

The World of Otome Game is a Second Chance for Broken Swords

Story Starts

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Chapter 7.3 -

The Storm

Angelica fidgeted nervously as she tugged at the hem of her armoured hip skirt, which was open in front—perhaps a bit too open for her liking. The metal plates felt sturdy enough, but the design left her feeling oddly exposed, especially around her thighs. She shifted her weight from foot to foot, hyperaware of every gap in the plating.

She was currently in her power armour, specially made through a collaboration between Leon's familiar, Luxion, and Olivia, using the Lost Item's resources. The silver-white breastplate fit her form precisely, its segmented plating designed for mobility rather than the bulkier designs favoured by most nobility. A purple crystal pulsed at its centre—the armour's magical core, Olivia had explained—whilst the deep violet bodysuit showed at the gaps between plates. White armoured knee guards and matching boots completed the ensemble, with gold accents catching the light at every mechanical joint.

The workmanship was genuinely exquisite—she could appreciate that much, at least. The precision of each joint, the seamless integration of the mechanical components with the fabric beneath, the way every segment moved in perfect harmony. Every bit of her current outfit was made of the same material—according to Olivia's explanation, the power armour consisted of tens of thousands of tiny lost items called nanomachines.

The styling choices, however... that was another matter entirely, and one that made her stomach twist with embarrassment every time she thought about it.

Because when she stepped back and examined the full picture, it essentially amounted to an armoured leotard. An armoured leotard, for mercy's

sake—one with a particularly daring cut that left far too much of her hips exposed to the world, not to mention her equally exposed thighs and chest. The very thought made heat creep up her neck. She'd seen similar designs in the academy's restricted literature collection, though those had been illustrated for entirely different purposes. The vambraces at least offered some dignity, their silvered plating substantial and professional, and the high greeves provided welcome coverage down her legs. But the central design? It left her feeling decidedly vulnerable, despite the magical reinforcement thrumming beneath the surface.

'There had to have been alternatives,' she thought with quiet frustration, though even as the thought formed, she knew the answer. Olivia's designs didn't really care about function.

Why? Well, each nano machine had its in array carved onto its surface and the combination of these arrays provided an invisible barrier around all her exposed skin, even her face as if she was wearing full body armor and helmet, this of course granted her the freedom to not care about function as her whole body is already protected leading her to make power armour using her own... aesthetic interests.

'Why does everything Olivia touches end up looking like this?' she wondered, suppressing a sigh.

Thinking about the clothing Olivia's guardian spirits wore—even Leon's guardian spirit, Meltryllis, wore those thin bottoms that could have passed for risqué lingerie meant for very private sessions. The only one who'd worn something less revealing at the time was Durga, but now that Angelica looked at her properly, even she had changed. What had appeared to be modest white robes from a distance turned out to be a two-piece outfit with cloth draped 'strategically' around her body, leaving very little to the imagination.

'At least I'm not alone in this indignity,' Angelica thought, though the observation brought little comfort.

Typically, Lost Items didn't really equate to being strong; it was more about lost magic and technology from before the various modern kingdoms occupied the lower part of this planet's stratosphere. Ancient knowledge, certainly, but not necessarily superior in raw power. Or so the conventional wisdom went.

But after their group tested it out during another raid in the cosmic dungeon—where they'd contracted with their latest guardian spirits—Angelica could see that this power armour could easily equal the best, or maybe even surpass, what this kingdom could offer, especially when it came to customised equipment. The mobility alone was remarkable, the mana conductivity beyond anything she'd experienced before. She'd felt lighter, faster, stronger. The difference had been immediately apparent in combat. The segmented plating moved with her body like a second skin, responding to her movements in ways her family's ceremonial armour never had.

But as she looked down, studying the exposed sections of her thighs where the hip skirt plates parted, she still frowned at the sight. '*Again must it be quite so... revealing?*'

Leon had at least apologised on behalf of Olivia—his expression had been genuinely apologetic, tinged with that particular brand of long-suffering exasperation he seemed to reserve exclusively for his ward. But she could see that her friend, whom she'd grown fond of, wasn't quite as apologetic as she ought to be, judging from the large grin plastered across Olivia's face and her travelling eyes that made Angelica cover her exposed skin by reflex, one hand instinctively moving to shield her thigh.

Just from the memory alone, her face heated.

She also remembered Leon's eyes drifting downwards—just for a moment—and her face had flushed hot at the sight, heat creeping up her neck as she realised what had caught his attention. Though remembering the absolutely shameless, teasing smile Olivia had given her when she'd caught Leon's momentary lapse made the mortification burn even hotter. The other girl had looked far too pleased with herself, as if she'd orchestrated the entire thing deliberately.

Which, knowing Olivia, she probably had.

Belted to both her hips sat something Leon had given her—a sabre and a shorter sword. He'd named them Reiterpallasch and Reiterdegen, respectively, the foreign names rolling off his tongue with practised ease. What made them truly remarkable was that each weapon had a barrel built directly into the blade itself, similar in principle to the rifle she typically used for channelling her magic, though the barrels were considerably shorter and more elegantly integrated into the design. The craftsmanship was exquisite, the balance perfect in her hands.

With these, she could dual-wield her magic whilst simultaneously defending herself properly in close-quarters combat—something that had always been a glaring weakness in her fighting style.

Combined with her power armour, the nanomachines could reconfigure themselves and load into the weapons as specialised ammunition, though this came with an unfortunate side effect: the front-open skirt would become shorter and shorter with every use, drawing from the armour's material reserves. Much to her consternation.

She appreciated these gifts immensely, though she'd initially insisted on paying for them with her family's coin, only to be immediately denied. Leon had declared her a friend, his tone brooking no argument on the matter. Besides, he'd added with that dry pragmatism of his, it wouldn't be right to ask for money when all of them were currently in the same sinking boat together. The metaphor had been apt, if somewhat depressing.

These past few days were when she'd really got to know Leon—he'd specifically asked to be called by his given name rather than his title, and she'd been surprised how readily she'd adjusted to thinking of him that way. She could understand now why Olivia—or rather Livia, as Leon sometimes called her—was so thoroughly taken with the man.

Much to Angelica's own slight, unwelcome jealousy that she tried very hard not to examine too closely.

The way he took care of Olivia, the easy banter between them, the evident protectiveness tempered with exasperation—it spoke of a bond more profound than mere friendship, even though their relationship apparently hadn't progressed past anything platonic. Leon had some romantic history he clearly hadn't moved on from, something she'd learned from that one drunken night she and Olivia had shared.

Regardless, they'd spent a considerable amount of their free time working together, increasing their group's synergy and coordination in combat. On top of that, Olivia had helped tremendously with developing more of her—

Knock. Knock.

The sharp sound cut through her thoughts. The door to their waiting room swung open as one of the guild staff from the capital's adventurer's guild branch stepped inside, their professional expression firmly in place as they announced that it was time for them to proceed.

"Miss Redgrave, Baron Bartfort, Knight Olivia," they announced with practised formality, their voice carrying the weight of routine ceremony. "It's time. Please proceed to the transport platform."

Angelica's stomach dropped precipitously, a sudden weightlessness that had nothing to do with magic and everything to do with anticipation. The moment had arrived—no more delays, no more preparation time, no more excuses to postpone what lay ahead. This was it. This was really happening.

Her pulse quickened despite all her mental preparation, despite the countless hours of training and planning. All the work they'd put in would now be tested against reality rather than theory.

Leon stood in his crimson and black power armour, the deep red plating covering his torso and upper arms in segmented plates that allowed full mobility whilst maintaining complete coverage. Black reinforced sections protected his lower body—proper trousers, she noted with perhaps more envy than was strictly warranted—whilst gold-accented greaves and gauntlets completed the ensemble. At the centre of his chest, an orange magical core

pulsed with steady power, noticeably larger and more prominent than her own purple crystal. A flowing red hip cape attached at his waist added a martial elegance to the design, the fabric settling against his legs.

Beside him, Olivia wore her own nanomachine armour in white and turquoise; her friend had designed herself an equally revealing ensemble, the silver-white breastplate extended down into an armoured leotard much like Angelica's own mortifying design, whilst a dramatic skirt of segmented white plates fanned out around her hips in a starburst pattern, open at the front to reveal just as much thigh as Angelica's outfit did. Turquoise accents marked the magical arrays, and a flowing white cape billowed behind her. Knee-high greaves covered her lower legs, but the overall effect was still decidedly... daring.

Angelica drew in a steadying breath, forcing herself to compartmentalise the flutter of nerves threatening to undermine her composure. '*Steel yourself,*' she thought grimly, recognising the familiar weight of pre-battle tension settling across her shoulders.

The moment stretched between them, heavy with anticipation. She glanced toward Leon first, beside him, Olivia's posture radiated barely contained excitement, her turquoise-accented armour gleaming as she practically vibrated with anticipation, her white cape settling and unsettling with each slight movement.

All three of them understood what came next. The time for preparation had passed.

It was time.

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Both Leon and Olivia flanked Angelica as she led everyone towards the academy's duelling grounds. However, their current arrangement wasn't exactly a traditional duel where everyone would take turns fighting until only

one remained—no, this was a proper skirmish. The duelling grounds simply weren't expansive enough for such an event.

When that particular logistical problem was raised, Margot Fou Bellefleur offered the use of one of her personal holdings. This massive floating lost item dwarfed the academy's standard facilities.

Folkvangr was the name of the territory in question, a lost item Margot herself had discovered during her days as an active adventurer before settling into her role as guild administrator—which later evolved into her position as guild head of the Adventurer's Guild's Bartfort branch. This was the very same land where she had trained all of her vassal knights alongside the royal palace's elite guard, transforming raw recruits into hardened warriors. The kingdom considered it one of its most valuable strategic resources, and with good reason.

The particular enchantment woven into Folkvangr's foundations allowed anyone within its boundaries to train in battles to the death without actual casualties. The magic embedded in the floating island recognised when a participant was about to receive a lethal blow and immediately teleported them to designated safe zones before the strike could land.

It was the perfect environment for forging elite soldiers—after all, only genuine life-and-death experiences separated ordinary knights from true elites, and Folkvangr provided that crucible without the permanent losses. Beyond that practical advantage, the lost item possessed its own self-repairing mechanisms, automatically reconstructing damaged terrain and structures, provided time and someone kept feeding it enough earth-type gemstones to fuel the restoration processes.

And this would be the staging ground for their skirmish. The thought of any of the high nobles' sons or the prince dying in such an event had forced Margot's hand, which was why she'd visited Leon a few days ago to vent her frustration whilst he sat in seiza with his arms high above his head, holding that position for hours on end. This later led Angelica, Olivia, and Mégane to be forced to do the same.

Her frustration had bloomed even further when she'd looked at the blue betting chits the trio were clutching when they barged into his dormitory whilst he remained mid-punishment.

That frustration escalated further when she discovered the exact sums wagered. Her shrill anger culminated in her shouting that they'd transformed what might have been a contained incident into a far more public spectacle than it ever needed to be—the bookmakers would almost certainly open this betting opportunity to the general populace now, spreading word throughout the entire capital and probably beyond.

She begrudgingly accepted their reasoning after Leon explained the strategic thinking behind forcing such high stakes. However, she also pointed out with considerable emphasis that if they actually won whilst the majority of the populace had wagered on the prince's victory, he'd make a substantial number of enemies. The kind of enemies who wouldn't forget being made to look foolish, or worse, losing significant money on what they'd believed was a certain wager.

Leon could only permit a weary sigh to escape his lips. Despite her obvious frustration with their methods, Margot did ultimately provide them with sound tactical advice—a gambit designed to deter any of the lower-ranking nobles from attempting to come at them afterwards, particularly those who might suddenly find themselves bankrupted by what they'd foolishly believed would be an easy victory.

Leon glanced around as their group exited the academy building towards the staging area where two transport platforms currently sat idle, waiting to ferry participants to Folkvangr's floating battleground.

The assembled crowd suddenly fell quiet as Leon and his companions stepped into full view. The silence lasted only for a single held breath before raucous jeers erupted from nearly everyone present, most of them brandishing red betting chits held high to signify they'd wagered substantial amounts on the prince's inevitable victory.

Well, almost everyone.

Leon could spy with his magically reinforced eyes both Daniel and Raymond standing towards the back of the crowd, discreetly displaying their blue chits to show their support. The gesture was subtle enough not to draw unwanted attention from their peers, but clear enough for Leon to notice and acknowledge.

'At least Luxion acquiesced to my request,' Leon thought with some relief. The artificial intelligence had been particularly vocal about him being excessively soft on betrayers and those who'd wronged them, a complaint inevitably followed by Luxion's typical programmed offer to reduce certain problematic individuals' territories to molten glass via orbital—well, aerial?—bombardment.

Leon had grown familiar enough with the AI's patterns that he could now accurately predict the usual sequential flow Luxion conducted whenever making his regular suggestions. It invariably started with a coldly factual observation about the current tactical or social situation, followed immediately by either a cutting personal insult directed at Leon's 'soft' decision-making capabilities or Olivia's tendency towards 'certain' topics. Then came the inevitable offer to comprehensively destroy the new humans—or propose something functionally equivalent in destructive scope—which was finally concluded with begrudging acquiescence to whatever more moderate request Leon had actually made.

Sometimes, though, the pattern deviated. On those occasions, Luxion **received** Leon's emphatic rejection—particularly whenever Olivia found herself agreeing with the AI's characteristic solution to virtually everything: systematically glassing the surface of their enemies' territories until nothing problematic remained.

A familiar snapping sound cut sharply through his musings, pulling Leon's attention back to the present moment as his heterochromatic eyes met a pair of striking blue ones across the crowded arena. It was Deirdre who had snapped her fan open with that characteristic flourish of hers, the gesture deliberately theatrical and perfectly timed.

For just a heartbeat, she revealed the blue chit wedged carefully between the decorative folds of her signature accessory before snapping it shut again with equal precision. The smile she offered him was pure challenge, all sharp edges and barely concealed amusement. The expression practically screamed 'entertain me' in the most aristocratic way possible.

Leon merely gave the blonde noblewoman a raised eyebrow and the slightest tilt of his head in acknowledgement.

Deirdre had not approached or contacted him even once since that dance during the academy's ball—the one before everything had spiralled into this particular mess—which was quite understandable given his very public challenge to the crown prince. Her family's position was precarious enough without being seen as openly supporting someone who'd thrown down a gauntlet at Julius Rafa Holfort's feet. Well, at Marie Fou Lafan, technically, but Julius and his entourage had accepted it on her behalf.

Her family had also suspended any previous arrangements of collaboration between their respective territories, severing economic ties with the same cold efficiency that nobles employed when political winds shifted unfavourably—not that it would harm his future holdings.

In fact, many noble families had not commented publicly on the current situation at all, adopting that time-honoured wait-and-see approach. None of them vilified him or called for any form of punishment for his challenge to the heir apparent, which was... interesting.

'Probably because this is an academy spectacle rather than an official court matter,' Leon reasoned. *'Or maybe they're just waiting for the result before voicing anything. See which way the wind blows.'*

Even Lucas Rafa Holfort, the academy professor who, on occasion, would summon Leon to his office for tea and what the man insisted on calling 'catching up,' hadn't really admonished him for the challenge itself. Instead, the lectures had focused more on the public spectacle this whole affair had

devolved into; the professor's disappointment centred on Leon's lack of discretion rather than the challenge itself.

Leon then turned his gaze toward Deirdre's left as Clarice Fia Atlee came into view, seated primly beside her blonde companion. Olivia had already informed Leon about Clarice's public wager on their victory, staking a considerable sum. That was also understandable, considering Jilk Fia Marmoria was her supposed betrothed—the very same Jilk who now numbered amongst the men thoroughly ensnared by Marie Fou Lafan's inexplicable charm.

Though according to both Olivia's and Mégane's observations, Clarice had been remarkably cold toward Angelica when they crossed paths after Clarice placed her bets. Mégane had offered her own analysis of the situation, explaining with a matter-of-fact tone that Clarice probably blamed Angelica for failing to keep the prince properly in line, which had subsequently led to Jilk cutting off all contact with his actual fiancée in favour of chasing after Marie like some lovesick fool.

Speaking of Mégane, she was still languishing at the academy with her poor, overworked assigned professor, the two of them trudging through the accumulated backlog of schoolwork with all the enthusiasm of prisoners serving a sentence. Leon allowed himself a brief chuckle, sympathetic amusement flickering across his features.

Then applause erupted through the arena, the sound reverberating off the structures surrounding the duelling grounds. Their group now stood assembled on their assigned transport platform, the magical construct humming faintly beneath their feet. Almost as one, their group turned to follow the direction of the collective gaze, heads swivelling toward the opposite entrance.

At the far side of the duelling grounds, Marie Fou Lafan emerged into view, her petite form flanked on all sides by an impressive entourage. The prince maintained his position at her right hand, his bearing regal despite the circumstances, whilst the sons of the kingdom's high nobles arrayed themselves protectively around her—their faces set with determination. Her

attendant, Kyle, trailed just behind, and their guardian spirits manifested in shimmering forms that caught the afternoon light.

Leon and their group had been present during the contracting ceremony, had witnessed firsthand when Marie's devoted followers bound themselves to the various cosmic fairies discovered at the bottom of his territory's cosmic dungeon. The same fundamental type of guardian spirits as Art, Ria, Pollux, and Britomart, though the similarities ended there in terms of the bonds formed and the partners chosen.

But additional guardian spirits also accompanied Marie's contingent now—entities they hadn't observed during the dungeon raid itself. Well, except for the prince's own guardian spirit, that particular being inherited through his royal bloodline rather than contracted through personal effort. The spirit who bore an uncanny resemblance to His Highness himself.

The one whose power was whispered about in hushed, almost fearful tones—rumoured to be capable of single-handedly turning the tide against entire armies and emerging victorious. The very same being whose devastating blast attack had actually managed to damage the transparent flooring of Leon's cosmic dungeon during their first descent, though Leon himself had also embedded one of his swords in the floor. The damage done by the guardian spirit, however, had been far more significant. Thankfully, upon recent inspections, the dungeon had already reversed the damage itself.

A sudden shriek of magical feedback cut through everyone's applause like a blade, causing several audience members to flinch and cover their ears. Then a voice was projected outward to reach every corner of the arena, amplified by enchantments woven into the very architecture. "Good afternoon, everyone attending today's unprecedented event. My name is Aldwin Fia Westbrook, and I'll be serving as your completely unbiased announcer for this—"

The voice paused awkwardly, trailing off as if the speaker was frantically trying to locate the proper terminology to describe this absolute circus of an event without causing a political incident.

"—this interesting event with rather substantial wagers that has swept through the kingdom like a storm these past weeks. I am joined in the commentary box by two iconic and legendary figures of our beloved kingdom, none other than Margot Fou Bellefleur and Barret Fia Arclight themselves. Do the renowned sword saint and the infamous witch of calamity have anything enlightening to say before we commence today's skirmish?"

Silence descended upon the arena like a suffocating blanket.

"..."

The two legendary figures simply stared forward, their expressions completely blank, faces betraying absolutely nothing of their inner thoughts regarding this farce.

"..."

More silence stretched on, growing increasingly uncomfortable with each passing heartbeat.

"..."

"A—uhm, yes, well, the stakes involved are admittedly quite high, so I completely understand the contemplative silence that everyone is currently experiencing whilst still processing this rather dramatic turn of events and their implications for the kingdom's social structure..."

"..."

Still nothing from either commentator.

"..."

The announcer's voice had taken on a slightly desperate quality now, clearly floundering without support from his supposed co-commentators.

"Y—yes—moving on then, this skirmish is occurring today due to a formal challenge thrown down by Lady Angelica Rapha Redgrave against Miss Marie Fou Lafan, essentially a battle between romantic rivals for His Highness's

affections. Who amongst you believes will emerge victorious from today's contest? Judging from the overwhelming sea of crimson visible throughout the various floating spectator stands surrounding us, we can observe that the crowd heavily favours Miss Marie Fou Lafan achieving victory in this skirmish. Of course, who amongst the nobility would be foolish enough to wager against the beloved pri—"

"Ahem." Barret Fia Arclight's pointed interruption cut through the announcer's commentary.

"Ah, yes, maintaining complete unbia—never mind, I appear to have become distracted by the spectacle before us. Please allow me to introduce everyone in attendance to each participating member of both groups, beginning with—"

"Look Leon, I think Chris is about to piss himself from sheer terror," Olivia whispered urgently to his left, her voice barely audible beneath the announcer's continued prattling and the ambient noise of the crowd.

Leon briefly turned his head, deliberately allowing only his peripheral vision to observe the opposing team's formation as Chris Fia Arclight stood with visible nervousness radiating from every line of his posture.

The young swordsman's head was angled awkwardly, determinedly looking in literally any direction except one specific location—and judging from the precise trajectory of where his father Barret Fia Arclight's penetrating gaze was currently fixed from the commentary box, Chris was desperately attempting to avoid making eye contact with the legendary sword saint who'd sired him.

"—beginning with the challenging party. First, we have the instigator of this entire affair—ouch!" Leon could see from where he stood the announcer rubbing bothsides of his ribs before he continued.

"Um—the challenger Lady Angelica Rapha Redgrave, daughter of Duke Redgrave and current betrothed to His Highness Crown Prince Julius. She is accompanied by her contracted guardian spirit, Britomart, secured from the Bartfort territory's cosmic dungeon."

The announcer continued, his voice carrying that particular tone of forced neutrality whilst simultaneously trying hard not to express any personal opinion whatsoever, lest he gets elbowed by the two flanking him again. "Lady Angelica's champions for this duel are Baron Leon Fou Bartfort and Knight Olivia, both of whom discovered and claimed multiple dungeon territories in the Bartfort region approximately six months prior to the current academic year."

A smattering of derisive laughter rippled through the crowd at the mention of Leon's rural barony, the sound starting as isolated chuckles before quickly building into outright jeering.

"Baron Bartfort is accompanied by four contracted guardian spirits—" The announcer's voice strained to be heard over the growing noise, his tone becoming slightly desperate as he attempted to maintain some semblance of professional decorum. "—named Ria, Art, Meltryllis, and Durga, all secured from various dungeons within his territory. Knight Olivia is similarly accompanied by four guardian spirits of her own: Sella, Leysritt, Illya, and Pollux."

Leon heard the shout ripple through the stands like wildfire, the numbers—twelve against twenty-three—becoming a chant that swelled with each repetition. Twelve against twenty-three. The maths was simple enough, brutally simple in fact, and the crowd seemed to relish the certainty of it all. They didn't stand a chance, the voices proclaimed with such gleeful certainty that it almost sounded like a prayer.

The jeering intensified, dozens of voices now harmonising around that singular refrain: *they don't stand a chance, they don't stand a chance*. It was almost rhythmic in its cruelty, a drumbeat of aristocratic certainty that the outcome had been decided before a single blade had been drawn.

Beside him, he could sense Olivia's sharp intake of breath—whether from indignation or calculation, he couldn't quite tell. But the numbers remained what they were, hanging in the air between them like an unspoken challenge that the crowd was determined to make very, very spoken indeed.

"Look at the commoner playing dress-up!" another voice jeered with genuine venom, followed by cruel laughter that suggested the speaker found the very concept of Olivia's knighthood to be some sort of elaborate joke. "Does she even know which end of a sword to hold?"

"The disgraced duke's daughter and a rural baron—what a pathetic combination!" A different voice joined the chorus, this one carrying the particular smugness of someone who thought themselves terribly clever for pointing out the obvious. "They couldn't even get proper allies!"

Leon's peripheral vision caught Angelica's shoulders stiffening infinitesimally at the casual mention of her 'disgrace,' though her expression remained carefully neutral. Her training as a duke's daughter was showing through—decades of maintaining aristocratic composure, even whilst publicly humiliated, couldn't be undone by mere mockery.

He could see that in the minute tightening around her eyes.

"I heard they got escorted straight to the bottom of that cosmic dungeon whilst His Highness and a proper group of adventurers cleared all the previous floors!" The heckler's voice dripped with contempt, the accusation spreading through the crowd like wildfire as people seized upon this particular narrative with obvious delight. "They didn't even do the real work! Just waltzed in after everyone else did the fighting and claimed the rewards!"

More laughter erupted at that particular jeer, red betting chits waving triumphantly throughout the stands like battle standards declaring their holders' absolute confidence in Marie's inevitable victory.

The announcer gamely attempted to continue over the rising cacophony, his voice taking on the strained quality of someone who was beginning to regret accepting this particular commentary assignment. "I should note that, according to information provided by Margot Fou Bellefleur, the Witch of Calamity herself, all three members of the challenging party are currently equipped with customised power armour manufactured within the Bartfort territory's facilities. The specifics of these customisations have not been

disclosed to the general public, however Lady Bellefleur has verified that each suit incorporates unique modifications tailored to—"

"WHO CARES ABOUT SOME BACKWATER ARMOUR?" The heckler's voice cut through with particular venom, drowning out whatever the announcer had been attempting to say about the customisations. "THE PRINCE HAS MILITARY-GRADE EQUIPMENT! PROPER ARMOUR FROM THE ROYAL FORGES!"

"This is an execution, not a duel!" another voice crowed with vindictive satisfaction. "We're about to watch three fools get systematically dismantled!"

"I should have bet MORE on the Prince!" A different spectator's voice carried genuine regret, as though they'd missed out on easy money by being too conservative with their wagers. "These odds are practically theft—it's guaranteed winnings!"

Red betting chits waved throughout the stands like a crimson tide of absolute certainty, their holders shouting odds and mocking predictions with the enthusiasm of people who believed they'd discovered a foolproof way to increase their fortunes. The noise had grown so overwhelming that the announcer had given up trying to speak over it entirely, simply waiting with visible resignation for the jeering to subside even slightly before attempting to continue his introduction.

Beside him, Olivia's smile had taken on that particular sharp quality that usually preceded someone getting cursed with explosive diarrhoea—or possibly something more creative and elaborate, depending on how offended she was feeling. Her guardian spirits had moved fractionally closer to her position, forming a protective semicircle that suggested they were prepared to physically restrain their mistress if she decided to start hexing the crowd preemptively. Sella's hand rested warningly on her mistress's shoulder.

"Fifteen-to-one odds," Olivia murmured, her voice carrying a dangerous sort of satisfaction beneath the jeering crowd's continued mockery. "Every single one

of these fools is about to learn a very expensive lesson about underestimating people. I almost feel sorry for them. Almost."

Angelica's face had gone carefully blank, her aristocratic composure holding despite the very public humiliation of hearing exactly what the kingdom thought of her chances against her former fiancé and his new beloved. Her hand drifted almost unconsciously towards the Reiterpallasch at her hip, fingers brushing the weapon's grip as if drawing comfort from its solid presence—the familiar weight of steel offering reassurance where words could not.

Leon noticed the gesture, *'She's more affected than she's letting on, he assessed clinically. Understandable. Being publicly humiliated by your ex-fiancé whilst several hundred nobles laugh and place bets on your defeat would shake anyone's composure.'*

The transport platform hummed more insistently beneath their feet, its magical mechanisms building power in preparation for the journey to Folkvangr's designated battleground. The vibration travelled up through Leon's boots, a physical reminder that this spectacle was about to transition from mere theatre into actual combat.

The jeering continued unabated, red chits waving like crimson flowers blooming throughout the stands.

Then, jeering slowly turned, at first it was a cacophony of noises, but then the cacophony suddenly merged into a single chorus as they started chanting.

"Julius, Jilk, Chris, Greg, Brad!"

"Julius, Jilk, Chris, Greg, Brad!"

"Julius, Jilk, Chris, Greg, Brad!"

The crowd's chanting finally subsided as the announcer cleared his throat, his voice taking on a noticeably more enthusiastic tone—whether from genuine

admiration or simple self-preservation instinct after being elbowed twice, Leon couldn't quite determine.

"And now, ladies and gentlemen, allow me to introduce the defending party—though perhaps 'responding party' would be more accurate, given the nature of this challenge."

The announcer's voice carried across the arena with considerably more energy than it had during Leon's team introduction. "We shall begin with the formidable Lord Greg, whose strength anchors this distinguished group!"

Greg stepped forward onto the platform, his bronze and burnt-orange power armour gleaming in the afternoon light. The heavy plating and reinforced design made him appear like an immovable fortress, broad shoulders supporting thick armour plates that spoke of pure defensive capability and mobility. His amber core glowed steadily at his chest, whilst the short brown cape and spiked pauldron details gave him a wild look.

"Lord Greg is accompanied by four guardian spirits—the cosmic fairies Gawain and Puck from the Bartfort dungeon, joined by the inherited spirits Setanta and Ajax from his noble lineage! A formidable combination of ancient power and newfound allies!"

Cheers erupted from the stands.

From Leon's vague memories of the game, it looks like Greg had forgone the mentality that only second-rate warriors bothered with the latest advancements. This armour looked pristine and relatively new—at least relative to the power armour of everyone, and like in the game, he was wielding a large spear.

Leon couldn't help but raise his eyebrow as the experienced adventurer met his eyes, giving him a feral grin that promised violence to come.

"Next, we have Lord Brad Fou Field, a study in steadfast reliability!" The announcer gestured toward the armoured figure. "His steel blue and navy power armour features clean lines and balanced construction, with shield

attachment points clearly visible on his left arm. The sapphire core speaks to unwavering dedication!"

Brad's rounded pauldrons and professional demeanour earned approving nods from the more militarily-minded observers. His simple chest plate design and short cape emphasised function over flash, the very image of a dependable guardian. Several small spears with no handles were affixed to his back, long, narrow, and cone-shaped.

And if it were anything like the game, they could float through the air with his excellent control magic. He, too, used a spear as his choice of melee weapon.

"Lord Brad commands two guardian spirits—the cosmic fairy Bedivere from the Bartfort dungeon, and the inherited spirit Patroclus from his family's honoured tradition! A combination built for supporting his allies and holding the line!"

Solid applause followed, with the crowd clearly understanding the respect for the supporting role.

"And now, Lord Chris Fia Arclight, son of the legendary Sword Saint himself!" The announcer's voice carried particular weight on this introduction. "Lord Arclight wears platinum white and midnight blue power armour designed for maximum mobility—lightweight plating that prioritises speed and precision over heavy defence! His diamond-white core blazes with the intensity expected of the Sword Saint's heir!"

Chris's sleek armour gleamed, the sharp angles and minimal plating making him appear ready to move at a moment's notice. His lack of cape and thin vambraces emphasised the speed-focused philosophy, every element of his design speaking to the Arclight family's legendary swordsmanship.

"Lord Arclight is accompanied by two guardian spirits—the cosmic fairy Lancelot from the Bartfort dungeon, and the inherited spirit Odysseus from the Arclight family legacy! Cunning and skill combined in pursuit of victory!"

The applause was thunderous, the Sword Saint's son commanding considerable respect from the assembled nobility.

"Lord Jilk Fia Marmoria, foster brother to His Highness and trusted companion!" The announcer's voice swelled with appropriate reverence. "Lord Marmoria wears power armour of forest green and dark grey, featuring an asymmetrical design with enhanced plating on the left shoulder! His emerald core marks him as a master of strategy and precision!"

Jilk's sleek armour gleamed as he inclined his head slightly, his dark green half-cape shifting with the movement. The silver-trimmed vambraces and boots spoke of quality craftsmanship, understated but supremely effective. His entire bearing radiated the quiet competence of someone who operated best in his liege's shadow.

"Lord Marmoria commands an impressive array of four guardian spirits—a testament to both his considerable standing and the crown's confidence in his abilities," the announcer declared, his voice ringing with appropriate gravitas. "The cosmic fairies Tristan and Agravain, secured from the Bartfort dungeon, serve as his foundation. From his family's own storied legacy comes the inherited spirit Roland, a name that carries weight and history in equal measure."

He paused, letting the crowd absorb the significance before delivering the coup de grâce.

"But most notably, Lord Marmoria has been granted Arjuna on loan from the royal palace itself—one of the legendary guardian spirits bound to the Holfort bloodline since the kingdom's founding, when the first of that dynasty descended into the capital dungeon centuries ago. Some say Arjuna's might could even rival his ancient companion Karna. Such an honor speaks volumes to the deep trust placed in Lord Marmoria by the crown, a recognition of his position as His Highness's foster brother and the exceptional bond between them."

The applause swelled considerably, the palace loan—and the historical weight behind it—unmistakably marking Jilk's elevated status. An ancient spirit from the founding of the kingdom itself, entrusted to the prince's foster brother. The significance was not lost on the assembled nobility.

"Miss Marie Fou Lafan, daughter of Viscount Lafan, the one whose honour we—I mean the prince and his retinue will defend today!" The announcer's voice now carried genuine warmth. "Miss Lafan's power armour is a work of art—pearl white plating with rose gold accents that catch the light like morning sun on fresh snow! The elegant breastplate features exquisite filigree, whilst the flowing, layered skirt plates shift like petals with each movement. Her lavender crystal pulses with gentle power at the centre of her chest, and the translucent pink cape gives her an almost ethereal, angelic quality!"

Marie stepped forward with practised grace, her armour gleaming like a beacon of purity and elegance. The crowd's reaction was immediate and overwhelming—cheers mixed with applause, red chits waving frantically.

"Miss Lafan is accompanied by her loyal elf attendant Kyle, and two contracted guardian spirits—the cosmic fairies Oberon and Titania, both secured from the Bartfort territory's cosmic dungeon! Titania is particularly noteworthy for bearing a striking resemblance to Miss Lafan herself—a testament to the deep bond formed during their contract!"

The enthusiasm in the stands reached new heights, Marie clearly having won the hearts of the assembled nobility.

"And finally—" The announcer's voice dropped slightly, building anticipation before rising to fill every corner of the arena. "His Highness Crown Prince Julius Rafa Holfort, heir to the throne and defender of Miss Lafan's honour!"

The crowd erupted before he could even continue, the roar of approval nearly drowning out the announcer's next words.

"His Highness is accompanied by his two guardian spirits," the announcer proclaimed, his voice trembling slightly with the weight of what he was describing. "The first is Karna—one of the two legendary guardian spirits

originally contracted by the founding Holforts when they discovered the capital dungeon and established this very kingdom. Passed down through the royal bloodline for generations, Karna has served as the crown's greatest protector through countless trials."

The announcer paused for effect, allowing the crowd's anticipation to build.

"When His Highness came of age and recontracted with Karna, the ancient spirit took on His Highness's own noble countenance and visage—a transformation that speaks to the profound bond between them, and a sign recognised throughout history as marking a contractor of exceptional destiny! Karna's power is the stuff of legends whispered across the kingdom—rumoured to possess the capability to face entire armies single-handedly and emerge victorious!"

Murmurs of awe rippled through the crowd at the mention of Karna's transformation. Such a phenomenon was rare, significant, a mark of fate itself.

"And joined with Karna is the cosmic fairy Arthur, contracted by His Highness himself from the Bartfort cosmic dungeon! Together, these two spirits command forces that have never known defeat! Ancient power and newfound strength, united under the crown prince's banner!"

The cheering intensified beyond anything that had come before, the crowd's fervor reaching absolute fever pitch as they chanted Julius's name. The arena practically vibrated with their collective energy, red betting chits waving like a crimson storm of absolute certainty.

"JULIUS! JULIUS! JULIUS!"

The chant was deafening, drowning out all other sound.

To both flanks of the announcer, Leon could see the tired faces of both the Sword Saint and the Witch of Calamity, their expressions betraying the sting of the blatant favouritism that had just dripped from the announcer's honeyed words when he'd described the prince's group.

"Before we start our awaited event, let me just show everyone how we'll be able to watch this skirmish and the reason why I was hired to be today's announcer." The announcer's voice rang out with renewed theatrical enthusiasm, and with a flourish of his hand, several orbs emerged—no, extensive winged eyeballs, their surfaces gleaming with an unsettling lustre—and began flying around the arena in geometric patterns.

Then, suddenly, a series of large crystalline screens materialized in front of each bleacher section, flickering to life with shimmering magical energy and displaying different angles of the participants arranged across the platforms.

"This is a lost item I discovered back in the days of my youth when I was a brave adventurer myself," the announcer began, launching into what promised to be an exhaustingly vivid and self-aggrandising account of his youthful escapades. Leon could already sense the lengthy digression building—the man's tone had taken on that particular quality of someone thoroughly enamoured with the sound of his own voice recounting past glory.

"Ahem!" Margot's voice cut through the arena with decisive authority, and Leon grimaced as feedback shrieked across the grounds—a collective wince rippled through the bleachers.

"Y-yes, my apologies," the announcer stammered, recovering with practised smoothness. "With this lost item, everyone from around the kingdom will be able to watch today's event. Especially considering the substantial amount of dia being wagered today. The palace's Holfort Amusement and Gaming Corporation is certainly profiting handsomely from the spectacle."

"Before they depart for the legendary lost item known as Folkvangr," the announcer continued, "let us welcome our academy professor and today's referee. Please give your attention to Lucas Rafa Holfort, the Grand Sage of the kingdom."

The crowd erupted into polite applause—respectful, almost reverent—as their professor descended to the arena floor with measured dignity, his robes settling around him like silver mist. He positioned himself squarely between

the two platforms, his presence alone commanding the space as effectively as any magical working. The microphone floated to his hand with barely a gesture, responding to his will as naturally as breathing.

"Before we commence," Lucas announced, his voice steady and authoritative, carrying the weight of both wisdom and power that had earned him his legendary title, "both parties shall face one another and recite their oaths. The code of chivalry demands honourable conduct from all participants—a fair contest decided by skill and courage, not treachery or deceit. These oaths bind you to uphold the spirit of noble combat."

He paused, allowing the gravity of his words to settle over the assembled crowd.

"Lady Angelica, as the challenger, you shall speak first..."

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Leon stood at the plateau on the opposite side of the large island of Folkvangr, surveying the landscape with his reinforced eyes. This massive fifty-square-kilometre island—a Lost Item hybrid that somehow functioned as both terrain and artefact—provided an excellent staging area for power armour combat. The sheer scale alone offered room for manoeuvring, flanking, and the kind of high-speed exchanges that would reduce a smaller battlefield to rubble within minutes.

The island itself was remarkably complete in its ecosystem diversity. Lush forests sprawled across the eastern quadrant, their canopy thick enough to provide cover but open enough beneath for armoured movement. An expansive plain stretched before him, ideal for direct engagements. A river carved through the central region, feeding into a crystalline lake that reflected the sky above. Somehow, the island even boasted a desert area to the south—heat shimmer and all—whilst the entire landmass was bordered by towering mountains and plateaus that created natural boundaries.

'Quite the convenient training ground,' Leon mused.

Now Leon locked eyes with Angelica, then Olivia, holding each gaze for a fraction longer than necessary—acknowledgement, reassurance, solidarity. As he stepped forward, his armoured gauntlet came down on both their shoulders in turn, the contact brief but meaningful.

His gauntlet hand extended, fingers splaying outward as will shaped reality—or rather, an object was moved from unreality to reality. The trusted bow he inherited from Archer's endless catalogue of memories manifested from nothing, materialising atom by atom until solid alloy settled into his palm. The familiar weight grounded him as he steeled himself, walking with deliberate purpose towards the edge of the cliff where wind whipped at his white locks.

Margot's advice still rang in his ear, each word measured and precise as they'd been when she'd spoken them.

'I understand the need for acquiring capital to grease the wheels a bit,' she'd said, her expression unreadable but her tone carrying the weight of hard-earned experience. *'But that may prove useless against those who truly want to do you harm. Money opens doors—it doesn't stop blades or ordnance from raining down on your territory. With this upcoming skirmish, you must be decisive. Show them something that makes them think twice before attacking you and those you deem important.'*

Margot had locked eyes with him then—whilst he'd still sat in uncomfortable seiza on the dormitory floor, his legs already protesting the formal position. Her stare had been unflinching, almost challenging.

'The time to lay low is now off the table, Leon. Half-measures won't suffice anymore—not if you want to protect what matters.'

And so he wouldn't. Now, standing at Folkvangr's edge with bow in hand, Leon exhaled slowly, feeling the familiar weight of destiny settling across his shoulders like a shroud as he centred himself. The words came unbidden, rising from the depths of his soul where two lifetimes lay coiled like a sleeping

dragon—one ended quickly, and the other was hundreds of lifetimes worth of massacre for the sake of humanity. *"I am the bone of my sword, Steel is my body, fire is my blood."*

The aria felt different this time—heavier somehow, as if the very air recognised the gravity of what he was about to unleash. Leon had to use three full lines for this particular invocation, the minimum amount of overlap between reality and his innerworld, each word carefully measured as he reached deep into his reality marble, searching for something specific.

Something that Archer had come into contact with during those countless, exhausting battles against the King of Heroes. Those fights had been exercises in futility more often than not—times where Archer Emiya was at his brink, masterless, or both—but they'd left him with knowledge—dangerous knowledge of weapons that shouldn't exist in mortal hands.

The sword materialised with a weight that made the air itself groan in protest. A massive blade appeared, standing almost as tall as Leon himself, its surface gleaming with an otherworldly sheen that hurt to look at directly. The blade was shaped as a colossal drill, its spiralling grooves promising devastation on a scale that made conventional weapons seem like toys. This wasn't the regular drill sword that Archer Emiya had employed in desperate battles—no, this was something far more terrible. This was the original that had laid dormant inside the King of Heroes's Gate of Babylon for several millennia, the primordial iteration of the sword that legends claimed could cleave mountain tops as easily as a knife through butter.

Prototype Caladbolg. The name alone carried weight that pressed against reality.

Using alteration, he began the delicate process of transformation. The noble phantasm groaned and protested violently as it was forced to shrink, its very essence rebelling against the unnatural compression. He wasn't destroying mass—that would be impossible even for him. Instead, he was condensing its size down to a more aerodynamic shape, forcing matter to occupy spaces it was never meant to fill. The atoms screamed as they rearranged themselves,

compacting into an optimal array to accommodate the mould into which they were being forced. He could feel the resistance in every fibre of his being, the sword's pride warring against his will.

Leon had to reinforce his body to its absolute brink, every circuit blazing with power as the mass of the massive sword made itself known. The weight wasn't removed—physics didn't work that way, not even with magecraft. It was merely forced to occupy a smaller space, and his body bore the strain of that impossible density. His muscles trembled with the effort, reinforcement keeping them from tearing themselves apart as he lifted what should have been unliftable.

He adopted a shoulder-width stance, his feet finding purchase on the cliff's edge as he readied his bow. The weapon was of western design, elegant in its simplicity, but he couldn't help reverting to old practices drilled into him through countless hours of kyudo in another life. As he notched the impossibly heavy arrow, memories of standing in Homurahara's shooting range flickered through his mind—a different boy, a different dream, but the same fundamental desire to save everyone.

Raising the bow with deliberate care, he drew it back to full extension. The string sang with tension, and then he pulled even further, past what should have been possible. The bow groaned in protest, its frame threatening to snap as he fed mana into the noble phantasm like pouring gasoline onto a bonfire. The arrow began to glow, first a dull red, then brilliant orange, then something beyond colour that made reality blur around its edges.

More and more power flowed through his circuits until the arrow was completely saturated with magical energy. Until it transcended its original purpose and became something else entirely—a broken phantasm, a noble phantasm deliberately overloaded past its breaking point for exponentially greater destructive power. He could feel it wanting to explode in his hands, held back only by his will and the last vestiges of its structural integrity.

"My core is twisted in madness, Caladbolg."

The words were barely past his lips when the noble phantasm practically tore itself from his grasp with violent enthusiasm. The release was instantaneous and catastrophic. Several sonic booms followed in its wake, each one a thunderclap that shattered the air itself. A long crimson streak painted itself across the sky, moving so impossibly fast that observers couldn't tell if it had started from Leon's position or somehow originated from the opposite end of the island. Time seemed to hiccup, as cause and effect briefly divorced, the arrow exceeding what physics should allow.

There was a serene, almost holy silence for a single heartbeat. The world held its breath.

Then something that looked remarkably like a small sun bloomed on the opposite side of Folkvangr. The explosion that followed defied description—light and heat and force combining into something that rippled across its immediate vicinity. When it finally dissipated, leaving purple afterimages burned into everyone's retinas, a significant chunk of the island had simply ceased to exist. Not destroyed, not shattered—disintegrated at the atomic level.

"..."

"..."

"..."

The silence that followed was deafening in its completeness.

"P-Puck, Ajax, and K-Kyle have retired from the battle." The announcer's disbelieving voice finally echoed through the slack-jawed members of the audience, his professional composure completely shattered. The announcement reverberated throughout all of Folkvangr, carrying equal parts awe and horror.

"LEON FOU BARTFORT YOU FUCK!! WHEN I TOLD YOU—ARGH! WHEN I ADVISED YOU NOT TO HOLD BACK, I DIDN'T FUCKING MEAN TO DESTROY A SIGNIFICANT PORTION OF MY FUCKING TERRITORY! YOU LITTLE SHITHEAD ALONGSIDE OLIVIA AND MY PETULANT DAUGHTER WILL SPEND THE REST OF THE UPCOMING BREAK MINING FOR EARTH-TYPE GEMSTONES, UNTIL FOLKVANGR IS RESTORED TO ITS PREVIOUS SPLENDOUR! "YOU CU—"

The broadcast cut with mechanical finality, replaced by pointed silence. Whether the Sword Saint had exercised his authority, the announcer had panicked, or some mercy from the heavens themselves had intervened, the Witch of Calamity's fury was silenced before that particular curse could air across the entire kingdom.

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End

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