

An Understated Dominance [On-Going]

Chapter 2531

Mateo gripped his Guandao tightly with both hands and suddenly let out a thunderous roar, shaking the air around him like an explosion across the plains.

He charged at Dustin like a raging bull.

The heavy Guandao in his hands felt weightless as he swung it with full force. The blade sliced through the air with a sharp whistle, as if ready to tear everything in its path to pieces.

With the full force of a thousand pounds behind it, the blade came crashing down toward Dustin.

Mateo poured nearly all his strength into that strike. The sheer pressure stirred up the dust on the ground, forming swirling columns of debris.

He knew Dustin wasn't easy to deal with—and if he wanted a shot at winning, he had to strike first and strike hard.

“Nice sword skills.”

Despite the brutal attack heading his way, Dustin remained eerily calm.

His figure flickered like a wisp of green smoke, quickly sidestepping the attack. The Guandao barely missed him, brushing against his clothes and stirring up a gust of wind.

In the same breath, Dustin flicked his sword like a striking snake. While dodging, he thrust the blade at Mateo's shoulder.

But Mateo reacted quickly. After missing with his first strike, he shifted instantly from a downward chop to a sweeping motion.

The Guandao's blade glinted coldly in the sun, flashing like silver silk as it swept low toward Dustin's waist.

It was fast—blindingly fast—and carried brutal force. Mateo clearly wasn't trying to block Dustin's sword but was aiming to trade injury for injury.

In his mind, a stab to the shoulder was just a flesh wound. It wouldn't be fatal.

But if his blade connected, it could cut Dustin clean in half.

So he expected Dustin to back off, not take the risk.

And that's exactly what happened.

The moment Mateo launched the sweeping strike, Dustin abandoned his attack. He tapped the ground lightly with his toes and leapt into the air, dodging the deadly blow.

At the same time, his sword moved again—fast and fluid—slashing downward toward Mateo's arm like a whip.

The angle was tricky, and the speed was terrifying, making it almost impossible to defend.

Mateo reacted just in time. He raised his Guandao and blocked the strike with the flat of the blade.

Clang!

A sharp metallic ring echoed through the martial arts field as sparks flew. The blow was so strong that it made Mateo's arm go numb. He was shocked.

He thought Dustin was all speed and agility. He hadn't expected this kind of explosive strength. It was something else entirely.

Without pausing, Mateo went on the offensive again.

He wielded the Guandao with sweeping, open movements—powerful and direct. Each strike had the weight and force to decide the outcome of the fight.

If he could land even a glancing blow, it could cause serious damage.

Back and forth they went, alternating between attack and defense. The duel was intense and unrelenting.

Mateo had plenty of combat experience. Even when things weren't going his way, he knew how to adapt and turn things around.

He was far stronger than the previous deputy general, Emmett.

The weapon clash between Mateo and Dustin captivated everyone. The crowd watched in awe.

Each fighter played to the strengths of their weapon. Mateo's Guandao was heavy, with a wide attack range. His sweeping strikes, paired with his brute strength, were devastating.

Dustin's sword, light and agile, allowed for fast and unpredictable attacks. His mysterious footwork only made him harder to pin down.

No one could tell who would win yet, but the fight had already amazed everyone.

As the battle wore on, Mateo began to feel the pressure.

No matter how fierce or fast his strikes, Dustin handled them all with ease—and even found time to counterattack.

At first, Mateo didn't think much of it. But now, his strength was slowly fading.

If the fight kept dragging on, defeat was only a matter of time.

He needed to do something—disrupt Dustin's rhythm, break his flow, and turn the tide.

Mateo took a deep breath. A flicker of resolve flashed in his eyes.

He was ready to go all in with his ultimate move.

"You won't walk away from this!"

Mateo seized the moment, gripped the Guandao with both hands, and raised it high above his head. A powerful surge of energy burst from him.

In an instant, golden light flared from the blade, bright as the sun.

"Cut!"

He roared as the Guandao came crashing down, aimed straight at Dustin.

This strike contained all of Mateo's remaining strength and will.

The moment the blade fell, the air around them twisted under the pressure, forming swirling currents.

The force created a vacuum-like cage around Dustin, trapping him for a brief moment—perfectly in sync with the incoming blow.

Everyone watching held their breath.

They knew—this was the moment that would decide the fight.

If General Veilleux's strike landed, the outcome would be sealed.

But Dustin didn't flinch. He remained calm, as if the massive attack aimed at him was nothing more than a breeze.

Just as the Guandao was about to strike him down, Dustin moved.

His sword drew a perfect arc through the air, moving at an angle and speed that defied logic. It looked like a casual swing—but it hit precisely where the Guandao's blade met the handle.

It was a split-second move, but it carried immense force.

Crack!

With a clean snap, Dustin's sword cut straight through the Guandao, splitting it in two.

The upper half of the weapon, now unsupported, crashed helplessly to the ground.

Mateo, caught off guard and rushing forward too fast, nearly stumbled and fell.

His so-called ultimate move had been shattered with a single strike.

And Dustin hadn't even broken a sweat.

Chapter 2532

"What a fast sword—and such sharp instincts!"

"I can't believe General Veilleux's ultimate move was broken like that. It's unreal!"

"I really thought he could turn things around for us, but we still lost in the end."

As everyone stared at the broken guandao and Mateo's confused expression, murmurs rippled through the crowd.

They all knew how powerful Mateo was.

As a master who had reached the peak of his cultivation, he was practically unbeatable when wielding his guandao.

And yet, in a critical moment, Dustin shattered it with one strike.

No one saw that coming—it was both shocking and unbelievable.

Some believed it was just bad luck, thinking Mateo might have won under different circumstances.

But true experts saw it differently.

Even though Mateo used his ultimate move and had Dustin momentarily restrained, Dustin still managed to land the decisive blow. That wasn't just luck—it was skill.

It was a combination of speed, precision, and absolute control.

Plus, Mateo was clearly winded after the intense fight, while Dustin remained calm, showing no sign of fatigue.

And remember—this was Dustin’s third consecutive fight, and he still looked fresh.

From start to finish, he stayed composed and unshaken.

That alone showed how much strength he had been hiding. Even against someone like Mateo, Dustin never needed to go all out.

So while Mateo did lose, it was by no means an unfair defeat.

The master Nathaniel brought in was on a whole different level.

“Hahaha! Brother Rhys, you’ve truly lived up to your reputation. That was incredible!” Nathaniel was the first to applaud, breaking the silence with laughter.

The soldiers quickly followed, clapping with genuine admiration as they looked at Dustin with newfound respect.

He had just defeated Deputy General Trottier and then General Veilleux—two back-to-back wins, both handled with ease.

It was clear: Dustin wasn’t just skilled—he was on another tier entirely.

And what amazed them most was his age. He was about the same age as they were, yet already a top-level martial arts master.

His talent was undeniable.

“General Veilleux, thank you for the match,” Dustin said respectfully, cupping his fists before returning his sword to its sheath with precision.

“Mr. Rhys, your strength is extraordinary. I accept the loss without any resentment,” Mateo said, bowing deeply in sincere respect.

Others might not have seen it clearly, but Mateo knew just how terrifying that last sword strike was.

Dustin struck after him—yet landed first. He was so fast, Mateo couldn’t even track the movement.

But what shook him most was how Dustin had instantly spotted the weakness in his technique and exploited it without hesitation.

It was terrifyingly precise.

All he could do was admire such talent.

"Mateo, Emmett," Nathaniel said with a knowing smile, "Now you see what it means when they say there's always someone better out there, don't you?"

"You've taught us a valuable lesson, Your Highness," Mateo replied humbly. "We were too full of ourselves because of our limited achievements. Now, after witnessing Mr. Rhys's strength, we feel deeply ashamed."

"Absolutely! Mr. Rhys made us realize how far we still have to go," Emmett added. "Starting tonight, we'll train harder and never let ourselves get complacent again."

Dustin's power left them no room to argue.

But he had given them enough dignity—he'd won cleanly, without humiliating them.

His character stood out just as much as his strength.

"Alright, keep up your training. Mr. Rhys and I still have things to discuss," Nathaniel said, satisfied that his message had landed. He didn't linger and quickly left the training grounds with Dustin.

Once they stepped outside, Nathaniel smiled and asked, "So, Brother Rhys—what do you think? Not bad, right? My soldiers held up pretty well?"

For someone like Dustin, a grandmaster, it was no small matter that his top generals had at least managed to last several rounds.

"They're all elite fighters, even more impressive than I expected," Dustin said with a nod.

"Hahaha! They're not quite at your level, of course—but in all of Oakvale, they're some of the best," Nathaniel said proudly.

He had invested a lot into building this elite unit.

And that wasn't even counting the hidden forces he kept in reserve—his secret trump card.

"Your Highness has remarkable resources. I'm impressed," Dustin responded politely.

Nathaniel grinned. "Well, this is just the surface. But what I really need is someone like you, Brother Rhys—someone strong enough to lead the way. Then the team will truly be complete."

Dustin smiled faintly but didn't reply directly.

"Of course, there's no pressure. I'm not asking for an answer right now," Nathaniel said, waving it off casually. "Like they say—even if the deal falls through, the friendship stays. No matter what happens, we're still allies."

“Of course,” Dustin said with a polite nod.

“You’ve had three fights today—you must be tired. Go get some rest.”

Nathaniel didn’t press further.

“Mr. Lu, this way please,” a beautiful maid on the left said gracefully, stepping forward to guide Dustin into the inner courtyard.

As Dustin walked away, Nathaniel narrowed his eyes thoughtfully. He turned to another maid and gave a quiet order: “Go bring Wynter. I want her to keep Master Rhys company.”

The maid’s eyelashes fluttered slightly, but she nodded quickly and left.

Everyone knew Wynter was the prince’s favorite.

No one expected him to offer her up just to win over Mr. Rhys.

It was a bold and surprising move.

Chapter 2533

Nathaniel’s mansion was massive—almost like a maze.

Even though Dustin had the architectural plans with him, he still had to stay sharp and double-check his surroundings as he walked through the estate.

After all, there’s always a gap between what’s on paper and what things actually look like in real life.

Led by a maid, Dustin followed her through winding paths. It wasn’t until after what felt like a cup of tea’s worth of walking that he finally arrived at a garden courtyard.

The courtyard was spacious and quiet, filled with birdsong and blooming flowers. It was a peaceful, secluded spot.

“Mr. Rhys, please rest here. If you need anything, just let me know,” the maid said, bowing politely. Her gaze lingered on Dustin, full of admiration and gentle anticipation.

She had seen his performance in the martial arts arena and knew he was a highly respected guest of His Highness.

If she could catch the attention of such an influential figure, her fortunes might change overnight.

“That’s alright. You may go—I won’t need any assistance here,” Dustin said with a wave of his hand.

The maid hesitated. “But...”

“Don’t worry. I’ll explain it to the Third Prince. You won’t get in trouble,” Dustin reassured her.

“Understood. Please enjoy your rest, Mr. Rhys. I’ll take my leave.” A trace of disappointment flashed across her face, but she had no choice but to turn and walk away.

She had always considered herself beautiful—someone people couldn’t help but take a second glance at.

Sometimes, Her Highness would even use her appearance to win over important guests.

But today, the charm she’d always relied on didn’t seem to work on Dustin at all.

In fact, from the moment they met, he hadn’t looked at her twice.

For the first time, she wondered if she was getting older—had she lost the allure she once had?

After sending the maid away, Dustin stepped into the bedroom, closed the door, and pulled out the architectural plans he had brought with him.

Even though he was already familiar with them, he needed to reanalyze based on what he had just seen—just to be safe.

“Mr. Rhys...”

A clear voice called out from outside.

Dustin frowned. He had told the maid to leave—who was disturbing him now?

He got up, opened the door, and found a woman in a light pink gauze dress standing at the entrance.

She had a graceful figure, snow-white skin, and bright, intelligent eyes. Her beauty was striking.

This woman was none other than Wynter, known as “Matchmaker,” ranked eighth on the Beauty Ranking.

“Mr. Rhys, I’ve heard so much about you. I came today hoping to meet you in person. I hope I’m not intruding.” Wynter gave a slight bow. Her smile was like a gentle spring breeze—warm, soft, and disarming.

“You’re a guest—please, come in,” Dustin said courteously, stepping aside to let her enter.

The room already carried a faint floral scent, and now with Wynter's subtle perfume blending in, the space seemed even more elegant and charming.

"Mr. Rhys, I heard about your skills in the martial arts arena. Seeing it with my own eyes today, I must say—your reputation is well-earned," Wynter said as she took a seat and sipped from her teacup. "I don't know much about martial arts myself, but I greatly admire people like you."

"You flatter me, Wynter," Dustin replied with a small smile. "My skills are hardly worth mentioning. You, on the other hand, are well known not just for your beauty, but for your talent. That's truly impressive."

Though he had never met her before, Dustin had heard of Wynter.

She was the favored courtesan under Nathaniel's roof—accomplished in music, chess, calligraphy, and painting. Her beauty and talent weren't something ordinary people had a chance to witness.

Whenever important guests visited, Nathaniel would often ask Wynter to perform.

But this was the first time someone had been sent directly to him.

It seemed Nathaniel was pulling out all the stops.

"Mr. Rhys, you're too kind. I'm just trying to survive in this world with whatever little skills I have. But you've achieved so much at such a young age. I wonder—do you have any hobbies?" she asked, covering her mouth as she smiled sweetly.

"In my free time, I sometimes play chess. It helps me relax," Dustin answered calmly.

"Oh, how lovely! I also enjoy playing chess. Since fate has brought us together today, would you be willing to play a game with me?" Her eyes sparkled with interest—and something more.

She knew she was just a tool Nathaniel had trained. Sooner or later, she'd be used to win favor from someone important.

If she had to give herself to someone, she'd rather it be someone like Dustin—a man of strength and dignity—than some fat, lecherous official.

"Since you're interested, I'd be happy to," Dustin replied without hesitation.

He couldn't afford to appear distant or disinterested—doing so might raise suspicion.

He wasn't here for wealth, fame, or women.

So, what was he here for?

Better to keep up appearances for now.

“Someone, bring me my chessboard,” Wynter ordered the maid beside her.

“Yes, ma’am.” The maid quickly returned with a delicate, beautifully crafted chess set.

The black and white pieces gleamed softly under the sunlight.

The two sat across from each other and began their match.

Wynter played black, her movements graceful and refined.

Though her opening seemed casual, it was filled with clever strategy.

Dustin stayed calm, responding steadily with confidence and skill.

“Mr. Rhys, I heard that His Highness holds you in high regard,” Wynter said as she gently moved a piece. “He hopes you’ll join his army. With your strength, the two of you together could make a real mark in Oakvale.”

Chapter 2534

Hearing that, the white chess piece in Dustin’s hand paused briefly before he slowly placed it down. With a smile, he said, “Miss Wynter, I thought you came to exchange chess strategies. I didn’t expect you to be here as a lobbyist.”

“Hehehe... Mr. Rhys, you’re sharp. How did you figure out why I’m really here?” Wynter chuckled without hesitation. “His Highness saved my life and treated me as an honored guest. Of course, I want to repay the favor and help him resolve his troubles. I hope you don’t mind.”

“You’re smart and straightforward, Miss Wynter. That’s rare. Why would I take offense?” Dustin replied with a smile.

He had expected to deal with flattery or hidden motives, but Wynter’s honesty caught him off guard—in a good way.

“To be honest, Mr. Rhys,” Wynter continued as she made another move on the board, “His Highness has never valued anyone as much as he values you. He’s genuinely sincere in wanting to bring you on board. As someone close to him, I’d like to help make that happen. If you agree, I’m willing to meet any conditions you ask.”

As she finished speaking, Wynter looked up slowly, her eyes glowing with a captivating light and irresistible charm.

In the world of elite beauty, appearances alone aren’t enough to stand out—the real difference lies in identity, status, and personal ability.

Wynter was ranked eighth on the Beauty Ranking, and her looks and figure were nearly flawless.

Her gaze was mesmerizing, her eyebrows gently arched, and her nose small and straight, giving her face a refined, sculpted look—like a perfectly carved jade statue.

Her lips were the color of freshly bloomed roses, soft and red, and when she smiled, dimples appeared like hidden wells of tenderness.

Her skin was whiter than snow, glowing with a pearly sheen in the sunlight. She looked elegant and refined, like a fairy stepping out of a painting—stunning enough to take one's breath away.

Even though Dustin had seen countless beauties, he still found himself momentarily distracted when he met Wynter's eyes.

There was no doubt—Wynter was both beautiful and enchanting. Every expression, every smile, carried a seductive charm.

And even though he knew it was a carefully played beauty trap, he couldn't bring himself to resent it.

After all, the matchmaker was refreshingly honest—so honest it was almost convincing.

He had to admit—Nathaniel played this card well.

"Mr. Rhys," Wynter said as she turned her gaze to the board, "Look at this game—black and white pieces locked in battle. Only by working together can a game be played well. Just like His Highness and you. If you joined forces, you'd definitely gain the upper hand in this ever-changing situation."

She smiled as she subtly changed the subject, clearly not wanting to press too hard.

"Life is like chess," Dustin replied with a smile. "Every move must be made carefully. One wrong step can ruin the whole game."

"There's nothing wrong with being cautious," Wynter said, moving her pieces quickly as her offense became more aggressive. "But being too cautious can make you miss out on opportunities—it can backfire."

She played with precision, setting traps and trying to lure Dustin into a mistake.

"I've always been the careful type. I'd rather take no action than make the wrong move," Dustin replied calmly. He handled each of her attacks with ease, countering at just the right moments.

Slowly, the board started turning in his favor.

Wynter, who had been playing aggressively, now found herself on the defensive.

“Nice move!”

Seeing Dustin’s final play, Wynter’s eyes widened in surprise—but she was genuinely impressed.

She had assumed she was decent at chess, but Dustin proved even better. In just a few moves, he reversed the situation and forced her into a checkmate.

His skill was nothing short of master-level.

“Mr. Rhys, you’re truly a great chess player. I admit defeat.”

Wynter put down her piece and nodded slightly, admiration clear in her eyes.

She had thought Dustin was just a talented warrior, but now she realized he was both strategic and powerful—a true genius in both civil and military matters.

No wonder His Highness valued him so highly.

“Thank you for the compliment, Miss Wynter. I was just lucky,” Dustin said modestly.

“If you’re free tonight, I’d love to keep playing and have a deeper discussion,” Wynter said with a flirtatious smile. “I guarantee—you won’t want to leave.”

There was nothing subtle about her invitation—it was bold and clear.

“Ahem... I don’t usually play chess at night,” Dustin replied, feigning innocence.

“Mr. Rhys, you really know how to flirt,” Wynter said with playful frustration.

It wasn’t often she met a man this handsome, talented, and capable. She didn’t want to let him slip away.

Who knew when she’d meet someone like him again?

Rather than letting some old rich guy have her, she’d rather give herself to the man in front of her.

At least that would make her heart happy.

“Even if you came yourself, Miss Wynter, I’d still make sure you returned empty-handed.”

As he spoke, Dustin pulled out an exquisite jade box and placed it on the table.

"This contains the Dracan essences His Highness wanted. Please deliver it for me. As for my loyalty... I'll need more time to think it over."

"Dracan essences?"

Wynter's eyes lit up.

She had two missions on this trip: to get the Dracan essences, and to recruit Dustin.

She thought both would take time.

But to her surprise, she'd already completed half the task.

At least now, she had something solid to report to His Highness.

Chapter 2535

"Mr. Rhys, you're incredibly generous. I honestly don't know how to thank you."

Wynter gently traced the intricate designs on the warm jade box. Her eyes glistened with tears as she looked up at Dustin with genuine gratitude.

"It's just a small gesture, nothing worth mentioning, Miss Wynter," Dustin replied with a calm smile. "Besides, it was always meant for His Highness the Third Prince. I'm simply delivering what's owed."

"Is there anything you want in return? If it's within my power, I'll do it," Wynter said seriously.

"I have no special requests. I only hope that if I ever face trouble, His Highness will be willing to lend a hand," Dustin answered.

"So that's it—I understand now," Wynter nodded.

He wasn't asking for riches or treasures, but for a favor from Prince Nathaniel. Considering the prince's status, that kind of favor was more valuable than gold.

If Nathaniel eventually rose to power and claimed the throne, this one favor could be worth ten or even a hundred times more.

In fact, if Dustin ever committed a serious crime, this favor might be powerful enough to save his life.

It was a smart move—one that spoke volumes about Dustin's foresight.

"It's getting late. I shouldn't keep you up," Wynter said, rising to her feet and bowing slightly. Then, with a playful smile, she added, "Of course, if you're still interested, I'd be happy to play chess with you tonight."

Dustin hesitated for a moment, and Wynter smiled before turning to leave.

Her light pink dress flowed in the breeze like fluttering petals, and soon she disappeared beyond the courtyard gate.

“This woman is dangerously charming,” Dustin muttered with a shake of his head.

He liked to think he had strong self-control, but even he found it difficult to stay composed around Wynter’s subtle teasing.

Now that he had handed over the Dracan essences, all that remained was to wait and see what happened next.

After leaving the villa, Wynter walked briskly to Nathaniel’s study.

She knocked, and upon hearing his voice, she entered quietly.

“Well? How did it go?” Nathaniel asked as he motioned for her to sit and poured her a cup of tea.

He didn’t treat her like a servant, but more like a respected guest—something Wynter had certainly earned.

“Your Highness, the mission is complete. I’ve secured the Dracan essences,” she said respectfully, placing the jade box in front of him.

“Oh?” Nathaniel raised his eyebrows, quickly opened the box, and peered inside.

When he saw the soft glow of the Dracan essences, his eyes lit up with delight. “Excellent! Wynter, you’ve done an outstanding job.”

He held the jade box tightly, as if it were a priceless treasure.

He’d expected the task to be much more difficult, but things had gone far more smoothly than anticipated.

Sending Wynter had definitely been the right call.

“I’m honored to serve Your Highness,” Wynter replied modestly, never letting her pride show.

Though Nathaniel treated her well, she knew better than to get comfortable.

“Since Dustin handed over the Dracan essences, what does he say about joining us?” Nathaniel asked.

“He said he needs more time to consider it. I believe we should be patient,” Wynter said. “He’s clearly aware of Your Highness’s sincerity, but this decision involves his future, so it’s natural for him to be cautious.”

“Fair enough. Now that we have the Dracan essences, we can take our time. Whether or not he chooses to join us, we’ll deal with it then,” Nathaniel said, waving his hand.

He could see that Dustin was waiting to gauge how the political winds would shift before making any commitments.

In other words, Dustin wasn’t someone who could be counted on in desperate times—but he could be a valuable ally when things were going well.

Even so, it was worth keeping up appearances and showing respect.

The night was pitch-black, shrouding the entire mansion in darkness.

Moonlight filtered through scattered clouds, casting a soft silver glow.

Nathaniel, now carrying the Dracan essences close to his chest, walked with two guards toward a hidden courtyard.

The courtyard was surrounded by thorn-covered walls and stood behind tall gates. Two sentries stood watch, their eyes sharp and bodies tense like statues.

“Your Highness,” they said in unison, bowing as Nathaniel approached.

He nodded and spoke quietly, “Open the gate.”

With a heavy creak, the gates slowly opened.

Nathaniel stepped inside, passed down a shadowy path, and arrived at what looked like a plain, unremarkable building.

Two more guards stood at the entrance. After confirming his identity, they let him inside.

The room was dimly lit by only a few oil lamps casting a faint glow.

Nathaniel approached one of the walls and turned a hidden switch. With a deep boom, the wall slowly slid open, revealing a staircase leading underground.

Step by step, he descended into the hidden passage, each footfall taking him deeper into secrecy.

Finally, he arrived in a vast underground chamber.

The secret room was filled with rare and priceless treasures—glittering jewels, ancient weapons that gleamed coldly in the low light, and precious books stacked neatly on shelves.

At the far end stood a massive vault. Its iron door was etched with intricate runes and glowed faintly with power.