

THE LAST PARAGON IN THE APOCALYPSE

Chapter 2: Klaus

A slim, dark-haired young man was mopping a long corridor in what looked like a lavish building. He had headphones on, probably listening to music. His movements with the mop were both graceful and slick—almost like he'd been doing this for so long that he'd developed his own technique, a rhythm that was uniquely his.

Suddenly, the doors burst open, and a swarm of young men and women came rushing out of the classrooms, flooding the hallway. The young man quickly stepped to the side, giving them room to pass.

"Damn it, all that work for nothing," he muttered, glaring at the dirt now streaked across the floor. His twenty minutes of careful mopping had been ruined in seconds by the sudden stampede of students.

"Hey Klaus! What's the deal? It's not your birthday; why are you just standing there, keep mopping?" a voice called out from a few meters away, making him frown.

This young man, Klaus, was a soon-to-be 16-year-old dropout working as a janitor to help support his family. He lived with his mother, a frail woman who also worked hard to make ends meet. Klaus's father had gone missing five years ago, leaving a gaping hole in their lives.

When he saw how much his mother was struggling, Klaus made the difficult decision to drop out of school and take on whatever jobs he could find to help keep them afloat.

Together, they managed—barely. Each of them doing their best to support the other in a world that seemed to get harder every day.

Fifty years ago, Earth entered a new phase of evolution. Humans, insects, wild animals, and even plants began to evolve in ways that seemed straight out of fictional movies. This shift brought about sweeping changes.

In the first decade, the planet underwent a period of adaptation. Although countless lives were lost, many managed to endure. The following ten years saw significant advancements in both power and politics. By the third decade, a new transformation began—one that would shape the future of the next generation.

When the spiritual Qi descended 50 years ago, a fortunate few among humanity gained extraordinary abilities that allowed them to battle the evolving monsters. However, thirty years later, this boon ceased for newborns. Instead of inheriting these powers, new humans were born with normal abilities, though they were healthier than their predecessors.

But this status quo didn't last. Over the past twenty years, scientists discovered a special gene present in all new births. This gene, when stimulated, could awaken latent talents and abilities. Fueled by this breakthrough, doctors and geneticists went to work, and within months, they developed a revolutionary drug.

This drug could activate these hidden genes, unlocking the dormant strengths within individuals.

But this drug only works on 16-year-olds. Because of this, the education system was overhauled to include combat and survival training, prepping these new humans for when their powers would awaken.

Klaus, who's had a tough time these past five years, has been working tirelessly to save up enough money to buy the Celestial Water before his birthday, which is just around the corner. Even though life hasn't been easy for him, he's determined and hopeful that he'll make a breakthrough soon.

He quickly re-mopped the area and made his way across the vast campus, skillfully avoiding detection. After a few minutes, he reached a tall wall. Pulling a rope from his side bag, he tied it to a hook and threw it up, securing it on the wall.

With a quiet climb, he made it to the top and lay flat, peering over the edge. "Day #655, what are we learning today?" Klaus muttered to himself as he watched a field where young boys and girls practiced with wooden swords.

Klaus pulled out a small notebook from his bag and began scribbling notes, documenting what he observed. Klaus watched intently as the students practiced with their wooden swords below. He muttered softly to himself, making notes and sketches in his small notebook.

"Alright, let's see... First, it's all about stance." Klaus scribbled a quick drawing of a basic fighting stance. "Feet shoulder-width apart, knees slightly bent. Balance is key."

He glanced back at the field. "That's right, keep your weight centered. It makes it easier to move and strike." He drew a figure with arrows showing weight distribution.

"Now, the basic strikes. Overhead chop, sideswipe, and thrust." Klaus sketched out the different moves, drawing lines to show the paths of each strike. "The overhead chop should be powerful. The side swipe needs to be fast and clean."

He noted how the students practiced their strikes in sequence. "Timing is important. You need to be quick but precise." Klaus made a quick drawing of a student performing a combo of strikes.

"Breathing. Don't forget to breathe. It helps with control and focus." Klaus jotted down a simple diagram showing a breathing pattern alongside the sword strikes.

Klaus looked closely at the way the students were positioning their hands. "Grip is crucial. A firm grip without being too tight." He drew a hand holding a sword, showing the correct grip.

"Remember, practice makes perfect. Repetition is how you get better." He wrote this as a reminder to himself, underlining it for emphasis.

After two hours of observing and taking notes, Klaus climbed down from the wall, packed his equipment back into his side bag, and headed out. This had become his routine over the past years—sneaking in a bit of learning every day before heading home.

Even though what he was doing was illegal, it worked best for him. Since no one had caught on yet, he made it a habit to spy on the students' training sessions and document everything. When he gets home, he will review his notes and practice with simple and ordinary wooden swords.

Despite not having paid the school fees at Ross Academy where he worked, Klaus always came home with fresh new insights. As they say, "Work smart, not hard."

"Out of the way, scum!" Just as Klaus was feeling a sense of triumph, an arrogant voice echoed in his mind, making him jump to the side instinctively. A speeding bike roared past him, kicking up a cloud of dust.

The rider, clearly a student, didn't even glance back or apologize. He just sped off. "Ah, why bother," Klaus muttered, brushing the dust off his clothes. "Once I awaken, I'll make sure to put all these self-entitled brats in their place."

Klaus continued walking. After a few minutes, he entered an area that starkly contrasted with the opulent buildings and polished roads he had just left behind.

"There's no place like home," he mumbled, shaking his head. He lived in a slum where the laws seemed nonexistent. It was a rundown part of Ross City, a place where society's outcasts and degenerates gathered. Ross City was owned by the powerful Ross Great family, who controlled most of the businesses and had significant influence over the city.

But this particular part of the city was a lawless zone, where the Ross family's control didn't reach. It was where Klaus and his mother had ended up three

years ago after they were forced to leave their self-contained home following his father's disappearance, which was presumed to be death.

"Mom, I'm home!" Klaus called out as he stepped into their beat-up apartment—a small, single-room space with a broken door and cracked walls.

"Come and eat," a calm and sweet voice replied from inside, making Klaus's face light up. He walked into the room and saw his mother preparing food. She turned to him with a warm, beautiful smile. Despite the hardships they had faced, her beauty still shone through. Her dark hair framed her slender figure, and though the struggles had taken their toll, she remained graceful.

Klaus dropped his bag and went over to her. "It smells great, Mom," he said, his eyes gleaming with appreciation. She reached out and gently ruffled his hair, her smile never fading.

"You must be tired, Klaus. Sit down and eat while it's still hot," she said, setting a plate on the small table they shared. The food was simple, but it was made with care, and Klaus felt his heart warm just looking at it.

As they sat down together, his mother watched him eat with a soft expression. "You've been working so hard, Klaus. I'm proud of you," she said, her voice full of love. Klaus paused, looking up at her, and smiled back.

"It's nothing, Mom. I'm doing it for us," he replied, his voice steady but filled with emotion. She reached out, placing a hand on his cheek, her touch gentle and comforting.

"I know, my dear. You've grown up so much," she whispered, her eyes misting over slightly. Klaus swallowed, feeling a lump in his throat, but he didn't want to show it. Instead, he just nodded and kept eating, the warmth of his mother's love filling the room.

"Don't worry, Mom. Once I awaken, our living situation will change. I just need to get a hundred more gold coins, and I can buy the Celestial Water," Klaus said, looking at his mother with determination.

"I know you will, my dear. I know you will," she replied, gently ruffling his hair. "Just don't push yourself too hard. Your health is what matters most to me."

A few minutes later, Klaus finished eating and had washed the dishes. He then grabbed the wooden sword he had made and went outside to practice what he had learned from spying on the students.

As Klaus walked out, his mother watched his back with a heavy heart. She couldn't help but shed a few tears. She quickly wiped them away and glanced at her left hand, focusing on her ring finger. "A mother is supposed to take care of her children. I'm sorry, my love, but I can't hold on to this any longer. Klaus needs me, and the only thing I can do is help him."

She stood up and called out to Klaus, telling him she would be back within the hour. Klaus nodded and continued practicing, swinging his wooden sword with all the focus he could muster.

After a while, Klaus went back inside, took a bath, and quickly fell into a deep, resounding sleep. His body was exhausted, but his mind was at peace, knowing he had done everything he could that day.

A few hours later, his mother returned. She held a small case in her hands, her expression serious yet resolved.