THORNS 215

Chapter 215 - With Style And Grace

"Well, well, well. Look who it is? Emelie Herst. I've heard an awful lot about you in Myria. They say you're the top hound of Eldoria."

With a smug grin sneer stretching across his sharp features, Ryuuji cracked his neck from side to side as he stared down his opponent.

Emelie stood entirely still with her hands resting loosely at her sides. Although the front of her sleek bodysuit remained unzipped down to her upper stomach, she herself looked unbothered.

"I'm sure you have and you're right to think so. Can't exactly say I've heard a single damn thing about you, though."

SHEEN!

The holographic runes in the sky suddenly shifted, initiating the countdown for the first bout.

"""FIVE!"""

Ryuuji's eyes narrowed into a venomous glare as he scanned her provocative attire. "Big mouth for someone who dresses like a street whore."

"""FOUR!"""

"Oh, I bet you know everything there is to know about street whores, Ryuuji-chan~"

"""THREE!"""

Ryuuji flinched. His aggressive posture faltered for a split second as a wave of panic flashed behind his eyes. "What... what the hell are you talking about?!"

"""TWO!"""

"Nothing. Don’t mind me. Just thinking out loud."

"""ONE!"""

Suddenly, Emelie’s eyes flashed with a deep glow. At that exact moment, a subtle static noise rippled through the coliseum’s audio speaker, cutting out all signals.

Her voice hissed through the air, sounding like a demon whispering straight into Ryuuji’s eardrums: "But just know... the second I head to Myria... you and that pathetic little underground playhouse of yours are getting burned straight to the ground."

Ryuuji’s eyes blew wide open in horror.

The glow vanished from Emelie’s eyes, and the audio speakers returned to normal.

"""FIGHT!"""

BOOM!

Emelie shot forward like a missile.

Using an explosive burst of telekinesis against the air behind her heels, she crossed the expanse of the arena in a literal second. Ryuuji, still stunned and mentally paralyzed by the horrific secret she had just whispered into his soul, barely even saw her coming.

Before he could raise up a guard, Emelie was already inside his personal space. With a terrifyingly gentle, almost intimate motion, her hands shot forward and firmly cupped his cheeks, locking his face in place.

Then, in one breathtakingly fluid movement, she extended her right leg perfectly straight up into the air, executing a flawless vertical split beneath the sun. And with a vicious force, she brought her leg crashing down, driving her knee straight into Ryuuji's face.

CRACK!

The brutal impact fractured his nose, releasing a spray of blood into the air as the momentum sent his body flying backward across the stone floor. He tumbled violently through the white stone before skidding to a halt several yards away.

Emelie landed gracefully on one foot as she watched him with a cold, detached serenity.

["WHAT AN OPENER, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN!!!"] Commentator Ken leapt out of his seat and screamed into his microphone. ["Before Yamada Ryuuji could even process the start of the match, she practically took his head off!"]

["What an amazing display of speed and beautiful flexibility!"] Christy reacted after him.

Down on the Myrian benches, Mei clicked her tongue in irritation as she dug her fingers into her crossed arms.

'What the hell did she say to him?He froze like a complete novice.'

"GAAAH! DAMN YOU!!!" Ryuuji roared, bursting up from the ground with a face covered in blood and rage. "I'LL END YOU, YOU HEAR?! I'LL FUCKING KILL YOU, YOU BITCH!!!"

He violently slammed both of his palms flat against the stone, forcing an unprecedented amount of mana into the subterranean bedrock.

RUMBLE!!!

A miniature-earthquake erupted, which shook the coliseum structure. The stone floor beneath them cracked and buckled, sending massive shockwaves through the air.

["Whoa! Hold onto your seats, people!"] Ken yelled. ["With everything shaking like this, I have a feeling something big is about to happen!"]

Emelie, not worried in the slightest, simply allowed her body to float off the ground, which completely negated the seismic vibrations so as to not lose an ounce of her balance.

"You think being off the ground will save you?! Well think again!"

The ground beneath her floating form turned a glowing, molten shade of orange. Before she could adjust her altitude, a massive pillar of liquid lava shot straight out of the bedrock, swallowing her whole in a geyser of boiling, liquid rock.

Ryuuji let out a loud, hysterical laugh, wiping the blood from his nose as he watched the lava cascade over her position.

"Hahaha! See?! You're not all that, you arrogant Eldorian trash! Nothing survives the heat of my–"

As the molten liquid cleared, Emelie was revealed to be entirely unharmed. She remained floating in mid-air with a translucent coat of compressed telekinetic armor wrapping around her body.

The boiling lava slid off the invisible barrier like water off a raincoat, not leaving a single burn mark on her skin or her black bodysuit.

Ryuuji's laughter died instantly in his throat. "W-What?!"

Without offering a single word of reply, she flew straight at him once again like an apex predator.

Feeling an overwhelming sense of threat, Ryuuji frantically began slamming his fists against the ground repeatedly.

"Get away from me!"

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

Five consecutive pillars of liquid lava erupted one after another, creating a boiling maze directly in Emelie's flight path.

However, she moved with the style, grace, and effortless precision of a master dancer.

With a subtle tilt of her shoulders, she dodged the first pillar, the molten heat missing her cheek by a fraction of an inch. She spiraled through the air to cleanly clear the second, spun around the third with a beautiful arc, and seamlessly slipped between the fourth and fifth eruptions without losing her forward momentum.

She didn't even blink as the boiling liquid exploded all around her.

And just like that, she was in front of Ryuuji again.

Panicking, Ryuuji swung an earthen, right hook straight at her jaw. But Emelie simply bent her entire torso backward – all the way down until her spine was practically parallel to the ground.

Maintaining her inverted posture, she shot her right foot straight up into the air, delivering a snapping kick right beneath his chin.

THWACK!

His body stumbling three steps backward in a daze as his head snapped back.

Ryuuji fiercely shook his head, trying to clear the blinding stars from his vision. Filled with seething rage, he pointed both of his palms at her and screamed. "DIE!!!"

A ginormous stream of concentrated fire erupted from his palms. The massive flames rapidly shifted and took the terrifyingly intricate form of fire dragon that surged forward.

Emelie leapt and flew backward at high speeds to create distance. But the massive fire dragon was relentless; it locked onto her and began chasing her all across the expansive arena.

The audience sat in breathless awe. The magnificent sight of a fire dragon flying in complex loops and arcs across the clear sky left both Myrians and Eldorians completely mesmerised.

Emelie, leading the dragon in a circle, suddenly changed her trajectory mid-flight. She spun around and dived straight back down toward the ground where Ryuuji was standing. And as she descended, she thrusted both of her palms forward.

Two compact spheres of mana materialised in her hands – one of fire, and one of swirling water. With a quick flick of her wrists, she threw and slammed the two opposing elements together directly in front of Ryuuji's line of sight.

PHIIIISSSH!!!

"Blocking my vision?! This pathetic trick won't work on me!" Ryuuji scoffed. He quickly dodged up into the sky to escape the steam cloud.

Below him, Emelie and his own fire dragon shot past beneath his previous position. Ryuuji let out a triumphant laugh. "Ha! Ha! Missed me, you stupid–"

Suddenly, the absolute unexpected happened.

Emelie extended her right hand backward toward the trailing fire dragon. Forcing an immense surge of telekinetic grip into the flames, she seized control of the dragon. Then, with a violent jerk of her arm, she altered its trajectory, snapping the massive fire beast's head around a full 180 degrees and directing it straight up toward its own creator.

"That... that’s my spell! That won’t work–"

Ryuuji raised his hands to execute a counter-dispel, but the moment he tried to move, his entire body went rigid. Every single one of his joints, muscle fibers, and limbs locked up in solid paralysis.

"W-What’s going on?! What did you do to me–!"

When he looked down, he saw Emelie sticking her pink tongue out at him while holding a single finger down on her lower eyelid in an act of childish mockery.

"Bye-bye, Ryuuji-chan~"

The fire dragon widened its fiery, cavernous jaws and swallowed Ryuuji whole before violently detonating into a blinding mushroom cloud of explosion magic.

BOOOOOOM!!!

The shockwave rippled through the coliseum.

As the cloud of smoke and scattered embers began to disperse into the afternoon sky, the audience looked up. Ryuuji’s body was still being held suspended mid-air by an invisible telekinetic lift.

His pristine uniform was charred and shredded, his skin covered burns, and his eyes rolled back into his head. He was out for the count.

With a lazy flick, Emelie casually tossed his limp body across the sky.

Thud.

Ryuuji’s unconscious form landed in front of the Myrian representative bench, where the healing priests immediately went to work on him.

Emelie casually extended a mocking finger toward their bench, dripping her voice with terrifying dominance:

"Next."

Chapter 216 - The Golden Idol

"Oh, Yamada-kun, honestly," a melodic voice sighed, cutting from the Myrian bench. "With all that big talk you were blabbering, you could have at least tired her out a teeny-tiny bit. How embarrassing, haha."

["OH MY GODDESS!!!"] Commentator Ken suddenly lost his mind into the microphone. ["LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, WE HAVE MYRIA'S SECOND CONTESTANT STEPPING UP TO THE ARENA!!! She is the undisputed golden idol of the Myrian continent! The shimmering jewel of the martial arts scene! MAKE SOME NOISE FOR... JIN FU!!!!"]

A young woman with radiant, golden hair tied back into an intricate, flowing high ponytail gracefully hopped over Ryuuji's charred body, marching straight onto the arena. She wore a stunning, highly specialized black and golden combat dress that fluttered elegantly with every step.

Jin paused right at the edge of the ring. Looking up toward the floating display tag that broadcasted her face to the spectators, she casually formed a finger gun with her right hand. She brought the tip of her index finger to her pink lips, planted a soft, winking kiss against it, and aggressively "shot" it straight at the camera with a bright smile.

"Pow!"

"KYAAAAAA!!! JIN FU!!! LOOK AT ME!!!" Thousands of fans – from Myria especially – aggressively waved glowing golden light-rods through the air.

"THE GOLDEN IDOL IS HERE!!! DESTROY THEM, JIN FU!!!"

"SHOW THAT EMELIE WHAT TRUE MARTIAL PROWESS LOOKS LIKE!!!"

Down in the VIP front row, Dominik leaped completely out of his seat with pure excitement as he pointed a trembling finger at her. "It’s Jin Fu! It’s actually Jin Fu! Kurt, holy crap, I’m literally seeing the golden idol live in person! Mia, look! Look at her hair! Are you looking?! Look at her!"

"Oh. My. Goodness! She’s even prettier in person!" Mia clutched her cheeks as her eyes practically turned into hearts.

"Hey. Dom. I thought you were supposed to be a hardcore Emelie?"

Dominik didn’t even look back at Kurt as he waved his arms wildly through the air and let out a loud cheer for the Myrian idol.

"Kurt, listen to me! Two things can be true at once! I love Emelie, but Jin Fu is someone I rarely get to see!" He then cupped his hands around his mouth and screamed toward the center of the arena, "DO YOUR BEST, EMELIE!!! WE LOVE YOU, JIN FU!!! KILL EACH OTHER!!!"

Because the Gauntlet format was a continuous bout, there was no need for a secondary countdown. The moment a new combatant’s boots touched the arena; the match was on.

Jin didn’t waste any more time on her entrance. The moment her winking gesture left the projection, her bubbly smile immediately sharpened into an intense, focused battle grin.

BZZZZZZT!

A blinding aura of golden lightning surged from her body. She thrusted her right hand out to the side, and mustered a flash of condensed mana, creating a double-headed golden battleaxe right in the palm of her hand.

"Let’s see if that invisible armor of yours can handle the destructive force of my gold, Emelie-chan!" Jin Fu shouted cheerily.

Using an explosive burst of lightning steps, she transformed into a golden blur, leaping high into the air and bringing the massive golden axe crashing down toward Emelie’s head with a whistling downward force.

Emelie didn’t feel threatened, nor did she move. She simply raised her left hand, her green eyes flashing with mana as a dense wall of telekinetic force materialised above her hair.

BOOOOOOM!!!

The golden battleaxe slammed powerfully against the invisible barrier, creating a concussive shockwave that blasted the surrounding debris away in a perfect circle. The golden lightning streaks from the weapon strenuously spiderwebbed across the air, desperately trying to pierce through Emelie’s defense.

["Whoa!"] Christy gasped into her microphone. ["The raw power behind Jin Fu’s opening strike is completely diabolical! The sand is practically cracking beneath them!"]

["But Emelie’s specialised technique is holding firm!"] Commentator Ken roared over the noise. ["She’s blocking the weapon with just a single hand!"]

Emelie’s razor-sharp smile didn’t fade as she addressed the girl trying to crush her. "Nice toy, Goldilocks. My turn."

With an upward flick of her wrist, Emelie unleashed a telekinetic pulse, forcefully throwing the golden axe – and Jin along with it – high into the air.

"Whooaoaaohhh! So this is your specialised magic, Telekinesis!"

Before the idol could recover her orientation, Emelie pointed two finger guns at her, manifesting three pressurised spheres of water. She then shot them like cannonballs straight toward the airborne fighter.

"Na-ah uhhhh!"

Jin Fu, displaying an extraordinary level of mid-air agility, casually released her battleaxe and let the weapon dissolve into harmless golden sparkles. In that exact same second, she clapped her hands together and created a pair of golden dual-swords.

SLASH! SLASH!

With two incredibly fast cross-cuts, she cleanly sliced the first two water spheres in half, sending light drizzle cascading over the arena.

As the third sphere neared her face, she nimbly planted the soles of her boots directly against the liquid surface and used it as a platform to launch herself backward in a graceful backflip, landing gracefully on the ground several feet away.

"Hahaha! Wow, you're a tough nut to crack, aren't you?" Jin laughed breathlessly as she spun the dual blades around her fingers before letting them snap out of existence with a casual wave.

"No wonder Yamada-kun got his butt handed to him. You're a total powerhouse."

"And you talk a lot for someone who's supposed to be a Myrian Representative. Although, I guess you all have your quirks. So, are you going to fight me, or are you trying to impress me?"

"A little bit of both, honestly!" Jin beamed, her eyes sparkling with competitive fire. "A true idol always has to keep her beloved fans entertained, after all! Watch this!"

Jin violently slammed her foot against the stone floor. This time, her golden lightning mana didn't just wrap around her body – it surged outward into the air behind her, rapidly forming a massive, floating armory.

Within seconds, multiple types of weapons ranging from swords, spears, daggers and curved blades – all of different varieties – hovered in a semi-circle around her silhouette, all locked squarely onto Emelie.

["HOLY! Look at that absolute visual spectacle!"] Commentator Ken screamed with amazement. ["Jin Fu is deploying her legendary Unlimited Golden Arsenal! She can manifest and control an entire battalion's worth of weaponry through her will!"]

["Also, look closer! Every single one of those constructs is reinforced with her signature golden lightning,"] Christy added. ["This is going to test the absolute limits of Emelie's defensive capabilities!"]

With a theatrical snap of her fingers, Jin's entire floating armory launched forward. The spears, swords, and daggers tore through the air like a metal storm, leaving long, crackling trails of golden electricity in their wake as they converged on Emelie's position from multiple angles.

Realising that her telekinetic barrier would eventually shatter under that amount of consecutive blows, Emelie opted for an offensive defense.

She raised both of her hands and twitched her fingers in complex gestures. Using her telekinesis to forcibly seize control of the loose stone boulders that had been shattered during Ryuuji's earlier earthquake, she pulled the massive rocks into the air, spinning them around her body like a planetary ring.

'Let them know pain, Emy.' Kurt watched with a dreamy gaze.

Zip—BANG! CRASH! SHATTER!

The golden spears and broadswords slammed explosively into the spinning boulder shield, detonating in a series of bright, electrical explosions.

Stone debris and golden sparks rained down across the arena like a chaotic firework display as the sheer force of the impacts created a thick cloud of dust that completely obscured the center of the arena.

But that didn't stop the onslaught.

BOOM! BANG! CRASH! SMASH!!!

After a five-minute non-stop assault from Jin Fu, the attacks finally stopped.

"... D-Did she get her?!" a Myrian screamed from the upper decks, leaning over the railing.

"... No way, Emelie wouldn’t go down that easily! She’s literally called The Best!" an Eldorian roared back.

Suddenly, a forceful gust of wind blew from the center of the dust cloud. Emelie shot wildly out of the haze, flying barely an inch off the ground as she manipulated the air currents behind her heels.

Her black combat bodysuit was completely pristine, not even a speck of dust had touched her skin as she swiftly closed the distance to the idol.

Jin’s eyes widened with genuine thrill coursing through her veins. "Yes! That’s what I’m talking about!"

As Emelie neared her, Jin instantly created a massive golden warhammer into both of her hands, swinging it horizontally with an air-shattering force.

Emelie’s hair brushed against the golden metal as she smoothly ducked beneath the swing. Using her telekinesis to anchor her left hand against the stone floor, she used the momentum to swing her entire lower body around, executing a flawless enhanced sweeping kick aimed at Jin’s ankles.

Jin effortlessly leaped over the sweeping leg, but the moment her boots left the ground, Emelie’s right hand shot upward, blasting a ball of fire from her palm directly toward the idol’s chest.

Mid-air and unable to dodge, Jin hastily crossed her forearms in front of her face, creating a golden kite shield just over her skin as the fireball detonated.

BOOOOOOM!!!

The explosive blast sent her flying backward through the air, her boots skidding severely across the stone as she landed, leaving two long, deep trenches in the arena floor.

She let out an exhilarated laugh as she wiped a trace of soot from her cheek.

Across from her, Emelie stood perfectly composed.

Down in the VIP seats, Kurt slowly leaned forward. His single eye locked unblinkingly onto the two girls as a dangerously appreciative smirk pulled at his lips.

'Now this is a real fight. Jesus, I'm getting pumped just watching them. Neither of them is holding back a single damn thing anymore.'

The entire coliseum fell into a tense, breathless silence. Both the golden idol of Myria and the top hound of Eldoria stood at opposite sides of the ring, their respective elemental and telekinetic auras flaring so fiercely that the air between them began to visibly crackle and distort with terrifying power, setting the stage for an explosive clash.