

## The World 79

### Chapter 79: Joint Training (6)

The third day of joint training dawned, and our group returned to the familiar training spot.

As we strolled, Titania turned to me, fists clenched. "I'm going to ask her to spar with me," she declared, a hint of nervousness in her voice. "But... I'm really on edge, Leon. I don't think I can..."

"Come on, don't bail on me now. I promise she'll agree if you ask," I reassured her.

"Really?" she questioned, still visibly anxious.

I gave her head an encouraging pat, ruffling her hair gently. "Yes, really."

As I did that, a symphony of disapproving clicks of tongues echoed around us.

"Flirting when we're supposed to be training, how shameless."

"What does she even see in him?"

"Well, I can't deny he's attractive... but he's skillless."

"He must have pulled some tricks for her to accept being in a relationship with him."

They threw rude comments our way, but I brushed them off; there were far more crucial matters demanding attention.

"Oh, right," Titania chimed in as if she had an epiphany. "If I'm going to spar with President Artemis, who are you going to pair up with?"

"...That's a good question. I doubt President Artemis's partner, the Vice President of the student council, would want to team up with me," I mused, rubbing my chin in contemplation.

The best course of action eluded me for a moment. Then, it hit me. "...I guess the best choice is right in front of me," I said aloud, my gaze fixated on Zeruel. Since she had been rotating practice partners daily, it seemed she would be the most fitting choice for a practice bout. I just hoped she hadn't paired up with someone else already.

Titania followed my line of sight, and upon realizing who I was eyeing, she frowned. "Leon, you cheater," she accused, giving me a look that suggested I was quite the character. But then, her frown transformed into a smirk. "Well, if you're eyeing her as a potential concubine, go for it. As long as I'm the queen, that's all that matters."

Her words caught me off-guard. I had assumed she'd be the possessive type, wanting her man exclusively for herself. "You're not bothered by your partner having other women?"

"Why would I be?" she replied, her tone unwavering. "Marrying me means you'd ascend to the throne as the King of Bethlan. Naturally, bees would swarm around a powerful man. I can accept that. The number of women a man has reflects his power. My father keeps a hive of concubines, so I'm not against my man having a woman or two.

Just remember, however, that I'm the queen bee."

Well, my initial judgment of her was way off. Looks like you can never truly judge a book by its cover.

"Hmm... But aiming for Zeruel might be a tough feat. How about starting with one of my royal guards?"

"...Some other time," I replied. I still couldn't believe Titania was okay with the idea of me having a harem. Maybe I should finally respond positively to her confession now?

While contemplating that, Titania took a deep breath and exhaled slowly. "Here I go," she announced.

"Good luck," I wished her.

Titania confidently approached Artemis, asking her to be her sparring partner for today's training. Artemis eagerly agreed, setting the stage for their joint training. Titania shot me a triumphant 'I did it' signal with her arms before joining Artemis to kick off their session.

Now, shifting my attention...

My gaze locked onto Zeruel, who happened to be staring in my direction. As our eyes met, a fleeting connection sparked, and she hastily averted her gaze.

I decided to close the distance, catching her off guard. Visibly flustered, she remained frozen as I approached. With just a step away, I inquired, "Mind if we team up?"

"Eh?" Her mouth fell open, clearly not expecting my proposition.

"Ah, do you already have a partner? If so, my bad for bothering you. Well then..." I turned to walk away.

"Ah, no!" she exclaimed, reaching for my hand and grabbing it. I came to a halt at her touch.

I cast a glance back at her over my shoulder, and the realization that she had inadvertently stopped me from leaving crossed her face. Her reflexive grab at my hand had a hint of instinct, and as soon as she acknowledged it, she swiftly released her grip.

"I-I'm sorry!" she stammered.

"Why apologize? There's nothing for you to be sorry about."

"O-Okay..." She lowered her head. "I, um, didn't say I didn't want to."

"So, it's alright if we team up?"

"Y-Yes," she affirmed.

And just like that, Zeruel and I became sparring partners.

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We began by swinging our swords, a repetitive motion that we repeated at least 500 times. Swinging a sword without a specific target might seem like a simple exercise, but it demanded real determination to endure. Most folks would throw in the towel around the 100th or even 50th swing, but I never quit halfway. Zeruel, too, showed the same level of persistence.

Following that, we took a brief ten-minute break before squaring off against each other. Both of us were clad in our exercise gear, distinct from one another. Mine, a shade of brown, and hers, a deep black. Zeruel gripped her wooden sword with deadly seriousness etched on her face. It was clear she harbored no intentions of taking it easy on me, unlike Titania's earlier approach.

Well, that was only natural. In genuine combat, your adversary wouldn't consider giving you a break. In a life-or-death situation, the strongest prevailed, and the weaker succumbed. It adhered to the laws of the jungle; the weak became prey for the strong, and those who fell prey typically met their demise. Losing simply wasn't an option.

As students of the Milham Academy for Magic Knights, our goal was to be prepared to face any genuine threats. This required unwavering effort and a constant seriousness in our approach. While swordplay might hold an element of enjoyment, it was undeniably perilous.

We assumed our stances. My positioning was admittedly clumsy, reflective of a beginner finding their footing. I awkwardly held my wooden sword just above my waist, poised for both offense and defense. The ambient sounds of our training area faded into the background as my focus zeroed in on the woman standing before me.

On the contrary, Zeruel adopted a stance that exuded fluidity, a hallmark of someone well-versed in swordplay. With her right hand lightly gripping the wooden sword, I could still discern the tightness of her hold. There was no opening in her stance. Even I had to acknowledge that fact, which was why I refrained from making a move.

Her choice of a serious stance signified her commitment. Despite my perceived weakness, she was prepared to face me earnestly. That suited me just fine because I had no intention of taking it easy either. I was prepared to approach this with complete seriousness.

Sensing my commitment, Zeruel refrained from any careless advances. Despite my awkward beginner's posture, she recognized the sincerity in my approach. In her mind, she was likely searching for an opening, but none presented itself.

After a brief moment, we initiated our exchange. Dust kicked up in our wake as we surged forward, closing the distance between us in a blur. With the agility of a coiled spring, Zeruel launched her wooden sword in a fluid lunge, capitalizing on the momentum of her initial step.

I blocked her strike and countered with a thrust of my own. Almost instantly, she parried, her reaction time leaving me slightly staggered. It was evident why she ranked among the top students of our year; her swordsmanship was nothing to scoff at.

Back and forth we went, each of us launching attacks and swiftly defending against the other's onslaught. What started as a sparring match at a normal pace gradually escalated into a frenzy of rapid movements.

She seemed momentarily surprised that I could match her pace, her eyes widening briefly before her serious demeanor returned.

Our momentum surged, each movement executed with increasing speed. Despite the escalating intensity, neither of us showed any signs of slowing down. We pressed on relentlessly.

Slash, block, thrust, dodge, slash, block.

The rest of our group ceased their training, drawn in by the spectacle unfolding before them. Even Artemis and Titania halted their activities. Our spar had become so intense that it commanded the attention of everyone present. Though merely a sparring session, it felt as though we were engaged in a life-or-death duel.

Our already rapid pace accelerated even further, reaching dizzying speeds. Our focus narrowed solely on each other, our eyes locking in unwavering determination.

'I can go even faster,' I silently challenged myself.

With that resolve burning within me, I pushed myself even harder, unleashing a flurry of strikes with lightning speed. Each movement was executed with precision, fueled by adrenaline and determination.

Zeruel met my onslaught with equal fervor, her movements swift and calculated. It was as if we were engaged in a dance of blades, each step choreographed with deadly precision.

The intensity of our sparring reached its peak, the air crackling with the energy of our clash. Sweat dripped down our brow, our muscles straining with exertion, yet neither of us showed any signs of faltering.

The spectators watched in awe as we continued to push the limits of our abilities, our spar transcending mere practice and evolving into a test of skill and endurance.

In that moment, there was only the sound of wood clashing against wood, the rhythm of our breaths, and the unspoken challenge between us. We were locked in a battle of wills.