Reincarnated Avatar; I got 2 SSS-Rank Unique Skills

#Chapter 111: Surprise surprise! - Read Reincarnated Avatar; I got 2 SSS-Rank Unique Skills Chapter 111: Surprise surprise!

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{Deadly Musician -> Lord Doom]

*Good evening boss, how was your day? Hope you had a nice day because it's about to become a whole lot better. Surprise surprise! Club Echelon's building is finally ready!

Silence.

Aria, Benjamin and the others looked at Noah curiously. "What?"

Noah finally snapped out of it.

The first part of that message definitely caught him off-guard. Nightingale was clearly the boss, so why call him boss?

He shook his head. 'I can't understand how he thinks at all'.

If the first part of the message caught him off-guard though, the second party truly left him surprised. 'So fast?'

"Spill it!" Genevieve urged impatiently.

Noah smirked and looked at her teasingly, long enough till she almost exploded in impatience before he answered with a slight smile. "Our club building is finally ready".

"..."

For a few seconds after Noah said it, none of them could say a word.

"Really?!"

They all logged out of the game.

...

Birmingham City, England...

Immediately after logging out of the game, Benjamin's apartment turned into coliseum where 3 energetic gamers clashed.

"Vivi, what's taking you so long in the bathroom?!"

"I want to bath too!"

No response.

Benjamin fumed. "What the hell are you still doing inside? Are you giving birth?!"

No response.

And then, he banged on the door. "I'm coming in!"

Genevieve finally responded, shrieking. "Ahhhh!"

"You pervert! Stay outside!"

"You're a man, you don't understand how a girl's body works. If you're a gentleman, you better wait and let me bath thoroughly!"

"I'm no gentleman!"

Genevieve was speechless.

In the end though, after about a dozen minutes or so, the 3 of them were finally ready in some of their best clothes.

It was already evening but they could not afford to wait.

They wanted nothing more than to trudge into the building right now.

Caleb and Benjamin were dressed in a black suit, while Genevieve was dressed in a simple black gown. Together, they left, taking a taxi to the airport where they took the next flight to London.

...

Coventry, England...

When Gabriel noticed his girlfriend quickly rush out of her gaming room, going to the bathroom to take her bath, he already knew what it was about.

"Your friends again, right?"

Aria didn't answer till she already took her bath and was on her clothes. Like Genevieve, having planned it together, she was also dressed in a simple black gown.

Only after she was ready did she walk up to her boyfriend with an apologetic smile on her face.

"I'm sorry babe, but something really important came up".

"I told you about I and my friends' intention to create a new club, right? Our sponsor finally bought a club building, and I want to go check it out the first time".

"You know, it's a historic moment and I don't want to miss it".

Gabriel sighed. "Yeah, it's fine, I understand. You can go".

"Thank you babe, you're such a darling". Kissing him passionately on the lips, Aria quickly rushed from the apartment, going straight to the airport.

There, she took the next flight to London.

...

London, England...

At the airport in London, the 4 friends finally met up and from there, together, they took a taxi to the new Club Echelon Headquarters, excitement buzzing between them.

"Nightingale really went all out, huh?" Benjamin whistled as they approached the building.

"Well, he did say it was going to be next level". Genevieve added, adjusting her bag.

Even Aria, who had traveled all the way from Coventry looked genuinely intrigued. "If he made me take a damn plane for this, it better be worth it".

They turned the corner, and froze.

"...Holy shit".

Their expectations were already unrealistically high due to the true identity of their sponsor, but still, Nightingale managed to blow them away.

Club Echelon's new building was a masterpiece.

Standing in the heart of London, the structure was a monument to gaming dominance. A sleek, futuristic skyscraper; its glass-and-metal design gleaming under the city lights.

The entrance was lined with LED panels, displaying Echelon's logo that they agreed on a while ago, a silver crest with a digital phoenix rising from flames.

A massive holographic display overhead showcased scenes that Aria and her friends never expected to see outside the game; footages of the guild war, including Lord Doom, their Avatars, including Nightingale's own Avatar, seamlessly shifting between highlight reels of their greatest plays of that legendary day.

Benjamin took one look and smirked. "Nightingale's flexing hard".

"But I love it, skadosh!" He grinned.

Stepping inside, the first thing they noticed was the air of luxury.

The lobby was grand, lined with black marble floors and illuminated by crystal LED chandeliers. A massive digital screen covered one wall, playing replays of famous Warstar tournaments.

The Echelon emblem was proudly embedded into the floor beneath them, glowing softly.

A sleek reception desk greeted them, and standing right there, arms crossed, waiting with a smug grin was Nightingale.

"Welcome home, Echelon".

There was a moment of silence as the team took in the grandeur of their new headquarters. Then, Benjamin suddenly clapped his hands together.

"Ahem," he cleared his throat, smirking. "Guess you could say we've officially reached the Echelon of gaming greatness, hehe".

A collective groan filled the room.

Aria smacked his shoulder. "You bastard..., I literally felt my soul leave my body. Stop these jokes of yours if you don't want me dead from groaning someday".

Benjamin chuckled, rubbing his nose. "My jokes don't kill, they revive".

Caleb adjusted his glasses. "That joke was so bad it should be classified as a debuff".

Genevieve sighed. "I'd almost forgotten what it was like to be around you".

Even Nightingale, who had prepared a whole speech, pinched the bridge of his nose. "...I regret this already".

They laughed.

And then, Nightingale finally said what they've all been waiting to hear. "Are you guys ready to go on a tour around Club Echelon?"

Benjamin exaggeratedly went on one knee, pointing forward. "Lead the way boss".

The others laughed.

Nightingale led the way.

Chapter 112: Club Echelon's grand unveiling

Led by Nightingale, the tour began.

Nightingale first took them to the War Room, a state-of-the-art strategy hub lined with holographic displays capable of projecting entire battlefields in real time.

A massive conference table stood at the center, designed for deep tactical discussions and game analysis.

Before meeting Noah and his crew, Noah barely knew anything about the inside of a pro club. But after their meeting the last time, he spoke privately with Noah to know all the requirements for a state-of-the-art professional club.

Having captained Cyber Squad for over 10 years, living in the club building, and having visited the buildings of almost all the big pro clubs in England, Noah knew the ins and out of pro club building like the back of his hand.

Nightingale did his best to meet all the requirements that Noah listed.

After the War Room, Nightingale led them to the training grounds, an entire floor dedicated to practice, featuring high-end gaming stations, customizable VR battle simulations, and even a reaction training facility designed to sharpen reflexes.

Each player had a personalized pod, adjusted to their optimal settings.

The more they toured, the more shocked they became. 'Jeez...!'

Everything was moving so fast. This was even far better and more state of the art than Cyber Squad's club building!

At some point, Benjamin had to ask.

He gulped. "Umm..., boss Night, how much did you spend on this?" He pointed round. "You know, all of this".

Nightingale smiled politely. "Let's forget about that".

'Forget about that my foot! I feel like I'm in paradise!'

Benjamin managed to tone down his racing thoughts, and so, they continued the unforgettable tour.

After the training grounds, Nightingale led them to the Stream Arena, a professional-grade streaming studio, complete with high-end microphones, lighting setups, and multiple recording rooms.

A separate area was dedicated for live events, where Club Echelon players could stream matches in front of a live audience.

And then the Lounge and Recreation Floor. It is a big relaxation space, including a gaming arcade, a private cinema, a bar and café, and even a rooftop lounge with a stunning view of the London skyline.

Benjamin almost fainted out of luxury. "Someone, pinch me, tell me I'm not dreaming!"

Aria did pinch him though, growling in his ear. "Maintain your composure bastard, don't act like a country bumpkin!"

"But..."

She pinched him harder. "Shut up!"

In the end, Benjamin managed to calm down.

After the Lounge and Recreation Floor, Nightingale finally took them to the Living Quarters where every Echelon player had a luxury apartment within the building, fully furnished with modern interiors and smart home automaton.

At this point, they were already numb from astonishment.

Close to the end of the tour, as Nightingale led them through, the team couldn't hide their reactions.

Benjamin whistled. "I could live here forever".

Caleb adjusted his glasses. "This level of investment..., Nightingale," he looked at him. "You weren't kidding about making Echelon a powerhouse".

Nightingale smiled bashfully. "I've been a big fan of you guys since I first learned of Warstar. I always wanted to be involved in some capacity, I never expected Cyber

Squad forcing your retirement eventually providing me with the opportunity that I always dreamt of".

"So yes, to me it's a dream come true too".

"Wow, said like a..."

Thud!

"Ouch...! Aria!" Benjamin glared at her.

Aria glared back at him, before staring at Nightingale with a polite smile. "Please continue".

Nightingale coughed. "Umm, ok".

As they continued, Genevieve smiled. "It actually feels like a real club now".

Aria crossed her arms. "I hate to say this, but... I'm impressed".

"You see!" Benjamin quickly chipped in, only to be cut off...

"Shut up!"

He glared at Aria grievingly.

Nightingale clapped his hands. "Now that you've seen the place, let's talk business. We've got a club to run, and championships to win".

With their new headquarters established, Club Echelon was officially ready to take over the world.

Before continuing though, Nightingale looked around. "Umm, I don't know if you guys have noticed, but where is God Noah?"

Silence.

The 4 friends looked at each other, then, "Umm, ahh, ehm..."

Nightingale chuckled. "I guess something held him up this time too, right?"

"Yeah, something held him". Aria quickly said with a chuckle.

Nightingale looked away. "I know there are things that you guys are hiding from me. I don't know why, but I respect your decision".

"You guys have not told me, but something is wrong with God Noah, right?" He looked at them.

"This..."

"It's fine if you guys are not comfortable about telling me. I'll give you guys time, as much time as you need to build trust".

"When you guys feel like it's the right time, you can tell me".

"If it's something I can help, I won't hesitate".

Aria looked at Nightingale with a serious face. "We will," she said. "When the time is right".

"Ok". Nightingale said, suddenly in a bubbly mood again.

"One last thing before Club Echelon becomes official," Nightingale smiled. "Registering with the Pro Alliance".

"This...," Aria was worried but Nightingale waved a hand dismissively.

"There are few things in the world that money can't solve". He smirked. "Don't worry, my friends are already working on it".

A few minutes later, Nightingale got a call.

After taking the phone call, he looked at the others and smiled. "It's official, Club Echelon is now part of the Pro Alliance!"

"YEAH!!!" They cheered, jubilating excitedly.

"This has to be celebrated with a champagne!" Benjamin yelled.

Nightingale obliged, bringing a champagne that they opened to commemorate the occasion. His only dissatisfaction was the fact that God Noah could not be in this historic occasion.

He didn't pay too much attention to it though.

'When the time is right, they'll tell me'.

After the big event that evening in London, Nightingale registered them in the building's smart system to enable them access into the building anytime.

Whenever they wanted, they could relocate and start staying here.

That night, since they all brought their Warstar account cards with them, they logged in right there in the building.

They decided to spend the night there.

Chapter 113: Skill points seeking quest

[Avatar 'Reckless Storm' has logged into Warstar!]

Late that night, while the others were already sleeping, Aria stood up and secretly accessed one of the Warstar consoles, logging into the game.

During the tour in the evening, she took it on herself to take a few pictures, including a video or two all for this moment.

Logging into the game, she met up with Noah.

There, she told him about all that happened, describing Club Echelon's state of the art building to him. And then she sent him the pictures and videos as a file, something that Noah could still view even in this state.

At the end, Noah commented. "Nightingale went all out".

"Yeah". Aria nodded.

He chuckled. "Looks like we really made it.

Aria hesitated for a moment, and then she said it. "He asked about you again".

Noah looked at her. "What did he say?"

Aria took a deep breath and repeated everything that Nightingale said.

Noah took a deep breath. "Tell him that I'll personally tell him the true after I'm at level 60 and complete the Heavenly Domain challenge".

Aria frowned. "Is there any significance to telling him at level 60?"

"No," Noah smiled. "I just feel like telling him then".

Aria shook her head. "You're still as carefree as ever, huh?" She sighed. "Only you will still have the will to play games so casually and enthusiastically in a situation like this".

"At this point, I think we should have made a few inferences about your unusual condition already".

"I don't believe in that reincarnation sh*t".

"You didn't reincarnate into the game; this is just some unknown technology in play though we don't yet understand how it works".

"If I'm not wrong, this feels closer to you being kidnapped and yet here you are, playing the game as if nothing happened".

"What should I do? Cry?" Noah chuckled. "There's no use worrying over what I can't change".

"I can only do what I can now, then try to look out for clues".

"When I find one, be rest assured that I'll be the first person to want to get to the bottom and truth of my condition, whether I'm truly a reincarnated Avatar or not, or if this is just some prank".

Noah leaned against a wall, looking into the distance. "About our Skill Points Seeking Quest, do you have any idea?"

"Nah," Aria shook her head. "Any idea?"

Noah chuckled. "I'm stuck in the game, so there's nothing for me to do apart from playing games. It's ironic but I actually like it. So yes, I have a few ideas".

"I did thorough research and found some interesting quests".

"The first is called the trial of the Forgotten Kings, it's a solo dungeon challenge". He looked at Aria. "Apparently, each team member must face off against the spirits of ancient Kings who ruled over the Heavenly Domain before the age of gods".

"Each King specializes in a unique combat style, forcing payers to adapt and counter different techniques".

"The reward is on the lower side. +3 skill points for completing the trial, and +1 bonus skill point if the player defeats all Kings without using healing items".

Noah looked at Aria. "What do you think?"

She shrugged. "Beggars are not choosers".

"Fair point". Noah chuckled. "Another one is called the Song of the Eternal Siren, a puzzle plus combat hybrid quest type".

"Unlike the first one that is solo, it's a team quest".

"The description says a cursed melody lingers in the ruins of an ancient cathedral, driving all who hear it to madness. To break the curse, the team must battle waves of enemies while deciphering the forgotten notes of an ancient hymn to restore harmony".

"The reward is +4 skill points for each player for solving the puzzle and defeating the Siren Queen".

Noah looked at Aria.

She shrugged again. "Continue".

Noah did just that. "Another one is the Chaos Gambit, another team quest that and this one is a survival battle royale".

"From the description, apparently, the team is thrown into an unpredictable battlefield where every five minutes, the rule change; gravity shifts, time slows, random buffs/debuffs apply, and enemies become stronger or weaker".

"The goal is to be the last ones standing".

"The reward is +5 skill points if we survive till the end, and +1 bonus skill point if no one dies during the challenge".

"There's also the Abysswalker's Reckoning, another solo quest type".

"The description says deep within the Shadow Abyss lies an entity trapped between mortality and godhood. The challenge? A one-on-one duel where the opponent adapts to the player's fighting style in real time, mirroring their techniques and countering them".

"The reward is +4 skill points and +1 bonus skill point for winning without getting hit more than five times".

"Also there's the Harbinger's Paradox".

Aria looked at Noah. "It's always unnerving to see how much your brain can carry at a time".

Noah smirked. "Is that a compliment?"

"Well, thank you, I know I'm a genius".

"Get lost!"

Laughing, Noah continued. "This one is a team quest type".

"The description says a mysterious warlord from the future has invaded, claiming he has already defeated the challenging team in every timeline. To change fate, they must defeat him within 15 minutes before time resets".

"It's a time-limited boss raid".

"The reward is +6 skill points if they break the loop, and +2 bonus skill points if they finish the fight with at least one minute left on the timer".

"And then there's also the..."

"That's enough," Aria stopped him. "Keep them to yourself".

Noah chuckled. "Tired already?"

"Not everyone has that freakish brain of yours".

For the next few minutes, the 2 friends talked about different topics, the game, the world, the past, the future, and then Club Echelon.

Like this, before they knew it, an hour already passed.

It was when she yawned that Aria finally remembered to check the time. "Oops, it's too late, I need to go sleep now".

"Ok then, goodnight".

She looked at him. "What will you be doing?"

"I'll solo some more dungeons, get some more experience before going to the inn to sleep".

Aria hesitated a bit, then she said. "Just wait, one day, we'll rescue you from the game".

"I know". Noah smiled.

Chapter 114: Reactions [1]

The next morning, after waking up, still in club Echelon's building, Benjamin and the others decided to log into the game using the Warstar consoles that were already installed inside the building.

There, they met Noah in-game as they raved about the encounter.

Benjamin trolled. "Too bad you're stuck in the game, hehe," he laughed. "You have to see the state-of-the-art building".

"There are even flying fairies and floating rooms!"

"Hah," Noah laughed. "I believe you".

"I'm serious!" He said shamelessly.

"I know". Noah laughed again.

"Lies!" Geneveive looked at him contemptuously.

"Come on Vivi, don't look at me like that". Benjamin chuckled. "I mean, even if I'm not exaggerating, club Echelon's building has to be the best eSports club building in the country!"

"You're right about that". Caleb added.

Emboldened by Caleb's support, Benjamin continued babbling on, telling Noah in detail about the tour that the had around the building and how much he missed due to being stuck in the game.

It was only after his rambling did Noah finally propose his idea to them, and the result of his research, the skill points seeking quest.

They were visibly surprised.

"You really found so many quests to get skill points?" Genevieve asked.

"Of course, I won't lie to you guys".

Well, that gave them a new goal to focus on.

But before embarking on the skill points seeking quest, there was something important that Benjamin, Caleb, and Genevieve wanted to do first..., relocation.

After spending just 1 night in Club Echelon, they had no intention of staying 1 more night in Benjamin's shabby apartment.

And so, later in the day, while Aria left London back to Coventry to meet her boyfriend, they also left back to Birmingham City where they got set to relocate.

They were able to get all of the things they needed ready before the next day's morning. Only after that did they travel back to London.

And with that, Club Echelon got its first 3 inhabitants; Benjamin, Genevieve, and Caleb.

The building was just too big to accommodate just the 3 of them though.

For the building to function properly, a lot of things were needed; cleaners to clean the building on a regular basis, chefs to make food for the pro players, and assistants also for the pro players.

For the specific requirements to make the club hospitable to its players, Nightingale and his crew spoke with Benjamin, Genevieve, and Caleb, knowing exactly what they needed before they started hiring.

While Nightingale hired, populating Club Echelon's building, in another world, the world of social media, England's eSports scene erupted due to the announcement of a single news.

[BREAKING NEWS!]

[A new Giant enters the Arena; let's welcome Club Echelon!]

Club Echelon's creation was not an anonymous event, and it was accompanied by reactions.

The English Warstar eSports scene was shaken to its core with the official unveiling of Club Echelon, a brand-new pro team that was tied to the in-game guild Echelon which was led by none other than the infamous Lord Doom and his legendary squad.

By now, talks about Lord Doom's true identity was a source of countless debates in multiple Warstar communities.

For years, England's Warstar scene has been dominated by enduring powerhouse clubs like Cyber Squad, Juggernaut, Phoenix Rising, and Scarlet Rose, but Echelon's sudden rise had sent shockwaves through the entire ecosystem.

Club Echelon's popularity was a weird situation. Afterall, this was a club that was just registered and was not even a part of the competitive Pro Alliance yet.

Afterall, there were other requirements to play in the Pro Alliance.

Despite not even playing one in the Pro Alliance yet, the new club managed to garner so much attention simply due to one name..., Lord Doom.

And then, the one question dominated headlines again.

Who is Lord Doom?

...

It was not just the Warstar fan community that jumped into the hype train started by Club Echelon's creation, the analytic community of the pro scene and Warstar in general also reacted.

News casters and analysts jumped on the hype train.

"I don't think people understand what this means. Lord Doom is not just a top-tier player, he's an enigma. A monster. A force of nature. A player with an SSS-Ranked skill is a nightmare for every established club".

>Marcus "IronMind" Walker, Warstar Analyst<

...

"The question of Lord Doom's true identity has finally been answered. I had a close-door interview with Gabriel, Club Phoenix Rising's captain, and he confirmed recent suspicions that Lord Doom is indeed our dear retired God Noah".

>John Paul, Warstar Analyst<

...

"And it's not just Lord Doom- God Noah. The entire team is ridiculous. If Lord Doom is God Noah, then the others should be Aria, Genevieve, Caleb, and Benjamin! These are players who, even as free agents, would have been snatched up by any major club. The fact that they formed their own is absurd".

>Evelyn "StormWatcher" Hayes, Warstar eSports Commentator<

Not just the analysts and commentators jumped into the hype train, pro players themselves and club executives also jumped into the train on interviews.

>Gabriel "Dain Ironvalor" (Phoenix Rising Captain)<

"Gabriel, what do you think about Club Echelon?"

"I always welcome new competition. But this? This is war. If they think they can just walk into the pro scene and take over, God Noah or not, they're dead wrong".

The mind games already started.

...

>Isabella "Stormborn Valor" (Cyber Squad Vice Captain)<

"Noah..., sorry, Lord Doom is terrifying in a solo setting. But Warstar isn't a one-man game. The pro scene is different from ranked PKs. We're waiting for them to join the Pro Alliance next season, we'll see if they can handle it".

...

>Jonathan "Crimson Saint" (Scarlet Rose Captain)<

"To Noah, whenever you want, I'm ready for you. Stop bullying casuals in the game and come face me in the Pro Alliance like a man!"

...

>Lionhearts Legacy (Club Statement)<

"We respect every new club entering the pro scene, but history favors experience. We'll be waiting for them".

The reactions didn't end there, there was also the fan reactions.

Chapter 115: Reactions [2]

The fans jumped into the hype train first.

Fueled by their endless energy, analysts and commentators jumped into the hype train, also attracting pro players and even the pro clubs themselves, and then the baton was handed back to the fans again.

The fan reaction on social media was explosive.

~-----~

*@WarstarInsider: "HOLY SHIT. LORD DOOM IS COMING TO THE PRO SCENE. SOUND THE ALARM!!!"

*@CrazyPsycho: "Who would have believed that Lord Doom was actually God Noah?! I still can't believe it, I actually interacted one-on-one with God Noah! I need to go back to that conversation and archive it, OMG!"

*@RisingChampion: "LOOOOOOOOOOOL Cyber Squad fumbled so hard. You LET this man go? And replaced him with Caster, a rookie? And now he's your direct competition? GGs".

*@ChokedInnit: "Whoever said God Noah was old after last season? Bro, pass me the weed that you guys are on, like wtf! Go watch some Lord Doom compilations online and come say that to me again!"

*@DoomCultist: "Bruhhh! Aria? Genevieve? Caleb? Benjamin? And Noah??? IN ONE TEAM??? Again?! With the Lord Doom Avatar?! Pro clubs are so SCREWED".

*@DonaldTrumpBastardSon: "Guys, I know the season is just tired but I which it can end already! I can't wait for next season man; I can't wait to see Lord Doom in the Pro Alliance! Come on BABY!"

*@UKWarrior: "You guys are seriously meat-riding so hard. You're all letting nostalgia get to you, you all know the true that Noah and his friends are old. They're washed! I bet Echelon doesn't even last a season. Pro play is different. Ranked beasts always flop when they hit the real stage".

*@JustCameForTheDrama: "That guy above me, pass me the weed you're smoking. It's so freaking hot!"

*@DoomForPresident: "First game of the season next season, I need Echelon vs Phoenix Rising, a rematch of last seasons champions league final! The world deserves this! Please, Warstar, make it happen!"

*@CasterFanNo1: "I swear if we don't get a Noah vs Caster rematch in the pro league, I'm rioting".

*@TheDoomProphet: "Warstar just became a damn anime. LORD DOOM AND HIS CREW ARE IN THE PRO SCENE. THIS IS NOT A DRILL. I REPEAT, THIS IS NOT A DRILL".

*@RIPCyberSquad: "Cyber Squad is officially finished. DONE. Echelon just took their soul and their future. I feel bad for Caster, but man..., you let LORD DOOM walk? LMAO".

*@EchelonBeliever: "Bro. Just think about it. Noah, Aria, Genevieve, Caleb, Benjamin, all in one team again, with those broken new Avatars. That's a fcking avengers-level threat!"

*@CopiumPhoenix: "Okay but pro play is different. Ranked gods have flopped before. Echelon ain't proving shit until they win against actual pros".

*@AnonymousMan: "Did bro really say that about God Noah? The... God NOAH? Bro, change that shit you're smoking, it's not good for you".

*@AriaEnthusiast: "Aria in pro play? There's gonna be actual violence. That woman's aggressive playstyle is gonna cause an international incident".

*@CalebMathGod: "I swear Caleb's brain is a cheat code. Dude's gonna be calculating frame data and movement patterns mid-fight like a damn AI".

*@BenjaminPuns: "With that broken unique skill of his, I just know Benjamin is about to make the most infuriating pun of all time during their debut match. Can't wait!"

*@CasterCopium: "Noah vs Caster. It has to happen. The storyline is already there. Echelon vs Cyber Squad, please!"

*@ChrolloRevolution: "But wait..., guys, we seem to be missing something. if Noah and his friends are coming back, does that not mean they're not tired of the Pro scene yet? Does that mean Cyber Squad forced them into early retirement?!"

*@IShowNut: "Now that you say it..., WTF!!!"

*@CyberSquad4Life: "@Cyber Squad @Manager come answer to us, what truly happened?!"

~-----~

From just gushing about Lord Doom and the new Club Echelon, Cyber Squad got caught by a stray bullet, suddenly dragged into the storm.

And then, a revolution started online, a hate revolution.

Countless Warstar fans in England trolled Club Cyber Squad, dragging the club executives, the manager, and the club chief for their poor management, demanding an explanation for God Noah's retirement.

The hate and publicity were so much that Club Cyber Squad could not play ignorant this time, they had to do an impromptu press conference to appease the fans.

In the interview, Cyber Squad's manager finally came true to the public, revealing the truth that he advised God Noah and his friends into retirement.

In the press conference, he sugar-coated it, saying advised but the fans were not having it. He clearly forced God Noah into retirement!

Even after the press conference, for the next few days, a storm of hate and negativity surrounded Club Cyber Squad that affected the club.

And when matchday 2 of the Pro Alliance rolled into town, Cyber Squad's 2nd game of the season, Cyber Squad lost for the 2nd straight game which truly pushed the nerves of the fans to a breaking point.

The abuse and hate became too much, both online and physically as Cyber Squad fans hit the street, demanding for explanations.

It became too much and a day after Cyber Squad's matchday 2 game, Cyber Squad's manager finally filed in his resignation letter.

The manager resigned from the club due to the multiple death threats from fans, some aimed at his family and his only daughter.

Not able to take the abuse, he withdrew from the spotlight.

With someone finally taking the fall, the wrath of the fans was appeased a bit but Cyber Squad's situation was still extremely tense and worrying.

And then, the final thoughts on this whole saga which originated from Club Echelon's registration..., the most anticipated debut in Warstar history.

Most fans of the Pro Alliance, especially those who played in the 11th server were so impatient to see Lord Doom in the Pro Alliance that they could not wait for next season to start.

This was unprecedented in the history of the Pro Alliance.

With Lord Doom leading the charge, Club Echelon was not just a new team; it was a declaration of war on the established elite in England.

Love them or hate them, everyone was watching.

Their first match in the Pro Alliance will be one of the most anticipated in Warstar history.

Can Club Echelon live up to the hype and insane expectations, or will they crumble under the weight of the pro scene?

No one knew for sure.

One thing's for sure though, Warstar in England will never be the same again.

Chapter 116: Popularity surge

While the whole world was burning outside, the culprits responsible for all the chaos meanwhile were inside the game, going about their business like they didn't just start a fire and abandoned it.

Noah and his teammates didn't expect the level of hype that would follow Club Echelon's creation, it shocked them but trust Noah, he took full advantage of the publicity.

Noah knew that one day or another, his true identity behind Lord Doom would be revealed but for it to be revealed in such a manner..., he could not have envisioned it any better.

Alongside his teammates, and Nightingale and his crew, they took full advantage of the publicity for the hiring to man the club building.

Not just for hiring for the club building, but also for recruiting in-game.

Originally, new guilds that are created in the game take a long time to grow.

In-game guilds are divided into 4 distinct categories, the super anonymous guilds, the weak guilds, the pseudo-top guilds, and then the top guilds of the game that are affiliated with teams in the English Pro Alliance.

Every new guild in the game that is not affiliated with a club in the English Pro Alliance automatically starts as an anonymous guild.

To build popularity, it would take time and a lot of effort.

But due to Lord Doom's association with guild Echelon as its guild leader, guild Echelon got a big boost, starting as a weak guild as all Lord Doom fans trooped in, joining the guild to give it an early boost and a solid foundation.

Nightingale's money also played a big role.

But now, with this sudden publicity birth due to Club Echelon's creation, the popularity of guild Echelon in the game skyrocketed.

From a weak guild, guild Echelon's level skyrocketed to the very top of the pseudo-top guilds, just one step from becoming a full-fledged top guild.

And just like that, the threat of guild Echelon that the top guilds in the 11th server feared became a very present reality.

With the guild's sudden rapid expansion, there was a lot of work but Nightingale and his crew were more than happy to take on the job, allowing Noah and his crew to focus on building their in-game Avatars.

Nightingale didn't take on all the expanded work himself with just his friends though. Afterall, money could solve so many problems.

He hired real-world assistants that would also live in Club Echelon's building, but their job description would be defined towards the guild.

Their work was the guild administration on his behalf.

And just like that, a new juggernaut was born in the 11th server, the rapidly developing juggernaut called guild Echelon.

While all of this happened, Noah and his teammates already abandoned all of it as they focused all of their attention on the game and their in-game Avatars.

They needed to get to level 60 as soon as possible.

Not just leveling up, they also focused on their skill points seeking quest, and they started with the team quest, the Song of the Eternal Siren.

...

[WARNING!]

[You have entered the Abyssal Shores!]

[You have triggered the Quest: The Song of the Eternal Siren]

[You have triggered a hidden storyline!]

[Quest Rank: S]

[Recommended Players: 5+]

[Objective: Resist the Eternal Siren's melody and break her curse before she drags all into the abyss.]

[Failure Condition: All party members succumb to her song, dying.]

Aria looked at Noah. "Hidden storyline?"

Noah shrugged. "I dunno".

Aria cursed. "Nothing with you is ever normal, huh?"

Benjamin chuckled. "The walking calamity himself has struck again".

According to Noah, the original quest description says a cursed melody lingers in the ruins of an ancient cathedral, driving all who hear it to madness.

To break the curse, the team must battle waves of enemies while deciphering the forgotten notes of an ancient hymn to restore harmony, but now the objective said resist the Eternal Siren's melody and break her curse before she drags all into the abyss.

The quest has changed due to triggering the hidden storyline. By how much it changed though, they had no idea.

They would have to find out as they played.

Without hesitation, their journey began.

Noah and his team stood at the edge of the Abyssal Shores, a desolate coastline where the sky was forever tinged with a haunting purple hue.

The ocean beyond was black as ink, its surface unnervingly still, until it wasn't.

A faint ripple distorted the water, and the first note of a melancholic melody hummed through the air.

The Song of the Eternal Siren.

The quest had begun.

A translucent, ethereal mist began creeping across the sands, carrying the melody further. It wasn't just a sound; it was an enchantment, a force that dug into the mind, distorting thought, bending reality.

Noah immediately felt the pull, at least his Avatar.

A whisper in his mind.

'Come closer'.

His vision blurred for a split second, the world tilting as if reality itself were drowning as his orientation suffered.

Aria gritted her teeth. "Tch. A mind-control effect?" She unsheathed her twin blades, stabbing one into the sand as an anchor.

"Noah, this isn't what you told me!" She growled.

Noah chuckled awkwardly. "I didn't see this coming too". He defended himself.

Genevieve's eyes flickered with divine light. "This magic..., its ancient. The song doesn't just lure you, it binds your soul to her".

A counter already popped up showing how much of their soul was already bound by the ancient Siren.

Benjamin clapped his hands over his ears. "I swear if this is another one of those irresistible temptation traps, I'm suing the developers".

Caleb's expression remained unreadable. "This is worse than that". He muttered. "The melody adapts. The longer we're exposed, the stronger the pull".

Noah took a deep breath.

He had fought against illusions, against shadow magic, against nightmares that tried to twist his will. But this? This was something else.

A psychological war.

'Worth being a quest that gives skill points'. He thought.

"Well, let's start". He muttered, taking the first step forward.

Chapter 117: Skill points spree [1]

"Well, let's start". Noah muttered, taking the first step forward.

And then from the inky ocean, figures began to rise; warriors in rusted armor, spectral knights with hollow eyes.

[You have encountered the Lost Champions!]

The Lost Champions, those who had succumbed to the siren's melody and were now bound as her eternal guards.

BOOM!

They moved, attacking in synchronized, hypnotic movements, as if still moving to the song's rhythm.

Their swords were imbued with echoes of the melody, each strike carrying a faint hum that threatened to sink deeper into the mind.

As for Noah's counter strategy?

He anchored himself by attuning his movements to a different rhythm, using the clashing of weapons and the sounds of his own breathing as a counterpoint to the siren's song.

His Aetherforge, now a Berserker's Greatsword glowed with pulsating energy, each swing emitting shockwaves that disrupted the eerie harmony.

Beside him, Aria and Benjamin launched aggressive attacks, not allowing the Lost Champions to fully synchronize with the melody.

As for Genevieve, she deployed a holy barrier, a flickering light that fought against the creeping mist.

Caleb summoned shadow tendrils, twisting and distorting the battlefield to interrupt the flow of the melody.

After an intense battle, the Lost Champions collapsed back into the sea, their souls released from the curse. But this was only the beginning.

The ancient Siren took it to the next level.

Her eerie voice grew clearer, no longer just a song carried by the wind but a direct whisper in their minds.

"You cannot fight forever... rest... sink... belong to me..."

The environment began to shift; the ground felt unstable, the ocean seemed closer than before, as if reality itself was bending to her will.

The team's willpower was being tested, and the ones with weaker mental resistance started seeing illusions.

Aria's vision blurred. For a moment, she saw herself standing alone, her teammates all gone, abandoned.

Behind her monitor, Aria knew that this was just an illusion created by the ancient Siren, but there was nothing she could do about it.

'This quest... is harder than expected'. She thought.

Genevieve saw shadowy figures of her past failures, moments where she stumbled in the past, even as far as when she died in the Demon's Tower, the shadowy figures whispering that she wasn't strong enough.

Genevieve was stunned. 'Warstar... is this advanced already?!'

'They can even use player's past experiences to devise quests now?!'

While Aria and Genevieve were caught in illusions, Caleb's mind calculated countless battle scenarios, yet none of them led to survival.

His usual cold logic became his own worst enemy today.

Benjamin's humor faded; a first for him as an overwhelming sense of dread seeped in. it was still just a game, Benjamin secure behind his monitor but when he wanted to say a joke, his in-game Avatar no longer accepted the input.

'Damn! These guys are devious, unfair!'

As for Noah? Noah was still, watching, observing, and analyzing.

Then, he smirked.

"Cute trick".

With a stomp, he drove his greatsword into the earth, sending a shockwave that momentarily disrupted the illusions.

He knew exactly what this was. A mental siege. But a siege required a point of entry, a weakness to exploit.

And if the siren thought she could break them, she was underestimating the wrong team.

Noah called out. "Gene, cast an anti-illusion ward. Caleb, disrupt the melody's frequency. Benjamin, say something, anything, just say something stupid".

"..."

Benjamin blinked, then grinned. "You ever wonder if sirens just need a hug? Like, maybe all this chaos is just an elaborate cry for therapy?"

"...!" Noah almost choked on his own spit.

"Bro, the hell! Where did that come from?" Noah was impressed.

The sheer absurdity of the statement cracked the tension. Just enough for Genevieve's ward to flare to life, purging the illusions.

The siren screeched in frustration.

They had reached the final stage.

BOOM!

It happened suddenly.

The ocean split apart, revealing the siren herself; a towering, ethereal being with flowing silver hair and luminous sapphire eyes.

Her form shifted between beauty and monstrosity; her lower half still submerged in abyssal darkness.

Her song twisted into something more violent, more primal.

Waves crashed against the shore, forming into serpentine water spirits that lunged at them as the melody turned into an auditory weapon, vibrating the air itself and sending sonic shockwaves through the battlefield.

That was it. The final stand.

Noah's strategy? He communicated it to his teammates in an instant through their private group chat after briefly consulting with Caleb.

And then, the execution started.

Genevieve countered the sonic attacks with resonant divine magic, creating soundwaves that disrupted the deadly melody.

Caleb manipulated shadows to distort the siren's voice, interfering with her control.

As for Benjamin, he just yelled nonsense. And somehow, this actually helped.

Genevieve could not wrap her head around it but it was working. 'This unique skill of his is truly crazy..., what were the developers thinking?!'

On the other side, Aria went full offense, launching herself at the siren with relentless sword strikes, not giving her a moment to stabilize.

Noah? He just grinned.

"It's over".

All the pieces in his puzzle finally came together, forming a whole.

Aetherforge pulsed in his hand, once again shifting into its most destructive form, an executioner's greatsword, brimming with explosive energy.

And then with a single leaping strike, Noah cleaved through the siren's chest, severing her physical form.

SHRIEKKKKKKK...!!!

She let out a soul-shaking shriek.

And then she let out one final, sorrowful note before dissolving into mist, her melody fading into silence.

The quest... was complete.

[Congratulations! You and your team have completed the quest, the Song of the Eternal Siren!]

[Skill Points +5]

[You have received additional +10 skill points for hidden storyline!]

[Title Unlocked: Abyssal Songbreaker]

>Grants minor resistance to auditory-based illusions<

[You have received a Unique Item: Siren's Tear]

>A consumable that negates mind-control effects once<

As the battlefield returned to normal, the team exhaled in relief.

Benjamin clutched his chest. "We almost got turned into fish food".

Aria stretched. "Tood bad. Would've loved to punch her again".

Caleb adjusted his glasses. "This was a dangerous one. But... effective".

Genevieve smiled softly. "One quest down. More to go".

Noah, standing at the edge of the dark ocean, just smirked.

This was only the beginning.

Chapter 118: Skill points spree [2]

Noah didn't jump on another skill quest immediately.

This was because after the clash against the ancient Siren and all the XP that he got from it, he finally leveled up to level 40.

His teammates were not quite at his level yet when it came to leveling speed, but they were also mostly at level 38, Caleb already at level 39.

So instead of facing another skill quest immediately, Noah instead took his friends dungeoning where they would get more XP to raise their levels as fast as possible, the hardest dungeons with the most XP-giving monsters.

For the next few days, they ground non-stop for XP and when Noah was already level 41, the last of them, Genevieve finally hit level 40.

And still, Noah didn't jump to the next skill quest yet.

He decided to level up Aetherforge again first.

And so, he took on the next level up test for the SSS-ranked weapon even as Aria and Caleb also took the level up tests for the Blades of Aamon and Hell's Key.

Personally, for Noah, this time's iteration of the level up test was far easier than the first one and he soon understood why after getting to its end.

The reason why the level up test was easier was because this time, Aetherforge didn't unlock a new weapon form for him, only raising the level cap of the SSS-Ranked weapon to level 40 and improving the weapon's lethality.

When Aria and Caleb were also done with their level up tests, together, they took on the next team quest among the skill point quests that Noah found.

They took on the Chaos Gambit quest.

[Team Quest: The Chaos Gambit]

[Quest Rank: S]

[Recommended Players: 5+]

[Objective: Survive the Gambit of Chaos, disrupt the Mad Jester's game, and break his control over the realm.]

[Failure Condition: The team loses all its Gambit Tokens or falls to the Jester's tricks. Welcome to the twisted invitation.]

Crack!

The world shattered around them.

One moment, Noah and his team were standing on solid ground.

The next, reality itself fractured into shifting puzzle pieces, swirling together in a vortex of colors, laughter, and madness.

A grand theater stage formed beneath their feet, lit by floating chandeliers dripping with liquid moonlight.

A single voice echoed from the darkness above.

"Ladies and gentlemen, welcome... to the CHAOS GAMBIT!"

A figure descended from the shadows, spinning midair like a marionette with invisible strings. He landed in a low bow, arms outstretched.

[WARNING!]

[You have encountered the Mad Jester of Pandemonium!]

He was tall and gaunt, clad in a harlequin's outfit that shifted colors unpredictably; red, then gold, then pure static.

His mask was split down the middle, half a grin, half a frown, his exposed mouth stretched into an exaggerated smile.

In his gloved hand, a deck of gleaming obsidian cards shuffled themselves with an eerie hum.

"Now, now! You've accepted my little game, which means you know the rules... or do you?" He cackled. "No matter! The rules don't matter! Until they do! Let's BEGIN!"

With a snap of his fingers, the air rippled like glass and suddenly, five floating Gambit Tokens appeared before the team.

Each one was a glowing, spinning coin imprinted with an arcane sigil.

Genevieve narrowed her eyes. "I assume losing these is bad".

The Jester clapped gleefully. "Ohhh, terribly bad! You see, dear players, these tokens are your lives. Lose them all, and your souls... are mine".

Noah grinned. "Then we just have to win".

The Jester's eyes twinkled. "Such confidence! I love it. Let's begin the first round, shall we?"

With a flourish, he flicked a card into the air. It flashed with crimson light.

"Round one! The Fool's Labyrinth!"

The stage collapsed beneath them.

The team fell... and fell... and landed in a shifting, surreal maze, its corridors twisting in impossible directions.

The walls were checkered, alternating between solid stone and transparent voids that showed glimpses of other possible versions of the maze.

The objective? Escape before time runs out.

The catch? The maze itself lies.

Every path looked different to each person. What was an exit to one was a dead end to another. Shadows whispered false directions, the walls shifted when no one was looking, and the Jester's mocking laughter echoed throughout the halls.

Noah's eyes flickered. The quest itself was not exactly how his investigations told him, but with the information he had, he instantly developed a counter-strategy.

He instructed everyone to close their eyes for five seconds at a time, relying on their other senses to move. This disrupted the maze's illusions by not allowing the brain to process false pathways.

Caleb used spatial markers; small, enchanted objects that resisted illusion to keep track of the true paths.

Genevieve's divine magic pulsed in waves, dispelling weaker enchantments.

Aria brute-forced through walls that turned out to be phantoms, revealing hidden paths.

As for Benjamin? He literally just ran in a straight line screaming. "I don't believe in you, maze!" And it actually worked.

The moment they reached the true exit, the world flipped upside down and they were back on the Jester's stage.

The Jester pouted. "You're no fun. But fine! Let's make it harder".

He flicked another card, it burned with violet flames, and then...

"Round Two!" He yelled with a grin. "The Gambler's Dilemma!"

Five thrones rose from the stage, each one an obsidian seat carved with mocking grins and wide, hollow eyes.

In front of each throne, a deck of cards appeared, swirling with arcane energy.

The Jester twirled in delight. "A simple game! Sit down, draw a card, and accept the consequences. Or... refuse to draw and sacrifice a Gambit Token. Decisions, decisions!" He laughed.

The team glanced at each other. This was a test of risk and reward.

If they played, they could win powerful buffs. And if they lost..., well, the Jester didn't put death on the table.

But he didn't have to.

Noah sat first. He flipped his card.

[Ace of Blades]

>All attacks gain a 20% chance to ignore armor for the next round<

He smirked. "Not bad".

Aria went next.

[Queen of Shadows]

>Your own teammates will briefly perceive you as an enemy".

"...What?" Aria looked at the others. "Is that even possible?"

Genevieve hesitated. "Does this perhaps work like a Paladin Tank's taunt skill?"

The effect activated immediately and for the next thirty seconds, like Genevieve guessed, Aria was surrounded by a Paladin's provoke skill aura; every Avatar instinctively saw her as a hostile entity.

She had to dodge their attacks while cursing Noah's name.

Benjamin flipped his card.

[Jester's Favor]

>You are completely immune to the next round's challenge<

Benjamin stood up, stretched, and laughed. "Ha! Finally, a game that recognizes my brilliance".

Genevieve hesitated, then flipped hers.

[The Inverted Healer]

>For the next round, your healing will harm, and your damage will heal<

Genevieve blinked. "That's... extremely bad".

Caleb narrowed his eyes. He was the last one left. He took a deep breath and flipped his card.

[The Gambler's Wild]

>Choose one player to reroll their card effect<

Without hesitation, he pointed at Genevieve.

"Boo!" The Jester pouted. "You're no fun". But the effect triggered.

Genevieve's card flickered and changed.

[...]

Chapter 119: Skill points spree [3]

Genevieve's card flickered and changed.

[Shield of the Gambit]

>For the next round, you may negate one effect of your choice<

"...I'll take it". Genevieve muttered.

Satisfied, the Jester snapped his fingers. The game board vanished, and the next card burned with golden light.

"Final round!" He grinned, gesticulating wildly with his hands. "The Chaos Gauntlet!"

He jumped excitedly on the platform. "Get ready to be skeedadled!"

Without hesitation, it started.

BZZZ!

The world collapsed into a battlefield of pure insanity. Instantly, the laws of physics became a meaningless nursery rhyme in this realm.

The world went mad.

Gravity inverted at random intervals. Time stuttered, looping certain attacks. Enemies appeared and disappeared in an instant. Reality itself twisted, creating unpredictable terrain.

That was not all though. For the first time since he started this crazy test, the Jester finally descended into battle himself.

Wielding an impossible number of weapons; daggers, swords, playing cards that became guillotines in mid-air, he seemed unstoppable.

He was everywhere at once, teleporting unpredictably.

He didn't attack immediately though, joking and mocking the players, trolling their helplessness in the face of overwhelming strength.

This seemed like a normal design but Noah knew. 'They did this to make the situation a bit fair to challengers, huh?'

It gave challengers a breather, a few seconds more to think and plan.

In the grand scheme of things, it meant little since few teams in the world could clear this quest. Coincidentally though, Noah's team was part of the 0.1% teams in the world that had a chance of clearing this quest.

And yes, in that little time, coming clutch again for his team, Noah revealed his plan to his teammates. He already devised a counter-strategy.

With a grin, he started it. "Follow my lead!"

Noah synchronized the team's movements to adapt, treating the fight like an unpredictable rhythm battle. In a fight against a Jester, try not to outsmart him.

Rather, try to be crazier than him.

It was crazy, but this was the crazy strategy that Noah took.

His teammates didn't hesitate though despite how crazy his plan sounded.

Following his plan, Caleb created temporal disruptions, using the glitches in time to predict the next shift.

Genevieve blocked a game-breaking effect with her Gambit Shield, while Aria as the tip of the spear like always hunted for the Jester's real form, using her aggression to keep him from controlling the battlefield.

As for Benjamin, he literally rode one of the glitches like a surfboard, yelling. "CHAOS IS MY ELEMENT!"

Afterall, he literally had the Jester's favor.

With 5 extremely skilled players taking on the Jester, the indomitable Jester no longer seemed as indomitable, seeming foolish instead.

Noah out-crazed the Jester!

And then, the final blow came when Noah tapped into Aetherforge's resonance, severing the Jester's dimensional tethers and forcing him back into his core form.

One decisive strike.

BAM!

Game over.

The Jester laughed as he faded.

"You win... this time. But oh, what a show you gave me!"

The quest system lit up with a notification the next moment.

[Congratulations! You and your team have completed the quest, The Chaos Gambit!]

[Skill Points +5]

[For managing to entertain the Jester, you have received +5 additional skill points!]

[Title Unlocked: Gambit Master]

[Unique Reward: Jester's Coin]

>A single-use item that forces a reroll on any random effect<

As the world settled, the team just stood in silence.

But then Benjamin laughed. "Hehe, what a quest, I love it!"

Genevieve glared at him.

He coughed. "Well, that was absolute madness".

Aria huffed. "I hate that clown".

Noah just smirked, looking at them. "Next quest?"

...

London, England, Club Echelon building...

It was already night when the 4 players of Club Echelon completed the new skill points quest with their captain.

And so, when Noah asked 'next quest?' the first thing Aria did was look outside. And then she looked at the others.

Benjamin reacted first, pumping a fist excitedly. "All-nighter! Come on guys, let's do an all-nighter!"

Aria looked at Caleb who shrugged. "I'm also in the mood".

She looked at Genevieve who nodded.

"That's it then" But Aria stood up. "You guys should go ahead; I need to go speak with my boyfriend first. I'll meet you guys soon".

Groans quickly filled the room but Aria ignored them, walking off.

...

Aria left to her personal quarters in the gigantic club building.

She sighed as she leaned back against her bed, the dim glow of her personal gaming setup still casting shadows across the room. The clock read past midnight, and she knew she should've called earlier.

Still, she pressed the call button.

A few rings later, Gabriel's voice came through, warm and teasing.

"Wow, a call from the elusive Aria Belmont?" He joked. "What did I do to earn this honor?"

Aria groaned. "Don't start. I already feel bad".

"Oh? Should I get a notebook and mark the date? Aria Belmont feels bad?" he chuckled, but there was something in his voice, something softer. "What's up, babe?"

Aria opened her mouth to speak, but then she paused.

Her face changed. "Benjamin!" She growled. "You better leave that place before I resume my boxing practice with your face!"

There was a crashing sound outside her door.

"Ouch!"

And then the sound of someone scurrying away.

Only after a few seconds did Aria focus back on her call.

She hesitated for a second, gripping the phone tighter. "I just... I know I haven't been around much. I know our initial agreement was to play from home, but...," she sighed, not knowing how to continue.

"I'm either at the club, grinding in the game, or sleeping like the dead. I haven't even been over in days".

Gabriel exhaled. "Yeah, I noticed".

Silence stretched between them, not heavy, but not exactly comfortable either.

Aria ran a hand through her hair. "I don't want you to think I don't care. I do. It's just... this whole thing with Club Echelon is big, Gabriel".

She took a deep breath. "It's real. And I want to give it everything I've got".

Gabriel was quiet for a moment, and she worried she'd said something wrong. The almighty Aria feeling this way in itself was a shocker.

How the mighty have fallen.

Love could humble even the most valiant of heroes.

Gabriel finally answered, and it wasn't what she expected.

"I get it".

She blinked. "You do?"

He chuckled. "Aria, I know you. Have you forgotten how I met you? You were raging over losing to club Phoenix Rising". He chuckled. "And I know you started dating me at first so you could abuse me to get back at Gabriel, Dain Ironvalor's controller since we shared the same name".

"Uhh...," Aria coughed awkwardly.

Gabriel chuckled. "I know you Aria," he repeated. "You don't do things halfway. When you commit, you commit".

"I wouldn't be dating you if I didn't love that about you".

A breath she hadn't realized she was holding escaped her. "So, you're not mad?"

"Nah. But I do miss you".

That hit harder than she expected.

"...I miss you too".

More silence. This time, it was softer, like a blanket instead of a weight.

Then Gabriel hummed. "So, what if I just joined?"

"Huh?"

Chapter 120: Skill points spree [4]

Aria was confused at first but when she finally started comprehending, she thought she comprehended wrong.

She sat up. "What?"

Gabriel chuckled. "Nothing too serious".

"I mean, I work in analytics anyway. Technical analysis, game data tracking, competitor analysis, why not put it to use at Club Echelon?"

"You guys are building something big, and I know I can help, so why not? Most importantly, we'll be able to stay close together".

Aria's mind raced, and before she knew it she was blushing.

This..., the idea was solid but still.

Her boyfriend, working in the same place at her, with her friends? With Caleb and Genevieve? With that maniac, Benjamin?

She felt her mind racing..., did she want this?

In that moment, Aria didn't know exactly how she felt. On one hand, she loved her boyfriend and missed him but the idea of acting loved-up in front of those bastards left her blushing in shame.

'Dammit!'

'All my steeze!' She felt like crying.

But then, a question reared its way into her mind. 'Am I ashamed of flaunting my relationship?'

'Am I ashamed of Gabriel?'

As soon as that question came, she froze.

Aria was a warrior, a fighter.

From a young age, despite being a girl with a relatively slim frame, she was never bullied. Rather, she was the bully.

From a young age, she was not one to back down from a fight, any challenge.

She loved confrontations.

This was what also brought her to love Warstar. Meeting that annoying guy in the game one day, fighting against him in a game she thought she was so good at, to be beaten so thoroughly hit her competitive spot.

'Over my dead body for me to surrender without a fight!'

'Noah huh? I won't stop until I beat him!'

And that was how the legend of Sprinkling Brooks came about.

And that was why, again, at this moment, faced with the conundrum of being ashamed of her boyfriend, Aria's competitive spirit revolted aggressively.

'Me? Ashamed?'

'Preposterous!'

"Gabriel, come now!"

"Huh?"

Aria froze, and then she chuckled. "Sorry, my bad".

She finally managed to calm down.

The idea was... solid. No, brilliant. Gabriel was sharp; his ability to break down complex patterns, track trends, and predict opponent behavior was ridiculous.

Even if she removed her personal feelings from the equation, an employee of his talents would be a massive asset to club Echelon.

She took a deep breath. "You're actually serious?"

Gabriel chuckled again. "I wouldn't say it if I wasn't".

Aria smirked. "Well, well, look at you. Trying to mix business with pleasure?"

"Oh, absolutely. Gotta keep my goal close, don't I?"

She laughed. "I'll talk to Nightingale. But honestly? I'd love to have you on board".

Gabriel's voice softened. "Then its settled. No more 'I feel bad' calls, alright? We'll figure it out. Together".

Aria smiled. "Yeah. Together".

As soon as the call came to an end, Aria navigated through her phone before putting a call to her boss.

As soon as Nightingale picked up the call, she laid out the proposition to him.

Nightingale didn't hesitate.

And just like that, Gabriel was hired.

With that, Aria's personal business was finally settled. Going back to the training grounds where her friends waited for her, Aria had a spring in her step.

Benjamin noticed it. "Umm, you good?"

Aria looked at him, smiling eerily. "Next time you try to eavesdrop on my conversation with my boyfriend, you know what I'd do?"

Benjamin chuckled nervously. "No?"

Instead of answering with words, she made a cutting sign across her neck.

Benjamin gulped. "Won't happen again!"

"Better".

And with that, the group of friends enthusiastically jumped into the game.

They would play all night.

...

After the Chaos Gambit, they didn't have to think to know their next target in the list of quests that Noah had prepared for them.

This time, Noah targeted the Harbinger's Paradox quest.

Noah and his team regrouped in a quiet part of the city, checking their status and tallying their newly earned skill points. Of course, with his SSS-Rank 10x skill points unique skill, he got far more than his teammates.

Benjamin could not help looking at him from time to time in envy.

Noah chuckled. "Sorry Ben, you can't be me".

"Get lost!"

Noah laughed.

And then, he faced them. "We're not done," he said, his voice carrying that undeniable certainty that made it impossible to argue. "Next, we're taking on the Harbinger's Paradox".

Aria raised an eyebrow. "The what now?"

Genevieve frowned. "All these quests, none of them are common..., just where the hell did you hear about them?"

Noah smirked. "Let's just say I have my ways".

The team exchanged glances, and then, as expected, they followed his lead.

The quest began at an abandoned ruin at the edge of the Twilight Rift, a desolate landscape where time itself fractured unpredictably.

Unlike other locations in Warstar, the Rift wasn't bound to a single era. At any given moment, remnants of past battles, future catastrophes, or forgotten civilizations could manifest, all effects of the mysterious warlord who was the main character this time.

As they stepped into the ruin, the system notification flashed.

[You have entered a Distorted Time Zone!]

[Quest Activated: The Harbinger's Paradox]

A spectral figure stood in the center of the ruins, cloaked in shadows that bled into the air like ink in water.

Its presence twisted reality, shifting the surroundings between different timelines. One moment, the team stood in a pristine temple and the next, it was nothing but rubble, and the sky turned crimson with an impending apocalypse.

The figure turned toward them; its voice layered with echoes of countless lifetimes. "Humans..."

"You seek knowledge beyond your time... but are you prepared to pay the price?"

Before anyone could respond, the world broke.

CRACK!

Noah and his team suddenly found themselves standing in a vast battlefield, surrounded by armies locked in a desperate struggle.

The banners bore symbols they didn't recognize and yet, somehow, Noah's system identified it as an event that never happened in Warstar's official lore.

Genevieve's breath hitched. "This... this isn't pat of the game's history, what the hell!"

"Because it wasn't meant to be," Caleb murmured, eyes narrowed. "We're in a timeline that was erased".

They all looked at Noah.

He coughed. "It didn't say this in the description".

"F*ck!"