

Few Wives 371

Chapter 371: Klaus's true strength

BOOOOOOOM!

CK's mana exploded out of his body as he walked back to Klaus slowly.

The calm look on his face was long gone. A dark expression has replaced it instead.

His own soldiers who saw this stepped back in fear.

This made Klaus's men want to step forward and defend their leader. But unfortunately for them, they were getting crushed by CK's aura and couldn't move.

And so, they could only look on in terror as the man walked closer to their leader who also seemed to be stuck.

And even that took a lot of effort as even breathing was hard to do in front of the overpowering aura.

"Good good. I should have known that the brother of an ungrateful dog is also an ungrateful dog. I shouldn't have wasted my time extending a hand to dogs. The only way I can wash myself of this dishonour is by ending your pathetic life right here and now. But I will first make you watch as I kill all your people one after the other. And the women will first serve as the playthings of my soldiers before they are killed too. I want to experience ultimate pain before I send you on your way" CK spoke calmly but ruthlessly.

Soon enough he was back in front of Klaus. At that point, his black eyes had turned red. This matched his hair.

At this point, Klaus and the others finally understood why he was called the Crimson King even before he did anything.

They could even guess his power from how the surroundings were quickly heating up.

In fact, they had gotten so hot that anyone lower than R3 would quickly die without even being directly attacked.

The soldiers from Tactoa were only okay because of their suits...

"Soldiers, what are you waiting for? Didn't you hear m..." CK was addressing his soldiers after seeing that Klaus wasn't saying anything.

Which he assumed was his way of submitting to him. And so, he decided to move on to the punishment.

However, before he could finish giving his orders, something shocking happened.

Klaus who shouldn't have been able to move calmly raised his hand and placed it on CK's shoulder. Which pretty much recreated a certain meme.

"So this is the power of an R5 huh?... Well, at the very least that's what I wanted to say right now. However, this isn't the power of an R5 is it? You're close but far at the same time. At most, you're a bit over Peak Pseudo R5s in strength. But we both know that a legit R5 would dog walk your ass. Your energy signature is nothing but a farce. I'm glad my brother left Tactoa before it completely ruined his body and talent. Even if it did harm it a bit without him noticing it.. Well, aren't you going to say anything?" Klaus said what he wanted to, to the shocked CK.

In fact, it wasn't just the CK who was shocked. Everyone present was shocked. After all, none of them understood how Klaus was resisting CK's aura so easily.

After all, he had never done anything which suggested that he could. Even though he had proved without a shadow of a doubt that he was the strongest among them.

In hindsight, he managed to punch CK away before. And even if it was a surprise attack, it was still hard for a lower rank to do that to a higher rank.

And there was how he was disrespectful and unbothered by CK's presence from the start.

It was only now that people were starting to see the light. And that was the likely fact that none of them actually knew the limit of Klaus's power. From the looks of things, he was way more of a beast than they thought he was...

"You... How are you doing this?" CK asked a question instead of attacking like everyone else expected.

The reason for this was that Klaus was spot on when he said that CK wasn't a legit R5. After all, just like Lewis Smith, his strength was enhanced by the Monarch...

But that wasn't the problem. The problem was that Klaus could tell. And it only made sense that anyone who could tell was of the same level, if not stronger.

"Don't you think we've spoken enough? I feel that people want to see a fight now. Plus I only touched your shoulder instead of attacking before I wanted you to see it coming. Jumping you didn't seem fun. So, now... Take my punch..." Klaus replied then...

BOOOOOOOM!

He gut-punched CK. However, the blow was blocked. But the force generated still pushed CK back.

He looked down at his aching hands then back up.

He was met with an interesting sight. And that was seeing Klaus's body double in size and muscle. Pitch black marks appeared on the right side of his body while pure white ones appeared on his left.

He looked quite weird and majestic at the same time. It was also the first time anyone from Klaus's group, including his brother saw the transformation.

And to their surprise, his aura climbed to the peak of Pseudo-R5 just because of the transformation.

Which was completely unheard of. Transformations gave people power, but it was never so dramatic as moving from not even PR4 to Peak Pseudo-R5. That should have been impossible from what they knew... Fortunately, they didn't know Muku or they might have gotten heart attacks.

"Finally, someone who's worthy of my true power..." Klaus spoke calmly.

As black and white mana swirled around him...

"That mana... Whatever. Die!" CK could feel that there was something wrong with Klaus's mana but he couldn't place it. So he gave up on that and decided to end Klaus's life first.

He felt that he had been too chatty that day. It was time to take care of business.

And so, with an explosion of red flames behind him, CK exploded forward.

He simultaneously deployed his mana armour. Which wasn't something humans normally around them and they hadn't developed the instinct for it yet.

Some could keep it on most times, but CK who wasn't that talented couldn't. So he only deployed it during battle, like now.

BOOM!

Klaus was hit dead centre and flew away into the distance.

CK immediately pursues as he wanted to kill Klaus as quickly as possible to make up for the time he lost.

Plus Klaus was so weird that he didn't want to give him any more time to pull something weird out of nowhere.

Anyway, soon enough, the two were a distance away from the rest of the group.

As or was only then that CK noticed that Klaus wasn't actually getting hurt despite all the beating he took until they got there.

"So you just wanted to get me away from the other huh?" CK asked as he sent fire attacks at Klaus.

"No talking" Klaus immediately shut him down.

He really disliked chatty opponents. Which was odd since he was chatty himself.

Anyway, this time he didn't tank the attacks and dodged them instead.

After that, he flew toward CK and the two were soon entangled in a magic and fists battle despite the option of using long-range attacks.

Though CK wanted to use long-range attacks, just that Klaus wasn't letting him go too far from him.

And so, he could only fight it out and sneak in long-range attacks when possible.

It's not like he had a reason not to accept close range... After all, it was soon apparent that despite the transformation which put him infinitely closer to CK in power. He was still weaker.

And so, he was soon bruised, battered and bleeding. Which was all to CK's pleasure.

The redhead quite liked the feeling of beating down the disrespectful Klaus....

...

More than thirty minutes later...

"Just give up and die trash... I'm way out of your league!" CK arrogantly declared to Klaus who was now practically half dead.

His skin was burnt off in many places, and his hair was also a mess. And his left hand was hanging loosely on his shoulder as it was broken...

His face was also beaten black and blue. And yet his fighting spirit didn't decrease. Even his expression was still calm after everything...

"Why would I give up when I'm winning?" Klaus asked the craziest question in the world.

"Ha! Hahahahahaha. You're winning? Okay, sure. You're winning then. Let's make you're win official by ending your life!" CK replied mockingly at the man who had clearly lost his mind from the beating he had given him.

"Of course I'm winning. You've literally thrown my way everything you could throw. You used your mana armour, domain, and even your strongest attacks, and yet you still couldn't bring me down..." Klaus replied calmly...

"Hoho. You think I used my strongest attacks because I used my domain and mana armour? Let me show you my real strongest attack before I send you on your way!" CK replied angrily.

After all, it was a sore spot for him that he hadn't been able to take out Klaus after everything he did.

And so....

BOOOOOM!

His flames turned an eerie pitch black. He almost moaned from how good the new strength felt in his body.

He was so focused on his power that he didn't notice the small smile which appeared on Klaus's face.

Chapter 372: Thank you...

"Hahaha. Now witness my true power! Burn!" CK called out loudly as he sent a torrent of black flames toward Klaus.

The flames surrounded Klaus, so there was no way he could escape.

The duo were fighting in the sky at that point, so even escaping into the ground wasn't an option as flames were coming from there too.

Soon, Klaus was completely enveloped by the pitch-black, corrosive flames.

A sizzling sound was soon heard. It was quite shocking when one knew that there was a person who was likely getting burnt alive at the centre of the flames.

However, the sound was practically music in CK's ears. He always liked it when he heard his opponents getting burned to death as they screamed in their most horrified voices... Wait...

"What isn't he screaming?" CK asked himself out loud.

A possible answer for why there were no screams was that Klaus had been burned up completely in an instant before he could scream.

However, if that was the case, then there wouldn't be the sizzling sound which was still ongoing.

For that reason, CK was greatly confused. He had never actually used the black flames at such a large scale. But he was more than certain that they were way stronger than his normal flames. Which meant that they should have made quick work of the job that his normal flames could slowly accomplish. And yet...

Well, whatever was going on gave him a bad feeling. He started contemplating his next move. Whether to retreat or add more power...

However before he could come to a conclusion, something happened...

"So you finally noticed it... Well, it's too late. Now it's time for me to show you my power. Truly, thank you for using the corrupt flames..." Klaus's voice which was completely absent of any pain was heard clearly from inside the flames.

Then in front of the astonished CK, the flames slowly parted. And a completely unharmed Klaus was reviewed.

Well, he was harmed, but the harm was from the previous clashes. His state hadn't been changed by the flames at all. He didn't seem to even feel their terrifying heat.

And upon looking closer, CK noticed that the flames weren't actually touching Klaus's skin. They were close but not quite there. It was almost like there was an infinite space in that little space the flames couldn't overcome. Or they were scared to touch him.

Before CK could say something, Klaus's closed eyes began twitching. And then they slowly opened.

It was only then that CK noticed that Klaus's eyes had been closed all this time.

Which meant that he wasn't able to finish off a weaker opponent who didn't even have his eyes open.

Sure, mana sense was as good, if not better than eye vision in a close enough distance, but that didn't change the fact that Klaus's eyes were closed. This was very humiliating to CK.

His anger and hate towards Klaus increased as he couldn't even remember how many times the bastard had embarrassed him in less than two hours.

But it wasn't the time to be angry... He couldn't be angry even if he wanted to. Because the next moment, Klaus's eyes completely opened...

CK looked directly into them... Surprise and awe appeared in his eyes and then...

BOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOM!

A horrifying aura exploded out of Klaus's body. It completely erased the pitch black flames around him.

However, it wasn't just an aura which appeared. It was also accompanied by a force so strong that CK was slammed into the ground before he could react.

He tried to lift his head in defiance, but he couldn't even move an inch. He tried to deploy his mana/domain armour but it was instantly broken as soon as it formed.

He tried to deploy his domain, but it was also destroyed when it formed.

He tried to surround himself with the black flames, but they were even worse. They didn't even form. It was almost like they were afraid of Klaus.

It was at that moment that CK regretted his life choices. He thought that he should have taken care of Klaus at the very beginning without acting arrogantly. Or he should have taken care of him with his normal power no matter how long it took.

After all, from Klaus's words, it was clear that he was only able to display his current power which was infinitely close to R5 because CK used the black flames he got from the Monarch.

As for how the two things were related, he had no idea. But he was more than certain that he was screwed and his life was likely about to end.

And that thought terrified him. A strong unwillingness appeared inside his body. However, it was also accompanied by a strong sense of powerlessness since there was nothing he could do.

He has literally tried to pull out everything in his arsenal but nothing worked. Hell, it was literally his trump card which got him into the horrible situation.

"Look at me one last time before I send you on your way..." Klaus's calm voice was heard again.

After which, CK was able to move his head again. However, he didn't look up.

He would rather die than listen to what the bastard told him to do.

"Sigh..." Klaus sighed then...

CRUNCH!

"ARGHHHHHHHHHHHHH!" CK screamed loudly in pain.

He then looked up in intense hatred.

Which was only natural... After all, Klaus just crushed both of his legs into meat paste with his power.

However, the hatred was completely wiped away when he looked into Klaus's eyes again.

That wasn't just because the eyes looked weird, but they also held a suppressive force in them which made him feel inferior and unable to feel angry toward Klaus. It sounded crazy, but that's exactly what was going on...

Speaking of Klaus's eyes, they were not normal human eyes anymore. The shape was still the same. However, instead of a black at the centre and white on the outside like before the apocalypse... One eye was black on the outside and had the white part of the Yin and Yan symbol with the little black centre.

The other one was the opposite, it was white with the black half of the Yin and Yan symbol at the centre.

Honestly, just from the eyes alone CK felt like Klaus was no longer just a mere human Evolver. He was something more, something stronger... Something he couldn't mess with or hope to defeat.

Only if he knew that Klaus was hiding something that big at the start. He would have retreated and called for some backup.

He regretted being blind when he noticed how nonchalant Klaus was from the start.

Unfortunately for him, it was already too late...

"Yes, that's it... That's the regret I wanted to see. Now that I'm satisfied. Goodbye... Hopefully, you make better life choices in your next life" Klaus spoke with a neutral expression on his face. It was almost like his emotions had been suppressed by his new power...

And then...

CRUNCH!

CK's whole body was completely crushed leaving nothing but meat paste and cloth behind.

Fortunately, it was only the neutral Klaus who was present to see this otherwise if the others were also there, a few people would have definitely vomited.

Some would have fainted and likely most of them would forever be terrified of Klaus even if they knew he would never harm them. After all, the way he killed CK was just too brutal!

"Hmm. It seems my brother didn't let me down after all. Let me go and... Oh?" Klaus spoke calmly and was about to go assist his team when he noticed something.

CK's meat paste was actually melting into a pitch black substance. And energy tentacles began extending from it into the distance.

They were all heading for the Tactoa members who were chasing after his team...

He considered letting the tentacles make contact and see what happens but...

BANG!

He created an invisible barrier around the tentacles which they crushed into.

Then he held out an open hand which he began to close slowly.

The space around the tentacles began decreasing with his hand movement until the now completely black paste was just occupying space only big enough for a soccer ball.

However, something interesting happened. The paste actually changed states and took on a solid form... The new form looked awfully a lot like a large beast core.

However, it would have to be a completely corrupted core since the energy was completely different. Unlike the serene and pure cores, even if they contained dark element mana.. this core-like orb gave off a sinister aura.

It reminded him of the story his brother told him about a slime which was made from Tactoa gun energy that his sister and brother encountered... Just that this seemed like an advanced version of that.

"So this is what Tactoa is d..." Klaus was making a comment when a black shadow appeared in front of him then disappeared before he could clearly see what it was.

He looked down at his hand in which he was holding the black orb before and it was gone...

The shadow has literally appeared in front of him and stolen something he was surrounding with his power and left.

A cold chill went down his spine as he tried to figure out what had just happened....

Chapter 373: Dark Shadow...

"Ahhhhhhhh!"

"Ahhhhhhhh!!"...

Before he could figure it out he heard screams in the distance.

And so, without thinking about it he charged forward. After all, the screams came from the direction his group was in...

It didn't take him long to arrive... And his eyes immediately widened to the max upon arrival.

His neutral state was completely breached as his eyes reflected a horrifying scene.

They reflected Chris and the others gathered together in a large circle behind Chris's barrier while looking outside warily.

Many of them were battered and bruised. Some were even missing limbs while others were dead. The sight looked quite morbid.

However, that wasn't the worst or horrifying part. That part came from the scene outside the barrier.

More than two hundred corpses were lying on the ground. And all of them had hopes where their hearts used to be. A horrified look was frozen on each and every one of their faces.

It was this sight which horrified Klaus. After all, he knew that even he wouldn't have been able to kill all of them so cleanly and so quickly.

It literally didn't take him even thirty seconds to get there. And yet, they had all been killed off in that time... If it were an area of effect attack which took them out, then he would have understood.

However, it was clear that they were killed one by one.

That's right, more than two hundred armed Evolvers were killed in less than thirty seconds without even a single one of them being able to retaliate or try to.

There was only one way such a thing was possible... And that was....

"Rank 5..." Klaus spoke slowly and warily...

And to make matters worse, the power-up he had gotten quickly left his body. Which meant that if he had to face the unknown R5... He wouldn't even be in his peak state.

And that thought brought him despair even though nothing had happened yet.

That's right, for the first time ever since the whole thing began. Klaus was utterly and completely shaken.

He then waited for the R5 to make an appearance while getting ready to do whatever he could to repel it.... Even if he was more than a hundred percent sure that he wouldn't be able to do anything to it...

However, nothing happened even after waiting for ten minutes.

For these ten minutes, neither he nor anyone from his group made a sound as they prepared to be attacked at any moment.

Even those who were in extreme pain held themselves back from making a sound so as not to disturb the others.

"... Let's get out of here..." Klaus suddenly spoke after seeing that nothing was happening.

He wasn't sure what was going on with the R5 but he felt that it was better to leave the scene than wait there to die.

Maybe it had left for the time being and would return for the bodies later.

And if it were to find them there, wouldn't they be killed off too?

After all, they'd practically be a fresh meal which prepared itself...

"Yes", Chris replied and created a huge flat barrier below everyone and took them away after Klaus climbed on.

None spoke until they were more than a thousand kilometres away...

They went towards the place Chris saw Jade last since they didn't know which direction the creature which killed the Tactoa members went. So they might as well go in a productive direction...

"What do you think that thing was?" A random person in the group broke the silence as he asked his friend.

He had actually whispered instead of speaking aloud... But he had forgotten that everyone present was a high-level Evolver, so his whisper was no different from talking normally in the situation they were in where everyone was quiet.

"I don't know and have no idea. All I saw was a pitch black shadow when it slowed down a bit" The friend whispers back.

"I saw a pair of red eyes. It felt like the creature could look into my soul and expose every secret I have with just a mere glance" Another person from the ground shared what he saw without being asked.

He was probably just trying to calm himself down by speaking.

"I saw them too. Those were definitely the eyes of a demon. Though I couldn't see any emotion in them. It was like the eyes of a predator looking at weak prey. They were nonchalant. Like it everything that was happening was only natural and needed no mention. That scared me more than if it had cruelty in those eyes" Another person shared.

This time it was a lady who began shaking more and more as she spoke.

Klaus's eyes narrowed a bit but he didn't say anything. He came to the conclusion that the same creature which snatched the orb from him was the same one which killed all the Tactoa members.

He could tell the others, but he saw no reason to do so. After all, they might panic even more if they knew that their strongest was as easily humbled by the creature as they were.

Sure, they probably understood that he likely wouldn't be able to do anything to it. But just having the hope that maybe he could have done something was enough.

It was false hope, but it's what kept them sane and that's all that mattered...

He began silently thinking as to why the creature did what it did. Like why did it only kill the Tactoa members but spare the rest?. As well as why it took the black core but spared his life when killing him would have been super easy and effortless.

Soon something clicked in his head... And that was something the Tactoa members all probably had in common despite their different backgrounds from before the apocalypse.

And that something was the black energy from the Monarch...

All Tactoa members had it to some extent.

And from how the creature took their hearts which have the most concentration of the energy and dismembered their guns as well... It was clear that it was after that energy.

After all, those guns were rigged to explode after being tampered with... Yet that didn't happen. Which only meant that the energy which was supposed to explode was taken out.

And the fact that it came after the cure which has the highest concentration proved his conjecture even more...

Anyway, if that was the case. Then he could relax. After all, that meant that the creature had no reason to pursue them.

He was glad that he had taken care of the traces in Chris's and Scarlett's bodies without them knowing. If not, his brother and sister-in-law might have been killed too...

With that taken care of, he could think of other things... The first thing on the agenda now was getting stronger.

The situation has been too close for his liking. They were literally only alive because the creature found them worthless. If not, they would have died along the Tactoa group.

And so, he needed his base strength to be R5 at least. And that was without the unreliable trump card of his which only works when there's Monarch energy close by...

So he quietly decided to first reach R5 before seriously looking for his sister. He heard from Chris that she and her group were really strong. And unlike Chris, he couldn't stomach the idea of being weaker than her.

Which meant that he had two reasons to get stronger now...

...

Tactoa headquarters....

"What the hell!?. Legion that traitorous bastard! Not only did it completely break off connection with me. Now it's killing off my men! I wasn't even a lot to see what was going on through the monster they would have made after death because it had already absorbed them! And I feel like I would have found out something very important too. Yet that's all fine because of that thing! I should have destroyed it when I had the chance! This is what I get for sending out my prototype into battle. If it hadn't exposed the connection flaw, its creation would have been a total loss! Now I'm left with nothing!" The Monarch orb exploded out in anger as it floated in its room.

Its anger caused earthquakes in the whole area even though it wasn't actively doing anything. This showed just how powerful it was. Just its anger could affect the surroundings...

The Tactoa members in the area all shook in fear as they stood still wherever they were. After all, it wasn't the first time the orb had been mad like that.

And the last time, the guy who tried to calm it down was instantly dissolved into a puddle of black liquid then absorbed by it.

What made that occurrence more terrifying was how the guy was their strongest member and second in command after the orb.

Which meant that no one was safe from its wrath.

So whenever it was angry, they all stood still and held their breath until it was calm again while praying that it wouldn't look in their way... After all, a few people had died just because they didn't like how chaotic their energy became when they were afraid...

....

In a random cave somewhere...

A human sized pitch black humanoid figure with nothing but a mouth and a pair of red eyes on its head could be seen sitting in a cave...

There was a vertical crimson line on its abdomen which looked out of place. But those who knew what it hid were terrified of it...

"RE...vE...NgE..." The creature spoke in an unclear and hissy voice...

It looked in a certain direction in hatred...

...

Sneeze!

"The heck?! Is someone cursing me?!" Raya spoke annoyedly and confusedly as she swam in the open lake.

She was confused by the sneeze since she didn't even know that she could sneeze until then...

Chapter 374 Empress versus Empress

The morning of the gauntlet.

Audrey and Jade could be seen facing each other in the air arena Muku prepared. The battle was physical, so the ground wouldn't be useful to either of them.

And at that point, they were setting out for the stadium after being gone for over two years.

It was something Freya requested after realising that the next evolution would likely be too much for the ladies there to handle on their own. And since it was sort of like her old home with the ladies being her old family, she wanted to help them.

Muku who remembered that he had made a promise/bet with a certain girl there wasn't against going to help them.

Plus he had invested in them back then, so it was only natural that he'd want to make sure that they live long enough to be useful.

So, he decided to hold the gauntlet while heading towards the stadium. He decided to visit the university too if there was still time...

"Contestants are you ready!" Raya who had begged to be the referee after falling in love with wrestling from Muku's memories shouted excitedly.

Sure, she was playing both an announcer and a referee, but she didn't care. She quite enjoyed it actually.

"Yes!"

"Yes!"

Audrey and Jade replied with the same level of enthusiasm as the little girl.

If it were Muku, they probably wouldn't have done it, at the very least, Jade wouldn't have done it... But it was Raya, the team's youngest, cutest and strongest member. So they didn't mind.

It actually took all of Audrey's willpower not to rush towards Raya and pinch her rosy cheeks.

"Good. Now, a little preview for the viewers.. To the right, we have Mama Audrey. The team's resident vampire empress with unparalleled beauty and strength. And on the left side, we have Jade. The team's resident beast empress is renowned for her versatile beast aura. So this fight can be said to be an empress versus empress battle.. So it should be extremely entertaining... Anyway, I will not waste more time. The battle will begin as soon as this extremely narcissistic Muku-coin touches the ground after I throw it up..." Raya finished her announcements and threw the coin she was holding up into the air.

The reason she called it narcissistic was quite obvious to all who saw it... The coin literally had Muku on both sides. One side was happy while the other was sad.

And it was so detailed that the girls realised that Muku might be more narcissistic than they thought.

Anyway, the coin didn't take long to hit the ground...

Yet, neither Audrey nor Jade moved... They continued staring at each other intently then...

BOOOM!

BOOOOOOOM!

They both disappeared at the same time and a second, louder boom was heard.

The two reappeared as they jumped back from each other.

"Impressive..." Audrey commented as she looked at her slightly shaking hand.

Neither of them had used their full strength in the attack. In fact, they used about the same strength and their fists collided against each other. This resulted in the second boom.

And yet Jade looked to be unharmed when her hand was shaking slightly.

This reminded her of how Jade's body was actually a level above hers now. Sure, she already knew it, but it was her first time actually experiencing it. And now she could properly gauge how much Jade was stronger than her.

And she began coming up with a plan on how to deal with the physical difference.

She wasn't disheartened at all. After all, as a veteran, she knew that just being physically superior didn't guarantee a win. Even if it was a physical battle...

Hell, Jade knew that too. Which was why she wasn't recklessly charging at Audrey.

"Hehe... Thank you" Jade replied then she disappeared again.

She saw no reason to delay. And there wasn't any... While she couldn't be arrogant. That didn't stop her from going on the offensive. After all, she had the base advantage which she intended to completely exploit...

Boom! Bang! Bang!...

And so, the battle between the two finally began in its entirety.

Jade was on the offensive while Audrey was on the defensive.

Even though Audrey wasn't able to throw even a single blow at Jade. She was completely calm and unbothered as she blocked all of Jade's attacks.

The reason for this was simple. Jade was more of a raw-power-type while Audrey was a lot more swift...

So while Jade was stronger and faster... Audrey was a lot better at controlling her body. This gave her the ability to block Jade's attacks while redirecting their force. So she wasn't injured at all...

Jade was also unmoved by what was going on. After all, they both knew each other well enough to know that it wasn't going to be easy for either of them to take out the other no matter the advantages that were given...

The two went on to "dance" like that for close to thirty minutes...

In this time they both studied each other on a deeper level as they tried to figure out how to break through the other party...

Jade finally found a slight opening in Audrey's defence. It wasn't there at the beginning, but only came later on as she changed up the way she fought while trying to break through.

A small smile appeared on her face then...

BOOOOM!

BOOOOM!

She punches Audrey on the gut without holding back... However, she was surprised to receive a hit from Audrey at the same time.

Both parties staggered back and looked at each other as they grabbed their stomachs in pain.

Jade's eyes were full of surprise while Audrey's were full of amusement despite the pain.

"What? You thought I wouldn't attack also? Yeah, I noticed that fixation of yours. You were so hellbent on attacking that you forgot that you could be attacked too. That's a terrible mistake which could get you defeated... However, I'm glad that you listened and decided not to hold back." Audrey spoke.

"Thank you... But are you sure you should be telling that to me now? After all, I will now keep it in mind and you won't be able to hit me again..." Jade replied.

"Hmm... That is a possibility. But don't you think that there's a high chance that now that you'll start thinking in a completely different way from before while trying to incorporate what I said... You'll mess up at some point and I can take advantage of that?" Audrey replied.

"Wha..." Jade was about to reply when she was interrupted by a punch to her face.

"Sorry about that. But I noticed that you put your guard down, and I had to capitalise..." Audrey apologised to Jade who was now holding her cheek from a distance.

"...No, it's fine. I appreciate the lessons actually..." Jade replied after looking at Audrey in silence for a little bit.

And she meant what she said. Also, she suspected that Audrey had been wanting to teach her such things for a while now but just didn't have the chance to before.

Sure, she could have spoken to Jade about it... But Audrey wasn't the type of person to do such a thing. She'd be too embarrassed.

"Great! Now let's continue!" Audrey gave Jade a heads-up this time and attacked again.

This time Jade managed to block.

However, an unexpected kick hit her side and sent her in the distance.

Audrey didn't stop this time as she followed with a stump that missed because Jade got out of the way.

However, a roundhouse kick still hit Jade and sent her flying again...

.....

On the terrace...

"Umm. What's going on? Isn't Jade stronger? Why is he losing?" Emily asked with eyes full of disbelief.

"It's simple really. What you're seeing right now is what we call talent paired with the perfect body. Audrey has by far the highest amount of talent in the team when it comes to martial arts. And her abilities also sculpted her body into its perfect state. She's the very definition of "not just a pretty face". And on the other side, Jade is great. She's also talented in martial arts like the cheat she is. But Audrey is just better, also, unlike Audrey who adapted well to the fighting style, Jade is still fighting against her own instincts. After all, that's how she fought for more than two years..." Muku replied as clearly as he could.

"So you're saying that if Audrey went back to her old fighting style, she'll win?" Emily asked again.

"Nope. She'd lose quicker. And she knows it too. Which is why she's still using the techniques I taught her despite the disadvantage. And I'm quite proud of her for that. I expected her to give up on them... It seems she's finally growing..." Muku replied while wiping a fake tear from his eye like a proud father.

"Tsk. So that's why you bet on Ms Audrey, you knew she'd win..." Emily spoke while rolling her eyes...

She also felt a pang of regret in her heart as she had placed her bet on Jade.

"No, no. Even though Audrey is suppressing Jade right now. It's still anyone's game. They haven't even gotten serious yet after all... In fact, look, things are finally about to get serious and interesting..." Muku replied while directing everyone at the battle..

And so, they all refocused on the fight...

Chapter 375 Force Vs Force!

"If you don't use it now you'll lose" Audrey advised the bruised and battered Jade she just kicked away.

"Will it even be useful after you told me to use it?" Jade replied in a somewhat wronged tone.

While she expected a tough fight from Audrey, she never expected one so tough that she'd get completely overwhelmed.

She was practically being bullied. And that was with Audrey probably holding back so as not to embarrass her too much.

"...." Audrey didn't say anything, only smiling wryly.

She kinda felt bad for Jade. But she also couldn't let up lest she get beaten up instead. That's why she thought of giving Jade a suggestion.

It was only after giving it that she realised that it was a terrible one. In fact, it probably felt like mocking, to Jade.

And so, she decided not to say anything else until the battle was over.

{Well, she isn't wrong... I can at least throw everything I have at her before I lose... And it's not guaranteed that I'll lose either...} Jade thought to herself then...

BOOOOOM!

An invisible energy suddenly exploded out of Jade...

And without wasting even a millisecond she charges forward at Audrey and...

Bang!

Her first-ever clean hit with no consequences landed on Audrey.

It had happened so quickly and suddenly that Audrey was completely caught off guard... However....

BOOOOM!

A similar energy exploded out of Audrey as she dodged Jade's follow-up move...

"Now let's see you managed to retain more Force" Audrey said with a smile while floating in the air.

A little blood was flowing out of her mouth and she was obviously in pain from the serious hit she took... But that didn't stop her from trying.

Maybe it was because of her class or Muku's blood tainted her, but when the conditions were right, she also became a battle maniac like Muku and Jade.

The punch from Jade seemed to have done just that. She even forgot that she promised herself not to speak anymore.

"Sure..."Jade replied simply then...

BOOM

BOOM

The two exploded forward at once and clashed at the centre.

This time, force was doing all the talking. And since their mastery was about the same. They exchanged blows left and right.

At one time Audrey would land a hit and at the other Jade would.

This was because pure martial arts wasn't as effective when your opponent could release a force wave to disrupt you. So Audrey's advantage was mostly nullified.

This was why Muku said that it was still anyone's game before...

....

A whole later...

Audrey and Jade were now fighting in the air to see who would slip up first since they were both still not too proficient in aerial battles.

They could fight on the ground but that would make the fight even longer than it already was. Which was something neither wanted after fighting for so long.

After all, whoever won had to face the rest of the girls. So they couldn't afford to fight for too long.

It was already terrible enough that their fight lasted so long.

BANG! BANG! BOOOM!

The duo kept on exchanging blows until they were both bloodied all over.

The others looked on in awe. They were certain that if it were them facing either Audrey or Jade, they would have lost long ago.

And that made them respect the duo even more. They weren't ashamed to admit that no matter what the final result would be, the winner of the current battle would be the rightful number one and the loser would be the rightful number two...

"Okay, this is lasting too long... Why don't we end it in one attack?" Jade proposed an idea to Audrey while slightly huffing.

She was more than happy to continue as she was enjoying the battle a lot. It was after all, the first time she had such an evenly matched match.

But she knew that it wasn't smart to continue anymore...

"Sure. That sounds like a good idea to me" Audrey replied while huffing slightly as well.

"Great... Ref, can you toss that coin again please?" Jade called out to Raya after Audrey agreed.

Raya silently nodded then came in between the two who were more than twenty meters apart. She then threw the coin into the air and disappeared from the centre before reappearing back on her seat.

The duo gathered their remaining force as they focused on the coin.

With their current evolution stage. The coin was crystal clear and practically moving in slow motion in front of their eyes. Then...

Tink!

The coin came down and hit the metal ground.

BOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOM!

A combined sound which showed how in sync Audrey and Jade were in that moment was heard. Then... Silence.

"Well, it seems I lost. But losing to you isn't all that bad I guess..." Jade spoke calmly then...

BO....

Her body started cracking about to explode into pieces when Muku appeared beside her calmly and touched her shoulder.

The explosion which was about to kill her on the spot was instantly erased from existence.

However, Jade still fainted from it leaving a continuous flow of blood from her mouth, nose, ears and eyes... It was clear that she was extremely injured even though everything was stopped in time...

"N..." Audrey was about to scream in horror and regret when Muku placed his finger on her mouth which stopped her.

"Don't embarrass her by crying about this. She'd want you to take the victory proudly. She said that she's happy that you won after all... Besides..." Muku spoke calmly as he removed his finger from Audrey's mouth.

As he finished speaking, a familiar green glow appeared around Jade's body...

It was Hope's healing glow. And in no time at all. Jade was completely healed without any hidden injuries.

And again, Hope showed her unparalleled importance in the group. They couldn't literally lose anyone else since they had offensive fighters left and right, but they couldn't lose her since she was the only healer. And she was probably the best healer on the planet too.

So even if she didn't have her poison element which again placed her among the elites of the planet, she would still be as important as she was then.

"See. She's completely fine..." Muku continued after Hope quietly healed Jade from the side...

"Why isn't she waking up?" Audrey who was still not completely appeased asked.

"Don't worry about that. She's just mentally exhausted and is asleep. You can look at her face..." Muku replied calmly and directed Audrey's attention to Jade's completely relaxed face.

"Oh okay..." Audrey could only let it go for now under Muku's reassuring gaze.

However, she still felt terrible for what she did. She wished she could go back in time and not do it...

"Good that you understand. Congratulations on the win. You'll get a five-minute break to gather yourself while your next opponent is also getting decided..." Muku addressed Audrey then walked away with Jade in his arms.

"...I'm proud of you" He spoke again without looking back.

"And I'm proud of you too..." He whispered while looking at the girl in his arms.

He knew more than anyone that the battle was anyone's game until the very last moment after all...

In fact, if things had gone how everyone thought they were going to go, Jade would be standing tall as the winner...

Audrey looked at Muku's receding back for a bit longer then closed her eyes. She opened them soon after, but this time there was only resolution in them.

She then sat down as she wanted to rest as much as possible before her next opponent. And mediation was the way to go...

....

"Is she really okay?" Emily asked Muku worriedly as she and the others came to check on Jade when Muku placed her on a newly created bed beside him.

"Yeah. She should wake up after resting for a bit..." Muku replied while he sat back down and looked at Audrey who was now mediating.

A small approving smile appeared on his face. He liked how Audrey had "matured" a lot compared to two years ago.

Back then she wouldn't have been able to recover so easily. Sure, she probably hasn't recovered from what happened, but she now knew how to keep her priorities straight and put her worries aside for later...

"Oh, okay. That's good... But, what was that? I thought Jade was dead!" Emily asked after checking on Jade.

"That... Well, that was genius. So genius that even I never thought of it... Then again, I've never been in such a situation. However, it was genius nonetheless. Truly unexpected..." Muku replied while in a state of awe as he replayed what happened in his head.

"Oh, it was genius, was it? That's great! But that still doesn't answer anything!" Emily snapped because of Muku's vague answer. He spoke like he was appreciating art instead of explaining clearly like she expected any normal person would do.

"Oh, right. You all are still too green and weak to see everything clearly huh? Well, let me tell you what happened then. Listen clearly for we just witnessed history today!" Muku replied again. The dreamy look in his eyes didn't disappear.

Everyone listened intently not wanting to miss what he was about to say...

Chapter 376: Second fight...

"What happened is... None of your business until the whole gauntlet is over! What did you expect? Me telling you about someone's ultimate move before you face them so that you can watch out for it? Nuuuuh, that's just not fair now is it?" Muku replied in a way that almost made all the girls cough up blood in anger.

Like, why tf did he gather them around and look all solemn when he wasn't going to tell them anything?!

The worst part was how they couldn't disagree with what he said. After all, it really would be unfair for them to be told about Audrey's secret move before facing her.

They certainly wouldn't want anyone to know about their own moves before battle. After all, such information could change everything.

So while they were scared to fight Audrey after what they witnessed. They didn't demand anything or back out.

After all, Jade's grave injuries were probably only so severe because she wasn't expecting what happened.

Which was unlike their situation. Sure they didn't know exactly what happened. But they at least knew to expect something and when to expect it. Which was already more than they deserved.

"Tsk fine..." Emily replied annoyedly.

"Good that you all understand. Anyway, now is the time to decide who's going next" Muku replied smilingly.

"Why wasn't that decided earlier?" Chloe couldn't help but ask.

"That was an option, but this is more fun. One doesn't get too much time to mentally prepare before they have to go and fight" Muku replied.

"As expected from you..." Chloe spoke in a voice which sounded somewhat like she was mocking Muku. But he didn't pursue the matter.

After all, they could get fed up with him and refuse to fight if he bothered them too much. Which would ruin his fun since he won't be able to do anything in such a situation...

Well, he could try begging but he'd rather not casually throw away his face like that.

"So how are we doing it?" Freya asked from the side.

She didn't particularly want to fight. But since it had to be done anyway, she decided to get it over with as soon as possible.

"Probably the same way we decide everything..." Layla replied calmly.

"Rock-paper-scissors?" Freya asked.

"Yup! Now get to it" Muku replied in Layla's stead. His excitement was as blazing as ever.

The girls rolled their eyes but still got on with it.

And so, several rounds of rock-paper-scissors were carried out. They all had three matches with each other. A person's losses against another were combined then the one with the most losses would be the one to go next.

The ultimate loser ended up being... Emily.

A dark look appeared on her face when this happened.

Sure, Audrey had just come out for an intense battle and was nowhere near her peak condition. But still, she was Audrey.

A "beast" who almost completely dominated Jade from start to finish. And from what they saw, the last exchange between her and Jade didn't take too much out of her.

This meant that she was likely nowhere near being burnt out.

Hell, she wasn't even breathing heavily after sitting for like a minute or so. Which meant that the remaining four were pure fuel to her.

So yeah, Emily didn't like her odds at all.

"Hehe. Are we about to see a friend's revenge?" Muku spoke with glowing eyes as Emily slowly walked toward Audrey.

"Shut up!" Emily snapped without looking back.

She had forgotten that Muku could also be insufferable when he was excited. What made it worse was how his excitement was almost always linked to their suffering.

It was like he only experienced schadenfreude when someone close to him was involved...

Anyway, it wasn't the time to be bothered with him. So, Emily closed her eyes as she walked forward and took a long breath to calm herself down.

.....

A few seconds later...

Audrey's eyes which had been closed for close to five minutes suddenly snapped open.

They instantly zeroed in on Emily who was standing around ten metres away.

Emily was slightly startled. So she took an involuntary step back. The focused and somewhat predatory look in Audrey's eyes was something she had never seen before. At least not from the gentle Audrey. So her reaction wasn't unexpected.

"Hello..." Audrey who had noticed Emily's increasing unease greeted her in her usual gentle voice.

The predatory look also vanished as she spoke. Her eyes quickly returned to the state Emily was familiar with.

"H...hi". Emily replied nervously..

However, her nervousness was already decreasing.

"Don't think about it too much. Just think of this as a slightly serious spar between us. In fact, that's exactly what it is. Just think of it as a spar in which you use all your strength that's unrelated to mana.

There's no need to worry about hurting me since Muku will step in on time. And Hope is also here if injuries occur. So it's completely safe" Audrey spoke as she tried to calm down Emily even more.

"... You're right. There's nothing to fear" Emily replied as she closed her eyes again and took another long breath.

Internally she smiles wryly at Audrey's misunderstanding. She realised that Audrey seemed to think that she was worried about hurting her. But instead, she was worried about being hurt by Audrey.

But she didn't correct Audrey. There was no need. Hearing Audrey's caring voice was just what she needed. She was completely calm now.

"Little Raya..." Audrey called Raya after seeing that Emily had calmed down.

Raya silently appeared in-between the two like before. Then she announced their identities again. After which she tossed the Muku coin again and then disappeared.

"Here I come!" Audrey warned Emily then...

Boom!

She didn't start out too strong unlike Jade.

After all, Jade was an explosive firecracker while Emily was a lot calmer.

Which was also similar to Audrey's own style. For that reason, the two wouldn't start out intensely.

Anyway, Emily also moved forward and the duo met at the centre.

Their exchange began. Audrey matched Emily's physical capabilities as they exchanged blows.

After all, the gauntlet wasn't only to crown a winner. It was also a way for the girls to improve their skills in battles with someone of a somewhat similar level.

It was easier for many to learn from people closer to their level than those way beyond it after all.

And so, Emily and Audrey sparred for close to ten minutes.

Audrey then jumped back. It wasn't because she was forced back, so Emily didn't pursue as there was no reason to pursue. She also suspected that Audrey wanted to say something...

"Hmm, not bad... However, you're way too reserved in your attacks. It's almost like you're prepared to defend at any time instead of trying to achieve victory... I think I have an idea why you're doing that so I won't say anything more about it. However, I will tell you this... I'm about to get serious. Good luck..." Audrey addressed Emily then without waiting for a response she charged forward.

Her style changed from a reserved one like Emily's, to a somewhat tyrannical one which leaned towards Jade's way of fighting.

Her first attack was a literal stump from above. It was definitely deadly if it connected, but it was also easy to dodge. Emily successfully did.

However, she didn't have much time to rest as Audrey followed up with a right hand. Emily successfully blocked it... Or so she thought.

The right hand turned out to be a faint as a left landed on Emily's gut instead. She flew off into the distance. An obvious look of pain on her face.

However, Audrey who has zeroed in and gotten into the zone didn't stop. She followed after Emily ready to throw another critical hit.

Emily panicked a bit as she saw this. She felt like she was a little rabbit being hunted by a huge snake.

However, as a battle veteran, her fear didn't immobilise her, in fact, it made her sharper and...

BOOOOOM!

Emily punched the ground with a fist full of force.

The force flew in all directions and forced Audrey to jump back in retreat.

Emily who was now also in the zone didn't let Audrey stabilise her position as she came after her with a force boost.

So she arrived in front of Audrey in less than a second. Then...

BOOOM!

She threw a fist full of force towards Audrey.

Audrey noticed this and threw her own fist despite the precarious position.

However, it seemed Emily was expecting this as the first turned out to be a faint and the real attack was a kick to the side of Audrey's midsection which tossed her into the distance.

This time Emily didn't pursue as she sensed that anything she might try at that moment would fail for whatever reason.

Audrey who was kicked on the side stopped midair and looked back at Emily.

There was pain in her eyes as she clutched her side but she was also smiling.

"Amazing. What a great combo. And the instincts not to pursue despite the seemingly obvious opening..." Audrey complimented Emily.

However, her eyes darkened immediately after. It was time to go all out!

Chapter 377: Warrior Empress!

Seeing the intense look in Audrey's eyes. Emily got ready to receive the fight of her life. She could tell that Audrey was about to throw her best at her.

"Haaa!" Audrey shouted as she raced forward.

Emily got ready to receive her. She thought that meeting her in the middle like Jade did before would be suicidal, so it was best to wait for Audrey to come to her then see what happens.

That was actually a good strategy... The learning from someone else's mistakes part.

However, whether the information she learned would be helpful or not was unknown...

And Emily was well aware of this. So she was quite tense and ready to receive any sort of attack Audrey might throw her way.

Then...

Bang!

"!?" Emily was surprised by how the expected force was nowhere to be found in the attack she received.

She didn't think about it too much as the reason was irrelevant for the time being.

What mattered was that she could take advantage of it and take out Audrey if it worked.

And so, the ready-to-shoot force she has inside her body exploded forth with the intent of ending Audrey before she could rectify her mistake.

By how her attack was almost out of her body but Audrey hadn't done anything yet... Emily couldn't help but smile slightly as she thought that she had managed to beat the one she thought was unbeatable.

However, something weird happened the moment her attack left her body.

Her whole body was instantly wracked with pain the moment her force came into contact with Audrey.

"Argghhhhhhhhh!" Emily screamed out loudly in pain.

Her consciousness began fading soon after.

She had one final thought before she lost consciousness and that way....

{Oh... So this is what happened to Jade... No wonder she lost...} Then Emily fell into Muku's arms who was already standing beside her ready to receive her.

This time they were even less urgent in the way he did things.

"Impressive, you can control it a lot better now. There's barely any damage to Emily's body. And it's just your second time... I'm quite jealous actually. You might be more talented in the technique than I am" Muku complemented Audrey again.

Audrey didn't say anything however. She just sat down and closed her eyes. In the next second, she was already in a meditative trance.

Muku looked at her silently for a bit before turning around and walking away with a slight smile on his face.

He wasn't offended by Audrey's actions at all. After all, it was clear to him that she was in the zone. And she was doing everything in her power to maintain that state.

Which meant that talking wasn't something she could do at the moment.

Hell, there was a chance that she didn't even hear what Muku said.

...

"Again?" Chloe commented in surprise.

She looked at Audrey in the distance with nothing but awe in her eyes.

While she expected Audrey to win, she never expected it to ve through a method similar to the one she used last time.

And honestly, the way Audrey looked right then was quite badass. She looked like a warrior empress taking care of business like the boss she was.

"Yeah... Hope, if you please." Muku replied simply then called out to Hope.

Hope who knew what she was being called for, immediately healed Emily.

At this point, Jade had woken up. She just came to the right when Emily was about to lose.

This allowed her to pretty much see what happened to her from an observer's point of view. And she was even more amazed by it than when she was the one experiencing it.

Maybe because she could clearly see that Audrey was now almost completely in control unlike before.

And that was amazing, because what she was doing was amazing. It should be quite hard just to use the move, let alone control it...

She suspected that Audrey's body was suffering quite a bit from using the move. And yet because of the adrenaline Audrey was able to push on as if nothing was happening.

Anyway, just because she understood what Audrey was doing didn't mean that she would tell the others. In fact, Hope just tried asking her about it and she remained quiet.

As Jade was stuck in her thoughts, the others did another rock-paper-scissors tournament.

And this time the winner... Or loser rather, was the timid Freya who couldn't help but shake when she looked at the dormant Audrey.

She could tell that the current Audrey was different from the usual her. There was currently an overwhelming pressure coming out of her that she normally didn't have.

It wasn't a mana pressure or a pressure caused by any other energy. It was literally just pressure caused by Audrey's state of mind.

It was weightless and harmless, yet Freya felt it crushing down on her even without being targeted by Audrey who didn't know her next opponent yet as her eyes were still shut and she was completely focused on meditating.

It was only when Muku placed his hand on her shoulder that Freya managed to calm down a bit.

And so, after the five minutes were up, she walked toward Audrey.

The moment she reached ten metres away, Audrey's eyes snapped open.

Freya expected this so she didn't scream out in fear like she would have done if it were unexpected.

"Oh... It's little Freya. I'm sorry but I won't be able to teach you right now. The state I am in is a bit weird, so I can't think of anything other than defeating my opponent in the slowest amount of time possible. So please bear with me. I promise to make it up to you after the battle... And I'm not saying I'll win, just that I won't be holding back..." Audrey spoke in a calm and somewhat absent voice.

Her crystal clear words sent a chill down Freya's spine.

Although Audrey said that she wasn't certain of her victory, the confidence in her voice was unmistakable. It was clear that even if Audrey didn't win, whoever took her down wouldn't be able to do it easily no matter what.

And that made her the deadliest opponent one could face. Someone completely detached from everything else apart from the battle.

Freya could only think of one word to use to describe the current state Audrey was in...

"Battle mode..." Freya spoke in a soft voice.

Raya immediately appeared between the two and did what she was supposed to do.

Then the battle began...

BOOOOOOM!

Freya who had been talking with the real Muku more often than the others was no slouch in the ring.

So she easily went from zero to a hundred and charged towards Audrey.

She felt that waiting for Audrey to come to her would be a mistake. So she went towards Audrey instead.

However, her plan wasn't to throw everything she had at Audrey. After all, everyone had seen clearly that attacking Audrey with Force was seeking death. So even if they didn't know why that was so, they didn't dare try it.

For that reason, Freya decided to use her force as support while not using it all when attacking Audrey.

The momentum from that should actually create enough natural force to make a difference in the battle.

She wasn't certain if it would work but it was the only option she had since their synthetic force was a no-go. And duking it out with Audrey with her much stronger body wouldn't work either.

Anyway, it was a decent plan for such short notice. And the chance of success wasn't bad... Only one problem...

Audrey disappeared right in front of Freya's eyes.

That's right, she disappeared. Not "exploded" away with her Force like how Freya exploded forward or the others did before her. Audrey just disappeared silently.

This caused Freya to pause as she tried to make sense of what was going on.

However, as a veteran, she expected Audrey to appear behind her... So she turned around quickly in a defensive position...

However, she saw nothing then everything went black...

"..."

Everyone who was looking from the side including Muku were speechless.

No, they were shocked... No, they were beyond shocked...

Wtf did they just see?! How did Freya who was clearly stronger than Emily get one-shotted by Audrey?!

And what the hell did Audrey do?! Were they still using the same technique?!

Did Muku teach her something extra that he didn't teach them?!

But then again, Muku looked even more shocked than they were when they looked at him.

It was almost like he was seeing a ghost. So yeah, there was no way he knew what was going on with Audrey.

"Big brother... What was that?" Hope asked Muku with her eyes still focused on the ring...

"I don't know... But, there's no need for you all to decide on who's going next. I think it would be best if you went at one if you want to stand a chance..." Muku spoke with a solemn look on his face as he looked at Audrey in the distance.

"What?!" The girls all screamed in surprise.

Chapter 378 One Vs Four!

A while later...

"Are we really going to do this?" Chloe asked the others in a voice full of unwillingness.

"You heard what he said. Mom is on the verge of an important breakthrough. For that, she needs sufficient pressure. Something none of us can do alone right now. And Muku would be too much pressure. Even if he holds back, it won't be as natural..." Layla replied calmly.

"I know but... I don't know" Chloe replied uncertainly.

She was barely okay with fighting Audrey at all. And now she had to do it with other people? That was way too much!

"Are you forgetting how he made quick work of Freya despite her being one of our best? In fact, we're wasting time here talking. She might miss the opportunity because of us. So if you don't want to participate, you can sit this one out. We won't hold it against you" Layla addressed Chloe again.

This time her voice was gentler as her "big sister" mode took over for a second.

"Fine. If it's for her sake, I'll do it" Chloe who was extremely averse to fighting someone she saw as her mother finally agreed.

The others really didn't judge her for her unwillingness despite what was at stake. After all, they knew that she had imprinted on Audrey just as much as Hope had imprinted on Muku. She was just way better at controlling herself compared to Hope. So her case wasn't as obvious as Hope's unrestrained one.

So yeah, just as Hope would hate nothing more than to fight against Muku outside of sparring, Chloe didn't want to fight Audrey either...

Muku just looked on from the side without saying anything. It wasn't that he couldn't, but he felt that the girls had it, so he didn't have to say anything. Of which they really had it.

Anyway, since Chloe agreed, the girls immediately got into position. They surrounded Audrey who was standing still with her eyes closed from all sides.

"What didn't you join?" Muku asked the girl standing beside him.

"I'm not so shameless as to join a battle after losing it already... Even if you say the situation is different now. I will not join. This is their battle not mine" Jade who was the one standing next to Muku replied calmly as she looked at the others.

"Hmm. How noble of you... Only if I didn't know that you aren't joining because you're afraid of going out of control and using your Beast Aura..." Muku replied with a slight smirk on his face.

"Tsk. Can't you let the readers' view of me improve by just a bit?" Jade complained about how Muku exposed her.

"Nope", Muku replied simply.

"Whatever" Jade replied and started ignoring him.

Talking to him was both angering and distracting. Neither did she want to experience. Especially when she was about to witness Audrey's new and mysterious prowess...

Muku didn't continue bothering Jade either as he also wanted to focus on the battle.

.....

On the battlefield...

"So you decided to come at me at once huh? Well, honestly that's a smart strategy. For which I am proud of you..." Audrey replied in a calm and almost alien voice.

She sounded so detached despite expressing how proud she was of them.

The girls instantly confirmed that there really was something going on with her.

Sure, they believed in Muku. But the jerk didn't seem to be above bribing Audrey and giving her extra lessons just to make the battle more interesting for himself...

The girls didn't say anything and only gave each other looks full of information.

Since Jade, Emily and Freya weren't participating. There were actually only four of them. Namely Layla, Chloe, Hope and Elsa.

And so, Audrey was surrounded on four sides...

BOOOOOOOM×4

The girls all exploded forth at once after giving each other the signal.

They all used their gathered force from training in their very first move. This was to be expected though, after all. Audrey had done things which warranted that much "care" at the very least.

Audrey who was at the centre still had her eyes closed and hadn't moved at all. However, the moment the girls moved. She smiled slightly and...

Bang!

Bang!

Bang!

Bang!

She surprisingly managed to block all of the girls and push them all back.

But of course, their attacks didn't contain Force so they weren't injured by that weird ability of hers and were just knocked back.

"Good plan but... You weren't in sync" Audrey spoke in her detached voice.

"Yeah. Our speeds are different so it's hard to sync up without prior training. But hurting you wasn't the purpose of the attack. I just wanted to see if you would use that move you used on Freya. We already know how to avoid the Jade one. Now we know that you can't use the Freya one if there are more than multiple opponents coming at you at once" Layla replied to Audrey.

Of course, she didn't say anything that wasn't obvious or would put them at a disadvantage. She wasn't that dumb, even if they were fighting her mother, she wanted to win!

"..." Audrey didn't say anything. Then...

BOOOM! She charged at Layla.

The others immediately jumped in to assist Layla.

And just like that, they managed to ward off Audrey again.

The five kept doing that for close to thirty minutes.

At this point, Layla and her group were all sweating and heaving. And yet Audrey seemed fine.

Sure, she had damage from all that had happened. But other than that, she wasn't sweating, nor heaving at all.

"How does she still have power?!" Hope exclaimed after managing to catch her breath a bit.

"... I don't know" Layla who felt that things weren't going according to plan replied after a little silence.

The four of them had actually decided to tire Audrey out before going in for a kill. However, it seemed like Audrey was a perpetual motion machine.

She literally fought three people before them and yet they got tired before she did.

And they had been hit by her more times than they hit her despite having a significant number advantage.

She couldn't help but look at Muku behind them.

And surprisingly, unlike before, there was no longer a look of glee on his face. There was a trace of worry instead as he looked at Audrey.

This made Layla's heart skip a bit. She then turned to look at Audrey again.

This time she paid closer attention to her.

That's when she noticed something. Audrey's skin had actually turned slightly rosy at some point... Not her face, well, not just her face but her whole body.

And there was no way such a thing could be good.

That's when something clicked in Layla's head.

Audrey was doing something dangerous to her body to allow her to continue fighting.

And from the looks of it, it wasn't something minor since it seemed to be destroying her from the inside out.

She couldn't imagine the pain Audrey was in. Yet her mother hadn't made even the slightest pained sound from the start until that point.

"Everyone. I think we should rush things up. There's something wrong with Mom's body. We can't delay any longer. Let's go all out and not stop until she's defeated. Even if she breaks our bones..." Layla suddenly suggested something crazy.

However, after hearing why she said it and looking at Audrey closely. The others all made up their minds to do as she said...

After all, Hope could heal them all with a single spell... Even if she was also going to fight with them. She can cast her healing spells even when she's close to fainting.

So there was no need to worry as there was no way things would get that dire... Right?

"Let's go!" Chloe was the one who led the charge this time.

The girls all jumped at Audrey at once.

And another heavy-hitting round began. The girls targeted Audrey from all angles. Some attacks missed while some landed.

Of course, some of Audrey's attacks landed on them as well. Layla's left leg was grabbed and twisted by Audrey at one point, but she didn't stop fighting as she kept herself standing with her Force. She continued fighting with her hands.

All the girls had their faces almost punched in with black eyes but they still didn't stop. Chloe's right hand was also broken. Elsa's ribs were in tatters. It was only Hope who somehow managed not to have a single part of her body broken. However, she was still beaten up and was in as much pain as the rest despite that...

The girls were determined to take Audrey down no matter what. Even if they couldn't win, they would at least take her down with them.

This battle was destined to end as a draw!

Even the spectators who were awed by what they were seeing thought the same.

That's when...

Whoosh...

A familiar sight occurred. Audrey who was at the centre of the girls disappeared again.

And before her opponents could figure out what was going on...

Bang!

Bang!

Bang!

Bang!

They were all hit hard at the back of their necks and the next thing that happened was them all falling to the ground.

One thought went through all their minds.

{We lost!... But we succeeded...}

"Thank you all. And I'm sorry" Audrey's gentle, grateful and apologetic at the same time voice was the last thing they heard before everything faded to black.

Chapter 379 Rest

Cough! COUGH!....

Audrey who had regained her senses began coughing furiously immediately after speaking.

Blood began rushing out of her mou... Well, it wanted to. But Audrey's power was literally blood manipulation.

So no matter how terribly injured she was, she would never let even a single drop of blood leave her body.

However, just from her coughing alone, everyone could see that she was in a very critical condition.

"Raya" Muku called out to the little dragon girl.

Without wasting a second, Raya disappeared from where she stood and appeared beside Audrey.

However, she didn't appear empty-handed. She was holding something in her hand...

It was a large silver jug full of a red liquid. That's right, it was a jug

Audrey sensed it immediately and without saying anything to Raya.

She snatched the jug and drank it down like her life depended on it. In fact, her life really might have depended on it.

The injuries on her body all began healing at a visible speed the more blood she drank.

Soon enough, there were no visible injuries on her body. And her aura had also stabilised.

However, that didn't mean that she was completely healed.

While her vampire ability could heal her completely in normal cases. Her body was simply way too injured for it to heal this time.

While she looked completely fine from the outside. She was actually only half healed at best.

Her internal organs were barely holding on with the help of her mana which took over after she exhausted her last Force in her last attack.

But hey, that was enough to keep her going for a while. And that's all they needed. She should be completely healed as soon as Hope wakes up and does her magic.

At the end of the day, nothing could beat healing magic in healing people.

Muku walked over and, without saying a word, hugged Audrey. It wasn't tight because she was still injured and that would worsen her situation.

"You won. I'm so proud of you..." Muku spoke softly in her ear.

"Of course you are. You probably won a few bets because of me. You better give me a share of your winnings or I'm fighting it out with you" Audrey replied in a happy and joking tone.

"Of course, of course. You know me. I'm all about fairness. I'd never mistreat my winning ho... Cough" Muku replied and stopped himself from saying something he would have regretted.

"Your winning what?" Audrey asked in a chilly voice as she held Muku slightly tighter than before.

"Winning honorary wife of course" Muku replied with nothing but sincerity in his voice.

"Wah wah. You bully!" Audrey was caught off guard and reacted cutely before letting go of Muku and running away.

Sure, she knew that he had changed what he had almost said before. But that didn't change the impact being called wife had on her.

She was so happy and embarrassed that she ran away.

Muku looked at her running away without doing anything. A cunning smile appeared on his face as if he had just found a cheat code to life.

"Tsk. You really are shameless, huh?" Jade's displeased voice sounded from behind him.

She had heard everything he said and she couldn't help but call him out for it. She didn't know why but she felt very displeased at the moment.

"What was that honey?" Muku turned around and asked her with nothing but honesty and love in his eyes as he stared directly into hers.

And like Audrey, Jade was also defeated by the words and the look.

Again, like Audrey, she felt her cheeks heat up and made a break for it. She didn't even say anything.

She just gave him one last wronged look and ran away.

Muku stayed back with his hands on his waist doing the iconic superhero pause like he was a hero who had just saved the world.

But then again, he managed to beat two strong women with just a few words.

That was something not even Naruto could do.

"Humans are so interesting and entertaining" Tracy commented from the side with an amused look in her eyes.

"You have no idea..." Muku replied and then carried all the unconscious girls back with his Telekinesis.

The gauntlet was officially over and the winner had been decided. It definitely took an unexpected turn towards the end but the main objective was accomplished.

And that was to allow everyone to use what they learned in a battle somewhat similar to real life.

Which was necessary for them to completely understand the techniques and make them theirs instead of a tool they acquired.

.....

Sometime later...

Emily and Freya were the first to wake up. Muku then took it upon himself to enlighten them on what happened after they fell unconscious.

Hearing everything he said made them want to kick themselves for missing such an epic event.

What happened was something they could learn from even if they didn't participate. Just watching would have been quite insightful. And yet they missed it.

Freya was even more disgruntled than Emily because she was technically the start of it all and yet she couldn't even see how she was taken out.

Anyway, since it had passed, there was nothing which could be done. Muku promised them that he'd ask his mother if there was a way to let them see the memories of others when he manages to get into contact with her again.

But for now, the girls could only forget about it and blame their terrible luck for losing the rock-paper-scissors matches and coming in first...

After the two woke up, Hope was next. This was fortunate for the girls who were still unconscious because she healed them before they woke up.

Otherwise who knew how much pain they would have experienced when the time came for them to wake up but Hope hadn't healed their broken bones. It would be a terrible experience without the adrenaline that numbed their pain receptors before.

Anyway, after healing them, Hope finally got to healing Audrey who had refused to get healed before the others.

After that, she apologised to them many times even though they said that it was unnecessary the first time she apologised.

They gave a valid reason why there was no need to apologise. Which was that everything happened during a battle they willingly participated in and their most serious injuries only happened because they refused to give up.

But that wasn't enough for Audrey to forgive herself for causing them harm. So the girls asked her to teach them the weird move she used as a way of settling things.

Which was something Audrey happily agreed to.

However, Muku broke their bubble by saying that it was probably something only Audrey could do. At the very least, the learning process seemed to require someone to be in that trance-like state. That Muku called battle mode.

And it was a mode none of them had been able to get into before. Hell, they didn't even know it existed.

The best they were able to do was get into the zone. But battle mode seemed to be a level above that.

And how Audrey managed to get into it was still unknown. The only thing everyone knew for certain was that the pressure from facing one opponent after the other had played some part in the process.

However, if pressure was all it took, then they should have all gotten into the mode a long time ago after all the situations they had faced. And yet they didn't. And that included Muku.

Also, the pressure from facing Audrey wasn't little either for the girls who literally got knocked out or had their bones broken... So yeah, pressure wasn't the only thing.

Maybe it was a certain state of mind Audrey managed to get into by accident due to her meditation...

With that being said, the girls were extremely disappointed but there was nothing they could do.

The only good part about everything was that Muku said that he would look into it and study it with Audrey.

If they manage to make a breakthrough, then everyone will get a chance to do it too...

After that nothing else worthy of note occurred. The ground didn't even talk about the battle events too deeply as Muku stopped them.

He said that they would do that the next day and for now everyone is completely relaxed.

Which would be a first since around a month ago.

For that reason, the girls didn't refuse. They happily did as they were told and they all ran up to their rooms and jumped onto their beds.

Within a few minutes, all of them were fast asleep.

This showed just how mentally exhausted they were.

Even Layla who would normally use such time to do some extra practice or meditate went to bed.

Audrey did the same.

Only Muku, Raya and Tracy were left awake.

And so, Muku decided to relax as well. However, since he wasn't tired like the girls. He decided to relax by teaching Raya and Tracy how to play cards.

This was also his way of attempting to get the two to become closer.

Tracy had no issues with it, but Raya did. She never liked Tracy for whatever reason...

Chapter 380: Discussion

The next day...

Everyone was up and feeling a lot better. Their minds were completely refreshed after a night of sleep.

Just because R4s could easily go months without sleep didn't mean that they would be unaffected by it.

This was partly because they were all accustomed to sleeping almost every day. Even after the apocalypse...

Anyway, that was all done with. It was now time to look into the future. But first...

"The battle is over. We've all rested. Now tell us" Emily enthusiastically addressed Muku.

Muku, who understood what she was implying, smiled, and then spoke.

"Sure. I'll tell you everything as clearly as I can..."

"The first thing you want to know is how Audrey defeated Jade right? Then I suppose after that you want to know how she disappeared and beat Freya then the rest. Since both are basically stages of the same thing. I'll tell you about them one after the other without pause...." Muku gave them a rundown of what he was about to speak about...

"You see. Audrey managed to tap into a state I've only ever heard of from Mom once. She said that it was a possibility when one comprehends the essence of the technique. Which is something easier said than done. Most of us normies can at best understand 100% of the technique. But then there are monsters like Audrey who go beyond that. It's so rare that she's literally the third person to do it. The first one is mom. The second one is someone she didn't tell me about... Anyway, the point is that she's amazing and we'll likely never be able to do what she did. Yeah, that's right, there's something even I can't do in this world. That's how great she..Mmm.mmm" Muku glazed Audrey left and right until she was blushing.

The glazing went on until Audrey had to jump on Muku to cover his mouth so that he stopped.

Anyway, after that like a sidetracking moment, Muku got serious again...

"The state is called battle mode. It allows the user of the Force Technique to achieve "One with the technique". From the name, I think you all can understand what that means. It basically allows the user to completely merge with force and manipulate it at will. This basically makes the stages of the technique irrelevant to the individual. Anyway, the reason Audrey was so hurt by it was that it was her first time and she didn't know how to properly do it yet. Also, her body isn't used to mixing with the technique..." Muku paused for a bit...

"Now let's talk about the fact move she used. The one which almost blew up Jade. That one is quite difficult but also doable by normal people like us with enough practice. The move works like this... The user gathers all the force in their body into one point. But instead of shooting it out. They freeze it in place... What this does is create a devastating recoil for anyone who attacks that spot with force. The more force the opponent uses, the more the recoil they face. This is why Jade who went all out almost died. Emily also did her best but Audrey was more familiar with the ability by that point so she disbursed most of Emily's force. That's why she was in a much better state than Jade..." Muku paused again to let them digest what he said.

The girls were simply awed by what Audrey could do. And they could now see someone agree with the glaze Muku was piling on before.

After all, what Audrey did should have been impossible. It was like loading a gun and shooting it, but at the last moment just before the bullet leaves the barrel, you change your mind so you make it freeze in place without losing any of its built-up momentum.

But that wasn't all, the part about gathering all the force energy into that one spot was also easier said than done.

While Jade used "all her strength", she hadn't used all the force in her body since gathering it all would require at least a few minutes. A few minutes she didn't have at the time. Yet now she was being told that Audrey could do it in seconds?!

Then again, with everything else she could do. It was only natural for her to be weird in that too.

Jade who felt slightly bad about her loss was finally completely at peace with it. She realised that there really was no winning the match. Even if she had somehow managed to survive the move which took her out. Audrey would still find a way to take her out soon after.

And being taken out how she was taken out was a lot better than being taken out like Freya was taken out. The poor girl didn't even get a chance to do anything before she was done for...

The girls all had a single thought after hearing what Muku said. And that thought was...

{Never challenge Audrey in a strictly physical(Force included) battle. That was a recipe for disaster}.

Sure they were willing to train with her to get better. But as for fighting her with the intention of winning... Yeah, no way. Such thoughts were merely that, "thoughts". There was no way of winning against her without "battle mode"... Which apparently they will likely never be able to experience...

"Now that you've all come to terms with the Impossibility of the first move. Let's move on to the second... Hehe. This one is even better than the last. Do you want to know why?..." Muku trailed off after asking a question.

"Why?" Emily who couldn't take the silence and the expectant glare Muku was throwing their way asked.

"Because... I have no idea what she did. All I saw was her literally disappearing from the world then appearing. She was completely undetectable during the time she disappeared. However, the force in the area spiralled during her disappearance. Like, it was literally everywhere in the arena. Just that it was so thin that only high-level Force users like me could detect it... Just when I was about to completely lose it the first time she used it, she appeared and took out Freya. So I figured that maybe she turned into Force. Which sounds ridiculous, I know. But hey, if you have a better explanation of what happened, you are free to tell us about it" Muku told the girls what he knew.

"What the hell?! Then why did you pretend to know everything?!" Emily who was extremely interested in the force technique exploded.

"Ey! You might not have been awake to see it, but Jade asked me about it and I told her that I didn't know. She probably thought I was holding back information back then though... Is it so surprising for me not to get what's going on? I mean, we all started the apocalypse at the same time. My knowing all those things you don't know is good enough if you ask me" Muku explained himself. He even put on a fake "wronged" expression on his face to make Emily feel bad.

The others saw through it, but Emily didn't. And so, she was hit by a wave of regret and before she knew it, she had Muku in her arms while apologising for the way she spoke.

The others looked on with deadpan expressions on their faces as Muku practically motor-boarded himself on Emily's ample breasts.

He was smiling from ear to ear with a perverted glint in his eyes.

"Okay, that's enough" Jade who couldn't take it anymore split the two up.

She had noticed what the others didn't... Well, Elsa might have noticed and decided to ignore it.

That something was the fact that Emily had long realised that Muku was faking it. But was playing along with Muku because, quite frankly she liked the skinship. Especially in front of the others. Which was something she wouldn't have been able to do in normal situations.

She was even wondering if she should seal the deal with Muku the following night so that she could do such things whenever she wanted without hiding behind flimsy reasons.

And then Jade had to come and ruin it all for her. She could only glare silently since there was nothing she could do for the time being...

"I think what happened with mom is very simple. Like you said, the state is called "one with the technique" right? So I hypothesise that the first stage in which she reflects an opponent's attack is only the preparation for the real stage. Which is when she disappears. And like you said, you could only sense Force. Then you assumed that she might have turned into Force, which is crazy. But if you think about it. Emily once turned into pure flames that time she came back to life. Then that Earth Dragon thing you told us about which also could turn into flames. Sure it was mana on those cases. But energy is energy right?" Layla chimed in after everyone settled down.

"Huh... That's... That might be what happened. After all, it doesn't sound too far-fetched compared to some of the things that happen around us. And as you said, the name seems to suggest such. I just didn't think it was a literal thing..." Muku agreed with Layla's hypothesis.

"Okay, okay. Whatever it is. It doesn't matter. I'm sure we will find out eventually. Maybe mother-in-law will tell us when she can contact us again..." Audrey spoke as she tried to end the matter.

Everyone froze after hearing her words.

"What?" ...