

# The World Is Mine For The Taking

The shop we were at was closing at 8 P.M., so we decided to relocate for a continuation. Opting for an inn, we rented a room until 10:30 P.M. Since crossing the 11:30 P.M. curfew meant facing consequences from the dormitory, we had to wrap things up before then. According to the Book of Rules, missing the curfew would result in a deduction of points on the ranking evaluation.

For me, being the lowest in the bronze rank, losing a few points was inconsequential. Shredica shared the sentiment, knowing she could easily reclaim the top spot if she fell in the rankings.

However, Titania wasn't as accepting. The gold class resembled a battlefield, with students consistently pulling each other down to climb the rankings. The students in the gold class were intensely competitive. They didn't view each other as classmates but rather as enemies. One wrong move, and you could plummet down the ranks, making it a formidable challenge to climb back up.

That was the constant hurdle faced by those in the gold class. Titania held the 70th spot, and any rule-breaking could plummet her even further. Climbing back up would be akin to scaling a mountain without any equipment.

This intense competition meant we couldn't afford to stay overnight, at least not Titania. Me and Shredica could, theoretically. However, the idea of sharing a room with Shredica didn't sit well with me. It felt like a risky move. I had a suspicion that if I drifted off to sleep, she might just stab me with a knife.

Shredica likely harbored similar concerns. It was understandable; she didn't trust someone like me, making it difficult for her to share a room with a guy, especially someone she didn't trust.

With less than two and a half hours to review the necessary materials, we had to be selective. There was a lot to cover, but given the one-day cramming session, we had no choice but to prioritize certain topics. Shredica was content as long as she could pass, so achieving a passing score sufficed for her.

"Leon, if you're not focused, you won't pass, you know?" scolded Titania. It was genuinely surprising that Titania excelled at teaching and studying, given her overall appearance suggested otherwise. I had always assumed she was the kind of woman who would slack off, spending the day before exams at karaoke, having fun with friends. After all, she did have that gal appearance.

"Even though I'm taking my time to teach you, you're not even focusing. So ungrateful."

I hadn't expected Titania to notice my lack of focus. I was merely hearing her words, with them going in one ear and out the other. I was hearing, not listening, you could say. I had even reached the point where I felt like I might fall asleep with my eyes open, pretending to be attentive. Apparently, Titania was exceptionally observant, noticing even the slightest detail of me not paying attention.

Well, I didn't really need to study. I could pass the midterm examination just fine, with Gabrielle's help, of course. I asked her if I could see the examination papers. Memorizing the answers was all I needed, and I'd be safe. So, studying was unnecessary for me.

"Sorry, my head's throbbing from all this studying, so it's not like I'm ignoring you," I explained, rubbing my temples. "It feels like an overload of information is jamming into my brain, ready to burst. Mind if I take a little break?"

"Hmm..." Shredica hummed, eyeing me skeptically. "Is that so? Then why don't you go somewhere that won't bother me?" she suggested, an edge to her tone.

"Sure thing," I agreed, stepping away from them. Surprisingly, Shredica was holding up well. Titania only needed to teach her once, and she absorbed it like a sponge. A natural genius. The real reason she wasn't academically sharp was likely her lack of focus on studying, prioritizing the honing of her combat skills. I believed that if she channeled her efforts into academics, she'd excel.

I left them for a bit and returned after 20 minutes.

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It was precisely 10 P.M. when the melody of someone's smartphone disrupted the study session. Shredica's phone echoed in the room. She glanced at the screen, her expression shifting as she stood up, declaring, "I guess it's about time for me to go."

Titania and I exchanged puzzled glances. "Huh? But we still have 30 minutes left," Titania protested.

"I'm sorry, but this is pretty important, so I can't afford to stay any longer," Shredica explained. Gathering her belongings, she moved towards the door.

"Hey," I interjected before she could open it. "Are you going to be alright?"

"I've got the confidence that I'll be fine tomorrow," she replied. "so you have nothing to worry about."

"Don't worry, Leon," Titania reassured. "Shreddy's going to ace this."

"Shreddy?" I raised an eyebrow. "When did you two become friends?"

"Just now!" Titania enthusiastically declared.

"No, we didn't," Shredica corrected. "And can you stop calling me that? It's very off-putting."

As they engaged in banter, I discreetly checked Titania's domination requirement to see if there were any changes.

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1. Expand her circle to 5 people (1/5)

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Yup, it had gone up. Titania now considered Shredica as her friend. Progress was smooth, and I was steadily advancing in dominating Titania.

I flashed a sly smile at Titania. "Miss Shredica's just not honest with her feelings, Titania. That's why she's like that," I whispered.

Titania returned the smile. "I know."

While sharing this secretive conversation, Shredica quietly exited the room.

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I stepped back into the dimly lit shop where Mr. Leon, Miss Titania, and I had been hitting the books until 8 P.M. A message had summoned me back,

claiming there was some suspicious activity stirring in the depths of the notorious Black Market.

The Black Market, an illicit underbelly, a realm of clandestine transactions that danced on the fringes of legality. Here, everything was a shade darker, from illegal drugs and weaponry to the grotesque trade of beastfolk's meat and the despicable commerce of human lives as slaves. It was a cesspool of vileness.

"The fact that there's suspicious movement there is very disturbing..." I muttered to myself as I entered the dimly lit establishment. The atmosphere was tense, and the weight of impending danger hung in the air.

Inside, Miss Arianne and Mr. Conrad occupied a table, their faces etched with concern. The faint jingle of the welcoming bell signaled my presence. When they heard the welcoming bell, their attention shifted to me. Both were members of the Silver Blade, a father-daughter duo with matching orange hair. Despite not looking much alike, their shared hair color made their familial connection apparent.

"You're finally here, Shredica," Miss Arianne said with a sense of urgency, gesturing for me to take a seat.

I settled into the chair she pointed to, my curiosity piqued as I surveyed the detailed map spread across the table. It unfolded the expansive landscape of the entire kingdom of Milham.

"What's happening?"

A meaningful glance passed between Miss Arianne and Mr. Conrad before he addressed me, "Norman Amarathea is gearing up for another round."

"...What?" I couldn't hide my surprise. Norman Amarathea, a name synonymous with infamy—a cunning criminal, a puppet master whose moves were as slippery as a snake. His dark legacy included masterminding large-scale abductions, like the Santuria Incident, a haunting episode where countless travelers vanished in the Santuria planes.

The revelation that Norman Amarathea was the orchestrator sent shockwaves throughout the kingdom.

"My father has detected suspicious movements by Norman Amarathea across the kingdom. The last time he made such moves was five years ago during the Santuria Incident," Miss Arianne explained with a tone laden with concern.

"So then... he's planning to do it again? Do you know where?"

Mr. Conrad scrutinized the map, his gaze intense. "Just yesterday, Norman was right in the heart of the Black Market. It struck us as odd, prompting our allies to delve into the situation. They unveiled Norman, deeply engaged in a mysterious meeting with someone. While the identity of the other person remains an enigma, our suspicions point to..."

"...Is it him?"

Mr. Conrad raised his head to look at me. "Exactly."

A chill ran down my spine. What business did that person have with Norman? Why were they collaborating? The answers eluded us, but the involvement of that mysterious figure boded ill.

"And as for the location... based on Norman's recent machinations and the clandestine whispers from allies in the Black Market, there's a sinister likelihood he'll unleash his terror upon Hertan Village. The exact timing remains elusive, but the looming threat could materialize within this week or the next."

Miss Arianne gently placed a hand on my shoulder, her expression reflecting deep concern. "I'm sorry if we're interrupting your date, but this is far more important."

I clicked my tongue, dismissing her touch with a shrug. "It's not a date."

"Is that so? But hmm..." she hummed, an intriguing gleam in her eye, "That young man you're with is the one you went out with the other day, right? He's the one I wanted to recommend to the leader. Did you inform her?"

"I did," I replied.

"What did she say?"

I cast a sidelong glance at Miss Arianne, "She didn't want him."