

## World Mall 301

### Chapter 301 A Guest

"Haaa!" Kanaria let out a long sigh with a tired expression. She slammed the door open after a long, stressful interview. "I'm finally done!"

Ragna smiled wryly. Even he had a hard time earlier.

"Thanks for your hard work." Clovis took a peek from the living room while saying, "The food is almost ready. Come in."

"O-oh!" Kanaria nodded. "These are things that you want me to buy. Some desert and snacks."

"Yup. Just bring it to the table." Clovis nodded while going back to the kitchen.

Ragna scratched the back of his head, feeling a bit embarrassed. Normally, the ones who prepared the food were either him or Kanaria. But Clovis could also cook some basic stuff.

Jay and Melody were completely hopeless, so they never really asked for their help.

Still, having someone prepare everything after a long, exhausting day just warmed his heart.

Unfortunately, they didn't have a lot of time. Right after dinner, Clovis got a call from Erwin, saying that he was outside their room. Hence, Clovis just went straight to invite him inside.

"Yo! It seems that everyone is waiting for my great presence." Erwin smirked.

"..." Clovis and the others stared at him for a while before saying the same thing. "No."

"Oi! Why are you all answering? Isn't Jay supposed to have no interest in something like this? Besides, Clovis, you should handle this kind of thing better! And what's with the weird pause? It makes you look like you're thinking about it seriously!" Erwin pointed at the group.

Of course, Clovis was just playing a little bit with this new 'friend' of his by involving the others.

"Hahaha." Clovis laughed out loud as if he had gotten some satisfaction.

"Kh. You jerk! Do you think you can do anything to me because you've won against me once?" Erwin gritted his teeth but ended up sitting as if he didn't plan to continue with this.

"To think that you really invited him to the meeting..." Kanaria shook her head helplessly. It seemed that her mother was right.

"Since he offered it himself, I thought it would be a waste to not accept it." Clovis shrugged. "I think all of you have felt something was wrong in the group battle..."

"!!!" Jay raised his head.

"Now that I think about it, it feels like we're being toyed with." Melody nodded with a serious expression.

"That was because of him." Clovis pointed at Erwin.

"What?" Melody opened her mouth wide, while Erwin crossed his arms with a smug.

"I don't know the full extent, but he should have seen through everyone's true nature to a certain extent. We've reached an agreement. This guy will help us a little bit to win against the Eight Swords tomorrow." Clovis nodded, acknowledging Erwin's talent.

"Well... I will only be helping you with some information. It will be up to you whether you trust me or not. For the time being, I'm planning to give you their basic information, strength, and my prediction. That's all." Erwin shrugged.

"So that's how it is..." Jay crossed his arms. He finally understood why their plan failed so badly. Erwin had seen through him. Clovis had seen through Erwin's plan and ordered him to go back, but Erwin knew Jay would ignore Clovis' order.

"Hehehe. I'm good. That's all." Erwin rubbed his chin. He then took out a small notebook from his pocket. "Anyway, I will be giving you their information, starting with their captain. I shouldn't stay here for too long to avoid suspicion.

Will that be alright?"

"Sure." Clovis nodded before glancing at Melody. The latter knew what he wanted and opened the profile of the Eight Swords' captain, Rafael.

"In that case, let's start." Erwin looked at the picture and said, "His name is Rafael, 23 years old, Tier 4, and he has Muscle Affinity. His blood is O-, his girlfriend is currently nonexistent, and his family relationship doesn't seem to be smooth."

"Huh? I understand the first part, but the second..." Kanaria frowned.

"That's important too, Miss Kanaria." Erwin stopped for a moment before opening the page about Kanaria. "For example, what if I say that you have become a bit fatter? Maybe about 2 kg?"

Kanaria's body shook as if she recognized it. Still, she couldn't help but grab her gun and say, "You should know that it's a very sensitive topic, right?"

"I know that you have gained some weight because you haven't done any expeditions for a while. Of course, normal training is the same. It must be because of the competition. I'm sure that you will gradually lose it again after this competition ends." Erwin smiled.

Kanaria was completely speechless.

"See? I can manipulate your emotions a little bit just by showcasing some information."

"..." Kanaria scratched the back of her head before glancing at Clovis as if she were trying to explain.

"Don't worry, Miss Kanaria. I have no intention of shaming you. From the looks of it, Clovis himself doesn't really care about those few kilograms. But I'm sure he wants you to maintain a good body, not only for himself but also for your safety during the expedition.

If he were to reply, it should be something like... 'People call having standards as body shaming nowadays, but striving to be a better person for someone you like is called effort. I respect that effort.' Or something along the lines."

Clovis pinched the bridge of his nose. "It seems that you are extremely accurate in assessing people."

Erwin shrugged as if it wasn't a big deal for him.

"For now, let's listen to what he has to say. All kinds of information are necessary. You should have seen the effect of that information in the group match." Clovis waved down, gesturing for Kanaria to sit down.

"Yeah, sorry." Kanaria nodded. Erwin had proved himself with just a few sentences.

"In that case, I will continue." Erwin returned to the page about Rafael. "Moving on to his strength..."

#### Chapter 302 Erwin's Analytical Ability

"Moving on to his strength... Rafael is quite strong. His overall raw strength is similar to Jay's, but his profession is that of a Guardian like Ragna. His weapon of choice is a sword and a shield.

"While it's true that he is a guardian, his swordsmanship won't be losing to an extremely good swordsman. If he abandons that shield, his sword will become stronger... since he basically ignores his defense.

"As a Tier 4, he has Muscle Augmentation as well. In terms of raw strength, I can say that Jay is still slightly above him, but in overall evaluation, I have to say that Jay will lose unless you have something you haven't shown me this far. For example, a hidden strength beyond my analytic skills.

"Anyway, he has a calm and collected attitude, but this competition weighs a lot on his shoulders, so that's something you can take advantage of." Erwin stopped, allowing them to think about it.

"Having a bad relationship with the family... Is that abuse or expectation?" Clovis asked.

"!!!" The rest of his teammates couldn't help but raise their eyebrows.

"As expected of you, Clovis, it seems that you've seen through it." Erwin smirked. In addition, Erwin had been mentioning Jay this whole time as if he knew that Jay would be the one handling Rafael.

"I see." Clovis understood what it meant to have a lot of expectations from the family, considering he also came from a very powerful one. And his was just a bit too extreme compared to Rafael's family.

"I believe that Rafael will choose to guard the flag, allowing your team to take the initiative to attack. This way, they will have a terrain advantage. If I say more than this, I will just cause more confusion. Hence, I'll continue with the second person first, the vice captain." Erwin flipped the page.

At the same time, Melody changed the picture to a woman.

"The vice captain is Jane, 24 years old, Tier 3 with Heart Affinity. She looks calm, but she is a fiery person inside. This also means that she is hiding her own feelings from her junior, Rafael. There is nothing to say about her family relationship. They're quite reputable without a lot of dirt. Her three sizes are 88-62-90..."

"Aaaaahhhh!" Kanaria screamed, trying to stop Erwin. "What kind of information was that?"

"What do you mean? This is all the information. I'm just saying that in that picture, you don't see a lot of volume. That's because she suppresses them. And it means that she will be exhausted pretty easily if you're planning to fight her with speed." Erwin glanced at Clovis, implying that he was the only one who could easily defeat her.

"..." Clovis remained silent. On the other hand, Melody and Ragna couldn't help but look at Erwin's notebook, thinking the same thing. 'How much information does that notebook contain?'

"Heart Affinity... does she have..." Clovis frowned.

"Of course."

"Heart Affinity boosts regenerative power like Ragna's constitution. So I can't really use simple speed, huh?" Clovis sighed. "Alright. I think I understand what I'm supposed to do. Let's continue to the next four people."

"Alright. The next one is Aran, their operator. He is similar to your operator, but I don't think he is strong enough to be compared to her. Just consider him a downgrade of your operator. There isn't much I can say about this guy. Plain and boring.

That's all, I guess.

"As for the fourth person, Grace. She is an assassin, the type that will deliver a killing blow. However, her skill is actually ranked last among the rest of the group despite having such importance." Erwin pointed at Kanaria and Melody. "If you split both of them, you don't have to worry about her. Besides, your operator is extremely efficient.

Unless she is at the same level as Aileen, I don't think she can escape your detection."

Clovis squinted his eyes as if he noticed something else from that information. However, he still said, "Continue."



"The fifth person is rather interesting. He has Blood Affinity, but his weapon of choice is a spear. His specialty is thrust. His thrust is quite deadly. For example, he might be able to keep you at a certain distance with swift and deadly thrusts, Clovis."

"Hoh?" Clovis's expression turned serious. "That's rather interesting to see."

"He has a daddy's issue due to him being a drunkard. You might be able to use that to trigger him, but if you do that..."

"I know. It will look scummy. Then again, I don't really care. For me, the most important thing to consider is the fact that I can't use the same trash talk with my next opponent." Clovis smiled.

"That's right. I'm helping you guys right now because I want you to face Bloody Rose. So there is no need to feel indebted to me. It's as simple as my own selfishness." Erwin shrugged. "As for the last person, Melvin... He is strong but dumb, similar to our Gilza."

"To be honest, there aren't a lot of things I should say regarding the last four people. Rafael has gotten their absolute obedience, so things like Jay won't happen to them."

"And they're just... not interesting like you guys. When I discussed your group with my teammates, I had to talk for a whole two hours so that they knew about all the details and took advantage of them. Unfortunately, you guys just surpassed even my analytic skills. Feel free to be proud." Erwin shrugged.

"Mhmm... So what do you think will happen in tomorrow's match?" Clovis asked another question.

"I'm not really good at tactics, so I can't really say for sure. I will just say what Tarkan told me beforehand. If your plan is to win the championship, you will definitely need to let Clovis rest as much as possible during the fight against the Eight Swords. In other words, Jay will become the focus.

"In other words, you will have to win the group match with at least a three-point gap. This way, you can send Jay in for the first match. Of course, your opponent will definitely be Rafael himself. You have to win, Jay. That's the only way if you want to become the champion."

Chapter 303 Provoking Two Teams

"See you tomorrow! I'm waiting for the party. You better not escape!" Erwin waved his hand while walking out of the hotel.

"I know." Clovis nodded.

While looking at Erwin's back, Kanaria couldn't help but ask, "Clovis... What do you think about tomorrow's match? Is it really going to be as he said?"

Clovis glanced at her.

A moment ago.

"You need to win with at least a three-point gap. Jay will defeat Rafael in the first match and you can fight the Bloody Rose in a rather better position."

Clovis squinted his eyes. "You sound like the Blood Rose will defeat their opponent. Their opponent has a Tier 4 explorer as well, you know."

"You don't have to worry about that. The gap between the two groups is not small. The Bloody Rose will definitely win even without my help," said Erwin with a serious expression.

Clovis remained silent for a while before saying, "Well, if we use the information you provide, we might be able to win against the Eight Swords pretty easily. But you haven't calculated one thing..."

"Just beat them like that. This way, my group will look better. I can last for two matches in the individual match, while they can only fight one match." Erwin snorted.

Clovis shook his head helplessly. "I'm talking about this city. If we beat them that hard, you should know that they will end up getting hate from the citizens. In addition, we might end up getting hit by the rioting citizens."

"You're thinking too much. They can still get third place anyway." Erwin shrugged.

Clovis sighed. It was impossible to convince him. While they could ignore such a thing, they might end up getting the wrath of the citizens.

Then again, if he made it to be like a close match, Clovis would be exhausted before fighting the Bloody Rose.

"Well, I'm thankful for your help, but I have to consider the plan myself." Clovis waved his hand.

"If that's the case, then I will not remain here any longer. I hope you don't disappoint me, Clovis." Erwin harrumphed.

After recalling what Erwin said, Clovis glanced at Kanaria and said, "Yeah. With that information, getting a three-point gap should be possible. If what he says about the Bloody Rose is correct, that means we have no choice but to do it that way... or we might not be able to even put up a good fight against the Bloody Rose."

...

Bloody Rose.

Aileen was staring at the night sky with a grim expression.

Lana came to her side while asking, "Are you still thinking about his words?"

Just like Clovis, Aileen had met Erwin.

It was right after Erwin had just come out of the recovery pod.

In the end, both of them came out together, leaving Erwin's teammates inside the medical room.

"What are you doing here, Aileen? Don't tell me. Are you worried about me? No. You don't seem like someone who can worry about others." Erwin chuckled.

Aileen didn't have any change of expression as she said, "To think that you would lose to them..."

"So you're going to mock me for losing? I know that I can't even fight for the third position... even though I have told you I would beat you in the final."

"No. I have no intention of mocking you. Even I won't escape unscathed against your web." Aileen shook her head. "It's just a surprise that you are already that strong. Still, I need to win against them for our city."

"I don't really care about that. Suits yourself. I'm not going to help you with the information though."

"I don't need it. I will still win against him without that."

"I wouldn't really say that if I were you." Erwin smirked.

"Huh? What do you mean?" Aileen frowned.

"I won't help you, but I don't mind warning you about one thing. Clovis hasn't shown his full strength yet."

"!!!" Aileen raised her eyebrows as though she couldn't believe that a Tier 2 human who had shown unprecedented strength actually had something up in his sleeve.

'Shocking, right? That was my thought during the battle.' Erwin muttered inwardly while recalling the fight. 'I didn't know why but his face always showed me that there was one more card that he could use to easily defeat me.'

'However, he looked like he didn't really want to rely on that, either because there was a side effect or it was an unreliable skill.'

But all that doubt was answered right after the match, specifically when Clovis said, "I learned that trick from my mother."

At that time, Erwin simply couldn't believe what Clovis said. Everything instantly clicked in his mind. Why would Jay and Kanaria become that strong? Why would Ragna manage to overcome his weakness?

That was the answer.

'His mother, huh? Wires are such unique weapons that only a glimmer of people use them, let alone at a high level. The fact that his name is removed means he has a very high level mother. In that case, there's only one person who matches the description, Aisha Hacfield.

'I can't contain my laugh. To think that I would end up fighting my idol's son... To think that the person before me is a Hacfield... That explains everything, especially that ridiculous strength.

'This match is really my complete defeat.'

Erwin knew that the trump card Clovis was hiding must be a very special one. That was why he didn't want to rely on it, especially in front of the crowd.

Erwin said, "Don't worry. Libation Fiesta will defeat the Eight Swords. I just want to see which one of you will emerge on top... Don't disappoint me, Aileen. If you still can't defeat an exhausted group, it means you're trash."

Aileen frowned, looking at Erwin's return to the medical room. She couldn't help but clench her hands into fists before walking away. It seemed that she didn't have enough preparation for tomorrow's matches.

...

The next day, as usual, Shion raised the people's excitement. "We have finally reached the Shining Star Competition's Final Day! There will be a total of four matches! After such an exciting battle yesterday, I'm sure everyone can't wait for the competition to begin..."

#### Chapter 304 Semifinals

Despite such an exciting atmosphere, there was silence inside the stadium.

Everyone dropped their jaws to the ground as they couldn't help but look at the result in the arena.

Aileen was standing in the middle of the arena while the Tier 4 Martial Artist representing the Dragon Fist was lying down on the ground, her body covered in blood.

Aileen's expression remained cold, as if such a sight didn't disturb her. On the other hand, the people couldn't help but gasp. There wasn't a single wound on Aileen's body, while the same couldn't be said for the other party. This was simply the gap between their strengths.

Even Clovis slightly understood why Erwin wanted him to fight her.

"Hey, are you alright?!" The three referees suddenly came to Rika's side, checking her condition. They had asked the medical team to enter.

Aileen glanced at them for a moment before saying, "She should be fine. She just passes out after losing too much blood."



"!!!" The referees couldn't help but check the wounds again.

"This is..."

"There are a lot of wounds but every single one of them is actually missing vital areas. Blood transfusion and recovery pod should be what she needs to make a full recovery..."

The referees looked at Aileen again as if they couldn't believe what had just happened. They never thought they would actually be fooled by her exceptional skills.

Erwin simply smiled as if he knew this was what would happen after the cheap provocation he did yesterday.

Meanwhile, Clovis took this as a challenge. This was a clear message from Aileen as if saying, 'If you want to defeat me, better use all your strength.'

Clovis crossed his arms while smiling. "You are truly a jerk, Erwin."

Clovis knew that Erwin must be the reason for her showing such a thing. And it also sealed Clovis' choice. If he truly wanted to fight the Bloody Rose on equal ground, he really needed to defeat the Eight Swords swiftly.

"Clovis." Kanaria placed her hand on his shoulder. "I think you already know this. I, too, want to fight against the Bloody Rose. But those who can't see the opponent in front of them can't defeat the opponent beyond that."

Clovis' expression mellowed down. "Indeed."

"Let's go, shall we?"

Clovis nodded. He turned around, looking at his teammates. "I'm going to say this again. Jay, the group match is not the place for you to settle the fight against him."

"I know." Jay nodded. "I will definitely win against him during the individual match. I won't make another mistake again."

Clovis smiled. "As usual, Ragna, I will leave the flag to you."

Ragna gave a thumbs up. "I won't let any of them pass me like in the previous battle."

"The opposing team this time has six members. On the one hand, it makes it easier for us to win because the number of points we can gain from them is greater than what they can gain from us. On the other hand, this will also cause the match to be extremely difficult due to the one-person difference. However, I know that this team is strong."

Since we have reached this place, let's go all the way to the final."

Jay and Ragna nodded. Melody's expression turned serious. She played a big role in this match, considering the enemies might choose to fortify their defense. She had to find a gap in their defense.

In addition, this was their home ground. The people would definitely cheer for the Eight Swords, which would put some pressure on their shoulders.

If there was anyone who couldn't afford to lose, it would be them. After all, this competition was to showcase the quality of their explorers.

...

On the other side of the arena, there was heavy tension in the air.

Rafael had a grim expression, carrying the weight of the entire city. In addition, his father had forbidden him to play one or two tricks against his enemies for some reason.

With such a handicap, he had to deal with Libation Fiesta, who had momentum from the previous match.

"It's time."

Rafael heard his vice captain before nodding. "Yeah. I will only say one thing. Fight as if your lives depend on it."

...

Now that the arena had been fixed, Shion finally took over the atmosphere. "After such a heavy match, let us move on to the next exciting match.

"The team that will be the challenger today is definitely Libation Fiesta. After defeating Imemine, they're carrying their momentum.

"However, their opponent this time is none other than our beloved team, the Eight Swords, who shall represent this city."

The cheers erupted once Shion mentioned the Eight Swords.

"Eight Swords!"

"Eight Swords will win! Destroy the Libation Fiesta!"

"Our Eight Swords is the strongest!"

Even though they cheered for the dark horse yesterday, it would be different for this match. After all, people didn't really want their city to be humiliated.

The people screamed at the top of their lungs, creating an atmosphere that would put a lot of pressure on Libation Fiesta so that they couldn't win.

They were chanting the whole time before cheering once again when Rafael and the others took the stage.

It was different when Clovis and his teammates entered the arena.

They were actually booing them as if yesterday's cheers were just a lie.

"Boo!"

"Go back, Libation Fiesta!"

"Just lose. We'll cheer you on for the third position!"

Melody had a wry smile, saying, "Uah, look at them. They really want us to lose. I guess it will feel nice to crush the Eight Swords to shut them up."

"Don't say it that way unless you want their rage to turn against us." Kanaria shook her head helplessly.

"We'll just do our best as usual, and the result will follow." Ragna shrugged.

Since the two groups had made their appearance, Shion finally continued, "Look at the atmosphere inside the stadium; I believe there is no need for me to say anything. Now that each group has taken their position, without further ado, let's begin the match!"

Chapter 305 Arrogance?

"Erwin. What do you think he will do?" Tarkan asked while looking at Clovis' team.

Erwin shrugged. "I don't know. He is a jerk, but he is trying not to be a jerk. Even though he is planning to defeat them, he doesn't want to get a complete victory. The only thing I know is that he has no choice but to get ahead by three points in the group match."

Tarkan furrowed his eyebrows. "In that case, he might end up mobilizing his entire team right away, causing confusion for the enemy. But Rafael is not an opponent who will fall for that bait easily.

"Start!"

Clovis smiled as soon as he saw the hologram on top of the arena.

"Oh! The Eight Swords have chosen to fortify their base." Shion looked at one side, finding the people from Eight Swords to adjust their position but remain around the base. However, her expression changed the moment she turned to the other side. "W-What?! What is going on? Clovis is going alone?!"

That was right. Clovis actually entered the forest alone while his teammates remained in the back.

"Huh?" Tarkan raised his eyebrows.

"Is he going to ride the momentum of yesterday's battle and defeat the Eight Swords like their first match in the first competition?" Shion gasped.

"Are you kidding with us?"

"How dare you underestimate the Eight Swords?"

"Just beat him up and drag him back to the ground!"

"Destroy that proud idiot!"

The people were shouting angrily, thinking that Clovis had decided to insult the Eight Swords.

However, there was no change in their strategy. Clovis continued marching ahead by himself and eventually reached the other side of the forest.

"Oh! They're truly here." Clovis smirked, looking at their formation on the base.

"Huh?" Rafael furrowed his eyebrows. "Aran!"

"There is no sign of them on the radar. They are actually waiting in their base." Aran frowned. "Are they underestimating us?"

Rafael frowned. "There's no way they will do something like that. This is clearly bait, but..."

Rafael squinted his eyes as his gaze met Clovis'. He muttered inwardly, 'If they want to go from one side to the other, they will require about one minute and twenty seconds unless they're using their full speed... which will allow them to reach this position in under fifty seconds.'

'Even then, we still have some time to react the moment they appear on the radar. They must be using Clovis as bait. Do they believe that he can actually fight all of us for one minute and launch a surprise attack?'

"...In that case, we will fall for that bait!" Rafael pointed forward. "Aran, Grace, Farhan, and Melvin. You four go and defeat Clovis!"



"Roger." The four of them immediately rushed forth.

Clovis looked at the incoming four people while furrowing their eyebrows, thinking, 'Despite falling for my bait, he is not committing his full team to hunt me down. I guess it's impossible to grab only that flag. But this is not a bad move from him.'

"Four, huh? In that case, I'll see if they're enough to defeat me or not." Clovis raised his swords, his position remained next to the woods. He needed the trees to block Aran's bullets after all.

The four of them moved forward. Since Aran had the longest attack range, he made the first move and pointed his gun at Clovis.

Clovis immediately jumped back to the woods as several bullets ended up hitting the ground or trees, missing him.

Both Melvin and Farhan moved together from the front, while Grace used the trees to hide her presence.

Clovis stopped next to a tree, using it to block Aran's vision. At the same time, he let Farhan and Melvin move toward him.

According to the radar, Grace was coming from the opposite direction as Aran. However, Clovis knew that this was a trap.

The moment he was aiming for Grace or Aran, they would definitely move back, allowing Farhan and Melvin to flank him from the side.

That was why Clovis actually remained in his position.

Farhan sped up, lifting his spear. When he was a few steps away from Clovis, he came to a halt while thrusting his spear.

Clovis raised his short sword, parrying the thrust.

"!!!" Clovis noticed something from this thrust alone. The thrust wasn't weak, but it wasn't strong either. It was as if Farhan didn't pay any attention to actually defeating him.

Farhan even positioned himself at a distance where he could easily react in case Clovis decided to defeat him.

"So that's how it is." Clovis frowned while glancing to the side.

There was one dot coming toward him from behind, while the other dot was approaching within his vision.

It was Melvin and Grace.

"You don't think about going, right?" Farhan roared as he sped up his thrust.

A series of clicking sounds echoed as Clovis kept parrying his spear. While he could still move even after all these thrusts, Farhan would definitely stick to him like his shadow, trying to open up a path for his teammates.

Still, Clovis couldn't move from his spot. After all, Aran was still waiting to fire at him the moment Clovis came out of behind the tree.

"Hahahaha! Here I come!" Melvin approached Clovis with his two-handed greatsword.

Grace landed on top of the branch behind Clovis, waiting for the opening before moving in.

However, right before they attacked, there was a sudden movement from Libation Fiesta.

"Watch out! They have finally made their move!" Aran suddenly warned them while looking at the radar. The attack this time was actually similar to what they performed in the last match.

Clovis was in the center, luring these four people. Meanwhile, one person came from the right side, while two people made their way from the left side.

Seeing their positioning, Rafael couldn't help but mutter, "So that's how it is... It seems that you're using the same tactic in order to split us up. If you think that we're that easy to defeat, then you're wrong! Jane, plan D."

"Understood." Jane nodded and finally entered the battlefield.