

Paragon 291

Chapter 291 - 291: Dharma, The Northern Overlord

A day after the launch of Oracle, millions of orders flooded in for the Oracle Helmets. The long-awaited VR platform had finally gone public, sending everyone into a frenzy of excitement. Joon and his team had anticipated this massive demand and had prepared accordingly.

They'd manufactured a vast stockpile of helmets for their first big sale, ensuring that despite the overwhelming number of orders, deliveries were running smoothly without a hitch.

The excitement surrounding Oracle was palpable, with people eager to dive into the digital world Joon and his team had crafted. The buzz continued to grow as more users joined in, and Oracle's influence was quickly becoming undeniable.

Klaus and his friends, who decided to stay at Stone Valley for a few days before leaving for the Genius Gathering at Senji Valley, spent the last few hours exploring the Mountain Forest Monastery—the monastery Klaus had modeled in Oracle.

"This place is beautiful," Klaus's mom said, admiring the Butterfly Garden that Klaus and Queenie had designed. Perhaps because Queenie had gone a little extra with the flowers, the garden was indeed stunning.

Klaus smiled, but deep down, he felt a bit sad. This had been his home after his mother sacrificed herself to send him away from their pursuers. But now, after reviewing the second part of his past self's memories, he knew the monastery had also been destroyed forever.

He couldn't endure all those emotions without thinking about killing. But despite the pain, he just smiled and led his friends through the vast and beautiful monastery.

"There's something strange about these statues," Miriam said as they stopped in front of one of the large statues.

"Indeed," Klaus replied with a smile. "I call this statue Master Kluitox, a Mental Sage. Just being near it or staring at it from a kilometer away will affect your mental state. Since Oracle is 100% immersive, the changes that happen here can affect your mind even outside this space," he added.

"Are you saying this statue can strengthen our mental resilience?" Lily asked.

"Exactly," Klaus nodded. In truth, the past few days since he had awakened his memories had been spent adding these effects to various parts of the monastery.

Thanks to Yuying's teachings from the second part of his memories, he now understood more about the mind, soul, body, aura, and Qi cultivation. He had become something of an encyclopedia, filled with vast knowledge of different types of cultivation.

He had imbued most of the statues with different types of effects, so anyone who neared them would need the strength to resist, or else, to a certain extent, they could die and be ejected from Oracle.

"Mom, you probably shouldn't get too close to any of the statues," Klaus said, pulling his mom away. Among them all, she was the weakest, and he didn't want her to get hurt over something like this.

After a while exploring the rest of the monastery, Klaus and his mother exited the space. Miriam and the others decided to stay and gain some clarity from the strange, ancient things they had encountered.

What none of them knew was that, since their helmets were neuro-linked, the effects happening inside Oracle would have the same impact on their minds in the real world.

After exiting Oracle, Klaus and his mom climbed to the top of the Oracle building to watch the sunset. A while later, Lucil came to inform him that he had a guest.

Klaus was puzzled because he wasn't expecting anyone, but he went to see who this mysterious guest was.

Lucil led him to a meeting room. As soon as Klaus entered, he sensed a powerful presence emanating from a man who looked like he was in his late 30s. The man had long dark hair, refined cheekbones, and a rather unusual set of pink eyes.

The moment their gazes met, Klaus felt as though his soul was being sucked out of his body.

'Brat, that man is a powerful soul master. It would be in your best interest not to antagonize him, or else you won't even know how you died,' the senior's voice echoed in his mind from his soul sea.

'No kidding, genius,' Klaus replied, fully aware of the danger the man before him posed—very dangerous.

'But we'll talk about those eyes later,' he added, cutting off the connection between them.

"Nice to meet you, Klaus. I am Dharma, the Overlord of the Northern Union, but you can call me Brother Dharma," the man said.

Contrary to what Klaus expected, when he approached the chair reserved for him, Dharma extended his hand for a firm handshake.

"Well, you already know my name, but it's nice to meet you too, Brother Dharma," Klaus replied, flashing a small smile. While those pink eyes radiated danger, he sensed no killing intent from Dharma, so it seemed safe to assume he wasn't in immediate danger.

Dharma smiled upon hearing Klaus call him "Brother."

"So, what did I do to warrant a meeting with an Overlord?" Klaus asked after sitting down.

"Shall I list them? You've done more than enough to deserve a meeting with an Overlord," Dharma replied with the same charming smile.

Klaus was handsome, but the man before him was not only handsome, he exuded a dangerous yet calm presence that Klaus couldn't quite put his finger on.

"Maybe we should get to the main point—I have caused quite a bit of chaos, after all," Klaus said with a hint of shamelessness. Dharma simply smiled and retrieved a space ring.

"You managed to complete the quest set by the Overlords, so I'm here to reward you as per the rules of the quest." He handed the ring to Klaus.

"Full disclosure: I added something extra in there as a thank you for making my Union look good these past few months," Dharma added with a smirk.

While there were many geniuses out there, what Klaus had achieved was simply too grand. From the moment he awakened until now, he had accomplished feats that even seasoned warriors couldn't imagine attempting.

He had killed the five devils in the Demons Abode which was a quest set by the Overlords. He knew his rewards would come soon enough, so he wasn't shocked to receive the space ring.

"Thank you, Brother Dharma," Klaus said, pocketing the ring. He wanted to check its contents immediately, but the look on Dharma's face told him that the Overlord wasn't finished with what he came to say.

"Klaus, I know about your situation with the Duncan Legacies, and though I would love nothing more than to help you resolve it, you'll have to handle this on your own," Dharma said with a slightly regretful expression.

He had wanted to assist Klaus, but their leader had instructed him not to. Klaus needed to solve his own problems, and if the Overlords or the academy stepped in, many would accuse him of receiving special treatment. Therefore, this was a challenge he had to face alone.

"Don't worry about that, Brother Dharma. Those idiots... the Legacies, won't know what hit them," Klaus replied with a smile. Truth be told, he didn't want the Overlords' help. He relished the mischief, and the Duncan Legacies had just walked onto his playing field.

Dharma smiled and stood up. "Still, be careful. The Legacies are no easy targets. They have connections, and with the Dark Order hot on your trail, you don't want to incur their wrath."

"I'll keep that in mind. And thank you for the gift," Klaus said, shaking hands with Dharma before the Overlord vanished from the room. Klaus sighed and leaned back in his chair.

"Tsk, a bunch of arrogant rich bastards. When I'm done with them, even their shadows will be afraid of me," Klaus muttered coldly.

Somewhere far from the Oracle headquarters, Dharma smiled and shook his head. "I should probably give the War God in Union City a heads-up not to interfere in his business. Klaus, I look forward to a good show."

Chapter 292 - 292: Going to the Gathering of Geniuses [Bonus]

Klaus spent the last few days with his mother at Stone Valley before the day for the one-week gathering of geniuses at Sinji came. During their time at Stone Valley, Miriam and Klaus's friends explored Oracle. They preferred exploring the Mountain Forest Monastery that Klaus had created.

By this point, millions of people had already moved into Oracle, with some setting up businesses. Real estate companies had begun selling homes, and, surprisingly, millions had already purchased one.

Some people also started forming factions, and, as always, conflicts were beginning to arise, which only added to the intriguing nature of the virtual world.

Klaus, who preferred to brave the waking world, used the time to explore Stone Valley with his mother. Naturally, Lucil and Olive were more than happy to be their guides.

Lucil had merged her game company with Oracle, making her an unofficial full-fledged employee of the Three Nerds. Her designs and world-building were exactly what Joon and the others needed, so even though she could be fiery at times, they began working with her.

But that did not mean she didn't have time for Klaus, her idol. Images of Klaus's mother had already graced the internet, making everyone wonder where such a beautiful woman had been hiding all this time.

But looking at her beauty, they quickly realized where Klaus's handsomeness came from. Without a shred of doubt, Klaus's mother, despite being only a Level 3 Ascended, could easily be considered one of the most striking beauties in the world.

Lucil and Olive, who were always looking for content to fuel their creative projects, decided to spend every last second with the mother-and-son duo. In the end, Klaus's mother enjoyed being around Klaus's friends, and more importantly, she loved doing their hair.

Klaus could only smile and let her have all the fun. He would be leaving for the gathering in a few days, so he made sure to spend as much time with her as possible before going. This also gave him a chance to calm down.

In his past life's memories, Yuying had often taken Fruity sightseeing to help calm him when he was awakening the Slaughter Aura.

While one might assume that a place like the Tormented World was nothing but terrifying, in reality, despite its horrors, it had some of the most breathtaking sights.

Fruity and Yuying had spent much of their time exploring those places, which had helped him find peace. Now, Klaus was doing the same—spending time with his mother, who had a strangely calming aura around her, something Klaus found very endearing.

"We'll see you in a week," Klaus said to his mother after hugging her. He also kissed Miriam before boarding the jet Joon had arranged for their trip. It would drop them off and pick them up a week later.

Miriam decided to stay with Klaus's mother. This meant Klaus was going to Sinji Valley with his two Vixens, his sister, and the five male friends.

Klaus hadn't had any intimate affairs with Anna and Lily yet, but that didn't mean they hadn't shared a few make-out sessions, which only involved a few kisses and nothing more.

Klaus still didn't understand what the two ladies were aiming for. He wasn't sure if they were hesitant to take the next step or if they were just deeply bonded. Anna and Lily have become something of an inseparable twins.

They always like to spend time with him together. This made Klaus wonder why they preferred that.

Of course, the shameless yet innocent Klaus decided to talk with Lucy to better understand what they wanted, though he had a vague idea, something he found quite amusing.

"Klaus, those three legacies will be there, you know?" Daniel suddenly spoke on their way in the jet, making everyone except Klaus frown.

"What? It has to be addressed. Max, Ethan, and Ella Duncan will cause trouble regardless of how calm Klaus tries to be," Daniel said when he noticed the looks his friends were giving him.

"No need to bring that up now. Klaus said he doesn't want trouble, so why ask something that could trigger him?" Lily glared at Daniel.

"But still, we have to be prepared. Those three are just too... hateful," Daniel said, clenching his fist.

He knew the upcoming Trial, which would take place in Union City, would be chaotic, especially since the so-called Legacies had banned Klaus from entering the city unless he got down on his knees and apologized for insulting them.

Of course, Klaus would never do something like that, so they banned him. Despite the three being merely at the Master stage, their influence was surprisingly strong. Everyone knew it wouldn't be easy to have the ban lifted, which was why Dharma wanted to intervene.

But now that Dharma couldn't do anything because of Queenie's commands, Klaus would have to solve his own problem. Klaus had informed his friends that he would be a pacifist for the next few weeks, which made them worry he might be forced to take extreme measures, especially since they were heading to a gathering full of adrenaline-fueled youth.

The three Legacies would undoubtedly try to cause trouble, but what they didn't know was that Klaus had chosen not to wield his sword due to his bloodlust. But that didn't mean he couldn't use his other abilities—after all, he had just relived memories of his past.

The knowledge he had absorbed was more than enough for him to destroy an entire army without lifting a finger.

In the past few days since he woke from the memory, Klaus had begun cultivating some of the techniques he learned from his past self.

The [Sage Mind] and [Unshakable Mind] techniques had already been cultivated to a stage that even he found shocking. His current question was whether the memories he recalled were directly affecting him or not.

The Sage Mind technique has three stages, and he had already cultivated the first stage in just a few days—something that took Fruity months. As for the Unshakable Mind, he was currently cultivating the first of its five stages.

In addition to these, he had also begun cultivating the [Soul Mending Pagoda], a soul technique Yuying had given him when he entered the Soul-Breaking Abode back in the tormented world.

The technique had nine levels, and he had already cultivated the first two. In short, although Klaus hadn't shown any active training, he had been steadily training his mind and soul.

The current Klaus was far more terrifying. His mind was now much stronger, and his soul had become robust. If he wanted, he could take control of the minds of anyone below the Tier 6 (Sage) stage, and he could also destroy their souls before they even realized it.

He had become a terror. So if the three Legacies wanted to provoke him, they could certainly try—but they would be in for a dangerous surprise. At worst, his sabbatical would be cut short by a few days, but the three of them would regret antagonizing him.

"You guys should just focus on enjoying yourselves. As for me, I'm looking forward to seeing my dear friend Miguel again," Klaus said with a smile, munching on an apple.

His friends looked at him with puzzled expressions. For a moment, they felt a chill run down their spines at the sight of his smile. They instinctively knew that by the end of this one-week gathering, Klaus would be walking away with even more enemies.

'Mercy on those Legacies,' Anna sighed inwardly, knowing full well what her boyfriend was about to do.

Chapter 293 - 293: Arriving at Senji Valley [Bonus]

Sinji Valley was one of the many valleys Celestial Mountain Academy built many years ago. They took ordinary locations and transformed them into grand and beautiful retreats, perfect for a vacation away from the chaos of the apocalyptic world.

Just like Stone Valley, which was primarily made of stone, Senji Valley is made of water. One could even say it resembled an island, as it's surrounded by water. However, with the mountains around it, the moniker "Valley" was well deserved.

It's a place where many seek refuge from the harsh reality outside. People often say that the moment you land in Senji Valley, it feels like stepping into a whole new world.

After flying for three and a half hours, Klaus and his friends finally crossed the borders of the valley, and the sight that greeted them was nothing short of breathtaking.

"This place is beautiful," Klaus muttered, staring at the picturesque scenery beneath them as they flew ahead.

"Indeed," Hanna agreed, also gazing out the jet's window.

"It's certainly stunning, but the waters are filled with monsters. Thankfully, defenses have been built, so we can even swim in the outer areas without any trouble," Anna added.

"Then I'd love to dip my feet into those waters before we leave," Klaus said with a smile. His quest to calm down and awaken the Slaughter Aura required enjoying as much relaxation as possible.

The valley looked perfect to Klaus, and he knew he had to make good use of the few days they would be spending there to get his affairs in order. They flew for a few more minutes before landing somewhere in the eastern part of the valley.

As soon as they disembarked from the jet, a car was waiting to pick them up. Klaus was about to ask where the car came from since none of them had requested it, but the lady leading them to the vehicle quickly explained.

"Welcome to Senji Valley, everyone. As you may know, this island is the property of Celestial Mountain Academy, so it's only natural for future disciples to receive the warrior treatment."The lady began

Klaus and his pals nodded with smiles. Indeed, without even spending a minute there, they already knew they were in for a treat.

"The valley is divided into five sections, corresponding to the regions of the Northern Union. We're heading to the eastern section, which is designated for warriors from the Eastern Region. This arrangement ensures you'll be close to your regional allies.

"Later on, everyone will gather for the opening ceremony of this year's Genius Gathering. It's going to be an eventful week, so settle in and get ready for the full Celestial Mountain Academy experience."

They drove further east, and after a while, they arrived in front of a grand, elegant building. In front of this building, many youngsters could be seen moving into the numerous apartments.

At a glance, it was clear that each apartment housed only one person. Yet, every apartment looked as luxurious as a two-bedroom suite in a five-star hotel.

The lady led Klaus and his friend to register and collect their key cards. Klaus, eager to get some rest and explore the place later, had already started using his senses to scan the environment.

He made sure not to extend his senses beyond the building, which would have invaded other people's apartments. Wanting to avoid any awkward situations today, he limited his scan to the hundreds of people present.

Since the regional trial ended with only 1,000 people selected from each region, the Eastern Region now had 1,000 participants, and almost everyone was present. Some were yet to arrive, but it was well known that none would reject such a grand occasion.

Especially one organized to introduce the youngsters to the life they would live once they entered the academy—everyone would love to attend and witness such luxury, which, in some way, would motivate them to strive for greater success.

After registering and obtaining their key cards, they were led to their rooms. Strangely, they all got rooms—or rather, apartments—in the same section.

Klaus, in particular, received one of the best views one could ask for. His apartment was at the edge of the large building, offering a panoramic view of the surroundings. But that wasn't all—he could see the vast expanse of sea surrounding them.

After settling in, he called his mom to let her know they had arrived safely before jumping into bed. Later, they would attend the welcoming ceremony, where he knew for certain he would meet his nemesis, so he tried to calm himself as much as possible.

But unlike Klaus, who had all the time in the world to rest, the others, including his friends, did not waste a moment. With Oracle helmets in every room, they immediately jumped into training. Of course, they would be reminded to log out when it was time.

The lady had already explained everything they needed to do, so they all began training. Almost 97% of the participants present were using their helmets, either training or engaging in various activities.

A while later, the time for the welcoming ceremony arrived. Klaus, now awake, dressed up and left with his friends.

The venue for the event wasn't far from their housing, so they casually walked there like everyone else. By the time they arrived, the place was already buzzing with life as thousands of young men and women gathered for the opening event.

Klaus and his friends found a place to sit, but as soon as they sat down, Klaus felt a murderous gaze aimed at him. He turned to look and saw Max Duncan, the blonde-haired youngster with the bow tattoo on his forehead, glaring daggers at him.

Klaus smirked and wanted to give him a thumbs down, but something else caught his attention, making him avert his gaze. This, of course, did not sit well with the handsome blonde, who looked as though he was about to explode.

However, before he could cause a scene, a young lady with beautiful features held his hand, and like hot metal in ice, Max calmed down almost instantly.

"Don't worry, Max. You'll get your revenge soon enough. Just let it rest for now," Ella Duncan, the viper who had poisoned Max into challenging Klaus in the first place, said.

Max took a deep breath and decided to heed her words—for now. From the anger in his eyes, it was clear he wouldn't be able to hold back for long.

Beside them, another handsome, dark-haired young man sat calmly, as though he wasn't even present. Ethan turned to look at Max and smiled before saying, "Just don't go overboard when you get your chance." He smiled again and turned away.

The three were legacies and top geniuses of the Northern Union. However, when Klaus surfaced, their importance and fame diminished drastically. This, of course, didn't sit well with them, so Ella made sure Max challenged Klaus in an attempt to humiliate him. But in the end, it was Max who had his face dragged through the mud.

This, of course, caused them to hate Klaus deeply, and now all they wanted was to get back at him, many times over.

Klaus, unaware of what the three legacies were planning, turned to see a familiar face staring back at him with mixed expressions.

"Miguel, my friend, how have you been?" Klaus said with a smile, looking at Miguel, his perhaps archenemy, who stared back at him with a look that screamed sinister intentions.

Klaus wanted to tease him again, but before he could say anything, the senior spoke.

"Brat, I sense something on this island that can help awaken your Slaughter Aura..."

Chapter 294 - 294: Mad Berserker Red Tiger Core

Klaus had been looking forward to teasing Miguel for a while. Although he knew what he was doing was provocative, he just couldn't stop himself. There was something about that guy that made it impossible for him to hold back whenever he saw him.

However, today, for some reason, Klaus was able to divert his gaze when he heard the senior speak from his soul sea.

"Senior, what is it? I'll retrieve it quickly so I can get this out of the way," Klaus thought, eager to awaken the Slaughter Aura so he could finally kill without the worry of being overwhelmed by bloodlust.

"Relax. Whatever it is, I'm not sure you can retrieve it easily. Just stay calm for now and keep observing," the senior said, causing Klaus to sigh inwardly.

He had received quite the gift from Dharma, so he planned to awaken the Slaughter Aura first before diving into it.

Even the senior had told him he needed to deal with the Slaughter Aura before leveling up, especially with the high-tier cores he had received from both Dharma and Dave Arcadia waiting to be absorbed.

Klaus returned to smiling at Miguel, who occasionally cast sidelong glances at him. Miguel was a thick guy with arms strong enough to strangle the life out of Klaus. But Klaus knew that wouldn't be possible.

Unlike the arrogant Legacies who still believe Klaus is beneath them, Miguel has already realized Klaus is on an entirely different level, so was always striving to get stronger so he can defeat him someday.

Unbeknownst to him, his willingness to keep training so he could defeat Klaus was pushing him beyond his limit.

A while later, a figure entered the large hall. As soon as he did, an oppressive aura swept across the entire room, silencing everyone.

"Welcome, everyone," he spoke suddenly. "I am Cephass Tune, an Inner Disciple at Celestial Mountain Academy and your instructor for this year's Genius Gathering." The moment he introduced himself, jaws dropped across the room.

They had all assumed he was an instructor from the academy, but upon hearing he was just a disciple, everyone was shocked senseless. If a mere disciple had such an imposing aura, then what would the instructors be like?

Instantly, everyone wanted to possess such an aura—everyone except Klaus, who had already experienced far worse both in his current self and his past. Still, he had to admit the academy knew how to push people to their limits.

It didn't take a genius to realize that the young man before them wasn't an elite of the academy. No institution would send their top students to babysit rookies in one of the most secure places on earth.

So if that was the case, it meant Cephass was part of the not-so-strong disciples who are at the bottom of the ranking. If only they knew Cephass was there on a mission and he would be paid for every single day he remained there.

"I know you're all eager to get things started, so I won't waste time with unnecessary talk," Cephass continued. "In previous years, this event had three sections. The first is a series of lectures from selected instructors, which takes place over the first three days.

"The second is an early recruitment section, where various factions from the academy will present why you should join them when you pass the Union Trial and get to the academy.

"And lastly, of course, there are the competitions—friendly duels where you challenge each other. That's the part most of you look forward to the most."

Everyone listening grew excited when they heard about the final event. They all wanted to showcase their prowess to the seniors who would be coming to showbiz their factions.

Although they called it early recruitment, it was really an opportunity for rookies to display their skills, hoping to catch the attention of the seniors.

This could help them greatly when they finally entered the academy, so most used these duels to highlight their abilities.

"However, this year's event will be slightly different," Cephas suddenly said. "While all events will proceed as planned, the academy has decided to organize a regional competition this time.

"Instead of fighting in a real-world arena, we'll be taking it to Oracle. The first day will be dedicated to lectures, which I'm 100 percent sure will be very informative—so don't miss them," Cephas added with a smile.

It wasn't hard to understand what he was implying.

"The second day will feature the exhibition of the various factions, which I highly recommend you attend. It's important to know the kind of treatment you'll receive before deciding to join any faction once you arrive at the academy."

"As for the final event, which will take place over the last three days, each region must select 100 warriors. You have two days to do this, after which the 100 selected from each region will represent their region in the competition.

"There should be 100 warriors from each region. These 100 from every region will enter the competition, but in the end, only one person will emerge victorious. However, the entire winning region will be rewarded. This means that if someone from your region wins, you will all benefit.

"And before anyone frowns, every participant will receive a vial of Earth-Grade Mountain Dew and two Devil Cores. Also for the 100 selected warriors from each region, you will receive an additional vial of Earth-Grade Mountain Dew and five Devil Cores.

And to the ultimate winner, you will receive a Tier 7 Tyrant Core from a beast known as the Mad Berserker Red Tiger."

Saying that Cephaz retrieved a pulsating red core, about the size of half a basketball, radiating a bloodthirsty aura.

Instantly, everyone in the room felt a bloodlust making their primal instincts screamed at them to seize the core and consume it.

Klaus was no exception; his gaze turned icy as he locked onto the core. He could see that what he had been after had finally appeared.

"Brat, that core is what you need. It contains the essence of a bloodthirsty monster. Absorbing it will help awaken your Slaughter Aura. You must do whatever it takes to obtain it," the senior urged, and Klaus nodded inwardly.

Knowing this, Klaus felt no reason to hold back. Once he got his hands on that core, he would be able to solve his problems and continue his grind.

"That concludes everything. Use the next few days to select your 100 warriors and familiarize yourselves with each other's strengths and weaknesses. Trust me, you're going to need it for the upcoming competition.

And before you assume the Mountain Dew is the same as the ordinary ones you've received before—think again. That will be all," Cephaz finished. Without taking another step, he vanished from the hall.

The whole place became chaotic as they all looked at each other. Klaus, on the other hand, had his eyes closed, talking with the Senior in his soul sea.

He knew the next few days would be fun; finally, he would come face to face with his haters, Miguel, Lawrence, and the others who hadn't been bold enough to speak up arrogantly at him during the Felin Youth Ball.

The Eastern Region has 1,000 people, and they have to select 100 to represent them. Of course, nobody would want to be excluded from this group of 100. There are bound to be some problems considering the rewards on the line are just too enticing.

"Klaus, what are we going to do?" Suddenly, Anna tugged on Klaus's shirt and asked.

"What else? Find a way to use your leadership skills to bring all of them together. We can continue from there," Klaus said, knowing that the moment he made any move to step up, chaos would erupt.

"But..." Anna wanted to complain, but before she could speak, Miguel interjected, causing Klaus to raise an eyebrow.

"Fairy Anna, can you help with the leadership position? We have only four days to select the 100 participants."

Chapter 295 - 295: The First Move

The sudden request from Miguel took Klaus aback. Of all people, he never expected Miguel to be the type who saw the bigger picture.

Klaus had expected him to use their misunderstanding to make things difficult, but strangely, Miguel seemed to see reason and offered the leadership position to Anna, the second ranker during the Regional Trial.

Of course, Miguel wouldn't choose Klaus. While he might have been the bigger person for choosing Anna, he hated Klaus far too much to appoint him, let alone take orders from him.

Anna, who had been offered the leadership position, stood there in a daze. Managing a small group of warriors was one thing, but an entire 1,000 warriors—each a genius in their own right—was asking for too much. She wasn't ready for something like that.

"You'll do fine. Just do what you do best and lead," Klaus said with a reassuring smile. Anna sighed and then walked forward.

"First, we need to find a place where all 1,000 of us can meet and have a proper discussion before taking any immediate action," Anna said, her tone commanding, just like a leader should.

"There's a conference room in our resting area; we can use it," a young lady suddenly spoke from behind, and everyone nodded in agreement.

"Then let's meet there after dinner today," Anna continued. "And please, come with an open mind. We want this meeting to go well, and more importantly, we have to do well and win this for our region—and for our War Goddess." Everyone nodded at the mention of the War Goddess.

Klaus, who was sitting calmly watching Anna, smirked. He knew she was using Miriam's authority to subtly warn anyone planning to cause trouble during the meeting. It was a brilliant move.

While many might doubt her, the reality to many was that the War Goddess was Klaus's older sister, and Anna was Klaus's friend. So it wouldn't be difficult to get Miriam involved, which everyone knew wouldn't end well for them. That woman is just unreasonable.

After issuing her command, everyone dispersed to get a good look at the valley before the meeting. Klaus, along with his friends, also left the building and decided to take a stroll around. However, they had just left the building when they were blocked by ten individuals.

It only took a single glance to know they were minions of someone.

"It would be best if the big dogs came out instead of sending their lackeys," Klaus said, eyeing the ten youngsters before them.

As expected, it didn't take even a second for Ethan and Max to appear from behind the ten individuals.

"If it isn't the two Nobodies from nowhere," Klaus said with a mocking smile, his words cutting deep. Calling Ethan and Max—two of the most influential Legacies—"nobodies" was a low blow, even for Klaus.

Truth be told, he has been expecting them the entire time. So now that he has them face to face, nothing is going to stop him from getting under their skin.

As expected Max's face flushed with anger, but Klaus wasn't finished.

"Honestly, I'm surprised you two even bothered to show up. I thought you'd be too busy basking in your so-called 'legacy' to mingle with us, mere mortals. Or is it that without your fancy titles, you're just two overhyped disappointments looking for relevance?"

Ethan's eyes narrowed, but he stayed silent, his expression darkening with every word Klaus uttered.

It wasn't just the two of them; the ten minions they brought along were all exuding killing intent toward Klaus. However, he simply ignored them and focused on the two.

Anna and the rest of Klaus's friends looked at the two legacies and their lackeys with mocking grins, especially Lily, who had become somewhat bold and slightly shameless after tasting Klaus's lips.

Klaus chuckled, taking a step closer. "Let me guess—you both thought bringing your backup would intimidate me, right? That's cute. But here's the thing: I don't care how many lackeys you bring, or how many titles you throw around. At the end of the day, you're still just a couple of spoiled brats, pretending to be important."

Max finally snapped. "You think you're better than us, Klaus? You think just because you've gotten a little fame, you can walk all over us?"

Klaus tilted his head, his smile widening. Truth be told when he heard that the Mad Berserker Red Tiger could help awaken his Slaughter Aura, he became something of a menace, knowing he wouldn't have to continue his monk lifestyle anymore.

These two had clearly come at the worst time—or perhaps the right time—for Klaus.

Klaus continued to smile and said, "Better than you? No, Max. I don't think I'm better than you. I know I am." He paused, letting the weight of his words sink in.

"And deep down, you both know it too. That's why you're here—desperate for validation, trying to prove something to yourselves."

Ethan, his voice low and seething, finally spoke. "You're digging your own grave, Klaus. You don't get it, do you? We've got the power, the connections. You... you're just a fluke."

Klaus raised an eyebrow, his amusement growing. "A fluke? Is that the best you've got?" He shook his head.

"You can keep clinging to your little delusions, but here's the truth: no amount of power, no amount of connections, will ever make up for what you lack."

He eyes them with a teasing grin. "You lack substance. Without all the noise and titles, you're nothing. And that's what scares you most."

Klaus wasn't holding back with his words. He knew something was off.

Ella Duncan wasn't there—but he didn't care. Since the two had decided to be his punching bags while she was off doing whatever she wanted, Klaus would mentally dismantle them. In some way, it was a win-win-win-loss situation for them.

"Just keep running your mouth, soon, you will come begging," Ethan said as lightning flashed across his gaze clearly trying to intimidate Klaus.

"Ethan, buddy, why is your skin glowing? You wouldn't happen to have applied baby oil, would you?" Klaus suddenly asked with a mocking smile.

"It's true! I heard he has a closet full of baby oil," Lily added, making Klaus and his friends burst into resounding laughter. This further dug deep into Ethan's heart, making him want to rip Klaus's head off his body right there.

Max, seeing that Ethan, who had been the calmest at first, was about to lose it, quickly dragged him away along with their ten lackeys.

"We should probably head back to the resting area before these legacies pollute our people and make things difficult for Anna," Klaus said after the two legacies and their lackeys were gone.

He knew since they couldn't openly fight, he could only use his big mouth to torture them. His words certainly made an impact.

Since they were prohibited from fighting while in Sinji Valley, Klaus knew people would start using underhanded tactics to get back at him—and he was right.

Max and Ethan, now sitting in the Central Region's section, glanced over at their sister, Ella Duncan.

"Was it successful?" Ethan asked.

"Yes, I managed to pull the top leaders from the Western, Southern, and Northern regions to our side," Ella replied.

"What about the Eastern Region?" Max asked.

"Since that bitch Anna Ross is their leader, I sent people to the third-ranked individual, but he rejected the offer. Don't worry, though—I have my people working in the background. Klaus Hanson will get what's coming to him soon enough."

"Nice one, Ella. We need to prepare for our region, too. This time, we'll show Klaus Hanson who he has messed with," Ethan said, clenching his fist.

Chapter 296 - 296: Eastern Region Meeting

After roaming around the valley for a while, Klaus and his friends returned to their resting area. They had dinner, and an hour later, all 1,000 young warriors from the Eastern Region gathered in a large conference room for their first meeting to discuss the possibility of working together for whatever the academy was planning.

Anna walked to the front and began addressing the 1,000 youngsters, all eager to be part of the top 100 to represent their region.

"I think we all know why we're here, so I won't say much. But for those who still don't know, we've gathered today to decide how we're going to select the top 100 who will represent the Eastern Region in the competition organized by the Academy,"

Anna said with a calm expression—something she had learned from her sister, who was also known to be an excellent leader on the battlefield.

And thanks to her affinity for the ice element, she didn't need to do much to maintain that icy, calm demeanor.

"Now, since this is an open discussion, I'll allow every one of you to suggest how we should proceed," Anna said, prompting almost everyone to raise their hand—Klaus included.

However, Anna knew Klaus was just looking for trouble, so she didn't call on him. Instead, she pointed to a young lady sitting in the middle. "You, introduce yourself and share your suggestion," she added.

"I'm Sophie Hanks," the young lady introduced herself. "From my perspective, we should follow the list posted after the regional trial. The top 100 from that list should represent the Eastern Region," she suggested.

Many nodded in agreement, mostly those who knew they were already on the list. Even Miguel seemed to support the idea, as they all wanted to rely on the elite rankings from the regional trial.

"That would be unfair," a young man interjected. "The list is from three months ago, and some of us have made progress since then. I suggest we hold duels in an arena to select the top 100." He paused for a moment before adding, "By the way, I'm Teye Happy."

His suggestion was met with many votes of approval. "Yes, some of us made mistakes during the regional trial, which is why we aren't on the list.

"So I suggest we organize a duel to determine who gets to be on the list of 100 representing us," another young lady said. Soon, the idea of holding duels was welcomed by most of the group.

However, it wasn't the only suggestion made. After an hour of intense back-and-forth debate, three main proposals emerged.

The first was to go by the list of the top 100 from the regional trial three months ago. About 80 people supported this idea, unsurprisingly, all of whom were already on that list.

The second suggestion was to hold duels, giving everyone an equal chance to prove themselves and represent their region in dominating the others.

This received the highest number of votes, as most agreed that they had grown stronger in the three months since the regional trial.

The last suggestion, though rather unusual, proposed numbering everyone from one to a thousand and drawing lots. Those who drew numbers from 1 to 100 would represent the region. Strangely, this idea also garnered quite a bit of support.

But in the end, they would have to depend on their leader to make a solid decision. Anna knew that choosing any of the options would leave some people unhappy. For a moment, she felt at a loss, but then she noticed Klaus still had his hand raised after the entire hour of debate.

"Yes, Klaus, what do you have?" she asked, crossing her fingers, hoping her white-haired boyfriend wasn't up to any mischief.

Klaus stood up with a smile on his face. His gaze shifted to Miguel, and his smile widened, but he didn't say anything to him directly.

"I hope I don't need any introductions," he began with a smirk, "but in fairness to our leader's instructions, I am Klaus Hanson."

"From everything that's been said, I think your suggestions are valid, but I also think they're flawed," Klaus continued. "While going by the top 100 list may seem like a great idea, that list became irrelevant the first week after the regional trial.

"As for the suggestion of duels, do any of you know how long it would take to organize them? We have less than four days, so we don't have time on our hands here.

"And for the third suggestion, relying on lady luck is a terrible idea. We all know the Eastern Region is considered the weakest according to the records available online. We have fewer resources, but that doesn't mean we should face those pompous bastards relying on luck." Klaus grinned, clearly enjoying himself.

"Then what do you suggest?" Lin Zhou, one of the Zhou twins, asked with a flat expression. "I assume you didn't raise your hand just to insult our suggestions."

"I know most of you already know I'm a co-creator at Oracle, which means I have some influence and authority there. And, as it happens, I contacted one of the creators and asked them to grant us access to two Trial regions." Klaus's words caused a ripple of surprise among the crowd.

Everyone had been using Oracle over the past few days, gaining valuable experience. Since death in Oracle wasn't permanent, many had started taking risks and exploring dangerous areas.

But trials were something rare. It's not yet popular in Oracle— so only the boldest ventures into zones where monster tides and other challenges could mimic real trials. So, hearing that Klaus had arranged access to actual trials was a game-changer.

"No need to look so shocked," Klaus continued with a grin. "The first trial was the City Selection trial, and the second was the Regional Trial. Since we've all improved over the past months, I believe our leader can make good use of these trials to help select the top 100."

He finished his explanation, glancing at Anna, who stood in stunned silence. In truth, Klaus already had access to additional trials that he and Lucil had developed.

Now, all he needed to do was add the names of the 1,000 warriors from the Eastern Region, and Lucil would handle the rest, ensuring they all had access. Being a co-creator of one of the most revolutionary inventions of the century certainly had its perks, and Klaus was thoroughly enjoying them.

Oracle had become the premier training space, and Klaus knew the value of embracing it, though he still valued real-world training. In fact, with his Slaughter Aura on the verge of awakening, he knew he'd need to hunt more to fully unlock its potential.

Anna, now recovering from her initial surprise, addressed the group.

"Then it's settled. We'll spend the next two days training inside the First Trial space. In three days, we'll organize another trial within the Endless Tide trial. This should help us determine the top 100 warriors who will represent the Eastern Region."

"Any complaints or further suggestions?" Anna asked, scanning the room. But no one spoke up. Running the trials again was clearly the most logical and efficient solution needed to select the top 100.

Klaus smirked, knowing the upcoming competition would be anything but straightforward. All they could hope for was that the top 100 selected from their region would be strong enough to face whatever challenges lay ahead in the competition.

Chapter 297 - 297: Lecture on Monsters and Beasts

After finalizing everything about how they would select the 100 individuals to represent the eastern region, everyone returned back to their training. With the First Trial open to them, they all eagerly began preparing.

Klaus, on the other hand, went back to his room to meditate. He didn't really need the trial anymore. Although it wasn't the same as the one used during the City Selection Trial, he had outgrown it. He had become much stronger on his own.

The current version of Oracle was just like training in reality, with the only difference being that one doesn't die permanently. Although the temporary death experienced there feels just as real, the knowledge that it isn't permanent remains an obstacle.

This can only truly be cleared through real-world life-and-death battles.

Klaus has had plenty of those battles by now. Currently, his focus is to cultivate his mind and soul to a powerful level before his next breakthrough. After all, he has a Sovereign to kidnap and torture, so he needed every weapon in his arsenal sharpened.

He spent the night meditating. When morning came, he went to find his friends so they could attend the lectures together, but they were locked in Oracle training, so he left on his own.

When he arrived at the lecture, there were only 15 people out of the 5,000 participants in the fire magic class. Klaus could only smile and sat through the session. Thankfully, the lecture was very engaging.

Later, he attended another lecture about monsters and beasts. He wanted to understand the current state of the monster-beast system in the apocalyptic Earth.

"As many of you might have already realized, as monsters grow stronger, they begin to gain intelligence similar to humans. This is especially true for Zombies and some rare monsters," the lecturer began. He was a peculiar-looking human male with short brown hair and deep black eyes.

Klaus immediately sensed those eyes were his source of strength—he was a Spirit Master.

"According to our research, when a monster reaches the Tier 7 stage, they begin to evolve into what we call True Beasts. At this stage, they gain abilities as powerful as those of humans," the lecturer explained.

Klaus nodded. He already knew this, but from his past self's experience, it was typically after they became Tyrants (Tier 8) that they began adapting and transforming into Beasts, usually starting at Tier 9 or late Tier 8.

They don't become full-fledged Beasts right away; first, they become something akin to Pseudo Beasts, and as they grow, they fully develop into True Beasts.

However, it seemed that things had changed over the years. Now, that process appeared to begin as early as Tier 6.

"Now on Earth, starting from Tier 5 forbidden zones and upwards, you will begin to encounter some of these monsters—or should I say beasts. They are very powerful and trust me, a Tier 7 evolving monster or let's just say a beast is several times stronger than a Tier 7 normal monster.

Recently, it was discovered that some zombies are even more terrifying compared to humans. So, be careful out there," he added.

"I know this is just an introductory lecture, which will be given again when you arrive at the academy, but since a few of you decided to come, I'll make an exception and let you all ask some questions. I'll do my best to answer them all," he said, and immediately, the 12 disciples who had made it to his class raised their hands, Klaus included.

A few of them asked their questions, which he answered before calling on Klaus to ask his.

Klaus stood up after being called and introduced himself. After a moment of thought, he asked, "You mentioned that Tier 7 beasts are several times stronger than Tier 7 monsters. What exactly makes them so much more dangerous? Is it their physical strength, abilities, or something else?"

The lecturer smiled, he seemed pleased with the question. "Good question, Klaus." He said before answering

"The difference lies in a combination of factors. First, beasts have a more refined control over their elemental energy compared to monsters.

While monsters often rely on brute strength and instinct, beasts—especially at higher tiers—can use advanced techniques, manipulate their surroundings, and even evolve their bodies mid-battle.

"Second, their physical resilience is on a completely different level. A Tier 7 monster might have tough skin or strong bones, but a Tier 7 beast has regenerative abilities, natural armor, and heightened senses. They're not just strong; they adapt and learn quickly.

"Lastly, many of these beasts have intelligence that rivals or even surpasses humans. This makes them cunning and strategic, unlike monsters that can be more easily baited or tricked. Combine all these factors, and you've got something that's not just a threat but a true force of nature."

The lecturer paused, letting the information sink in. Klaus and the others present in the lecture held thoughtful looks on their face. He has faced most of said monsters in his past life so he knew that much.

But even back then, they were Tier 9 and above. It's only a few that started evolving from Tier 8. So hearing Tier 7 on earth is already this adaptive, he was taken aback. Of course, he had faced mutated Zombies before and knew just how intelligent monsters can be.

"So can there be a situation where a monster can be born a True beast from the beginning" Klaus suddenly asked another question, "For example, like how humans nowadays awaken stronger than those during the early days of the apocalypse?"

The lecturer's eyes widened slightly at Klaus's unexpected follow-up question. He crossed his arms, thinking for a moment before responding.

"That's an insightful question, Klaus," he said, his voice thoughtful. "In rare cases, yes, there are instances where a monster can be born as what we would classify as a 'True Beast' right from the start.

These beings are usually the result of highly favorable conditions—whether that's being born in a rich energy environment, or from a parent with an incredibly powerful bloodline.

In such cases, these creatures possess traits that would take normal monsters years or even decades to develop, essentially skipping several evolutionary stages."

He leaned against the podium, his gaze sweeping across the class. Clearly, he was enjoying the class due to how thoughtful but rather unusual questions Klaus was asking.

Klaus of course knew the answers to these questions, but he just wanted to know the current state of monsters in this world. His knowledge is a little outdated, so he wanted to know the danger level now before making any moves.

"Your comparison to humans awakening stronger now than during the early days of the apocalypse is spot on. Over time, as the world evolved and its energy grew more potent, the natural order itself changed.

"Just like humans are now born with stronger potential, some monsters are born as True Beasts, meaning they already possess the intelligence, elemental mastery, and even regenerative capabilities of higher-tiered beasts.

"So when facing a beast, especially a high-tier one, you can't rely on strength alone. You need strategy, awareness, and often, a bit of luck to come out alive."

Klaus nodded thoughtfully. He had expected as much. When the apocalypse descended, humans, monsters, and even trees began evolving, but over time, the nature of that evolution started to change.

Newborns are now born healthy, and once they awaken their Talents and Classes, they become several times stronger. But the same is true for the monsters—they are also evolving, and their newborns are emerging as true Beasts. This, of course, has caused their danger level to rise alarmingly high.

Klaus spent the next few hours asking questions, which the lecturer was happy to answer. Strangely, the others in the hall were also enjoying the lecture.

After the long but informative session, he returned to his apartment to resume his meditation.

Chapter 298 - 298: Selecting the Top 100

A day after the informative lecture on beasts and monsters, which earned Klaus a friend—a lecturer/instructor who specialized in beast and monster anatomy—Klaus once again attended the exhibition of the various factions.

Although there was a rule prohibiting recruitment until the rookies officially entered the academy, Klaus still received several invitations. They all wanted him to join their factions. His legend was well-known both in the outside world and within the academy.

However, Klaus had already promised Aoi Hiroshi that he would join the Yin-Yang Palace. Klaus, who always aimed to shine wherever he went, spent extra time at the booth set up by the Yin-Yang Faction, eager to learn more about them.

In the end, he got what he was looking for, and it was as he had expected. They were ranked at the bottom and lacked resources.

It was perfect for him, as he believed that with his presence, he could rise through the ranks and face-slap his haters, who he was sure would do everything they could to join the higher-ranking factions.

He was more than happy with the situation Aoi's faction was in and planned to tease her once he entered the Academy.

Afterward, he spent more time meditating until the day arrived when the Eastern Region of the Northern Union would select their top 100 geniuses to compete with the other regions.

Despite his confidence in ranking at the top, Klaus joined the trial like everyone else. The lecturer who had given the lecture on Beasts and Monsters came to spectate at Klaus's request. They had gotten along quite well.

Strangely, Klaus found himself fascinated by the anatomy of monsters. It was a bizarre moment for him, which made him reflect on many things. He was a monk, that much was true, but to be someone intrigued by the anatomy of monsters was a whole different vibe.

He knew that trait came from one of his past incarnations.

Thanks to everyone using Oracle for a while, they were familiar with the Oracle system used for the Regional Trial. The monsters there were nearly lifelike. If you cut them, blood would flow, and even better, the battlefield would be littered with the bodies of slain monsters afterward.

This enhancement made the experience even more realistic and intense. So, when the trial began, everyone fought with great ferocity.

Each participant would receive a vial of Earth-grade Mountain Dew and a Tier 6 monster core. In addition, the top hundred would receive an extra vial of Earth-grade Mountain Dew and four devil cores.

Aside from that, there was a grand prize for the last person to come out on top, along with another reward for the entire region, which everyone knew would be shared among the participants.

So despite the tough nature of the trial, everyone pushed themselves hard, trying to hold on for as long as they could.

It took a full two hours before the trial finally ended. The enhanced trial was much more difficult now with all the modifications that had been made.

By the end of the day, the top hundred were selected. They all demonstrated exceptional fighting and killing abilities.

As expected, Klaus topped the chart, followed by Anna. And just like in the regional trial, Miguel came in third. Despite his bitter rivalry with Klaus, his combat power was undeniably brutal. He was a muscular fighter wielding a colossal double-bladed axe called the Demon Axe.

His killing power was devastating, but he lacked speed. Had he been a bit faster, he might have surpassed Anna.

Hanna, of course, maintained her position at fourth. Miriam had given her two skill books before she and Klaus's friends entered the forbidden zones for training, making her significantly more powerful.

Surprisingly, Lily took fifth place, with the Zhou twins, Lin and Zing, securing the 6th and 7th spots. Daniel came in 8th, while Mark ranked 9th this time.

Danny and Kilian took 10th and 11th, respectively, with Lawrence, Klaus's other nemesis, landing in 12th. Omari Hackman, another of Klaus's rivals, ranked 13th.

Surprisingly, someone who had ranked 302nd during the regional trial came 14th this time, shocking everyone. And it wasn't just a one-off occurrence. Of the top hundred from the regional trial, only 68 maintained their spots in the top hundred.

New faces emerged, and frankly, no one was surprised. Failure had pushed Hanna to train more vigorously this time, so it was only natural to see others rise to this level as well.

Klaus thanked the instructor who had assisted with the selection trial before dispersing for the morning. Later, the top 100 gathered again to strategize. As expected, Anna, their leader, was the first to speak.

"Everyone, I know many of you don't see eye to eye, which is normal given our age and the rivalries we have. However, I don't think I need to stress how important this competition is for each of us.

Most of us come from wealthy backgrounds, and while many have already encountered and absorbed a couple of Devil cores, an Earth-Grade Mountain Dew is something none of us can claim to have even seen before." Everyone nodded in agreement as she spoke.

Indeed, they had all absorbed a few Devil cores, but Earth-Grade Mountain Dew was something entirely new to them.

During the City Selection, they had been given Common-Grade Mountain Dew, which they treated as ordinary. During the regionals, they received Epic-Grade Mountain Dew, which, while far superior to the Common-Grade, still wasn't considered extraordinary.

Now, they were being offered Earth-Grade Mountain Dew, which, according to what they had heard from their older siblings and friends already in the academy, had over 20 times the effect of Epic-Grade Mountain Dew and 100 times that of Common-Grade.

They desperately wanted it, and since they had already secured a spot in the top 100, each of them would receive two vials.

But the final prize, which would be awarded to the entire region, was something they all knew would benefit them collectively. Anna's emphasis on it made perfect sense.

"What I'm trying to say is this: we all have our differences, but right now, we need to put those aside and work together to achieve a common goal."

From what Anna has said, everyone understood that she was addressing Klaus, Miguel, Lawrence, and Omari Hackman.

She couldn't afford to have them fighting amongst themselves, especially now that they were all on the same side. Winning for the eastern region is something she wanted.

Although, thanks to Klaus, she and Miriam are practically like sisters, Anna still wants to impress her. Not only that, but she also wants to prove to herself whether she can be a good leader like her sister. The Ross sisters are known for their skill in controlling the battlefield, and this is especially true for Lucy, who wields the wood element.

"Leader, don't worry. My misunderstanding with Klaus won't interfere with this alliance," Miguel said with an expressionless face.

"Good, and you can just call me Anna," she nodded.

"Same here. We can go back to our rivalry after this competition," Lawrence added, and Omari Hackman, the swordsman, nodded in agreement.

"Good," Anna acknowledged, then turned toward Klaus, who was sitting with a smile on his face.

"I know when it's business, Anna. Since the Legacies will likely try to cause trouble for us, I think I can hold off teasing Miguel for a few more days so we can crush them. After that, we can go back to our 'rivalry,'" Klaus said with a small smile.

"Then it's settled," Anna declared, and everyone nodded in agreement.

As much as Klaus would love to stir up some mischief, he knew when to be serious. Now, knowing the competition would be between him and the three Legacies, he had to step up, not just for himself but for his girlfriend Anna, who, though promising, was still too green to be a leader capable of competing against Legacies.

Chapter 299 - 299: Journey To The South

A day after the top 100 were selected, the time for the competition finally arrived. The chosen 100 from each region gathered at a different building, where 100 sets of gaming chairs were prepared for each group. Klaus and his friends made their way toward the room, but before they could enter, 15 people were standing at the entrance.

"Klaus Hanson, I hope you're prepared. This time, I'll crush you," Max Duncan, the Devil Archer, said, his fist clenched. Beside him stood Ella and Ethan Duncan, along with several others who Anna quickly recognized as the top contenders from the Western, Northern, and Southern regions.

"Looks like the Doofus Legacies had to call in extra dogs just to face me," Klaus said, mocking them. It didn't take much for him to insult someone—just knowing they were against him was enough.

As expected, the faces of the 12 others immediately darkened upon hearing his insult. Klaus was too unpredictable, making it difficult to challenge him.

"No matter," Klaus added with a smirk, "I just hope you guys have something up your sleeves to make this exciting." He then gestured for his group to follow him inside.

Since the rules prohibited physical fighting, he could only hope to encounter them early in the competition so he could torture them in his own way.

"Don't worry, Max. Klaus will understand what it feels like to cross us soon enough," Ella, clearly the mastermind of this enterprise, said, tapping her brother on the shoulder.

Among the three Legacies, Ella was the strategist, the schemer, and the mastermind. Anything unruly came from her, and while many might say it didn't suit her, she was undeniably good at what she does.

As for the muscle, that was Ethan. Despite being just a Peak Master stage expert, he could unleash some powerful and terrifying fighting power. He was strong—very strong—which was the main reason for his arrogance, especially for his age.

Max, on the other hand, was more of a prodigy than an idiot among the three. He had awakened with a soul weapon, making him one of the top prodigies among the Legacies. However, he seemed to have a low IQ, so Ella always found a way to manipulate him.

Because of her, he had been disgraced in front of the whole world by Klaus. But despite that, he still listened to her. And this time, they had cooked up something for Klaus, who, after waking up from his trip down memory lane, would be in for a surprise.

"Let's go." Soon, they all appeared in the large hall where Instructor Cephas and some other instructors were already present to start the competition—the first of its kind.

"Welcome, everyone," Cephas greeted. "As I announced four days ago, this year's competition will be held based on region, and thankfully, it will take place in Oracle. It's the first of its kind, so be proud."

Many smiled upon hearing that. Oracle had certainly made things simpler for everyone. Although only 500 of them were present now, the rest were watching from their resting areas.

"Now, before I explain what the competition will entail, I have a few things to announce. First, the leaders came together and decided to enhance the reward system. Initially, all 5000 of you were to be given two Devil Cores and a vial of Earth-Grade Mountain Dew. However, that has now changed.

You will all receive a vial of Earth-Grade Mountain Dew and five Devil Cores instead."

Everyone, whether present in the hall or watching on the big screens, smiled slightly upon hearing that. While some might act wealthy and claim they had plenty, few could boast of casually acquiring Devil Cores to absorb. They were a valuable commodity.

So, getting five for free was already a huge deal for many.

"Then, for the 100 selected, you will receive an additional vial of Earth-Grade Mountain Dew and 3 Tier 6 Cores. But that's not all. For every 12 hours you remain alive in the competition, you will get another vial of Earth-Grade Mountain Dew and a Tier 6 monster Core.

So, do your best to survive, as the competition will take two and a half days to complete." Cephas scanned their happy faces and smiled.

"As for the region that wins, all participants will receive an additional two vials of Mountain Dew, so strive to win. And to the last person standing, you will receive a Tier 7 Core and a vial of Gold-Grade Mountain Dew."

At the mention of Gold-Grade Mountain Dew, everyone clenched their fists. Mountain Dew, something only available at the Celestial Mountain Academy, comes in various grades: Common, Epic, Earth, Gold, Heaven, Diamond, and Legendary.

It's something the academy holds dear because of its versatility. So, obtaining a vial of Gold-Grade Mountain Dew means one can experience explosive growth in cultivation once consumed.

"Now, to the main event," Cephas said, suddenly switching on a screen displaying various views. "The competition is called Journey to the South, and as the name suggests, you will be traveling from a fixed starting point to a marked destination in the south.

"The start will be at a random location, and you and your team will have to travel several miles, facing various challenges and dangers, to reach a point known as Alpha. There will be a single entrance there that will take you to the next stage of the journey.

"The sooner you reach Alpha, the sooner you can enter. All of you will be traveling from different places but will have to enter through this single door to advance. Of course, there will be a catch, which you will discover when the trial begins.

"From Alpha, you may use any skills at your disposal to cross what we call the Fractured Mountain. It's full of dangers, so be careful not to fall into traps set by us or your fellow competitors.

"After crossing the Fractured Mountain, you'll need to traverse the Willow Forest, which is both dangerous and, some might say, fun," Cephas smiled before continuing.

"From the Willow Forest, there's one more obstacle to overcome before arriving at the southern destination. As for what the last obstacle will be, you'll have to find that out on your own.

"Once you reach the south, you'll need to head to a place called the Sage Eye. All you have to do is place your hand on the eye to be declared the winner. If two or more of you survive, you can either fight it out or choose one person to place their hand—it will be up to you.

"By our estimation, the trial will take two and a half days to complete. If, after that time, none of you manage to place your hand on the eye, the trial will end with no declared winner.

"So, do your best to clear the obstacles before time runs out."

Everyone was both shocked by the nature of the competition and pumped for some action. In reality, something like this couldn't be arranged, but with Oracle, as long as you can imagine it, you can model it.

With a quick gesture, everyone went to their side of the hall and sat in the gaming chairs. Max Duncan gave Klaus a quick, murderous glance before putting his helmet on. Klaus just shrugged and then put on his own Oracle helmet.

Soon, he was standing in a field with 99 others around him. Since they were all starting from the same fixed point, equidistant from Alpha, he knew that the moment the bell rang, they would have to move. He turned to the 99 with him.

"As you can see, the Central, Western, Northern, and Southern Regions have formed a cohort to wash us out—specifically me. But fear not. All we have to do is follow the strategies we came up with and adapt to the changes along the way.

And, well, try to have some fun. I know I will," Klaus said, and everyone nodded.

"Welcome to Journey to the South. The match starts in 5... 4... 3... 2... 1... GO!"

Chapter 300 - 300: Start of the Competition

Immediately after the countdown stopped, everyone began to move. A map of the area appeared in front of them so they knew where to go. All five regions, moving from different starting points, were headed to Alpha, where they would pass through a door before continuing with the trial.

Shortly after they moved toward Alpha, a thick forest greeted them. Without wasting any time, they dove in and started moving as quickly as they could.

Before the start of the trial, Klaus and his team had strategized and set plans based on everyone's strengths.

Anna, who had an affinity for both water and ice elements, would cooperate with the other mages to subtly cast all kinds of boons for their team. This was to ensure everyone moved at a suitable speed and that no one would be left behind.

As soon as they started, Anna cast a stamina-recovery spell that immediately made everyone smile happily. Another mage cast a speed-enhancement spell that boosted everyone's speed, even Miguel, Danny, Daniel, and the other brute fighters on the team.

Klaus and Lily, who were the fastest in their group, took the lead. Anna, their powerhouse for boons, was in the middle, protected by Kay, Kilian, Mark, and the Zhou Twins.

The Zhou Twins were Earth Elemental wielders, so they could easily raise defenses to protect their core. On the other end, Hanna was made to stay at the rear for reasons that nobody stated, but Klaus knew.

He only told them she was a sharpshooter, so anything that tried to sneak up on them could easily be dealt with by her.

Anna had given him the strategist role in their team. Nobody questioned his competency, mainly due to his feats and the way he had demonstrated what a leader should be like during the Felin Youth Ball.

He had proven he could devise strategies, so despite being the leader, Anna appointed him to handle strategy while she controlled the execution.

Of course, Klaus knew she just wanted to ensure his image looked good by carrying the team throughout the trial. So, despite her willingness to lead, she made her boyfriend take the helm this time.

"We have incoming." Klaus and Lily suddenly stopped a few minutes into the forest. "All ice mages should move around the team and prepare to throw some ice bombs," Klaus said, scanning their surroundings.

A few seconds later, hordes of monsters known as Lava Crawlers started to appear within reach. "Attack!" Klaus commanded, and like snowfall in Canada, chilling bombs of ice descended upon them.

"Don't use too much essence on this; they are just Tier 4 monsters, which have weaker ice resistance," he said, noticing how the mages were unleashing powerful attacks.

The Lava Crawlers were centipede-like creatures that burrowed beneath the ground, but not too deep—just a few inches. Earth Elemental wielders could have easily dealt with them, but that would require them using too much essence, so he decided to use the ice mages instead.

Of course, he could easily kill them by using the Lotus Flower, but he wanted to see just how powerful the hundred from the Eastern Region were, and so far, they didn't disappoint. Anna didn't even have to do anything this time.

A little over two minutes later, they had killed all the Lava Crawlers and were on their way.

About twenty minutes later, Klaus and his team stopped moving again. Klaus scanned the area for a few seconds before smiling.

"Archers, on my mark, shoot arrows at this point, that point, and that point," he said, pointing in several directions. Hanna and the other archers on the team stepped forward.

On his mark, they shot the arrows, not knowing what they were meant to do. However, as soon as the arrows were released, their questions were answered.

A trap was triggered, releasing hundreds of flaming arrows—enough to take out a few of them. Everyone tensed up when the trap was activated, but soon thanked their gods they were on Klaus's team.

After the trap was neutralized, they moved again, pushing to gain some ground.

The other teams also moved through the forest toward Alpha, and they all crossed paths with the Lava Crawlers without any casualties. However, when they reached the fire arrows trap, some teams incurred losses.

Unlike Klaus's team, who had him with his superior senses, the other teams did not, which led them into the trap, triggering the fire arrows. In the Northern Region team, ten people died by the time they managed to pass through the trap.

The Southern team also suffered 12 casualties, while the Western team lost 8 members. However, the Central team managed to trigger and destroy the trap, saving themselves from an early death. Ella Duncan, their leader and strategist, just like Klaus, had her own way of sensing her surroundings.

As a mage, she was able to cast a spell that enhanced her senses, allowing her to see and destroy the traps before they walked into them.

After crossing the trap zone, they encountered another trap, which Ella sensed and destroyed quickly. After 8 hours, they came within reach of Alpha. However, as soon as they appeared within 12 kilometers of it, packs of Tier 5 Stone Wolves descended upon them.

They immediately went into combat that lasted a whole hour. By the end of the battle, they had lost 4 people, which was a huge blow to Ella's ego. She wanted to cross the first mark of twelve hours with a full team, but dealing with hundreds of Tier 5 wolves was more difficult than she had expected.

Since she wasn't about to exhaust herself before crossing paths with their main competitor, Klaus, she didn't unleash some of her more powerful spells.

After clearing the monsters, they quickly made their way toward Alpha.

Klaus and his team also encountered the second trap and some minor obstacles that were quickly dealt with. When they came within 12 kilometers of Alpha, the wolves swarmed them, but Klaus sensed them long before they appeared. This allowed him to plan effectively.

Miguel and the brute fighters were deployed to advance, with the archers and mages providing support. As for the swordsmen and spearmen, Klaus let them handle the spillover.

This strategy helped them clear that obstacle without any casualties or injuries. With Anna's support, they were able to clear it even faster. Klaus didn't even have to lift a finger in the battle.

If he had, they would have cleared it more quickly; however, he knew that would deny others the opportunity to fight as well. Since this wasn't a real-world battle where one could earn experience points, he stepped back and let them have all the fun.

They quickly advanced, and soon they arrived at Alpha, where a very large door stood open for anyone to pass through. Knowing they would be the first, Klaus quickly led his team inside.

"Anna, advance with them. I will stay behind to greet our rivals. Once I'm done here, I will meet you all at this point," he said, pointing at a specific location.

"Take care," Anna said, trusting Klaus wholeheartedly. She knew they had nothing to worry about, so she quickly led the team away.

Klaus, on the other hand, stomped on the ground, and an ice chair appeared in front of the gate. He sat down, crossing his legs as he waited for the other regional teams to arrive.

A while later, Ella and her team appeared, only to be greeted by an evil grin from Klaus.

"Well, well, well, look what the cats dragged in," Klaus muttered, flashing a grin.