

## H. Academy 51

### Chapter 51 Chapter 13.2 - Main Characters

"What a weirdo," Ethan spoke to himself as he left the training grounds, walking towards his group. He had recently awakened, so he didn't know much about the world of Hunters in terms of strength, but as someone that was nurtured by a strong family, he knew how good Astron's unarmed combat skills were.

It is not that he was unbeatable or anything. Rather, Astron himself didn't seem to be overly engulfed in the martial arts either. He looked like he had just trained a little bit.

But the thing that got Ethan's attention was something different. It was his talent.

'He improved rapidly.' He assessed, reviewing the fight.

Ethan was a righteous person who believed in his values, but he was by no means a stupid guy. No, rather, he was quite smart, especially in combat terms.

It was quite hard to put into words the talent of Astron, but if he would say it, he would say it like this.

'It feels like I was fighting with someone like myself.' He wanted to talk with him about combat arts, what he thought about swords, his fighting. Astron seemed like a person that was serious about everything.

However, the thing that made it weird to talk with him was his initial coldness. He didn't have much interaction with him before, but he knew he was ranked last. That was all he knew about him since he hadn't cared much about him at the start.

But, he first noticed him on the training grounds practicing with his daggers, and it seemed like he was decent enough. Like, the art he was training was probably the common dagger art that one could get from everywhere pretty easily. Therefore he didn't think Astron was amazing, but he was certainly good.

Though at that time, he thought he was restraining himself for training purposes since he could see he was moving at a speed that was easily seen. Never once he thought that was his peak speed; after all, to become a student in this academy, that kind of physical aspect would not be enough.

However, apparently it was. Since when they had sparred with each other, he felt like Astron's strength was quite low. He was weak; his endurance was low. Only his speed was decent.

"I must admit, his movements were simply astounding. No matter what I tried, I couldn't seem to gain the upper hand against him." It was this realization that led him to believe that Astron possessed a unique talent - not just in physical training, but in the art of combat itself.

'This is kind of fun....I really want to see how he will do in the future. His beliefs were also interesting.' Ethan thought. Astron's way of behaving resembled a wolf in his eyes. He disliked interacting with others, behaved coldly towards them no matter what their gender where, and mostly he seemed to like being alone.

"Look, Ethan, I respect your perspective, but don't waste your time on me. Our world doesn't work the way you think it does."

Remembering what he said at that time, he thought about his words.

'Our world doesn't work in the way I think it does, huh? You really sound like my brother.' Ethan mused, remembering what his brother would always say about his words. He would say he needed to grow up, but Ethan didn't want it.

It was not that he was unaware of how this world did work. No, rather, he just wanted to believe that he could make the world a better place by becoming a better person. Rather than behaving like a normal hunter that puts their own gains before others, he wanted to become a better person that also valued others more.

He believed that if everyone could put their selfishness aside, the world would be a better place.

"Yo! Where are you going on your own?" Just as he was thinking to himself, suddenly, a hand touched him on his shoulder.

"Lucas."

"Where are you going, man?"

It was his best friend from childhood. Seeing him coming like that, he unconditionally smiled. "I was just coming to you." He answered as they started walking. "Where are the others?" Looking back, it seemed only Lucas was left.

"They left. Julia said she was going to train, and Victor followed her like a dog."

"Hey, you know if he hears about this, you are going to be in trouble, right?"

"It is fine, it is fine. Even Victor couldn't have this many eyes inside the academy. Also, that guy is trying to court that idiot sister of mine. There is no way he can do something to me."

"Well, you are right. He is not even making it secret."

"This is how he does. But that bastard. Does he really think by showing off, he can make that dumbass like him?"

Ethan raised an eyebrow. "Well, maybe?"

"Nah...Really, Ethan? It seems you need a bunch of lessons about girls."

"Yeah, yeah, mister Playboy. So, where are the others?" Ethan asked, smiling at his friend's antics. Lucas was always like that, playing with people and joking around all the time. Though he knew he could entrust his back to him no matter what.

"Others, huh? Irina seemed quite upset, so she probably went to burn some students or something, I don't know. Lilia said she needed to be somewhere, probably a business meeting. Seriously, how is she able to manage her studies, training, and her guild position at the same time? I can't understand." Lucas asked as he wondered about Lilia.

That girl was beautiful and one of those he wanted to woo but at the same time, she was one of those he would never get close to. That girl would probably roast him alive if she knew about his deeds in the academy.

"Well, she is always busy. But whenever I see her notes, I am also left in awe. She is probably one of the tidiest people I know." Ethan answered, remembering Lilia's notes. She was one of those that Ethan respected, even though he knew their values were different.

"Then, where is Carl?"

"Carl? He mentioned something about Student Council Work, so he probably headed there." Lucas answered as they walked further.

However, suddenly Ethan was curious about Astron and how others viewed him.

"Hey, Lucas, did you hear about that new guy, Astron?" Ethan asked, curiosity piqued.

"That guy you are sparring with, right? What about him?" Lucas asked another question.

"I mean, he kind of looks interesting."

"What? Hey, hey, hey. Ethan, bro, don't tell me you swing that way." Lucas widened the distance as he said with a smile, but his words were enough to get the attention that was already on them to Ethan.

"YO? WHAT THE HELL? Where the hell did you get it from?" And since he was not gay, at the very least, Ethan felt the urge to defend himself and tried to clear the misunderstanding.

"I mean, you just came to me, randomly asked about a brooding guy, and said he was interesting. What do you expect me to think?" Hearing Lucas's reasoning Ethan wanted to slap his forehead, but he resisted.

"Just think like a normal person, maybe? I just asked it because that guy seems a bit mysterious." Ethan said. He just wanted to ask his friend's opinion, but Lucas did his own thing and made everything complex again.

All right, all right, my bad. No need to get all defensive," Lucas chuckled, raising his hands in surrender. "But you're right, Astron is a bit of a mystery. There have been a few rumors swirling around about him."

Ethan's interest was piqued even more. "Rumors? Like what?"

Lucas leaned in slightly as if sharing a secret. "Well, you know how stories get blown out of proportion in this place. Some say he's the sole survivor of that attack inside the academy two weeks ago. Remember the noises we heard at that time from the forest? It seems a monster appeared right there."

Ethan's eyes widened. "Wait, what do you mean by the attack inside the academy? And a monster?"

"Yes. The academy was trying to hide it, but it seems a sneaky monster was able to enter the academy. They don't even know what kind of monster it is. Some are even saying it was a demon. Those three that didn't come to the classes, remember? They were the ones that died in the hands of that monster."

Ethan's skepticism was evident. "That sounds a bit far-fetched, doesn't it? I mean, if it were true, it would have been all over the news. After all three academy cadets died, how come nobody knows about it."

Lucas let out a sigh, shaking his head. "Ethan, my friend, you're still thinking about this place as if it's some normal academy. The world doesn't work like that, especially not in the realm of Hunters."

Ethan frowned, clearly puzzled. "What do you mean?"

Lucas leaned against a nearby wall, his expression serious. "Look, you know how the academy operates. They have their reputation to protect, and sometimes that means keeping things hushed up, especially if it's something that could cause panic or fear among the students or the public."

Ethan's skepticism remained. "But a monster attack? That's a bit hard to hide, don't you think?"

Lucas raised an eyebrow. "Is it? Think about it, Ethan. We're in a world where Hunters face creatures that defy imagination, where magic and the supernatural are real. The general public might not know the details of what goes on in this academy. And besides, the Academy Council holds a lot of power. They can control the flow of information."

Ethan still seemed unconvinced. "I get that, but three cadets dead? That's not something they can just sweep under the rug."

Lucas gave a wry smile. "You'd be surprised. The Academy Council has ways of making things disappear. They could manipulate the story and claim it was an accident or some sort of training mishap. They have resources we can't even fathom."

Ethan folded his arms, deep in thought. "So you're saying Astron might have been involved in that attack?"

Lucas shrugged. "Who knows? But it does add a layer of intrigue, doesn't it? That's why rumors like these gain traction. People are drawn to the mysterious and unexplained. Also, it seems like he changed his weapon from daggers to bow after that weekend as well."

"He changed his weapon?"

"I mean, he didn't entirely change, but he just also registered a bow as his weapon. I think he awakened in the face of danger."

Hearing this, Ethan thought about it for a moment. It was not that common to change one's weapon from dagger to bow, but assuming that he was connected to the attack since he changed weapons right after the said attack....That seemed a bit relied on too many assumptions, probably his inherent liking of Astron also played a role in his judgment, but Ethan didn't believe he could do such a thing.

"Well, I think it is impossible," Ethan said as he remembered the training he did with Astron today. "He is not that strong to pull such a thing off."

"Ho? Why do you think so?"

"You know today I was partnered with him, right? He seemed like he was really weak, probably lowest in terms of raw strength." Ethan explained.

"Are you sure? Maybe he was restraining himself."

"No, it is not possible. He moved in such a way that I can easily say that he was accustomed to that strength like his own body. There is no way he is that experienced."

"Hmm....That makes sense. Irina also said that guy had a hard time dealing with one simple Lesser Silver Wolf. Anyway, why are you interested in him all of a sudden? Don't tell me it was because of Sylvie. Are you mad now he made her cry like that?"

Ethan's cheeks reddened slightly. "No, no, it's not like that. I'm not interested in Sylvie."

Lucas grinned, nudging Ethan with his elbow. "Oh really? Then why are you so defensive?"

Ethan let out a sigh. "Sigh...Don't tease me, Lucas."

Lucas laughed. "Come on, Ethan; you can't hide it from me."

Ethan rolled his eyes. "Fine, you win. Maybe I was a bit upset about it, but it's not like that means I like her. It just felt uncomfortable."

In the end, Ethan was also a guy, no matter what. Though, it was not specifically about Sylvie, and Lucas also knew that. After all, he knew about the one in Ethan's heart.

However, that didn't mean he was not going to tease him. "Yeah, yeah, sure."

Just like that, the two friends kept going with their talk as they kept walking.

Chapter 52 Chapter 13.3 - Main Characters

TAP TAP TAP

I was inside my room, pushing the buttons before me. As for what I was doing, I was looking for things to invest in.

Know that, even though I was planning to invest in that girl and her guild, I fairly underestimated the money I could make from going to dungeons and selling the corpses.

The bracelet saved me a lot more money than I had initially expected. Therefore, there were a lot more funds than I could use on Emilia. She would probably not accept such money from a stranger, and that was pretty normal.

Therefore, I started looking at the companies and the guilds on the Internet and their stock prices. Even though I was not that engulfed in the stock market in the game, knowing the future events, maybe I could find a guild that would later rise or something.

TAP TAP TAP

I kept searching and surveying on the internet.

'There are quite a few that I think get a lot more popular, but I am not sure.'

There were certainly some names that I knew from the game, but it was a little hard to read the stock market prices and convert the information to how they were doing right now.

Some of the guild's stocks may not be as high as I expected them to be, but that didn't necessarily mean those stocks were going to rise in the future. In the end, the stock market doesn't specifically reflect how the guild is doing on their ranking or how their hunter job is going. There are other things that affect it, and this is what differentiates the real world from the game.

Just as I was looking at the guilds, one of the other parts got my attention.

Agency Groups, Mercenaries, and Free Lancer Works.

'Right, there was such a setting.' I thought. In the game, one could not only be a Hunter and join a guild, but they could also become a Mercenary that goes with commissions or Free Lancers that would venture around the guilds and join their operations.

'Now that I think about it, is the Agency Group Ethan is going to find here?' I thought and started surveying under the tab Agency Groups.

Since Ethan was a good kid that wanted to raise his strength, he naturally ventured around the world, and thanks to a talented agency he had found, as a player, we would have quite an easy time finding gates, dungeons, or monsters in the wilderness.



'Though, they also brought quite a lot of troubles to him thanks to their unique past.'

Sitting before the laptop, I stared, pondering about this investment was worth it or not.

'That little kid....He was really useful, his knowledge of computers and his trait being related to them.'

Having a hacker certainly would help, especially for my goal. But at the same time, not every people in this world would follow a person that wishes to murder every bit of demon and erase their existence, which left me in a dilemma.

'Either I am going to make them extremely loyal to me, or I am not going to reveal my purpose.' That was what I had concluded.

'For now, this matter is far in the future. There is no point in thinking about this now.' I thought, but I still took a mental note for the future.

But that didn't mean I couldn't invest in their little agency.

'Let's invest around 20000 Valer. I don't need immediate money for now.'

Since I had also visited the dungeon inside the Black Market, I now had around 70k in my bank account, and the debt of the academy had one whole year to pay, so I didn't need to make it worse.

Though while investing in them, I used a small amount of money to commission a broker from the black market, making myself anonymous, though that kid would certainly trace me back.

'Let's teach you a little bit about the world.'

With that thought, I spent 25k investing in them.

DING

At that moment, a message came from my watch as I looked into its content.

DING DING

Though, following it was another two.

'Must be clubs.'

I thought and opened the panel.

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Adventurer and Exploration Club

Thank you for joining our club!

We're excited to have you on board. Don't forget about the orientation trip next Sunday. It'll be a great opportunity to get to know your fellow members and start your journey as an adventurer. See you there!

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History and Arts Club

Hello and welcome to the History and Arts Club!

We're thrilled that you've joined us. Our club meetings are always filled with excitement and creativity. Get ready to explore the fascinating world of history and arts together! Looking forward to seeing you at our next meeting. It is refreshing to see freshmen being interested in Art and History, and we are very happy to have you here.

The orientation session will be on Saturday morning, and we will start with a small picnic inside the forest.

If you wish to, you can also bring the food you want, but it is not mandatory. I hope you are having a good week!

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Archery Club

Welcome to the Archery Club.

Make sure you're serious about improving your skills if you're here. We don't have time for slackers. Training sessions are mandatory. Be prepared to prove yourself.

Orientation is on Friday Evening.

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Looking at the messages in front of me, I could certainly feel the differences between the clubs' atmospheres from the tone of the messages alone.

Adventurer Exploration's message was short, but its tone was simply polite and welcoming, while the archery club was arrogant and serious.

It was enough to show that how where this Archery Clubs' egoistic reputation came from. Even their messages were arrogant.

And, as for the History and Arts Club, it was certainly showing the characteristics of that shining senior who is the club president.

'That woman was too bright....I should maintain my distance from her.' I thought as I closed the laptop.

The night was already there, and I needed to sleep soon.

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"Hey, Sylvie, which Clubs have you joined?"

As three girls were walking towards their room, one of them asked the girl in the middle, who had a rather tired expression on her face, as if she was about to sleep as soon as possible.

"Sylvie?" Since she didn't get an answer, the girl asked once again, looking at her friend.

"...."

"Kuhum. Sylvie!" Seeing this was not going to work, she cleared her throat and raised her voice slightly.

FLINCH

"What? What is it?" Sylvie, who woke up from her dream, looked into her friend.

"Which club did you join?" Her friend repeated the question as she looked into her eyes.

"Hmm? Haven't we talked about this before?" As Sylvie tilted her head to the side, she asked.

"Well, I forgot." Her friend sheepishly said while scratching the back of her head, but Sylvie could see something was different.

The emotions of her friend....They were different. She felt suspicious, but thinking that she was having a bad time for some reason, she decided to ignore it.

After all, the feelings she saw were not that strong; only a small amount of darkness probably stemmed from stress.

"I joined the History and Arts Club only." She answered, but her body momentarily flinched as she considered if her choice was right. 'That senior was too scary.'

Even for her, who was mostly cheerful and happy, that senior was someone overwhelming, like a star that shone through the night and illuminated everything but made those closer to them blind.

"I see." Her friend answered, lowering her gaze, though Sylvie's thoughts were on the senior and her overwhelming attitude, so she didn't hear, neither did she see the expression on her face.

'What a stupid girl.'

Her friend, whose name was Daniella, thought with a small smile creeping upon her face. Though the one inside her was no longer the same girl, she knew.

Without knowing anything about it, Sylvie had already put herself in danger.

"Hey. What are you going to do about him?" Just at that moment, another voice echoed. It was the third girl who was typing something on her watch before.

"What do you mean?" Sylvie asked as she tilted her head to the side.

"I mean about that bastard who made you cry. Should I do something about it?"

Hearing this, Sylvie's body momentarily stiffened as she remembered his words back then once again.

The words she was trying to forget.

"If you're not willing to confront your weaknesses head-on, then perhaps you should reconsider being a part of the academy."

However, the already tired Sylvie didn't want to talk about him right now. She didn't want to feel uncomfortable anymore. She had been studying for the whole day, and her brain was on the verge of exploding.

"Why are you mentioning him now?" Sylvie asked. Her friend knew she didn't want to talk about him, but why was she bringing it up now?

"For some reason, I feel irritated with his attitude." The girl spat out her feelings. "He acts edgy, and it cringes me whenever I see it. Does he think we will think he is cool if he acts like that? Bastards like him who acts cold and edgy to impress girls are the ones that I hate the most."

As Sylvie heard this, she felt like she could relate to it. But at the same time, she knew that was how Astron acted normally. It was basically his character since she knew he had never had any intention of impressing others with his attitude.

That basically stemmed from his indifference, but that was what made him more irritating.

'Couldn't you be a little kinder?' She asked herself.

Though, at that moment, she also remembered what she saw in the club room.

She saw Astron and decided to hide since she didn't want to talk to him. A part of her knew she was escaping, but she decided to hide nonetheless.

However, when he was talking to the senior, she couldn't help but stiffen at his words. He also wanted to join the History and Art Club. She even reconsidered her decision to join the club.

But she also felt a weird feeling when she looked at the senior talking to him. That senior constantly tried to give him potatoes while pressuring him.

And Astron was uncomfortable with it; Sylvie could feel it. But, in the corner of his heart, a small feeling of warmth was there, like he was slightly enjoying it.

'He is enjoying it?'

This made her feel angry. He acted coldly toward her every time when they talked. No, not only her but others as well, Since Sylvie was watching him, she knew. But why was he now enjoying it?

She even forgot his sincere gratitude at that time, thanks to his harsh words at that moment.

'Why are you enjoying it?'

Even Astron himself didn't know he enjoyed the senior's presence, but Sylvie, with her trait, could see it.

And, because she felt angry for some reason, she impulsively acted and went to the seniors in a bad mood.

Though, she wished now that she never did it since she walked to one of the toughest battles where chips could be a weapon.

"SYLVIE!"

At that moment, she heard a shout making her wake up from her thoughts as she looked at her friend in her front.

"What?"

"Why are you daydreaming now?"

"Ah...My bad."

"Hey, it is fine. She is probably tired. And why are you bringing it up now? Don't you know it makes her uncomfortable?"

"I know, but I feel angry whenever I see him for some reason....Sigh....Anyway, should I do something about him?"

"No, leave it be; it is fine."

"Is that so?"

"Yeah."

"Your choice then."

Just like that, the three walked together as they reached their dorms.....

## Chapter 53 Chapter 14.1 - Archery Club

"Do you have any questions?" Professor Williams inquired, his gaze sweeping across the students who seemed a tad restless after the lecture. "If not, then we can conclude the class for today."

The room erupted into a chorus of relieved murmurs and quiet sighs of relief.

"Hooh... Finally..." someone muttered from the back, the sentiment resonating with many.

"I thought this was not going to end ever," another voice chimed in, capturing the general consensus of the students.

As the students exchanged knowing glances and sympathetic smiles, the professor's attention returned to the front of the room. His expression remained composed as he addressed the class again.

"Before you all leave, a reminder: the second assignment has been posted on the online portal today. It's a research task focused on the political intrigues of the Hunted Realms during the Era of Shattered Thrones. Make sure to choose your topics wisely and submit your assignments by the end of next week."

The announcement was met with a mixture of groans, groggy nods, and a few exchanged looks of concern.

"Another research assignment? Seriously?"

"I can barely keep up with the readings, and now this?"

"Let's hope he at least goes easy on the grading this time."

Professor Williams continued, his tone unwavering despite the students' reactions. "Understanding the political landscape of the past will provide crucial insights into the dynamics that have shaped our world today. Remember, the more you delve into history, the more you can anticipate the challenges of tomorrow. That's all for today. Have a productive weekend."



With those words, he left the room, leaving the students alone. Today was the last day of classes for the week, and we were going to have an orientation for the Archery Club.

'It shouldn't be that long. But, if I can see Instructor Ethan, I can maybe ask him for some pointers.' I thought to myself.

The reason why I accepted their proposal was to learn and observe how the Archery Club members used their bows and adapted to their styles, adding them to myself.

Looking at the front desk, I could see Lilia was also preparing to leave. I was not sure, but she was probably in the Archery Club as well.

"Hey, where are you going?" Julia asked, seeing Lilia trying to grab her things. She would do it normally as well, but today for some reason, she seemed to be a little more hurried."

"I have a club orientation this evening, so I am going to get prepared," Lilia answered with her usual blunt tone.

"I see. You were in Archery Club, right?" Julia asked since she forgot which club Lilia was in; rather, it was more likely she was not that interested.

"Yes."

"I don't understand. Why did you join that club? You don't have anything more to learn, don't you?" Irina butted in, looking at Lilia. For instance, she was a mage, but she didn't join the magic research club, even though she was invited. Since she knew they were only trying to make connections with her and those researchers could never be more advanced than what her family was doing.

"One always has something to learn from others," Lilia replied calmly, her eyes focused on gathering her belongings efficiently.

Julia looked genuinely intrigued. "Is that why you're in the Archery Club? You must be quite skilled already." She was also in the Way of Swords Club, but the reason she went there was to spar with seniors; she didn't believe those members could help her learn more.

Lilia shrugged, her movements precise and controlled. "Skill is never a reason to stop learning. There's always room for improvement." She answered.

'Ho....This is the reason why this girl was not a heroine in the game.' Astron thought to himself. As a player who played the game quite a lot, the one he respected the most was Lilia, the girl who never once her way in life. Even though she was slightly egoist and looked down on others, she also sought improvement.

Her duality was the things why players called her 'Hypocrite Woman,' but Astron rather respected it. In a way, she was one of that women that prioritized their career.

Irina raised an eyebrow. "So, you're saying you're there to learn from the other members?"

Lilia's lips curved into a faint, enigmatic smile. "I'm saying I'm there to learn from everyone. You never know where you'll find wisdom. And it is not like I always need to be there. They can't say anything to me, either."

With that quote hanging in the air, Lilia efficiently packed her belongings and stood up, her posture poised. "Have a good weekend." And with those words, Lilia left.

"This girl. Why do I feel like you can never win against her with words?" Irina spoke, looking at Lilia's departing figure.

"Well, she was always like that," Victor spoke with his usual calm tone, then shifted his attention to Julia. "Do you want to grab dinner, Julia?" He asked.

"No. I am going to train." But Julia simply refused and stood up while picking her things up. "And, no. You are not coming with me." Cutting Victor, who opened his mouth, she left immediately.

'I should leave as well.' Confirming that Lilia joined was enough, so I didn't waste any more time and stood up as well, leaving the class.

"Pffttt....hahahaha...."

"What are you looking at? Tch."

Though, I could also hear Victor's grumbling at Lucas and Ethan, who was the subject of his anger. It seemed he was the one that got the short stick.

While leaving, I again felt gazes on me, but this time there were three of them. It seemed that as time passed, the number of people who gazed at me also increased.

'Irina, Sylvie's friend Lora, and that guy.'

Just as my thoughts were consumed by these observations, a sudden collision jolted my senses.

SWOOSH THUD

Though the said 'thing,' the collision almost sent me flying if not for my fast reflexes. I turned my attention to the person who collided with me as a fragrant scent of Lilies entered my nose.

"Watch where you are going!" And hearing the girl's voice and seeing the annoyed expression on the beautiful face reminded me who this was.

Green hair and blazing crimson eyes.

'Lilia.'

It seemed she had forgotten her things inside the classroom. Even though she was fuming at me, there was no reason for me to interact with her any longer.

Cleaning the dust on my uniform, I stood up and walked further without answering.

"Hey, I said some-"

"Don't talk to me."

After cutting off the response she was going to give me, I left. There was no need for any further talk since I could easily see where it would go.

Simply she was going to scold me as she usually does with others in her guild and then walk proudly like she was a goddess; after all, that was how she was treated most of the time.

Even though Lilia was a person that sought improvement, this was her weakness--her ego, which was the thing that made her someone that wasn't liked by the community of players.

And I didn't like that either. Even though her seeking for improvement was condemnable, her ego was what made her, not a heroine, and she is probably going to live her life all alone until she dies.

It is not like I am different.

Just like that, I reached my room and prepared for the clubs.

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The Archery Clubs training area and the place where they had conducted their training was a specially designated outdoor area only for Marksmen. It was away from the heart of the Academy Campus, where most main buildings were located, so it took a little bit of walking for me to reach there.

As I entered the Archery Club's training area, I was met with a scene that radiated the club's distinctive pride. Nestled within a serene corner of the academy's grounds, this secluded haven promised a unique experience.

The training space was a harmonious blend of nature and purposeful design. Towering trees created a protective canopy, their leaves allowing soft sunlight to filter through.

In the heart of this serene setting stood a substantial wooden building—the indoor training hall. Its quaint exterior hinted at the hours of diligent practice that took place within those walls.

It was obvious that the design of this place was inspired by the Elves that invaded this world, but the human touch was also there, showing its modernity.

The outdoor training focal point—a meticulously crafted shooting range. It was a testament to the club's unwavering dedication, an arena for perfecting the art of archery.

Targets of various shapes and distances were positioned thoughtfully, some stationary while others moved in complex patterns.

Even though there seemed to be a lot to there, since members were gathered on the open area of the Club grounds, I didn't walk any further.

FLINCH

Suddenly my body flinched as I got chills.

"Tch. Nowadays, it seems everyone likes to glare daggers at others." I mumbled, clicking my tongue.

Feeling another but a lot stronger stinging gaze, I turned my head to the source. There again, I could Lilia as she was looking at me.

Different from Irene, Lilia's gaze didn't look like she was glaring daggers at me, but my senses were saying this was a lot more dangerous. Her slightly calm gaze felt more dangerous.

'It doesn't matter.'

Now, some may think that why was I like that to the people whom I know the strength?

The answer is simple. I don't care.

They could destroy my future career by pressuring me but it is not like I am planning to be a renowned hunter in the future.

It is not something I deserve anyway.

Also, this girl is already a picky person with a high attitude, so unless you simply bow your head and lick such people's shoes, they will pick up on you regardless of your attitude.

Anyway, while I was thinking about those, I felt two strong presences coming.

Two people before the crowd were intentionally releasing their aura as they were looking at the newcomers.

The captain, Adrian Castillo, stood tall with an air of authority.

His voice rang out with assurance, "Archery is not just a skill; it's an art, a display of precision and elegance. We uphold the legacy of the finest archers in history, and we welcome those who believe they have what it takes to embrace this noble path."

I knew him from the game.

He was a highly competitive person whose sole purpose was to become the next Bow Emperor, taking the title of the current one.

An individual with a cold expression, the tallest among them, a young man with striking silver hair. His posture was impeccable, and his cerulean eyes bore a hint of condescension as he surveyed the assembly.

'It is really sad that your competitive spirit is toxic.' I thought.

As an individual whose purposes clashed with the girl who was glaring daggers at me, in the end, he was going to enter fierce competition with her.

And would lose everything. His title, his name, and his social life because behind his cold facade laid an egoist guy who looked down on others and blackmailed people using his family name and resources.

A person who thought he was of noble blood, a person who was an elitist like Victor.

His gaze stayed on Lilia for a second before turning to the girl who strove forward. But I could see a dirty desire in that gaze; even Lilia seemed to sense it as she tensed up slightly.

Beside Adrian stood a poised young woman with raven-black hair cascading down her shoulders. Her gaze held a touch of haughtiness as she regarded the gathered students. "I am Elara, the vice-captain of the Archery Club," she announced, her voice silky yet commanding.

"As the captain spoke, our purpose here is to become the best, and those who don't wish to compete shall take their leave."

The girl who would later become the best helper of, Lilia and would become the heroine instead of her place-Elara Holden.

With everything set in stone, the clubs started.

#### Chapter 54 Chapter 14.2 - Archery Club

After the initial greetings finished, the senior members led the newcomers through the area, their steps echoing with an air of authority. Adrian, the captain, explained, "Here in the Archery Club, we train to achieve mastery over precision and timing. This range is designed to challenge your accuracy, your ability to adapt to changing conditions, and to develop an unerring eye."

Elara, the vice-captain, continued, "The indoor training hall is equipped with state-of-the-art equipment to analyze and perfect your form. Remember, every detail matters in archery—from how you stand to how you breathe. It's about becoming one with your bow and arrow, and that requires unwavering dedication."

The reason why such equipment was dedicated to the Archery grounds was that the Current Bow Empress was a student who graduated from Arcadia Academy.

'As expected, coming here was the right choice.' Astron thought. Even though he thought he may have wasted his time before coming here, now that he saw the facilities, it was evident that this was the correct choice.

As Astron listened, he watched as club members demonstrated their skills, their arrows flying with elegance and fluidity that seemed almost otherworldly. The environment was intense yet inviting, a place where dedicated marksmen could thrive.

There was a reason why the students there were displaying such amazing skills. It was because they were the ones that left after the competitive setting of the club left the ones without any skill out.

And just to explain this to newcomers, Elara continued to speak. "However, let me be clear—the Archery Club is not for the faint of heart. Our standards are high, and our expectations are even higher. We are not interested in mediocrity; we seek excellence. Those who cannot meet our standards will not remain."

Then, Adrian turned his attention to the sides.

"The way you will be eliminated will be related to your performances on the practical tests. If your notes don't meet our standards, we will subject you to a test where we will test your skills and dedication. And then, we will decide whether you will stay in this club or not."

As Adrina finished his words, he turned his attention to the students around them. "Any questions?"

"....." Nobody answered since none of them had the guts to do so, and those who had didn't have any questions.

"No? Good." Seeing that his message was conveyed, Adrian finished his words.

"Then, before we finish, please come here and take your identity cards," Elara said, pointing towards the cards on the table.

"This card will let you have access to club facilities no other can access. Don't ever lose it since we won't be giving anyone another one."

As her words sank, the members made their way toward the table and took their cards.

A card with a simple symbol of a woman holding a bow in her hands with the bow stretched and aimed at the sky.

"Now, we are finished for today. You can stay here and train. You can also watch the seniors if you want, and you are free to leave if you wish to do so." As Elara finished, the newcomers looked at each other, not knowing what to do.



Just like that, the orientation finished.

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As everyone got their identity cards and the instructions finished, we were left alone in the club room.

Some of the newcomers looked uncertain, unsure whether to stay and train, watch the seniors in action, or leave altogether.

'Well, now we shall start with the reason why I am here for.' I thought.

For me, the choice was clear. I was here to learn, to absorb as much as I could from those who had already mastered the art of archery to a certain extent and make it my own. I made my way toward the area where the senior members were training, drawn by the prospect of observing their techniques up close.

As I approached, I could see a bunch of seniors training there. Even though the place was fairly empty since it was Friday evening and it was quite late, I still had enough material to observe.

I was keen on observing their techniques, understanding both their strengths and areas that could be improved.

'It is time to do what I am the best at.' I thought. Observing and understanding.

SWOOSH THUD

One of the seniors exhibited a meticulous approach. Their stance was composed, with every muscle in their body appearing taut yet controlled. Their grip on the bow was unwavering, and the release of the arrow was seamless, showing years of disciplined training.

'Hmm...He is more reliant on his strength than his usage of mana.' I analyzed. He was a slightly bulky person, and the bow he was using was a longbow with a big string that could exert a lot of strength.

'This is certainly not my style, but the way he uses his muscles is certainly different.' Looking back at my posture, I compared both in my head.

Analyzing their style, I recognized the impact of their body build – robust and sturdy, favoring the immense draw weight of the longbow. It was a strategy that prioritized power, reflecting the anatomy of someone with developed pectorals and biceps. Comparing this to my own leaner form and the compound bow I favored, I mentally noted the unique muscular distribution required for their method.

However, that didn't mean I couldn't use it. With enough training, I was sure to adapt this to my own.

But there was one thing that made this way of using a bow less effective. It was the fact that the usage of muscles overly would make it harder to move swiftly. That meant he was more like a sniper that attacked with high firepower.

'But if I manage to compress this style onto my upper body while making myself swift. Certainly, this seems adaptable to other styles.' I took a note and continued.

Delving into my analysis, I focused on another senior's technique. Their movements flowed fluidly, reminiscent of a dancer's grace. Their posture exhibited dynamic adjustments with every shot – an adaptable approach that showcased their agility. Muscles like the obliques, glutes, and quadriceps seemed to work harmoniously to maintain balance even during the action of shooting. She was training in the middle of a square training room where a lot of moving targets and projectiles aimed at her tested her skills.

'A dynamic way of fighting. This made me remember Turks of the past.' I thought. Even though I was a gamer, I liked studying war arts, and the warriors of Turks always got my attention with their horse-on-fighting style. Turning my attention to the seniors again, I analyzed her.

'Her dynamic vision is certainly impressive. But, this style doesn't suit her.' The way she moved was certainly fast, but the fact that she was missing a lot of information about the environment and the moving targets made her not suited for such a style since she was constantly wasting a lot of energy while trying to dodge the arrows that she noticed at the last second. However, it seems she was also aware of that since she was trying to develop her style.

I contemplated the versatility of their style and how their reliance on different muscle groups aligned with their choice of a recurve bow. Their lithe and nimble form, apparent in their lean yet toned appearance, allowed them to manipulate the bow's agility to its fullest. Comparing this to my own posture, I pondered the balance between power and finesse.

'Even though she is not completely using it and needs to work on her awareness, certainly the way she is using her body to move this swiftly is impressive. I can clearly see the difference between those two.' I thought, registering the strength of each style.

Lastly, my focus shifted to another senior whose actions were swift and purposeful. Their execution appeared efficient, suggesting a deep understanding of the equipment. Muscles like the brachialis, extensor carpi radialis brevis, and infraspinatus seemed to be activated with precision, facilitating controlled movements and accuracy.

This senior's posture conveyed a sense of purpose, with each movement executed with minimal wasted effort. I recognized that their approach was centered around precise targeting and quick follow-up shots. It was evident that their training was dedicated to accuracy and rapid-fire, a testament to their meticulous discipline and mastery of timing. The way he instantly fired his shots like he was using a gun made me watch in awe.

'What a precise marksmanship.' Immediately recording his body in my mind, I was about to leave since the day was about to end, and I needed to train before going to rest.

However, just as I was about to leave, at the corner of the training grounds, I saw a figure standing alone.

It was Elara, the vice-captain.

SWOOSH SWOOSH

Arrows moved swiftly, each finding their mark. But the thing that made her most impressive was not her posture or anything. It was the way she utilized mana.

'It is incredible.' It was my first time seeing such a good mana utilization aside from Irina and Elanor, but they were both monsters in their own way.

'Certainly, seniors are really good.'

She moved with a fluidity that seemed almost choreographed, her every action purposeful and economical. She almost didn't make any unnecessary movements like she knew her body limits to the maximum.

'This is how it should be. Knowing your body and adapting your technique to it.' I remembered the figure under the moonlight, which was moving in a way that was similar but better than this. He also moved effectively without wasting any time.

'As a grimoire that was specified for me, it is showing me the direction. I understand it a lot better now.' I mused.

Seeing her and other seniors certainly helped me to see where my position was at. As I kept observing Elara, I could feel the mana around her getting chilly.

She was using Ice mana and imbuing her arrows with it.

'She can even imbue specific type of mana on her arrows now, it seems. She must be good since they teach it at the start of the second year.'

This meant she didn't have too much time to practice, yet she could do it here, and that meant she was talented at it.

SWOOSH CRACK

When her arrows imbued with ice hit the targets, the ice spurted from the tip of the arrow, making them surrounded by it.

SWOOSH BOOM

And with an explosion of fire, the frozen targets were blown up. I could see a faint smile on her face as she looked at her craft.

Her bowmanship was a harmony of efficient muscle engagement and expert mana control. Arrows imbued with distinct properties shot forth with swift precision, each strike hitting its mark unerringly.

Elara's mastery over her craft was undeniable, and her expertise with mana manipulation was particularly remarkable. Her seamless integration of technique and energy imbuing was a sight to behold, setting her apart as a true markswoman.

As I was about to leave, I felt her gaze on me momentarily. She looked at me for a second and nodded in acknowledgment.

'It seems she can at least appreciate others.' And then she returned and continued her training, and I, too, concluded my observations.

With newfound insights, I withdrew from my observation spot and entered the indoor training hall provided by the club.

Armed with a deeper understanding of the various styles, I was eager to improve on my personal practice session. Guided by the lessons learned from the seniors, I focused on refining my posture, enhancing my mana control, and perfecting my aim.

The Archery Club's training area had become my haven of improvement, and I was determined to adapt and evolve my own technique.

Chapter 55 Chapter 14.3 - Archery Club

"Haaah....Haaah....This is certainly working." I mumbled to myself, breathing heavily.

Then, I took a look around me as I walked outside of the training room. Arrows had stabbed the walls as the signs of battle could be seen.

The place I was in was the Archery Club facilities, that was different from the training grounds provided by the academy.

This one had rather better simulations and better monsters for one to train. As you might be expected, the training rooms didn't create a monster, but they created their simulations and holograms, but at the end of the day, they were Artificial Beings created by technology.

Therefore, the more advanced the technology used was, the better the efficiency. Of course, being arguably the best academy in the world, Arcadia Hunter Academy had access to the best facilities.

The problem lay in them only being accessible to high-ranking students. Capitalism was it.

In any case, thanks to the better facilities provided by the club room, I could focus on my training, and I can easily say now that I have improved.

And I had been training non-stop for the rest of the evening.

'It is 1 AM. I guess I should head back.' With that thought, I got out of the training rooms and entered the general hall.

SWOOSH

A small wind blew through my face. The sound of the wind was accompanied by a captivating sight. There, amidst the quiet intensity of the training hall, Lilia stood gracefully.

Her distinctive green hair and piercing red eyes gave her an almost ethereal aura. She moved with an innate elegance as she expertly handled her bow, her form a harmonious blend of fluidity and precision.

Looking at her like that, I could easily see why she was revered as a Campus Belle. Her face was perfectly beautiful, and it was satisfying to watch from an aesthetic perspective. But that was it.

'Though, I wish it was the same for her character and ego.' I mused as I observed her.

What truly caught my attention, however, was her exceptional mana control. The way she seamlessly imbued her arrows with mana, manipulating their properties with finesse, was nothing short of remarkable.

'As a first-year, her mana control is certainly of the rooks. As expected from the fourth-ranked student.' I thought.

Caught in the midst of her training, Lilia seemed unaware of her surroundings.

But as she completed her current set, her gaze shifted, and our eyes met briefly. There was a flicker of recognition in her crimson eyes, but it quickly turned into a dismissive indifference.

I knew what that recognition meant. It was her type of remembering people that offended her.

Without a word or a hint of acknowledgment, she resumed her training, leaving me standing there, an unnoticed presence. It was a stark reminder of the distance that separated us, not just physically but also in terms of our lineage and social standings.

Well, that was to be expected, and I didn't have anything to see more; thus, I simply left and made my way toward my room.

It is not like that was something important anyway.

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RUSTLE RUSTLE

As the swift breeze of the next day passed me, I kept running, improving my physical aspects.

It was Saturday. Therefore, not many people were around aside from those who really wished to improve themselves. Those diligent ones that I could see.

I made morning runs my routine, as I was running at least one hour before beginning my day. It was good for both my physical aspects and my mental health as I could get time to think to myself.

SWOOSH

But, just at that moment, I felt something passing me at a rapid speed.

"Hey, Julia, slow down."

And behind me, a voice that I was familiar with came.

'Ethan.'

"Huff....Huffff...."

It was our protagonist who was running while breathing heavily. His blue hair was messed up, and his hazel eyes were determined.

"Heh...Don't tell me you are going to stop now!" The girl who just went passed me like a bullet shouted with a smile. "If you're throwing in the towel, just admit it!"

Though her words were aimed at Ethan, her attention remained on him even as she kept her distance. Her ivory-white hair remained pristine, untouched by perspiration. There was a certain tomboyish charm in her arrogant yet cheeky grin.

"Sigh....Okay, okay. I give up. Just slow down, okay?" Ethan, who had already reached us, said as he made waved his hand. "Today's dinner is on me." With a defeated expression, Ethan said.

'It seems they made a bet.' I thought. 'This is a very Julia-like thing.'

"Oh, Astron. Good morning." However, it seems our protagonist could see me under my hood."

"Don't talk to me."

But I had no interest in talking to them. My focus was momentarily shifted by the bullet-like phenomenon that had breezed past me, but now that I identified it as Julia, I resumed my pace without further ado.

"As cold as always." Ethan's remark trailed after me as I propelled myself forward, a lone figure against the morning backdrop.

A faint smile from Julia accompanied my pass-by, but I paid it no heed, allowing the steady rhythm of my run to carry me further.



\*\*\*\*\*

After Astron left, Julia approached Ethan, who looked at the departing figure with a smile.

SMACK

"Why are you smiling like an idiot?" She asked as she smacked him on his back.

"Kurgh-" The sudden impact caused him to let out a surprised, slightly pained noise, and he coughed as the water he had just consumed went down the wrong way. "What the hell? What are you doing?" Ethan asked, clearly perplexed by her unexpected actions.

"It is fine, it is fine," Julia said, her face containing a mischievous smile.

Ethan cleared his throat, regaining his composure. "You really need to warn a guy before you do that."

Julia shrugged casually. "Where's the fun in that?"

Ethan chuckled, rubbing the spot on his back that had taken the brunt of her playful attack. "Fair enough."

They exchanged an amused glance before turning their attention back to Astron's departed figure.

"He's as mysterious as ever," Ethan mused, his smile softening into a thoughtful expression.

Julia raised an eyebrow. "You're interested in him, aren't you?"

"Well, he is certainly interesting. Whenever I talk to him, he always cuts me off." Ethan said as he shook his head.

"It is the first time I am seeing someone getting interested in others because that someone cut them off," Julia said, her gaze squinting. "Don't tell me. Are you into this?"

"Pfffft...." Innocent Ethan, who just wanted to drink his water, spurted everything out once again as he looked at Julia in bewilderment. "Where did you get it from?" He asked, looking at her blankly.

'These two twins are certainly good at teasing.' Ethan thought. It seemed Julia and Lucas shared this same prospect when it came to teasing.

"AHAHHAHA! Look at his reaction; it's priceless," Julia exclaimed, her grin widening. Her hair, pure white as snow, glowed in the morning sunlight. Despite her angelic appearance, her playful behavior often overshadowed her feminine side.

"Sigh.... You're thoroughly enjoying this, aren't you?" Ethan said, his tone resigned. Despite her teasing, he found comfort in her lightheartedness. Hanging out with her was just easier than dealing with the likes of Lilia or other girls.

"Wow, Sherlock. Isn't it obvious?" Julia replied, her playful smile persisting.

"...."

"I thought as much."

"Sigh...."

"Anyway, spill it. Why are you so interested in him?" Julia's expression grew serious. "He doesn't seem worth your attention. No strength, no connections."

Even though Julia was rather tomboyish and dumb, she lived in a world where strength mattered, and she knew how important one's strength and standing were.

And Astron had neither of them. Neither did he have any connections, nor he had any individual strength to stand on his own.

Ethan took a moment before answering, his gaze distant. "It's intuition, I suppose. There's just something about him that piques my curiosity. And you know how my intuition has always worked."

If Astron was there, he would certainly say it was the intuition of the protagonist.

Julia's eyebrows raised, a knowing smile curving her lips. "Oh, I definitely know. Your 'intuition' is usually scarily accurate."

Ethan scratched the back of his head sheepishly. "Yeah, well, you've seen it in action. It's like a gut feeling, and it's never let me down before."

Julia's grin widened. "Remember the time you 'intuitively' found that rare artifact in the game we played? Everyone thought you were crazy until you actually dug it up."

Ethan chuckled, the memory clear in his mind. "Yeah, that was something."

Julia bumped her shoulder against his playfully. "I've always said you've got some sort of sixth sense."

Ethan chuckled again, nudging her back. "Maybe I do. But in this case, I'm not sure what it's telling me about Astron."

Julia's playful demeanor softened, a more serious look in her eyes. "Just be careful, okay? Intuition or not, not everyone is what they seem. Just like you, I am also getting a weird feeling from him." Julia said.

Even though it was not as strong as Ethan's, Julia was also a warrior and swordsman. Thus, she also felt something was amiss with Astron.

Ethan nodded thoughtfully. "I get that feeling, too, honestly. But I don't think he's a bad guy. He's just... different. Maybe a bit edgy, but not necessarily malicious."

Julia crossed her arms, looking at Ethan with a skeptical expression. "Edgy? Is that your professional analysis?"

Ethan chuckled. "Hey, it's the best I can come up with at the moment. There's more to him than meets the eye, that's for sure."

Julia sighed, her gaze softening as she looked at Ethan. "Just promise me you won't get too involved if things start getting strange."

Ethan placed a hand over his heart in mock sincerity. "I solemnly swear I won't dive headfirst into trouble."

Julia rolled her eyes, but a smile tugged at her lips. "I'm holding you to that."

SMACK

But suddenly, another smack fell onto the back of Ethan, making him stagger.

"What now?" He looked at Julia with annoyance this time as her joke was getting off the chart.

She smiled warmly, her hand ruffling his hair. "Now, come on, let's get some breakfast. You owe me after losing that race."

Ethan rolled his eyes, but a grin tugged at his lips. "Fine, fine. But one day, I'll win, mark my words."

As they walked away, their laughter echoed through the academy grounds, a testament to the bond between childhood friends who knew each other better than anyone else.

However, in the back of her head, Julia made a mental note about the boy whom her friend was interested in. Though, she forgot it instantly....

Chapter 56 Chapter 15.1 - History and Arts Club

Inside the forest of the Arcadia Hunter Academy on Saturday, I walked alone, making my way to the meeting place sent by the History and Arts Guild (Club).

Not many people were still present since today was the weekend, and most students had lost their drive to study after their initial excitement left them.

Looking at the leaves the signs of the approaching winter could be seen on the leaves of the forest.

RUSTLE RUSTLE

As I felt the sounds of footsteps coming behind me, I slightly turned my gaze towards there only to see a certain familiar person there.

'Sylvie.'

Well, since she didn't approach me, I didn't approach her either as I simply walked to the gathering place, and after three minutes of walk, I reached there.

After approximately three minutes of walking, I arrived at the appointed location. The clearing before me was surrounded by trees, offering a serene and natural setting.

The area was spacious enough to accommodate a group comfortably, and a makeshift arrangement of logs and rocks served as seating. The ground was covered with a carpet of fallen leaves, creating a rustling underfoot as I moved.

Rays of sunlight pierced through the gaps in the leaves above, casting dappled patterns on the forest floor.

The ambiance was calm and tranquil, a stark contrast to the bustling energy of the Academy's main campus. I took a moment to appreciate the serenity before me.

But just at that moment, I heard an exciting voice coming before me.

"Ah, you are here!"

Turning towards the source of the voice, I found myself facing a shade of purple-colored silky hair and excited blue eyes. Her bright and enthusiastic smile was infectious, as was her exuberant tone.

"Senior Maya," I greeted with a nod, acknowledging her presence.

She approached with a spirited skip in her step, a sense of eagerness filling the air. "You are the first one to arrive." She spoke with a small smile. "Guess what? I brought snacks! You've got to try them!" Her enthusiasm was hard to ignore.

Before I could react, she extended a bag of snacks toward me, her eyes sparkling with anticipation. "Come on, don't be shy! You're going to love these. Just take one."

"I don't want to," I answered the same as before. This time the smell coming from the snacks somehow made me uncomfortable.

She didn't wait for my refusal to sink in, her excitement not waning in the slightest. "Oh, come on! Don't be such a stick in the mud. One won't hurt."

"I don't want to."

"Come on, just take it."

"No."

"Hey. Listen to this senior once. I guarantee you will love it".

Seeing that resistance was futile against her infectious energy, I gave in with a sigh and accepted the bag of snacks. "Just one, then."

A triumphant grin lit up Maya's face. "I knew you'd give in, Mister Gloomy Edge lord! Enjoy!"

Just as I was beginning to munch on the snack, another presence caught Maya's attention. It was a presence that was trying to hide, but Maya and I were able to feel her since she was not particularly good at it.

Her gaze shifted, and a warm smile greeted the newcomer. "Sylvie! You're here too!" Maya's voice practically sang with delight. Sylvie, who had just arrived, offered a small wave.

FLINCH

"G-good Morning, Senior Maya."

I could see Sylvie flinching behind the tree as she stuttered.

"You're just in time! Have some snacks!" Maya's enthusiasm didn't waver as she extended the bag of snacks toward Sylvie. Sylvie hesitated, looking at Maya with a horrified expression, but in the end, she couldn't do much about it.

"I-I will get one then." I didn't know why she was behaving like that, but it was probably because of Maya's overbearing excitement.

Seeing them like that, I made my way back to a small tree and leaned on them, grabbed the book from my bracelet, and started reading it.

I was not in the mood to talk with others, especially with Maya, who was too bright for my liking.

As I leaned against the tree, opening the book from my bracelet, a sense of calm settled over me. The rustling leaves above, and the distant sounds of the forest created a serene atmosphere. I was eager to lose myself in the world of words and knowledge, hoping to find solace in the pages before me.

However, my tranquility was abruptly shattered by Maya's energetic presence. It was as if she materialized out of thin air, her enthusiasm palpable even before she spoke.

"Junior!" Maya's voice rang out, full of cheer and exuberance. I reluctantly tore my gaze from the book, facing her with mild irritation.

"What?" I replied, my tone cool and detached. I wasn't in the mood for small talk or Maya's overwhelming energy.

Looking at back, I could see Sylvie looking at me with a squinting gaze, but she also looked relieved.

Maya plopped down next to me, her bright blue eyes wide with curiosity. "What are you reading?" She leaned in, seemingly uninterested in personal space.

"Just a book," I answered tersely, hoping she'd take the hint and move along.

She leaned in closer, undeterred by personal space. "Come on, Junior, give me something more exciting than that!"

From the way she behaved, I was getting really irritated. This woman basically always intruded on my space, making me uncomfortable.

Just as I was about to fend her off suddenly she stood up.

"Ah, Amelia is here." And left immediately, leaving me alone.

'I am saved.' I thought. Right now, I am seriously considering my decision to join this club. But looking at the blonde girl throwing gazes at me, I once again remembered why I was there and turned my attention to the book.

As the forest clearing retained its serene atmosphere, the members of the History and Arts Club began to trickle in, each adding their own presence to the gathering. The tranquil ambiance was gradually enlivened by the chatter and laughter of the arriving students.

One after another, unfamiliar faces joined the group – mostly freshmen like me, their features brimming with curiosity and excitement. Slowly, the senior members also made their appearance, adding their familiarity and experience to the mix.

And then, my gaze fell on one individual who I knew had a significant role in my presence here.

A boy, his countenance a blend of striking handsomeness and an ever-present, amiable smile, entered the scene. His presence radiated a sense of ease and approachability, qualities that undoubtedly made him a natural leader among the club members.

His sandy-brown hair caught the sunlight, and his green eyes held a glint of mischief. There was a casual confidence about him as if he was effortlessly comfortable in his own skin. He carried himself with an air of camaraderie, moving through the gathering with a certain charm that seemed to put everyone at ease.



But beneath the surface of his easygoing demeanor, I knew that there was something more to him.

And that was for a reason.

FLINCH

Then, without warning, a surge of potent emotions washed over me. The sensation was overpowering, a torrent of intense anger and hatred that pierced through my being.

'What is this.'

It was as if the air had thickened, heavy with a malevolent aura that surrounded the young man in question.

Looking at the boy, he was now covered with a small black aura, as if he was different from others.

'What is happening.'

THUMP

My heart started breathing fast and strong; my balance was broken. Something was affecting me.

As the unsettling emotions coursed through me, I couldn't ignore the intensity of the sensation. It was as if a storm was raging within, fueled by an unfamiliar yet undeniable hatred and anger.

'Calm down.'

I fought to steady my breathing, my mind racing to grasp the origin of this overwhelming feeling.

Observing the young man who seemed to be at the center of this maelstrom, I began connecting the dots. The aura surrounding him wasn't a figment of my imagination; it was real, tangible. And it was unmistakably dark, an embodiment of something sinister.

'It is because he is a demon contractor.'

I knew his identity from the game, and he would be the first reason that made me join this club.

'Mason Kent.'

It was his name. A character who had contracted a demon even at the start of the academy because his family is already working for the Villain Society in the association.

'But, where does this feeling come from?' The moment I asked this question to myself, the answer revealed itself.

'It is because of my passive skill.'

Vengeful Bane.

'It must be because of that.'

That passive skill made me stronger against demons which also seemed to make me able to sense their hidden energy.

"This makes sense now," I mumbled and closed my eyes.

"What makes sense?"

At that moment, a voice that I wanted to avoid came before me.

"....."

"Junior? Why are you sweating? Are you hot?" Maya's vibrant presence loomed, her blue eyes peering into mine, seemingly seeing through me.

Maya's inquiry pulled me back to reality, and I realized that my discomfort was apparent. Attempting to regain composure, I shook my head slightly. "It's nothing."

Unfazed by my response, Maya's enthusiasm seemed unwavering. She reached into her bag, producing a chilled snack and offering it to me. "Here, this might help you cool down."

I really didn't want to eat that snack, but it was a small price to fend this woman off before me. Right now, I absolutely needed to take control of my emotions.

I accepted the cold snack with a nod, appreciating the gesture despite my persistent unease. It was a simple Ice-cream that seemed to come from Maya's spatial artifact.

'Just how many snacks she has?' I thought as I took a bite. At that moment, a bitter and sour taste spread through my body, making me flinch.

'This is so bad.' I wanted to spit it out, but I refrained. It would seem too rude.

"Thanks," I was able to mutter even in the midst of such a feeling.

Senior Maya beamed in response. "No problem, Junior! You should always stay refreshed and ready."

Before I could respond, the members of the club began to gather more actively, a noticeable shift in the atmosphere signaling the start of their functions. As the group assembled, Maya's role as a senior became evident as she efficiently directed everyone's attention.

"All right, everyone! Let's get started. First, I want to welcome all the new members. We're thrilled to have you here." Maya's voice held a warm and inviting tone as she addressed the newcomers, including myself.

As Maya continued to speak, her voice filled with passion, she began to outline the club's purpose and goals. The History and Arts Club aimed to explore and dissect the world as it existed before the Nexus Convergence – the event that transformed our world by introducing mana and magic.

The remnants of the past, both in terms of historical events and artistic expressions, held the key to understanding the roots of our present reality. This was what the club wanted to convey to the world.

"Our focus is on uncovering the layers of history, art, and culture that shaped the world before the Nexus Convergence. We believe that delving into these aspects not only enhances our knowledge but also enriches our perspective on the current world we inhabit."

However, as Maya spoke, my gaze was on the boy who was silently observing Sylvie, probably trying to find a way to get closer to her.

'First you, then your family. I will not spare those dogs that sold themselves to demons either.'

CLENCH

Clenching my fists, I swore to myself.

'I will erase everyone connected to demons. And I will start with you.'

Looking at the innocent smiling two-faced before me, I relaxed my breath. Now was not the time to do such a thing.

Chapter 57 Chapter 15.2 - History and Arts Club

After the orientation of the History and Art Club met its end, Maya spoke to everyone with a happy tone.

"All right, everyone! That's a wrap for today's orientation!" Maya's voice carried a joyful tone as she addressed the gathered members. "I'm so glad to see so many new faces joining us on this journey of discovery."

CLAP CLAP CLAP

A round of applause and cheers erupted from the group, a clear indicator of the positive energy that had taken root during the club's inaugural meeting. It was all thanks to Maya, who was spreading energy around like a radiant sun.

Senior Maya's ability to lead and engage was evident in the way the members responded to her, and it was clear that her genuine excitement resonated with everyone present.

"Thank you all for being a part of this," She continued, her expression radiating gratitude. "For the time being, we are still working on the future arrangements, but rest assured we will hold future travels that would help with our history research."

The excitement in the air was palpable, and as Maya's words settled, I noticed the sense of camaraderie that had formed among the members.

The differences in backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives seemed to fade into the background as a shared curiosity and passion took center stage.

'Does she know that most of the people here joined this club just for the sake of free credits, I wonder?' I thought.

Even though clubs are not mandatory, attending the events that were organized by the clubs would increase one's score in the academy. It was like extra optional points that would be offered in some courses at the college.

"Anyway, we will end our orientation with this. We will meet next Saturday here again, and we will talk about how art has progressed after mana has come into our world." Senior Maya's voice held an excited tone, her eyes gleaming with anticipation for the next gathering. Her words were met with nods and smiles from the members, the promise of another engaging discussion bringing a sense of eagerness.

With her final announcement, the orientation came to a close, and the clearing was soon filled with the sounds of shuffling and laughter as the members began to disperse.

Some engaged in animated conversations, others lingered to exchange contact information, and a sense of camaraderie lingered in the air.

Most students here joined this club with their friends. Thus, the conversations flowed swiftly. There were even some freshmen who wanted to flirt with Maya.

With furtive glances and smirks, they initiated a somewhat clumsy attempt at flirtation with Maya. "Hey there, Senior Maya," one of them began, his tone slightly nervous but attempting to sound confident. "You've definitely made this club a lot more exciting."

His expression was blatantly nervous, and he had a small blush on his cheeks.

Observing this unfolding scene, I couldn't help but raise an eyebrow in bemusement. 'Seriously? Are they really trying to win her over on the very first day?' The sheer audacity of their endeavor left me both astounded and slightly amused.

And it was not only me but others as well since people looked at the scene with amused expressions.

But the boy couldn't continue as he almost fainted from embarrassment. Seeing this, another boy chimed in, his words a bit more practiced, "Yeah, and we were wondering if maybe you'd want to explore the history of our hearts too." His approach was marginally smoother, but the awkwardness still lingered in his tone.

'Nah...' I winced internally, cringing at the spectacle before me. The audacity and lack of self-awareness on their part were almost painful to witness. I couldn't help but turn my gaze away, unable to bear the secondhand embarrassment any longer.

In a swift and timely move, Maya's friend Amelia intervened, stepping forward with a touch of annoyance coloring her expression. "Boys, boys," she chided mockingly, her voice dripping with sarcasm. "You might want to practice those pick-up lines a bit more and maybe work on your overall presentation too."

The boys blinked in surprise, clearly taken aback by the unexpected interruption. Amelia's acerbic comment seemed to momentarily stun them into silence, leaving their flattery hanging in the air like a deflated balloon.

Amelia's gaze shifted, her mocking tone now directed at me. "And if you're going to try and win a lady's heart, at least look as handsome as our gloomy friend here." Her words were laced with playful mockery, a mischievous glint in her eyes as she playfully pointed in my direction.

'What is this woman doing all of a sudden?' My eyebrows shot up in surprise at being singled out, my expression caught between bewilderment and mild irritation.

"Tch."

"Ah, now he clicked his tongue. Mr. Edgelord." Amelia spoke with an amicable smile, looking at me. For some reason, she seemed to like to tease me, which I haven't liked even a bit.

"Cough...." I cleared my throat, attempting to respond, but Amelia had already moved on, leaving behind a chorus of laughter from those who had witnessed the exchange.

Maya, on the other hand, was handling the situation with her usual grace. Ignoring Amelia's teasing and the boys' flustered reactions, she retrieved a bag of snacks from her belongings, offering it to them. "Here, have some snacks," she said, her smile still radiant. "It might help you recover from that rough start."

The boys accepted the snacks with a mixture of gratitude and residual embarrassment, their flushed cheeks earning more chuckles from the surrounding members. Maya's ability to diffuse awkward situations with charm was nothing short of impressive.

'As expected, she is a natural leader.' I thought. This girl was bright and happy-looking, but not everyone with such qualities could direct a crowd in such a manner.

If she was doing this unknowingly, she was a natural genius at managing crowds, and if she was doing this knowingly, then she was a scary monster. That was all I could say.

As the encounter came to an end, the boys eventually retreated from the scene, their confidence slightly dented. Maya refocused her attention on the members, her warmth and enthusiasm once again guiding the atmosphere as the orientation concluded.

I started packing my things up as well, but at that moment, my gaze went to the brown-haired boy who was approaching Sylvie.

THUMP

My heart started beating faster again.

'He is using his mana.' I instinctually knew that he was using his demonic energy, even though it was in a small manner.

'He also probably did this when he first came through the gathering place.' Probably the way to trigger my [Vengeful Bane] was related to the demonic energy. Since I hadn't felt any anger, neither did my heartbeat increase while we were conducting the orientation.

Observing from a distance, I watched as Mason Kent approached Sylvie. His presence exuded confidence and charisma, drawing attention effortlessly. In his outstretched hand rested a seemingly insignificant item, and his tone as he spoke to Sylvie carried a veneer of innocence, a façade that was difficult to decipher.

"Excuse me," Mason's voice was smooth, his expression politely apologetic. "I believe you dropped this." He presented the small object to Sylvie, his green eyes holding a friendly warmth.

Sylvie blinked in surprise, her gaze shifting from the object to Mason and back again. A mix of gratitude and curiosity danced across her features, evident in the way her lips curved into a small smile as she accepted the item. It was a fleeting interaction, but something about it felt off-kilter.

As I observed closely, what intrigued me more was the subtle shift in Sylvie's demeanor. The usual brightness in her eyes seemed to dim ever so slightly, a cloud of uncertainty passing over her usual alert presence.

'As expected, it was because of his demonic mana.' I concluded.

Mason's words seemed to have a lingering effect, causing a momentary furrow in Sylvie's brow as she hesitated, her response momentarily delayed.

It was a fraction of a second, hardly noticeable to anyone who wasn't actively paying attention. Yet, for someone like me who had grown accustomed to observing the smallest of details, it was a telltale sign that something was amiss.

Because when interacting with someone that you don't know, the average response time would be 1 to 3 seconds. However, in the case of Sylvie, her average response time was exactly 2.3.

But, right now, this was extended by a whole second since the time it took for her to respond was 3.4 seconds.



It was obvious that this guy had the effect the cloud one's judgment.

'That explains why Sylvie randomly expected such a thing. It seems they had prepared for something extraordinary, even to trick her.' I thought.

Their goal was Sylvie's. Therefore, it was obvious that they knew about her talent.

In the future, she would be key to discerning demons and damaging them, which was a threat to them as well.

Even though I am not sure if she has awakened her talent right now or not, demons are probably cautious about this right now. ((N1))

Sylvie accepted the item with a gracious nod, slipping it into her pocket with a small smile. "Thank you," she said politely, her gaze fixed on Mason. "By the way, I don't think we've met before. What's your name?"

Mason's smile remained friendly as he extended a hand toward Sylvie. "Apologies for not introducing myself earlier. I'm Mason Kent, a fellow member of the History and Arts Club. It's a pleasure to meet you, Sylvie."

As Sylvie shook his hand, I observed the subtle shift in Mason's demeanor. His words were polite, but there was a hint of something more in the way he held her gaze.

It was as if he was using his mana to create a fleeting connection, a subtle charm that could easily be overlooked by anyone not attuned to such nuances.

Sylvie's smile remained courteous as she acknowledged his introduction. "Nice to meet you too, Mason. Thank you again for returning this to me."

Mason's response was measured, his tone pleasant. "You're welcome, Sylvie. I'm glad I could help. If you ever need anything else, feel free to ask." With a final nod, he excused himself and seamlessly blended back into the conversations happening around us.

Sylvie's attention returned to the group, and I continued to observe from my vantage point. The exchange had been seemingly harmless, yet I knew what his goal was.

The item that he had given to Sylvie. It was a small item that she would forget soon, but an item that would change her future until she remembered it once again.

It was an item that made her academy life hard.

'Abyssal Twin Tracer'

Was the name of the item that guy gave to Sylvie? Its sole purpose is to send its twin pair to its location.

An item that defies technology and is straight up from Demon Realm. This item would be discovered around the later times of the semester by the player, and this is where Sylvie's position would slowly start to reveal itself.

But for now, nobody would know about it aside from me.

As the guy straight up left, Sylvie sat there for a second as she looked like she was thinking about something.

Suddenly, Sylvie's expression changed as if a veil of confusion had descended over her. She blinked a few times, her brow furrowing as if she were struggling to recall something important. Her fingers moved to her pocket, where the item Mason had given her was safely tucked away.

"Um, what was I just thinking about?" Sylvie's voice held a hint of uncertainty as she looked around, seemingly puzzled. It was as if a fog had clouded her memory, erasing the momentary contemplation that had crossed her mind just seconds ago.

The item also had disintegrated itself. Thus, she couldn't find anything.

I watched her from a distance but didn't do anything, as I knew doing something would do more damage than good. If I revealed that I knew about the item, then they would send a lot stronger people to the academy, which I can't afford to risk right now.

'Sorry for endangering you, but this is for the best:' I thought, looking at the girl who was already leaving.....

And following her I left as well....The events of the story were coming closer and closer, and I needed to be prepared enough.

'First demon is going to make its appearance soon.'

-----A/N-----

N1: Astron doesn't know about Sylvie's talent for reading emotions since, in the game, it was not explicitly mentioned. Rather, he thinks it is a talent similar to his which enables Sylvie to find demons.

## Chapter 58 Chapter 16.1 - Nexoria City Trip

Since today was going to be the day when the orientation of the Traveling Club would be done, I needed to be there on time.

Just as I had been expecting, even the message was the same in the game—a simple informative message which was befitting of the club president's character.

'Today, nothing will happen.'

Adventurer and Exploration Club was one of the two clubs that was essential for all players to join, since there were a lot of story events that were related to this.

However, the events would start after the first trip. Normally I was considering not going there and simply joining the normal trips where the demons and other villains made their appearance, but I decided to participate later on.

The reason was to make myself familiar with the seniors and not gather too much attention. Knowing that after I made my appearance, the demons randomly appeared made some people suspicious.

It is not that that is concrete evidence or anything. But the fewer things that I gave people, the better it would be.

Therefore, I participated in today's trip for that reason.

Today's first trip would basically be a trip to the Valerian Federations' second-biggest city.

The inaugural trip was slated for the Valerian Federation's second-largest city.

'Nexoria.'

A fitting name for the bustling second heart of the federation, brimming with adventures waiting to unfold.

'Now that I think about it, there was a museum there ranging from the unknown materials that came to our world or historical weapons that had been used by those that led the world in the past.'

'I should take some pictures of those things for later. I feel like they are going to be useful in the History and Art Club.' I thought.

Just like that, I started picking my things up from the training grounds.

RUMBLE

As my stomach rumbled at the same time, I was reminded of the fact that the heavier the workout was, the larger the proportions must have been.

On the way, I dropped by the cafeteria and grabbed a meal with heavy mana density.

Then it was time to dress and get ready for the trip.

\*\*\*\*\*

As I left my room, I made my way toward the entrance of the Academy, where we would meet.

My gun and weapons were stuffed on my bracelet. Today, nothing was supposed to happen, but that didn't mean carrying weapons was pointless. No, that was the opposite since the game's knowledge might not cover everything.

And since I was always carrying my weapon with me, it was not something that made me uncomfortable.

As I reached the place I was supposed to, I could see the main cast was already there.

The man with blue hair and a bright smile, whose hazel eyes were looking at the gates of the academy, seemingly reminiscent of something.

Ethan.

SMACK

Beside him was a girl who smacked him from his back. A girl with white hair and a tomboyish face.

"Dumbass....Why are you dozing off again?"

"Hey! Why are you keep hitting me?"

"Because it is funny. I like when you flinch even from a small touch."

"You are saying this is a small touch? Are you crazy?"

"A bit?"

"More than a bit."

"...."

As the two of them were talking, behind Ethan was another boy who had a cold glare on his face.

"You can hit me if you like," Victor mumbled with a small sound, and it seemed none of them heard it.

'No, I am sure Julia is just ignoring him.' Since even I was able to hear it from a distance, there was no way Julia, who also had superhuman senses thanks to her awakening, couldn't hear it from such a close distance.

"Hey, shut up! It is annoying." And another voice entered the line. A voice that sounded annoyed and a voice that I disliked to hear.

The girl with fiery red hair and yellow eyes was looking at the two who were responsible for the commotion.

Her irritation was palpable as she grumbled. But given the context, it was justified – hearing the person she had a crush on utter something so embarrassing to another girl.

"Tch. You are no fun." Julia spoke as she retracted her hand.

"How is it fun to hit others?" Irina replied. Ethan seemed troubled by the two that were grumbling, but he just stood there.

Thankfully for him, help came sooner than he thought.

"Hey there, everyone!" Jim's cheerful voice echoed through the air, cutting through the banter. He strode towards us with easy confidence, his presence commanding attention.

Ethan straightened up, a sheepish grin replacing his dreamy expression. The white-haired girl playfully stuck her tongue out at him while Victor's gaze remained impassive as ever. And the fiery-haired girl's annoyed expression subtly shifted into a coy smile, her irritation momentarily forgotten.

Jim's average height and friendly demeanor belied the charisma that oozed him. He exuded the aura of a leader effortlessly. Well, it is not that he was leading an army, but rather simply he was good at making things friendly.

It was not on the level of Maya, but he was good nonetheless.

"I see the early birds have all gathered." Jim's gaze swept over the assembled group, his eyes twinkling with warmth. "I'm excited to welcome you all to the Adventurer and Exploration Club's orientation!"

He was a guy with a good temper. He had a good reputation in both academy and the player base since if you improve your relationships with him; he would be a very good wingman for the player.

As he spoke, his enthusiasm was infectious, managing to draw even the most stoic Victor into the ambiance.

"Most of you must have come here learning about our club's reputation." Jim's tone became more serious, but his smile remained. "Well, the name says it all – we're all about adventures and exploration! And we are here to escape from the serious atmosphere of the academy and leave everything behind, even for a day or two."

Looking at his words right now, I remembered the events that would unfold in this club. The things that Ethan would witness, etc.

'Escape from the serious atmosphere of the academy, huh? It doesn't matter where you are. If you are with the protagonist, then the trouble will always follow you.'

I thought.

He held up a folded piece of paper, clearly a prepared speech that he'd probably practiced countless times before.

"We embark on thrilling journeys, uncover hidden treasures, and discover the uncharted corners of our world." He unfolded the paper with a flourish as if revealing a hidden treasure of its own. "Our motto is 'Where the extraordinary becomes a reality.'"

He paused, letting the weight of those words sink in before continuing.

'Certainly, the journeys will be thrilling. It won't be a mere word.' I mused.

But instead of the weight of his words sinking, the reaction he got was not something he was expecting.

"Pfft....."

"Kuhm-"

Two people at the front were having a very hard time holding their laughs.

"Umm...Juniors, can I ask what is too funny?" Jim inquired his attempt to maintain a cool facade not quite succeeding.

Julia and Irina, who were looking at the Club President trying to act cool, could no longer hold their smiles.

Julia and Irina, struggling to suppress their smiles, exchanged a knowing glance before turning their attention back to Jim.

"Well, Mr. Charismatic Club President," Julia managed to get out between stifled chuckles, "we were just marveling at your grand speech."

"Indeed," Irina chimed in with a playful twinkle in her eye, "who knew our Jim could be so eloquent?"

Jim's cheeks flushed a shade of red that even I could see from where I stood.

"Uh... I mean... it's just a speech, you know..." Jim stammered, clearly flustered by the unexpected teasing.



Julia and Irina burst into laughter, the friendly ribbing bringing a light-hearted atmosphere to the group.

They knew Jim from their childhood since he was a senior whose father worked with Julia's family quite often, and Irina met him thanks to Julia.

As the atmosphere had already lost its cool, Jim raised his head, trying to regain his control as the Club President.

"Anyway, to explain shortly, we are here to get away from the Academy's suffocating atmosphere. So, training in times of club activities is strictly forbidden."

As he finished his words, he looked at the members of the club.

"And today's destination will be Nexoria City. Now, without further ado, let's kick off this orientation by pairing up for today's trip!"

He clapped his hands together, the sound sharp and resonant.

"The pairs will be selected through a lucky draw," Jim explained. "No need to worry – destiny will decide your partner for today!"

With a wink, he signaled to the assistant standing nearby, who held a box filled with slips of paper.

"Okay, folks, let's find out who your partners are! People on the front, come here and grab a name."

Hearing his words, the members went there, and I just waited behind. Since the members on the front were going to grab a name, there was no need for me to get one.

"Then, I will go first." Saying that Julia went and grabbed her name.

And the result was certainly something she was not expecting.

"Julia."

"Please get another name." As she read the name Jim gestured. Since he didn't know which ones would be the ones drawing the lots, he probably put everyone's name in there.

"Okay." Saying that Julia grabbed another one, and the name was something she did not want to probably.

"Victor." After her reading the name of her partner, Julia looked at the boy, who was slightly smiling.

"Okay, our first pair is Victor and Julia," Jim announced, and the drawing continued.

"Tch." Saying that Irina pushed her forward, and the name that came out of there was something I did not want this time.

"Astron....." Reading my name, Irina turned her blazing yellow eyes to me as she glared daggers. Her already soiled mood seemed to get worsened by my name appearing, and it was not that different for me.

'Tch. This annoying girl is my pair of all people.' I thought, turning my gaze away and waiting for the drawing of pairs to end.

The drawings in the game were random as this one. You either be paired with a random NPC, or you could be paired with a named character, so there was no fixed route in this part.

And right now, the one Ethan drew was a girl named Shelly, a girl with glasses and a timid expression on her face.

"Now that we have finalized our pairs, now it is time to travel." With those words, Jim led us out of the academy, and we hopped into a small bus that would take us to the portal connecting Arcadia City and Nexoria City.

The atmosphere on the bus was a mix of excitement and curiosity. People chatted among themselves, sharing their thoughts on the upcoming journey.

I sat near the back, keeping the window to myself. However, I couldn't help but feel a pair of intense yellow eyes on me.

Irina was seated a few rows ahead, her gaze occasionally flickering back to meet mine, but I simply ignored her.

The bus ride went by quickly, and before I knew it, we arrived at the portal station. The portal itself was an awe-inspiring sight – a swirling vortex of magic and technology that connected two distant cities in an instant. The sensation of passing through the portal was brief but disorienting, like a sudden shift in the fabric of reality.

As we emerged from the portal into the vibrant city of Nexoria, a sense of anticipation hung in the air.

"All right, everyone," Jim's voice carried over the excited chatter. "Here's the plan – you are free." He said, cutting his own words. "Since today is the orientation day, you are free to wander around the city as you please but note that you need to be here around 7 AM. Is that clear?"

""""""Yes. """"""

After Jim's talk, the group dispersed, pairs forming naturally as members mingled and shared excitement. Irina and I found ourselves standing together, but any camaraderie seemed far from her intentions.

"You know," Irina's voice cut through the air, sharp and pointed, "I didn't sign up for this to babysit some bastard who doesn't even know what they're doing." She said, looking at me. "I am going my own way, don't follow me."

With those words, she turned back and started walking.

I didn't respond and watched her walk away.

'It is time to visit that museum.' With that thought, I opened my watch and searched for the museum....

Nexoria City.

The second-biggest city of the Valerian Federation.

Nexoria City, the sprawling heart of the Valerian Federation, stood as a testament to human ingenuity and ambition.

The city's grandeur stretched far and wide, encompassing a landscape that blended the old with the new, the historical with the modern.

As I walked through its bustling streets, I found myself immersed in a sensory symphony that painted a vivid picture of this vibrant metropolis.

The reason why we have taken the portal to come here was because two cities, Arcadia City and Nexoria City, were on opposite sides of the federation.

Therefore, coming from Arcadia City to Nexoria City took ten hours by train. And even that was with the fastest one. The average train took 15 hours to arrive.

In any case, the atmosphere of the city was not that different from Arcadia City's own. But if there were one distinct difference, then that would be the appearance of hunters being more here.

The reason for that was simple.

The landscape and the place that surrounds Nexoria City are filled with places that were yet to be recovered from the wildlife.

As you may have already expected, the Valerian Federation occupies a huge amount of land, and not all of them are habitable.

There are places where life has been taken over by monsters from the gate, and Nexoria City is in such a state.

The landscape around here has a lot more threats which is the main reason why this place is the second-biggest city since it is not the safest.

In any case, it was said that this city was the capital of a fallen kingdom before the Nexus Convergence; therefore, making this place another metropolis was not that hard, which is another reason for this city to be this developed.

'Certainly, the landscape is similar to the game.' I thought, walking on the streets. This place was another place in the open world where players could wander around freely. Therefore, I had prior knowledge of coming here.

With that thought, I kept walking and observing things.

'For some reason, I feel in danger.'

I could not understand what was happening, but for some reason, my senses were constantly tense.

'Am I being followed?'

This doesn't seem to make sense. Why was I being followed? My past was clear; I didn't show off or offend anyone. I mean, I did offend some, but it was not to the point where they would follow me like that.

Also, this feeling came after I stepped onto Nexoria City, so it didn't make any sense unless the ones targeting me knew I would come here. But that was pretty unlikely since I don't think the ones targeting me would do it right here rather than while I was visiting Black Market.

'That means one thing.'

I thought.

'Demons are nearby.'

There is nothing that made me more uncomfortable than demons appearing.

GRIT

If there were demons or demon contractors appearing, that meant something was going to happen that we didn't know in the game.

'I was expecting this kind of thing.'

After all, there was no way a world based only on a game would be enough to call a world. No game can cover a whole world with every action that are happening in that world.

However, that didn't mean the game didn't give any information.

'But, seeing that we didn't hear about this, this event should be disclosed. That means this is nothing big.'

Most of the time, things related to demons would be hidden from the general public since the federal government already did have their hands full with the invasion of other species and international problems.

Internal problems and the panicked society would be a lot harder to deal with, which is also something demons are trying to make.

Public Distrust.

Terrorism.

Underhanded techniques will make the power of the government and association lower, which will end up making the human federation weaker.

That was the reason why the news was mostly filled with happy news.

In any case, even though I felt like something was going to happen, I had no way of knowing the source. And even if I did, right now, I couldn't even deal with Academy Students on my own, let alone demon contractors.

I also couldn't inform other people.

Therefore, the only thing I could do was to continue my way and stay alert to any possible danger.

Just like that, I kept walking, wandering around the streets of Nexoria City with my watch open wide as the map of the city was before me.

"Freshly roasted monster meat! Try the delicacy from the dungeon itself!" A vendor's enthusiastic call caught my attention, drawing me toward a lively food stall. The aroma of sizzling meat filled the air as a crowd gathered, curious to sample this exotic fare. It was not an easy sight one could see inside the serious atmosphere of Arcadia City.

As I reached the stall, a man with a wide smile and a twinkle in his eye beckoned me. "A taste of adventure, sir? The beast that roamed the dungeon's depths – now on your plate!"

I couldn't help but be intrigued. "What kind of monster is it?"

"Ah, a fierce one, that's for sure! They call it a Skyrage Wyrms, and let me tell you, its meat is tender and succulent, thanks to its fiery nature."

'Skyrage Wyrms. I am hearing this for the first time.' I thought. My curiosity picked up since the store was pretty crowded.

I raised an eyebrow. "Fiery nature?"

The vendor nodded enthusiastically. "Oh yes! These creatures breathe fire, you see. But fear not, we've tamed the flames and left only the exquisite taste behind!"

I decided to give it a try, and the vendor deftly sliced a portion of the roasted meat onto a plate. As I took a bite, the flavors exploded in my mouth – a mix of savory and slightly smoky, with a hint of spice. It was unlike anything I had tasted before, a true fusion of adventure and cuisine.

This made me remember once again what type of world I was living in. The feeling of mana entering my body from the monster meat was alone, showing that this world was a world that could offer many things.

"Thanks. How much for the meat?"

I asked. The money was not a problem.

"500 Valer."

Until I heard the price.

'You can't be serious?' I thought, raising my head, only to see the name of the stall. Because I was constantly tense, rather than paying attention to the names of stalls, I was paying attention to the people, which made me miss what was before me.

In the end, it was a stall that was opened by a famous chief. Thus, the only thing I could do was to pay for my meal and make my own way.

As I wandered, I couldn't help but overhear snippets of conversations, a blend of excitement and familiarity.

"Did you hear? The Blackfang Guild is organizing an expedition to the Wildwood Dungeon!"

"Yeah. Finally, some high-ranking guild is stepping in."

"Indeed. I don't even understand why did it take this long for them to enter the dungeon anyway?"

"I heard a problem with the tax occurred. They are saying the association demanded quite a lot this time."

"That makes sense. Nowadays, they are saying the association is putting too much pressure on the guilds in terms of taxes."

Such words were a testament to Nexoria's adventurous spirit, where Dungeons and the treasures they held were a part of everyday life, but here I could see the strength of association a lot better.



Since I was mostly associated with the Black Market Dungeons, I didn't have a license for now. I could get one, but I hadn't.

Therefore, I didn't know much about the dungeons of the association.

In any case, after walking for a while, I finally managed to reach the place of my destination. The museum.

'The feeling of threat also disappeared. I guess they retreated.'

I thought.

Since I was not feeling the discomfort anymore, I decided to enter the museum without wasting any more time.

'This trip feels a little refreshing.' I thought. I had been working non-stop for the past three weeks without doing anything, and wandering around like this made me clear my head a little bit.

I walked through the museum's entrance, the name "Nexoria Museum of Enchantment" displayed in elegant lettering. With a sense of quiet determination, I decided to navigate the exhibits on my own, forgoing the assistance of a guide.

The receptionist at the front desk, a young woman with a warm smile, greeted me. "Welcome to the Nexoria Museum of Enchantment! Are you here for the guided tour?"

Her clothes were tidy, and she had an amicable smile. Looking at her sleeves and the small pocket on her uniform, I could see she was smoking; at the same time, she was using capped teeth.

'The brand she is using is a high-quality one. Her breathing doesn't seem to be rugged. She has been smoking for at least ten years; the signs of nicotine addiction are masked with her extensive makeup under her eyes. She is not married, but her sex life is well-satisfied. There are three different scents of male perfume mixed with her own. I guess she is a player.'

'Well, that's enough for now.'

After concluding that, I replied to the woman. "No. I wish to explore alone."

She nodded understandingly. "Of course! Feel free to take your time. If you have any questions or need assistance, don't hesitate to ask." Even though my tone was blunt, she didn't mind it.

'A rare professional.' With a nod, I stepped into the lands of the museum, making my way to the museum.

This place was a place where things from other worlds as well as from the past, gathered.

The first stage of the museum was a place where the materials from the other world were showcased.

The first display caught my attention—a collection of gleaming metal ingots that seemed to emit a soft, ethereal glow.

<Luminarus.>

A plaque nearby indicated that these metals had been recovered from the depths of the Luminary Cavern, a Dungeon renowned for its intricate network of subterranean tunnels.

These crystals were said to harness and amplify mana, making them valuable resources for spellcasters and enchanter.

However, that was only in the past. It was a material that made the civilization what it was since one of the reasons why humans were able to resist the invasion of the species who had access to mana firsthand.

The technology that has worked with mana rather than electricity was thanks to this material. A groundbreaking discovery. Being able to convert any type of mana into raw energy, fill mana batteries, and many other things.

This world was different from Earth in this fundamental way.

Earth's civilization was formed on electricity, while here, the world revolved around mana.

Moving on, I encountered other fascinating materials. There were iridescent scales recovered from the Azure Abyss, a Dungeon immersed in an underwater realm. These scales were imbued with a protective aura, rendering them ideal for crafting formidable armor.

A few steps away, delicate petals from the Celestial Blossom, harvested from the Elysian Fields Dungeon, were displayed. These petals held extraordinary healing properties and were revered for their ability to mend wounds and ailments.

THROB

Just as I was walking further, suddenly, I felt a throbbing feeling in my head.

'What?'

Before I could ask any other question, the throbbing feeling intensified as my vision momentarily blacked out.

"Astron."

A voice echoed inside my head as the silhouette of a woman appeared before my eyes.

'Sister.'

However, no words could leave my mouth as I felt my chest suffocating. It was the same dream I had been having over and over again all the time. (N1)

Now, a cryptic sound would come, which was veiled with an unknown presence.

"Seek the moonstone."

However, this time the words rang out like a bell, the meaning crystallizing within me. It all fell into place. The throbbing in my head was no longer a cryptic enigma but a guiding force, leading me to a purpose.

As my vision was cleared out, my eyes were drawn to the corner of the museum, where a soft silvery light illuminated the protective cage.

Like a child bewitched by the smell of candy, my steps guided me in front of the cage, my steps staggering.

And the moment I reached the cage, a stone was revealed, as well as the name of the bracket beside it.

Chapter 60 Chapter 16.3 - Nexoria City Trip

"Astron."

"Seek the Moonstone."

As the contents of that dream echoed in my mind, I couldn't resist the pull that seemed to be guiding me toward the corner of the museum. There was an inexplicable connection that drew me closer to something hidden there. It was as if an invisible thread tugged at my consciousness.

As I reached the corner, my gaze fell upon a small, faint light emanating from a cage, its glow casting an otherworldly aura. Adjacent to it was a modest stone, its presence bearing an enchanting quality.

<Moonstone.>

That was what was written beside it, as the small and faint light was shining upon the stone.

I didn't know why, but I felt myself getting enchanted by the stone, like something was pulling me.

The dream was now disappeared from my eyes, but the connection I was feeling with the stone was real.

'It is the moonstone.' For this whole time, the contents of the dream had been haunting me. There were words whenever I slept, a silhouette that I was familiar with. But, not even once I could understand what those words meant.

But, now that I was before the stone, the dream was complete.

'Seek the moonstone, huh? Wasn't this stone useless?' I asked myself. In the game, there were not many chances that this stone would appear, and even if it did, most of the time, it was no different from a normal stone that was shining.

That was the reason why this was here, probably. Since it didn't have any use aside from art and architecture, this stone would be exhibited in a museum in such a way. It didn't have the property to conduct mana properly, and it was a hard material.

'But this connection is something that is impossible to ignore.'

Yet, the connection I felt was undeniable. Surreal yet certain, as if a dormant knowledge had been unlocked within me.

I instinctively understood that this stone held some sort of importance, though the details eluded me.

I don't know if there was such a setting in the game for any affinity, but I knew there was only one person that was using the power of the moon in the game.

She was a villain, and the weapon she was using was also useless.

'Was her weapon made from moonstone?' I asked. Since when we beat that villain, as the loot, the blade we got would be useless.

It didn't have much attack power, and neither did it have good magical abilities.

'That explains why she was that strong even though her weapon was weak. Maybe, it is a matter of suitability. That might also have something with my mana conduction.'

I thought. That was something I had been wondering for a while, but my mana control was not progressing fast enough.

As the other students around me had already gotten used to imbuing their weapons with their mana, and their power output was higher than mine.

For instance, when I used my dagger. Even though my mana increased its damage, the increased damage was relatively lower than I expected.

'It was like my mana was not being conveyed enough.' I thought.

'But, if it was related to material, then this explains everything. Even though my mana control is still not that strong, the output should be a lot stronger, considering my magic power stat. If it is about the material, then this makes sense.'

This stone's connection seemed to be tied to something beyond its physical properties. As I pondered the potential implications for my mana control and weapon enhancement, my thoughts were interrupted by the arrival of two people, one small and one slightly taller.

It was a girl with bright and widened eyes. She looked innocent, as her eyes contained a small bright light that was exclusive to children.

The young girl's eyes widened with excitement as they fell upon the moonstone. "Mommy, look! It's so pretty!" she exclaimed, her voice carrying pure wonder.

Her mother's response was less enthusiastic. "Honey, it might look pretty, but it's just a useless stone. Let's move on to something more interesting."

I didn't know what their names were, but the mother gave a serious vibe, and her presence was strong.

'She is a hunter.' I concluded. 'From the calluses on her hand, the way she walks, and her posture, it seems she is a spear user.' It was slightly rare for a woman to use a spear rather than a bow or a sword.

Most of the time, the spear rather needed a strong core and heavyweight, which generally didn't fit the type for women.

THUMP

But just as they were leaving, suddenly, my heartbeat started increasing as I felt something was amiss. The same feeling of death I had been feeling all this time was now here once again.

THUMP THUMP THUMP

'This time, it's a lot stronger.'

I concluded as my heartbeat increased further and further. Looking at the woman, I could see she was also tense as goosebumps filled her body. It was evident that she also sensed something was amiss.

BOOM!

And in less than a second, before I could say anything either I could do, a sudden explosion rocked the museum, sending shockwaves through the air.

CRASH

I could see the pieces of door and walls flying across the museum and immediately went to take cover. The woman probably took care of her own child, so there was no need for me to risk myself.

Chaos erupted as panicked shouts filled the space. The lights flickered, and alarms blared, a stark contrast to the peaceful atmosphere that had prevailed just moments before.

TOK TOK TOK

The sound of something heavy walking could be heard as an immense amount of pressure was released from the presence. I could feel it was no ordinary monster.

THUMP

But again, my heart started beating wildly.

'What is this?'

And another presence made itself known.

'A demon contractor. And a strong one at that.'

The pressure that was being released from the man was comparable to the monster.

'At least peak rank 9, or maybe 10.'

From the pressure alone, I could feel my hands shaking.

'I am feeling fear?'

It was the most primordial action one could have. When against an undeniable force, the feeling one would get.

Fear.

My shaking hands were enough to show that.

'I am feeling fear again? Just like that time.'

I could feel the tremble in my hands.

SPURT SWOOSH CRASH

"AH!" "HELP ME! HELP ME!"

"SOMEONE!"

I could hear the sounds people were making, but I just stood there kneeling and looked at my hands.



They were shaking, probably from the pressure.

'There is no way.'

But, my head was calm. No, rather than saying calm, it was angry.

I was angry.

'THERE IS NO FUCKING WAY! AFTER ALL THIS TIME, YOU ARE GOING TO CHICKEN AWAY! AGAIN!'

'YOU ARE GOING TO LET HER DOWN AGAIN! JUST LIKE AT THAT TIME! ARE YOU GOING TO WATCH?'

THUMP

I could feel my heart beating fast. The demon contractor was close.

I was angry at myself for feeling the difference in power.

I was so weak that my body didn't even listen to me. Even if my mind was strong, the difference between the raw power was enough to make me freeze.

'NO! I REFUSE!' I shouted in my head, I could feel the pleas coming from around me, but my focus was on a different place.

'IF I AM GOING TO TAKE MY REVENGE, THIS IS THE FIRST STEP I NEED TO TAKE.'

With my trembling hands, I reached for my bracelet and took the dagger from there.

STAB

And stabbed my own leg.

"Huff...Huff...Huff...." It hurt; it hurt a lot. But, this was a price in order to get rid of the lingering pressure on my body. I needed to make it respond to myself, and it did.

The moment I stabbed myself, I could feel the lingering tremble going away. The pain cleared my head, there was neither anger nor fear.

I could finally think clearly.

WOOSH

As I manipulated the shadows with my trait [Shadowborne], without wasting any more time I hid myself, making my presence unknown. I needed to see what was happening first. I knew I was not going to be any help in this situation. Both the monster and the demon contractor was too strong for me.

"HELP! PLEASE!"

Amidst the chaos, more sounds mingled—shrieks of desperation, pleas for assistance, and cries of anguish. People scattered in every direction, some attempting to escape the menace that had invaded their sanctuary.

The monster's rampage was relentless. The ground trembled beneath its heavy footsteps, and as its sinister presence neared, its path was marked by destruction. People fell, their fates sealed by an adversary beyond their comprehension.

RING RING

Alarms rang in an incessant, dissonant symphony, their urgent cries melding with the cacophony of terror. The air itself was charged with panic, a thick aura of dread that left little room for rational thought.

In a desperate bid to survive, some fled from the direction the attack had come, their footsteps a frantic rhythm against the backdrop of chaos. Others found themselves cornered, their eyes wide with terror as they confronted a force they couldn't hope to overcome.

"Mommy, I am scared." I could see the little girl looking at her mother with a cry, but the woman had a rather cold face. She was looking at the entrance where people were massacred while holding her daughter's eyes, closing them. Her mana was also covering the girl's ears, so she probably couldn't hear anything.

The way she had used her mana in such a precise manner was enough to show that the mother was someone that was very proficient with using mana.

'Is she some sort of celebrity?' I asked myself, watching the scene unfolding. It didn't make sense to see a hunter with such precise control. 'She must be disguising herself.' Both the woman and the little girl seemed normal at first, but as I paid more attention now, I could see a small interference was messing with my sight.

With a stern yet gentle expression, the woman crouched to meet her daughter's eyes, speaking with a hushed tone. "Jane, don't leave this place, okay? Mama will return immediately."

"You will go and kill those bad guys, right?" The girl replied with a small tone; she looked really scared.

"Yes. Mama will deal with those guys. You know Mama is strong, right?"

"Un. I know, mama is strong."

"Then, just wait and never move from here."

As she uttered those words, the woman's mana surged, forming a protective barrier around the girl's whole body. It was a mother's instinctive urge to shield her child from the horror unfolding around them.

TOK

As the woman rose to her feet, her eyes shifted from her daughter to the chaos around her. The urgency of the situation was not lost on her. With a glance that carried a mixture of resolve and authority, she assessed the situation and quickly formulated a plan.

"Hey, what is your name?"

She asked a woman who was hiding behind with a scared face.

"Anna."

"Good Anna, help the wounded! Keep them stable until the medical team arrives!" The woman's instructions were firm and immediate, leaving no room for hesitation. However, the girl still hesitated as she didn't want to put herself in danger, knowing such strong opponents were there.

"Who are yo-"

Just as the girl was about to react, suddenly, an immense amount of pressure enveloped her. It was even stronger than the monster and the demon there as a Hunter; the girl seemed to know the person before she was someone with a prominent aura.

Before the question could fully form, the air itself seemed to bend under immense pressure, as if the very atmosphere recognized the person who had arrived. The woman's appearance underwent a subtle transformation as if her mere presence commanded attention and respect.

The girl's eyes widened as realization struck. "Kaya... Kaya Hartley?"

Before the girl could talk further, the woman's cold gaze was on her. "Just listen to what I am saying, you insect. If you don't listen, it will be your family that will suffer." As the woman spoke those words, a shiver went down the girl's spine.

She was an incredibly cold woman who slaughtered monsters non-stop, even after she gave birth to children. A prominent hunter that was constantly on the news, a woman came from the family of Hartley's.

'I see...Here I thought, why hasn't she ever flinched. If it was this woman, then it makes sense.' As I thought about that, I just stood there and watched the scene.

TOK TOK TOK

The heavy footsteps grew louder, a reverberating cadence that announced the approach of the monstrous threat. The ground shook beneath its weight, the sheer size and power of the creature making it a fearsome adversary.

"EVERYONE!" As the woman shouted with a loud tone, the people who scattered around, the bodies that were about to die, everyone gathered their attention on her.

As the woman shouted with a loud tone, the people who scattered around, the bodies that were about to die, everyone gathered their attention on her. She quickly assessed the situation, her eyes locking onto the wounded and those in danger.

"Listen to me!" Her voice, calm yet commanding, cut through the panic. "We're in a dire situation, but we can overcome this if we work together. Those who can fight assist the injured. Form groups and defend yourselves."

As her voice carried through the air, a sense of reassurance began to spread. The woman's presence, her aura of authority and confidence, had a calming effect even in the face of danger.

"Hunters, mages, lend your strength to those who need it most. Remember, unity is our greatest weapon."

Amidst the chaos, her words became a rallying point. Those who had been paralyzed by fear found their resolve renewed. With her guidance, makeshift teams formed, their efforts becoming a coordinated response against the looming threats.

"Ah...You finally revealed yourself."

But following Kaya, a new presence emerged—one that struck dread into the hearts of those present. The air itself seemed to grow colder, a malevolent energy radiating from the depths of the museum.

THUMP

The reason for my hatred to grow.

The demon contractor made his appearance.

