

Few Wives 171

Chapter 171: Battle Roster!

"So, after hearing that. What's your choice, Layla? Do you want to Rank up immediately or not?" Muku asked Layla.

"It's obvious. I'm going to wait" Layla replied instantly. There was zero hesitation in her words.

The subject matter was the long-awaited in-team duels. While Muku could have waited for everyone to reach Rank Three. It would have taken quite some time, since Audrey, unlike the others. Didn't get any beast cores.

It seemed blood element beasts were super rare if they existed at all. So, while the girls could rank up within a few days. Audrey would be left behind. Which was something he promised himself to never allow to happen again.

Which led to the compromise. Those like him who had already reached R3 would battle each other. While those who hadn't would do the same.

Layla had already fought Muku. So she wasn't too interested in fighting him. As for fighting Jade. She was developing a strategy for her that wasn't ready. So, she didn't want to fight her yet. Especially when her power would be a bit unstable as a new R3.

Not to mention that there was someone she had always wanted to fight. Someone who could be called her direct opposite. That's right, she wanted to fight Emily. The stronger one between them had to be decided or she wouldn't feel right. Which was why she didn't hesitate to pause her rank up.

"Good. I knew you'd make the right decision" Muku smiled with an excited expression.

He had seen the side glance Layla gave Emily. Which almost made it certain that he was going to finally see one of the dream matches in his team.

He was a normal dude after all. Normal dude would, at some point, wonder who would win in a fight between an Ice user and a Fire user if they knew the two.

Based on common sense, it could be said that Elsa was Emily's real rival due to her water element. However, Muku felt that the real opposite of raging heat wasn't the calm water but freezing cold ice.

"Wait! Does that mean..." Jade suddenly exclaimed with a shudder as she looked in Muku's direction.

She didn't even finish what she wanted to say. But it was obvious. She had just realised that she was stuck with Muku and his Telekinesis this time. She could already see herself getting rag-dolled all over that place until she quits.

It would hurt too, because for some reason. When it came to her, Muku seemed to forget that she was a girl in how he treated her. Or he was always fully aware and was just a petty dude settling scores. Yeah, that's probably it. He was just super petty with her.

Anyway, we have to organise the other matches too. So, ladies... Who's fighting who?" Muku ignored the bleak-faced Jade and addressed the other girls.

"I vote for Ms Audrey versus Chloe. I'm just a defenceless healer who only knows healing and a little poison magic. So, my fight with anyone wouldn't be fun anyway. Not to mention that their match would be quite physical and interesting to watch" Hope immediately jumped at the chance to snake her way out of fighting after realising that there weren't enough people.

It's not like she didn't have a point. Her poison was the type that would allow for an almost instant win under the right conditions. However, when fighting her teammates, who knew pretty much everything about her. She was definitely at a disadvantage.

She was one of the weakest fighters in the team physically. While Audrey and Chloe were high up there when it came to physicality and magic. So she'd probably be one-shotted before she realised what was happening. Which she didn't want to do.

"Hhm, that sounds fine with me. Just know that you're not off the hook yet. I'll think of something for you to do after the battles. So you better be ready" Muku didn't refuse Hope's proposition, but that didn't mean she'd get a free pass. He was sure to make her go through something as intense as the others.

"S-sure, I'll be waiting then... Big Brother wouldn't do anything to hurt me right?" Hope replied, feeling a bit nervous. She was wondering if she had made a mistake by backing out. Maybe she had dodged a bullet only to be hit by a rocket.

"Hehe... Anyway, are you two okay with the plan?" Muku only gave an ominous laugh as a reply to Hope's question. He ignored her from then while she shook him trying to get his attention. He had already moved on to addressing Audrey and Chloe.

"I'm okay with it..." Audrey replied as gently as always.

While the idea of fighting one of her cherished girls didn't seem appealing to her. She understood that it was for the greater good. With their strength, they couldn't easily find other people to match them. So, they could only get human combat experience from fighting each other.

"Do I have to? Can't I just fight Hope?" Chloe asked. The idea of fighting Audrey, who was the closest person she had to a mother, was just too awkward for her. It just felt wrong.

"What?! No!" We've already decided that I won't be fighting!" Hope, who was still shaking Muku, paused a bit before shouting in protest.

There was no way she'd fight Chloe after the last incident between them. While she still liked Chloe as much as she always has. Battle-mode Chloe scared her quite a bit. Whenever Chloe incases herself in lightning when she fights. It always gives Hope chills. It reminds her of the time the berserk Chloe always knocked her head off...

While she knew that such a thing wouldn't have happened without her input. She still refused to fight Chloe again. Chloe had traumatized her a bit it seemed.

"I really wish I could agree to your request. Sadly, you can see how traumatized this one is. She probably would just freeze up if she was standing opposite you in a battle. Also, I feel like you're overthinking the fight. Don't think of it as a fight, but a spar instead. In fact, that's exactly what it is. Don't you want to show Audrey your improvement?" Muku interjected before Hope ran away from fear.

Hope's trauma was something that definitely had to be dealt with. She would have to face it one day, but it wasn't that day. He'd think of something they could try after the battles. For then, Chloe has to face Audrey. Of course, if she really didn't want to, he wouldn't force her.

"Well... If you put it that way. Fine, I'll do it" Chloe instantly folded. Making everyone raise their eyebrows. It seemed the girl's soft spot was proving herself to her mother(figure). Which was obvious from how her eyes glowed right after Muku mentioned it.

"Let's do our best tomorrow okay?" Audrey chimed in while lovingly rubbing Chloe's head.

"If that's what you want, I'll give it my all" Chloe replied with her eyes closed. Showing a gleeful expression on her face, clearly enjoying Audrey's touch. She was like a cute little kitten that likes being rubbed.

"Me too! I'll do my best!" Layla chimed in. Before anyone could react, she was already placing Audrey's hand on her head.

"Fufu, okay" Audrey replied while rubbing both girls' heads. She was radiating so much motherly love at that moment that it was almost blinding. The others could tell that she was enjoying the situation as much as the two girls.

It was a bit odd with how young-looking and gorgeous she was, but she made it work. It ended up looking like a very caring older sister though.

"Okay, with that done with. It's time to address our opening act. Elsa and Freya, our two fairy maidens. That honour belongs to the two of you if you're willing to accept it" Muku then addressed the two Half-step R2s of his team.

He looked at them with kin interest. While their fight wouldn't be too explosive because of their limited strength. It would still be quite entertaining to see two people with the assistance of fairies fight.

Their fight would definitely become a sight to see one day when they get stronger. However, who wanted to wait so long? The prelude to what was to come will have to do for the moment.

"I'm willing!" Elsa instantly agreed. The little girl had shown signs of being a battle junky, so it was obvious that she'd be game.

The real problem was with Freya. The peaceful lady. Honestly, everyone wouldn't be surprised if she refused to fight. The girl just didn't seem like someone who would want to fight unless it was a last resort.

"I'm willing as well!" Freya exclaimed with a fire burning in her eyes. It startled everyone. While they felt she would agree, they didn't think it would be so easy.

It seemed they had misjudged Freya's determination to improve. She was willing to go the distance even when she didn't want to.

"Well... Okay. You're all dismissed for now. If there's anything else. We can arrange it tomorrow. For now, go get some sleep, we've all had a long day. You can even allow yourselves to sleep deeply since Audrey graciously made five Half-step corrupt beasts for us. Goodnight to you all..." Muku then ended the discussion.

He didn't know about the others, but he was definitely tired. So he didn't prolong the meeting.

Without waiting for the girls to respond. He flew upstairs. He clearly couldn't wait to be in the embrace of his bed and sheets.

The girls just gave each other understanding looks before wishing each other good night. Then everyone went to their own rooms.

Chapter 172: Elsa versus Freya!

The next morning...

Everyone was excited about what was to come so they all woke up early. They did everything they had to do and gathered outside.

Unlike last time. It was Muku who created the barrier instead of Audrey. Its functions were basically the same as Audrey's, though. Which were, being soundproof and could contain the energy so as not to attract attention from any beasts that could be close by.

Just that instead of Mana, he used his Telekinesis. Which was a lot more practical than mana. As mentioned before, mana, in its pure form, can somewhat work like elements. It is still quite wasteful to use it like that. They just didn't have any other option last time, so they let it be.

Anyway, the participants and the spectators were already in their positions. Muku, who was feeling quite wasteful, literally created a freaking stadium with his metal. While it wasn't as detailed as a real stadium behind the scenes. It looked quite identical to a real stadium from where they sat.

Audrey couldn't help but sigh in helplessness seeing how wasteful he was and how the girls were happy he did it. She suddenly realised that she might be completely surrounded by kids. To think even the usually steady and dependable Muku could be so childish.

Then again he was a man, and men never lose their inner child. It just hides away most of the time. After thinking about it, maybe it was a good thing that he liked using his powers in such a way. After all, if he had a dark personality. With his current abilities that could allow him to destroy a pre-apocalypse big city with one attack, he would have been a nightmare to the world.

"Combatants! Are you ready!" Muku screamed out seriously while standing in between Freya and Elsa.

The two girls who were serious about the battle were taken aback. Their seriousness immediately crumbled.

"Haha," Freya let out a little laugh. She always enjoyed the moments when Muku shamelessly displayed his childishness to everyone.

It was like he didn't consider his current position as their leader at all when he acted. Who would feel safe with such a goofy leader leading them?! Well, that would have been the case if they were in the army or some other organisation like that.

However, they were just a small group. A group that was as close as they could be. So, Muku was the best leader they could ever wish for. To them, he was okay the way he was.

"Yes sir! Combatant Elsa is ready sir!" Elsa, who had been getting closer to Muku, recently played along. Which was a rare thing for the quiet little girl.

"Hahaha... Sorry, sorry. I'm ready too" Freya just couldn't hold herself back anymore as she laughed out loud before apologizing.

"No need to be sorry. This isn't some kind of serious affair. We're here to learn from each other. So there's no need to get too serious. Just try to do your best, learn what you can and be a good sport. Winning isn't the main thing here. Now, I'm going to throw this coin I made into the sky. The moment it reaches the ground. Your duel starts," Muku, who had intentionally done what he did, spoke.

He had noticed how the newbies were taking it too seriously. So, he had to remind them. Doing it like that might create unnecessary tension in the team, which he didn't want to see.

With that said, he threw the coin that narcissistically had his face on it into the sky. He was already sitting with the others before it even reached its highest point in the air. So, only Elsa and Freya were left in the ring.

It was sure going to be an interesting match. Elsa, the water element prodigy. Who was arguably the most talented member of their team. She just sucked up everything she was taught with seemingly zero effort. Then there was Freya, the gentle girl who was under the tutelage of an ancient plant fairy. Both housing fairies.

Pak!

The coin that had been the focus of everyone since it was tossed up finally hit the ground.

"Water arrows!" Elsa was the first one to attack. Throwing one of her oldest and most adept spells. While it wasn't too strong, it certainly packed a punch and could win her the match instantly if Freya was slow to react.

"Bramble shield!" Fortunately for Freya, her reaction time was good enough as she created a shield in time.

It wasn't something she just naturally possessed. She had been training with Iris in her mindscape whenever she had time. The fee for the lessons being... more of her memories. It also seemed like Iris had developed a real interest in Freya as well.

She might have been influenced by the memories of a tough life Freya had. Well, whatever the reason, Freya was gaining significant benefits from the relationship.

As for the "Bramble shield" it was part of a new spell set she had gotten from Iris less than a few hours earlier. Iris had evolved her plant magic to combat most of the other elements. She developed the "bramble" series to combat water spells in particular.

The defining characteristic of the spells was their ability to almost instantaneously absorb water based on its power level or quantity. Which was a rather annoying attribute that Elsa quickly realised.

The attack she was anticipating to set the battle's tempo in her favour was instantly neutralised. Freya's shield almost instantaneously sucked up all the arrows. It even buffed up the shield a bit.

"What?!" Elsa exclaimed in surprise while stepping back. She wasn't the only one who was surprised though. The others were the same. After all, Freya had never used her plant element in front of them ever since the Jade incident.

Honestly, with the little time Freya had spent with Iris. They didn't expect much plant magic from her. They expected her to use the sword Muku had made for her more. Yet there she was competing against Elsa in magic.

The battle didn't pause there, though, as Elsa was a decently seasoned warrior at that time. So one unexpected occurrence wouldn't leave her frozen. So she proceeded to throw different minor spells at Freya, trying to see the limits of her shield.

Interestingly enough, the shield kept on sucking more and more water and getting larger. It got to the point where Freya was completely hidden behind a giant shield about five metres tall. Made out of thick intertwining thorny vines.

Elsa could've stopped sooner but she wanted to make sure of something. It took a bit longer than she thought but she was finally done.

"Bramble surge!" Unfortunately for Elsa, Freya was done as well. She let out another unexpected move as her second move.

It was at a time when Elsa and the others were starting to think she only knew one defensive plant spell too.

The shield came apart and the hundreds of thick vines all surged at Elsa. The situation seemed rather familiar to when Iris fought or... beat up the four beasts rather.

Emily couldn't help but get nervous despite knowing Elsa's capabilities. Fortunately for her, Elsa lived up to her battle-genius reputation and got away.

How she did it, however, was quite surprising. For an unknown amount of time since the battle began. She had been covering the ground with water. For some reason, however, the water wasn't sinking into the ground. Likely because of Elsa's actions.

Just when the thorny vines were about to hit her. She slid away. It was more of, the water on the ground grabbed her feet and moved her out of the way. Everyone was instantly stunned by the ingenious way of using her element. No one among them had ever thought of such a thing.

Then again, maybe it was because of her element that she had such a thought. Or her young age that allowed her to think of such crazy things. Well, whatever the reason, they were impressed. They were certain from that act alone that Elsa was going to be a nightmare to all her enemies in the future.

"Water Cleaver!" Elsa instantly capitalised on her unexpected move and used an unexpected move of her own.

The others had only seen her use the waterblade before. Which would be a metre or so long, with a width of around five to ten centimetres. However, there she was releasing a blade of water close to ten metres tall with a width of around a metre.

She had slid to Freya's side. So when the blade struck, it sliced the vines in two from the source. Just to show that it was an intentional miss. The blade cut the vines just ten centimetres away from Freya.

Seeing that, Freya froze on the spot. All her power exited her body along with her will to fight. She had been outmatched and she knew it. While it was the Apocalypse. Where age no longer equalled strength. It still stung to be defeated by such a young girl who still had baby fat on her face.

"... I lose. You win" Freya spoke after recovering a little. She had already done the best she could anyway. So it was fine.

"Mmh", Elsa acknowledged Freya's words, then walked off the stage calmly. Which showed just how grounded she was.

That's what everyone but Emily thought anyone. She knew her sister well. The little girl was probably jumping all over the place in her head. She just didn't want anyone to see her as someone childish for some reason.

Which was rather ironic since everyone saw her as a child anyway...

Chapter 173: Audrey versus Chloe! (Pt 1)

"Well, that was certainly insightful" Muku commented from the sides.

"Yeah, their clash would have been a lot more interesting and intense if Freya had more time to prepare though. Elsa didn't even use half of her strength in it" Layla, who had been laser-focused on the battle from the start, expressed her own thoughts.

The others agreed. They could see that Freya was struggling to keep it together from the start despite the cool display. For that reason, Elsa had basically sealed most of her abilities for the battle to even seem like it, or Freya might have lost instantly if Elsa had gone all out.

Their power levels might have been similar, but Elsa's control and battle awareness were aeons ahead of Freya's at that time. So she stood no chance from the start.

"I like how Freya didn't let the loss devast her despite their age differences. With such a mentality, I'm certain she'll be a threat to Elsa sooner than we might think," Audrey chimed in while looking at Freya with an approving gaze.

Soon enough, everyone congratulated Elsa and gave Freya words of encouragement. It was time to move on to the next fight.

Audrey versus Chloe. It was definitely going to be a hard-hitting battle everyone was looking forward to. Blood versus lightning, who would emerge victorious?...

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A while later in the arena...

Everything had been smoothed out after the last battle. The stadium was even buffed up a bit more by Muku. He had been too lazy to make it super strong from the start. Not to mention that it would have just been a waste of mana.

"Okay, so I'm feeling too lazy to come there again. So I'm just gonna toss the coin from here okay!" Muku shouted out to Audrey and Chloe who were already standing in position waiting for him.

His words made everyone roll their eyes. How can someone be feeling too lazy to fly? Wasn't that beyond laziness instead??

"Are you ready?" Audrey asked Chloe a gentle smile on her face.

"Y...yeah, just a little nervous" Chloe replied. They chose to ignore Muku for the most part. Listening to him would just ruin their concentration.

"Good that you're ready because I'm not holding back. Show me everything you have" Audrey replied as her body was completely encased in a crimson suit.

The same as the one she has fought a troublesome opponent with before. The opponent cannot be named because the author forgot which one it was. Also, has no idea which chapters to search.

Anyway, the moment Audrey's whole body was covered up, leaving only her silver eyes exposed. The air around her changed. Before, Chloe felt like she was being looked at by the most gentle person in the world. Now, she felt like she was being looked at by a hungry apex predator. She felt like a little deer getting eyed by a lioness in the wild.

Pak!

Her whole body screamed danger and she jumped back.

Bang!

Audrey had attacked the very second the coin reached the group. It happened so quickly that Elsa and Freya saw neither Audrey nor Chloe's silhouettes when they moved. It was like they teleported.

The scene froze with Chloe standing three metres away with slight surprise in her eyes. Audrey crouched down in the place Chloe was before. Her hand was sinking into the ground. If the attack had landed, Chloe would have felt a world of pain.

Chloe didn't expect Audrey to be so resolute despite being warned. It was then she realised that if she messed around. She would get beaten up without getting a chance to do anything.

That thought lit a fire in her. The little sparks of lightning around her body intensified. She was finally in the mood for it.

"I guess now we can truly start..." Audrey spoke in a somewhat eery voice through the face mask that had no mouth. It was somewhat like the one Muku created. Only the eyes were present with no other facial features.

Boom!

Crack!

Bang!

Bang!

Whoosh!

Bang!

The two parties started clashing all over the arena. Muku and Jade could see everything clearly. Layla, Emily and Hope could somewhat follow everything. However, Elsa and Freya could only hear loud sounds. That's how fast Audrey and Chloe were.

Even more absurd was how they were still not going all out. The group was already damaged a lot more than it was by the previous battle just from the shockwaves.

"Lightning explosion!" Chloe cast the first advanced spell of the fight.

Lightning exploded out from her body going in every direction. No matter how fast Audrey was. There was no way she could dodge lightning that had almost instantly covered up the whole ring right?

Boom! Bang!

Yes, she really couldn't dodge such an attack. As a result, she was hit by it hard and got thrown into the steel walls of the arena. However, she didn't seem too injured as she got up almost immediately before Chloe could throw her next attack.

While she did seem unfazed by it. The observant eyes of Jade and Muku noticed that little cracks had formed in her armour. They were soon closed up as if they were never there before, but it was still proof of Chloe's successful attack.

"Bloody maw!" Audrey cast her own advantage spell. Some of the blood from her condensed blood from her armour lashed out in the form of a bloody mouth at Chloe. She waited for when they were in close contact since it was a close combat skill.

Chloe's eyes widened. She had never seen Audrey use such an attack before. She couldn't react in time, and she was gulped up by the three-metre-tall mouth, whole.

"You l..."

BOOOM!

Crackle!

Just as Audrey was about to declare the match her win. Chloe broke through out of the maw by blasting it open with her lightning. She had to increase her output to do so. Which was now beyond Audrey's. So it couldn't be said that she escaped due to her strength. She just got more serious than Audrey and broke out.

"I can take it into a higher gear too! Blood Bath!" Audrey explained. The condensed blood she was using as armour returned to its original form.

An unknown amount of liquid beast blood drenched the whole ring. While it could have gone beyond the arena. It didn't, due to Audrey's control. Otherwise, even the group in the spectator stand would have been implicated.

Everyone was surprised by the appearance of so much blood. After all, Audrey was able to compress into all into a slightly large in size suitcase. It was like seeing a dam of water appear out of a one-meter square cube of ice. Such a thing should be impossible. Yet Audrey was essentially doing exactly that.

"Execution Ground!" Without pausing after casting the first spell. Audrey cast another spell that made the blood stab two metres into the air in the form of solid blood spears.

There was no pattern to it as it happened randomly all over the arena. The only safe places were the ones Chloe was standing on as well as the ones Audrey was standing on.

Chloe knew that she was only safe because Audrey willed it. If Audrey wanted to, she would have bombarded her with an unknown number of spears at once.

"Do you want to continue it or give up?" Audrey's eery voice sounded again. She didn't call it her win because she knew that Chloe still had the power to protect herself from the spears for a while.

Chloe could just lash out and break apart all the blood around her and be safe. The problem, however, was that Audrey could reform the blood that wasn't disintegrated.

So, Chloe would have to keep on fighting it off while doing other things until the battle ended. Which would be more work for her. Her chance of winning would also be reduced by a lot since she'd have to split her attention.

As for using some of her strongest attacks? Well, it was an unspoken rule that if you couldn't ensure the safety of your opponent. You shouldn't use such attacks. Which Chloe or anyone but Emily could ensure in their group.

Also, such attacks took time to prepare. Time which Audrey wouldn't let her have. So the attacks might as well not exist during their in-team duels.

"I want to continue a little more... Let's see if my suit can keep up with yours for a bit", Chloe replied, refusing to give up.

She had never been in such a situation before. Her lightning has pretty much always done the job exactly how she wanted it ever since she got it. So, Audrey putting her in check despite all her efforts was rather new and quite frustrating.

She refused to give up until the very last moment. Even if she had to use her lightning coat. An ability that, in her earlier days, left her naked. While that was no longer a problem, there was another pressing issue to consider.

Which was how quickly it drained her mana. It was understandable considering how it needed to be constantly fed mana to exist. While she didn't mind losing to Audrey, she wanted to know she tried every move she could before that happened. So she dared to put it all on the line.

"Not giving up easily huh?... Okay, show me what you've got then" Audrey replied behind the mask. Her battle aura intensifies.

The way she spoke, Chloe was almost certain that Audrey was smiling behind the mask. Everything about Audrey screamed that she was enjoying herself at that moment.

"Sure" Chloe only said one word in response.

BOOM!

Her aura exploded out to the max and her body was encased in blue. She almost seems like a being completely made out of lightning at that moment. The lightning cracked furiously, blackening the ground around her.

The final showdown was about to start...

Chapter 174: Audrey versus Chloe (final)

"Blitz..."

Crack!

BOOOM!

With one word from Chloe, she was gone. That time her speed was so fast that only Muku and Jade could clearly see her. The rest were completely blinded.

All they saw was a flash of blue light. Even that wasn't Chloe. It was just the remnants of her actions as she had long passed that area by the time they saw the light. The girl had proved without a doubt that at the same level. She was definitely the fastest in their team. Jade and Audrey were also super quick with the addition of Muku to that level after his recent upgrade.

However, Chloe's speed was just something else. They got goosebumps thinking of how fast she would be by the time she reached Rank Five, Rank Seven, Rank Ten and possibly beyond.

BANG!

Surprisingly, Chloe missed Audrey, who had also lost track of her. She, being unaccustomed to such high speeds slammed into the arena wall hard.

"Oof! That's gotta hurt" Jade commented. Her eyes glowed from excitement. She was so enthralled by the battle that she was close to jumping in to join.

"What happened?! How did mom dodge that?" Layla asked in a surprised tone. While she had complete trust in Audrey's abilities. She was certain that Audrey shouldn't have been able to dodge that move.

"Oh, that. It was nothing short of genius actually. Audrey's danger sense is just as sensitive as Jade's at the same level. Through that, she could sense her end from Chloe's move. So, like any battle-seasoned warrior. She made the right call. Which was to retreat..." Muku paused for a bit in awe.

"She moved out of the way before Chloe could even make her move. The blood on the arena ground must have helped with that too. Chloe's lightning tends to move before she does. Which Audrey used as a signal of Chloe's attack when it struck the blood beforehand. Which was basically asking to be dodged since Audrey can sense her surroundings with it," Muku explained what happened, clearly the confusion in everyone's minds.

"Is Chloe okay though?" Hope asked worriedly. While she had become quite the bro-con recently. She still cared about the others. Especially Chloe, who was like her first-ever friend in the group.

"Yeah. Don't worry. Chloe must have been prepared for it... Look" Muku gave a halfway reply before pointing towards the ring.

"How is she completely fine?!" Hope asked in surprise as she watched Chloe get off the ground looking completely fine after the heavy impact.

"Momentum neutralisation..." Layla was the one to reply. It was the reason why she hadn't shown any concern for Chloe. She judged from the exaggerated sound that Chloe must have done something.

"What she means is that Chloe sped up the impact's occurrence but took herself out of it for the most part. What she did was attack the ring with a strong lightning attack before she hit it. The action created a force wave that acted against her momentum. Which cancelled out most of it. That's what caused the loud bang sound. So, while she did hit the wall in the end. It wasn't a strong impact. It was within something her Evolver body could take easily" Muku explained after seeing that Layla wasn't going to say anymore.

It seemed Layla wasn't in the mood to improve her communication with the group at that moment. She had long refocused on the arena again after replying to Hope. She probably didn't even hear Hope's second question. The others didn't mind, though; it was understandable that she'd be so enthralled considering who the two fighters were.

"Oh. So that's what happened. They're both really smart, huh?" Hope commented while seemingly lost in thought. She was patting herself on the back of her head for refusing to fight either of them. She felt that she would have been beaten up before she could even blink once. The two were just too intense for her liking.

"Are you okay?" Audrey asked Chloe with worry in her voice. Even the mask on her face had been removed.

She didn't have Layla's calculative mind to figure everything out instantly. Or Muku and Jade's high rank to see everything. So she was really worried about Chloe. She was even thinking that maybe she shouldn't have moved out of the way. Only if she had thought of what would happen if she dodged.

"Don't worry, I'm fine. We can continue..." Chloe replied in a gentle voice. She really liked it when Audrey showed worry for her. Her battle intent melted away, which was obvious from how the lightning surrounding her had been deemed a lot. Along with not being as furious as before.

"No, let's stop here. I don't want to do this anymore" Audrey's motherly heart got the better of her and she refused to continue.

As she spoke, the blood all over the place was gathering into the form of a suitcase beside her. Which was a clear sign that she was giving up. It was clear that even her battle intent was gone. Though for a different reason.

While Chloe was KOed by Audrey's care. Audrey was KOed by not wanting to see Chloe getting injured. Especially because of her.

"Okay..." Chloe didn't argue. She was just a bit hesitant thinking that she had let the others who wanted to see a clear winner down. Well, whatever; a situational draw wasn't too bad, either. They can also pick up from where they left off or someday, maybe.

Hopefully, the author doesn't get chewed up because of the ending. He's just a slave to the personalities of the characters he created okay...

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"Well... That was anticlimactic. I should have expected it though. Audrey is a terrible choice for these things. She emotionally defeats both herself and the opponent. Next time, I'll just have to look for someone who isn't any of the girls to fight her," Muku spoke while rubbing his forehead in a wry tone.

The ending made him want to flip a table or something. Why didn't he think of it before finalizing it!! It would have been better to watch Hope get beat up instead!

"Don't worry, the next battle will definitely have a winner..." Layla spoke from her seat. She was already radiating battle aura. Ready to put it all on the line.

She wasn't too bothered about how the Audrey and Chloe battle ended. Honestly, she had suspected that something like that would happen. Her mother was just that kind of person. When she cared, she really cared. Even if her care got in the way of other things. She didn't care. Such was Audrey's personality, which would likely always be like that.

"R-right" Emily supported Layla's words. However, she had a wry expression on her face. She felt that it was ironic for the quiet Ice Element Evolver to be the hot-blooded one between them.

She was nowhere near as enthusiastic as Layla. The worst part, she was certain that if she held back, Layla would make her pay for it.

However, she was curious to see who would win between them. A heavenly flame versus a hellish ice. It was certainly going to be an interesting fight. Before she knew it. Emily was also excited about what was to come.

"Can we start now?" Layla asked getting ready to get up.

"Woah! Little Frost! Let me fix the ring first. Why the rush, we have all day. We can even continue tomorrow if that's not enough time" Muku stopped her with a nickname he had kept in his mind until that day.

Hearing the odd nickname, Layla's impatience was instantly diffused. She then raised her brow at Muku. Silently asking him about the nickname.

"Aha! I knew I wasn't the only one with a weird nickname. It's just I was the only one who gave you reasons to use it!... Wait, am I so problematic to you?!" Jade chimed in before reasoning herself to anger.

"Shut up! That's definitely not it. I'd never give each and every one of you a nickname just because I got bored one day" Muku defended himself. However, his shifting eyes and unconfident tone weren't helping his case

"So, Big Brother. What's my nickname? Is it something cute" Hope didn't even try to act like she believed him as she immediately asked what her nickname was.

"What?! I told you. There's nothing like that. Do you believe Jade over me your brother?! I'm so hurt, I don't even want to talk to you anymore!" Muku refused to relent. As he chose to acknowledge it no matter what.

"Okay, if you say so. Can you give one for fun then?" Hope also refused to relent. She chose a way that would give both of them what they wanted. She would get to hear the nickname and Muku will get to play it off as if it didn't already exist in his mind.

"Well, I guess I could come up with something. Just for fun of course. I'll call you Baby Koala" Muku replied enthusiastically as if he had gotten the justification he needed.

"...Okay, thanks" Hope replied dully. Her enthusiasm was completely gone. She had deflated like a balloon. After all, he had just indirectly called her clingy. The other girls trying to stop themselves from laughing didn't help either.

They also wanted to hear their nicknames. However, that thought was instantly scrapped after hearing Hope's name.

"Why do you seem so down. Don't you like it? I'll have you know, baby Koala Bears are my favourite animal. So cute and loveable, and they never leave their parent's side," Muku spoke to Hope while giving her a little background information.

"R-really?" Hope asked with happiness in her eyes. She was happy to know that even if he thought that she was clingy, he liked it. That's all that mattered.

"Yeah. Anyway, I'm done with the repairs. You can go now Layla and Emily" Muku addressed Hope briefly before moving back to the event.

His saying it just before the other girls asked about their nicknames was rather sus. Whether it was planned or not. Only he knew.

Well, whatever the case. Layla versus Emily was next and it was definitely going to be epic...

Chapter 175: Layla versus Emily (pt 1)

"You both know the drill, the moment the coin hits the ground. The battle starts" Muku shouted from the stands again.

The atmosphere in the arena was already tense. Emily was laser-focused on the coin that was spinning in the air under Muku's control. She was ready to attack the moment it dropped.

Layla, on the other hand,, was focused on Emily. A chilling air radiated from her body. It was clear to see that she was barely holding herself back.

Without further delay Muku let the coin drop. With their strength, the speed at which it dropped was no different from slow motion. They could all see it clearly as it fell. Until it hit the battered ground with little to no sound.

"Creeping Ice Spikes!"

"Firestorm!"

BOOM!

Both girls instantly made their moves. Layla attacked with ice spikes that stretched from where she stood, spreading to where Emily stood. Emily attacked with raging flames coming out of her outstretched hands.

The attacks collided midway and cancelled each other out with a boom. The obvious result of the clash was steam, and there was a lot of it. White steam covered up the whole arena for a little bit before fading into nothingness.

"Firestorm! Maximum!"

"Raging Blizzard!"

Without missing a beat. The girls cast their next spells that were stronger than the first ones.

Emily's attack was an even bigger firestorm than before. It was so large the whole arena would have been quickly covered up in golden flames if Layla hadn't done something.

Layla used the spell she had created to battle such types of Emily's spells. The whole sky was covered in snow that fell to the ground furiously. Just as Layla expected, the spell stopped the advance of Emily's attack.

The deadlock, with no one gaining the upper ground, went on for a while. They both decided to stop their spells at once since it seemed pointless.

"Flame boost! Flame punch!" Emily then did the unexpected. Something she rarely ever did. Which was to get close to the opponent.

With a boost of her flames, she was almost instantly in front of Layla. Her right hand was enveloped by flames as punched forward. It was something she had copied from Chloe. However, unfortunately for her, flames could only burst forward but couldn't sustain that speed. Which was why she rarely used the move.

She only resorted to it because she had realised that her normal fighting style might not work. Layla seemed to have studied her a lot. Which was obvious from the way she had an answer for all her mid-rank spells. It was quite weird that Layla did that, but it was the truth. So, Emily had to try different means of fighting her.

"Ice shield!" Layla didn't panic as she immediately cast a shield of ice in front of herself.

BOOM!

Emily's punch hit the ice shield hard and destroyed it. However, Layla had already retreated a distance away.

"Hail storm!" Layla took that moment to cast her next spell. If Emily didn't act in time. She would be taken out by it since Layla's ice would hurt a lot more than real ice. This was because it fell at a much higher speed and was bigger and harder as well.

"Exploding shield!" Fortunately for Emily, she was quick enough for her own sake.

She might not have studied Layla as much as Layla studied her, but she did think of some things. One of those things was what she would do if Layla used ice attacks that were too fast for her flames to burn away before she was reached? The answer was simple. She would use force to repel them.

What that meant was that she would use her exploding flames. The flames would explode upon contact. After that, the generated force would either throw the attack off course or slow it down enough for her to react.

Her idea worked perfectly on the blocks of ice. They were mostly thrown off course giving her enough time to move away before the next wave came.

"Smart..." Layla couldn't help but compliment her. She actually thought that she would be able to hurt Emily a little before she figured out a way to get herself out of the situation. Yet Emily dealt with it instantly.

The two girls then kept on going back and forth without anyone gaining the upper hand. They seemed evenly matched for the most part. Their abilities cancelled each other out so much that the visibility in the ring was almost always low. There was steam everywhere.

"Okay, this isn't working. Why don't we try stronger attacks?" Layla paused and spoke to Emily.

"What do you have in mind?" Emily asked curiously. She also didn't want to continue with the deadlock.

"Well, nothing too serious. So the ultimate attacks are out. But anything just below that is fine... We'll have thirty seconds to gather mana," Layla replied.

"Okay, let's do it" Emily agreed to the idea.

The two girls then started gathering their mana for stronger attacks. They had quite a few attacks that met the qualifications. So they both closed their eyes trying to focus and choose the one they wanted to use.

Emily quickly decided what she wanted to do. Which was obvious from how an attack was already forming above her.

Layla seemed to be channelling her mana into the sky yet nothing was happening. However, from the little smile that appeared on her face. It was clear to see that she was up to something. The girl rarely smiled after all.

Soon the time was up. They both opened their eyes at the same time. The first thing they did was make eye contact and then look at what the other one created.

Layla's eyes widened when she saw what Emily created. Which Emily noticed and felt happy about. She then looked around Layla but saw nothing. She could sense that something was up from Layla's mana that had saturated the whole place. However, nothing was obvious.

"Oh well... World Ending Flame Meteorite!" Instead of figuring out what she would find out soon anyway. Emily chose the Jade route. Which was to attack first and ask questions later.

So, she released her attack that was supposed to not be as strong as an ultimate attack. Layla looked at its approach with suspicion in her eyes. How was such a thing not counted as an ultimate attack by Emily??

It was a freaking huge sphere made out of flames for God's sake! The diameter was probably radius was around probably around seven metres. Which meant the whole thing was absolutely humongous.

Layla wondered if Emily didn't consider it as an ultimate attack because she had never used it before. Or maybe her ultimate attacks had gotten a lot stronger and it didn't qualify. Well, whatever the reason. Layla was screwed if she didn't have a good game plan.

"Well... This messes up the initial plan a bit, but I think I can make it work..." Layla spoke to herself calmly. However, her heart was racing.

The spell was slow and still a distance away, yet she could already feel the heat it emitted. She was already sweating a little. Would she be able to get out of it?

The spectators were at the edge of their seats waiting to see what would happen next. Audrey, who was feeling gloomy for letting everyone down despite how no one took it personally, forgot all about that at the moment.

She was so worried that she barely managed to stop herself from jumping into the arena and taking Layla away. The only thing stopping her was knowing about the unique attribute Emily's flames had.

Emily, who was looking on, noticed how her attack was almost upon Layla, who wasn't moving. She smiled thinking that her plan had succeeded. She had decided to create such an attack in hopes that it would ruin whatever plans Layla had from its sheer size and force. From the look of things, she might have succeeded in her goal.

Her expression quickly changed, however. She noticed the little smile that had left Layla's face slowly return. Her mind started racing. It was clear to see that Layla was up to something.

She immediately put her guard up to the max. On top of that, she used a little more mana to speed up the flame sphere. She refused to let Layla ruin her perfect plan when she was close to winning. So expending more mana than expected was reasonable.

Due to Emily's sudden action, the sphere's speed suddenly increased. Which likely caught Layla off guard and messed up her timing for whatever she wanted to do. At least that's what Emily hoped occurred.

She could no longer see Layla since the sphere had covered up her view. If she was close enough, she might have been able to see through the flame. However, the distance was too much, and she couldn't do that.

That didn't matter too much as the sphere reached the area Layla was in and touched down. Unlike what everyone expected, the sphere didn't explode on impact. Honestly, if it did explode then it would have had to be considered more than a normal attack from the force of that alone.

The sphere burnt away the ground and left a huge hole in it that took up an eighth of the ring's space.

Muku's expression darkened as he looked on. How tf was he supposed to fix that?!

As for why Emily and the others weren't worried that she might have potentially killed Layla? Well, it was obviously really. Emily can choose what she burned and what she didn't. So if Layla was caught in the attack, she would still be fine... Maybe naked, but fine.

That's where the problem came in. After the flame sphere disappeared. Layla was nowhere to be seen...

Chapter 176: Layla versus Emily (Final)

"Where did she go?!" Emily exclaimed to herself. Her heart skipped a beat as she thought of a scary possibility.

However, she quickly calmed herself down. If by the unlikely chance that Layla was burnt away by her fire. She would definitely have resisted visibly first. Not to mention that Muku wouldn't have just looked on as it happened. Her attack wasn't strong enough to kill someone of equal strength like Layla, so there would have been enough time for Muku to act.

With that realisation, Emily immediately turned around to look behind her. She was expecting Layla to be there by some weird means she employed like in the movies.

However, she was met with nothing. She then tried looking around the arena and still nothing. Layla was still nowhere to be seen. Emily started getting more and more tense.

"Flame Dome!" As a last resort, Emily cast a defensive spell that covered her from all angles.

Whatever trick Layla was employing would be useless that way. Now, all she had to do was wait until Layla made her move. With the dome, she had time to react no matter which direction Layla attacked from. The flames were close enough for her to see through, so she was set.

"Are you going to keep hiding until we're kicked out of the arena? I thought you wanted this! Why aren't you showing yourself now?! You coward!" Emily started shouting out trying to taunt Layla into coming out. She couldn't take the suspense anymore.

Her mind wasn't even working properly anymore. Doubt was starting to creep in about whether she had actually killed Layla by accident. Maybe they both made some weird mistakes that ended in Layla's death.

"No, no. That can't possibly be it. There has to be something I'm missing. Why do my feet feel cold?... Wait...No!"

Freeze!

(A/N: I tried to think, I tried to search for it. I just couldn't find what sound effect represents someone getting instantly frozen -_-)

Emily was about to break down when she suddenly felt her legs getting colder and colder. She instantly realised what was going on. Layla had somehow hidden in her shadow during the time she attacked her with the flame sphere.

However, before she could look down to confirm. She was already frozen completely. If she could look down, she would have seen both of Layla's hands coming out of her own shadow and grabbing her legs.

It seemed that, while Layla couldn't attack while completely inside the Shadow Realm. She could attack as long as the body part she's attacking with is outside and in contact with the target.

Emily didn't see it coming. Layla being able to use the Shadow Element had completely slipped her mind. Which was not entirely her fault. She was aware of it when they first started fighting.

However, as there battle continued, there were many things to think about. Due to this, she forgot about it. Layla was also consciously trying to make her forget about it with how she fought. There were times she could have used it, but chose not to.

Emily even had the feeling that she was forgetting something important throughout the battle. She just couldn't remember what it was. Which was something most people have gone through at some point in their lives.

Especially in situations like her current one, where she had to be constantly on her toes. She didn't have time to take a step back and properly think.

Which she paid for, unfortunately. She was locked in ice before she could do anything. On the bright side, she won't ever forget Layla's ice ability from that day onwards.

"Firstly, I'm not a coward. It's called a strategy. Secondly, it's because I wanted this that I thought of a winning strategy without going all out. Which is why I won, and you lost," Layla spoke calmly while coming out of Emily's shadow.

The flame dome had been dispelled the moment Emily was trapped in ice. From the look of things. It was definitely Layla's win without a doubt.

BOOOM!

"No! You haven't won! Exploding Flame Spear! Huh?!" Emily, who had thought she had played along well enough to successfully ambush Layla, was surprised.

Just as her attack was about to strike Layla. The black-haired Ice Element Evolver dissolved in front of Emily's eyes. She wasn't too surprised by the visual effects since she had seen how Layla entered the Shadow Realm before. What surprised her was the fact that Layla shouldn't have been able to do that with the shadows to enter.

She was even more surprised when she noticed that the whole ground around her was shaded darker due to the shadows on it.

"Look up..." Layla's voice sounded in Emily's right ear from just beside her.

"Ahh!"

Which obviously startled her into jumping away. Then she did what Layla asked her to do after taking a defensive position. Which was looking up. The moment she did, all her fighting spirit left her body.

"How do you like my Sky Stalactite spell?" Layla asked her without moving from her position. There was even a hint of taunting in her voice. She was clearly enjoying the situation.

"I told you that I've won" She continued without waiting for Emily to reply to the obviously rhetorical question.

"I thought we agreed not to use our best spells?" Emily asked with a defeatedly low voice.

How could she not be defeated when the sky above her was covered by an unknown number of huge pointy ice cones around half the size of the fire sphere she used before.

The damn things were covering every inch of space in the arena. No matter where she tried to run to, they would be there. If she tried to mount a defence. It might work for a few of them but she would eventually be overwhelmed and squashed. There was really no way out for her without getting out of the arena. Which would be her loss since that was against the rules.

Well, she did have another plan. Unfortunately, she was nowhere near as agile as she would need to be to actually carry it out. Only people like Jade, Emily, Audrey and Muku would be able to because of their physical prowess. Not to mention that even they would need some luck to do it.

The plan was to jump up and meet the attacks midway. Then, use your abilities to jump in between them until they are below you. Which would be really cool if done, but she couldn't.

There was also the option to create her strongest-ever defence and ward off the attacks. However, using flames to defend against such large solid objects from above was no different from seeking death. People like Muku and Audrey could maybe do it with their elements that also have solid states, but she couldn't.

"That's not one of my best attacks though. Otherwise, they would have been black instead. I'm sure you know the difference between the two..." Layla defended herself in a relaxed manner.

It was clear to everyone present that the fight was over even though Emily hadn't admitted defeat yet. So, talking wasn't a problem.

"I know that... But it seems a little excessive don't you think? It seems to blur the lines a bit if you ask me. Just because you have crazier attacks doesn't make that any less crazy, you know," Emily persisted in her stance. She was secretly hoping to reason Layla into agreeing that it was a draw since she went too far.

While she didn't mind losing too much. Anyone would choose a draw of a loss if there's a chance for it. She was definitely not being a sore loser...

"Look behind you hypocrite" Layla didn't try to argue. She only told Emily to look behind her while pointing at something there after an eye roll.

"Hhm? Oh... Yeah, I totally deserve that" Emily did as told and she immediately understood what Layla meant.

At some distance behind her was the huge crater, she had made with her flame sphere. She might have nerfed it by not adding the "explode-upon-impact" attribute. However, it was still devastating and pushing it a bit. Which was obvious from the damage it did.

"You almost had me there if I wasn't lucky" Layla decided to add a few words so that Emily really understood the situation and wouldn't argue about the ending anymore.

"Fine, I get it. It's your win. I give up. However, how did you make it from there to my shadow though? I know for certain you had not activated those things in the sky yet" Emily finally admitted defeat which brought an official conclusion to the duel. Of course, she asked the question that had been bothering her since the event happened. How did Layla do what she did?

"Oh, that, it's simple, really. Of course, like I said before there was an element of luck involved as well. Just when your sphere was about to hit me. I escaped into the Shadow Realm. I created an ice arrow,

which was given a sufficient shadow by your attack's light. Then shot it towards you as I entered the shadow. It was a risky move since the arrow didn't survive long under such intense heat. However, it survived long enough for me to jump into your shadow before fading into nothingness" Layla explained how she did what she did since she had already won.

There was no need to keep such things from her comrades after all. Maybe one day Emily would be faced with such a case while fighting an enemy. The information would be quite useful then, preventing her from suffering any unnecessary losses.

"What would have happened if it had melted away before you reached me though?!" Emily asked feeling horrified.

She felt that Layla was way too reckless. Especially for such a petty match...

Chapter 177: Do I look like a little girl to you?

Layla looked at Emily silently. She understood where she was coming from. However, she felt that it wasn't as serious as Emily thought it was.

"Oh, that; I will admit that in normal cases, it would have been reckless. I don't even know what could happen if my link to the outside world was cut off like that. However, with him here, do you think anything like that will happen? You might not have noticed, but he's always primed to intervene at a moment's notice whenever there's a fight going on. Whether here or outside. Thank you for the worry, though," Layla spoke after a moment of silence.

She acknowledged Emily's worry as a teammate and friend. Which was why she even bothered to explain herself so much. She even spoke in a way that actively sought to calm down Emily. That wasn't something the past Layla would have done. It showed that she was actively trying to get closer to the others unlike before.

"Okay... If you say so. How come I didn't notice that? I mean, I knew he would always assist if something went wrong outside. However, to always be primed to interfere? Isn't that tiring? It's like he has a papa-bear personality" Emily responded.

Layla had calmed her down, she then instantly moved on to her favourite subject to talk about. Which was Muku and anything to do with him. She always liked discovering new things about him.

Especially in their current setting, where she can say she knew most things about him due to being around him every day. Of course, there would be personal secrets. She didn't expect to learn those from observing him or hearing it from others. That was something she hopefully would hear from the man himself one day.

It's things like what Layla mentioned. Which she had missed that she liked finding out about. After all, different people can notice different things while studying the same topic.

"Yeah... It honestly rather pisses me off sometimes. It's like he doesn't trust our own capabilities" Layla added her own take on the matter.

There was some real frustration in her voice. It seemed it had been bothering her for some time. While she wasn't a radical feminist or something like that. She wanted Muku to trust her and the others a bit more.

Even though he took a somewhat laid-back role a while back. Which was good and she silently appreciated. She could still feel that he was ready to intervene at short notice.

Which again, wasn't bad. The bad thing wasn't actually with Muku even. It was with her. Knowing that he's always there, ready to help, has made her somewhat reliant on him subconsciously. Which was why she tried something so reckless without a second thought. Maybe if Muku wasn't so present. She would have come up with an alternative instead.

While unlikely, considering the time constraints, it was still possible. She first grew up in an orphanage alone. She got adopted by a timid mother who was too scared to get close to her. Developed a rather self-dependent personality. Due to this, Muku's presence sometimes feels off to her.

"Well, I don't think of it like that. I think it's just his way of showing care. No one would want someone they care about to be injured right? I'm actually happy to know that he is paying more attention than I thought he was. As for you, I think you should get used to it since you're stuck with him from now on. Don't reject his presence. Embrace it instead... Anyway, we should go, we're wasting everyone's time by standing here. You should probably dispel those. It must be a drain keeping them up there so long" Emily spoke one last time, giving Layla a little advice before walking off towards the others.

"...I should embrace it?... Maybe I'll try that..." Layla spoke to herself while dispelling her spell.

She then followed after Emily. She was congratulated on her win upon arrival. While she played it off as not being important. She was actually happy that inside. The girl really liked winning and being congratulated for it after all.

...

A while later...

Muku had been standing for more than a minute looking at the beaten and battered arena. The girls had no idea what he was thinking.

"What's wrong? When are we fighting? Don't tell me you're chickening out now" Jade asked what he was doing with a little taunt. She just didn't know how to speak normally with Muku.

"It's nothing much. Just that... I think it's better we not battle. If the restrained R2s of our group could do this. Then I don't know what you will do. Which is a risk we can't take without anyone of the same rank casting the shield for us. If I do it, I might lose focus, which will lead to problems." Muku didn't mind Jade's taunting since he had long gotten used to it.

He clearly explained what he was thinking without even turning back. He has tried to think of an alternative but couldn't think of anything.

"What did you mean me?! Shouldn't it be "we" since we'd be doing it together? Why am I being singled out"? Jade snapped in defence of herself.

"Obviously, it's just you we have to worry about. You, girl, have control issues when you get into a battle. We aren't certain of what you can do with your current strength yet. So I refuse to experiment when it's not even stable yet. I don't know how it skipped my mind before" Muku explained bluntly.

"You jerk! How can you say such hurtful things to a lady?!" Jade screamed furiously!

So, what if it was true. Did he have to be so blunt about it? How insensitive can one man be?

"Firstly, you, like most of the girls where aren't old enough to be called ladies yet. You're just an adolescent girl. The only ladies here are Audrey and Freya. Secondly. I didn't say we wouldn't have the duel. It just won't be now. We'll wait for the others to rank up first. So they can be the ones to create the barrier. It shouldn't take too long. So in a few days, you'll get the beating you want," Muku defended himself.

However, his words not only made Jade angrier but also offended most of the girls in the team. For some reason, when girls are young, they hate being called young, and when they are old, they hate being called old. Muku had just offended all the young ones while talking to one.

He suddenly felt a chill go down his spine. Looking around, he immediately realised what was wrong. However, like a real man, he wasn't afraid to die for what he believed in. So, he just stood there bravely not taking his words back.

Audrey and Freya smiled wryly while looking on. The funny situation even made them feel a lot better about how their battles ended.

"Don't call me that! Look at me! Do I look like a little girl to you? What little girl looks like this huh? And I'm turning seventeen in two months!" Jade shouted in anger while spinning around in front of Muku.

Muku couldn't help but look. True to Jade's words, she really didn't look underage. Her body had developed beyond her age. Which has become a real problem in modern society. Young girls seemed to be growing faster than their age could keep up with.

She, along with the other three were all like that. Hope follows close behind. It was one of the things that landed many men in prison when they couldn't control themselves or they were tricked by the girls into believing that they were older than they actually were.

The girls in his team had especially gotten more mature looking too. It might have been because of their rapidly improving strength as they got stronger. Their looks were also top-notch and improving daily. The only reason no one in their group thought that they were outstanding was because of seeing Audrey every day.

The lady's beauty had long gone past the point of mortal beauty. If they were compared to the most beautiful girls in the world instead of her. They would definitely win with no doubt. Muku couldn't help but gulp down some saliva before getting a grip on himself.

It was already hard enough to keep a clear mind while surrounded by them every day. So, Jade doing what she was doing suggestively was just torture. Especially when Muku couldn't even relieve himself. Since there were people in the mansion with good enough hearing to hear what everyone was doing no matter where they were.

He had never done such a thing before so he didn't know what would happen after. He was afraid that he wouldn't be able to stop if he started. So he could only rely on certain dreams he basically had every night to help him.

"I will admit that you don't look like a young girl. And are definitely attractive. However, have you heard the term, "jailbait"? That's what you are right now," Muku admitted that he found her attractive while feeling a bit confused about how they got there. However, he still stuck to his conviction.

"Argh! How dare you call me that?! I'm outta here!" Jade was angered even more. The other girls silently mirroring her.

Since she couldn't find Muku, she chose to leave. She just didn't want to see him at that time. Her mind wasn't thinking straight. How dare he call her jailbait?!

"Wait for me!"×3

"Hmph!"×3

Emily, Layla and Chloe called out to Jade. Then ran after her after making a "hmp" sound at Muku to signify their dissatisfaction.

Muku just watched them leave with a wry smile on his face. He'd just let them cool off on their own. He had already spoken to them about it anyway. It was quite surprising how they appeared to all have selective memory loss.

"Who are you?!" Jade's annoyed exclamation sounded from just outside the arena. Muku hadn't taken it down yet.

BOOM!

Without a second thought, Muku flew toward the girls and was there less than a second later.

Chapter 178: Leader Jeff

"Who are you"? Muku asked in a threatening voice the moment he landed, startling the group of strangers standing in front of the girls.

His dangerous aura was leaking out a bit. It was almost like he was indirectly telling them that if he didn't like their reply, they were going to suffer.

"Hey! You're scaring them!" Emily spoke as she hit Muku on the shoulder.

She hit him as a way of showing the spooked strangers that he wasn't as unreasonable as he seemed at that moment. Of course, there was a little rebuking involved as well.

She had noticed long ago that he did particularly like it when males, especially strangers talked to them. While he wouldn't react like that in normal cases. Jade's annoyed voice when she called out, made him misunderstand the situation.

She, in reality, only spoke in such a tone because of their quarrel. However, in the heat of the moment, such a possibility slipped his mind. His prejudice got the better of him.

Emily understood all that. So she tried to salvage the situation. The other girls, who weren't too prone to talking to strangers, let her lead. They all especially didn't feel like talking at that time for obvious reasons.

"I'm sorry for his rude behaviour. However, we would appreciate it if you told us who you are and what you are doing here" Emily spoke clearly with a kind smile on her face.

She basically did what Audrey would have done when dealing with new people. She did it better as well, considering that she didn't have to cover her face. Or so she thought before she noticed that the five men were starstruck by her smile.

"If you don't reply, you are going to have to deal with him..." Emily got a bit annoyed by their display that she subtly threatened them with Muku.

He hadn't spoken since the question, choosing to let Emily deal with them. However, he was still glaring at them. It was rather fun to quietly intimidate people after all.

"R... right, I'm Jeff and these four are my teammates who don't need names right now. We're a scouting team from New Life Base. We go around searching for new hunting grounds. We were drawn here by the mansion and stadiums that weren't here the last time we passed by. We just got here too. I swear!" Jeff immediately explained after Muku was mentioned.

Muku reminded him of his base's strongest Evolvers. He didn't want to anger such a character. Especially when he literally flew in, which was something he had never seen before.

"Oh? Is that so? New Life Base huh? So, some people have embraced the apocalyptic world to that extent huh?... Tell, me, is it a safe zone or just a random building that survived the World's Evolution?" Muku got interested after hearing Jeff's explanation. He took over from Emily.

Another reason he got involved was because letting Emily continue leading would drag things out. Even while explaining, Jeff's eyes were trying to steal glances at Emily and the other girls.

As Muku spoke to Jeff he signalled for the girls to continue on their way. Their being there was just distracting. Knowing that he'd notify them later on of the conversation, the girls did as ordered. Their little quarrel wouldn't stop them from listening to him when it mattered.

Audrey and the other three came and went with the others. Audrey had long covered her face before appearing in front of Jeff's group. If they had seen her face, who knows what would have happened...

"I... it's a safe zone. It was a mall in X city. Thanks to our amazing leader, I dare say that even if the barrier disappeared right now. We would have nothing to fear. Our ten commanders and leader are strong enough to keep everyone safe from anything" Jeff replied.

He felt a little more nervous after being left alone with Muku. However, he got rather arrogant at the end when he started talking about the strongest members of his base. He was even giving Muku provocative looks.

Which, honestly, Muku found funny. Dudes like Jeff are the type that causes more problems for their allies than enemies. Like, there was literally no reason for Muku and those people to fight. Yet, there Jeff was trying to cause trouble.

"Is that so? Where is this New Life Base of yours?" Muku just dismissed Jeff's hidden taunt. He wasn't some third-rate villain who got triggered into doing the dumbest things just because someone said something.

"I can take you there if you want. Another one of our missions is to find people. Especially strong ones to bring back to join our base. You should barely qualify to join us" Clearly Jeff's nervousness was long gone. Otherwise, there was no way he would be trying to rope in Muku even though he knew nothing about him.

Not to mention the little insult when obviously weaker than Muku. Yet, he dared say Muku barely qualifies to join. Jeff's teammates broke out in cold sweat. They were wondering if their leader was trying to get them killed.

"You said it's where X city used to be right? Maybe I will go check it out. There's no need to take me with you. You can go ahead and continue with your task" While there were still some things he wanted to ask Jeff.

He felt like if he kept on talking to him, he might end up slapping him to death by mistake. Jeff was just naturally annoying. It was like a gift at that point.

"Are you sure? What if you get lost? You wouldn't blame me, right? You don't seem...Mmmph!" Jeff, who seemed to not see that he was annoying Muku more and more, was about to insult him before his team members got involved.

They all dog-piled him while covering his mouth. While he had eyes but couldn't see. They could see pretty clearly, and they saw how Muku's expression was darkening the more Jeff spoke.

"We're sorry for his behaviour sir. He has some mental problems. We'll continue on our way and get out of your way"×4 The men all apologised at once. Their hands still on the struggling Jeff's mouth.

"Smart dudes. I'll accept your apology this time. A little advice... Choose a new leader before this one gets you all killed" Muku spoke with a smile that didn't hold the emotions of a smile on his face.

As he spoke, the group was awed. This was due to the stadium structure behind Muku that faded into nothingness. It was as large as any stadium, just lacking some detail. Yet, it was created by someone's spell.

While Jeff was blind. They were not. They could tell that the man in front of them was a beast in human form. Their heaven-defying leader might not be the man's match.

By the time they snapped out of their stupor, Muku was gone. They quickly looked behind them and their awe increased. The mansion they saw before had taken off and flown away!

They couldn't help but wonder if they were having a shared dream instead of being awake. After all, how can such a thing be possible?!

"Wait! That direction..." One of the nameless dudes exclaimed before trailing off.

However, everyone... Not including Jeff understood what he meant. Jeff was even still fuming about their actions. If they weren't all stronger than him, he would have definitely beaten them up.

"What about the direction?" Jeff asked annoyedly.

"They are going in the direction of the base", Someone replied annoyedly. They were fed up with this trash leader of theirs. If he wasn't the younger brother of one of the generals, they would have beaten him up and left him there.

"Yeah, so? Isn't part of our mission to lead people there?" Jeff asked confusedly.

However, no one replied at that time. No one felt like wasting their time explaining to the idiot that the people they met were too strong. Sending them to the base was a dumb move. Who knows if they will take over after arriving??...

...

In the floating mansion...

"Why do you look so annoyed?" Audrey asked Muku curiosity.

It was rare to see him with such an expression after all. Jade even called him creepy one time for always having a smile on his face. However, even she was wondering why he didn't have that trademark smile at that time.

"Oh, nothing. Just that I feel like I lost some brain cells by talking to that idiot" Muku replied tiredly.

After reaching Rank Three. Moving the mansion was as easy as breathing for him. He didn't need to focus on it nearly as much as before. He also had the vague feeling that it had gotten better due to Freya.

Speaking about Freya, the girl had been realising her potential almost daily. She could now change the room temperature, get rid of all the dust in every room with just a thought and many more random things like that. She had tried to change the room order at some point. However, she didn't have enough mana, so she failed.

She was actually close to reaching Rank 2. Elsa wasn't lagging behind either. She was actually ahead of Freya by a significant margin. Freya was at 80%, and Elsa, who had developed many moves in secret, was at 98%. She was actually keeping it a secret from everyone. Her goal was to surprise them when she broke through in a few days if she was lucky.

"Oh, so... What did he say?" Audrey asked what they all wanted to know after acknowledging his reply. Muku then proceeded to tell them everything.

"Is that our next destination then?" She then asked the question on everyone's mind after he finished telling them everything.

"Why not, right?" Muku replied with a short answer as a smile reappeared on his face...

Chapter 179: New Life Base...

The next morning...

So, it turned out X city was quite a distance away even when one flew there.

Especially when you get attacked by LR3 bird-type beasts every now and then. With Jade holding a grudge and refusing to scare them off with her aura.

It was already evening by the time they got close to the New Life Base (NL Base). Of course, they wouldn't get too close with a floating mansion with them. Not before they knew how strong the other side was at least.

So, the moment Jade could spot a speck that seemed like a building in the distance. Muku immediately stopped the mansion. He even took it back one more kilometre. He has a gut feeling that something was different about that base compared to the two he went to before.

As someone who always went with his gut feeling. Which had never let him down. He chose to stop there. Even Jade supported him. While she didn't feel anything life-threatening from the base. She felt uneasy and didn't want to get close to it.

Which prompted Muku to put together a scouting team he would lead. The team involved himself, Audrey and Chloe. While Jade didn't want to go, the others did. However, they understood why Muku chose Audrey and Chloe instead of the others.

The reason was simple. Audrey and Chloe could handle themselves well whether at range or in close combat. Which was perfect when stepping into an unknown situation.

Of course, it didn't mean that the others were useless in close combat. Just that they weren't as effective as the two Muku chose.

As for why Muku didn't mind getting involved with the base when he wanted to avoid Ares and the voice from the sky? Well, simple really, those two were beings he definitely shouldn't mess with. They also seemed limited in how much they could interact with the world.

However, whoever ran the base was a human who seemed quite ambitious from Jeff's information. In the current world, the person probably has a significant chance of doing something big if he has enough power.

That was the information Muku wanted to know most. He wanted to know if the leader had enough power to be significant or not. From the initial appearance of things. The situation didn't seem promising for his side.

He had the feeling that the leader was definitely worthy of note. As for what he would do if that was really the case? He wasn't sure yet, he would have to meet the man first. It was definitely going to be an interesting encounter if the other party's capabilities were good enough.

"So, how long are you going to take before coming back?" Hope asked when holding Muku's hand. She definitely wouldn't let go if she didn't like his answer.

"Don't worry, it won't be that long. It's just a scouting mission. As soon as we get the information we want, we'll immediately come back. In fact, the sooner we go, the sooner we come back" Muku replied in his softest voice.

For obvious reasons, Hope was the one he treated most delicately in the group. For that reason, he didn't mind her overly clingy personality. He knew that it was because of the emotional wounds she got from losing her family.

She was affected a lot more than the others. Jade had a strong personality that helped her survive through it, even if she would feel pain every time she thought of them. She could still soldier on.

Emily had Elsa for support. Layla hasn't lost anyone since Audrey was found. Chloe's relationship with her father wasn't too deep after years of neglect so she wasn't too affected by his assumed demise.

Hope, on the other hand, was completely devastated. For that reason, Muku became her everything. Which, he, who had never had anyone who relied on him so much before, really liked. On a psychological level, maybe he should try to get her to recover but... Did he really want to?

"Okay, If you say so. Hurry on back then..." Hope spoke while reluctantly letting go of Muku's hand.

She had sensed that he was treating the mission a little more seriously than those before it. Which was why she couldn't help but act out like that. While she knew he probably wouldn't be back as soon as he said he would. She still let go because she didn't want to be too difficult.

"Yeah... See you soon, okay? One last hug before I go" Muku replied while giving her a hug and nodding at the others.

Jade frowned. The way he was acting, it was almost like they weren't going to see each other ever again or something. Not wanting to ruin the mood, she remained quiet.

Internally, she couldn't help but wonder what she'd do if she didn't ever see him again. A slight red flashed in her eyes before quickly disappearing. The answer to that was so scary she didn't know what it was...

Muku and the two girls then flew away under the gazes of the others. The situation seemed uncharacteristically emotional despite them having done it a few times before.

Was something bad really going to happen?...

...

Less than a kilometre away from NL Base...

"So, what's our game plan? Are we breaking in or?" Chloe asked. Unlike before, there was no meeting to discuss how they were going to deal with the base. Which she just realised, so had to ask.

"Oh, that... There is no game plan. We're just going through the front door. Which is why I didn't see the need to discuss it. Oh, and we're three PR2 siblings who were lucky enough to gain Rare Classes and are barely surviving the apocalypse alone. For that reason, we're here to seek refuge after meeting Jeff. If they ask for any more background information. Let me speak, okay?" Muku told the two girls everything they needed to know.

The honest truth was that he believed in his strength so much that he had gotten a bit cocky. For that reason, he felt too lazy to come up with a game plan. However, he couldn't say that to the girls lest they ditch him and go back. So, he came up with some random bullshit on the spot.

"Oh, okay... We'll do that then" Chloe looked at him with slight suspicion but didn't say anything.

Her attention has been grabbed by something else. That was the mall. It was actually her father's mall! He had so many, in many different cities that she couldn't remember most of them. It was only because of the name "Charlotte" written on the front of it that she remembered.

Her father had renamed all his malls "Charlotte" which was his wife's, her mother's name after her death. He really loved her with all his heart even after her death.

It was also because of her that Chloe, a rich girl went to an average school. Charlotte didn't want her daughter to grow up as an entitled snub, so she chose a normal school. Of course, not all rich people were snubs... probably. Charlotte just didn't want to take the chance.

Anyways, realising the mall's origin unsettled her heart. She felt angry that some stranger claimed it as theirs. Even though she knew that such a thing was unreasonable in the apocalypse, she couldn't help how she felt.

"Chloe!!!" Muku's voice sounded in Chloe's ears. Startling her to the point of almost yelping in surprise.

"What's wrong? Why are you shouting?" Chloe asked while rubbing her irritated ears. If she was Jade she would have exploded and asked for a fight to the death. However, she was a reasonable person, so she asked why he did it instead.

"I had been trying to call you for a while, yet you weren't responding. It was either that or a pinch from Audrey's metal nails so... Anyway, we're here. Look," Muku explained everything to Chloe, then pointed forward.

That's when she noticed that they were flying really low, almost at ground level. They could clearly see the guards at the mall entrance, and it was safe to say that the guards could clearly see them as well.

"I think it's time we start walking. I want to keep as much hidden as possible from the other party" Muku spoke while completely placing the two girls on the ground as he landed as well.

The girls didn't argue. The trio then walked toward the guards normally. They showed neither fear nor arrogance. Just like how normal people with a little strength would behave.

They would seem like three normal people if Audrey and Emily's faces weren't veiled. Not to mention Muku's rather devilishly handsome looks.

Just those reasons alone were enough for the guards to put their...guards up. They did nothing else, however. They stood there, waiting for Muku and the girls to arrive.

As for it only being one gigolo-looking dude and two girls coming their way. They didn't care, they were already primed for a battle. The two guards understood well that in the apocalypse, looks no longer mattered.

The trio in front of them could be monsters in strength for all they knew... Which was very true, actually, though they didn't know that. They were definitely some top-tier guards in vigilance, at least.

"Hello, I'm M..." Muku wanted to introduce himself to the guards before one raised his hand to stop him from speaking. Which he did, he was fully committed to the role or someone might have gotten their hands broken for being disrespectful.

"This conversation won't happen unless they take off their veils..." The guard on the right spoke while the guard on the left nodded his head in agreement.

Muku could immediately tell that they weren't going to be as easy to deal with as he thought...

Chapter 180: Auntie Tilda?!

In front of New Life Base...

"Is that necessary? We've come in peace. Look, we aren't even armed" Muku tried to reason with them. Using a reason that wasn't reasonable anymore.

The guards just looked at him like he was an idiot. Wtf did he mean that they weren't armed? Who didn't know that modern weapons didn't work anymore? Hell, even if they still worked at that point, many humans would still be a lot more dangerous than the weapons.

So, for Muku, who had "walked" there with two girls through an unknown number of beasts, to say they weren't armed. Trying to hint at their harmlessness, was super shameless. Who in their right mind would believe such a thing?

For that reason, the guards rolled their eyes at him without budging. Their silence says, "They take their veils off, or you aren't entering".

On Muku's side, it couldn't be helped. Audrey's looks were just too dangerous. Even the most upright man might lose himself and turn into a beast after seeing her. She had kept on getting better looking after the Mest incident. So, even their old male associate might be starstruck despite having seen her before.

As for why he brought her on such an important mission? Simple really, he didn't think anyone would ask for such a thing. Especially when Jeff that bastard!, said the base was actively looking for people.

Would someone actively looking for people be so guarded? No! Such behaviour might scare off some people who didn't want to review too much away, which wouldn't be good for their agenda.

"If this is how you're going to treat us, then we're leaving. I can't believe I trusted Jeff, that bastard when he said this was the place to go if one sought refuge. I should have known" Muku tried a different approach.

While it seemed like he was furiously cursing Jeff for being a liar. In truth, he was indirectly mentioning to them that it was Jeff who told them to come.

As for whether it would work on such vigilant guards or not. He wasn't certain. However, it was worth a try. Otherwise, they might have to give up or break in... And there was no way he was going to give up after going all the way there.

"So it was that idiot... Cough... I mean, Leader Jeff, who directed you here? Well, big that's the case. I guess we can compromise. Only one of them has to take off their veil. We can't compromise more than that. You must understand that last night, some rebels tried to break in. So, security has to be a bit tight right now" After hearing Jeff's name, one of the guards finally spoke.

It wasn't that he was scared of Jeff or anything. He was afraid of the person behind Jeff. As one might guess, people like Jeff have a tendency to be quite narrow-minded. Jeff happened to be one of the most narrow-minded people in the whole base.

So, it was almost certain that he would ask about Muku upon his return. If he doesn't get a clear answer, he definitely will cause problems for the guards. While the person behind Jeff wasn't bad, they were quite indulgent when it came to Jeff. So, no matter what Jeff did, they would back him even if they didn't like it. After all, Jeff was their only remaining family member.

"Fine, I'll take mine off. Be sure to keep your word though. Otherwise, we'll go back and complain about you to Jeff" Chloe spoke before Muku.

She might be really beautiful. However, it was still within a tolerable range, unlike Audrey. So, it was fine for her to take off her veil. The guards didn't seem like the lecherous type anyway. To make sure that they didn't try anything after seeing her, she mentioned Jeff again.

"Sure, we're just doing our job after all. You do that, and we're good," The guard from before replied.

Chloe then proceeded to remove her veil. Seeing the beautiful face behind the veil. The two guards couldn't help but hold their breath as they appreciated the beauty. However, they didn't do anything more than that. They didn't even look at her lustfully.

Either they were good guys who didn't lose themselves over beauty. They could tell that she was a minor and weren't into that. Or they were into rainbows... Well, whatever the reason, it worked in the favour of Muku's group.

"Chloe?!" Just before the guards could say anything, a surprised female voice sounded from the side.

Everyone's attention immediately shifted as they all looked in that direction. There, a pretty and well-dressed lady in her early thirties stood with her mouth wide open. Her beauty didn't lose out to Chloe's. She even looked a bit better due to her mature age.

"Auntie Tilda?! Ahh! Auntie!" Chloe called out the lady's name surprise and shock. Then she screamed as she ran toward the lady. She was overflowing with happiness.

How could she not be happy when the lady was her father's secretary who had taken care of her for years? While Tilda hadn't always been present since she had to follow Chloe's busy father everywhere. She still tried her best to make Chloe not feel alone despite all that.

Which she did by video calling her every time she had the time in between her busy schedule. She also visited Chloe whenever she had some days off. The lady had been more of a parent to Chloe after her mother's death than Chloe's father, who basically disengaged from interacting with Chloe altogether.

"You girl! Where have you been? Do you know how worried I was? I went to look for you at the school but it was destroyed. Then at the mansion but it was gone!" Tilda wept as she spoke.

She had been distressed for the longest time after not finding Chloe. Especially after the exaggerated scenes she saw at the places she expected to find Chloe. She didn't know where the local safe zones were, so she couldn't go there to check.

"Why are you still crying? I'm here right now right"? Chloe tried to console her while also crying.

Muku and Audrey just looked on with slight smiles on their faces. It was always good to come across people you knew in the current world. Especially close ones like Tilda and Chloe.

The guards on the other hand. Their mouths were wide open with shock. How could they not be when the lady was Wind Goddess. One of their base's commanders. She was one of the strongest as well. Not to mention being the leader's trusted right-hand woman.

Thinking that they were just troubling someone who had such a close tie to her made them break down in cold sweat. What if she decided to slice them up for their actions in anger? While she wasn't a bad person, who knows what she would do when she was emotional?

"Let's go inside and talk. There's also a surprise for you there. Your friends can come with us" Tilda spoke while wiping her tears away and glancing at Muku and Audrey for a bit.

Muku felt the slight hostility she had toward him when her eyes passed by him. He didn't know why, however. So, he just ignored it. Maybe she thought that he must have done something to Chloe at some point after staying with her for so long. Well, whatever, if that was the case. It would be cleared up soon enough anyway.

With that, the group of four went inside. The two guards and the three ladies that were with Tilda looked on. The guards were sweating even more after Tilda gave them a dirty look as she passed them by. It was certain that, at the very least, they were going to face some kind of punishment for their actions.

Even though they were just honestly doing their job. It was really unfair, they were not wrong in any way. Their only sin in the matter was signing up for a side character position in the novel...

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Inside the mall...

Tilda took the trio to her room for a talk before she showed Chloe the surprise she mentioned before.

"So, are you going to introduce us?" Tilda asked Chloe to introduce everyone.

"Oh, right, I almost forgot. This man here is Muku, my former teacher. The same Muku I mentioned to you a few times before the apocalypse. I wouldn't be here without him. I would have died a long time ago. Now he is my group's leader. This lady here is Ms Audrey, she is the mother of one of my classmates. She's an angel we don't deserve...." Chloe immediately introduced the two parties.

She finished by introducing Tilda to Muku and Audrey. The three parties then became acquainted.

"So, tell me, what have you been through since the first day of the apocalypse? I want to know everything" Tilda moved on to the next topic. She had been controlling the tempo of the conversation from the start. A true professional office worker.

Muku couldn't help but raise a brow when she looked at him at the end of her question she was obviously asking Chloe. It was clear to see that she didn't like him very much. Despite knowing that Chloe only survived because of him, she still looked at him with a little hostility in her voice.

He could tell that it was going to be a rather troublesome conversation...