzing through Astra training the same way."

"We're heading to the next training ground," Elowen said with a small, teasing smile. "You coming, or are you going to stay behind and keep reading your erotic novels?"

Virek sighed. "Fine. Let's go. I'm curious myself."

With that, the trio vanished from sight.

Asher walked calmly behind the rest of the trainees, his thoughts drifting. 'Two more sessions and I'll be done for the day. Technically, it's only one because I won't be allowed to join the second until next month.'

The two upcoming trainings were weapons practice and monster subjugation.

The Wargrave family traditionally introduced their Suns, Moons, and the other trainees to beast-killing a full month after their awakening. That initial month, however, was strictly reserved for weapons training and sparring.

During this period, the Suns and Moons were expected to become familiar with their weapons and test their mettle against each other in preparation for their first real battle.

Asher, having only just awakened, was no exception. He would be given one month to master the fundamentals of his weapon before he was permitted to face a living threat.

As Asher stepped into the new training ground, he was greeted by a vast, open space, larger even than the area designated for physical fitness training.

At the center of the field sat a man in a lotus position, eyes closed, his presence radiating calm authority. He appeared to be meditating, undisturbed by the arrival of the trainees.

But the moment he sensed their presence, he rose smoothly to his feet and spoke in a clear voice, "Form up and begin your swings."

The trainees moved without hesitation. Each of them made their way to the weapon racks lining the sides of the field, selected a weapon, assumed a stance, and began their practice swings with focused determination.

The weapon instructor, Clinton, turned to Asher and addressed him in a firm tone, "Since you're new here, take position over there. Your task is one thousand slashes and thrusts, considering you wield a unique rapier."

Asher wasn't the least bit surprised that Clinton knew about his weapon. He assumed the Primarch had already informed Zarek, who had likely passed the information along to the instructors overseeing the First Training Ground.

With a silent nod, Asher walked toward the area Clinton had indicated. As he raised his hand, Virelass materialized in his palm, its blade humming softly with a faint resonance, eager, almost sentient, as if it shared Asher's anticipation for its first true use.

'Excited huh?' Asher mused.

Then, Asher closed his eyes.

He inhaled slowly, deeply, then exhaled, steadying his breath. Entering a modest stance, he raised Virelass above his head and brought it down in an awkward downward slash.

Almost instinctively, his body adjusted. His footing shifted. His breathing grew more measured. His grip repositioned ever so slightly, and he struck again.

Clinton began to approach, intending to correct the boy's form, newcomers often fumbled their first swings, especially with such a specialized weapon. But as he neared, he paused.

With each swing, Asher improved. Subtly at first, but unmistakably. His form refined itself with every motion, his body learning on its own, fluid, disciplined, focused.

Asher didn't seem to notice the instructor at all. He was locked in a rhythm, lost in repetition. His arms moved like clockwork, his body a finely tuned instrument executing the same movement again and again.

Sweat rolled down his skin, soaking through his clothes. His violet hair clung damply to his forehead as the sun bore down, merciless and bright, but Asher never stopped.

Clinton observed in silence for a moment longer before simply turning away. There was no need for interference.

Returning to the center of the field, he called over the three trainees from earlier. Without delay, he began sparring with them, correcting their stances, testing their reactions, and refining their instincts. It was hands-on instruction, aimed at sharpening both their form and battle sense.

Meanwhile, time slipped by.

An hour passed, and Asher completed his one thousand slashes with unbroken focus. Without pause, he transitioned seamlessly into thrusts. His right leg slid forward in perfect harmony with his leading hand, the point of Virelass darting out with precision, then retracting smoothly.

Again and again.

Each motion flowed into the next, as fluid as breath. His body, though drenched in sweat and trembling with fatigue, pulsed with exhilaration. Muscles ached, lungs burned, but Asher wasn't stopping.

He moved as if possessed, immersed in a rhythm all his own. No thoughts. No distractions. Only the blade. Only the motion.

His world had narrowed to the edge of Virelass, and in that narrow space, he found clarity.

Another hour passed, and still Asher did not pause, not for rest, not even for breath. His movements remained steady and composed. Then, at last, he halted, mid-thrust, the final motion of his one thousandth thrust complete.

He stood there in silence, chest rising and falling in a steady rhythm, sweat dripping from his chin to join the pool forming at his feet. The air around him shimmered faintly with heat and effort.

But instead of resting, he moved.

Dropping once more into a stance, Asher surged forward, his mind and body synchronizing perfectly. Slash flowed into thrust. Thrust gave way to slash. The two motions, once distinct, now blended seamlessly into one fluid dance.

His waist twisted, adjusting his center of gravity. Shoulders rolled, arms and legs moved in perfect harmony. Muscle memory from the movement training sparked to life in his mind, guiding his limbs with refined instinct. He wasn't just swinging, he was weaving.

Slash. Thrust. Step. Flow. Each element became part of a greater whole.

Minutes passed before he finally stopped. His entire form was drenched, steam rising faintly from his body. He stood still, blade lowered, breath deep and even.

Then, slowly, a smile crept onto his lips.

'So this is why everyone wants to reincarnate,' he thought, amusement and exhilaration mixing in his gaze.

Then he turned, and met Clinton's gaze.

The instructor stood frozen, eyes wide in disbelief. Around the field, the other trainees had stopped their swings, their attention locked on Asher. Some wore expressions of awe, others confusion, and a few... fear. To them, he no longer looked like a peer, but something else entirely. A monster in human form.

But Asher didn't care.

He had no intention of hiding his ability simply to match the expectations set for those who awakened on their third try. Let them stare. Let them talk. It didn't matter.

No one could question him.

He was the last heir of a Duke. The Tenth Sun of the Wargrave family.

With quiet calmness, Asher sat down on the ground, crossing his legs as his breathing slowed. He closed his eyes, shutting out the noise around him, and allowed his mind to replay everything he had experienced throughout the trainings, each movement, each sensation, each moment of growth.

Chapter 25: Invitation

Zarek walked with composed grace in a direction all within the estate recognized without question.

A calm, knowing smile curved his lips as he passed, and the maids and fellow butlers offered respectful greetings. After all, he was no ordinary servant, he was the personal butler of the Primarch.

Before him stood a black door. Without a word or gesture, it parted on its own, and Zarek stepped inside.

Inside, a man stood, golden eyed, golden haired, Azeron Wargrave, the Primarch of the Wargrave family.

He stood by the window engaged in an act that no one within the estate would have believed possible in their lifetime.

Azeron Wargrave, the esteemed fearsome Primarch, was smiling as he gazed out into the distance.

Anyone who witnessed the scene might have thought they had fallen into an illusion. It would have been easier to convince them that the entire history of Crymora was a fabrication than to believe that Azeron Wargrave was smiling.

He was a man whom few, if any, had ever seen smile. As a Wargrave, Azeron was known for bearing either a cold, unreadable expression or none at all.

And yet, in that quiet moment, one of the strongest men in the world wore a rare, gentle smile.

The reason? His youngest son, Asher Wargrave, the Tenth Sun.

Zarek stepping in didn't speak or interrupt, he simply stood in place quietly.

With Azeron's unparalleled perception, his senses extended across the entire Wargrave estate. At that moment, his attention was fixed on one person, Asher. The boy sat in a lotus position, eyes closed in deep focus. Azeron had been observing him from the very moment he stepped into the First Training Ground.

He had watched him move through each challenge as though it were second nature, effortless, precise, composed. The Astra Sphere, which had once taken Azeron himself five minutes to form, was completed by Asher in less. Perfecting it had taken Azeron twenty minutes; Asher matched that feat with striking ease. The wall climb, once an hour long ordeal for Azeron, was scaled in mere moments by his son.

Even the movement and balance training, which had taken Azeron four days to conquer on the lowest difficulty setting, had been approached by Asher with a grace and instinct that bordered on the unnatural.

And now, watching his son not only match, but surpass, every benchmark he had once set as a so-called once in a millennium genius, Azeron couldn't help but smile.

At last, Azeron spoke, his gaze still fixed on the horizon beyond the window.

"What did they bring, Zarek?"

"It was an invitation, Primarch," Zarek replied without hesitation.

Azeron's expression darkened. "Do these useless nobles have nothing better to do? The Emovirae are stirring unrest, enemy Empires are slipping spies into our borders one after the other and yet they waste their time sending me invitations to meaningless gatherings."

As he spoke, the faint smile that had graced his face vanished without a trace.

"But you haven't asked what the invitation is for, Primarch," Zarek said with a faint smile tugging at his lips.

He had known Azeron since the moment of his birth. He understood the man in ways few ever could, his temperaments, his rare moments of amusement, his silence that spoke more than words. He knew what Azeron despised: meetings, banquets, ceremonies.

Unless it involved war councils, strategies to crush rival empires, or decisive strikes against the Emovirae, such invitations were better left undelivered.

If not for Asher's awakening, Azeron wouldn't have bothered returning at all.

And yet, he had come, quietly, a week before the event, choosing to observe everything from the shadows.

"What is the meeting about, then?" Azeron asked, his tone flat, his expression cold. He had already decided to decline, as he always did.

Zarek answered with measured calm. "The Royal Twins' seventeenth birthday is a week from today. The Emperor has extended a personal invitation."

At those words, the icy edge in Azeron's gaze faded, replaced by a neutral stillness. His features grew unreadable, neither tense nor relaxed, merely still.

"The Prince and Princess," he murmured. "I suppose that is understandable."

"Are you planning to attend, Primarch?" Zarek asked softly.

"You already know the answer to that, Zarek. You've always known me better than my own blood," Azeron replied, his gaze never shifting from the window.

Zarek offered no response. He hadn't expected one. Azeron never attended such events; he would, as always, send a representative in his place.

"Who will be going this time?" Zarek asked, already sorting through the names of trusted advisors in his mind, those who had become seasoned delegates at such affairs.

"We'll decide that later," Azeron said curtly. "There's still a few days left to decide."

His golden eyes remained fixed on the distance, not on the Empire's politics or its Emperor, but on one boy alone.

Asher Wargrave.

Zarek's eyes followed Azeron's line of sight, settling on the First Training Ground below. Noting where the Primarch's attention lay, he spoke quietly.

"You didn't need to frame it as a reward," he said. "With your authority, you could have placed him there outright."

To anyone else, such words might have seemed bold, insolent, even. But between them, it was different. Zarek hadn't overstepped. Their bond ran deeper than rank or titles; it was a trust forged over decades.

When Azeron had first summoned Asher to his study, his intention had been clear, he would use his authority to personally reinstate him into the First Training Ground.

He couldn't bear the thought of his own son wasting away in the Third, surrounded by mediocrity, especially after multiple failed awakenings. At that rate, who could say how long it would have taken for Asher to make any meaningful progress?

But then he saw Asher, and noticed his Life rank. In that moment, he chose a different path. Instead of invoking raw authority, Azeron used Asher's Life Rank as justification, framing the transfer as a reward. It was a cleaner move, far more palatable to others, and, in truth, a better strategy than what he had originally planned.

Chapter 26: Lily Of The Abyss

"I know," Azeron replied simply, the familiar smile returning to his face. "But with this, he has earned it on his own."

"How is the Youngest Master faring, Primarch?" Zarek inquired. Unlike Azeron, he couldn't afford the luxury of spending his days observing Asher's training.

His responsibilities were many, duties that rightfully belonged to the Primarch, but which Azeron routinely neglected out of sheer indifference. Unless it involved a blade or concerned his family, it rarely made its way onto Azeron's to-do list.

"What can I say? He is a Wargrave, after all," Azeron said, a faint smile tugging at his lips. "And he's inherited his mother's innate gift with the rapier. If only she were here to witness it, to see her long-held wish finally fulfilled: a child of hers wielding her weapon with pride."

There was a subtle shift in his voice, something softer, more wistful. Beneath his composed exterior, a deep sense of longing lingered.

Lily, Azeron's late wife, had been a master of the rapier. Countless foes, men, monsters, even the dreaded Emovirae, had fallen to the precision of her blade. As the Primarch's consort, she had been formidable in her own right, an indomitable force whose strength had once commanded fear and respect in equal measure.

To become the wife of a Wargrave Primarch, a bloodline born for the art of war, one had to be extraordinary. But to stand beside Azeron, a man who existed beyond the bounds of conventional standards, she had to be something more: truly exceptional.

And Lily was exactly that.

A woman so formidable that the Empire itself had dubbed her 'Lily Of The Abyss', a name whispered with both reverence and fear. Her strength was the stuff of legend; few dared challenge her, and fewer still lived to speak of it.

Azeron had fallen for Lily the moment he laid eyes on her. Her striking violet hair, the piercing amethyst of her gaze, the flawless porcelain of her skin, the elegant curve of her waist, even her scent, it was all seared into his memory from that first encounter.

But at the time, he had not yet ascended to the title of Primarch, and love was a luxury far removed from his path.

Lily had loved him as well. Yet she, too, understood the unbreakable traditions of the Wargrave bloodline. Bound by duty and restraint, she made no move, knowing full well that desire alone was never enough to overcome the weight of legacy.

After Azeron rose to the rank of Primarch, the distance between them began to fade. They grew close, then closer, until, at last, he proposed.

But Lily Of The Abyss, forged in battle and unbending in spirit, was not a woman to simply yield to any man, Wargrave or not.

Instead, she made a counterproposal of her own.

They would fight. If Azeron emerged victorious, she would accept his proposal and become his wife. But if he lost, then he would be her wife. He would cook, clean, and serve her as dutifully as any traditional bride. And above all, he would obey her, just as a wife was expected to obey her husband.

Azeron had been momentarily stunned by her response. The notion of cooking, or performing domestic duties, was almost absurd to a Wargrave. Members of his family were warriors, not homemakers; their days were spent in training, not in kitchens.

They had chefs, servants, entire staffs dedicated to the mundane, so they could focus solely on the art of war. There was, in truth, nothing else he had envisioned but the two of them simply being together.

But he was a Wargrave. A man forged by combat, blood, and unyielding pride. And if battle was the price for love, then he would gladly pay it. Especially when the battlefield was shared with someone as unrelenting and wild-hearted as Lily, a woman as much in love with the clash of steel as he was.

The duel was nothing short of legendary.

Trenches tore through the land. Mountains were reduced to rubble. The earth split beneath their feet, and the land itself shattered beneath the weight of their blows.

It was not just a fight, it was a courtship written in scars and fury.

For Azeron, the battle was the proposal.

And for Lily, her defeat was her answer: Yes.

Even on the night of their wedding, Azeron and Lily did not share a traditional union. Rather than consummating their marriage, the two battle hardened souls spent the night crossing blades beneath the stars, an exchange of strikes instead of vows, steel instead of silk, battlefield instead of bed.

It was the only kind of intimacy they truly understood.

And yet, for all her strength, for all the legends whispered in her name, Lily Of The Abyss met her end not on the battlefield, but in childbirth. It was a fate so cruel, so absurd, that many refused to believe it. But reality does not bend for even the strongest of warriors.

Before her passing, Lily had only one wish: that at least one of her children would awaken to the rapier, her cherished weapon, her legacy.

That wish had come true.

But she was no longer here to witness it.

To enjoy it.

To nurture it.

To pass on the art she had once danced with in war.

She had died with Asher cradled in her arms, her final breath spent entrusting their son to Azeron. It was not a request, it was her last will, the final command of a warrior who had never bowed to anything but love.

And Azeron, bound by her memory, intended to honor that vow to its fullest, no matter what it demanded of him, until the day he, too, returned to the earth.... to Lily

As for the whispers of Asher's banishment, Azeron had never once considered such a thing. He had heard the rumors, yes, but he had not silenced them. Not out of neglect, but conviction. Asher may have been entrusted to him by Lily, but he was still a Wargrave by blood.

And Wargraves do not falter.

Azeron held no doubt: his son would awaken, if not on his first or second attempt, then surely on the third. It was not faith. It was certainty.

This was the kind of man Azeron Wargrave was, direct, battle hardened, loving, and disarmingly simple. A man who found clarity in combat, spoke with purpose, and loved with unshakable devotion.

Yet few truly knew this side of him.

Together with Lily, Azeron had raised their firstborn son, Malrik Wargrave, with immense love and care. He was their first child, their pride, and he had received the very best of them both.

Perhaps a little too much.

Unlike the typical Wargrave, known for their stoic expressions and iron restraint, Malrik could hardly maintain a straight face. He smiled often, laughed easily, and wore his emotions openly, an almost heretical trait within his lineage.

But there was a reason for it.

Malrik had grown up bathed in affection, taught to love fiercely and protect even more fiercely. And he had done just that. From a young age, he was raised to shield his

siblings, to be their sword and shield, and he embraced the role with a terrifying earnestness.

There were whispers of how many lives he'd taken merely for casting the wrong glance at his sisters.

And none dared question if the rumors were true.

Malrik had never believed Asher would be exiled, it was simply impossible as he knew the real Primarch behind the mask.

Sensing the mood had shifted somewhat, Azeron shifted the conversation without missing a beat. With a familiar glint in his eye, he launched into a cascade of boasts about Asher, his talent, his rapid progress, the feats he had already achieved.

He even went so far as to brag about Asher's ability to suppress his Life Rank aura, speaking as though Zarek hadn't been standing right there when it happened.

But Zarek said nothing.

He simply listened, as he always did.

Azeron never shared these fatherly praises with the other Ducal families, he reserved them for Zarek alone. And while the Primarch might have believed he was being subtle, Zarek knew the truth: these moments were less about pride and more about love.

Chapter 27: Twelve Hours

Asher sat in the lotus position, his posture composed and calm, while the clash of steel rang sharply in the air around him. Yet, the metallic symphony failed to disturb his focus.

In the Wargrave Ducal family, trainees were never coddled with wooden replicas. From the very outset, they were expected to wield authentic weapons, steel, sharpened, and unrestrained.

The risk of injury was not a concern; people with exceptional healing abilities were always on hand to mend flesh and bone. Mastery, after all, demanded real consequences.

The trainees no longer spared glances in Asher's direction. This time was meant for training, not idle admiration. Inspired, perhaps even pressured, by Asher's earlier display, Clinton had driven them to their absolute limits.

Seated in perfect stillness, Asher finally stirred. His eyelids fluttered open, revealing deep violet eyes that calmly took in the world around him. The very moment his gaze returned to the present, Clinton's voice rang out.

"Training will resume tomorrow."

With that simple command, the session came to an end. One by one, the trainees moved and began filing out of the open courtyard. Fatigue hung heavy in their steps.

The sun had already begun its descent, casting long shadows across the First Training Ground, it was evening, and darkness crept steadily over the horizon.

Asher walked ahead of the group, his pace unhurried yet assured. He had already familiarized himself with the layout of the First Training Ground, there was no need to follow behind like the others.

Up ahead, the trio of top-ranked trainees moved with the quiet confidence befitting their skill. Upon noticing Asher's approach, they halted at once and offered a respectful greeting.

"Good evening, Tenth Sun."

Their words served as a sudden reminder. The rest of the trainees, worn and distracted from training, had neglected the customary courtesy. But now that the session was over, formality could not be ignored, especially not with someone of Asher's status.

The thought alone was enough to stir anxiety. After all, who could say what might happen if the Tenth Sun deemed their disrespect intentional?

Without delay, every trainee bowed in unison.

"Good evening, Tenth Sun," they echoed respectfully, voices tinged with both reverence and apprehension.

Asher stood momentarily frozen, uncertain of how to respond. The collective greeting, formal and synchronized, left him mildly unsettled. He couldn't imagine enduring this routine every single day just for stepping onto the training grounds.

With a faint smile tugging at his lips, he spoke calmly, "From now on, within the training grounds, there's no need for formal greetings. Just head to your destinations and freshen up."

And with that, he turned and walked away, leaving the trainees stunned in his wake.

No one had expected a response, certainly not a gentle one. They had anticipated silence, perhaps even a cold glance, but a reply... and a smile? It was almost surreal. Was the world ending?

Asher, however, paid no mind to their bewilderment. He had no desire to wear a mask of superiority every waking moment. Politeness didn't need to be wrapped in intimidation. If he had to wear a facade, he'd only do so when absolutely necessary.

As Asher walked, a subtle sensation coursed through his body, faint, almost imperceptible, yet undeniably present. It wasn't a dramatic surge of power, but a quiet affirmation that he had grown stronger.

That slight, minuscule shift was enough. It was proof that his efforts during the rigorous training were bearing fruit.

With the other trainees trailing behind, Asher stepped out of the First Training Ground, his stride steady and composed. Though fatigue clung to his muscles, his body did not falter. He regulated his breathing with practiced ease, smoothing away the weariness that threatened to surface.

Without warning, Lyra appeared behind Asher like a phantom emerging from shadow, silent, graceful, and sudden.

"Lyra, it's been a while." Asher said, without turning or pausing his steps.

"It seems training went well, Young Master," she replied with a faint smile. Though she was barred from entering the First Training Ground, her senses had easily pierced the boundary. She had shadowed Asher's presence from beginning to end, and she knew, of course, that he had concealed his Life Rank.

"I'd say it was fun," Asher replied calmly, his smile returning as he felt exhilarated after everything that happened.

By the time Asher returned to his room, the sun had already dipped below the horizon. Without delay, he made his way to the shower, he could clearly smell the sweat clinging to his skin. The grime of effort needed to be washed away.

After cleaning up, he changed into a fresh set of clothes from his wardrobe and settled into a chair, waiting for dinner. Lyra had already moved to fetch it. The urge to open his system panel tugged at him, but he decided to wait, he preferred to finish everything involving Lyra first.

Moments later, she returned, carrying a tray with dinner. Asher wasted no time; he began eating immediately. After hours of intense training, his hunger had grown into a silent beast gnawing at him from within.

Between bites, he glanced at Lyra and asked, "Lyra, do you know why the Wargrave family doesn't offer structured training in elemental manipulation the way they do with Astra?"

Lyra, standing silently behind him, responded without hesitation.

"Young Master, while the Ducal family provides instruction, it does not teach everything. Its purpose is to offer a foundation, after that, it's up to the individual to build upon it in the way they see fit. The difference in this case is that the family has chosen not to offer a formal foundation for elemental manipulation. This is because the control gained from Astra manipulation can, with understanding, be adapted to govern elemental energy as well."

Asher absorbed her words in thoughtful silence. He had anticipated structured lessons in elemental control, yet none had come, not even Boris had spoken of it.

"So I'm expected to learn it on my own," he said quietly.

"Yes, Young Master," Lyra replied calmly. "Though you may seek guidance from others from time to time, most individuals train their elemental affinities independently. There isn't much complexity involved. With a bit of intellect and talent, even those with little natural gift can make measurable progress."

Asher gave a slight nod. He understood well that Crymora was unlike other worlds in the novels he read, worlds where mages delved deep into arcane studies, deciphering complex runes, memorizing incantations, and mastering the intricate theories behind spellcasting and elemental control.

None of that applied here.

In Crymora, elemental manipulation required neither profound intellect nor intense academic rigor. It was more instinctual, a craft honed through practice, not study... or with a bit of study.

A short while later, he finished his meal, setting the utensils aside just as Lyra reentered. She gathered the empty plates with practiced efficiency.

"Good night, Young Master," she said softly before slipping out of the room. The time was already 8:30 PM. Training ran from 7 AM to 7 PM each day, and the routine left little space for leisure.

Asher leaned back slightly, his eyes drifting toward the ceiling as thoughts filled his mind.

'With the Absolute Physique, I doubt I'll need a full eight hours of sleep. Five, maybe, even less, might be enough to restore me to peak condition. Still, I'll have to test it, tonight's sleep would be the test'

There was simply too much to do.

Twelve hours of daily training in the First Training Ground, followed by personal regimens that included elemental control, rapier mastery, and cultivation. It was a relentless cycle of effort with barely any time to rest, an unbreaking pace carved into every day.

'So this is why children from powerful families often begin with modest Life Ranks. It's not negligence, it's deliberate. Their early years are spent building a solid foundation. After all, a high Life Rank without the substance to support it is meaningless. No matter the world, strength without depth is shallow, and easily shattered.'

Asher

Chapter 28: Lazy System

'Time to see if there are any changes to my stats, since I feel subtly stronger' Asher thought with a smile.

'Status' Asher commanded.

[Name: Asher Wargrave

Age: Seventeen

Bloodline: The Wargrave Lineage

Physique: Absolute Physique

Titles: [Youngest Heir] [Tenth Sun] [Disgrace of the Wargrave] [Unique Body Holder]

Life Rank: Faintstar

Sub Life Rank: Flare

Affinity: Lightning

Strength: 57 → 58

Agility: 57 → 59

Vitality: 58

Perception: 52 → 60]

Asher's eyes swept across the changes, analyzing each with growing interest. His strength had risen by a single point, expected, given his recent physical exertion.

Agility, however, had improved by two, a direct result of his intensive movement and balance training. Vitality hasn't increased which was understandable.

What truly stunned Asher, however, was his Perception stat. It hadn't just improved, it had soared, leaping from the lowest stat to the highest in a single bound, now standing at an impressive sixty points.

He could feel the difference, his senses had sharpened considerably, and his Omni Perception now extended to a six meter radius.

'Looks like having arrows constantly fired at me actually paid off,' he mused wryly.

Asher smiled. In just a few hours of training, his progress had been remarkable. His thoughts drifted to his Absolute Physique; the ability Limitless Physical Growth, an ability that allowed his body to grow endlessly through combat and training.

Even without formal cultivation, as long as he pushed himself to the edge, whether through battle or relentless drills, he would shatter that edge and grow stronger in response.

Truly broken.

But Asher understood the truth behind it. While the concept seemed straightforward, the reality was far more brutal. The stronger one became, the more punishing it was to break past the next threshold.

Each new limit was a wall steeper than the last.

But that was a concern for another time.

Why waste thought on hurdles that weren't yet in his path?

Asher immediately settled onto his bed in a lotus position, his eyes closing with practiced ease. Without delay, he began cultivating. Streams of Astra in the air stirred, flowing through his pores and coursing directly into his Astra veins with rhythmic precision.

Just because the First Training Ground didn't officially allocate time for cultivation didn't mean he would neglect it. He would carve out his own path, even in silence.

Hours slipped by unnoticed, and soon it was already 1 a.m.

'System, is it possible for you to tell me the time' Asher asked as he opened his eyes.

Throughout his cultivation, he had opened his eyes several times, checking the clock intermittently. He had set a strict boundary, cultivation would end at 1 a.m., at which point he would shift into the next phase of his training.

The system remained silent. Whether it was genuinely speechless at Asher's attempt to turn it into an alarm clock, or simply unwilling to respond, he couldn't tell.

Just as he was about to rise from his bed, the familiar chime finally echoed in his mind, like the reluctant sigh of an overworked assistant pushed into unpaid overtime.

[Ding]

[It is possible, Host]

Asher glanced at the message, a smile tugging at his lips. He gave a small nod of acknowledgment.

'I'm about to begin my lightning training. It'll only last an hour, end time is 2 a.m. sharp. Notify me.'

After a short pause, the system responded.

[... Affirmative, Host]

Asher stared at the ellipses preceding the message, brows twitching slightly.

"This lazy system," he muttered with a shake of his head. "No time to waste."

Climbing down from his bed, Asher raised his hand, and crackling lightning surged to life around his fingers. With a focused breath, he willed the energy to flow downward, guiding it from his fingertips to his palm. The lightning arcs brightened, pulsing with a vibrant, sharpened hue as they followed his intent.

Drawing upon the fundamentals of his Astra control training, Asher attempted to compress the energy into a sphere, a lightning ball. Within seconds, the orb began to take shape, humming softly with unstable power.

He didn't pause to celebrate the minor success. Compared to the vast array of overwhelming abilities he had read about or witnessed, a mere lightning ball felt almost laughable.

Without hesitation, he moved on, trying to refine its form. He focused on condensing the sphere, willing it to solidify, then experimented with its size, enlarging it, then shrinking it, only to expand it again.

Then suddenly — BOOM.

The unstable lightning ball detonated in front of his face, sending a mild shockwave that instantly blasted his hair upward, transforming it into a wildly spiked mess.

In a flash, Virelass materialized beside him, as if asking what was wrong with his control.

'There's still progress to be made,' Asher mused, his eyes narrowing with determination.

He didn't relent. Instead, he pressed on, continuing his training with sharp focus.

Harnessing his control, Asher began shaping the lightning into rudimentary forms, spheres, lines, crude edges, though most wavered with instability. Still, within mere minutes, the raw potential began to settle.

The shapes grew more defined, less volatile. His rapid improvement was undeniable, a testament to both his talent and tenacity.

'I wonder how long it took others to reach this point,' he pondered briefly.

But the thought was fleeting. No matter. That has nothing to do with me.

"System, how much time remains? I've already completed the basics, and it still hasn't been an hour?"

[Ten minutes left, Host]

'Since I've wrapped up the fundamentals of lightning control. let's test something else.'

With purpose in his step, Asher turned and made his way toward the bathroom.

He had long since set his sights on walking on water. If walking on walls is possible, he reasoned, then why not water? The instructor may not have taught it, but that didn't mean it was impossible, or that Asher couldn't be the first to do it.

With that thought, he filled a wide, tub-like structure to the brim. Channeling Astra into his feet, he took a deliberate step toward the water's surface, only for his foot to plunge straight to the bottom.

'Just as I suspected,' he thought calmly, unbothered. The Astra control method for walking on walls clearly didn't translate to water, and he had intentionally used the same approach to confirm his theory.

A slow smile curved his lips as he withdrew his foot. The Astra beneath him shifted under his thought and control, with this new method, he took another step.

This time, his foot landed atop the water's surface, steady and undisturbed, not even a ripple.

Rising slightly, he placed his other foot beside the first. It, too, held firm.

The smile on his face widened into a grin. 'How many movie superheroes from my previous life could even dream of doing this?'

His first failure had sparked a revelation: walls were solid, water was liquid, their properties opposites. So why not reverse the control method as well?

It had worked, perfectly.

[Host. It's time]

The system's notification echoed in his mind.

Still grinning, Asher stepped off the water and made his way back to bed. Whether he would actually sleep, with excitement surging through every fiber of his being, was another matter entirely.

Chapter 29: Begin

Three days had passed since Asher's initial arrival at the First Training Ground. In that brief span, much of the training had begun to feel mundane to him, as he navigated its challenges with increasing ease.

But Harold remained undeterred. Regardless of Asher's rapid progress, he offered no praise, no pause for recognition, as though such improvement was merely the baseline of expectation.

Instead, he escalated the intensity of the training to match Asher's growth, and Asher embraced every moment of it.

During movement training, Asher chose to challenge himself by closing his eyes. Given that his Omni Perception remained active even without visual input, he saw it as an opportunity to refine its use.

Within a six-meter radius, everything fell clearly within his perception; beyond that, a veil of complete darkness prevailed. It was during this exercise that Asher came to a realization: while Omni Perception heightened his awareness and granted a seamless 360-degree view of his surroundings, it did not equate to true sight, particularly not when it came to perceiving the invisible.

But that didn't matter to Asher. He pushed his senses to their very limits. If he couldn't perceive the invisible directly, then he would learn to read the subtle shifts in the air, the breeze parting as something moved through it.

With that thought, Asher no longer wished to see the arrows flying toward him.

No.

He wanted to trace their trajectories using only the wind and sound.

At first, he was struck repeatedly. But gradually, he adapted. His body began to respond instinctively, his ears attuned to the slightest whistle, and his skin detected even the faintest disturbances in the air.

From clumsy beginnings, he progressed, steadily, fluidly, until, within thirty minutes, his movements became flawless.

The trainees, along with Elowen, who had believed they had already seen the extent of his abilities, were once again left speechless.

During the Astra control training, Asher demonstrated his ability to walk on water before Virek. Impressed, Virek informed him that water walking happened to be the next phase of their training.

The other three gifted trainees had also mastered the basic technique. However, Virek raised the difficulty, transforming the calm surface into surging waves, destabilizing the water beneath their feet and making balance far more difficult.

But Asher adapted effortlessly. He had already anticipated such a scenario and trained for it by himself before Virek even suggested it.

As for wall climbing, Asher was tasked with scaling unstable, uneven surfaces, walls that were anything but smooth. The purpose was clear: to sharpen his control and force his body to adapt reflexively, without the need for conscious correction.

Within just three days, Asher had shown remarkable progress across every aspect of his training.

Over the past three days, Asher had grown somewhat closer to the trainees. He never demanded formal greetings, he simply gave a subtle nod in their direction whenever he arrived.

To their surprise, Asher turned out to be far more easygoing than they had expected. He neither looked down on anyone nor spoke with arrogance or coldness. Whenever he had a moment to spare, he would casually offer a piece of advice to a nearby trainee.

That said, he wasn't going out of his way to help others, Asher wasn't nearly charitable enough to offer free guidance without reason.

Within the weapon training grounds, Asher moved with effortless ease. His footwork was flawless, each step flowing seamlessly into the next, and his swings and thrusts naturally adjusted in rhythm with his shifting stance.

Unlike his first day at the First Training Ground, when he simply relied on movements from his prior training, this time, Asher observed the movements of Clinton and the others, analyzing their forms and integrating their nuances into his own style.

The result was undeniable: his progress had been nothing short of remarkable.

Hearing footsteps behind him, Asher turned to see the instructor, Clinton, approaching with a smile on his face. He had witnessed many trainees over the years, but never had he seen such rapid and profound improvement.

To train someone this talented, someone capable of achieving the unimaginable, felt like an honor.

"You've been training alone for the past three days," Clinton said, his tone light but firm. "It's time for a spar."

Asher's eyes swept across the field. The top three trainees, and several others, were noticeably absent. He assumed they had been sent to the monster subjugation training; many of them had already spent over a month in the First training ground.

'In a month.' Asher reminded himself.

Though he looked forward to the challenge, he couldn't ignore the unease lingering beneath his anticipation. His first kill might make him nauseous, he might even vomit.

In his previous life, he had been just an ordinary person, someone who hadn't so much as killed a chicken. A few cockroaches and ants, perhaps, but even toddlers did that.

"Will I be sparring with you?" Asher asked.

Clinton shook his head and replied, "No. You'll be sparring with another trainee. Truthfully, with your level of talent, you should be facing the best we have, but he's currently away at the monster subjugation training."

Asher gave a small nod in understanding.

Clinton then turned toward a boy sparring at the edge of the field.

"Kale, over here."

Hearing his name, Kale immediately halted mid-motion. His gaze turned to Clinton, and without hesitation, he responded, "Yes, Instructor!" before jogging over.

Clinton turned to Asher and spoke. "This is Kale. Among those who've been here for less than a month, he's currently the most outstanding. In two days, he'll begin his monster subjugation training."

Asher gave a slight nod, his gaze shifting to the boy beside him, a fellow seventeen year old with striking red hair and sharp black eyes.

"This is just a spar, a weapon-focused training session," Clinton began, his voice clear and brisk. "No abilities of any kind are to be used. That includes your rapier skill, Tenth Sun. You'll fight using only your rapier, no Astra, no enhancements."

He paused briefly, letting the instruction sink in.

"Only superficial injuries are permitted. No critical strikes, and absolutely no aiming for vital points."

Clinton was thorough, knowing this would be Asher's first official spar. He wanted to ensure all boundaries were set clearly.

With that, he stepped aside, allowing Asher and Kale to take their positions, standing face-to-face on the sparring field.

"It's nice to meet you, Tenth Sun," Kale said with a polite smile, choosing his words carefully.

"Nice to meet you too," Asher replied, his tone relaxed yet clear. "I hope you're not planning to hold back just because of my family name. This is a training ground, not a political gathering. And don't worry, win or lose, I won't make your life difficult."

He spoke not just to reassure, but to dispel any assumptions Kale might hold. Asher knew all too well that many hesitated around the 'Sun' of the Wargrave family, fearful of offending prestige.

Kale's smile lingered, though a brief frown flickered across his face. Then he nodded.

"Very well. I won't hold back then, Tenth Sun."

With that, he dropped into a battle stance, twin daggers steady in his hands, measured, prepared.

Asher, in contrast, assumed no stance. He simply inhaled and exhaled, drawing his focus inward, sharpening his senses.

This would be his first true spar since reincarnation.

"Begin." came Clinton's voice from the side.

Chapter 30: Shattered Illusion

At the sound, Kale lunged forward without hesitation, his dagger slicing through the air in a swift arc aimed directly at Asher's abdomen.

Asher hadn't intended to initiate the fight. It was his first real spar, and his strategy was to observe, study his opponent's rhythm before fully engaging.

With that in mind, he brought his rapier up to parry. A sharp clang rang out as steel met steel, and a brief cascade of sparks lit up the space between them, marking the beginning of their clash.

Kale didn't hesitate. His second dagger shot forward, fast, sharp, and unforgiving. He honored Asher's request, holding nothing back.

Lowering his stance, Kale drove the blade toward Asher's knees in a fluid, deadly motion. But Asher remained composed. With effortless grace, he flipped forward, soaring above the strike and over Kale, his movement as smooth as flowing water.

As Asher flipped overhead, Kale responded in a heartbeat. His waist twisted, shoulders rolling in one seamless motion as both daggers snapped upward, ready to intercept a strike from above. But the attack never came, Asher had only dodged, offering no retaliation.

Kale didn't dwell on the reason. His mind stayed sharp, focused. Without pause, he advanced with even greater efficiency. His daggers flashed like twin streaks of silver, one driving toward Asher's shoulder, the other targeting his ribs with ruthless intent.

Asher took a single step back, effortlessly slipping past both strikes.

But Kale was undeterred, his movements fluid and serpentine, like a viper poised to strike again. Without missing a beat, he flowed into the next assault, his dagger darting toward Asher's wrist, aiming to disarm him of Virelass.

A flash of silver answered the threat. Virelass intercepted the blow mid-arc, ringing with a sharp clang. Steel sang against steel.

Their eyes locked.

Purple met black.

No words were exchanged, none were needed. In that silent moment, understanding passed between them.

Then, in a heartbeat, they exploded into motion.

Their figures blurred, vanishing from ordinary sight as speed took over. A storm of movement followed, blades flashing, feet gliding, instincts clashing.

The sharp symphony of steel on steel echoed like rolling thunder, marking the rhythm of their escalating duel.

Speed met speed.

Strength met strength.

Metal met metal

The space between them drowned in crimson sparks as their blades clashed and bodies weaved across meters of terrain in fluid motion. Each collision painted the air with flickers of red, fleeting and fierce.

Yet, not once did Asher strike back.

He wasn't here to win, he was here to learn. With no real battle experience to draw from, he welcomed the attacks, using it as a forge for experience.

His battle intuition burned brighter with every step, sharpening with each near miss and shifting strike.

His purple eyes flickered with focus, dancing within their sockets as they tracked Kale's every move. Posture, footing, the shift of his shoulders against his hips, nothing escaped Asher's gaze.

He analyzed it all with eerie clarity, reading Kale like an open book, absorbing every nuance as if etching it into muscle memory.

And through it all, his body moved, not from training, but from raw instinct, growing with each heartbeat.

'He's at the Dust Kindlesstar Life Rank.' Asher noted as he moved, reading Kale's strength with growing clarity. There was no surprise, Kale had awakened at fifteen, granting him two full years of cultivation, training, and real combat experience.

But to Asher, that gap meant little.

His Absolute Physique was a force unto itself, a gift that defied conventional limits. It bridged the divide that should have existed between them, neutralizing the advantage Kale's rank should have granted.

Kale's mind wrestled with the unfolding reality, struggling to comprehend what he was witnessing.

It was impossible.

No, it was supposed to be impossible.

Even for a genius, talent alone couldn't substitute experience. Kale knew that. He was sure Asher knew it too, otherwise, he wouldn't have made that comment about not making his life difficult if he lost.

At this moment, Kale felt as though he were dueling Clinton, their seasoned weapons instructor. The balance in Asher's stance, the subtle angle of his rapier poised for a block, betrayed an unsettling truth: Asher was anticipating his every move before he even completed the motion himself.

It was as if Asher was reading the very intent behind his strikes. That level of predictive combat wasn't something a novice should possess. Clinton could do it, yes, but only after decades of hard earned experience on the battlefield.

Driven by his current reality, Kale pushed himself, speed, strength, everything, to the absolute limit. But no matter how much he escalated, Asher matched him seamlessly.

Asher never surpassed him, never faltered, he simply mirrored Kale's intensity, maintaining a flawless equilibrium.

To Kale, it made no sense. Asher had only awakened three days ago. By all logic, he should still be at the Dust Faintstar Life rank. He was supposed to be weaker.

Even accounting for the Wargrave bloodline's inherent physical superiority, it shouldn't have been enough to disregard an entire major Life rank.

And yet, here he was, defying expectation, transcending reason.

Suddenly, Asher disengaged, fluidly stepping several meters back. His breathing remained steady, his posture loose, muscles relaxed, not a trace of tension in sight. Kale watched, uncertain, as Asher stood still, as though both his mind and body were recalibrating, aligning to some unseen rhythm.

'So this is the extent of what the current best can offer for now.' Asher thought silently.

His purple gaze settled on the red haired boy before him. Then, without flourish or arrogance, he spoke.

"I will be attacking now. Prepare yourself."

Kale couldn't understand why Asher had given him a warning, this was a sparring match, not a duel of honor. Still, his instincts kicked in. His body dipped slightly as he prepared to respond, knees coiled for motion.

But he never got the chance.

Before his muscles could even fully engage, Asher was already in motion, his figure blurring forward with frightening speed.

Virelass, his rapier, moved with flawless synchronicity, carving through the air in a clean downward arc aimed at Kale's shoulder.

Kale's footwork shifted reflexively as he moved to intercept the blow, but to his astonishment, the attack never landed where expected. Mid-strike, Asher's blade curved with uncanny twist, altering its trajectory in defiance of momentum.

'A feint? No... not quite. He readjusted mid-motion.' Kale's thoughts raced as he twisted, attempting to intercept the blade now veering toward his flank.

But he was a fraction too slow.

Asher's rapier sliced cleanly across his side, the cold kiss of steel meeting flesh. The sharp sound of tearing muscle pierced the air, followed by a fine mist of crimson as blood arced outward in a brief, violent bloom.

Kale's eyes widened in shock. Pain flared, sharp, immediate, but it didn't stop him. He'd been injured in spars before. This wasn't new. And truthfully, the pain was manageable... almost dull.

Kale retaliated instantly, his twin daggers slicing through the air in a fluid, whistling arc. They moved as one, sharp, chilling, deadly.

But Asher didn't block.

He simply sidestepped, smooth and effortless, as though he'd seen the strike coming from light years away.

'How is this even possible?' Kale's mind screamed.

But there was no time for answers. Asher allowed no pause, no room to breathe.

Virelass flashed forward again, a silver streak of death.

The blade tore cleanly through Kale's thigh, and a spray of blood erupted, staining the ground below. Pain shot up his leg, but before he could even flinch, Asher was already in motion, his form shifting seamlessly as he moved in for the finishing blow.

The rapier blurred once more, a whisper of steel slicing through the air — then halted.

Its tip hovered just centimeters from Kale's neck.

Kale froze.

His Adam's apple bobbed as he swallowed hard, black eyes locked onto the unblinking purple gaze that bore down on him with chilling clarity.

There was no rage in those eyes. No gloating.

Just calm detachment.

Like a judge delivering a verdict.

A moment ago, they had stood as equals, balanced, toe-to-toe.

Now, that illusion was shattered.

They were anything but that.