

Spirit Sword Chapter 21

SS Chapter 21

Chapter 21. Goodbye

TL: Warriormonk

Editor: Isleidir

They had moved to a location a bit further away, but the atmosphere between them remained just as awkward. Bishop Rains face was scrunched up, a result of him trying to think too hard. The situation that was presented to him remained that difficult to solve.

How bothersome.

Bishop Rain straightened up and looked at Luke.

First of all, there is something you need to promise me.

What is that?

What you saw just a while back, and the conversation we are about to have, must remain between the people here and never be revealed to anyone else.

Luke stared at the Bishop blankly.

Why must I promise you anything?

The Earl jumped into the conversation, growling fiercely.

Because if you do not promise, you will die by my hand.

This time, it was Isabelle who spoke.

Fine. If you kill Luke, you'll be killing me as well. We will at least be together in death.

Isabelle silently dug herself deeper into Lukes arms. The Earl and the Bishop flinched as one. Isabelle was a woman that had every possibility of developing into a Saintess, and was a resource that they had painstakingly procured and unwilling to lose.

Looking at the situation, you seem to be Lady Isabelles fiance. Is that correct?

It is.

It is to my knowledge that the Lea Marquisate has already broken off the engagement.

Luke shook his head, firmly denying the Bishops Intel.

The breaking off of an engagement requires acknowledgement from the engaged. I never agreed to call off the engagement.

I also never agreed to break off the engagement.

The Bishop silently looked at Luke, then at Isabelle, and lowered his voice.

As you wish. Either way, I will only start negotiating once you both promise to take these secrets to the grave. Do you swear to do so?

Luke pondered upon the issue for a moment before glancing at Isabelle.

All right. I will promise to do so.

Just a promise does not suffice.

The Earl glanced at Luke up and down with sharp eyes.

Have you been knighted?

Yes, sir.

Swear an oath of secrecy on your honor as a knight. Only then can I trust you.

Luke stared at the earl in the eyes as he said his next words.

I, Luke Esteban, as an officially knighted member of the Esteban Earldom, swear on my honor that I will not share what has happened and will happen here and now with anyone else.

The Earl and the Bishop visibly relaxed as Luke finished swearing the oath of secrecy.

Now that I have made the oath, I believe its time for you to tell me about who you are and why you massacred the holy knights of the church of Flora. And

Luke looked at the Earl with cautious eyes.

Please tell me who the aura master is.

I will tell you everything.

Bishop Rain silently but gladly began to explain all the circumstances surrounding the ambush.

We are people from the church of Maal.

At the mention of Maal, Luke glanced at Kurotan. Kurotan remained stone faced, not revealing any emotion.

From the very beginning, Kurotan has never trusted any human other than Luke. Even if they served or worshipped the same god, it meant nothing to Kurotan.

Bishop Rain continued on to explain what had happened five years ago. The crimes committed by Archbishop Aznan were revealed, one by one.

We believe that the ambush today was a justified act of vengeance.

Luke remained heavy faced after hearing out all of the Bishops explanations. He had not known that there was a seemingly sufficient explanation for the massacre, but he also did not wish to blindly stand on the side of the church of Maal.

That does not make the massacre you committed right.  
Of course not. However, we truly desperately need Lady Isabelle.  
It was normal for the strength of a church to be determined by the number of its members. This made it so that small churches, such as the church of Maal, were always desperate for high level priests, or Saints and Saintesses. Only then would the church be able to receive funding from high nobles, or even approach them.  
Despite the situation, I think one thing stands to our advantage.  
And what is that?  
Unlike the church of Flora, our church of Maal does not forbid marriage for high ranking members of the church.  
Is that true?  
It is. I myself am wed, and have children. You can trust me.  
If that's so  
Lukes face brightened with excitement. Isabelle also brightened up with anticipation.  
Please, let us take care of Isabelle. After being baptized at the main temple, we can train her in the knowledge of handling holy power in a year. After that  
Rain looked at Luke and then Isabelle.  
Whatever you two decide to do will be up to you.  
Even so, if Isabelle is revealed to be a Saintess of the church of Maal, would the church of Flora not take any action?  
The Bishop flinched. Luke had just pointed out a fact that he was most worried about.  
Just as Luke said, how could the church of Flora possibly remain still if Isabelle went missing for a year and then came out to the world as a Saintess of the church of Maal? Without a doubt, they would first move to kidnap Isabelle, then possibly interrogate her in order to find out the truth behind the ambush.  
It is our plan to have a retinue of faithful holy knights guard her.  
The holy knights of the church of Flora vastly outnumber yours.  
That is true  
Bishop Rain couldn't come up with an answer and was stalling when the Earl spoke up.  
A lot of words.

Even if they wish to take her, they must first get through me. Do you think that is possible?  
Luke shook his head darkly. How could anyone oppose an aura master capable of massacring thirty holy knights in an instant?  
Even if it is possible, if you take off with Isabelle now, you will be pursued viciously by the church of Flora. How could they do nothing when their holy knights are dead? Whoever is in her custody will be unable to avoid pursuit from the church of Flora.  
The Earl took a look at Luke, who remained silent.  
So stop complaining and let the Bishop take care of her. Just as he said, our church allows high ranking members of the church to marry. Come find her after a year has passed. I am the aura master of Sis Kingdom, Earl Wellington.  
The bishop turned to the Earl in astonishment when the Earl revealed his identity.  
Earl?  
It's all right, do not worry about it.  
The Earl calmed down the Bishop and gazed once again at Luke.  
After a year, come find me and I will tell you the location of the monastery she will be training in. However  
A strange smile spread across the Earls face.  
Come to me only after you've found a way to protect her from the church of Flora. Whether it involves becoming stronger yourself, or accruing influence.  
The Earl turned from Luke towards Kurotan.  
Looking at your apprentice knight, it seems you are quite talented in discovering and raising other talents. If you are to protect your woman, shouldn't you try your best at anything you can do?  
Lukes face turned ugly with a frown. It seemed that he would have to clean up the aftermath of the church of Maals ambush. However, he didn't see any other way to solve the problem at hand.  
Yes, it was my plan to elope with Isabelle at the first chance anyways. I must become powerful enough to protect Isabelle.  
Having made a decision, Luke looked into Isabelles eyes.  
Isabelle, do you trust me?  
Of course. If not you, then who would I trust in this world?  
Then trust me and wait just a year.  
Luke gripped his fists tightly.  
Not just the church of Flora, but no one else in the world will be able to touch you. I will become powerful enough to protect you from anything.  
Luke  
Isabelles eyelashes trembled. The Earls face turned ugly as Isabelle jumped into Lukes arms once more.  
Goddamn younglings

Thankfully, no one could see his expression under the helmet.

There is no other way as of now. Follow Bishop Rain and go get baptized into the church of Maal. I will be raising the strength to protect you in the meantime.

I trust you.

You can wait, right?

I've already waited five years. One year is nothing.

The next time we meet, I promise we'll never have to leave each other. I promise.

Luke reassuringly patted Isabelle's back for a while before turning to the Bishop.

Please, take good care of her.

The Bishops' face brightened.

Do not worry. We will put our brightest and most faithful minds into educating and training her.

Luke then turned towards the Earl.

I will come find you after a year. Please, let me know of her location when I do.

Only if you have become powerful enough to protect her from the church of Flora, of course. Whether that be personal power, or through influence.

I will see you after a year.

And so, Isabelle left Luke. For the Isabelle who kept turning back to see Luke, Luke kept on smiling and waving his hand until she rode out of sight.

However, when she was finally out of his sight, Luke's face tightened. A roar of pain ripped through his lips.

Fate, why can't you just leave Isabelle alone?

His tightly gripped fists trembled, as his eyes turned red in anger.

I will make Isabelle happy, no matter what I have to do. Fate, I will crush you with my bare hands if I have to.

The only one around to hear his oath was Kurotan.

The annihilation of the party of holy knights from the church of Flora was soon reported to the soldiers patrolling the border. A team of investigators from the church of Flora soon showed up to the scene.

The scene, however, made the holy knights become pale.

This was done by a single person.

He pointed out his finger to the cleanly cut armor.

Along with the shield, he cut through the armor and body in a single stroke. This is an impossible feat even with the best magic blades.

The leader of the team of investigators, Lancaster, stiffened.

Then

They were cut down by an aura blade. In other words, they were ambushed by an aura master.

An aura master massacring the holy knights of our church

Lancaster muttered in disbelief.

An aura master was not a figure so lightly spoken of. Most of the kingdoms and countries on the continent would rope in any aura masters by bestowing them with titles and land, as well as marrying a princess to them in order to make them a part of the royal family.

In other words, an aura master was the most powerful weapon that could be possessed by a nation.

This is impossible. How could we possibly carry on investigations with aura masters?

Because they were so powerful, their identities were considered top secret by the countries that could move them. No one knew the identities of aura masters unless they were in the very top class of the government.

The investigation carried on, regardless of Lancaster's worries.

All members of the escorting party were discovered in horrifyingly clean cut states. Earl Wellington had not left behind any survivors.

There was a single corpse, however, that was not discovered.

We were unable to discover the corpse of the Saintess hopeful. It seems that it was an ambush in an effort to kidnap the Saintess hopeful.

Well, that's a relief. As long as she remains alive, we have hope of discovering who was behind the incident.

Lancaster coldly looked on as the corpses of the holy knights and priests were organized.

No matter who did this, I will make them pay for you all.

Just by discovering that the Saintess hopeful was possibly alive, Lancaster was able to cut down the list of possible suspects.

If kidnapping the Saintess hopeful was their goal, then it was definitely an ambush by another church. The problem is figuring out which church.

Right then, a single holy knight rushed towards Lancaster in a hurry.

## Spirit Sword Chapter 22

What is it?

We may have found a lead, sir.

All the members of the investigator team jumped up from their seats.

A report was made by the soldiers on the border patrol. According to them, two people crossed the border about an hour after our holy knights did.

Who were the two people?

They were reported to be Luke Esteban, fourth son of Earl Esteban of the Hansel Kingdom, and his apprentice knight. Lancasters face darkened. He had been briefed about all the members of the party that had been annihilated as well as any significant relations with other people.

Luke Esteban, the fiance of the saintess hopeful?

It seems that their clothes were covered in dust, as though theyd been riding nonstop for a long time.

Looking at the situation, it seems that they were chasing after the saintess hopeful.

The holy knight next to Lancaster blushed with excitement.

Its very possible that he witnessed the ambush as it was happening.

Indeed.

Lancaster tweaked his head as he pondered an idea.

Is it possible that he is an unknown aura master?

The holy knight smiled bitterly as he shook his head.

Luke Esteban is known to be in his mid-twenties.

Hm, it seems not then. Either way, considering that he was only an hour behind our party when he crossed the party, it is very likely he witnessed the ambush.

Having come to a decision, Lancaster made his order.

We ride to Esteban Earldom. I will question Luke Esteban thoroughly once we get there. The rest of you, make sure that the corpses of our comrades are given proper burial.

As you wish, sir.

Lancaster walked towards the carriage, his face locked into a fierce expression of determination.

We ride to Sith Empire.

Kurotan nodded thoughtlessly at Lukes words.

All right.

Its so very comfortable for me that you were once an Orc. Had you been a true human, you would have tried to dissuade me.

Why?

Because, Sith Empire and the kingdom of my birth, Hansel Kingdom, are by no means on friendly terms.

Sith Empire was an aggressive kingdom located in the center of the continent. The Sith Empire had started numerous wars in an effort to increase their territories, wars that had resulted in the collapse of multiple kingdoms.

Lukes Hansel Kingdom, was currently in an alliance with Tranbel Kingdom, as well as the Garnet Kingdom in the north in order to deter Sith Empire.

Kurotan nodded and then proceeded to ask another question.

So why do you wish to go to the Sith Empire?

Because a year from now, I will have to go to earl Wellington and ask about Isabelles whereabouts. I might as well secure a good standing for myself in the empire before that.

Your explanations make no sense to me, so I will just do as you order.

All right, and I will try to find bodies for your brothers that are sleeping in the spirit sword.

Until now, Luke had kept the problem of possessing a spirit sword containing the souls of hundreds of orcs in the back of his mind. Kurotan had earned his trust, but not all orcs had the same personalities. Now, however, it was as though he had a fire at his back that he needed to outrun.

In order to be able to take back Isabelle from the church of Maal and also protect her from the church of Flora, Luke needed strength.

If you look at it now, it seems taking in Kurotan was a stroke of luck for me.

Luke was determined to make use of any resources he had in order to protect Isabelle.

Kurotan happily replied to Lukes decision.

That sounds good to me. I wish to see them very much. However

Kurotan suddenly warned,

If you wish to control them, you must become stronger than you are now. I have already acknowledged you and therefore follow your orders even though you are weaker than I am, but I do not know how the others will react.

I already know that orcs all religiously follow the law of strength. No need to worry, Kurotan.

Luke gripped his fists tightly.

From now on, I will be desperately improving my skills. I will do anything to protect Isabelle.

A smile spread across Kurotans face.

Then, to commemorate that feeling, shall we spar?

Thats exactly what I wanted to hear.

Luke unsheathed his sword with no more words and stood up.

The current Kurotan had already surpassed Luke. Now, it was hard for Luke to handle Kurotan even if he went all out. Lukes attitude, however, was completely different from the previous training sessions.

Keeuk.

Luke collapsed from a critical hit from Kurotan, but he refused to give up.

I can still fight.

You shouldnt over do it.

I can still fight.

Luke clashed with Kurotan to the very limits of his physical capabilities. During the process, he came to a single but important realization.

Kurotan, the speed that my aura is circulating at is increasing the more I push my limits.

Youve just realized this? This is considered a basic among basics within my tribe.

I never knew. I suppose I should push myself to my limits more often.

Luke and Kurotan continued to travel towards the Sith Empire while training heavily.

The borderline dividing Tranbel Kingdom and the Sith Empire was truly strictly guarded. This was because only thirty years prior, an alliance of Hansel, Tranbel, and Garnet Kingdoms had waged war with the Sith Empire.

The emperor of the Sith Empire had launched a war against the Garnet Kingdom when a diplomatic party that he had sent to the kingdom had been ambushed by bandits. Hansel and Tranbel Kingdoms had been in an alliance with the Garnet Kingdom, and therefore declared war with the Sith Empire as well.

The war ended after six months of fighting. The Sith Empire decided that three kingdoms were too much to handle and asked for a truce.

The Sith Empire relinquished control of all the territories of the Garnet Kingdom that it had conquered during the war, and the Hansel and Tranbel Kingdoms had also retreated from the territories they had conquered. The war had ended, but the relation between the alliance of three kingdoms and the empire only continued to deteriorate.

All merchants not officially sanctioned were highly restricted in their trades, and even common peasants could not interact as they pleased. As if to prove this, the current border post that Luke and Kurotan were at was guarded by hundreds of soldiers and devoid of any travelers.

It seems it wont be easy to cross the border.

Luke smiled bitterly. It was completely different from crossing the border between Hansel Kingdom and Tranbel Kingdom.

When they had crossed over from Hansel to Tranbel Kingdom, the border was guarded by a few dozen soldiers, but the border between Tranbel Kingdom and Sith Empire painted a very different picture.

Luke briefly remembered what had happened when they had crossed the border post of the Tranbel Kingdom.

Why would a prestigious noble of Hansel Kingdom, such as yourself, wish to cross over to Sith Empire? Please, young master, reconsider.

At Lukes mention that he was going to Sith Empire to start a new life, the officer at the Tranbel Kingdoms outpost had nearly begged him to stay. From the officers point of view, it would have been a waste to let such an obviously talented young man with a bright future cross over from a Kingdom in the alliance over to the empire.

Please, if it is a bright future you wish for, consider our Tranbel Kingdom. I will write you a recommendation.

However, for Luke who had to find Isabelle after a year, it was an offer that could not be accepted. Luke refused politely but surely, and the officer had no choice but to heave a sigh and open the door of the border post.

It may be possible that the border post of the Sith Empire will not let you pass, so I will let you go for now.

Thanks.

So, Luke had safely passed the Tranbel Kingdoms border post and had now arrived in front of the Sith Empires border post. He made a worried expression.

I wonder if my letter has arrived. I hope my parents and siblings are not worried.

Luke had stopped by a trading city before he had reached the border post and sent off a letter. The letter was addressed to the Esteban Earldom in Hansel Kingdom.

The soldiers at the border post of the Sith Empire remained on guard and stiffly in position without any movement. It was a completely different picture from the soldiers guarding the border post of Tranbel Kingdom, who roamed around the post rather freely.

I have heard that the people of Sith Empire look up to those with strength and worship them. From the look of those soldiers, it seems to be true.

After waiting a while, an officer in uniform approached Luke and Kurotan.

So you are the people wishing to enter our Sith Empire?

Yes, sir.

Follow me.

The officer waved at the soldiers who had been standing there like statues, and the soldiers moved to open the door. Kurururung.

Luke swallowed down his nervousness as he stepped through the door. If he was unlucky, he may never again be able

to return to his home, Hansel Kingdom.

The officer led Luke and Kurotan to the main office of the border post. A middle aged man with sharp eyes sat behind the mahogany desk, reading papers.

I have brought them here.

Good. You are dismissed.

The officer saluted and left the room, and the middle aged man looked at Luke. In his hands were the papers that Luke had prepared as a self-introduction.

It is nice to meet you. I am the person in charge of the forty eighth border post of the Sith Empire, Baronet Lemington.

It is an honor to meet you.

The baronet glanced Luke up and down before turning his gaze back to the papers.

So you are the forth son of the famous House of Esteban, of the Hansel Kingdom. It seems youve served as an officer of the army for five years Is this true?

All of it is true without mistake.

Lemington narrowed his eyes.

Then you have already shown talent and achievement impressive for your young age. Then why do you wish to find a future in our Sith Empire, and not your native Hansel Kingdom?

If I were to put it simply, the waters of the Hansel Kingdom are too small.

Lemingtons eyes widened at Lukes bold words.

You wish to swim in larger waters?

If I were to be more exact, it is because I look up to the culture of Sith Empire of acknowledging the strong and worshipping martial prowess.

Lemington began to smile.

Hm, it seems that you are wise for your age. However.

Lemington suddenly turned serious.

As you already know, the Sith Empire is not on very kindly terms with your native kingdom. Thirty years ago, we were waging war. What do you plan to do if another war breaks out between your Hansel Kingdom and the Sith Empire?

Luke answered without hesitation.

A knights fealty goes to his lord, not a country. If I swear fealty to a lord from the Sith Empire, then I am a knight of the Sith Empire from then on.

Hm, truly a text book answer. Then what about in the case that you are not able to find a lord?

Then I suppose I will return to my native kingdom to become a knight of Hansel Kingdom.

Lemington smiled bitterly at Lukes bold attitude and words.

He is an honest if brass bastard. In my eyes at least, he does not seem to be a spy.

The process of letting anyone through the border post was entirely decided upon by the baronet. According to his experience, the young knight standing in front of him was a talent that must absolutely be cultivated by the Sith Empire.

Lemingtons expression softened as he looked at Luke, and he turned to look at Kurotan.

Is this your apprentice knight?

Yes, sir.

I wish to know about the circumstance under which you ended up taking him in.

Luke answered honestly. Of course, not the whole truth.

I took him in while I was serving as an officer on the eastern lines, at Fort Potellan. He was from a common background, and swore fealty to me for life in exchange for teaching him swordsmanship.

A vassal at your age? Impressive. Also, a fort on the eastern lines It is to my knowledge that there are no specific forces to the east of Hansel Kingdom that would require any forts?

It was a fort built to annihilate the orcs that had gone into hiding into the eastern mountain ranges.

Hm, you must have suffered a lot. Our Sith Empire is currently having problems with orcs as well.

A knight with five years of experience fighting orcs was not common even in the Sith Empire. Lemingtons eyes turned more and more kindly as Luke continued to tell him stories of his service at Fort Potellan.

I sincerely hope that you find a lord to swear your fealty to in our Sith Empire.

I have high expectations as well, sir. I feel as though there must surely be a lord worth serving in the wide lands of Sith Empire.

Haha, truly, you are a character.

Lemington nodded and placed his signature on the paperwork.

I give you and your apprentice knight to enter the empire. However.

Lemington looked at Luke seriously.

Spirit Sword Chapter 23

Chapter 23: To The Sith Empire

TL: Warriormonk

Editor: Isleidir

Since you were knighted in the Hansel Kingdom, the Sith Empire will not recognize you as a knight.

Is Is that so?

Well, I mean you probably wont be treated as though you were a peasant, but it will be hard for you to be acknowledged as a proper knight.

Luke looked carefully at Lemington.

Would you have any words of advice for me?

I do indeed. If you wish to be acknowledged as a knight by the Sith Empire, there are a few ways. I will tell you one such way.

I do not know how to thank you.

Im only telling you this because I consider talents like you to be absolutely necessary to our Sith Empire. Listen carefully.

The method proposed by Lemington was simple. Lukes eyes narrowed after listening to his explanation.

I have to win in a tournament held by a lord?

Yes. In the Sith Empire, strength is everything. The noble lords of our empire hold martial tournaments on a regular basis. Many reasons exist for this, but the main reason is to find hidden talents.

I see.

Whoever wins these martial tournaments are awarded with money and are knighted by the noble lord holding the tournament. This is how the Sith Empire discovers and raises talented warriors.

Even if I win the tournament, however, would I not have to serve as a knight of the noble lord holding the tournament without a say in the matter?

Lemington calmly shook his head.

Why would I recommend this method to you if that were the case?

.

The winner of the tournament is given a choice. If you decide to accept the land given to you as award, you will have to serve under the noble lord, but if you do not accept the land you can become a free knight and choose to serve whoever you wish.

Lukes face brightened up.

How practical. Why would the noble lord do that, when he doesnt have anything to gain?

The important thing is the discovery of talented warriors. The noble lords of our Sith Empire know what is truly important.

Truly, a tradition befitting the Sith Empire, where the strong rule.

Luke nodded his head while looking very impressed.

Anyway, you have chosen the perfect time to enter our Empire.

What do you mean?

Lemington smiled as he explained.

About two days ride southwest from here lies the lands of viscount Jabel. The viscount is hosting a martial tournament in about a week.

Is that so?

Since you are entering the empire in hopes of finding success, I am assuming you have the skills to back up your ambitions. Thats why Im telling you this.

It seems like a good opportunity.

Win of the martial tournament of Jabel viscountcy, and become a knight of the Sith Empire. It will make it easier for you to find a lord to serve.

I sincerely thank you for the information, sir. I will go to the Jabel viscountcy as soon as possible, if you will tell me the exact location.

Lemington happily nodded in approval.

I am not unfamiliar with viscount Jabel, I will write you a recommendation. You will be able to avoid the preliminary rounds that are meant to weed out the weaklings.

Thank you, but I will have to politely refuse.

Why?

Luke gripped his fists.

Since my ambitions are as such, I will climb from the very bottom to be able to stand proudly at the top. I will only accept your good wishes, sir.

Lemington laughed loudly.

An excellent attitude. Good. I will give you the specific directions to the viscountcy.

Luke and Kurotan headed towards Jabel viscountcy as soon as they left the border outpost.

You are quite impressive.

What?

How can you so easily convince the officer of a country on which you are not on good terms with?

Oh that? I definitely had to keep on my toes and use my head.

Luke shrugged as he looked at Kurotan.

I much prefer dealing with you instead.

Why?

I dont have to calculate this and that.

Luke smiled as Kurotan looked about stupidly in an attempt to understand him.

So you will participate in the martial tournament in order to become knighted?

Yes, but it will be you participating, not me.

Kurotans eyes widened.

How so?

Its not an easy thing to change your nationality. In addition, I have a loving and understanding family in Hansel Kingdom. I do not wish to betray them.

Luke smiled and looked at Kurotan.

A person who was an orc, like you, would not really attach meaning to your nationality right?

Of course. Nationality means nothing to me. Not just me but my fellow tribesmen either

So you can be the one to become knighted. Knighthood is pretty useful, you know. You can use it to solve most problems that you might run into

I do not really understand, but I will do as you order. Is it all right for just me to have knighthood though?

It is. I am technically your lord. I wont be ignored anywhere I go if I have under me an officially knighted warrior.

Kurotan frowned.

I dont know if I can communicate with any humans other than you.

No need to worry too much. All you have to do is what I tell you to do.

All right.

The new lord of Esteban earldom, Reynold, was frowning.

Luke, you bastard, where the hell are you and what have you done?

He was worried sick about his currently missing little brother. An investigator from the church of Flora had visited the earldom a couple days ago.

I am Lancaster, from the church of Flora. Ive come to the earldom due to a case I am investigating.

The earl of Esteban Earldom could only politely greet him and his party of twenty holy knights.

What does the church of Flora have to?

We are here to make an inquiry about Luke Esteban.

Luke is currently not here. He is visting Lea Marquisate due to issues with a divorce.

Yes, we are aware of that. We are planning on asking him directly when he returns. If it is not too much trouble, may we stay here until he does?

It is a matter of critical importance, so please consider it.

Reynold couldnt refuse them if they came out like this. He could only give them a place to stay.

He couldnt stay still however, as this was a matter pertaining to his little brother. Reynold asked his information agent Garfield to investigate Lancaster, which revealed some troubling facts.

What? A party of holy knights was annihilated due to an ambush, and Isabelle is missing?

The church of Flora had tried to shut down information from leaking out, but the soldiers of the border patrol had already run about spreading rumors. Reynolds worry only increased after Garfields report.

Luke, are you safe?

Looking at the situation, Lancaster and his holy knights wouldnt leave until they met Luke.

While Reynold was sick with worry, a merchant party from Tranbel Kingdom arrived at Esteban Earldom.

Lord, its Benjamin. May I enter?

Come in.

The door opened, and Benjamin, the butler, entered stiffly.

What is it?

Benjamin approached and lowered his voice.

Please, do not be surprised. Lord, a letter from young master Luke has arrived.

From Luke?

It looks like he sent it via a merchant from Tranbel Kingdom.

Reynolds face immediately brightened.

Show me the letter.

Benjamin took out a letter from his pocket, which Reynold took and read immediately. The letters content was truly simple.

Right then, someone else knocked at the door.

Who is it?



Its Lancaster, from the church of Flora. May I enter, lord?

Benjamins face paled. He had kept the letter strictly secret, so how had Lancaster come here so fast? Reynold shouted back.

I am busy! I will take a look at my schedule and let you know later when I am free.

I heard that a letter from Sir Luke arrived. I was only hoping that you could share the contents of the letter with me.

Reynolds face scrunched up painfully.

Goddammit Who was the bastard that blabbered his mouth?

This was what was so scary about the church of Flora. Since it was the most powerful and popular church in Hansel Kingdom, many people worshipped Flora.

A faithful church member would do anything for the god they worshipped. It was most likely a maid or a servant that let Lancaster know about the letter from Luke. Benjamin gripped the pommel of his sword with a stiff expression.

I will investigate carefully and deal out punishments accordingly.

As you should. Be strict, and kick them out when you are done.

Reynold nodded and said uncomfortably.

Is it not a breach of etiquette to ask for the contents of a letter from family?

Yes, lord, I am aware, but the situation is that dire. The church will formally and politely apologize about this matter.

Reynold could only sigh, as it seemed Lancaster would not retreat if Reynold did not show him the letter.

Come in.

Lancaster and two holy knights entered as soon as the words left Reynolds mouth.

Thank you for your understanding, lord Reynold.

I dont understand the whole situation, but I will be asking the church of Flora for repayment in regards to the disrespect shown to me today.

Lancaster kept his eyes on the letter in Reynolds hands as he responded.

We will pay the price gladly.

As you wish. This is the letter from Luke.

Lancaster took the letter Reynold handed him and read it speedily.

Big brother. Something unexpected has happened, and I do not expect I will be returning any time soon. I am planning on looking for opportunities in another country. I do not doubt that you will trust in me, as will the rest of my family. I will visit you in a year, and show you my success. Please, wait for me and believe in me until then.

Lancaster frowned as soon as he finished reading the letter. He had crossed some boundaries with lord Reynold in hopes of finding useful information, but the letter gave him nothing.

Curses He may be young, but hes still a noble.

Reynold looked at Lancaster with a smile on his face.

Could you give it back if you are done?

Is this definitely a letter from Sir Luke?

What the hell do you wish to hear from me?

Reynold finally showed his anger, and Lancaster flinched. Even if he was from the church of Flora, he couldnt show any more disrespect to the lord of Esteban Earldom, a house well known and respected in the Hansel Kingdom.

Please, I beg for your forgiveness I have crossed the line in my haste to solve the case.

I will be making a formal complaint to the church of Flora. And

Reynold coldly turned his back on Lancaster, as if dismissing him.

I hope you can leave the building reserved for guests as soon as possible. I no longer wish to play the host in the face of such disrespect.

As-As you wish. I apologize once more for my behavior.

Lancaster bowed multiple times before leaving with his holy knights in tow.

Reynold smiled as soon as they left.

As expected of Luke. He knows not to leave any evidence in his letters.

Young master Luke has shown his cleverness since he was young. He is very far from clumsy.

He says he will return after a year, so lets stop worrying about him. He isnt one to go back on his words

Benjamin smiled brightly, baring his teeth.

You have brightened up considerably since you have read the letter.

Is that so?

Reynold and Benjamin knowingly smiled at each other.

Luke and Kurotan arrived at their destination, the Jabel viscounty, after two days of travel on horseback.

So this is the Jabel viscounty.

Luke looked around the city with an excited look. The view that greeted him was similar to his own home city in Esteban Earldom, with buildings centered on the lords castle. Of course, the architecture and peoples clothes were slightly different.

Perhaps due to the martial tournament happening in four days, a high number of armored people roamed the streets with sheathed weapons.

Lets find a place to stay first.

Good, I want to wash myself.

Luke looked at Kurotan in bewilderment. How could he forget the troubles he had gone through to get Kurotan to wash himself the first time around?

I thought you got sick if you washed yourself?

I tried it and I didnt get sick. And I like being clean, now.

Luke clucked his tongue as Kurotan pretended that the past had not happened. They proceeded into an inn that they found, where Lukes eyes widened in surprise.

What the hell? Why is it so expensive?

The inn was of standard quality, but the price exceeded Lukes imagination. The innkeeper looked at Luke as if he was a country bumpkin.

Most inns prices are like this when there is a martial tournament. Our inn currently has a single open room.

Even so, isnt this too much?

If you wait until tomorrow, you wont be able to find a room even if you are willing to pay.

Luke looked around uncomfortably.

He had exchanged all of his money for the currency used in the Sith Empire at the border post. The innkeeper was requesting that he pay half of the money Luke possessed for a half-month stay.

Damn, it looks like I have to start worrying about how to make money.

If he were currently in Hansel Kingdom, Luke would not have had to worry about money. He had a house that he could ask for funds from, after all. He was currently in Sith Empire, however, a far away land.

Luke handed over the money with a bitter expression.

We provide three meals a day. We have an open yard in the back of the inn where you can train.

The room that the innkeeper led Luke and Kurotan to looked rather comfortable, at least. There were two beds next to each other, a much more appealing alternative to camping outdoors.

There is a well at the edge of the yard over there, you can use it to wash.

The innkeeper left the two of them to look around the inn, and Luke counted the rest of his money.

35 denaris Damn it. How should I make money?

Luke needed money immediately. He had to repair the axe that had been destroyed by earl Wellington as well as buy basic equipment.

He also needed to teach aura cultivation techniques to the Latilla tribe warriors that would soon be given human bodies. It would be a process that would require expensive mana scrolls and potions.

Were not just talking about one or two coins, Im going to need a fortune How do I approach this?

Kurotan jumped into bed and enjoyed the texture of the mattress, clueless to Lukes headache regarding financial problems.

A martial tournament is sure to have gambling involved. Damn it, I suppose I could try put up some money for the martial tournament, even if it doesnt sit well with my sense of chivalry.

Lukes gaze headed towards Kurotan, who was currently rolling around in bed.

If its that bastard, it wont be impossible to win the martial tournament either

Luke organized his thoughts and put away the pouch of coins into his bosom.

How much money will I have left after repairing Kurotans axe with 35 denarins? It probably wont be enough to gamble with.

Kurotan jumped up from bed.

Im going to go wash.

Wait a little bit.

Why?

Luke took out a book from the traveling bag.

Theres something you have to train in.

Train? Good!

The book that Luke had retrieved was the book of swordsmanship that he had received from Reynold. The mid-level swordsmanship that the mercenary aura master Belloche had created. Kurotan looked at the book curiously.

What is that?

Its a mid-level swordsmanship book that Im going to train you in.

Mid-level swordsmanship book?

Listen. Youve currently only learned basic swordsmanship, and your strikes and slashes have predictable and simple paths. Your attacks can be read by anyone who is somewhat skilled with the sword.

Kurotan is strong even without learning such things.

Even if you can become stronger faster if you learn this?

Kurotans face lit up at Lukes words.

Lets train together. I also have to learn this sword style if I am to train you in it.

All right. Your decisions have always been correct until now. I trust you and your decisions.

Luke smiled bitterly while looking at Kurotan, who was taking large strides to the door.

Youre so easy to convince, you bastard.

There was a large clearing at the back of the inn, just as the innkeeper had said. A couple of men were already clashing their swords in training. The sound of weapons clashing rang out harshly throughout the clearing.

Luke took Kurotan into a corner of the clearing.

The sword style you have been using up until now can be called the basic of basics. A beginners style

Is that so?

Under normal circumstances, you should learn a low-level sword style after the basic sword style, but

Luke flashed his teeth in a smile.

With your skills, we should be able to skip that and go directly to the mid-level sword style.

Luke had learned a high-level sword style unique to the Esteban House. Even so, Kurotan was able to dominate him almost effortlessly, with just a basic sword style.

Luke was far superior in terms of sword techniques, but Kurotan was able to defeat him effortlessly thanks to being able to amplify his physical capabilities by using aura. Even in terms of life and death battle experiences, there was a large difference between them.

To be honest with you, I have high expectations. You are already a formidable warrior with just a basic sword style.

I wonder how strong you will become after youve learned the proven sword style of Belloche.

If I can become stronger faster, I will learn it.

The Belloche sword style is a good fit for you. The sword style is mainly made up of continuous attacks without rest, while minimizing defense.

Kurotan gripped his sword and took a stance. Luke opened the book and skimmed the pages.

First of all, we need to ingrain the sword techniques and sword skills of the Belloche sword style into our bodies. Itll be just like the time I trained you in basic sword techniques, so you dont have to tense up too much.

All right.

The two men began to go through the sword skills and techniques that were in the book. It was usually taken as common knowledge that one could not learn mid or higher level sword styles from just reading a book. However, Luke had already learned a high-level sword style in addition to having trained in the sword since a young age. He was familiar with the points one had to be wary of when learning a sword style from a book.

The other men in the clearing glanced only briefly at the two. It would have been more entertaining if Luke and Kurotan were sparring, but the slow movements with which they carried out the skills from the books made them a boring sight.

After training into the late night, Luke and Kurotan left the inn after a good nights sleep and breakfast. They were trying to repair Kurotans axe.

I still do not enjoy using a sword, because its small and thin.

Yeah, and I think the Belloche sword style would be better executed with an axe than a sword. The destructiveness of an axe along with the continuity of the sword style would be extremely hard to deal with.

Luke and Kurotan walked towards a smithy, asking people for directions if they got lost on the way.

Ddaang. Ddaang. Ddaang.

The size of the smithy was rather big. Armored men and their weapons crowded the smithy. They seemed to be there to repair their equipment for the coming martial tournament.

Lukes sharp gaze scanned the room. His face brightened when he discovered a free blacksmith sitting in the corner. Follow me.

Luke and Kurotan walked over to the corner. The blacksmith was an old man with a face full of wrinkles, currently slowly enjoying a beer. His face and arms were covered with burns, testifying to his lifetime of hammering away at steel.

The blacksmith glared at Luke who had come to stand in front of him.

I dont even wish to know why you are here, go find another blacksmith. I do not do small jobs.

There was definitely a reason the blacksmith had been free. Luke smiled, despite the old mans grumpy mood.

Its not a small job. Would you take a look at my weapon first?

Luke placed the damaged axe on the old mans work station. The blacksmiths disapproving stare disappeared immediately as his eyes widened.

What?

The old man immediately sat up straighter and studied the two pieces of the bisected axe.

The surface of the cut, having been severed by an aura master, was impossibly smooth like a mirror.

The old mans voice trembled as he spoke, rubbing the surface of the cut with his finger.

Ho, how is this possible? It-It doesnt even make sense.

People started to gather around at the old mans response. The other blacksmiths also ceased their hammering and looked towards the old man.

This axe was made with molten steel, not by hammering. How could it be cut this cleanly? This is impossible even with a magic blade enchanted with a sharpness spell.

The old man looked at Luke with wide eyes.

What happened to this axe?

The crowds eyes all turned to Luke, or more specifically his mouth. Luke took a deep breathe before seriously facing the old man.

This axe was cut by the aura blade of an aura master.

The old man immediately slapped his knee in excitement.

Of course. Of course, it would be impossible if it wasnt an aura blade. But.

The old man glanced Luke up and down rather suspiciously.

You dont seem to be at a level where you can take on an aura master.

There was a misunderstanding and a brief clash. I didnt take him on, just blocked his attacks twice.

Luke remembered earl Wellington and Kurotans clash.

A mysterious aura master mistook me for an enemy and attacked. You see the bottom of the axe also has a cut?

The crowds eyes now looked at the axe. Indeed, there was a cut going through about half of the axe.

The old man nodded.

Yes, this is only possible with an aura blade. Yes, of course.

That was what happened after the first clash. The second clash is what cut the axe clean in half.

Luke glanced briefly at Kurotan, uncomfortable because he was telling the story as if he had been the one to clash with the aura master. Kurotan, however, was standing expressionlessly.

Afterwards, the aura masters kick sent me flying back quite a distance.

The audience held their breath. Just imagining the one on one battle with an aura master was enough to give them goosebumps.

When I blocked two of his attacks, the aura master ceased attacking me and asked for my identity. Fortunately, we were able to solve the misunderstanding.

The old man heaved a sigh with the end of the story.

I see. That explains the axe.

The audience continued to look at Luke without dispersing. To their eyes, Luke seemed to be a kid with incredible luck.

So why are you hear at the smithy?

I am thinking right now Ive considered repairing the axe, but it doesnt seem like a bad idea to leave it in its current state as evidence of my battle with an aura master.

The old mans eyes flashed with greed.

Give it to me. I will give you three axes from my personal collection.

Well

It was then that someone from the audience shouted out.

I will pay you fifty denarins. You should be able to buy four axes with that money, so sell the axe to me.

The first offer set off a cascade of offers from the rest of the crowd.

I will pay you seventy denarins.

One hundred denarins. Any object with the mark of an aura master is priceless.

Everyone at the smithy was here in order to attain fame at the martial tournament. Their final goal could be said to reach the end of their martial path and become an aura master.

It would have been impossible for them to ignore an axe that had been cut in half by an aura master.

Two hundred fifty denarins, my entire fortune. Please sell it to me.

After a while, the price of the axe had exceeded three hundred denarins. Luke couldnt help but gape at the sight of the frantic crowd.

This is why the Sith Empire has been able to survive while surrounded by unfriendly countries.

Although Luke felt impressed by the crowd, he still desperately needed the money. The axe was finally sold to the highest bidder for a grand sum of five hundred denarins.

Here you go. Please, take care of it.

The hairy man who had handed Luke five hundred denarins worth of gold coins only smiled wholeheartedly.

Dont worry, this will be my heirloom and handed down through the generations

Luke smiled bitterly watching the back of the hairy man as he walked away while cradling the axe.

Although the hairy man had stated that he would treat it as an heirloom, it was more likely that he had purchased

the axe just to brag to others about the story Luke had told the crowd.

Well, thats that. I have the money to bet on Kurotan, as well as prepare some equipment for him.

Luke turned to look at the old smith, who looked disappointed. It seemed that the old man had had high hopes for purchasing an object with an aura masters mark.

I will definitely give you the chance to purchase another object if the opportunity comes, sir.

Damn, I dont think that opportunities like yours are common. Anyways, I suppose you will need a new axe.

Yes, sir.

You are a man who has survived an encounter with an aura master. You have more than enough qualifications to fight with a weapon that Ive made. Come, follow me.

Luke and Kurotan followed the old man as he walked deeper into the smithy.

## Spirit Sword Chapter 25

Kurotan came out of the smithy a while later, with a brand new look. A sturdy looking steel helmet, as well as a steel plate armor that fit him perfectly as well as a metal skirt that extended past his thighs. His shins were covered by greaves, and his hands were protected by metal gauntlets, giving him a half plate armored look.

At his waist were two axes that looked well made even at a glance.

How wonderful. Its so comfortable to have such well-fitting armor.

How could Kurotan, during his time as an orc, have had the luxury of having armor custom fit? Luke smirked at Kurotan, who was beside himself with satisfaction.

Ill buy you even better equipment if you win the martial tournament.

Hehehe, really? Ill crush whoever my opponent is.

By the way

Lukes face slightly stiffened. He couldnt help but feel a little embarrassed about modifying the truth in front of Kurotan, who despised humans who lie.

I apologize about earlier. I know you dislike lies, but we needed the money.

Dont worry about it. I believe that anything you do is the correct thing to do.

But

When we give trust, we do so wholeheartedly. Besides

Kurotan glanced down at his armor once again and smiled widely.

Didnt I get a new armor for it?

Luke smiled bitterly and shook his head. Luke was likely the only human to have earned such blind trust from an orc.

Kurotan, fully armored and equipped, entered a period of harsh training starting that very day.

We have to fully engrain the skills of the Belloche sword technique into your body before the finals.

Of course, considering Kurotans skills, they wouldnt have to worry about the preliminary rounds. Only if Kurotan won the final round would he be knighted, so Luke trained Kurotan all day in the Belloche sword style.

As expected of a prestigious sword style, the techniques of the Belloche sword style were very complicated. Kurotan said in curiosity while training.

Its curious.

What?

I would not have been able to memorize such complicated movements previously.

Is that so?

I wasnt very smart, so I would forget the things I learned very quickly.

Its probably because you have the brain of a human now. You cant even begin to compare the processing power of a human brain and an orcs.

Luke thought of the original owner of Kurotans body, Hal.

He was a clever bastard that kept trying to manipulate me, so he definitely used his brain a lot.

I think so too. Ever since my soul has entered this body, I do not forget the things that I learn.

You know what? Youve changed a lot since youve possessed that body. Now, you think and act almost like a human being.

Really?

The two continued to converse as they practiced the sword.

Luke couldnt contain his surprise as they continued to train in the Belloche sword style.

It was because the Belloche sword style was more profound than he had expected.

This is a better sword style than I thought. Itll be a style to reckon with once weve mastered it.

Well find out when we do.

After four days of training the skills, the two began sparring. By simulating life or death battles in the spars, Luke and Kurotan were able to further familiarize themselves with the sword style.

You ready?

Yup.

Then lets begin.

Luke and Kurotan ran at each other, swinging their weapons full force without mercy.

Chwang. Chwwaanng. Chwang.

Sword and axe clashed midair, producing sparks. People who had been training besides them couldnt help but look at the two.

Wha-What?

Those bastards arent ordinary warriors.

Their eyes widened at Luke and Kurotans fierce and hair raising spar.

An attack aimed at a weak spot would be deflected or dodged, then a counter attack would begin right away. Just a little slip up of concentration would result in a critical strike.

Keeuk.

Luke frowned as he grabbed his side. His chain mail had burst at the seams, ripping even the leather armor he was wearing underneath. He grimaced as he looked at the ruined chain mail.

Its like a rag now.

Mine as well.

Kurotan put his hand through a hole in his chain mail.

Lets go to the smithy after our training is over. Even our leather armor is raggedy

I have no complaints about that.

Luke and Kurotan continued their bloody sparring until the martial tournament finally began.

People who wished to prove themselves flocked to the martial tournament. The citizens of Jabel all set up shop with food and other items in an attempt to get into their pockets.

Because of the positive effect it had on the territorys economy, the noble lords of Sith Empire tried very hard to open martial tournaments as often as possible.

The rules of the preliminary rounds outside of the castle were simple. The knights of the Jabel viscounty set up six rings, fenced off by metal chains in the middle of a clearing.

In order to participate in the tournament, one needed to purchase a bronze medal for 10 denarins. Before you entered the ring, you would hand it to the referee, and the winner of the match up would collect all the medals once the match was over.

You needed a total of ten medals in order to move up to the main matches. In other words, one had to win nine times. Those who lost had to purchase a bronze medal one more time in order to participate again. The medals cost different prices, depending on the territory, and was used by the stingy noble lords as an attempt to lower the costs of the martial tournament.

Fortunately, the medals at Jabel viscounty were rather cheap, as other places could cost fifty denarins. The six rings were surrounded by a large number of knights.

The victor was determined by a simple process. You would lose if you surrendered, or were incapacitated by injury, or died.

No medical aid was offered during the preliminary rounds of martial tournaments. In other words, any injuries had to be taken care of privately and in the case of death, it would be as pointless as a dogs death.

Those participating in the preliminary rounds tried their hardest to prepare adequate defensive equipment. A sturdy armor would significantly reduce the risk of their dying, after all.

Cooper, the knight captain of Jabel viscounty, looked down at the crowd of participants that had gathered and frowned.

The level of the participants isnt that high. It seems as though the Kaspar earldoms martial tournament three months prior was really not that long ago.

Kaspar earldom was the territory of a high noble lord, and was rather close in proximity to Jabel viscounty. Coopers face was not a pretty sight as he gazed out at the six rings continuously. To an experienced knight such as Cooper, the scenes that were being played out in the rings were enough to make him yawn.

There were instances where participants would lose their grip on their sword, and others that would simply run at them and grab the opponents collar.

I suppose its to be expected, as the preliminary rounds serve to filter out the nobodies.

The truth was that very few people won the martial tournament by climbing up the ladder from the preliminary rounds. The winners of the martial tournament were usually those who had a direct pass to the final line. In other words, the children of nobles or disciples of knights were almost always the winner of martial tournaments.

The participants of the preliminary rounds truly had a diverse background. A young commoner who had painstakingly trained, delinquents that had polished their skills in the back streets, experienced mercenaries, and even bandits in disguise.

However, none of them were a match for the seeded participants who had all trained systematically in high level sword styles since they were young.

A structured and early education is definitely something to be reckoned with.

Cooper shook his head and turned around at the sight of one participant roll the ground in a pathetic manner.

Drago, hows the situation in the ring over there?

Cooper frowned when Drago did not respond.

Do you see anyone of decent skills?

Only then did Drago respond.

Ah, I apologize, sir. I didnt respond because I was concentrating. Would you take a look at that participant?

Coopers eyes widened as he listened to Dragos request and looked towards the back ring. A high level duel was taking place at the ring he was now facing.

Who the hell is that bastard? I cant even follow his movements.

Hes on his fourth consecutive win.

Cooper was even more surprised by Dragos words. Four consecutive wins were no light feat. A duel would heavily drain ones stamina, making rest absolutely necessary after even a single match.

Finally, someone of decent skills that we can look forward to. His opponent is rather skilled as well, but he is overwhelming him.

Even though hes using an axe, his movements and attacks are sharp and quick. He definitely has had proper training,

sir.

The two knights looked at Kurotan with anticipation.

Kwang. Kwaaang. Kwang!

Kurotans opponent was a mercenary who seemed to be in his mid-thirties. The mercenary was well equipped and even had a shield, but Kurotan was overwhelming him with heavy blows with his axe. The mercenaries face was ugly from tension.

Goddamnit Curse my luck, someone so skilled right at the preliminary rounds?

The mercenary was Hansen, a veteran who had been roaming the mercenary world for nearly twenty years. He had even participated in a territory war once, and defeated a knight on a one on one battle.

He had been filled with confidence by the win, and had decided to participate in a martial tournament in hopes of being knighted.

If its a martial tournament held by a visocountcy, I could win the tournament easily.

However, his dreams had run into a large obstacle right from the get go. He had encountered an opponent far stronger than him in the preliminary rounds.

Kwaang.

Hansen screamed silently, barely blocking the horizontal slash with his shield. The senses that had been sharpened by twenty years as a mercenary were sending him strong signals of danger.

No way. I cant beat him no matter what.

Hansen staggered backwards, throwing away his sword and raising his hand in surrender.

I give up.

A mercenaries greatest asset was his body. He had surrendered as soon as he determined that he had no chances of winning the match. This was the reason Hansen had been able to survive as long as he did.

The referee stopped the match quickly.

Match over. Kurotan wins.

Kurotan clasped his axe onto his back, disappointment evident on his face. The earlier three matches had left him disappointed, as they had been extremely easy matches. Finally, at the fourth match, he had found someone worth a couple of blows, but he had given up soon after the match began. The referee handed two medals to Kurotan.

Will you continue?

Kurotan looked back at Luke. He could have kept fighting, but he needed Lukes permission first. Luke shook his head.

Stop fighting and come down?

Kurotan shook his head and stepped out of the ring with his medals, as the referee read out the names of the next participants.

I could have kept fighting, why did you call me down?

You could have finished the match a lot earlier, why did you drag it out?

Because

Kurotan scratched the back of his head. Lukes point was valid. Kurotan could have finished the match early, but had not done so in order to enjoy the match.

Dont do that from now on. The referees have sharp eyes. You can enjoy plenty of matches later on, as a part of the final line.

Why not?

Whoever the opponent is, you have to go all out. This is the mindset of a knight. As you will soon be knighted, it is a mindset that you have to have at all times from now on.

All right. I will keep it in mind.

Kurotan gestured that he was ready to the referee as soon as the match was over. The referee called out Kurotans name, and the participant that had just won the match frowned heavily as he watched Kurotan walk into the ring.

Goddamnit, why is he coming back?

No matter which way he looked at it, he would not be able to win against Kurotan. He gave up.

I give up the match.

Afterwards, Kurotan continued to win his way through matches following Lukes advice, holding nothing back. The matches finished in the blink of an eye.

Begin.

The referee signaled the beginning of the match, and Kurotans opponent glared at Kurotan as his grip on the sword tightened. Kurotan, however, became a blur of movements before his opponent even made a single slash, and the opponents vision went black.

Puuk.

The participant fell to the ground with unfocused eyes as the sound of metal being crushed rang out, a malformed helmet rolling across the ground.

Ku-Kurotan, victor.

The referees voice was shaking as he announced Kurotan as the victor.

Before long, Kurotan had gathered the ten medals he needed in order to move on to the final rounds. He traded in the medals, with the referees signatures on them, to a table organizing the event. The person manning the table handed



Kurotan a silver medal, a verification that he was qualified for the final rounds of the tournament.  
Good job. However, the final rounds wont be so easy. If you wish to do as well as you did today in the final rounds, you must familiarize yourself even more with Belloche sword style.  
Dont worry. Im training with you every night, so it wont take long for me to master it.  
Kurotan frowned suddenly.  
I am hungry.  
Lets go eat at the inn. Ill even order you a meat stew in celebration of your passing the preliminary rounds.  
Hehehe, those words are like music to my ears.  
Lukes wallet was bulging as they headed back to the inn. There were a lot of people that bet on the results of the preliminary rounds, and Luke had bet everything he had on Kurotan. Kurotan had been an unknown participant, a true dark horse.  
There were two pairs of eyes that followed the two men as they walked back to the inn.  
What will you do? Should we report this to the lord?  
Cooper nodded his head, expression stiff.  
It seems well have to. His skills are not ordinary.  
His sword style does not seem to be of our Sith Empire.  
I think so as well. It doesnt seem like he is that experienced in the sword style either. However  
Coopers eyes narrowed.  
That Kurotan, he definitely knows how to use aura.  
Dragos eyes widened at Coopers conjecture.  
How could that be  
Its definite. In the last five battles, even I couldnt follow his movements. His movements were impossible with just physical movements.  
Drago nodded silently. Cooper was at the level of an aura expert, capable of raising his physical capabilities through the use of aura.  
Simple but a profound sword style, as well as an aura expert. Suspicious.  
Drago narrowed his eyes as well.  
Its possible that he is a spy from a foreign country. It would be easier to travel around the country if you were a knight, after all.  
Regardless, we need to keep our eyes on him. Investigate him thoroughly.  
Cooper turned his back decisively.  
I will report this to the lord. Look over the rest of the preliminary matches, Drago.  
Yes, sir.

The preliminary rounds of Jabel viscountcy lasted for a week. Twenty one people successfully completed nine rounds, and received a silver medal.

Those who did not succeed in passing the preliminaries bitterly headed back to their home towns. There were some who had turned into cold corpses as well.

Participants who had received silver medals were given permission to enter the castle, as the final rounds were carried out in private. Only the privileged guests or those of status could view the final rounds.

All those entering the final rounds, present your medal and enter.

Twenty one participants all excitedly entered the castle. Their room and board would be taken care of by the lord of Jabel viscountcy for the duration of the final rounds.

Luke was also able to enter the castle as Kurotans second, a position held by a person of close relation that would take care of the aftermath of a participants death should it happen.

The room provided by Viscount Jabel was rather large and luxurious. The meals were much better than the ones that had been provided at the inn as well.

The room is so much larger than the inns!

The food is much better.

Luke and Kurotan were able to comfortably prepare for the final rounds of the tournament while staying at the Jabel castle.

There were fifteen seeded participants that were going to be participating in the final rounds, without having had to go through the preliminaries. Along with the twenty one people who had passed the preliminaries, there would be thirty six people participating in the last rounds of the tournament.

The preliminary rounds could be said to be a festival for the commoners of Jabel viscountcy. The final rounds, however, were meant for the eyes of nobles. The final rounds started with eager nobles from nearby territories, knights, and wealthy merchants watching.

Let the final rounds begin.

Unlike the participants who had passed the preliminary rounds, who were of a diverse age range, the seeded participants were mostly between their late teens and early twenties. Their eyes shining, the disciples of knights and children of noble houses hungrily waited for the chance win the tournament and the honor it would bring.

The first match will be between young master Chase, third son of Marquis Lael, and mercenary Alan, a level B mercenary from the Kital Mercenaries.

Their names called out by the referee, the two men stepped up on to the ring that had been prepared for them. The first rounds between the thirty six people would mostly be between the participants who had passed the preliminary rounds and seeded participants.

Unlike Chase, who was in his early twenties, Alan was a stocky man in his thirties with a messy mane. Alan bit his lips as he gripped his bastard sword tightly with both of his hands.

I must display my skills so that lord viscount notices me.

The way to knighthood was not limited to winning the martial tournament. If you were skilled enough, it was not uncommon for the lord hosting the martial tournament to approach you with offers of knighthood.

Most of the participants who had passed the preliminary rounds were aiming to be as lucky.

Even if he has received training from an early age, I have more experience in actual situations. I must aim to utilize my experience.

The referee signaled the beginning of the match as Alan was hardening his determination.

Begin match.

Alan roared fiercely and ran towards his opponent. Chase, however, calmly took a sword stance.

The match did not last long. Although Alan had honed his skills on the battle field and monster exterminations, it was not enough to defeat Chase, the son of a noble who had had the way of the sword ingrained into him at a young age.

Stop match. Young master Chase wins.

Alans mangled body was carried out on a stretcher as Chase lifted his sword proudly.

Most of the matches continued on with similar outcomes. The winners of the preliminary rounds found themselves being overwhelmed by the young masters of noble houses who had been born into the sword.

Not all of the matches, however, followed the trend.

Kwwannng.

Eric, of indirect line to a nearby noble house, frowned as he was pushed back from the impact of the clash. The shield he was holding was deformed beyond recognition.

What the hell? Why is this bastard so strong?

The young nobles greatest weakness was their lack of experience. Most of them held metal shields in order to overcome this handicap. By utilizing the large surface area of a shield, they could defend against even the more unpredictable

sword strikes.

This was one of the reasons that the seeded participants had been winning the matches so easily until now. Each one of the rapid attacks that Eric's current opponent was throwing at him, though, could not possibly be blocked even with a shield.

Kwaang.

A hole appeared in the middle of the thick shield, and Eric slid back with his feet braced. The arm that held the shield was numb, with no sensations coming from it.

No way. I can't lose like this.

Eric countered desperately but his opponent effortlessly deflected his attack before launching one of his own. Eric raised his shield once more with a pale face.

Ujijik.

A chilling sound rang out, as the arm holding the shield slumped in a strange manner. The massive force behind the axe had broken his arm. Eric had no choice but to announce his surrender.

I-I surrender.

Stop match. Kurotan, victory.

Kurotan looked disappointed as he withdrew his axe and exited the ring. The gazes of the audience were concentrated on Kurotan as he stepped down.

He had been a tornado of attacks that relentlessly beat down Eric until he had won.

What an amazing fighter.

Indeed, how amazing.

Luke smiled warmly to greet Kurotan, who had returned to his seat.

Good job.

Because there were so many people surrounding them, Kurotan merely saluted Luke silently before sitting beside him. The first rounds finished, and eighteen participants moved on to the second round. Kurotan was a shining star in the second round as well. He had overwhelmed his opponent to an extent unexpected by even Luke.

Kurotan's sword style was not yet complete. His familiarity with Belloche sword style could not be that high, as he had only recently learned it.

On top of that, it could be said that Kurotan had yet to fully adjust to his human body. Despite all of these factors, Kurotan was able to dominate his opponent mercilessly to the point of pity.

How surprising. I didn't expect that you would fight this well.

Of course I would. These opponents are like baby chicks compared to the knights I had to face when I was an orc.

Ha, I suppose so.

Besides, I have gained the strength of aura. This is nothing.

Kurotan defeated his third opponent lightly as well. His opponents so far had all been seeded participants, but he had been able to overwhelm them with his brute strength.

Kurotan had received many small wounds during this process. The Belloche sword style was heavily concentrated on offense, after all.

In order to win the martial tournament, one had to have a certain amount of luck. Only if you did not sustain many injuries would you have to stamina to be able to win the final round.

With two rounds left, Kurotan's previous two opponents had held on bitterly until their defeat, leaving many wounds on Kurotan's body.

It's all right, I can still fight.

Kurotan refused to cower even with his body wrapped up in bandages.

You stupid bastard, your final opponent won't be so easy to deal with.

I can still win.

Luke smiled bitterly and took out a glass bottle from his pocket. The liquid that splashed inside was none other than a healing potion.

What is that?

It's a healing potion. It was disgustingly expensive.

I had a lot last time, is it all right if I have it again?

Those were mana potions. This is a healing potion. I bought it especially for you and your victory, so drink up.

All right.

Kurotan chugged the healing potion without hesitation. His eyes widened as soon as he emptied the glass bottle.

Wh-What the?

As soon as he had finished the healing potion, his whole body had begun to itch, after which a wave of rejuvenation spread throughout his body. The wounds under the bandages began to heal rapidly.

Luke unraveled the bandages around Kurotan's arms. The wounds that he had sustained yesterday were gone without a scar. Kurotan exclaimed at the sight.

Amazing. Humans sure have interesting things.

You guys worship Maal as well though? You guys don't have a priest?

We don't have anything like that. We do have shamans, but they cannot heal wounds this rapidly.

I suppose, since orcs have a natural healing ability far beyond that of a humans  
With Kurotans wounds fully healed, they needed to prepare for the final opponent.  
Its a pity that we cant train due to all the prying eyes.  
It was something that could not be helped. Kurotan, who had made it up to the top two, was constantly under watch.  
Because of the circumstances, Luke and Kurotan waited for the final match to begin silently.  
The host of the martial tournament, Viscount Jabel, had taken an interest in Kurotan.  
Your predictions were correct, Sir Cooper.  
The knight captain, Cooper, straightened his posture.  
Lord, I am absolutely sure that Kurotan can utilize aura.  
Cooper had analyzed all of Kurotans battles in the finals in order to assess Kurotans skills.  
He forced his opponents to surrender by crushing their shields or breaking their arms. It is simply impossible to produce that level of force without the use of aura.  
How do you think he was able to train in aura when aura cultivation techniques are incredibly rare and valuable?  
Aura cultivation techniques were hard to obtain even in the Sith Empire unless you were a member of a prestigious noble house. The Jabel vicsountcy itself was not in possession of a complete aura cultivation technique.  
There are differences between aura cultivation techniques, but most of them require at least ten years of training before one can utilize aura freely. However  
Cooper frowned. There was something that he had been unable to wrap his head around.  
Kurotans achievements in the sword are not very high. It has not been that long since he has learned the sword.  
This was the most puzzling thing to Cooper. Cooper had become an aura expert by combining a training of blood and tears along with arduous hours of cultivating his aura.  
An aura expert was usually extremely polished in the sword. Cooper could not help but be suspicious at Kurotans obvious lack of experience with the sword, or axe, style.  
The sword style that he executes with his axe is definitely at least mid-level. It is focused on offense, but is still a fairly complete sword style, lord.  
Either way  
Viscount Jabel looked at Cooper seriously.  
Do you think that he is a talent worth recruiting?  
If we forget about the suspicious aspects of his talent, then yes, my lord. Should he not be a spy from a foreign country, we should absolutely try to recruit him.  
Is that so?  
However, we must find out the truth behind his less than polished sword style and how he came by an aura cultivation technique.  
All right.  
Viscount Jabel nodded his head silently.  
As you say, we should investigate a bit more thoroughly before making our decision. Let us concentrate on the final match tomorrow for now.  
Yes, my lord.