

## MULTIVERSE: LIBRARY

### Chapter 4: Chapter 16-20

#### Chapter 16: A Surprising Display of Strength

A dazzling crimson light burst forth as the pitch-black activator roared to life.

From its core, a pure white blade, forged from sheer heat, extended outward, emitting a resonant hum.

"Is that... the Ser-Veresta?"

Among the gathered students, including Julis, many couldn't help but stare at the Orga Lux in Kaiser's grip.

Yet, before they could fully process their awe, their attention was swiftly drawn to Arkadi's choice of weapon.

"A gun?"

"Wait, isn't Arkadi Fankenn a swordsman?"

"He changed his weapon?"

Indeed.

At that moment, Arkadi had also drawn his weapon—except this time, it was a gun.

It had a compact barrel but a slightly oversized body, resembling a submachine gun. However, unlike standard firearms, this one had an unmistakable mechanical and futuristic aesthetic, clearly marking it as a Lux.

Some students expressed their surprise, while others came to a realization.

"He really came well-prepared."

Julis offered this comment.

Even Kaiser, who had just activated Ser-Veresta, had to acknowledge it.

"So you specifically prepared for this duel, huh?"

Kaiser narrowed his eyes.

Based on the information he had gathered, Arkadi had always used a sword-type Orga Lux and specialized in close-quarters combat—not ranged attacks.

Yet, for this match, he had abandoned his usual weapon and opted for a firearm-based Lux. It was an unmistakable countermeasure.

"The Four-Colored Magic Swords are indeed famous, but because they're well-known, their abilities aren't exactly a secret."

"Especially Ser-Veresta. As one of Seidoukan's managed Orga Lux, most people are aware of its abilities."

"A sword that can burn through anything—that's undeniably troublesome. If I were still using a blade, I wouldn't even dare to clash with it."

A smirk played on Arkadi's lips as he spoke, evidently pleased with the astonishment on the faces around him.

"But as long as I avoid close combat, I won't have to worry about my weapon being cut in half."

For this reason, Arkadi had gone out of his way to acquire this gun from outside the academy.

"This is the latest model—the G12 Scatter Photon Gun. Its range is immense, and its rapid-fire capability is among the best you can find on the market for firearm-type Lux."

Arkadi seemed intent on pressing the psychological advantage, going as far as to introduce his weapon.

"With this, getting close to me won't be so easy, junior."

However, instead of being intimidated, Kaiser simply smiled.

That faint, almost amused expression made Arkadi scowl.

"Enough talk," Kaiser said flatly. "Let's begin."

"Hmph." Arkadi let out a cold snort. "Fine. Let's get started."

Both of them simultaneously reached toward the school badges pinned to their chests.

Each badge bore the emblem of a crimson lotus.

The Red Lotus—Seidoukan Academy's symbol.

At Seidoukan, and across all of Asterisk, these school badges were invaluable.

They served as student IDs, used for security access, attendance tracking, and most importantly—duel adjudication.

In Asterisk, every duel—be it a private skirmish or a world-stage tournament like the Festa—was decided by the status of these badges.

Destroy your opponent's badge, and you win.

The badge's destruction determined the outcome of the match.

Because of this, all student badges were reinforced and embedded with advanced information-processing systems capable of officiating duels.

Simply put—the badge was the fairest and most impartial judge in a match.

It handled everything, from announcing the match to monitoring its progress.

Thus, as the duel between Kaiser and Arkadi officially commenced, their badges responded.

A mechanical voice echoed through the arena.

**"Seidoukan Academy Official Ranking Battle—Group Seven, Match Seven. Kaiser versus Arkadi Fankenn."**

**"Duel—Start!"**

Above the stage, a floating interface displayed the names of both duelists. The names spun like flashing signs before splitting apart, then violently colliding with a dramatic impact.

*"DING!"*

At the exact moment the duel was declared—

Arkadi kicked off the ground, rapidly retreating.

*"BANG! BANG! BANG! BANG! BANG!"*

The moment he gained some distance, Arkadi opened fire.

His G12 Scatter Photon Gun quickly accumulated Mana, and its embedded green Manadyte responded instantly, converting the energy into luminous projectiles that rained toward Kaiser.

Since these bullets were made from pure Mana, Arkadi didn't need to reload or account for wind resistance. The barrage was relentless, the shots breaking past the speed of sound as they screamed toward Kaiser.

And judging by their impact force, they were far more destructive than ordinary bullets.

This was the advantage of Lux weapons.

Yet, in the face of the incoming storm of bullets—

Kaiser realized something surprising.

He could see them.

Despite the sheer speed of the projectiles, he could clearly perceive their trajectories.

A normal person wouldn't even have the time to react before being riddled with holes.

But for Kaiser—

He could dodge.

Harnessing his Prana, Kaiser's figure became a blur, surging sideways as the energy bullets crashed into where he had just stood.

With powerful strides, he lowered his stance, feet pounding the ground as he leaned into the motion.

His acceleration was astonishing.

Ignoring inertia, he twisted and darted with impossible agility, evading the hailstorm of bullets while charging straight for Arkadi.

"...!"

Arkadi's expression stiffened.

He immediately increased the distance.

Meanwhile, in the audience, voices rose in shock.

"That speed...!"

"I thought he was just some lucky kid who got his hands on an Orga Lux, but he actually has insane physical abilities!?"

"He was hiding this much? Someone outside the rankings shouldn't be capable of this kind of movement!"

"Just with that speed alone, he's already on par with rank 30 to 40."

As the crowd erupted in astonishment, Kaiser continued his advance, his movements leaving behind ripples of heat as Ser-Veresta trailed through the air.

*"BANG! BANG! BANG! BANG! BANG!"*

Arkadi refused to let him close the gap, continuously firing while backpedaling.

However, as the distance between them shrank, it became harder for Kaiser to dodge entirely.

Yet, just as the barrage was about to strike him—

His sword hand moved.

*"CLANG!"*

Ser-Veresta flashed, intercepting the first projectile.

"CLANG!" "CLANG!" "CLANG!" "CLANG!"

Each successive bullet was either deflected or sliced apart, instantly dissipating back into pure Mana.

Kaiser no longer dodged.

Instead, he pressed forward, using Ser-Veresta's searing blade to cut down the incoming shots.

His speed did not slow.

"...!"

Arkadi's pupils shrank in disbelief.

"This is impossible...!"

His shock was shared by the crowd.

"What insane swordsmanship!"

"If his earlier speed was impressive, this is on a completely different level!"

"That level of precision... even among the Page One, few can achieve that!"

*"ZING!"*

As the final bullet was effortlessly cut away, Kaiser lunged forward.

He closed the remaining distance.

*"Tch...!"*

Clicking his tongue in frustration, Arkadi tried to evade.

But—

Ser-Veresta had already begun its downward arc.

*"SHIIING!"*

With a sound akin to molten steel being split apart, the blazing sword cleaved through Arkadi's firearm.

Then, with a single swift stroke—

It slashed toward the school badge on his chest.

A streak of blinding white cut through the air.

The result was inevitable.

## Chapter 17: A Star Flickering Amid the Heatwave

"Shhh—"

A sharp tearing sound echoed through the eerily silent duel stage.

Fragments of fabric fluttered into the air as Arkadi was sent hurtling backward, retreating in a desperate, ragged motion. He barely managed to regain his footing before he could collapse onto the ground.

Yet, his expression was far from composed.

One side of his uniform had been sliced open—dangerously close to the school badge pinned on his chest.

"You actually dodged that?"

Opposite him, Kaiser stood poised with the Ser-Veresta, still maintaining the upward stroke of his attack. A single brow arched in intrigue.

"As expected of Rank Thirteen. Taking down a senior like you won't be so easy after all."

Kaiser's words did not flatter Arkadi. On the contrary, they stung like humiliation.

Glancing at the ruined remains of his weapon—its barrel severed cleanly in half, the molten edges glowing red like liquid steel—Arkadi took a deep breath.

"I should be the one saying that. The Ser-Veresta lives up to its reputation—it destroyed my weapon in an instant."

Without hesitation, Arkadi discarded the expensive firearm-type Lux. His gaze, however, turned ice-cold.

"I was too naive. Trying to defeat you with a weapon and a fighting style I wasn't proficient in..."

"I should have realized from the start—someone who's been acknowledged by a Four-Colored Magic Sword could never be an ordinary opponent."

"I never expected that our academy was hiding a powerhouse like you."

A student from outside the rankings, possessing physical abilities rivaling mid-tier ranked students, was already shocking enough. But to also wield such an awe-inspiring level of swordsmanship?

He had been hiding far too much.

"But I won't give you another chance."

Arkadi reached for his true weapon and activated it.

A katana-shaped Lux.

Its blade was exceptionally thin—thinner than most Lux weapons, clearly fine-tuned and customized for precision.

This was the weapon that had earned him his reputation.

Of course, if he tried to clash against the legendary Ser-Veresta, his katana would likely shatter in an instant.

But if he didn't block and instead focused solely on evasion—then he wouldn't have to worry about his weapon being destroyed.

Close-quarters combat was his specialty.

Even if Kaiser's swordsmanship was impressive, his raw physical strength and Prana reserves were inferior. That was his weakness.

"As long as I keep dodging, you'll never catch me."

Arkadi declared.

To this—

"If that's the case, it would be rude of me not to take this seriously."

As Arkadi drew his true weapon, Kaiser's aura shifted completely.

Yet, rather than surprise, a smirk tugged at his lips.

"What do you mean by that?" Arkadi's expression darkened.

"I mean—this is where the real show begins."

Kaiser raised the Ser-Veresta.

"Zing—"

A swirl of star-like embers ignited around him, enshrouding his body in radiant celestial light.

Summoning every ounce of Prana within him, Kaiser poured it all into Ser-Veresta.

Immediately, black markings surfaced along the blade.

The dark patterns spiraled and writhed, streaming toward the crimson Urm-Manadyte embedded in the hilt.

In that instant—the once-pure white blade of Ser-Veresta began accumulating an even more terrifying level of heat.

Its color deepened.

From pure white—

To searing red—

To a blazing violet-black.

"Whoosh—"

At the same time, an immense wave of heat burst forth.

A fierce windstorm of scorching air erupted around Kaiser, causing the space around him to distort and shimmer like a mirage.

Standing at the epicenter of the heatwave, Kaiser's entire body radiated with dazzling Prana.

At that moment—he looked like a star flickering amid the inferno.

This overwhelming sight sent an involuntary shiver down Arkadi's spine.

His instincts screamed at him.

Yet, before he could react—

"BOOM!"

The flickering star at the heart of the heatwave exploded.

A dazzling burst of light surged forth, carrying a hurricane of blistering wind.

And within that instant—

Kaiser vanished.

In the blink of an eye—

He appeared right in front of Arkadi.

"Wh—?!"

Arkadi's eyes widened in horror.

Before he could even process what was happening, a mirage-like figure wreathed in flames materialized before his very eyes.

"Zing!"

Ser-Veresta shimmered.

A streak of violet-black light carved through the air.

Arkadi had no time to react.

He could only watch helplessly as the blade slashed across his chest.

"Snap!"

Time froze.

Arkadi stood motionless, frozen in place.

His mind blanked.

Before him, Kaiser remained poised, his form still wreathed in flickering embers and waves of heat. Ser-Veresta remained suspended in its finishing stroke.

"Hummm—"

The blade vibrated with a resonant hum as Kaiser slowly withdrew it.

Then, he spoke.

"Good match."

The moment his words fell, the synthetic voice of the school badge's processing system echoed through the arena.

"Duel Over."

"Winner: Kaiser."

As the declaration resounded—

The badge on Arkadi's chest shattered cleanly in half, the fragments clattering onto the stage.

"\_\_\_\_\_"

Silence.

A deathly stillness enveloped the entire arena.

Everyone stared in shock—no one could even find their voices.

Then—

"WAAAAAAAAAH!"

The audience erupted.

A wave of chaotic noise flooded the stands.

"Did you see that just now?!"

"H-He was so fast!"

"What the hell was that speed?!"

"Not just his speed—his slashes were on a completely different level too!"

"How did he do that?!"

"He's insane!"

An uproar surged through the spectators.

Julis, watching from the stands, shot to her feet in disbelief.

"What was that just now?" She blurted out. "In those last few seconds—how did he suddenly become that strong?!"

The speed Kaiser displayed just moments ago—she couldn't even react to it.

That meant—

If she had been in Arkadi's place, she would have ended up exactly the same.

"How did he do it?"

She muttered to herself.

At that moment, Claudia spoke.

"It was the heat."

Her gaze remained locked on the arena.

"The heat?" Julis frowned.

"Yes," Claudia nodded, her expression serious. "He deliberately released the heat from Ser-Veresta, creating a surge of hot wind. Then, he channeled that wind against himself in the opposite direction of his movement—propelling himself forward."

"In simple terms—he used the heat as a thruster to accelerate his movement."

"Even his final slash—he used the heat wave to push the blade forward, accelerating the strike."

"That's how he reached such impossible speeds and swung his sword so fast."

Hearing this, Julis was utterly stunned.

"But... he just got Ser-Veresta a few days ago, didn't he?" she muttered in disbelief. "I heard the Four-Colored Magic Swords are notoriously difficult to control—how could he possibly master it so quickly?"

"...I've never heard of anyone utilizing the Ser-Veresta like this before," Claudia admitted with a wry smile. "This application is unheard of. He might just be the first person to ever do it."

Could this be... the result of exceeding the compatibility threshold?

Claudia's hand subconsciously brushed against the weapon at her waist.

Elsewhere in the stands, the other high-ranking students had grim expressions.

In their eyes—wariness had surfaced.

They all understood.

Starting today, Seidoukan Academy had gained a new powerhouse.

A warrior capable of standing among the Page One.

A warrior who might even claim a place at the forefront of that elite group.

Kaiser had arrived.

Chapter 18: [Tempest Edge]

Comprehensive Arena, Rest Area.

"Hah..."

As the duel concluded, Kaiser was escorted to the designated resting area. He exhaled slowly, letting his tense body relax.

"So this is what battle feels like?"

Only now did he have the presence of mind to truly process his first real combat experience. His pulse still raced, adrenaline coursing through his veins in a thrilling high.

"I felt this way even before the match... Could it be that deep down, I'm actually a battle junkie?"

Kaiser found himself questioning his own nature.

But he couldn't deny it—this sensation was exhilarating. Especially the feeling of victory. It was intoxicating.

"I owe you one, Ser-Veresta."

Kaiser grasped the hilt of the Ser-Veresta's activator, speaking with a grin.

"That went well. This proves that our combat method is completely viable."

Releasing the heat from Ser-Veresta to generate hot wind—using it to propel himself, increasing both his movement and slashing speed.

As Claudia had pointed out, this was an unprecedented way to wield the magic sword.

The Four-Colored Magic Swords were notoriously difficult to master. Most wielders considered themselves lucky just to use them properly. Developing an entirely new combat technique to further exploit their abilities? That was practically unheard of.

But Kaiser could do it.

He could exert absolute control over Ser-Veresta, wielding it as an extension of himself. Only with such synergy could this technique be possible.

This was a method Kaiser had devised specifically to compensate for his current shortcomings.

Even after absorbing a considerable amount of Manadyte, his overall strength had grown significantly—enough to secure a spot on the Named Charts. But compared to the Page One, he still had a ways to go.

Without Ser-Veresta, even with his innate mastery over weapons—an instinctual understanding of how to wield them in battle—Kaiser would only be on par with Arkadi's level at best.

In other words, he still wasn't a threat to the Page One.

There was no helping it. In terms of raw physical ability and Prana reserves, Kaiser was still somewhere in the middle of the Named Charts, around rank 30-50. Even if his weapon proficiency was exceptional, without the necessary base stats, he couldn't challenge Seidoukan's very best.

Even possessing Ser-Veresta, if he couldn't land a hit, it wouldn't matter. That was why Arkadi had confidently stated that he wouldn't let Kaiser close the distance.

Arkadi specialized in close-range combat. His physical abilities and Prana reserves surpassed Kaiser's. If he focused entirely on evasion, Kaiser might not have been able to land a single blow.

But if Arkadi could think of this weakness—then naturally, so could Kaiser.

That was why he had developed the heat-assisted acceleration technique—to eliminate that flaw.

And the results proved it.

With this method, he had nearly instantly taken down a Rank 13 opponent. He had forced even higher-ranked students to acknowledge his threat level.

"But using this technique comes at a cost."

Kaiser sighed, shaking his head.

Releasing Ser-Veresta's heat was simple. The sword itself could do it—it had already demonstrated this back in the underground testing chamber.

But controlling that heat—compressing it into focused gusts of wind, directing them to propel himself—was a different story.

Kaiser had managed it only because of his deep connection with Ser-Veresta. The sword had responded to him completely. But that level of manipulation put a severe strain on his Prana reserves.

Under normal conditions, Kaiser could wield Ser-Veresta at average output for over an hour.

But using heat propulsion to enhance his combat speed?

At best, he could sustain it for twenty minutes before burning through all his energy.

"Well... at least this is only temporary."

Thinking about the stockpile of Manadyte in the underground vault, Kaiser felt reassured.

He had already found a fast-track method for power growth. As long as he kept his strength under control, his physical abilities and Prana reserves would skyrocket.

"The first match of this season's Festa—the Phoenix Festa—starts in about two months."

Kaiser thought to himself.

"Even if I don't absorb the entire vault's worth of Manadyte, my strength will be completely different by then."

Based on his calculations, after absorbing a batch of Manadyte, he would need roughly a week to properly adapt to the surge in power before absorbing more.

Meaning—he could absorb four batches per month.

"One month should be enough for me to reach a level where I can defeat a standard Page One without relying on Ser-Veresta."

Kaiser quietly analyzed.

"By the time the Phoenix Festa begins, I'll be even stronger. I should be able to rank among Seidoukan's very best."

And with Ser-Veresta under his full control—

Kaiser was confident he could win the entire tournament.

"But... the Phoenix Festa is a duo tournament."

That thought made him pause.

"Who should I partner with?"

—

Suddenly—

"WOOOOOOH!"

A deafening cheer erupted from the arena, jolting Kaiser from his thoughts.

"What's happening?"

Slightly startled, he glanced at his display and accessed Seidoukan Academy's Official Ranking Battle Live Broadcast.

There, a highly anticipated duel was about to begin.

The two competitors had already entered the stage.

And they were both girls.

More importantly—

They were young.

Perhaps even too young.

Both had remarkable appearances, but one girl in particular stood out.

She wore Seidoukan's Middle School Division uniform—a clear sign of her age.

Her features were delicate and charming, her large eyes shimmering with an innocent light. She radiated a gentle, fragile aura.

Yet—

Strapped to her waist was a real katana.

Her silver hair cascaded down her back, tied into twin tails. Despite her petite frame, her figure was... surprisingly well-developed.

"...This... This is a literal anime body type."

Kaiser could barely believe his eyes.

A thirteen-year-old with this kind of physique?

Ridiculous.

"Wait, what? She's THIRTEEN?!"

Yes.

This girl was Toudou Kirin.

A first-year middle school student.

Only thirteen years old.

Yes. Thirteen.

Her body said otherwise, but the records were clear.

But the real shocking thing wasn't her appearance.

It was her ranking.

Because—

She was Seidoukan Academy's Rank #1.

She had only been at the academy for two months.

Yet, upon entering, she had defeated Rank #11 in a duel, securing a spot in the Page One.

Then, one month ago, during her first Official Ranking Battle, she had challenged Rank #1.

And won.

Since then—she had reigned as Seidoukan's strongest student.

And today—

She wasn't the challenger.

She was the defender.

The one challenging her was Rank #10—another Page One student who was also from the Middle School Division.

These two were the only middle schoolers in the Page One.

Everyone else was from high school or university.

So when the two youngest Page One duelists stepped onto the stage—

The audience erupted.

Even Kaiser, from inside the rest area, could feel the sheer excitement.

And yet—

Before the duel had even lasted one minute—

It was over.

On-screen, under the spectators' stunned gasps, a silver-haired girl unleashed an unbelievable sword technique—

Instantly cornering her opponent.

With one slash—she severed their school badge.

Victory.

Watching this, Kaiser's eyes gleamed.

"Keen-Edged Tempest, huh...?"

He fell into deep thought once more.

Chapter 19: I Will Challenge You

As the Rank #1 Challenge Match concluded, this round of Official Ranking Battles came to an official end.

One by one, spectators filed out of the Comprehensive Arena, still engaged in heated discussions about the battles that had taken place.

While the results showed some shifts in rankings—some students rising, others successfully defending their spots—there were only two truly noteworthy events that dominated the conversation.

The first was the successful defense of Rank #1.

Her duel had made it clear to everyone that, despite being a thirteen-year-old middle schooler who had only been enrolled for two months, her strength was undeniable. She deserved her place as Seidoukan Academy's strongest student. This was no fleeting miracle.

It was certain that her name would soon spread across all six academies. Before long, the entire world of Asterisk would know that Seidoukan had produced a prodigy.

The second major topic was Kaiser's victory over Rank #13, Arkadi Fankenn.

A previously unknown student—someone completely unranked—had not only displayed extraordinary skill but had also fully controlled a Four-Colored Magic Sword with ease, decisively defeating the strongest non-Page One duelist.

This, too, sent a message.

Kaiser wasn't stopping here.

Many students were already anticipating next month's Official Ranking Battle.

Would Kaiser challenge a member of the Page One?

Now that he had taken the Rank #13 spot, he was officially eligible to challenge the elite twelve—the Page One.

The question was: Who would he challenge?

And how far would he climb?

It was an exciting prospect.

At this moment, Kaiser's name had become one of the most frequently spoken words in Seidoukan Academy.

Second only to the Rank #1, Toudou Kirin.

—

Seidoukan Academy, Arena Corridor

Of course, Toudou Kirin herself was completely unaware of this.

The silver-haired girl who had already ascended to the academy's peak was currently hurrying through one of the arena's corridors.

Despite having successfully defended her Rank #1 title, proving her strength once again, her expression lacked any hint of joy.

In fact—there wasn't even a smile.

Instead, she carried a heavy, burdened look—her head lowered as she walked briskly, her footsteps oddly heavy.

Suddenly—

"Be careful."

A voice appeared in front of her.

"Walking with your head down like that... you might end up crashing into someone."

The unexpected voice startled Toudou Kirin. She flinched in surprise, immediately halting in place.

Thanks to that, she narrowly avoided colliding head-first into the person standing before her, stopping just a few centimeters away.

"Ah—I'm so sorry!"

Due to their close distance, Kirin could only see up to the person's upper torso, prompting her to instinctively step back and bow in apology.

Then, she heard a chuckle.

"No need to apologize. You didn't bump into me, did you?" The voice was lighthearted. "Though, I guess suddenly appearing in your way is my fault too. But seriously—you should watch where you're going. If you're not careful, you might end up crashing into some recently transferred special student, leading to the start of a harem-building romance."

...What kind of light novel protagonist nonsense was that?

And why did it sound so specific?

Kirin blinked in confusion before finally looking up—

And recognizing the person before her.

"Ah...!"

Her expression shifted to surprise.

"Y-You're Kaiser-senpai! The one who just defeated Rank #13!"

Kaiser raised an eyebrow.

"You know me?"

There was genuine surprise in his tone.

"Y-Yes." Kirin nodded rapidly, a little nervous, her voice softer than before. "I wasn't in the audience, but I watched the live broadcast from the player's lounge."

"I see." Kaiser nodded in understanding before offering a smile. "To think that Seidoukan's Number One actually remembers my name. I should be honored."

"N-No, it's nothing like that!" Kirin waved her hands frantically, visibly flustered. "You were amazing, Senpai! Especially your swordsmanship—it was truly incredible!"

As she said this, her timid gaze brightened ever so slightly.

It was clear—this had left a strong impression on her.

"My swordsmanship, huh?"

Kaiser, on the other hand, didn't quite feel the same way.

"Yes!" Kirin nodded enthusiastically, her eyes sparkling like an excited child seeing a new toy. "I've never seen anything like it before! It doesn't seem to belong to any sword style I know—it was so unique and eye-catching!"

But then—

She hesitated.

Her excitement dimmed slightly.

"But..."

She seemed unsure if she should continue.

"But what?"

Noticing her hesitation, Kaiser grew curious.

Kirin hesitated for a moment longer before gathering her courage.

"It's just... it felt less like swordsmanship meant to bring out your full potential... and more like techniques meant to fully optimize your weapon's abilities."

For a brief moment—

Kaiser's eyes flashed with intrigue.

This girl... she had remarkable insight.

She had immediately identified his true nature.

Kaiser had never trained in a specific sword school or martial art.

His techniques—his combat instincts—came directly from his Authority.

He never needed to learn fighting techniques. He never needed to train his reflexes or decision-making.

The moment he touched a weapon, his Authority told him exactly how to use it to its full potential.

So Kirin's observation was completely correct.

"I'm impressed." Kaiser chuckled. "You saw through me right away."

Then, he tilted his head slightly.

"But if we're talking about true swordsmanship, you're the stronger one, aren't you?"

Kaiser recalled what he had just witnessed during her match.

Toudou Kirin had not displayed immense physical prowess.

She hadn't even actively used her Prana.

She had simply drawn her sword—

And attacked.

Yet, in that single offensive sequence—

The battle had already been decided.

Every single strike had been flawless.

Every movement had been precise.

Every motion had seamlessly connected, forming an endless chain of attacks.

The Rank #10 opponent—a fellow Page One student—had barely been able to react before they were completely overwhelmed.

One slash, then another, and another, and another—

It was an infinite cascade of sword strikes.

Razor-sharp. Fluid. Relentless.

This was Toudou Kirin's blade.

"N-No, I'm not that strong..."

Kirin was clearly not used to praise. Her entire face turned red, making her seem even younger than she already was.

The sight was—

Dangerous.

For a split second, Kaiser felt something stir.

Then—he snapped back to reality, internally scolding himself.

*"What the hell am I thinking?"*

*"She's thirteen! THIRTEEN!"*

But then—

His gaze flickered toward one particular aspect of Kirin's appearance.

Her physique.

Her absolutely-not-thirteen-year-old physique.

And suddenly—

He barely stopped himself from facepalming.

*"What kind of twisted reality lets a thirteen-year-old look like THAT?!"*

It was unfair.

Unnatural.

A crime against logic itself.

—

At that moment—

"Beep!"

A holographic display suddenly opened in front of Kirin.

"What's taking you so long, Kirin?!"

A strict, scolding voice echoed through the channel.

"A-Ah! I'm sorry!"

Kirin's face paled instantly—her nervous panic returning in full force.

"Get over here! Now!"

The transmission cut off abruptly.

An awkward silence filled the air.

"...I have to go now, Senpai." Kirin bowed slightly, her expression unreadable.

Then, as she walked past him—

Kaiser's voice rang out behind her.

"Next month, in the Official Ranking Battle..."

"I will challenge you."

Chapter 20: The Troubled Girl

"Next month, in the Official Ranking Battle... I will challenge you."

The moment those words left Kaiser's lips and reached Toudou Kirin's ears, the silver-haired girl froze.

"I came to talk to you, but more importantly, I wanted to tell you this."

Kaiser's voice remained calm, unwavering.

"If I win against you—maybe your expression... won't be as heavy as it was just now."

Those words snapped Kirin out of her frozen state. Her head snapped up, turning to face him.

"Senpai, you..."

But—

By the time she turned around, Kaiser was already walking away.

"Get ready. Don't say I bullied you when the time comes."

Leaving behind those parting words, Kaiser departed.

All that remained was Kirin, standing there—watching his figure fade into the distance.

She looked as if she wanted to call out to him—

But didn't know what to say.

After a moment, she turned away, her heart weighed down with thoughts.

—

Comprehensive Arena, Rear Exit.

Kirin exited the arena through the back.

Once outside, she immediately made her way toward a wooded pathway, a scenic trail designed for leisure walks.

There, she encountered a man.

He had also just come from the Comprehensive Arena.

But unlike her, he wasn't walking aimlessly—

He was waiting.

And from the look on his impatient expression, he had been waiting for a while.

"Uncle..."

Kirin's voice carried a hint of fear as she called out to him.

And given their difference in stature, her fear was justified.

The man standing before her was built like a boulder—a towering, broad-shouldered figure dressed in a sharp suit.

However, his face was anything but refined.

Rugged and intimidating, he had the air of a gangster, not a businessman.

Most importantly—

Unlike Kirin, this man was not a Genestella.

There was no trace of Prana emanating from his body.

No matter how physically strong he might appear, he wouldn't last a second against someone like her.

And yet—

Standing before him, Kirin looked small.

Timid.

As if he had crushed her will before she even had a chance to fight.

The man stared down at Kirin, his expression harsh and unyielding.

"Why did you take so long?" His tone was cold. Commanding.

"Didn't I tell you to come straight here after the match?"

This wasn't just strictness.

This was bullying.

"I-I'm sorry." Kirin's head sank lower, her voice barely above a whisper. "I... I just spoke with a senior for a moment..."

"A senior?" The man's brows furrowed, his voice growing sharper. "From the high school division?"

"Yes." Kirin nodded honestly. "The one who just defeated Rank 13."

"Oh?" The man's eyes narrowed. "The one wielding Ser-Veresta?"

Kirin instinctively studied her uncle's face, searching for any reaction, before giving a small, hesitant nod.

"What did he say to you?"

The man demanded answers.

Kirin hesitated.

She looked as if she wasn't sure whether she should tell him.

"Speak!" The man's voice rose, tinged with irritation. "Or do you intend to defy me again? Think of your father!"

A visible shudder ran through Kirin's body.

It was as if an invisible knife had stabbed straight into her heart.

She curled in on herself—her posture shrinking.

"...He said that next month... he will challenge me."

Kirin's voice was barely audible.

"What?!"

For the first time—the man's expression changed.

This wasn't good.

He had been watching the Official Ranking Battle earlier—from the VIP section.

Which meant—

He had seen Kaiser's match with his own eyes.

And he hadn't forgotten what happened at the end.

Recalling the overwhelming force Kaiser had unleashed, the man clicked his tongue in displeasure.

"He just reached Rank 13, and now he's already aiming for Rank 1?"

"This is why I despise these Genestella brats!"

He spat the words with undisguised disdain.

He didn't even stop to consider that the girl standing before him—his own niece—was also a Genestella.

But Kirin didn't react.

She had heard this kind of talk before.

She had already grown used to it.

The man exhaled sharply, regaining his composure.

"Well... at the very least, we now know your opponent for next month."

"That kid might have some skill, and the Ser-Veresta is troublesome... but one month is more than enough time to prepare."

"A Rank 13 is still just a Rank 13. Even with that sword, he's no match for you."

The man sounded confident—almost arrogant.

"Dispose of him swiftly when the time comes. Understand?"

But this time—

Kirin spoke up.

"Senpai isn't just some nobody." She corrected him. "His swordsmanship... it's strange. It doesn't follow any structured style, yet every move is perfectly suited to the battle. It's flawless—without any openings."

"It's difficult to—"

She never finished her sentence.

"I don't care how impressive he is!"

The man cut her off sharply.

"No matter how strong he is, he's just a Rank 13. If you lose to someone like that, your reputation will be ruined!"

"That is unacceptable!"

His voice left no room for argument.

"I will gather all the information we have on him. For the next month, your focus will be on studying his weaknesses."

"When the Official Ranking Battle comes—you will defeat him quickly."

"You will not waste time. Do you understand?"

His words were harsh. Unyielding.

Kirin lowered her gaze.

"...Yes."

A long, heavy pause.

Only then did the man relax his expression.

"Good."

But he wasn't done.

"Kirin, you must remain Number One."

"Not just Seidoukan's Number One."

"I want you to become a legend. A true, undisputed, unchallenged Number One. The kind that will never be dethroned—the strongest in history."

His eyes darkened—his voice turning low.

"Only then will my ambitions be realized."

"Only then can you achieve your goal."

His next words—

Struck like poison.

"If you want to save your father—then you have no choice but to obey me."

At that moment—

Kirin shook.

Trembled.

"...Yes, Uncle."

Her voice was small. Weak.

"Let's go."

The man turned away, walking off without sparing her another glance.

Kirin followed.

Her steps heavy.

Her head low.

Her heart suffocated.

Then—

As they passed by a fountain, her eyes caught a reflection in the water.

A delicate, childlike face.

One that should have been full of innocence.

But in that reflection—

She looked like she was about to cry.

For some reason—

Kaiser's words from earlier echoed in her mind.

"If I win against you... maybe your expression won't be as heavy as it was just now."

That thought—

Would not leave her.

—

Later That Night—Seidoukan Academy

Under the cover of darkness, most students had already retired to their dormitories.

The academy had strict curfews.

Most buildings would be automatically locked.

But for Genestella, such locks were meaningless.

Especially for someone like him.

"So this is the place..."

Standing before a classical-style dormitory, a lone figure observed silently.

Kaiser.

After studying the building for a moment—

He sighed.

"Let's hope this goes well."

With quiet, calculated steps—

He advanced toward the girls' dormitory.