

## Paragon 171

### Chapter 171 - 171: Going to the Regional Trial

Klaus took a bath washing the stench of death off him and then went back to studying the Pentaface bead for the next few hours. Around 7, there was a knock on the door. When Klaus opened it, he saw Anna standing there, looking right at him.

"Good morning, Anna," Klaus said, trying not to think about the awkward conversation they had the night before.

"Good morning, Klaus," Anna replied, her tone carrying a hint of guilt. Klaus wasn't sure how to respond, but before he could say anything, Anna stepped forward and hugged him. An unexpected hug that is.

"Klaus, I know you said those hurtful things because you think I'm still young, and I understand that," she whispered. "But I want you to know, I won't give up that easily. I will find a way into your heart. If not now, then maybe a year from now, or two, when I'm more mature for you."

Klaus's heart pounded at her words. It's not that girls her age can't date, it's more like girls her age dating are just wasting their time instead of focusing on cultivating and training to brave this apocalyptic world.

They can date, but when all they think about all day is their significant other, then they are doomed. Klaus doesn't focus on just that, he has his priorities set, god knows he needs all the time to prepare since he will always have to fight for his life whenever he is breaking through realms.

He might have said those words to make Anna set her priorities straight, but he was also doing it to give himself at least a few years to grow before these instructions piled up. After witnessing a part of his past self, Klaus started to change without him even realizing it.

So hearing her, Klaus knew Anna had been thinking about those things. Thankfully, Klaus thickened his skin and made her realize she was complicating things for herself and him. Ohema and Lucy were both mature, unlike Anna and Lily who could get excited over every small thing.

Anna broke the hug, and with her flustered expression, she hurried to her room. Klaus just smiled and headed to eat the breakfast delivered by room service.

Danny and the boys were already eating, so he joined them without a second thought. Meanwhile, Anna found herself sitting with two Fairies listening to them like a baby bird.

"He's right, Anna. You're still young," Hanna said gently, watching Anna's conflicted expression. "But understand this—he does love you. It's just... it's a lot for him right now. He loves you both.

Give him time."

Anna's face softened, but she said nothing. Lily, standing nearby, nodded in silent agreement. They both knew Hanna was right.

"Anyway," Hanna added, standing up with purpose, "we should get ready. The trial starts at ten O clock"

With that, the women quietly excused themselves, heading off to prepare for the day ahead. A little while later, they left the hotel in the same flying car they had been using.

On the way, Klaus glanced at his friends and smirked mischievously.

"Although none of you will be getting the first spot, since this handsome friend of yours already has it, I expect each and every one of you to land in the top 50 among the 1,000 who will be selected."

His friends rolled their eyes, knowing he was being serious in his shameless way. They all understood that Klaus was an anomaly; everyone knew that. None of them were confident they could take that spot from him, but they sighed, realizing that getting into the top 50 was what everyone aimed for.

There were about 12,000 geniuses competing in the trial, but only 1,000 would be selected. It was common knowledge that those in the top 50 gained the most recognition and attracted support from others looking to win favor with them.

It happened every time there was a trial like this. So every youngster will aim for the spot.

"Just do what you can," he said, his tone sincere. "I have no doubt you all will advance to the next stage."

His friends nodded, determination settling on their faces. Klaus then leaned back in his seat, glancing at his phone as if expecting something. Shortly after, it began to ring.

"My dear mother, I thought you wouldn't call to wish me good luck," Klaus said with a smile, seeing his mother's face on the screen.

"Klaus, dear, good luck! Now put your sister on," his mother replied.

Klaus grinned and handed the phone over to Hanna.

"Baby girl, good luck in the trial! Make sure you show this bastard what you're made of," Klaus's mother said, her voice warm and encouraging. Hanna beamed at the praise.

"A traitor mother and sister, tsk," Klaus pouted silently, but he didn't say anything. He watched as his mother showered Hanna with affection before she handed the phone back to him.

"Okay, Klaus baby, take care of yourself and your sister. Bye!" His mother smiled teasingly before hanging up.

A few seconds later, a text came through: "Good luck, my love! Show everyone what a handsome and shameless son who peeks on his mother is made of."

Klaus wanted to smash his phone and jump out of the car, but he held back. Clearly, his mother wouldn't let go of that incident anytime soon. He smiled despite his embarrassment and leaned back in his chair, ready to face whatever came next.

A while later, they appeared in the view of a massive building, almost similar to the same building in Ross City.

As they neared, Klaus could see thousands of young people gathered outside, each ready to showcase their skills. Klaus sighed as he took in the scene; he knew that many would have their dreams of entering the prestigious academy in the entire world crushed today.

But who was he to complain? They alighted from the flying car and walked toward a corner. To his surprise, Klaus spotted his dear friend—at least, that's how he saw him, lol—standing there with a few friends and some familiar faces he had met at the Felin Youth Ball.

"My dear friend Miguel! It's been ages! You don't happen to miss me as much as I miss you, do you?" Klaus called out, moving closer to Miguel's group.

Miguel's expression twisted with disdain. He hated Klaus with a passion, and seeing that handsome, white-haired bastard only fueled his anger. All he wanted was to sever Klaus's head from his neck, but he forced himself to maintain a composed exterior.

"Funny how you think anyone would miss you," Miguel retorted, crossing his arms. The tension in the air crackled as their respective groups sized each other up.

"Ah, Brother Yaw is also here!" Daniel suddenly called out, walking toward a young man standing in Miguel's group. They seemed to know each other well. This gesture helped ease the tension in the air as friends began chatting among themselves.

Klaus stood with a mocking smile, his gaze fixed on Miguel. "When you're done hating me, I'd like to have a proper duel," Klaus said, throwing a cheeky grin at Miguel before moving in a different direction.

"Brother Nathan! Long time no see," Klaus greeted warmly as he approached a familiar face. This young man is the son of Dave Arcadia, the leader of the Arcadian Great Family and the wealthiest individual in the Eastern Region of the Northern Union.

"Ah, Brother Klaus! I'm sorry about what happened during the invasion. It was our negligence that nearly cost you your life," Daniel said, his tone sincere.

"Don't sweat it; accidents happen," Klaus replied, waving off the concern. "Tell me, how are things going lately? What happened to that group you were forming for the expedition to the Tier 3 Forbidden Zone?"

They exchanged updates for a while, Klaus absorbing all the information he could from Nathan. After their conversation, he returned to his group, feeling more informed and grounded.

After about an hour of waiting, the massive doors of the building opened, and everyone began to move in, anticipation buzzing in the air.

"Welcome to the Regional Selection Trial of the Celestial Mountain Academy" After everybody found themselves in the building, a voice suddenly spoke quieting them.

#### Chapter 172 - 172: Entering The Trial

A projection of a lady appeared, just like during the city selection. Klaus and everyone fell silent, eager to hear what she had to say.

"Congratulations on making it this far," she began. "This is the regional trial. As you already know, we will only be selecting 1,000 out of the 12,000 present here. However, those who wash out of this trial will still receive some attention from the academy."

Everyone listened intently. They understood that this would be their last chance to make an impression, even if they didn't succeed. "But that's as far as it goes. You might gain some recognition, which, while limited, will still draw some positive attention toward you."

No one was shocked by her words. They all knew that only the top 1,000 would advance, so they braced themselves for the news. Still, a few couldn't help but sigh in resignation.

"Now, let's discuss the structure of the trial. It will be like the city selection, but instead of moving through multiple stages, there will be only one stage called Endless Tide. As the name suggests, you will face an unending onslaught of monsters and zombies, ranging from Tier 4 to Tier 6."

A hush fell over the crowd as they absorbed her words. "There will be no breaks between tides. So if you don't want to be overwhelmed by stronger monsters, it's advisable to kill as quickly as you can. The strongest enemy you'll encounter will be Tier 6 Terrors or Tier 6 Zombie Generals, and there will be tides of them. So prepare yourselves."

Hearing this, everyone let out a collective sigh, a chill running down their spines. The weight of the challenge settled heavily on their shoulders. Klaus, standing with his friends, glanced at them and shook his head. They looked scared.

He understood their fear; they had never faced such large tides of monsters before. Klaus had, and it had been thrilling. Seeing his friends so worried made him want to comfort them, but instead, he said something that made them want to murder him.

"You guys are chickens. They're just monsters. How hard can it be to kill them?" It wasn't just his friends who glared at him; those nearby were ready to join in on the murder.

Klaus just smiled, unfazed, and turned his attention back to the lady's projection.

"Also, I know many of you noticed that the monsters during the city trials were weaker than those in the real world. We designed it that way so they could exert only 60 percent of their strength." Many nodded in understanding, recalling how easy it had been to defeat those creatures.

"However," she continued, "for this trial, the monsters will wield between 80 to 90 percent of their strength. So good luck, and may the strong and intelligent come out on top."

A heavy silence fell over the crowd as the implications sank in. The stakes had just risen dramatically. But there was no time to hesitate; doors opened along the walls, signaling them to enter.

"Alright, guys, try not to die early. It would be a bummer if some of you washed out," Klaus said with a grin. He cast a sneaky glance at a certain blonde-haired beauty who was watching them, more specifically, Danny. "Also, Danny, I think Alice is gunning for you, so be sure to make her happy."

Danny smiled and walked away, ready to chase his dreams. Anna looked at Klaus, and for some reason, she smiled as she walked off. This made Klaus raise an eyebrow, puzzled by her expression. The smile wasn't ordinary at all and Klaus knew that.

"Big sister, you should probably go. I think all of Mom's good luck has been given to you," Klaus said with a playful pout, eyeing Hanna, who couldn't help but smile before leaving. Clearly, the mommy's boy didn't like not getting all the attention anymore.

'Maybe I should take her to the mountains and leave her there for a few days. That will give me more alone time with Mom,' Klaus thought as he moved toward a certain door. The idea made him chuckle, but he quickly focused on the task ahead. The challenge awaited, and he was ready to face it head-on.

After walking through the doorway, he found himself in a room similar to the one for the city selection. Klaus lay back in a bed-like chair and placed the gaming helmet on his head. Soon, his consciousness entered Oracle, leaving his physical body vulnerable on the outside.

Meanwhile, in a room somewhere within the large building, the officials overseeing the trial were gathered. The lady who had made the announcement was present, along with a certain cute, dark-haired lady with a heavy chest—the War Goddess. She sat with her arms crossed, almost as if supporting those mountains.

"War Goddess, are you sure about this?" the announcement lady asked, her voice tinged with concern.

"Yes, Set his trial to 100 percent and increase the rate at which the monsters come," she replied. The lady looked puzzled but nodded, glancing toward the screen that showed Klaus selecting his weapons. She made some adjustments and sighed.

Inside the game, Klaus was presented with all types of weapons, but he chose only two: a sword and Viper Piercing Needles. It would be his first time using the needles in combat, so he wanted to have a backup plan.

The sword served as that backup, but even without it, he had the Ice Lotus and his Pentaface bead. However, he didn't plan to use any of that now; he wanted to focus on training with the needles and sharpening his mind during this trial.

After selecting his weapons, Klaus was transported to a vast field that stretched for thousands of kilometers. The landscape was dry and deserted, but with his senses heightened, he could already feel the presence of monsters approaching.

He could use the needles effectively within a 10-kilometer radius; beyond that, their attack power would drop. So, he waited patiently. According to the instructions, there would be an endless tide of monsters, and he knew there would be plenty to kill.

In the other parts of Oracle, youngsters stood in similar fields, preparing themselves and their weapons for the impending onslaught. Anna held her staff, exuding an air of calm as chill as ice. Lily gripped her sword tightly, the atmosphere around her seeming to respond to her steady heartbeat.

Danny, Daniel, and others were also poised in their respective trial spaces, eagerly awaiting the monsters' arrival. This is their time to show what they are made of, whether they qualify to be Klaus's friends or not.

Meanwhile, on one side of the trial space, Hanna stood with her bow in hand, crackling with subtle lightning. She has an affinity for the lightning element which in some way is very lethal for an archer.

Suddenly, hundreds of Tier 4 dark monsters appeared on the horizon, their various shapes and sizes looming ominously. Hanna narrowed her eyes watching them as they crossed the 5-kilometer mark. In an instant, a thick lightning arrow materialized in her bow. With a powerful pull, she released the arrow.

As it flew toward the first monster, it burst into sparks of lightning that streaked through the bodies of the creatures. Just like that, over a hundred monsters were dispatched, and she was just getting started. More Lightning arrows followed

#### Chapter 173 - 173: Like a Lightning Goddess With a Bow

Lightning streaked across the battlefield like a meteor shower, lighting up the sky in brilliant flashes. The monster that had dared to approach barely made it within 3km of the young woman holding the lightning-streaked bow firing lightning shot after shot.

Hanna stood her ground, calmly firing one lightning arrow after another. She didn't bother with any fancy techniques or flashy moves. It was as if she didn't have any special skills at all, aside from

morphing her lightning into arrows. And in truth, she didn't. She was one of the many who had awakened without any active skills.

Her only strength was her lightning element, and that alone made her stand out despite her lack of active skills. It gave her a raw, unshakable power that put her a step above the average awakened. She had no fancy combat moves or special abilities. All she could do was shoot her bow, transforming her lightning into deadly arrows.

But the speed at which she was killing was unlike anything you'd expect from someone with such a basic and average Stats. Everybody knew lightning element is one of the most powerful elements out, so it wasn't a coincidence she was that lethal with the bow.

During the city selection, Hanna had nearly washed out. Had it not been for a stroke of luck, she wouldn't have even made it into the top 200. That near-failure broke her for days, leaving her devastated.

But instead of giving up, she pushed herself harder. She began training relentlessly. Though she lacked active skills, she knew that honing her lightning abilities alone would be enough for now—until she could afford to buy a skill, which for some reason, cost an absurd amount.

They always said that once you reach the Saint-level, you'll automatically gain a passive skill and an active skill. Some lucky individuals even received a full technique set. Hanna had her sights set on that. It was her goal. But she also knew the path to becoming a Saint wasn't going to be easy.

That's why she was exploiting a loophole in the trial, one the announcement lady had hinted at. She planned to use it to her advantage.

The trial is called Endless for a reason. In most trials, you had to clear the first wave of monsters before the next one came. But this one was different. There were no waves. The monsters appeared at random, all mixed together.

Right now, Tier 4 monsters were roaming the battlefield, but Tier 6 could show up at any moment, with no warning. It was chaotic—but in a strange way, Hanna found it exhilarating.

She knew some of the geniuses with slower kill rates would be overwhelmed when the higher-tier monsters arrived. They'd be crushed under the sheer weight of numbers. But not her. She had figured out the key to survival—kill fast, rack up points before things got out of control.

And so far, her plan was working.

With her lightning arrows firing at an insane speed, Hanna was eliminating monsters quicker than anyone else. Her ability to stay ahead of the chaos made all the difference. While others were still struggling with the Tier 4 creatures, she was already thinking about the higher ones that would inevitably come.

She wasn't just here to survive. She was here to win—and stay beside her little brother, Klaus, who had accepted her into his family. These past days with Klaus and his mother had been the best of her life. She wasn't going to lose her place by Klaus's side anytime soon. After all, she is still Klaus's personal assistant.

Unbeknownst to Hanna, the moment Klaus woke up from his 72-day coma and welcomed her as his sister, her destiny changed in ways none of them could have imagined. And now, during the trial, part of that change was beginning to show.

Hanna's grip on her bow remained as firm as ever, but something was shifting within her. At first, she relied purely on raw strength to make her lightning arrows fly with devastating power. But now, there was something else happening, something deeper. It showed in her eyes.

Her eyes flickered with lightning, the same energy that now danced around her. As she loosed arrow after arrow, it was as though she was transforming. Even though this was just a virtual world, her consciousness was being affected by something greater.

She was becoming more lethal, more precise. Her lightning arrows began dealing far more damage than before. When Tier 5 monsters appeared, they stood no chance. They crumbled under the weight of her power.

The battlefield soon filled with creatures ranging from Tier 4 to Tier 6, but none of them managed to cross the 2km line she had set. It was like an invisible barrier of destruction; anything that dared to approach was struck down before even getting close.

Hanna wasn't just fighting anymore—she was evolving. Her lightning grew fiercer, her attacks sharper, and even in this digital realm, she felt the change within her soul. Something had awakened, and it was making her stronger than she ever imagined.

Yet through it all, Hanna's thoughts remained steady. All she could do was kill—and keep killing.

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In the observation room overseeing the trial, 12,000 small screens displayed the participants' progress. Soon, some of the screens began to turn red, signaling that contenders were washing out. The speed of their failures was staggering, and in no time, the number of active screens began to dwindle.

"Who is that?" a lady suddenly asked, pointing at one screen showing Hanna's trial. The display showed her firing lightning arrow after lightning arrow with deadly precision.

"Is she not using any skills?" a man commented, eyes fixed on the way Hanna's lightning arrows materialized seamlessly in her bow.

"Indeed," the announcement lady confirmed, clearly impressed. "She's just using her lightning as arrows. No skills involved."

"But how is that possible? You can't maintain that speed and power without a skill or technique," another person chimed in, making everyone else glance curiously at Hanna's screen.

"That's because this young lady has a lightning elemental mark," a calm voice spoke from the back. The War Goddess, who had been silently observing, now looked closely at Klaus's big sister, a small smile tugging at her lips. "It's faint, but it's there. I doubt she even realizes it yet."

"What? That... that shouldn't be possible," the announcement lady stammered. "Only someone who has formed a Sage Core can start sensing an elemental mark, talk less of someone who is just a master"

"Well," the War Goddess said, "she's a genius, then. The mark is there, and that's why she's wielding her lightning with such mastery."

The officials in the room exchanged shocked glances. They knew exactly what an elemental mark was—and what it meant. It's a rare, powerful link that binds an individual closer to the element they awaken.

Those with that mark often seen as a tattoo on their forehead hold great control over the said element with unparalleled mastery. So anyone with the mark or promised to have the mark is branded as a genius among geniuses.

The day she awakens the mark is the day she will truly command the storm and the heavens with lightning grace.

"She's like a Lightning goddess with a bow," a younger woman whispered, her eyes sparkling with admiration as she watched Hanna's lethal efficiency.

Hanna, unaware of the conversations happening in the observation room, continued firing her lightning arrows, each shot more powerful than the last.

However, on one side inside the Oracle, Klaus is standing at one spot and using his hands like a choir coordinator to direct the Void Piercing Needle to kill monsters like they are dummies.

#### Chapter 174 - 174: A Boring Trial

Klaus stood still, only his fingers moving as the Void Piercing Needle darted through the air, piercing holes in the heads of monsters. Everywhere it went, creatures disintegrated into nothingness, leaving only the eerie silence of their death.

The needle moved with terrifying speed, killing relentlessly. Tier 4 monsters appeared, but they didn't even last a minute before they were obliterated. There wasn't even a hint of resistance in their attempts to withstand Klaus's attacks.

It was as if they weren't worth the effort. Even though Klaus is fighting these monsters at their full strength, this is still the virtual world. They lacked the natural aura of intimidation they would normally

have on the outside. But still, there shouldn't have been such little resistance to the way Klaus was destroying them.

It felt almost too easy.

"At this rate, I won't even have to move an inch," Klaus said, disappointment creeping into his voice. He watched as the monsters fell one after another, feeling a sense of emptiness in their swift defeat.

The thrill of battle was fading, replaced by a dull sense of monotony. He longed for a challenge, something that would make his heart race. Instead, it felt like he was merely going through the motions, his skills wasted on such weak opponents.

Klaus sighed, wishing for a fight that would truly test him. He glanced around, hoping for a glimpse of something more formidable. But for now, the virtual world offered nothing but easy victories.

The Tier 6 monsters that appeared were all weaker than Klaus had expected. He couldn't quite understand why, but with his Eye of Malevolence observing the battle, he felt a strange sense of control. The monsters charging at him seemed like mere objects, each with countless ways to be destroyed.

He could pinpoint where to strike for an instant kill. As the needle moved, it became nearly invisible to the naked eye. The monsters didn't even realize what had hit them before it was too late.

Klaus knew if he were to start using the Nine Stars Ice Lotus Bloom right now, then the monsters wouldn't have much resistance. Even without it, they are not showing any resistance, not even in the slightest.

"Had I known I could use the Spirit Master Powers like this, I would have mastered using more than 100 needles by now," Klaus mused, watching as the monsters fell without a hint of resistance. The ease of it all left him feeling both powerful and unsatisfied.

The challenge he craved never came, on a bunch of weak monsters coming endlessly yet not able to do anything to him.

However, while Klaus was feeling bored, the thousands of young fighters were struggling. Many are facing overwhelming odds, especially those with slower killing speeds. Some were getting swarmed by the sheer number of monsters charging at them. Those who managed to kill faster were holding on, but it was only a temporary reprieve.

Even Klaus's friends were not faring as well as he was. On one side of the battlefield, Danny had switched to a heavy spear-like weapon, delivering devastating blows. But it wasn't easy for him either. Soon, he would be overwhelmed by the relentless tide of monsters.

Daniel was also in the thick of it, wielding his axe with heaven-shaking might. Both Dannels are brute-strength fighters. They rely on heavy weapons to deliver powerful attacks

Brute strength fighters have some devastating attack power, but when overwhelmed, their killing speed would slow dramatically. Daniel was doing his best to kill as many monsters as possible before the situation became unmanageable. The weight of the battle pressed on him, and he knew time was running out.

Mark was having it slightly easier, but not by much. His spear spun, stabbed, and struck as he focused on killing as fast as he could. However, in this large-scale battle, he struggled to keep up his killing speed. Spearmen are powerful fighters, but in this chaotic situation, he felt the weight of the monsters closing in.

Kay, on the other hand, was in his element. His fire arrows are activating every second, raining down flames on the monsters. He moved with agility, ensuring he kept his distance from the approaching threats. As an archer, it was only natural for him to maintain that gap.

Kilian on the other hand is swinging his blazing sword, slicing through monsters and unleashing arcs of fire with each strike. His attacks were lethal, and even without awakening his sword qi, his attack power was very impressive. The fire danced around him, making each move look both beautiful and deadly.

Lily, his sister, appeared to be one with the wind. With her affinity for the wind element, she was the fastest in the group. Her sword sliced through the air, sending wind arcs that cut silently through the monsters. She moved effortlessly, her speed making her a difficult target as she darted around the battlefield.

They all seem to be giving it their all as they battle the monsters like their life depend on it. well, it kinda does.

As for Anna, she was on an entirely different level. Like Klaus, she stood in one place, her staff stabbed firmly into the ground. Around her, a 1-kilometer radius was frozen solid. This was her killing zone. Although one can tell by the paleness on her face that she is struggling to keep the killing zone active, she doesn't back down either. She stood there with a determined look on her face.

Any monsters entering that zone were faced with a grim fate. Weaker monsters were frozen to death instantly, while stronger ones were encased in ice and pierced by sharp shards that were shooting from the ground. It was the perfect killing domain, and Anna was fighting to maintain it for as long as she could.

Despite the toll it took on her, she remained resolute, channeling her energy to keep the deadly frost alive. She wants to be within the top ten so she is doing all she can to enter that ranking even if it means she just wants to impress Klaus.

As for Hanna, she maintained her killing streak, but the paleness on her face signaled that she would soon be overrun. Despite her impressive speed, she was still an average awakener, and her stats were not that great. The struggle was evident.

In just 20 minutes, 10,000 young fighters had been eliminated. With each passing second, stronger monsters continued to appear, increasing the pressure on everyone.

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"I think this trial is meaningless for him. Just look at how he is killing those monsters— is he even human?" a man in the observation room said, watching Klaus.

He stood with both hands behind his back, eyes closed, relying solely on his senses and mind to control the Void Piercing Needle.

If only they knew that even with his eyes closed, Klaus was as deadly as ever. He is a paragon, someone who doesn't need to follow the same rules as everyone else. So it's only natural for him to be this powerful.

But they only see him as an Anomaly, unable to comprehend just how powerful can a master be.

"Even after making his trial extra hard, he seems just fine. Just how powerful is he really?" another observer wondered aloud. The War Goddess watched all of this with a gentle smile on her lips, clearly impressed by Klaus's performance.

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"Tsk, this trial should just end already so I can enter a forbidden zone and have a real fight," Inside the Oracle, Klaus muttered, frustration seeping into his voice. It had already been 45 minutes, and even with zombies now flooding the battlefield, it felt dull to him.

The thrill, the rush, the fun—he craved that adrenaline. Some might say it's strange for one to feel that, but Klaus didn't care, the zeal he brought for the Regional trial was washed away. He is bored and everyone watching can see that.

Chapter 175 - 175: Klaus is not Bothered, at all

"Yes, ma'am, I'll see to it that it's done," the announcement lady said, hanging up the call. She glanced around the room, noticing the strange looks on everyone's faces.

"Increase the rate at which the monsters pour in for his trial," she ordered, pointing at Klaus's screen. He stood there, calm, eyes closed, hands clasped behind his back. The scene was too shocking for anyone to comprehend.

"By how much, ma'am?" one of the operators asked, eyes wide as she looked at the display.

"Ten times," a voice interrupted before the announcement lady could respond. It was the War Goddess herself, her tone firm and unyielding.

Everyone's jaws dropped in unison.

"But War Goddess, that's... that's too much!" the announcement lady stammered. She had been told to raise the difficulty by three times, maybe five at most—but ten? That's an overkill.

The room was immediately filled with murmurs of disbelief. They all knew Klaus was a monster, but this was pushing it beyond reason.

"Are you sure?" the operator hesitated, her fingers hovering over the controls, unsure whether to follow the command.

The War Goddess fixed her with a steely glare. "Do it," she said, her voice final, leaving no room for argument.

The room fell silent, and the tension was thick. Everyone exchanged nervous glances, but no one dared to question the War Goddess any further. They knew what kind of power she wielded—questioning her would be foolish.

With a shaky hand, the operator entered the command. "Increase monster flow... tenfold," she whispered under her breath, her heart pounding as she hit 'Enter.'

On the screen, Klaus remained motionless, unaware of the chaos being set into motion for his trial. He stood there, calm, as if meditating, oblivious to the storm that was about to hit him.

"Good luck," the announcement lady muttered under her breath, her eyes glued to the screen. Everyone braced for what was about to happen next. For some reason, they felt pity for Klaus.

Back inside Oracle, Klaus stood firm, controlling the Void Piercing Needle with devastating precision. Suddenly, tens of thousands of monsters began pouring toward him, an endless wave of death.

His eyes snapped open, locking onto the storm of creatures rushing his way. "Looks like they want me to feel something," Klaus muttered with a smirk.

In an instant, the Void Piercing Arrow appeared in front of him, breaking apart into 45 sharp needles. With a simple gesture, he added ten more, making 55 needles float ominously before him. A smile played on his lips as the needles reformed into a single, new Void Piercing Needle.

This time, it wasn't the usual ten-inch needle. Instead, a thick, menacing 14-inch needle materialized, radiating danger. He grinned as he watched the monsters come within range.

Klaus stomped down, and from the ground, an ice chair emerged—elegant and sharp, perfectly crafted. With a mischievous look, he sat on it, comfortably taking his place. Thanks to his memories as Fruiy, he had mastered shaping the ice element into whatever he pleased.

Klaus really doesn't have any teacher to teach him how to use the Ice element, but thanks to the small memory he has of Fruity, his past self, he now knows how to shape some things.

Resting his hand on the chair's arm, Klaus supported his chin with his left fist, looking almost bored. With a flick of his right hand, he pointed a finger forward, and the newly enhanced Void Piercing Needle shot out.

In the blink of an eye, hundreds of monsters evaporated into thin air.

"Tsk, not that I expected anything different," Klaus murmured, unimpressed by the carnage. But this time, he knew he had to be faster and more careful—thousands of monsters were pouring in by the second.

"Well then," he said with a smirk, "why not make this more interesting?"

With a flick of his fingers, the Void Piercing Needle split into two smaller, 7-inch needles. Almost instantly, they shot off in opposite directions—one to the left, the other to the right.

What followed was pure devastation. Hundreds of monsters disintegrated within seconds, shredded apart by the relentless speed of the needles.

Klaus even stopped using fingers and went back to controlling them with nothing but his mind and his Spirit Eye. The slaughter was seamless as if the monsters were mere insects in the face of the needles' precision.

"I should really pay more attention to my class," Klaus muttered to himself, slightly amused. If he had realized this potential earlier, he might have already become a powerful Spirit Master—adept in controlling weapons with his mind.

But it was never too late to start, and the battlefield was the perfect place to learn. An hour had already passed, and yet, 1,500 youngsters were still inside the oracle, fighting for a spot in the Top 1000. Looking at their struggles, though, it was clear that within the next ten minutes, the true 1,000 would be chosen.

At this point, luck seemed to play a big role. All you had to do was hold on and hope the unlucky ones would be eliminated. Anna and the rest of Klaus's friends were still in the fight, but only Anna seemed to be handling the pressure well.

Five minutes later, only 1,200 remained, the red screens flashing in the observation room said it all. Although these youngsters were strong, they couldn't hold on much longer.

Suddenly, the number dropped to 1,000. Now, the next kills would decide who made it into the Top 50. Klaus's name sat at the very top, his points towering above the rest. Nobody in the room was surprised. Even though his trial difficulty had been increased, he didn't seem bothered at all.

In the second place, of course, was Anna. She was pushing herself hard, and it was paying off. Miguel is in third place and from the look of how he is fighting, he seems to be trying to catch up to Anna

Surprisingly, Hanna, who had ranked 195 out of 200 in the city selection, was now sitting at number 4. She has been training very hard for this trial and it seems to be paying off quite well.

Kilian held the fifth spot, with his sister Lily right behind him at number 6. Mark, the spearman from Klaus's group, was at number 8, and Daniel and Danny followed at 9 and 10.

Kay, on the other hand, was hanging in there at number 15. He is skilled with the bow, but his killing speed isn't the best. Still, it was enough to keep him out of harm's way while steadily taking down his targets.

Soon, the top 1,000 competitors began to dwindle. Before ten minutes had passed, only five remained inside the Oracle. Klaus sat calmly, continuing to kill with his two Void Piercing Needles, while Anna, surrounded by ice, was doing her best to hold on.

Miguel, still at third, fought on. Despite his hatred for Klaus, he proved himself to be a formidable warrior, showing everyone he wasn't a pushover. Hanna, clinging to fourth place, fought desperately, refusing to back down.

The fifth spot now belonged to Danny, who had risen from ninth. He fought fiercely, and if he managed to hold on a bit longer, he might even surpass Hanna.

But in the next minute, the final five were overwhelmed by monsters. They had no choice but to bow out of the trial. Anna finished second, followed by Miguel, Klaus's friend-nemesis, in third. Hanna secured fourth, Danny took fifth, Kilian came in sixth, and Lily, who had battled fiercely, ended up in seventh.

Mark finished eighth, Daniel took ninth, and Kay managed to finish the trial in twelfth place.

As the saying goes, friends of a lion aren't poppies. They have proven they are indeed worthy to be called friends of Klaus who the higher-ups are considering whether or not to let him continue the trial.

#### Chapter 176 - 176: The Creators Of Oracle

In the observation room, where all the officials had gathered to monitor the trials, the War Goddess and others stood watching one screen in particular. It showed a white-haired youth seated on what looked like an ice throne. His left hand rested on the arm of the chair, his fist supporting his chin, while his right hand lay casually on the other armrest.

His eyes were closed as if he had no care in the world.

Around him, thousands of monsters were charging forward. But as soon as they entered within 1 kilometer of him, something would flash, and the monsters would instantly dissolve into light particles, vanishing into the air.

"I've seen a lot of impossible things, but this... this is my first time witnessing something this bizarre," one of the officials muttered, shaking his head in disbelief. The others nodded, equally stunned, but the War Goddess stood silently, her expression unreadable.

It wasn't just the officials who found this hard to believe. Far from Hiroshi City, in a secluded location, three individuals sat around a table, also watching Klaus inside the Oracle with puzzled looks.

"Even though this is just a virtual realm, this kid is making it seem like we didn't put enough effort into making the Oracle feel as real as the outside world," one of them said, rubbing his chin thoughtfully.

"Well, it's a virtual world," another replied. "The terror people feel when facing real monsters is lessened here. They won't actually die inside the Oracle, so it's only natural."

"True, but still," the third person chimed in, frowning, "he's making this trial look far too easy. In reality, there's no way he could handle it like this. So, what's wrong with the Oracle that's allowing him to remain this calm?"

These three individuals are the creators of the Oracle. They have been developing it for the past five decades. Now, just as they were entering the final phase of their work, Klaus's performance had made them question whether they had indeed created something that could make a real difference.

"Why so gloomy? Isn't this the best thing that's ever happened to you three?" A voice suddenly broke the silence, causing the three individuals to turn toward the door.

"Big brother, you're here!" they all shouted in unison, despite their ages.

"Yes," the man replied calmly. Just by looking at him, it was clear he was powerful. The air around him seemed peaceful, yet there was an undeniable sense of danger lurking beneath the surface.

"Big brother, why do you say this kid is the best thing that's ever happened to us?" one of them asked, still puzzled.

"Just look at him. It's obvious he's not feeling the will imposed by true monsters. I know you three have been working on this for a long time, but you couldn't get that part right. So, why not add someone else to your team and see if he can help you with it?" the man suggested.

"You mean... include Klaus Hanson in our team?" one of them asked hesitantly. "But he's not even a Saint yet. What would the others say?"

The man smirked. "You think the Overlords are sitting around doing nothing? This is no issue. Just do it. If they object, I'll handle it," he said, his tone full of pride.

"Okay, big brother," they responded without further question. Their respect for the man in front of them was clear.

"By the way," the man added, "you three should better come up with something more creative for the Union Trial. That's all." With that, he vanished into thin air, leaving the three Oracle creators exchanging glances.

"Is it just me, or does Big Brother seem... happy?" one of them asked, eyebrows raised.

"Tsk, of course, he's happy," another replied. "He's an Overlord. I heard they recently discovered some ancient ruin and started exploring it."

"Well that is awesome I guess"

"We have to come up with something for the Union Trial. This kid has complicated everything; we need to step up our game," one of them said, frustration seeping through.

"Why not just use the Infinity Zero space for that trial?" another suggested.

"We can't. That's reserved for the upcoming Warrior Tournament. We won't have anything concrete ready by then if we use it now, so we need to play it safe. We just need to come up with something for the Union Trial that'll keep him on his toes," the third person chimed in, a bit more practical.

A mischievous grin spread across Logan's face. "Joon, that crazy girlfriend of yours back at MIT—wasn't she full of wild ideas for creating combat-ready spaces when we were brainstorming Oracle?"

Joon groaned, already knowing where this was going. "Logan, you bastard, you're not seriously thinking about that, are you? Lucil stopped talking to me after what happened five years ago. Don't drag her into this. She probably doesn't even want to see my face ever again."

"I don't know about that." Logan shrugged, a playful glint in his eye.

Joon's frown deepened, sensing something was off. "Ryan, what did you do?" he asked, noticing Ryan was smiling down at his phone.

Ryan looked up, clearly enjoying the moment. "Well, you know Lucil and I follow each other on Xter. Turns out, she's pretty interested in Klaus Hanson. She is a huge fan. So, I sent her a quick message letting her know we'd be working with Klaus for a while, and guess what? She immediately replied, saying she's taking a vacation in two weeks and might just swing by."

Joon's jaw tightened. "And by 'swing by,' you mean she's coming for the whole month, right?"

Ryan smirked. "Sounds about right."

Joon sighed heavily, shaking his head. "Ah, looks like my peaceful days are over..."

Logan and Ryan exchanged knowing looks before glancing at their friend with sympathetic smiles. They knew it was true—Joon's peaceful days were long gone. Lucil is a wild one, and after what had happened between the boyfriend and girlfriend duo five years ago, they were certain Joon was done for.

The three had been inseparable since high school, their friendship growing stronger through college, and now into their professional lives. Together, they were working on building a Virtual World—a place where warriors could train, connect, and even hold competitions.

Their work had earned them respect worldwide. The system they were developing promised to make life easier for warriors everywhere. But they hadn't released it to the public just yet. There were still a few issues to resolve, but once those were ironed out, the entire world would gain access.

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Meanwhile, back in Oracle, Klaus continued his slaughter of monsters with his eyes closed, sitting as if he were relaxing on a park bench. The Void Piercing Arrow was doing all the killing with his mind controlling it. However, suddenly, the endless waves of monsters stopped. Not a single one appeared.

He opened his eyes and smirked.

"Looks like they're finally tired of me," he muttered to himself. Then, his vision went dark.

When his eyes opened again, he was back in the Game room. Klaus removed the helmet and stood up, stretching lazily before heading toward the door. It slid open, and as he stepped through, he found himself back in the massive hall filled with 999 youngsters. All were excited, clearly thrilled to have made it into the top 1000.

Klaus scanned the crowd, quickly spotting his friends gathered near a large projection of the Trial's leaderboard. He looked up, and there it was—his name in first place. A grin spread across his face when he glanced at the names in second, fourth, and beyond.

"Klaus!" a voice suddenly called out. He looked and saw Danny waving.

#### Chapter 177 - 177: There is Something Different About These Two [Bonus]

Klaus waved back and made his way over to his friends. As he got closer, he noticed the same smile he saw on Anna's face still tugging her lips as they made eye contact. Klaus knew something was not right. Considering the talk they had the night before, she is supposed to be solemn, but with this new look, he just doesn't get it.

"Congratulations, big sister. You did well," Klaus said proudly. Hanna had ranked fourth, a surprising achievement that amazed many around them. No one had expected her to rise so high.

In the City Selection Trial, she had only placed 195th out of the 200 selected. But now, with 12 cities and over 12,000 young warriors, Hanna had fought her way to the top four. It was nothing short of shocking.

"Thanks, little bro," Hanna replied, her smile beaming with pride. "Mom's going to be over the moon when she hears what I placed."

Klaus rolled his eyes playfully. "Just don't let her spoil you rotten."

"Oh, I might take her up on that," Hanna teased, her confidence clearly restored. After all the struggles and doubts she'd faced, seeing her like this made Klaus happy. She had found her footing again, and he was glad she had reclaimed her strength.

"Everyone, I'll be back in a jiffy," Danny suddenly said, walking toward a certain blonde across the room. Mark and the others exchanged glances and sighed. It was clear they were all falling short in the women's department.

Klaus ignored Anna for a moment and turned to Lily. "Fairy Lily, you did well," he said with a genuine smile, making Anna pout in mock annoyance.

Lily glanced at Anna, then smiled back at Klaus. "Thank you, Klaus."

"Anna dear, congratulations on ranking second. I'm really proud of you," Klaus added. He didn't want to tease her, especially after the awkward conversation they'd had the night before. But seeing the mischievous smile she'd been flashing him all morning, he knew she was up to no good.

"Thank you, Brother Klaus," Anna replied with a teasing grin.

Klaus raised an eyebrow. "Brother Klaus, huh? Too bad I'm just a brother. I was planning to take you two somewhere special later, but it seems I'll only be taking Lily now," he said, moving to stand beside Lily and wrapping his arm around her shoulder.

Lily blushed deeply, while Anna's smile faltered for just a second. She knew Klaus was joking, but a small pang hit her heart seeing his arm around Lily. With so many people watching, she couldn't shake the feeling of being the third wheel.

Luckily for her, at that exact moment, a door opened, and the officials entered to make the final announcements. The last to enter was the War Goddess herself. Her eyes immediately found Klaus and a smile tugged at her lips.

"Congratulations, everyone. You've taken another step toward becoming disciples of Celestial Mountain Academy," the War Goddess announced.

"Though two more Trials remain to decide who will officially enter the academy's books, passing this one proves that you are among the finest warriors of your generation. You should be proud."

The room lit up with smiles as everyone soaked in her words. At least for today, the War Goddess has finally said something encouraging. She stepped aside, allowing the academy's representative to deliver her speech.

"As the War Goddess said, you should feel proud of your accomplishments," the academy rep continued. "However, in four months, you will gather again in Union City to face the Union Trial. This time, you'll compete against 4,000 others. By the end, only 2,000 of the 5,000 will advance to the next trial."

Her gaze swept over the crowd, making sure her words sunk in. "Use these four months wisely. Train. Prepare. Like before, each of you will be given three vials of Mountain Dew. Use it to reach the Peak Master stage before the Union Trial.

I know many of you are already close, so bridge that remaining gap."

"And to those who are still far from reaching the Peak Of Master Stage, work extra hard to bridge that gap before the Union Trial."

"Additionally, the academy will award each of you three passes to Tier 3 Forbidden Zones and one pass to a Tier 4 Forbidden Zone. These are your opportunities to hone your combat skills and grow stronger. The next trial will be more grueling and dangerous than what you've faced so far."

The academy rep paused, letting her words hang in the air for a moment.

"Lastly, three months from now, the academy will hold a gathering at Sinji Valley. Some seniors from the academy will be present. Use this event to learn more about what lies ahead, and find the motivation you need to succeed in the Union Trial."

The room quieted as everyone processed the weight of the trials to come. The doors opened on the sides of the building signally for them to enter and go for the Mountain Dew. Klaus looked at his friend and gestured for them to go.

He looked back and nodded at the War Goddess before leaving. After receiving the three vials of Mountain Dew, he and his friends headed back to their hotel. Once they arrived, Klaus handed his share of the Mountain Dew to Anna, Lily, and Hanna.

They all knew he had no use for them, so they accepted it without hesitation. After that, Klaus retreated to his room to take a bath. Once refreshed, he tried to call Ohema again, but like the last ten times, the call didn't go through. Frustrated, he sat down and entered his soul sea to study the Pentaface Bead more closely.

A few hours later, there was a knock on his door. He paused and opened it to find Anna and Lily standing there.

"Can we come in?" Lily asked, her voice soft.

"Sure," Klaus replied, stepping aside to let them in. As they walked past him, he felt his heart quicken, though he couldn't quite understand why. 'There is something different about these two'

"So, what brings you two here?" Klaus asked, trying to sound casual. The two exchanged glances before Lily spoke up.

"Klaus, do you hate us?" The question was simple yet complicated. Klaus swallowed hard, feeling the weight of it. He understood the deeper implications behind her words.

He didn't answer right away, taking a moment to consider his response. Saying the wrong thing could have serious consequences. He could tell them he didn't hate them, but what evidence did he have to back that up? In truth, he didn't harbor any hatred; he simply didn't want to get this complicated for now. His mind is still not straight from knowing about his past, so he wants to relax for a while.

But the tension was palpable. He knew it would be difficult, especially since he often flirted with other girls. If they remained in the friend zone for too long, it could create issues in their relationship. Anna knew Klaus liked them—she could sense it, and so could Lily. But he rarely showed it intimately to them.

Though they weren't as old as Lucy, he felt he should at least make them feel appreciated. He recognized that he had been distant, even playful with Anna when he should have been closer. Now, standing before the two beautiful faces, he realized he needed to do something.

With a sigh, he walked toward them without overthinking. He stepped in front of Anna, gently pulling her closer and planting a soft kiss on her lips. Anna froze in surprise, but Klaus didn't linger. He turned to Lily and planted another kiss on her lips, then stepped back, a smile forming on his face.

"Does this answer your question?" he asked, his tone light yet sincere.

Chapter 178 - 178: Handsome, Shameless, Pervert [Bonus]

Anna and Lily looked at each other, their faces flushed. They didn't know how to react. They had come to have a difficult conversation, but before they could even begin, they found themselves speechless. Klaus didn't say a word; he just leaned in and kissed them both. It was unexpected and wild.

"Klaus," Anna managed to say, her expression bashful. Lily wore a similar look, her cheeks still pink.

"I hope this answers your question," Klaus said, smiling softly. "Although we can't get more intimate right now, I want you both to know that I love you." He felt a warmth in his heart as he spoke. "We can be more active when I get this sorted out."

As he said this, he felt a sense of peace, having already taken that step in his heart. But for Anna and Lily, hearing those words made their hearts race, pounding against their chests. They exchanged glances, a mix of surprise and joy dancing in their eyes. The moment felt electric, charged with unspoken feelings.

"Hehe, look at you both, blushing like little tomatoes! Come on, come here," Klaus said playfully. Before they could react, he swooped in, and they all landed on the bed together. He planted a kiss on Anna's lips and then on Lily's before settling them down in his arms—Anna on his right and Lily on his left.

"Thank you," Lily said, lying rigidly in his embrace.

"No need to thank me. I've had my eyes on you both since the moment I first saw you," Klaus replied, gently rubbing her arms.

"Isn't Sister Lucy and Sister Ohema enough for you?" Anna blurted out, instantly regretting her words.

"Says the lady chasing her sister's boyfriend," Klaus shot back, causing Anna to close her eyes in embarrassment, her face burning.

"What about Sister Nia and Sister Asha?" Lily asked, sounding surprisingly calm about the whole situation.

"Hey, can't we just stay in the moment without thinking about others?" Klaus said, not liking where this was heading. He thought it was odd that the ladies were so supportive of each other when it came to a boy they both liked. Shouldn't they be rivals? Yet, all the women around him seemed to be rooting for one another.

"Your mom was right. You really are a player," Lily said with a teasing smile, her eyes sparkling with mischief.

Klaus looked at the usually quiet Lily and couldn't believe his eyes. She now looks lively and playful, and from the look of things, she might become a huge challenge in the future. As they say, don't judge a book by its cover.

"I'm pretty sure he has his eyes on War Goddess Miriam and Aoi too," Anna added, making Klaus pause and slip into deep thought. After a moment, a smile crept across his face.

"I knew it! He does have his eyes on them," Anna exclaimed.

"I only hope he has the stamina to satisfy them all," Lily chimed in, her tone teasing.

"Lily, you can't say things like that! It's too... naughty," Anna said, her cheeks turning a bright shade of red.

"What? You'll experience all that one day, so what's the harm in talking about it?" Lily replied with a grin.

"You!" Anna shot back, still flustered.

"Hey, ladies, I'm right here. Why not talk about us and forget about other things?" Klaus said, astonished by how mischievous Lily had turned out to be. He couldn't help but chuckle at the banter between them.

Klaus felt a warm glow of affection for both girls as they continued their playful banter. It was refreshing to see this side of Lily, and Anna's shyness only made her more endearing. For someone who had tormented her sister for weeks, this new look on her is just too cute.

Klaus was more than happy to have two beautiful girls in his arms. All the pent-up frustration he has been feeling after knowing a little about his past, the pain, and everything uncomfortable feeling started to melt away.

Before he knew it, for the first time in days, he fell asleep, leaving Anna and Lily to gaze at his face. Anna held a small smile as she looked at the peaceful expression on his features.

"He really is handsome," she whispered, not realizing she had said it aloud.

Lily turned to her, a playful smile spreading across her face. "You're not wrong. He has that brooding charm, doesn't he?"

Anna nodded, her cheeks flushing slightly. "It's like he carries the weight of the world but still manages to look good doing it."

"Exactly!" Lily laughed softly. "And that smile—when he actually smiles, it lights up the room."

They both chuckled quietly, careful not to wake Klaus. The moment felt intimate, a shared secret between them. As they continued to admire him, Anna felt a warmth in her heart.

"I'm glad we're here together," Anna said softly, her eyes never leaving Klaus's face.

"Me too," Lily replied. "It feels special." The exchange looks and smiles.

Neither Anna nor Lily wanted to wake Klaus, so they all fell back asleep, only stirring around six when Hanna came in to inform them that Aoi would be joining them for the outing they had planned after the Trial.

"You work fast, Boss," Hanna teased, turning to Klaus with a playful grin. Just a while back, she became his personal assistant. Now, she is his sister, that is just too cute.

"Big sister, you're making me blush," Klaus joked shamelessly. Just like how he got some pain and frustration from his past self, he also got some comfort when he was around Hanna. Her past self Haniva was his Babysitter after all.

Looking at the grin on Hanna's face, Klaus couldn't help but think back to his past self as Fruity, 'Tsk, that bastard sure had the best people around him' He thought.

Though tragedy had found him sooner than he had expected, Fruity had experienced all that love, and much of it came from Neniva, Hanna's past self.

"You do know that having too many girlfriends requires a lot of work, right?" Hanna said with a bashful smile on her lips.

"Don't worry! This brother of yours is more active than you think," Klaus replied with a wink.

"Pervert!" Hanna exclaimed, laughing as she darted out of his room.

Klaus shook his head, chuckling softly. "Tsk, that bastard had it good," he muttered, cursing his past self once more before heading to the bathroom.

His past memories clung to him like an annoying shadow, influencing him in all the wrong ways. The bits he remembered were all about monk stuff—discipline, restraint, all the things he no longer cared for. Now, Klaus is moving in the opposite direction, one that doesn't fit the teachings of monks. He had long abandoned their ways.

After his bath, Klaus dressed up and went to meet the others, who were already waiting for him. He had promised them an outing before they returned to their various cities. Once they were back, it would be all about training... and maybe some other nightly activities on the side.

He still needed to find his uncles, who had disappeared since his return from the dead. His friends would have to go into seclusion, focusing on hunts to level up and sharpen their combat skills. As for him, his schedule for the next four months was packed—training, missions, and even some unfinished business with Nadia. The upcoming Trial was looming, and it was going to be a hectic ride.

To top it all off, Klaus had been banned from entering Union City, but oddly enough, he wasn't too concerned. He figured things would work out in their own way. Right now, his only plan was to enjoy himself with his friends.

Soon after, Aoi arrived, looking as stunning as ever. Klaus grinned, putting on his usual shameless charm as he approached her.

"Beautiful, smart, and deadly with a sword. Damn, what a combo," he teased with a wink.

Anna and Lily rolled their eyes, but deep down, they knew they had fallen for this handsome, shameless pervert long ago and now, they have to live with him forever.

#### Chapter 179 - 179: Outing with Friends

Hiroshi City is vast and stunning, full of incredible places to explore. Klaus, his friends, and Aoi had wandered to many amazing places until they finally entered a club only available to warriors, a place meant for young fighters like them. The atmosphere inside was lively, and designed for everyone to have a good time.

They drank, laughed, and even had a few rounds of hard liquor. Despite them being warriors, the drinks hit them enough to leave them a little tipsy, but they didn't care, they managed to chart in the top 1000 out of the 12,000 youngsters in the whole of the Eastern Region. They deserved all the fun in the world.

Klaus spent most of his time flirting with Anna and Lily but as the night reached its peak, Klaus found himself alone with Aoi. She seemed to fit in just fine, mingling effortlessly with the group. But now, it was just the two of them.

"So," Klaus began, not giving Aoi any time to process the sudden moment alone moment. "How many pictures of me do you have in your room?"

It was the most shameless question he could think of, and he knew it. He couldn't help but smirk, remembering the last time they were at the Hiroshi Mansion. Mio and Miki, Aoi's older sisters, had let it slip that Aoi was a huge fan of his. That tidbit had stuck with him, and now he saw the perfect opportunity to tease her.

As expected, Aoi's face turned bright red, and she quickly covered it with her hands. In the academy, she is very respected due to many factors but mostly because of her sword skills. She is very good with the sword.

"Klaus stop that" she mumbled through her fingers, still too embarrassed to look at him. Klaus grinned, knowing he had already cracked through her composure.

"By the way, thanks for making sure I didn't lose face during our duel." He knew that without Aoi subtly holding back, he would have lost that match.

It wasn't something he could easily forget. That small gesture had meant a lot to him, and it solidified Aoi's place as someone he could trust. Some friendships are built through little acts of kindness, and Aoi was one of those.

Aoi shifted slightly regaining her composure.

"No need," she replied. "Just make sure you get into the academy and join the Yin-Yang Palace." Her face held a small smile, but Klaus could tell she meant every word. It was more than just a casual suggestion—it felt like something she truly wanted for him.

"Yin-Yang Palace?" Klaus raised an eyebrow, clearly intrigued. He didn't know what it meant, but he could tell it had something to do with the Celestial Mountain Academy. Since he was eager to learn more, he focused intently as Aoi explained.

"Yin-Yang Palace is one of the eight factions at the academy," Aoi began. "The eight factions are Yin-Yang Palace, Fire Dragon Hall, Thunder Blade Sect, Celestial Wind Pavilion, Iron Fist Clan, Aqua Spirit Sect, Earth Shadow Guild, and Sky Phoenix Sanctuary."

Klaus didn't say anything, he just sat there listening attentively.

"Since I'm in the Yin-Yang Palace, I'll talk about that one," Aoi continued. "Factions are like classes. They're designed to group warriors with similar talents and affinities so they can learn together and build stronger foundations."

"The Yin-Yang Palace, as the name suggests, is made up of warriors with diverse talents, especially those who don't quite fit into the other factions. Some joined because they didn't want to be in the other factions, and some were here because the other factions rejected them. Yes, we're at the bottom of the list, but that's because of how broad and varied our group is."

Aoi smiled softly, knowing what Klaus might be thinking. "But that doesn't mean we're weak. In fact, it's the opposite. We have access to a wide range of resources due to the sheer number of different classes we accommodate.

However, because we don't reject anyone, our ratings are always lower when it comes to competing for resources. But remember, in the Yin-Yang Palace, every warrior is treated like a friend and family. If you want to be with people who will stand by your side without the threat of getting stabbed in the back, this is the faction for you."

She hesitated briefly before adding, "Also... I want you to join because I want to stay in the same faction and practice the sword with you."

Klaus couldn't help but smile at that last part.

"But you're an inner disciple," he pointed out. "How can we practice together?" He didn't know much about the structure of the academy, but from what he had learned from Lucy, once someone climbed the Stairway to Heaven, they would join the Inner Area.

Aoi smiled knowingly. "That's true. Normally, once you become an inner disciple, you're focused on more advanced training in the inner section of the academy, away from the outer disciples. But," she paused, her expression softening, "I still make time to help those who mean something to me."

Klaus raised an eyebrow, clearly intrigued. "Meaning?"

Aoi shrugged, trying to appear casual, but the bashfulness on her face said it all. "Let's just say I'll find a way. The Yin-Yang Palace is big on helping each other, no matter the rank or status. We're family. And besides," she added with a playful smirk, "I can't let you go around slacking off just because I'm not there to keep an eye on you."

Klaus chuckled. "So, you're my personal drill sergeant now?"

Aoi's smile, her shoulders held high. "Something like that."

"How cute," Klaus muttered, watching the playful look on Aoi's face. She blushed lightly, caught off guard by his words. Klaus knew well that it wouldn't be simple for an inner disciple like Aoi to come down to the outer area of the academy, but he didn't care much about the details. He didn't know enough about the academy's structure to be concerned. All he could do was smile and reassure her.

"Don't worry, Fairy Aoi, I wouldn't mind joining your prestigious faction," Klaus said

Aoi's blush deepened at his words, but she quickly composed herself. "Good," she replied, trying to hide her flustered expression. "Just make sure you keep up. I won't go easy on you just because we're in the same faction."

Klaus chuckled. "I wouldn't expect anything less."

"By the way, know that my brother Taro won't be causing you any trouble anytime soon," Aoi said.

Klaus smiled. 'Oh he wouldn't dare try anything stupid after he realises I haven't only taken the girl of his dreams, his sister is also caught in my net' Klaus smiled slightly thinking that.

He wanted to say that out loud, but he didn't, instead he just smiled and nodded. He had already clashed with Taro once and knew the guy wasn't a match for him. The idea of Taro trying to cause problems now was laughable.

At the very least, Aoi could slap him back into place if he tried anything.

That thought made Klaus smirk even more. They spent a few more minutes talking before Anna and the others returned. After a few more rounds of shots, they all headed back to their hotel.

Klaus first wanted to spend the night with either Anna or Lily, but he decided against it knowing he had other plans for the night. The kind he doesn't want anyone knowing about it, at least not just yet.

He waited for everyone to fall asleep. Once the suit was quiet and still, he dressed in dark clothes and slipped out into the thick of the night.

## Chapter 180 - 180: The Dark Order Safehouse

Klaus moved quickly through the crowded streets, heading in a certain direction dressed in dark clothes. After interrogating the assassin, he managed to extract the location of two Dark Order safehouses—one in Hiroshi City and the other in Ross City.

At first, he thought about going back to Ross City before doing anything. However, after digesting the information he got from the Assassin, he changed his mind.

The safehouse in Hiroshi City had something far more valuable. From what he gathered, there is a system inside the Safehouse in Hiroshi City that holds the identities of assassins in the Eastern Region linked to the Dark Order. That wasn't all—there was also a list of targets the Dark Order had been contracted to kill.

Beyond that, the system could give him access to both major and minor hideouts in the region. Klaus knew he had to act fast and get that information before the Dark Order realized Assassin Number 91 had failed to complete the hit.

Time was running out, and Klaus didn't intend to waste a second. He slipped through the darker, less crowded parts of the city until he arrived at a five-story, hotel-like structure. On the outside, it seemed like just another place for travelers, but Klaus knew better.

This wasn't an ordinary hotel. Sure, it functioned like one, but only for a select type of guest—those who possessed a specific ring. If you have the ring, you can enter. No questions asked. That means everyone inside this particular hotel is either an assassin or working for the Dark Order.

"Welcome, guest. How can the Everdark Hotel serve you today?" Immediately Klaus entered, a woman at the front desk greeted him, her voice sweet and professional, just as Klaus expected.

To any bystander, it looked like a normal check-in, but Klaus knew the truth. From the assassin he interrogated, he learned that the safe house didn't know whether they were assassins until they showed the ring.

Klaus thought about asking what would happen if someone didn't have the ring, but he already knew the answer. Instead, he flashed the ring on his middle finger, his face unreadable. Without a word, the woman's smile faded, and she gestured for him to follow her to an elevator.

Once inside, Klaus pressed the button for the top floor. As the elevator ascended, he swept the hotel with his senses. What he found surprised him. There were dozens of assassins in the building.

Klaus sensed the presence of three Sages and thirty-four Saints scattered throughout the hotel, but he didn't dwell on it. His priority was to extract the data from their system before anyone suspected a thing.

"These people are meticulous," Klaus muttered, eyeing the sophisticated setup in the room he arrived in. The system was the type that left little to no digital footprint. It was designed to be as invisible as possible.

He sat behind the console and recalled the instructions the assassin had given him. All he needed to do was insert the ring into a specific slot. As soon as he did, the system came to life, prompting him with a security question.

Without hesitation, Klaus entered the answer. The assassin had been too bewitched to lie, fully convinced Klaus would let him live. One side effect of the bewitching spell was the ability to manipulate someone's emotions, making them more cooperative.

The moment he keyed in the security answer, the system granted him full access. Klaus wasted no time and dove straight into the most crucial details—safehouses, their locations, and the methods for accessing them.

Next, he searched for the registered assassins in the system. As he scrolled through the database, something caught his eye.

"Huh... what's 'Tier locked'?" Klaus murmured, noticing that the assassin profiles were categorized into four tiers: Tier 1 to Tier 4. However, only Tier 1 was available to him.

"Seems like the bastard I killed wasn't important enough to grant me higher clearance," Klaus scoffed, realizing that the assassin's low rank limited the information he could access.

"Not bad, though. At least I can get Tier 1 assassins." Klaus quickly accessed the list and was shocked to find detailed profiles of twenty individuals.

"Number 100 to Number 80," he noted aloud. It was clear now—the Dark Order used these numbers to refer to their assassins. Klaus scanned the list, not bothering to open their profiles for more intimate details, there will be time for that later.

As he kept scrolling, his eyes caught something suddenly.

"Number 92 is indisposed," he read, noticing a red tag next to the name. A grim smile tugged at his lips. That must've been the assassin who failed to kill him at the Arcadian city. He scoffed but didn't dwell on it. He wanted to kill the bastard himself, but this also worked.

Indisposed, 'indeed.'

Klaus pressed "print," and a stack of documents began piling up. He wanted everything, and the system was delivering. After printing the list of Tier 1 Assassins, he noted that Numbers 91 and 92 were already dead, leaving 18 more active.

He didn't linger on that detail. His next search was for the people on the Dark Order's hit list. Three names popped up, and one stood out—Cynthia Ross.

Anna and Lucy's mother. Klaus had always known there was something mysterious about her. She kept more secrets than even her daughters realized. He had asked Lucy about her once, but all she said was that Cynthia was always busy. Now, seeing her on the hit list, Klaus knew his Mother-in-law was one interesting woman.

"Looks like some competition wants her out of the way. I guess it's time for a little outing with my mother-in-law," Klaus smirked. He had no problem using her as bait to lure out the assassin.

"What are mother-in-law's for, am I right?" he muttered to himself, chuckling at the thought.

Afterward, he skimmed through more of the system's secrets, including how they processed their kills. He uncovered details about their dark web servers and ways to access them. By the time he was done, stacks of printed documents were scattered across the room.

After printing everything, Klaus decided to leave them with some parting gift, but for now, he needed to survey the building and everyone inside before doing anything.

He walked to a bed not far from him and fell on it as he activated his senses ready to observe everything. A few minutes later, a voice entered his head making him smile.

"Hello, my love," Klaus greeted warmly, a smile spreading across his face as he imagined Lucy smiling back, wherever she was.

"You sound happy," Lucy's voice responded curiously.

"Why wouldn't I be? It's rare to find yourself surrounded by friends whose undying sacrifice will help you level up," Klaus replied, his smile turning wicked.

"I guess it's good to have friends," Lucy said, misunderstanding his dark humor. If only she knew the love of her life was about to commit genocide, she would have said something different.

"How was your day?" Lucy asked, her voice soft but curious.

"The usual," Klaus replied with a grin. "Wooing ladies and the like."

"Pervert," she said, though he could hear the playful tone in her voice.

"Lucy dear, why don't we talk later? I've got some friends waiting for my help in crossing over to the next realm. I'll be sure to chat back and tell you all about how your sister's lips tasted." Klaus said before severing the connection between them.

He stood up, a wicked smile on his face, already imagining the look that must have appeared on Lucy's face upon hearing his cheeky comment.

He walked toward a door, bypassing the elevator altogether. As he moved forward, a dagger appeared in his hand—the very same dagger Number 91 had intended to use on him.

"Ah, there's nothing better than a cold night of slaughter," he muttered under his breath, a grin spreading across his face.

Without hesitation, he knocked on a particular door. "Room service," he called out, his voice calm and collected, but on his face, he held a wicked smile, one that he intended to send away with the person who would be opening the door.