

# An Understated Dominance [On-Going]

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Chapter 2526

“This...”

Dustin hesitated on purpose and didn't answer right away.

Nathaniel watched him fall into deep thought and became even more convinced that Dustin was weighing the pros and cons.

He leaned in slightly, his smile growing warmer. “Brother Rhys, you know how important the Dracan essence is to me. If I can gather enough of it, my luck will turn—and with that, taking the throne will become much easier. When that day comes, I promise, I won't treat you unfairly.”

As he spoke, Nathaniel carefully watched Dustin's face, trying to spot the slightest change or sign of hesitation.

Dustin finally looked up and met his eyes, a faint flicker of thought flashing across his gaze.

He pressed his lips together before speaking slowly, “Your Highness is right. The Dracan essence wasn't easy to get. I went through a lot of trouble for it. And if I hand it over to you—the Third Prince—I'll likely offend the other two.”

He paused intentionally, not finishing the sentence, but the meaning was clear.

“Brother Rhys, you can rest easy,” Nathaniel said immediately, thumping his chest with confidence. “This matter stays between you, me, and the heavens. No third party will ever know. And even if Tristan or Matthias catch wind of it, I'll do everything in my power to protect you. No one will threaten you under my watch!”

His tone was firm, his eyes sharp and full of conviction.

“Your Highness speaks with such sincerity—how could I not be moved?” Dustin responded, then shifted the topic. “But I do have one more question.”

“Of course, Brother Rhys. Ask me anything.” Nathaniel's eyes lit up. As long as Dustin was willing to hand over the Dracan essence, he'd agree to almost any condition.

“How confident are you in your ability to claim the throne?” Dustin asked bluntly.

“Oh?”

Nathaniel raised an eyebrow, a bit surprised. He hadn't expected this question. Up until now, Dustin had made it clear he didn't want to get involved in royal affairs.

But now, it seemed like he might be reconsidering.

After a moment's thought, Nathaniel replied with a meaningful smile, "If you give me the Dracan essence, I'd say I have at least a 50% chance of success."

Then he added, "But if you're willing to support me as well, I'd be at least 80% sure."

Dustin wasn't just a Grandmaster—he also had the backing of the West Lucozia Palace. His personal strength and influence made him a major force in Dragonmarsh. Far more useful than most royals.

In truth, even 80% was a conservative estimate. With West Lucozia Palace behind him, Nathaniel could easily overpower Tristan and Matthias—even if they joined forces.

Dustin didn't answer right away. He quietly took a sip of tea, as if savoring both the drink and Nathaniel's words.

Nathaniel grew anxious at the silence but tried not to show it. He pushed down his emotions and continued:

"Brother Rhys, you're a wise man. With civil strife on the horizon, someone in your position won't be able to stay neutral for long. Even if you don't think about yourself, you must consider the future of the West Lucozia Palace."

"If my older brothers take the throne, knowing their personalities, they won't tolerate West Lucozia's existence. Their first move will be to suppress any power they see as a threat."

"But I'm not like them. I care about the nation and the people. I understand how much West Lucozia has done for Dragonmarsh."

"If you choose to stand with me, I can promise not only generous treatment for you, but also long-term peace and protection for West Lucozia Palace. And if you don't believe me, I'll swear it right now!"

He raised his hand, ready to make an oath.

Dustin found the gesture a bit amusing.

Grace was right—this guy really is thick-skinned, he thought.

Still, he kept a serious face and replied, "Your Highness is too kind. I'm honored by your sincerity. But this is an important decision. I need some time to think it through. I hope Your Highness will understand."

“Of course,” Nathaniel said with a smile. “I respect your caution. How about this—stay at my residence tonight and take your time to think it over. I’ll have my staff prepare some entertainment so you can be comfortable.”

Dustin knew better than to rush into anything. That might backfire.

“In that case, I appreciate Your Highness’s hospitality.” He clasped his fists respectfully.

“Come, the food and wine are ready. We’re like old friends now—let’s eat and chat together.” Nathaniel was all smiles as he personally led Dustin to the dining area.

It was noon, and Nathaniel had prepared an elaborate spread—fit for royalty.

Right now, though, Nathaniel was more interested in winning over Dustin than in the Dracan essence.

The essence might improve his luck, but it wasn’t a sure bet.

Securing the support of Grandmaster Dustin—and through him, the West Lucozia Palace—was a much safer path to the throne.

And once he had West Lucozia and the Spanner family on his side, the emperor’s seat would practically be his.

## Chapter 2527

During the meal, Nathaniel had two beautiful women join him at the table.

Since ancient times, even the greatest heroes have found it hard to resist the allure of a stunning woman. Sometimes, a breathtaking beauty can be more tempting than wealth, power, or status.

But Dustin remained composed in the face of this gesture. He didn’t act overly pleased, nor did he reject it. He treated the woman beside him with respectful courtesy—joining her for a few drinks to liven the mood, but nothing more.

However, his calm demeanor gave Nathaniel a different impression.

To Nathaniel, Dustin seemed to be looking down on the people around him.

Then again, considering Dustin’s background, ordinary women likely didn’t impress him. If he wanted to get a reaction, he’d need to bring out something truly remarkable.

Looks like it’s time to send in his most prized beauty to test the waters.

After the meal, Nathaniel personally led Dustin to the martial arts training ground inside his estate.

The sun was shining brightly over the open-air arena, where more than a hundred armored soldiers were locked in intense training.

These warriors were clearly well-built, highly trained, and radiated strength. One glance was enough to see that they were elite troops—handpicked and rigorously drilled.

Each one could easily hold the rank of colonel or lieutenant in the military.

Dustin scanned the field. The strength of this elite squad was on par with, if not superior to, the Royal Law Enforcement Team in West Lucozia.

For this group, being an innate warrior was merely the starting point. The two commanding generals had even reached the level of martial arts masters—and not just any masters, either.

Their overall power was astonishing. In fact, this unit alone could easily wipe out an entire noble family.

This was likely Nathaniel's hidden strength.

Of course, this was only what Dustin could see. Who knows how many other experts were lurking in the shadows?

The fact that Nathaniel had risen above the other princes to become a strong contender for the throne clearly wasn't by luck.

"Brother Rhys, what do you think of my troops?" Nathaniel asked with a smile.

He had brought Dustin here to show off his power—an indirect way of expressing goodwill and demonstrating strength.

"They're outstanding," Dustin said, nodding in approval. "Elite soldiers like these could each take on a hundred enemies. Their combat skills are truly impressive."

"I didn't expect Your Highness to have such a formidable force at your disposal. I'm genuinely impressed."

"Haha! This unit was just put together casually—nothing official," Nathaniel said with a modest smile.

"Your Highness is too humble. A team you 'casually' assembled is already on par with some centuries-old sects," Dustin replied.

He wasn't exaggerating. With two high-level martial arts masters, over a dozen half-step masters, and hundreds of innate-level warriors, their combined strength surpassed many major sects.

What made them even more dangerous was the discipline. These soldiers were specially trained to fight as a unit. Their ability to follow orders and coordinate attacks significantly amplified their killing power—far beyond what ordinary martial arts groups could handle.

“Brother Rhys, these soldiers still have room to grow. Since you’re here, why not train them a little? Show them what it really means to face a master,” Nathaniel suggested.

On the surface, he was showing off his strength. But in truth, he was also looking to take advantage of the opportunity to sharpen his troops.

These soldiers were experienced, sure—but they’d never had the chance to go up against someone from the top tier of the martial world.

Now that Dustin was here, why waste the chance?

“Your Highness, are you sure that’s a good idea?” Dustin asked, a little hesitant.

These men were Nathaniel’s prized warriors. If something went wrong, it could backfire.

“Oh, don’t worry. It’s just sparring—no weapons involved. Just a bit of guidance. Honestly, some of them are getting too cocky. They could use a wake-up call,” Nathaniel said with a relaxed smile.

“Well then, if that’s what Your Highness wants, I’ll give them a few pointers,” Dustin agreed. He clearly understood Nathaniel’s intentions.

He had to admit—Nathaniel was clever, never missing a chance to get something out of a situation.

“Perfect.” Nathaniel smiled, then stepped forward and clapped his hands.

The soldiers, who had been practicing hard, stopped immediately.

“Form up!”

A burly, bearded general shouted the command.

In just two breaths, the previously scattered formation was back in perfect order.

Each soldier stood tall like a javelin, eyes sharp, energy fierce.

“That’s Deputy General Mateo Veilleux,” Nathaniel said, pointing to the bearded man. “And the one next to him with the spear is Deputy General Emmett Trottier.”

“Greetings, Your Highness! What are your orders?” Mateo asked, stepping forward and saluting with clasped fists.

“This is Mr. Rhys—a true master. Select a few men so he can offer them some guidance,” Nathaniel ordered.

“Hmm?”

Mateo turned to Dustin, raising his eyebrows slightly. His eyes showed clear skepticism.

To him, Dustin didn’t look like much—certainly not someone capable of standing toe-to-toe with elite soldiers like his.

## Chapter 2528

“Your Highness, I’ve trained these soldiers to be lethal. If they injure this distinguished guest, the consequences could be serious.”

Though Mateo’s words were indirect, his message was clear—If you’re not strong enough, don’t get involved. You’ll only end up humiliated.

Emmett stood silently beside him, but the look he shot Dustin was full of disdain.

How could a young man with such soft, delicate features possibly compare to these battle-hardened elites? He likely came from a noble family and knew the prince, now trying to prove himself in front of others.

“You all really don’t know what’s important,” Nathaniel said with a slight shake of his head and a smile. “If any of you can land a hit on Mr. Rhys, I’ll reward you with a thousand gold coins. But honestly, I doubt any of you can manage that.”

The mention of such a large reward immediately fired up the soldiers. Their eyes lit with excitement, eager to charge forward and put Dustin to the test.

“Since Your Highness has said so, I’ll assign a few men to give this guest a challenge,” Mateo replied. He turned, pointed at five of his strongest soldiers, and barked, “You five, step forward!”

“Yes!” the soldiers responded in unison, stepping into the center of the training arena.

Years of intense training had shaped them into intimidating figures. They radiated a fierce aura, and their eyes were sharp, like tigers ready to pounce.

“Brother Rhys, my men can get a bit arrogant,” Nathaniel said with a lighthearted tone. “Let’s have you teach them a lesson today.”

“If Your Highness requests it, I’m happy to oblige.” Dustin nodded and walked calmly to the center, standing across from the five soldiers.

He was composed and grounded, his gaze steady and unreadable.

These men were indeed elite, but given his current level, they posed no real threat. Unless they had an army of thousands, they were no match for him.

“Do your best—don’t embarrass His Highness!” Mateo ordered sternly.

He might have looked down on Dustin before, but now that it was a matter of honor, he wouldn’t allow his men to hold back.

“Please, go ahead,” Dustin said, motioning politely.

“Begin!” Mateo shouted.

The soldiers sprang into action immediately.

They moved as a unit, surrounding Dustin in a wide arc. Two soldiers rushed from the left—one aimed a sweeping kick at Dustin’s legs, while the other leapt into the air, swinging a heavy punch toward his face.

On the right, one soldier charged with a short stick, striking rapidly to cut off Dustin’s escape. Another moved with eerie speed, circling like a ghost, looking for an opening in Dustin’s defense.

But Dustin remained calm.

He shifted his body slightly, dodging the sweeping kick, and lifted his left leg just enough to block the incoming punch—effortlessly.

The soldier’s fist slammed into what felt like a brick wall. A sharp pain shot up his arm, and he let out an involuntary grunt.

Without missing a beat, Dustin turned and kicked his right leg like a spinning whip. His heel struck the wrist of the soldier holding the stick with pinpoint accuracy.

Crack. The stick flew from the man’s hand. He went pale, clutched his wrist, and stumbled back.

The remaining three charged harder, their attacks fast and coordinated. But Dustin moved like a shadow—quick, silent, untouchable.

In a blink, he appeared behind one of the soldiers and gave him a light tap on the back.

The soldier was instantly thrown off balance and flung forward, hitting the ground hard.

Another came at him from the side. This time, Dustin didn’t dodge. He rushed forward, meeting the man head-on, and delivered a clean punch to his chest.

It didn’t look like much—but it struck like lightning.

The soldier couldn't react in time. The force lifted him off the ground, and he crashed backward, spitting blood.

In moments, all five elite soldiers were down—completely defeated.

And this was with Dustin holding back. Had he gone all out, these men might have ended up seriously injured—or worse.

“How is that possible?!”

The watching soldiers were stunned, eyes wide in disbelief.

The arrogance they once had vanished, replaced by awe and fear.

Even Mateo and Emmett were speechless. They had never imagined that this seemingly frail man could possess such overwhelming strength.

Five elite fighters—defeated in mere seconds.

“I didn't expect you to be this strong,” Mateo said, frowning in frustration.

Emmett, too, had a serious look on his face. The way he looked at Dustin had completely changed.

Nathaniel, meanwhile, stood off to the side, smiling with satisfaction.

This was exactly the effect he wanted.

“Brother Rhys, that was incredible!” Nathaniel clapped his hands in admiration. “My men have gotten overconfident lately. I think they'll be much more humble after today.”

“Your Highness flatters me,” Dustin replied modestly. “They're strong soldiers, but they've never fought someone trained in martial arts. I simply took advantage of that gap in experience.”

Though Dustin had clearly won, he chose to give them face.

Just then, Deputy General Emmett stepped forward. Without a word, he removed his outer uniform, revealing a muscular frame. His eyes burned with fighting spirit.

“Mr. Rhys,” he said firmly, “we failed to recognize your strength. Now, I would like to ask you for a few moves. I hope you'll honor me with your guidance.”

Chapter 2529

Emmett stepping into the fight instantly raised the energy on the training ground.



All around, soldiers started murmuring among themselves.

“Deputy General Trottier is one of the top fighters in our army. With his martial arts skills, he’s taken down countless enemies in battle. It’s been a while since I’ve seen him in action,” a young soldier said with admiration.

“Yeah, he’s a battle-hardened warrior,” another veteran added. “If he’s fighting, Mr. Rhys is in trouble.”

After what they’d just seen, the soldiers knew Dustin was no ordinary fighter—taking out five elite soldiers like that was no small feat.

Still, in their eyes, no matter how skilled Dustin was, he couldn’t compare to Deputy General Trottier.

As a true martial arts master, Emmett surpassed ordinary fighters in every way—training, strength, and battlefield experience.

Even other high-level martial artists Mateo had brought in were all beaten by Trottier in the end.

They didn’t believe Mr. Rhys would be any different.

“Why? Is Mr. Rhys hesitating?” Emmett stood tall in the center of the arena, his presence powerful and commanding.

His hair swayed slightly, even without wind, and the air seemed to ripple around him.

Dustin glanced at Nathaniel. Seeing him silently smiling, he nodded. “Since General Trottier is interested, I’ll join you for a few rounds.”

“Great! That’s the spirit!” Emmett said with a grin. He pointed to the racks nearby. “Mr. Rhys, feel free to choose any weapon you like. If you don’t find something here, we have even more powerful ones in the armory.”

“No need,” Dustin said calmly. “This is just a spar. No weapons needed.”

“Alright then—just hand-to-hand.” Emmett rolled his shoulders, his joints cracking loudly.

He’d seen enough to know Dustin wasn’t just some show-off. He wanted a real fight.

“It’s been too long since I met someone who could challenge me,” Emmett added, his fighting spirit growing.

“Be careful. Don’t underestimate him,” Mateo warned quietly.

“Don’t worry. I know what I’m doing,” Emmett replied with a confident smile before turning back to Dustin. “Mr. Rhys—please.”

“After you,” Dustin responded, motioning with one hand.

“Here I come!”

With a loud shout, Emmett charged forward like a bull.

He moved fast, wind kicking up around him. The ground cracked slightly under his feet as he pushed off.

In a blink, he was in front of Dustin, launching a powerful punch straight at his chest.

That punch packed serious force—strong enough to destroy even a tank.

But Dustin stayed calm. He leaned slightly to the side, narrowly avoiding the blow.

At the same time, his left hand shot out like a blade, aiming for Emmett’s ribs.

Emmett reacted quickly, pulling back his fist and dodging sideways.

He stepped in with his left foot, spun his body, and swung his leg like a steel bar, aiming low to knock Dustin off balance.

Dustin lightly pushed off the ground with his toes, jumping into the air to avoid the sweeping kick.

Midair, he twisted and snapped out his right leg, targeting Emmett’s head like a lightning strike.

Emmett instinctively raised both arms to shield himself.

Bang!

Dustin’s kick slammed into Emmett’s forearms with a heavy thud.

The impact forced Emmett to stumble back several steps. His arms went numb.

Frowning but unfazed, Emmett launched a fierce counterattack.

His fists moved fast, whipping through the air with explosive power.

Every strike sounded like a firecracker going off.

But Dustin moved like a shadow, his footwork light and unpredictable. He slipped past every strike effortlessly, dodging and weaving like it was second nature.

No matter how hard Emmett tried, Dustin stayed calm—countering now and then, each hit pushing Emmett backward.

The clash was intense, and the soldiers were glued to the action. None of them had expected a battle this fierce.

They had assumed Emmett would win quickly.

But now, it was clear: Dustin was on a whole different level.

“Brother Rhys, stop holding back,” Nathaniel finally spoke up. “Let them see what you’re really capable of.”

Most of the onlookers didn’t notice, but Nathaniel knew: Dustin hadn’t even used his full strength.

Whether it was out of respect for Emmett or to avoid embarrassing him, Dustin had kept things defensive—barely attacking.

If he fought seriously, Emmett wouldn’t have lasted ten moves.

“Mr. Rhys! Come on! Show me what you’ve got!” Emmett shouted, fists still flying.

He was getting frustrated. Dodging wasn’t enough—he wanted a real fight.

“Alright, I won’t hold back,” Dustin said with a faint smile.

Suddenly, he launched a punch.

It moved so fast it looked like a meteor streaking through the sky—unstoppable.

Emmett’s eyes widened. Instinctively, he raised his arms to block.

Boom!

The punch shattered Emmett’s stance. His arms popped out of joint from the force.

He was blasted several meters through the air, crashing to the ground with a heavy thud, blood streaming from his nose.

Shock and disbelief filled his face.

Chapter 2530

Emmett always knew Dustin was strong—but he didn’t expect this strong.

From the start of their fight, even though he had a slight edge at times, Emmett still felt like he was being overpowered. Dustin’s movements, his technique—it was clear he was holding something back.

In Emmett's eyes, Dustin relied on martial world skills and a guerrilla-style approach, never facing him directly. That's why Emmett believed he could only win by catching Dustin off guard, finding a weakness to exploit.

But when Dustin finally revealed his true power, Emmett realized just how wrong he'd been.

Dustin wasn't just skilled at elusive tactics—he had been intentionally holding back, giving Emmett face and room to perform.

Once Dustin released even a portion of his cultivation strength, everything changed.

No matter what special techniques Emmett used, Dustin's strength, speed, and reflexes were overwhelming. The gap between their cultivations was simply too vast. No amount of skill could make up for it.

And it wasn't just Emmett who was stunned.

Except for Nathaniel, who had expected this outcome, everyone else was in shock too.

No one thought that once Dustin stopped holding back, he would defeat Emmett with a single strike.

Emmett was a seasoned martial master, known for his many battles. Among those at his level, he was a leader. It was true that his last reckless charge had drained a lot of energy, but even so, Dustin's punch had been too sharp, too clean to ignore.

Everyone now had to admit: they had all underestimated the seemingly delicate Mr. Rhys.

"Mr. Rhys, your strength is truly incredible. I accept my defeat with full respect."

Emmett stood up and saluted Dustin with a clasped fist. The arrogance in his eyes was gone, replaced by pure admiration.

In the military, the strong are always respected. And Dustin, with his power and youth, was a rare talent—a genius. Naturally, the admiration for him only grew.

"General Trottier, thank you for going easy on me."

Dustin clasped his fists in return, showing no pride or arrogance.

He had only agreed to this to help Nathaniel train his men—there was no pressure at all. The result had been obvious from the start.

"Well," Nathaniel said, scanning the group with a hint of warning in his voice, "now you understand what it means when we say there's always someone better than you."

He continued, “Most of you train hard, but your talent has made you arrogant. I brought Mr. Rhys here today to teach you a lesson. Remember this—moving forward, stay humble, stay focused, and keep pushing.”

“Yes, sir!” everyone responded in unison.

Seeing someone as young as Dustin with such overwhelming strength lit a fire in them. Their fighting spirit was reignited.

“Of course,” Nathaniel added with a faint smile, “if any of you still feel unconvinced, you’re welcome to challenge Mr. Rhys and test yourselves.”

Everyone exchanged glances.

Even Deputy General Trottier had been defeated effortlessly. What chance did the rest of them have? It would be like throwing themselves into a storm.

The difference in strength was too vast. They wouldn’t even be sharpening their skills—they’d just be getting beaten up.

“I’ll go!”

At that moment, a voice rang out.

It was Mateo—the one who had been itching to step up. As the commander of this elite team, his strength far surpassed Emmett’s.

Now that Emmett had lost, it was only right for Mateo to step in—whether to learn or to restore honor.

“It’s not often we get to face a master like Mr. Rhys. I’d be honored to learn from you,” Mateo said, stepping forward and clasping his fists.

Taller and more powerful than Emmett, Mateo had a commanding presence. His cultivation level was also clearly higher.

He believed that if he went all out, he’d have at least a fifty-fifty chance against Dustin.

“Brother Rhys, I’ll have to trouble you again,” Nathaniel said with a smile.

“No trouble at all. Since General Trottier is interested, I’m happy to oblige,” Dustin replied calmly.

“Mr. Rhys, we’ve already compared fists—how about we spar with weapons this time?” Mateo asked with a grin.

Weapons were his strength. It made sense for him to fight on his own terms now.

“Alright,” Dustin nodded.

“Bring me my blade!” Mateo shouted.

Two elite soldiers hurried over, carrying a heavy Guandao.

Mateo gripped the weapon and spun it in the air twice before slamming the handle into the ground.

Boom!

The earth trembled slightly under the force.

“Mr. Rhys, the armory here has dozens of weapons. Feel free to choose whichever suits you,” Mateo said confidently.

“I’m used to using a sword.”

Dustin didn’t waste words. He walked to the weapon rack, grabbed a longsword with one hand, and it snapped smoothly into his palm.

The blade vibrated slightly, letting out a soft hum.

Though the weapons in Nathaniel’s mansion were standard, this sword—made of black iron—was finely crafted. It could slice a strand of hair with ease.

That said a lot about its quality.

“Mr. Rhys, please,” Mateo said, taking his stance with the Guandao.

“Please,” Dustin replied, sword in hand, clasping his fists in return.

All eyes were on them.

On one side was the team’s commanding officer. On the other, a martial arts expert personally invited by the royal palace.

This would be a true test—a battle of weapons. And no one could say for sure who would win.