

Tyrant 98

Chapter 98: Against the Clock

Trafalgar collapsed onto the stone floor, chest heaving with ragged breaths. His muscles burned, and his mana swirled inside his core like a storm. Facing a monster one rank above him had drained every ounce of strength he had.

'Damn it... throwing myself at a Pulse Core when I'm barely halfway through Spark... I'm not invincible. If Cynthia hadn't been here, I'd be roasted ash by now.'

He tilted his head just enough to see her. Cynthia walked a few steps behind him, bow still in hand, her face as calm as if the fight with the Infernal Warden had barely cost her a drop of sweat.

'Third Core... no, she's close to the Fourth already. At this pace, she'll leave me two cores behind. Sixteen years old, orphan, no backing... how the hell does someone like her get this strong? She must have a monstrous talent, even greater than her brother's. Bartholomew is valuable as an ally because of his class, but she's dangerous in her own way.'

He let his eyes close for a moment—only to feel something poke his forehead.

"What now? Let me rest a bit," he muttered, opening one eye.

Cynthia crouched in front of him, tapping his head with the tip of her bow.

"We don't have time. We need to reach the center."

Trafalgar groaned. "For what? There's no reward. It's just a damn test."

"They said they were watching us. Our performance decides our classes. I'd rather secure a proper class than end up with garbage." She straightened, extending a hand to him. "Since we're stuck together, it'll be easier to reach the core. We've got an hour and a half left."

'Shit... she's right. If this really decides the quality of our classes, I can't afford to slack.'

With a sigh, Trafalgar pushed himself up. Cynthia's hand still hovered in front of him, and he raised an eyebrow, surprised.

"What's this? Your anger's gone already?"

The moment she remembered her earlier fury, she quickly pulled her hand back. Trafalgar stumbled, nearly falling again.

"Hey!"

"Come on, before I change my mind and leave you behind." She turned sharply and started walking.

Trafalgar clicked his tongue but followed. 'Tsk... what a damn temper.'

The labyrinth stretched endlessly, its halls of black stone branching and twisting like the veins of a colossal beast. Torches lit the walls at uneven intervals, their flames dim, offering little more than a gloomy glow.

Trafalgar walked ahead, sword in hand, each step cautious. Cynthia followed close behind, bow resting lightly in her grip, her gaze darting across the shadows.

"Why are we lost again?" she asked sharply, her voice echoing faintly off the walls.

"Because you told me to go first," Trafalgar shot back, not bothering to look over his shoulder. "What did you expect, a built-in compass in my head?"

She scoffed. "You've been taking turns at random. No wonder we keep circling."

"Random? I'll have you know I'm relying on instinct."

Cynthia gave a low, humorless laugh. "That explains everything."

Trafalgar thought. 'She's pissed, but she still follows me. If she really thought I was useless, she'd have left already.'

Another corner, another endless stretch of stone—but this time the air shifted. Less suffocating, less heavy. Ahead, the labyrinth opened into a vast chamber. At its center, a platform of carved stone glowed faintly, runes etched into its surface pulsing with a steady rhythm.

Cynthia stopped, eyes narrowing. "The center... we found it."

Trafalgar tilted his head, a grin tugging at his lips. "Well, would you look at that. And you were whining about instincts."

Before Cynthia could retort, Trafalgar's grin faded. His gaze sharpened.

Someone was already there.

A tall figure stood near the glowing platform, golden hair catching the dim light, eyes like burning embers fixed on the entrance.

'Oh, come on. Not this fucker again.'

Trafalgar froze at the sight of the figure, jaw tightening.

Standing tall, golden hair, Alfons au Vaelion radiated arrogance without even moving. His crimson eyes glowed faintly, fixed not on them, but on the glowing platform. He leaned casually against the wall, as if waiting for prey to wander in.

"...Fuck," Trafalgar muttered under his breath.

"What?" Cynthia whispered.

"That bastard. Again." His grip tightened on Maledicta, the blade humming faintly. "I beat him once already, and he still keeps showing up. Is he stalking me or something?"

Cynthia's gaze lingered on Alfons for a moment before she spoke. "You really shouldn't talk about someone from one of the Eight Great Families like that."

Trafalgar turned, smirk tugging at his lips. "You seem to forget I belong to one too."

That caught her off guard. Her eyes widened slightly. "Wait... that's true I forgot."

"Mhm," Trafalgar said, amused at her reaction. "What, shocked? Guess that explains why you were so eager to shoot me earlier."

Cynthia stiffened, clearly remembering. She quickly muttered, "For the record, I wasn't actually going to kill you. That was just... a joke."

"Oh?" Trafalgar raised a brow, grin widening. "Didn't sound like a joke when you were aiming for my head."

Her cheeks flushed, and she stammered, "I—It's not like that!"

Trafalgar let out a low chuckle, his laughter bouncing off the stone walls. "You're just like Bartholomew. Always so easy to fluster."

The sound of his laugh carried farther than he intended.

Alfons's head snapped toward the shadows where they hid. His crimson eyes flared with recognition, locking on Trafalgar.

"COME OUT, BASTARD!" Alfons's voice boomed, filled with rage. "This time I won't hold back!"

Trafalgar exhaled slowly, muttering under his breath, "Well, shit."

Trafalgar stepped out from the shadows, Maledicta already in his hand. Alfons straightened, lips curling into a venomous smile.

"There you are," Alfons sneered. "Last time you humiliated me in front of others. This time I'll crush you."

Trafalgar rolled his shoulders, forcing a lazy grin even though his mana reserves were thin. "Funny, you talk big for someone who already lost. Guess you like second chances."

Alfons's eyes blazed. With a flick of his sleek wand, carved from white wood and trimmed with golden symbols, sparks crackled across the air, swelling into a wave of flame.

Behind the stone pillar, Cynthia crouched low, bowstring drawn but not yet loosed.

Trafalgar murmured quietly, just loud enough for her to hear, "Can you do that arrow thing again? He hasn't noticed you yet. I'll keep him busy as long as I can."

Cynthia's eyes narrowed. She gave a sharp nod, mana flowing into her arrow but holding steady, waiting.

Alfons slashed his wand downward, releasing the wave of flame. Trafalgar darted to the side, invoking [Severance Step]. His figure blurred, cutting across the blaze in a curved arc, slipping past the fire as if it barely touched him.

He reappeared at Alfons's flank, Maledicta extended, the blade humming with pressure.

"Still too slow," Alfons spat, spinning with a burst of wind from his wand.

Trafalgar gritted his teeth, forcing his body forward again, blurring once more into another curved arc—every motion cutting away the distance between them.

‘Just a little closer... if I can keep his eyes on me, she’ll have the perfect shot.’

Alfons raised his wand high, mana swelling violently around him, his focus entirely on Trafalgar.

Trafalgar vanished with [Severance Step], closing the gap in a blur of speed—while Cynthia remained hidden, her arrow trembling with power, waiting for the right moment.