

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

Story Starts

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Chapter 7.6 -

The Storm

Everyone heard it through the shared comms—barely there, almost a whisper.

"Illya... Sella... Leysritt..."

Olivia's voice, speaking the names of her fallen guardian spirits. The words lingered in the air, heavier than they had any right to be.

Angelica, standing just to Olivia's right, didn't need a second glance to recognise what she was seeing. The girl was shaking—her entire frame quivering with something that wasn't fear.

It was rage. Pure, incandescent rage.

The kind that burned cold.

Angelica acted on instinct.

She reached across the scant space between them and gripped Olivia's shoulder—firm but gentle. An anchor. She squeezed, hoping the pressure would convey reassurance, would offer even a fragment of calm before the storm broke—trying to remind the blonde that the trio were safe and were teleported out.

It didn't work.

"B-B-BERSERKER!!!"

Olivia's scream tore through the battlefield—not a command, but a *declaration of war*. White-hot rage knifed through the air, so intense that Angelica

physically flinched. The sound carried across Folkvangr, silencing combatants on both sides, freezing them in place as something *shifted*.

The stork knights shuddered violently.

Threads of light and muscle began weaving together—contorting, merging, growing. What had been two dozen elegant bird-shaped constructs collapsed inward, their forms losing definition as they fused into something new.

Something *wrong*.

When the transformation completed, a monster stood in their place.

Five metres tall. Hunched almost double, as if its own mass was too great to bear upright. Bright white threads wove together into impossible musculature—the same nanomachine silk as Olivia's stork knights, but twisted into something far more brutal. Its face—if it could be called that—was a mockery of human features, mouth gaping wide in a silent scream that produced no sound at all.

No voice box. No lungs. Just rage given form.

Its chest heaved in mimicry of breath, but the only noise was the faint whisper of threads sliding against threads. Somehow, the silence was worse than any roar could have been.

Its eyes found the gathering of combatants.

It watched. Unblinking. Patient.

Waiting for the command to kill.

Angelica's heart pounded against her ribs, adrenaline flooding her system. She couldn't tear her gaze from the monster—from Olivia's rage given physical form.

For just a moment, she tasted metal on her tongue—the tang of dread, sharp and undeniable.

"Leon! Sword!"

Olivia's voice was a command, not a request.

A massive blade materialised beside the grotesque titan—Herakles's sword-axe, that brutal fusion of stone and steel that Leon had wielded earlier. Its chipped, jagged edge thrust deep into the earth, handle jutting skyward like a grave marker. The weapon was crude, uneven, unfinished—the kind of thing that belonged in the hands of a demigod, not a mortal.

The monster seized it without hesitation.

And in its grip, the weapon looked *right*. A tool made for destruction, held by something made for the same purpose.

Angelica felt her stomach drop.

The giant seized the handle and arched backwards, every thread of its woven flesh straining as it wound itself to breaking point.

Then it lunged.

The movement was too fast—far too fast for something that size. Legs launched it forward like a coiled spring releasing, massive arms already swinging with enough force to cleave the air itself. Angelica barely registered the motion before the blow landed.

The thing's colossal arm battered aside Agravain and Gawain like they weighed nothing, sending them tumbling through the air. Before they could recover, the jagged stone sword followed—shrieking through the space where they'd been standing, tearing through their torsos in a single devastating arc.

The screams that followed would haunt Angelica's nightmares.

Agravain and Gawain writhed in agony, their bodies flickering as the wounds proved too catastrophic to sustain. Their anguish painted the air in fresh, raw terror.

The monster didn't pause to savour its work. It was already turning, seeking new targets, that strangled hiss building in its chest.

Time jolted back into motion.

The shock melted away, replaced by feverish urgency. The arena filled once again with the storm of gleaming swords—Leon's rain of steel resuming with renewed intensity, each blade suspended with precise, ruthless intent.

And every single one was aimed at Marie.

"BARTFORT!!!" Julius's voice cracked with fury.

"NOOOOO!!!" Jilk's desperate cry overlapped, raw with panic.

But Marie was already moving. Her hands wove through the air with desperate speed, magic twisting around her fingertips even as the world crumbled around her. Leon could see her marshalling raw energy, transforming distress into spellwork—golden light flickering to life around Agravain and Gawain's broken forms.

Leon couldn't let her succeed. With three of their group down, they needed to even the odds quickly.

Jilk and Julius sprang into action, expressions grim with desperate determination.

Their power armour hissed and flared as they closed the distance in a heartbeat. Julius swept Marie up in a perfect princess carry—the kind of textbook rescue one expected from fairytales. But there was nothing romantic about the way her head lolled, the way her feet dangled limply, the way her hands still moved in frantic patterns even as she was lifted.

She was still trying to cast. Still trying to heal. Even now.

Jilk positioned himself above them, blade in one hand, magic flaring from the other. He wove a shield of crackling energy over the trio, deflecting sword after sword as Leon's relentless barrage hammered down upon them.

Sparks flew. The shield flickered. But it held.

'*Stubborn,*' Leon thought, tracing more blades.

Marie's healing spell flickered—golden tendrils struggling to knit together what the giant's blow had already undone. But she was being carried away, her concentration shattered, the magic fraying at the edges.

Angelica saw her chance.

She signalled to Britomart, and her guardian spirit moved without hesitation. Fairy wings spread wide, Britomart descended on Agravain's broken form with a devastating blow that pinned him in place—her broadsword driving through his shoulder, holding him immobile.

Britomart leapt back.

Angelica raised both gunblades and summoned fire.

Not a spout this time—a *lance*. Condensed heat and rage, channelled through Reiterpallasch and Reiterdegen simultaneously, converging into a single point of white-hot destruction that lanced straight into Agravain's chest.

His wounded cry echoed across the battlefield.

Then merciful silence claimed him.

A flash of teleportation light. Gone.

And above, Durga descended.

Not so much a guardian spirit as a pantheon of retribution incarnate. Her ten arms spread wide, each weapon flaring with crimson and black energy. Steel blurred, the clatter and ring of a dozen simultaneous strikes merging into a single overwhelming sound.

Gawain tried to raise his defences. Tried to block. Tried to survive.

It wasn't enough.

The twin talwars carved through his guard. The flexing urumi wrapped around his sword arm and *pulled*. The hammering gada crashed into his chest, his

shoulder, his helm—each strike shuddering with magic and wrath, driving him down, down, down.

Gawain's light flickered.

Durga's serene smile never wavered as she delivered the final blow—her trishul driving through his chest with absolute finality.

The guardian spirit faded from the world, his form dissolving into motes of light.

Another flash of teleportation. Another elimination.

Barely a moment later, the remaining champions pressed the advantage.

Pollux, Art, and Ria charged forward in unison—weapons raised, fairy wings blazing, eyes fixed on the battered group clustered around Julius and Marie. The Berserker construct lumbered behind them, each step shaking the ground, Herakles's sword-axe still dripping with the residue of its previous victims.

Oberon, Odysseus, and Titania scrambled to take up defensive positions. Magical energies swelled around them as they prepared their next desperate counterstroke—but the fear in their movements was palpable. They'd just watched two of their number get torn apart in seconds.

While Arthur and Lancelot were still missing.

From somewhere above, Aldwin's voice broke through the chaos—subdued now, almost reverent.

"A sudden upset as Agravain and Gawain have retired from the battle."

The words hung heavy in the air. In the stands, the audience had fallen silent. No more cheering. No more jeering.

Just the sound of steel on steel, and the heavy breathing of combatants who knew the end was coming.

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Olivia's vision flooded crimson for a fleeting, terrifying second.

Rage coursed through her veins like molten fire, setting every nerve ablaze with righteous fury. She knew—rationally, logically—that her precious guardian spirits were safe, sequestered in their predetermined location within the construct building found at the underside of the floating island. Folkvangr's teleportation had whisked them away before true death could claim them.

The knowledge should have been comforting.

It wasn't.

They'd dared to strike at what was *hers*. And now it was time for payback—sweet, devastating payback that would leave them broken and reeling.

With a savage mental command that reverberated through their connection, Olivia let Berserker loose.

The massive construct surged forward with primal fury, its overwhelming presence immediately drawing the attention of both Tristan and Odysseus. She watched with dark satisfaction as Tristan—armed with an elegant bow that gleamed in the chaotic light—desperately began kiting her beloved construct.

This masterpiece. Her Berserker. Inspired by her servant during the Fifth Holy Grail War.

She'd spent months perfecting it—long nights fine-tuning the design, searching for the proper departed soul's thoughts to infuse into the construct, balancing just the right type of violence and aggression. Failure after failure after failure, until that glorious moment when everything clicked.

Herakles 2.0, gloriously reborn. A testament to her growing mastery.

Meanwhile, Odysseus moved with calculated precision, his classical armour catching the light as he wielded his greatsword with unexpected finesse. Rather than engaging like a traditional knight—standing ground, trading blow for blow—he fought like a rogue. Darting in and out of combat with fluid grace, never lingering within range of Berserker's devastating attacks.

Smart. Annoying, but smart.

The construct's silent mouth gaped wide in a soundless roar of frustration, threads straining as it swung at empty air where Odysseus had been a heartbeat before.

The sight filled Olivia with grim satisfaction, but she wasn't done yet. Not even close.

Now that she'd extracted her pound of flesh, watching them scramble and panic, she still had to even the odds properly. The mathematics of revenge demanded balance—they'd taken three from her.

Well then. She'd take three from them.

And then more.

'Screw an eye for an eye,' she thought viciously. 'I'll take the whole head instead.'

Her gaze swept across the battlefield, tactical assessment mixing with predatory hunger as she tracked the movements of the prince's retinue.

There—Chris and Greg. Their faces betrayed mounting panic as Durga descended into their group like an avenging deity. Their previous positions as occasional long-range support had left them vulnerable; they'd clearly been avoiding the pocket free of the sword rain, unwilling to venture into the epicentre of fighting where guardian spirits clashed in brutal melee.

Cowards. Both of them.

The irony wasn't lost on her. A bitter laugh threatened to escape her throat.

In the game—that cursed otome game—Chris and Greg were the two who mainly depended on melee combat. *Especially* Chris, who was supposedly the son of the legendary Sword Saint himself. Yet here he stood, cowering at the edges like a frightened child rather than the warrior he was meant to be.

'Pathetic,' Olivia thought. *'Absolutely pathetic.'*

Above them all, Karna and Arjuna hovered like divine judges—their legendary presence undeniable yet strangely passive. They weren't taking advantage of their overwhelming strength to tip the scales further. Instead, the legendary duo had locked into an intense staring match with Leon, tension crackling between them like electricity.

It was Leon who shattered the standoff.

His characteristic pragmatism overcoming any hesitation, he summoned his two signature blades—Kanshou, black as midnight; Bakuya, white as fresh snow—the weapons materialising with practised ease. He launched himself towards the legendary pair with determined purpose.

"Olivia." Angelica's voice cut through her tactical assessment, accompanied by a firm hand on her shoulder. "Let's go."

She gestured towards the isolated Chris and Greg, who were growing more desperate by the second.

"Brit, help the rest," Angelica commanded. "Make absolutely certain they do not interfere with us. And send Meltryllis to assist Leon—he'll need the support against those two."

Olivia nodded approvingly at the plan, appreciating its elegant simplicity. The sooner we reduce their numbers, she thought with cold calculation, the easier it'll be to overwhelm the rest. Divide and conquer—the very same thing they planned they did at the start of the battle.

Her lips curved into a predatory smile. Olivia slammed her fist into her open palm with a satisfying crack, the gesture punctuating her bloodlust as her grin turned feral.

"Sounds like a perfect plan," she purred. "I hear no objections from Leon through the comms, so he's not against it. Melt—deposit us directly over the pair, then go help Leon with his legendary problem."

"Take care, Mistress Angelica!" Britomart called out, hefting her massive broadsword with ease despite its impressive width. Her ethereal wings flashed brilliantly as she leapt into the fray, trajectory calculated to cut off the prince's retreat route.

Julius was still carrying Marie in his arms, somehow managing to let her perform her healing even whilst being transported like precious cargo. The sight would have been romantic under different circumstances.

Now it was just a target.

The situation shifted dramatically. Julius was forced to place Marie down with obvious reluctance as Britomart closed in.

The pocket of space free from the endless rain of steel had descended protectively around the trio—Julius, Marie, and Jilk—who, like Chris and Greg, preferred to stay at the fringe borders rather than risk themselves in the free-for-all between guardian spirits. Jilk was desperately responsible for batting away the swords that threatened to pierce their defences, his movements growing increasingly frantic.

Now they faced another threat entirely. Dealing with a guardian spirit in power armour was doable—but incredibly difficult given their current circumstances.

'Good,' Olivia thought. *'Let them struggle.'*

Olivia and Angelica felt the familiar sensation of weightlessness as Meltryllis's wave lifted them again. The liquid motion was something they'd grown

accustomed to through repeated practice—cold but not unpleasant, like being cradled by living water.

They formed a wide, sweeping arc around the battling guardian spirits and her beloved Berserker, avoiding the worst of the combat whilst maintaining their element of surprise.

With practised precision, Meltryllis trapped both Olivia and Angelica within protective bubbles of her liquid form—somehow both yielding and impenetrable. Then she shot them forth like living projectiles towards the unsuspecting pair below.

Chris and Greg's vision was completely tunnelled. They were trapped in a desperate cycle—defending from the endless rain of swords whilst keeping wary eyes on the battle raging in front of them. One moment of distraction, one lapse in concentration, could lead to being ruthlessly removed from the board.

They never saw the attack coming from above.

"Surprise!" Olivia's voice rang out with vicious glee as they descended upon their prey.

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Chris and Greg looked up at the two descending women.

Their power armour was curious—showing more flesh than usual, clearly designed with aesthetics over practicality in mind. But the weight of magical output radiating from their forms was unmistakable. The sheer pressure of mana made the air itself feel heavy, crackling with barely contained energy that set every nerve in Chris's body on edge.

Angelica Rapha Redgrave and Olivia.

The woman they'd humiliated, and the commoner who'd dared to stand against them.

Angelica opened fire immediately—lance after lance of condensed flame erupting from her twin gunblades. Chris dodged the projectiles with practised precision, the heat singeing the air beside his face, scorching temperature felt even through his armour's protective enchantments.

But he could move now. The rain of steel that had pinned them down moments before had shifted elsewhere, giving him freedom to act.

His power armour had been begrudgingly updated with automatic shoulder foci—firing both live ammunition and magic. A modification he'd resisted for so long, believing it beneath a true swordsman. The same markings were etched onto his forearms, glowing faintly with stored mana. Light ordnance mounted at his back, waiting for the opportune moment to deploy.

The weight of it all felt foreign. *Wrong*. His trained muscles yearned for the simple elegance of a blade.

Yet the moment had already passed—Angelica and Olivia's sudden descent had stolen any chance to use it.

At first, he'd been resistant to these changes—utterly dedicated to his path with the sword. The path his father had walked. The path of honour and tradition.

But then Marie had cried.

Her voice breaking with genuine emotion, threatening to withhold affection whilst calling him stupid over and over again, tears streaming down her face. She'd grabbed his shoulders and shaken him, begging him to understand that pride meant nothing if he died.

He'd finally acquiesced. How could he not?

He wasn't the only one she'd done this to. Brad—first of their group to accept the modifications—and Greg had discovered the same thing: Marie was strict with them. Demanding. She'd cornered each of them individually, breaking

down their stubborn resistance with a combination of logic, emotion, and sheer determination that none of them could withstand.

But the more she complained, Chris realised, the more it revealed how deeply she cared.

The fact that she pushed to ensure his weaknesses were covered meant everything to him. It had been highlighted during their mock battles with inherited guardian spirits who had experienced much throughout the centuries. Those ancient beings had torn through their traditional tactics like paper, exposing every vulnerability with ruthless efficiency.

Marie had seen those failures and refused to let them happen again.

It was endearing, this fierce protectiveness of hers. It made him feel more love than he'd ever thought possible. The warmth in his chest when he thought of her overshadowed any embarrassment about abandoning tradition.

Which was why he wouldn't let the prince down. Not now. Not ever.

Imagining having to give up Marie—having her out of his life—was gut-wrenching. Like contemplating the loss of a limb. Or worse.

Not having the privilege of seeing the true Marie—the one beneath her public persona—would destroy him.

She was nothing like the other nobles who'd gladly give you the sweetest smile whilst stabbing you in the gut, honeyed words dripping with poison and false promises. Marie's honesty, even when it hurt, was refreshing in a world built on deception.

'She's real,' Chris thought fiercely. *'That's all that matters.'*

He'd been terrified when the behemoth started rampaging—its massive white form dwarfing everything around it, moving in eerie silence despite its fury. The fact that Bartfort could go toe-to-toe with the legendary guardian spirits of Holfort sent chills down his spine.

He was out of his league. The thought had nearly paralysed him.

No. He couldn't think like that anymore.

Chris was the son of the Sword Saint—one of the Big Four, the strongest this kingdom had to offer. It didn't matter if his father was cross with him over his choices, over Marie, over everything that had transpired.

He had found his resolve again. Burning bright in his chest like a forge-fire that would not be extinguished.

"For the prince," Chris declared, his voice ringing with newfound determination.

Then, as if to mock him, Angelica stepped into his domain with casual arrogance, her greaves touching down on the scorched earth with deliberate slowness. Each step unhurried. Measured. The casual arrogance of someone who had already decided the outcome.

She didn't say a word. She didn't need to.

With one more step, both weapons blazed to life—fire wreathing her twin gunblades until they burned like extensions of her fury. The heat rolled off her in waves, distorting the air around her silhouette, and for a moment she seemed less like a noblewoman and more like something *e/se*. Something older. Something merciless.

The Duke's daughter. The woman they had humiliated in front of the entire academy. The fiancée they had discarded like refuse.

She had come to collect.

Chris looked into the face of the woman scorned—weapons bathed in flame, eyes burning brighter than the fire itself—and for a moment his resolve wavered.

"Durga—incoming!" Leon's voice rang through the comms.

Olivia's head snapped up, her heart lurching in her chest as she cursed her momentary distraction. The gleaming lance in Greg Fou Seberg's hands whistled through the air mere inches from her face, its edges glowing white-hot with crackling magical energy. She could feel the heat radiating from the weapon as she jerked backwards, pulse hammering in her ears.

Greg's face was twisted into an expression that teetered between raw anger and something that looked almost like desperation—perhaps the dawning realisation that this battle wasn't going as he'd expected.

"Odysseus has retired from the battle!"

The announcement rang out across the battlefield, and Olivia felt a small surge of satisfaction bloom in her chest. Durga's handiwork—Leon's guardian spirit had been relentless in her pursuit of Chris's inherited spirit, and now it had paid off.

'One down,' she thought grimly. *'But still too many to go.'*

"Yes, Master!" Durga's voice resonated with eager anticipation, and Olivia could sense the guardian spirit's readiness thrumming through the comms.

Olivia's eyes darted across the chaotic battlefield, taking in the scene with practised efficiency. Her gaze caught the two missing guardian spirits—Lancelot and Arthur—as they streaked through Folkvangr like twin comets, their forms blurring with supernatural speed as they dodged and batted away the seemingly endless rain of swords. They were rushing back to rejoin the main engagement, and that meant their window of advantage was shrinking.

Seeing how the battle had shifted, she issued a quick mental command to Berserker, feeling the massive construct's acknowledgement reverberate through their connection like a deep, resonant gong. She directed its rampage towards the current free-for-all that had erupted between Pollux, Art, Ria, Oberon, Titania, and Roland—making sure it pushed Tristan into the fray.

The battlefield was becoming increasingly chaotic, but chaos was something she could work with.

Chaos meant opportunities.

With fluid grace that belied the weight of her weapons, Olivia slashed forward with two of her large degen. The massive blades floated above her head like the wings of some avenging angel, sweeping through the air in devastating arcs that forced Greg to stumble backwards. His eyes widened at the sheer reach and power of her attack, feet scrambling for purchase on the churned earth.

'Good,' she thought with grim satisfaction. '*Keep him off-balance.*'

"Ria, Pollux, Art," she called out, her voice carrying clearly across the din of battle, "I'm sending Berserker towards you—make sure your fight bleeds into the Prince's current position. The more distracted Marie is, the less healing they'll receive."

'*And the less they can coordinate,*' she added silently, watching as understanding dawned in her allies' movements. This wasn't just about overwhelming force—it was about disrupting their enemies' synergy, breaking down the careful teamwork that had made them formidable in the opening exchanges, well, after Leon's devastating first strike.

"Aye, aye!" came Ria's casual reply, the guardian spirit's tone almost playful despite the intensity of the combat surrounding her.

From the corner of her eye, Olivia tracked Ria's movement as the guardian spirit took to the sky, her form silhouetted against Folkvangr's artificial light. Brilliant arcs of magical energy rained down from above before Ria dove back into the fray with renewed vigour, her double lance spinning in devastating patterns.

Oberon caught her lance with his blackened, clawed hand—his fae nature manifesting in that monstrous transformation—whilst simultaneously batting

away another heavy strike from Art. The cosmic fairy's movements were fluid but increasingly desperate, forced to defend on multiple fronts.

Meanwhile, Pollux had closed in on Titania, engaging the Marie look-alike in brutal close-quarters combat. The brawler was releasing magical traps in an intricate pattern around her opponent, each one designed to force Titania into Pollux's rhythm, herding her into an increasingly small pocket of viable movement like a wolf corralling prey.

'Perfect,' Olivia thought, allowing herself a small, predatory smile. *'Everything's coming together nicely.'*

"Are you mocking me?" Greg's sudden exclamation cut through her tactical assessment, his voice cracking with indignation.

Olivia, who had just executed another sweeping strike with her threaded constructs, raised an eyebrow at the outburst. *'What's got into him now?'* she wondered, genuinely puzzled by the timing of his indignation. She studied his face, noting the way his jaw clenched and unclenched, and the white-knuckled grip on his lance, which spoke of barely restrained fury.

Her mind drifted back to that night when Angelica had thrown down the gauntlet—well, technically the white glove. She remembered Greg running his mouth then too, all puffed-up pride and aristocratic superiority that had grated on her nerves like sandpaper.

Though now that she thought about it, she wasn't entirely certain who had started the verbal sparring that night. *'He was the one who started it, right? Not me?'* The memory was a bit fuzzy, coloured by adrenaline and the general chaos of that evening. *'Though knowing me, I probably didn't help matters...'*

"So now you're being quiet—you were running your mouth that ni—BLAGH!"

Greg's accusation was cut short as Olivia shot him directly in the face with a quick gandr, the cursed energy splashing across his features like invisible acid. His countenance immediately looked worse for wear—skin paling, eyes watering—though she could see the effects were being mitigated by whatever

defensive enchantments were woven into his power armour. The faint shimmer of protective magic flickered across his whole body, absorbing the worst of the curse.

'Quality gear,' she noted with professional interest, already preparing her next volley. *'But not quality enough.'*

"Who was running their mouth?" Olivia demanded, her voice sharp with indignation as she rushed forward.

She reinforced her body with magical energy, layering the enhancement on top of the reinforcements already provided by her power armour. The dual reinforcement made her feel almost weightless, every movement flowing with supernatural grace and power that sang through her muscles. Her degen manoeuvred around Greg like predatory birds, their movements guided by her will, forcing him to veer left into her waiting attack.

She fired off a few more gandr in rapid succession, each curse bullet crackling with malevolent energy as it streaked towards her target. It was a technique she'd mastered around the second month of the academy, born from countless hours of practice and experimentation in the quiet hours when sleep eluded her—a technique she saw used and abused by one of Shirou, or rather Leon's previous lovers.

The spell was essentially a clever application of the rune uruz's actualisation, tweaking the mystery to express its opposite meaning—instead of strength and vitality, it brought weakness and decay. A fitting curse for someone who prided himself on physical prowess.

"You were the shithead who started posturing about 'saving us the humiliation' and going home!" Olivia yelled, her complaint carrying genuine frustration that had been simmering since that night. The memory of that confrontation was crystal clear now, Greg's condescending tone and superior attitude flooding back to her in vivid detail.

"Look who's humiliated now—you, the sons of the high lords of this kingdom who outnumbered us more than twice, are now scrambling, trying to delay the

inevitable, wishing the guardian spirits Julius and Jilk inherited would do more than what they're doing!"

"You dare—BLAGH! Stop that!" Greg blustered as another gandr caught him square in the face, even as he managed to parry another thrust from Olivia's degen. His frustration was palpable, written in every line of his body, and Olivia couldn't help but feel a vindictive satisfaction at his discomfort.

"Not so superior now, are you?"

"You and your group aren't strong!" Greg swiped again, creating distance between them with a wide arc of his lance. The weapon hummed with magical energy as it cut through the air, forcing Olivia to respect its reach. He bounced back immediately with a thrust towards Olivia's centre mass, his face a mask of concentration as he tried to regain the initiative.

A quick magic circle flashed into existence above Olivia's head, glowing with ominous violet light that promised pain.

Without missing a beat, Olivia placed her hand directly on the circle, cycling her od through her circuits as she forcefully interrupted the spell's formation. She could feel the magic resisting her intrusion, trying to complete its pattern, but her will was stronger. The magic circle shattered like glass, its fragments dissolving into motes of fading light that drifted away on the battlefield's turbulent winds.

"Amateur," she said dismissively. "Did you really think that would work?"

Greg ignored this casual display of magical prowess—or perhaps he simply couldn't afford to acknowledge it—stepping forward with renewed determination. His lance came up in a guard position as he advanced, each step deliberate despite the punishment he'd already taken.

"All of you were lucky—if it weren't for us escorting you to the bottom of the dungeon, you wouldn't have contracted with these strong guardian spirits—these aren't your strength, you were just lucky!"

The words hung in the air for a moment, heavy with accusation and wilful ignorance.

And then Olivia's composure cracked.

"HAHAHA—wait—HAHA—wait."

The laughter burst out of her before she could stop it, genuine mirth at the sheer absurdity of his claim bubbling up from somewhere deep in her chest. She found herself clutching at her sides, the laughter making her ribs ache as she backtracked away from Greg's pursuit. Tears pricked at the corners of her eyes—not from sadness, but from the hilarity of his delusion.

'Oh, you poor, deluded fool,' she thought through her laughter, timing her counterattack perfectly even as her body shook with mirth.

He was advancing on her now, clearly thinking her laughter was a sign of weakness, that he'd finally gained the upper hand. His lance drew back for a killing thrust, confidence flooding back into his movements.

With lightning speed, Olivia transitioned from her backwards movement into a forward step, closing the distance before he could react. Her fist drove deep into Greg's stomach with all the force her reinforced body could muster, the impact folding him nearly in half with a satisfying *whump* of expelled air.

She followed up by firing several more gandr shots directly into his stunned face, the curses splashing across his features in rapid succession. Her degen didn't remain idle either, slashing viciously at his exposed back while he was doubled over. The power armour cracked and split open under the assault, leaving a shallow but painful gash across his back that welled with blood.

"So what?" she asked, her voice dripping with disdain as she watched him struggle to recover, his breath coming in ragged gasps. "You know, you did this at the party, too—you sure like to run your mouth. If you want to talk so bad, why not invite me for tea next time?"

'Though I'd probably poison it,' she added mentally, watching as her taunts had their desired effect. His face flushed an angry red, veins standing out on his forehead.

Between dry heaves and gasps for air, Greg managed to speak through gritted teeth, "I'll crush you to pieces!"

The threat would have been more impressive if he hadn't been hunched over, clutching his stomach.

"At least your power armour is better quality this time compared to what you brought on the raid," Olivia mocked as she deflected his spear with almost contemptuous ease, the weapon glancing off her shield construct with a shower of sparks.

Greg tried to fly backwards, seeking distance to regroup and catch his breath, but Olivia was already ahead of him. She manoeuvred more of her nanosilk threads—an innovation she'd developed with Luxion during long nights in the workshop, the magitech through which she can channel her mysteries through—wrapping them around Greg's leg with surgical precision.

The result was immediate and undignified: Greg face-planted hard into the ground, his body crashing down with a heavy thud that knocked the wind out of him.

"What's the matter? Go on, weren't you running?!" Olivia sent another slash from her degen, and more of Greg's power armour was stripped away, revealing the desperate man beneath the noble facade. Sparks flew as enchanted metal tore free from its housing, clattering to the ground in broken pieces.

"Dammit!" Greg wailed, his voice cracking with frustration and humiliation. "Let me go!"

"Like I'd actually listen to you, idiot." *The entitlement of these nobles*, she thought with disgust. *Even when they're losing, they still think they can give orders.*

With methodical precision, Olivia completely annihilated what remained of Greg's suit, leaving him in nothing but a form-fitting bodysuit that did nothing to hide his vulnerability.

"Having fun?!" Greg spat from his prone position on the ground, his pride clearly more wounded than his body. He struggled to rise, muscles trembling from the accumulated damage. "You even call yourself a knight! You're only beating us because you're using that power armour!"

The accusation hung in the air, and Olivia felt something snap inside her. The sheer *audacity* of it—to claim her victory was due to equipment after everything she'd worked for.

'*Fine,*' she thought, cold fury crystallising into decision. '*Let's remove that excuse too.*'

With a thought, her power armour began to retract. The advanced technology folded away piece by piece, plates sliding back into their compact housing with soft mechanical whispers, until she stood there in just a two-piece outfit—a skirt and a tube top that she'd worn underneath. The cool air of the battlefield kissed her exposed skin, raising goosebumps along her arms, but she didn't flinch. Didn't show a single moment of weakness.

"Oh!" She spread her arms wide, inviting him to look. "You really think it was only our power armour and guardian spirits that made us win the fight?"

She began to pace, her voice taking on a lecturing tone that she knew would infuriate him further. Each step was deliberate, her bare feet pressing into the churned earth as she circled her fallen opponent.

"The fact that everyone is holding onto the idea that they apparently *escorted* us to the bottom of the dungeon is particularly amusing—when originally I only offered Angelica the chance for adventure." She paused, letting the words sink in. "My original plan was just Leon, Angelica, and I—along with our guardian spirits—would alone traverse the dungeon."

She could see the confusion flickering across Greg's face, the gears turning as he tried to reconcile this information with his assumptions.

"It was Angelica's idea to involve the academy—and you didn't even think of the fact that we cleared each floor, so you and your precious classmates could go straight to each boss, and you think we were escorted!"

The irony of it all was almost too much. They'd done the hard work, the dangerous work, clearing out every enemy, every hazard, making it safe for the others to simply waltz through to swoop in and fight the boss of each floor. And now Greg had the audacity to claim they'd been the ones being protected?

'Unbelievable,' she thought, shaking her head. *'The rewriting of history these nobles engage in would be impressive if it weren't so infuriating.'*

With deliberate slowness, Olivia kicked the lance that lay clattered on the ground towards Greg, the weapon spinning across the churned earth to stop just within his reach. The metal gleamed dully in the light, an invitation and a challenge all at once.

"Now let me also remove one more of your assumptions—I am now not wearing the power armour." She gestured at herself, at the exposed skin and minimal clothing that left no room for hidden enhancements. "Now stand up—I'm sick of your blustering. Show me this vaunted strength of what you think a knight should be!"

The mockery in her voice was razor-sharp, cutting deeper than any blade could.

She watched him scramble desperately for the lance, his movements graceless and panicked—a far cry from the confident noble who had sneered at her that night at the ball. His fingers closed around the familiar grip, and for a moment, hope flickered in his eyes.

It wouldn't last.

As Greg looked back at her, probably expecting to see fear or uncertainty now that she'd removed her armour, Olivia calmly plucked out several strands from her hair. The motion was almost casual, as if she were merely fixing her appearance rather than preparing for violence.

Even without the support of the power armour, she knew Greg could still hear it—the thunderous stomping that accompanied the approach of the monstrous construct she'd summoned. Berserker's footfalls shook the ground, each impact sending tremors through the earth, its massive white form looming ever closer. The construct moved in eerie silence otherwise, its mouth gaping in a soundless roar as it decimated everything in its path.

"Unlike you," Olivia continued, her voice carrying a weight of contempt that could crush stone, "I don't enjoy harassing the weak."

Greg froze, the lance trembling in his grip. "Wh-what the—? What in the world are you saying?!"

"I said I don't enjoy tormenting those beneath me, unlike you and your friends." Olivia tilted her head, studying him like one might study a particularly unimpressive insect. "Are you really that hard of hearing?"

"Enough of your nonsense!" he howled, desperation cracking his voice. "We've never bullied the weak!"

"Ah ha ha ha!" Olivia couldn't help cracking up, the laughter spilling out of her unbidden. "You have some goddamn nerve. You had the gall to come out, so confident in your abilities. But you underestimated me."

She stepped closer, her smile turning cruel, predatory.

"You're no different from any other guy. You're strong, I'll give you that, but you acted so tough when we agreed to the duel. I expected you to put up a fight, but look at you." She gestured at his prone, stripped form. "You're worthless. You're nobody. And you know what? It doesn't sit right with me to torment small fry, so I wanted to end this quickly."

Another step. Close enough to see the sweat beading on his brow.

"Not that you'd understand—I really am too kind spelling this out for you."

"Argh!" Greg scrambled to his feet, grabbing his lance and rushing forward with the desperation of a cornered animal—but paused at the last second, something making him look up.

His face went pale.

The strands of hair in Olivia's hand had begun to transform. They shifted and writhed like living things, taking on new shapes, new purposes. The white nanomachine silk caught the light as more constructs began to materialise around her—each one formed from the essence of predatory creatures, circling their prey with patient, hungry menace.

Wings. Claws. Fangs. All woven from thread, but no less deadly for their construction.

Olivia smiled, and there was nothing kind in it.

"Shall we finish this?"

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"G-Greg has retired from the battle."

The announcer's voice was sullen at this point, each word dripping with disappointment that seemed to echo through the arena. Jilk felt the weight of those words settle heavily upon his shoulders, a cold dread creeping up his spine as he parried another devastating strike from Angelica's guardian spirit.

His arm—despite the reinforcement given by his armour—shook violently from the sheer force the greatsword delivered. The impact reverberated through his bones, sending sharp jolts of pain up to his shoulder that made his teeth clench.

'We're losing ground,' he thought grimly, his mind racing through scenario after scenario—both possible and impossible—even as his body moved on pure instinct.

Currently, the three of them—Julius, Marie, and himself—were circling the guardian spirit like wolves around a bear. Except they were the ones being hunted.

Marie—their beloved, their precious one—was now forced to participate directly in the brawl, her delicate hands gripping her weapon when they should have been weaving healing magic. She was no longer given the time to heal or provide her enchantments, every attempt interrupted by that relentless guardian spirit.

Jilk's heart clenched at the sight of her in such danger. This wasn't how it was supposed to be. She should have been safely behind their lines, protected, cherished—not fighting for her life in the thick of combat.

Though to be fair—Marie was quite the wild lady when she took vanguard duty.

They'd first witnessed this during the descent into Bartfort's cosmic dungeon, and later when she'd insisted on training for the skirmish. They'd delved the capital dungeon together, and it was yet another thing everyone had found quite endearing about her.

Despite her calm and poised persona in public, she could be charismatic, cute, and surprisingly energetic in private. A hidden fire that burned beneath that demure exterior—one that only their intimate circle was privileged to witness.

Jilk shot forth several blades of wind towards the guardian spirit, the compressed air screaming as it cut through the battlefield. The spirit batted them aside with casual ease, barely breaking stride as she rushed towards Marie.

Every time they attempted to create space for Marie to apply enchantments or desperately needed healing, the guardian spirit would shift her entire focus—directing her full, terrifying attention to Marie alone. The admittedly stunning spirit showed no mercy, caring not for propitious moments to strike at Julius or himself.

She pursued Marie with single-minded determination whenever the healer paused to cast.

It was an obvious tactic on their part—something they should have planned for. But they hadn't anticipated being put in this position. Not with their numerical advantage. Not with all their careful preparations.

They'd thought it would be simple: Jilk, the prince, and several guardian spirits guarding Marie, while the rest overwhelmed Angelica and her group. With Marie's healing, they'd be unstoppable.

How could they have predicted this? How could they have known that their formations would shatter, their groups separated and scattered across the battlefield? Who would have thought the enemy could isolate Marie from most of her guards so effectively?

This was them underestimating their opponent.

This was *his* fault—as the person who had proposed most of the battle plans.

'No plan survives contact with the enemy,' the old military adage whispered through his mind. *'But if only I'd taken them more seriously from the start...'*

Even now, with his latest gambit, Jilk had deliberately left his body open to devastating blows, hoping to buy time for Marie. After all, she could simultaneously heal everyone in their group with her unique magic—he'd gladly endure significant injury if it would secure them just one step closer to victory.

But the point was moot. The guardian spirit wisely prioritised Marie whenever she tried to cast, ignoring Jilk's sacrificial openings entirely.

'She won't even take the bait,' he thought bitterly.

"NOOOO!"

Jilk's eyes widened in shock and dismay as multiple pillars of brilliant light suddenly flashed across the battlefield. His heart sank as he recognised the magic signature—but it wasn't Marie's gentle, warm healing light.

It was the opposing team's.

The radiance was different. Somehow purer, more intense, and infinitely more demoralising. It washed over the enemy combatants in golden waves, knitting wounds and restoring vigour with effortless grace.

Olivia. The scholarship student who had become the talk of the academy.

The girl who, just before enrolling, had somehow managed to earn knighthood. She and that irritating Baron Bartfort had discovered several valuable dungeons for the kingdom, catapulting them both to fame and fortune in a way that defied all social conventions.

Quite frankly, Jilk had been surprised when they'd volunteered. Most of Angelica's allied families' sons and daughters had smartly declined to step in—self-preservation winning over loyalty. So it had been unexpected when Bartfort stepped forward.

At the time, Jilk had simply chalked it up as a no-name family brownnosing above their station. Desperate social climbers seeking favour with the Redgraves.

A shame, really. With his achievements, Bartfort would have made quite a good asset to the kingdom once Julius ascended to the crown. Competent commoners and minor nobles were always useful tools.

'Too bad he'll go down with the Redgraves' fall,' Jilk had thought dismissively.

At least, that's what he'd believed at the time.

How naïve that assumption seemed now.

And now Olivia had demonstrated—just as she had near the battle's start—that she could employ wide-area targeted healing exactly like Marie could.

The implications hit Jilk like a physical blow.

Everything on the enemy side had completely reset. All their injuries healed. All their stamina restored. The careful damage they'd inflicted, the gradual wearing down of their opponents—all of it erased in an instant.

Meanwhile, their own numbers were slowly but steadily dwindling.

They still possessed numerical advantage, but it was a small margin at this point. Growing smaller with each passing moment.

'We need a new strategy,' Jilk thought desperately. *'Or we're finished.'*

"MOU!! Unfair! Unfair!! Unfair!!!"

Marie's adorable complaint rang out across the battlefield—that endearing character they'd all fallen in love with suddenly emerging from beneath her usual public facade. This was something she normally reserved strictly for private moments, only shown in front of Jilk, the prince, and their intimate circle.

And then she moved.

Without warning, Marie kicked off from the ground, charging directly at the greatsword-wielding guardian spirit with reckless abandon. She wielded her own single-bladed two-handed sword—a katana, as she called it—the weapon cutting an elegant silhouette as she closed the distance.

Her blade traced along the flat side of the guardian's greatsword, sliding past the spirit's guard with surprising speed and grace. Planting her feet firmly with perfect form, she delivered a magically reinforced fist directly to the guardian spirit's core.

The impact was thunderous.

The massive construct went flying backwards through the air, tumbling end over end before crashing into the churned earth with enough force to crater the ground.

Jilk stared, momentarily forgetting the chaos around him.

'That's our Marie.'

Though an unfortunate complication was that the pocket of space free from the rain of steel moved with the guardian spirits—and they were forced to scramble desperately, covering for each other whilst taking pot shots at whoever they could reach.

The metallic storm followed them like a predator stalking prey, never quite letting up, never allowing them a moment's respite. Each movement had to be calculated, each dodge perfectly timed, or they'd find themselves skewered by the relentless barrage from above.

It was exhausting. Demoralising. And there was no end in sight.

Jilk risked a glance upward, his heart sinking as he took in the most problematic opponents of them all—Baron Bartfort and his guardian spirit, now accompanied by a lunar spirit he recognised from earlier. The one who wielded water like an extension of herself, her movements fluid and graceful even in the chaos of battle.

The sight made his chest tighten with a mixture of frustration and grudging respect.

That the baron could go toe-to-toe with Karna—the legendary spirit who the royal family had boasted he could fight entire armies single-handedly—sent a chill down Jilk's spine. When combined with Arjuna, they formed a pair that had never truly lost a battle. Legends in their own right. Warriors whose names were spoken with reverence and fear throughout the kingdom.

Yet here was this upstart noble, this baron from a no-name family, matching them blow for blow as if it were child's play.

'Who is this man?' Jilk wondered, not for the first time.

Though frustratingly, the two legendary spirits seemed not to be giving their all—only truly engaging when directly prompted by their masters.

Jilk could see it clearly, using the enhancement his power armour provided to sharpen his vision. The legendary pair seemed... lively. Almost *enjoying* themselves, trading blows with the baron as if this were a sparring match rather than a battle that would determine the fates of the Prince and Marie.

'If they'd just take this seriously—'

Julius, ever the opportunist, took advantage of the pair's apparent distraction. He raised his sword and shot a beam of pure white energy towards the back of the lunar guardian spirit—perfectly timed, brilliantly executed.

It should have connected.

But suddenly, without warning, several swords materialised behind the guardian spirit, arranged in an intricate mesh pattern. Before Jilk could even process what he was seeing, they turned outward towards their group, more than quadrupling in size as they shot forward with lethal intent.

'How does he do that?' Jilk wondered frantically as he dove aside, the displaced air from a passing blade ruffling his hair. *'Where do these weapons even come from?'*

Neither he nor the others dared try to parry the blades—the sheer foolishness of such an attempt was obvious from the craters they left on impact. Instead, they dodged and weaved around the utter destruction these constructs caused, each one carrying tremendous weight and devastating acceleration.

Every impact sent tremors through the ground. Earth and stone exploded outward in deadly shrapnel, forcing them to keep moving, keep dodging, never able to find a stable footing.

It was like fighting a natural disaster.

Then, without any warning or visible casting, a large formation of water coalesced around the battling trio above them. The liquid barrier shimmered and rippled, hiding everything within its aqueous depths and distorting Jilk's view of the aerial combat.

Arjuna and Karna fired into the seemingly floating body of water with increasing frequency, their attacks, seemingly, growing more desperate. Arrows of light and lances of solar fire disappeared into the depths without any visible effect, swallowed by the mysterious aquatic shield as if it were bottomless.

'What kind of magic is this?' Jilk thought, genuinely unnerved. 'I've never seen anything like it.'

Then globules of water began to fall from the pool, each one catching the light like deadly jewels as they descended.

Swords shot out from different points within the pool in retaliation—aimed at Karna and Arjuna, each blade's trajectory impossible to predict. They emerged from seemingly random positions within the water mass, turning the floating sphere into a fortress bristling with lethal projectiles.

And still the globules continued to fall, drifting down towards the battlefield below with deceptive gentleness.

The water globules descended gently around the area, their peaceful drift completely at odds with the chaos of battle. They looked almost beautiful, like morning dew falling in slow motion.

Jilk's instincts screamed at him.

'This is wrong. This is a trap!'

Then one hit the ground.

His worst fears were confirmed—the globule burst into a devastating wave of icicles and blades, exploding outward at extreme speeds. The transformation

was instantaneous and horrifying, turning that single droplet into a garden of frozen death and steel that shredded everything in its radius.

More globules were landing. Dozens of them.

The entire battlefield was about to become a killing field.

Jilk threw himself behind cover, feeling icicles whistle past his head close enough to draw blood from his cheek. When he dared to look again, his frustration and disbelief mounted to new heights.

Everyone on the opposing team had somehow been prewarned about this attack.

They'd taken cover or defended themselves at precisely the right moment—Angelica behind a conjured shield, Olivia protected by one of her constructs, their guardian spirits positioned in safe zones as if they'd *known* exactly where the explosions would occur.

And now, while Jilk's side was still reeling from the onslaught, the enemy was already bouncing back. Already charging in. Already pressing their advantage with ruthless efficiency.

'Coordinated,' he thought bitterly. *'They're completely coordinated, and we're falling apart.'*

"Everyone, we need to rotate positions!" Julius urgently commanded, his voice cutting through the chaos with authority.

Jilk could see the chaotic brawl between opposing guardian spirits heading their way—a roiling mass of magical energy and destruction that they'd been desperately trying to avoid throughout the entire battle. The melee was a death trap for anyone caught in its midst, and it was getting closer by the second.

But the massive white construct the scholarship student had conjured were wreaking havoc across the entire battlefield, constantly pushing the chaotic battle towards them no matter how they tried to manoeuvre. Every time they

found a safe position, those silent, monstrous things would herd the fighting in their direction.

"Titania and Tristan have retired from the battle."

The announcement made Jilk's blood run cold. Two more of their guardian spirits, gone. Their numerical advantage was evaporating like morning mist.

"NOOOO—Could this possibly get any worse?" Marie asked, her voice carrying a note of desperation that made Jilk's heart ache. Her usual composure was cracking, the strain of the battle finally showing through her carefully maintained facade.

He wanted to comfort her. Wanted to tell her everything would be alright.

He couldn't. Because he wasn't sure it would be.

"Incoming!" Jilk shouted as he pushed his power armour to its limits, rocketing towards Marie and the prince.

He batted aside more of the rain of steel with desperate swings of his weapon, conserving his magic for when he truly needed it. His enhanced vision caught sight of two more globules falling dangerously close to their area, and his stomach dropped.

'Not again—'

But it wasn't another chaotic bomb of icicles and swords this time.

The globules burst apart like eggs hatching nightmares, and from within emerged Leon and his guardian spirit. Both of them looked far too fresh for how long this battle had been raging—no visible injuries, no signs of exhaustion, nothing to suggest they'd been fighting at all.

Jilk's gaze snapped upward to the pool of water still hovering above them. It was still shooting swords towards Karna and Arjuna, still maintaining that impenetrable aquatic barrier whilst the legendary pair fired back with increasing desperation.

'If they're down here,' Jilk thought, 'then who's controlling that?'

The answer, he suspected, was that it didn't need controlling anymore. The baron had set his trap, and now he was here to spring it personally.

"Arjuna! Karna! They're here!" Jilk shouted, bracing himself for what was coming next.

"Incoming!" Marie declared with alarm that bordered on panic, her voice pitched higher than usual. "Big sword-wielding fairy is coming back for another round!"

Jilk would have laughed at the description if the situation weren't so dire.

'When it rains, it pours.'

The fitting saying his family tutors had drilled into him suddenly sprang to mind—an ancient adage from the old world, back when humanity still lived on the surface of the planet, before they'd been driven to the skies. He'd never truly understood its meaning until this precise moment.

Leon and his guardian spirit were charging towards them with murderous intent, their approach inexorable as an avalanche. The baron's heterochromatic eyes—one gold, one silver—were fixed on their position with predatory focus.

Angelica's guardian spirit was flying towards them from another angle, greatsword gleaming with deadly promise, fairy wings blazing as she closed the distance.

And the chaotic battle between multiple guardian spirits, plus the monstrous white construct created by the scholarship student, was heading towards them like a storm front. The silent behemoth herded the fighting ever closer, their eyeless face somehow radiating malevolent intent.

They were being surrounded. Hemmed in. Trapped.

"Chris has retired from the battle."

Another announcement. Another nail in their coffin. The Sword Saint's son, defeated.

One thought surfaced in Jilk's mind, the words escaping his lips before he could stop them—not even registering that he'd spoken aloud:

"When it rains, it sometimes truly, catastrophically pours."

Julius shot him a look. Marie's eyes widened at the uncharacteristic admission of despair.

'We're going to lose,' the realisation hit him like a physical blow, stealing the breath from his lungs. *'We're actually going to lose this.'*

He looked at Marie—precious, wonderful Marie, who had brought light into all their lives. Looked at Julius—his prince, his friend, the future king he'd sworn to serve.

'Unless—'

His jaw tightened.

'No. If it's for the prince, pride be damned!'

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End

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