

# Dream of the Guardians I-1: Rising

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## Dedication

To my late father, that perished right before I could finish this first book. I used to tell him some fragments of the story as a way of bonding despite the many things that happened between us.

Specifically, about a certain character that he inspired.



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# Introduction

Long ago, when humans were just beginning to form communities, two beings of great power collided, bringing destruction to the earth. For mortals, the land full of life was trampled on by the whim of beings outside their world, outside their lives. With great anger towards the beings and fanning the flames of their hearts with the love of the land they were born from; the beings were expelled from the world.

With the power they awakened, humans built great civilizations, expanded their domains throughout the world. Nothing was out of reach; no monster was able to cope with them... until the world became boring and meaningless. Jealous of their fellowmen, each civilization began to yearn for the power of its brethren, those who could build longed to destroy and those who could destroy longed to build.

Before long, everything they built after eons of trial and error, mutual support, and bonds beyond the ages, disappeared in less than a blink. The very power they used to protect the world where they lived ended up consuming them until no trace of them remained.

Time passed, new civilizations rose above the ashes of the old world, and although no one knew what had happened, history repeated itself once again in an inevitable cycle. The endless race of the human to build a path to greatness, reach the heavens, just to end up falling into the abyss only to repeat the process.

Along the way, humans with power took the reins of the course of civilization, anyone with power can take the reins, yes, but not anyone with power will take the road to greatness. In this way, powerless humans became fed up with the endless cycle of impotence.

Making use of the only power they had, their inventiveness, powerless humans began to prosper and reached heights never imagined by humans with power. They turned the tables, now they had the power and the reins. Humans with power were repudiated and were forced to

hide in the shadows, where no one found them, where they could live in peace.

400 years ago, a man gathered humans with power and unified them in a single movement, with a single goal, to survive under the light of the world. To be able to shout to the four winds that he is alive in the world, to feel the freedom that he longed for all his life, that man really reached to greatness and his name was engraved in the annals of time.

Little would everyone know that he would end up betraying everyone, humans with and without powers, in order to reach the top and bring great darkness to the whole world. The scar he left, the same one that has been repeated infinitely in the world, would give rise to the story of a young man with the ambition to reach that same peak.

# Chapter 1 – The first step

In a lifeless village, where everyday life is looking for something to do with their lives, villagers speak worried about the rise of passagers in the last years. Recently more outsiders passed by through the town, although it is good for business, they cannot lower their guard because of the possibility of being taken away from what little they have.

Someone starts talking over a box about the recent monster attacks in the area, the inhabitants are more concerned about how active the world has become. A young man in rags and covered in dirt carrying a slightly large sword and a sack in each hand goes into the village in search of a tailor.

People give him the right directions, and as the young man walks his way everyone looks at him and talks behind his back. After a short tour he arrives at his destination and inside he meets a man with gray hair so white that the young man's eyes squint when trying to look directly at him.

The old tailor drops a chuckle, a sign of being used to giving the same first impression for a long time. Unlike the rest of the people, he ignores the appearance of the young man, and when pointing it out the tailor responds:

—In this line of work the first thing you see in a person is what a customer can become. Each person is a work of art yet to be sculpted.

The young man appreciates his wisdom and holds a conversation while his measurements are taken:

—What kind of outfit will you want? Preferred colors? Usual postures?  
—the tailor is very methodical about the details of his work.

The young man is quiet trying to answer each question clearly enough, the conversation is more of an interrogation.

—I want an outfit to travel, to cover the most essential, to resist the cold, walk a lot, be able to carry objects easily. I guess blue and black. I'm more used to having my legs somewhat open and moving my arms, so take into account the area of the upper back, knees and crotch. —The mental effort to remember each question and formulate a clear and concise answer to each of them leaves a good impression on the tailor. —«Specific requests, he must have a clear objective»—thought the tailor —What is your objective? If you can tell me. —asks the tailor while taking measurements of the young man's exercised body. —Eventually I will take the King's Mountain Challenge far to the west and reach the top of the world, then I will be able to fulfill my goals. —answers the young man in a very serious expression, but full of motivation, a fire that the old tailor has seen more times than days he has lived.

The tailor claims that it is a suicide, even his lifelong friends left the town in search of adventures when they were young and were never heard from again. He is the only one who has lived so long, having his feet on the ground and asks the young man to be realistic.

—There is no point in living if you do not at least try to reach your goals, whether dreams or ambitions. —says the young man with complete honesty that his words reach the heart of the tailor, they even made him feel young once again —Although you say that it is a suicide, there is nothing else I want to do with my life, it is the only thing I am completely sure of. Besides, it's not just for me, it's no longer just my dream. He says as he turns his gaze to his sword.

The young man appreciates the old man's concern and assures him that he is not just any person.

—«That look, this young man is determined» —the tailor deduces when he saw the face of his unusual client up close, until he saw more closely—«Those dark circles, how much have you cried in your short life? »

—«You remind me of an old friend, but it is precisely this aspect that led me down this path» —The young man thinks when he notices that the tailor is leaving professionalism aside.

Returning to the business, in addition to the outfit, the young man orders a few garments to be better dressed and the clothes are stocked swiftly. From the sack he carries with him, the young man pays the tailor with a piece of gold little larger than his fist.

—«Is this guy crazy? With this he would be able to buy a dozen luxurious suits» —thought the tailor since the people have not gone through good times in many years—Where did you get such a large piece? —the tailor asks and leaves the young man somewhat puzzled.

-I don't know, my teacher gave it to me for completing my training and to start my journey. He mentioned that it would help me stay in shape. —the young man stands as he opens the sack and shows that there are many more pieces of similar size occupying the entire space of his sack. —I have never handled money, being an orphan, I only received what I needed to live if I fulfilled my duties in the temple. With or without money, I will live as I please.

While the payment and the sack are worshipped with bulging eyes reflecting such treasure the young man asks about the piece of cloth that is framed on the wall.

—It's my greatest treasure, a piece of elf robe, very sturdy and light and has a great story behind it. —the tailor replies with great pride and nostalgia, which was enough for the young man to ask enthusiastically to hear the story and the tailor is excited to have the opportunity to dust off his story.

"When I was young, as young as you, I was an apprentice in the family business, my father was an excellent tailor, so much so that he received orders from wealthy families from faraway places. One day a royal visited us and asked for a specific outfit, but my father refused, as it was impossible to get the most important material.

The reputation of the family fell because of the rumors that began to circle around, so I decided to grab the bag and go to the forest to get what caused so much trouble. I easily found it, but then I discovered the reason why it was impossible to get it, the forest was infested with monsters, and I was too deep to get out right away.

I was at the mercy of a very large monster and just as I was about to be devoured the monster fell to the ground, completely stiff and I could see that he had received arrow shots. From among the trees came a man carrying a bow and told me to run for my life, but while saying it the monster moved again and I shouted with everything I had "Behind you!" and ended up being injured because of me.

After easily finishing off the monster, I could clearly see that it was an elf, with long ears, very white skin and very young appearance. He retreated deep into the woods and all I could pick up as a souvenir was that piece of cloth from his robe. I never got to thank him for saving my life, but thanks to that I managed to live long enough to vindicate my family."

The young man listened to every word very carefully, thanked him, and asked how long his assignment will take. One day, so he has enough time to rest at the inn, get ready, and start his journey off on the right foot.

With an equally exaggerated payment, they give him a feast for himself and the most luxurious room, for a small town. At night, the young man spends his time discovering what a mirror is and makes his best attempt to remove all facial hair.

The young man looks in the mirror with his bare upper body, seeing how his body is toned, covered with scars and remembers how he got every one of them. A jingle sounds and he sees the crystal pendant hanging from his neck, looking deeply into it in a deafening silence.

—«Just look at you, after so much training, I'm sure the two of them wouldn't recognize you. Does it matter? We each take our own course,

so there is nothing more to think about, it remains only to move on» — thinks the young man who clearly hasn't had much interaction with people in a long time.

After spending hours chatting with himself and baffling staff and guests with the noises of the shower and the mess of bathing utensils, the young man fell asleep like rock in the greatest invention ever, the bed, something he never had in his life.

The next day the young man soon began to wear his travel attire, hard-sole boots, pants, tunic, jacket, long half-finger gloves, as well as a bag at the waist and even included a strap to carry the sword on his back. The fact that the tailor considered that the young man uses the sword was a great gesture.

While the young man talks a little more with the tailor, a ruckus is heard in the vicinity in addition to the voices of the people. When they leave, they notice that the town is under attack by werebears, beasts of 5 meters high, and there are at least ten of them.

The young man goes towards them, but out of nowhere fire comes out and the beasts are defeated one by one, a few flee while from the fire as a young man with reddish hair and his fists comes from flames. The "firebrand" boasts of his victory, but one of the bears rises to attack him from behind and is suddenly thrashed to the ground by a punch of the young man.

—Oh, thanks for covering me. You are a good person. —the firebrand says very carefree, but the tailor approaches the scene and asks if the two of them are "adepts".

Both answers affirmatively and receive the news that in the village there is rejection towards the adepts, so they must retreat, far away.

They run away once people start gathering with pitchforks and shouting "Adepts! Adepts!" and the young man can't help but engrave in his

mind the image of the hatred they feel towards him without knowing him.

After getting away far enough, the two adepts rest to catch their breath a little, the firebrand is presented as Guilian, a globetrotter who has spent some time touring the surroundings. The sword is laid on the ground and Guilian is reciprocated.

—My name is Chris; I'm just starting my journey. —despite the presentation Guilian only received a name and vague information, but it is the best thing Chris could get out —What else do you want me to tell you? There are not many relevant things in my life.

Guilian asks him if he is really 'one of his own', as he does not believe that Chris is an adept, he only hit the werebear, but Chris immediately shows him that he is wrong. He is an Earth adept, he simply does not move earth, he uses his powers to increase his own strength.

—It's not about the power you have, but how you use it. —Chris explains as he manipulates the earth to prepare a bonfire —Do you think it's possible that a human without powers could knock out such a beast with brute force?

Guilian is a little intrigued by how the power of the Earth becomes brute force, but Chris decides not to respond, it's not like they know each other enough. Therefore, he invites Chris to travel together, the two defeating monsters while making their way into the world seems like a great idea.

—Well, where do you suggest we travel? Do you have anything in mind? —ask Chris because it was Guilian who proposed such an idea, it is certain that he has something planned.

—No idea, I'm a globetrotter, I just travel without planning. I take advantage of the opportunities that come my way. —answers Guilian with a very blatant carefreeness that makes Chris sigh.

Chris mentions that he wants to go to the forest that the old tailor mentioned, he wants to do something about the old man's pending thanks.

—Wait, why do you want to go there? —Guilian asks a little puzzled  
—It's just an old man you saw a couple of times, isn't it?

—Is there anything wrong with it? Maybe no one noticed it, but I heard what the villagers were saying behind my back, when I got to town, when I was having dinner at the inn, even while I was in the bathroom.

—Chris replies bluntly—That tailor was the only decent one in the whole town, I want to reward his good heart. Life is only one and for him it is impossible to close that business, I don't want to give up on him, I can't leave it unfinished.

—«Is him serious? He speaks with total clarity, he does not lie, he does not hide anything. His intentions are clear as water» —Guilian thinks as he gazes at Chris's determined gaze

Guilian laughs out loud, finding Chris's words refreshing, tells him that he is the first guy he knows that would dare to do something like that. Guilian thinks it's a great idea to venture into the monster-infested forest to find the elf village that no one has confirmed its existence for longer than the surrounding towns and villages exist.

—Are you serious or are you just being sarcastic? —Chris asks as he realizes that his own idea sounds crazy once someone else says it.

—So, can I go with you? I've already toured the villages of this entire region and you don't miss much. —Guilian asks ignoring the debate with Chris —«You're a weirdo, but hearing your reasons, I can't let you go alone, I would hate if you died so soon after I met you»

—Do what you want- —Chris replies after giving a big sigh.

—«Which of us is dumber? Me for wanting to go or Guilian for following me? Anyway, I cannot allow that tailor to be left with such an unfinished business» —Chris debates in his mind about his own intelligence and the influence of his first partner.

—Hey Guilian, I wanted to ask you, how did the bear men end up arriving in town? Yesterday one of the villagers only mentioned that

the attacks were in the vicinity. —Chris asks curiously, he found the attack very sudden.

—Ah that, I don't know, they just came suddenly, they are very rude, I was eating orc meat outside the village, and they ruined my food. I wish we could go back to the village to devour their flesh as revenge.

—«Then it was your fault, firebrand» —Chris concluded without much effort.

After half a day of walking, the two arrive at the famous forest and enter without considering that it is about to get dark. While Guilian uses his flaming fists to illuminate his surroundings, Chris guides the raid by perceiving the surroundings with his earth powers.

Once again, Guilian tries to figure out how Chris uses his powers, so Chris relents this time. By trying to control the surrounding earth, that area is like a part of his body, you can recognize the shape, position and everything that is in contact.

Among the trees, a female figure is resting quietly until something disturbs her. A smell that only gives bad omen, so she begins to jump among the foliage. Chris suddenly stops Guilian, says that something is watching them, but from one moment to the next, Chris warns him that a creature is approaching to attack them. He holds Guilian and pulls him to dodge the monster's onslaught, revealing its true figure.

A 10-meter-long, fully armored centipede prostrates in front of the two of them as Guilian prepares his fire to counterattack, but Chris stops him on the spot, warning him that his fire could set the entire forest on fire, wreaking havoc.

—Trust me, I will fight this time. —says Chris as he draws his sword and takes a stand.

—«Impressive, just his pose shows how much concentration he gets in an instant. How many years have you prepared to have this level? » — Guilian thinks as he watches Chris, as he entrusts his life to a guy he met that same day.

Despite how big his weapon is, he holds it with one arm and Chris runs straight to the centipede in a mutual approach. Chris slides underneath the creature and gives it a sword attack strong enough to lift the centipede and fall lying down.

Chris can't relax yet, his sword hit it, yet he didn't cut it, he must find a better angle to deal a critical attack. Immediately the monster rises and attacks a second time, Chris hits it with his left fist, turning it over and discovering his jaw.

He jumps to attack the same place, calm his breathing, concentrates his force on a single point, the shell was weakened by the first attack, a stronger attack must finish the job. With a sword attack faster than sight, the centipede begins to spill its fluids as it contorts from suffering, attacking both adepts with its huge body.

Chris stops the attack, covering Guilian, with his increased strength, although it is difficult to resist because of how slippery his body is from the fluids. As Chris holds as long as he can, a projectile fly straight at the centipede wound, leaving a huge hole running through its head, and falling to the ground.

The battle was intense despite lasting less than a minute, but Chris can't stop breathing because of the shortness of breath, so his sight begins to fade, and he falls face to the ground. While losing consciousness he manages to see a few feet approaching the illuminated area as Guilian's voice is lost.

As everything gets cloudy, a very deep memory in his being comes to the surface:

—What's your name? —a girl with a sweet voice asks tremblingly.

—Chris. —responds sharply a child with a lack of brightness look.

—You don't have many friends, do you? —the girl replies a little annoyed.

—You don't have to be with me. No one forces you to do it. —Chris maintains his barrier of indifference.

—That's not true, no one should be alone, at least... I don't want to be alone. —says the girl as she lowers her gaze starting to speak more and more decayed.

—Do what you want. —says Chris resigned to the company.

—My name is Karen." —the girl introduces herself with a smile.

—...

—Can you at least answer me? —Karen asks irritated by Chris's lack of manners.

—For what? You want company, I don't, talking is not necessary. —Chris is trying to cut off the possibility of conversation.

—You yourself said to do whatever I wanted; I want to talk. —Karen replies with a lot of longing in her eyes.

—You talk, I don't. —Chris tries to get rid of her.

—Even if you don't like it, now we're talking, ha, ha. —Karen's strategy paid off.

—«Now that I think about it, that's where I began to feel again, my heart began to beat, and I began to feel alive. There's not a single day I don't regret how things ended» —Chris reflects as he clearly dreams of one of the most special moments in his life.

## Chapter 2 – Arrow Shot

Chris opens his eyes, woke up in a strange cabin, and as Guilian breathes a sigh of relief, the first words Chris releases are to ask where his sword is. Guilian tells him that it is sheathed and at the village chief's house, Chris connects the dots, someone gave the final blow to the centipede, and they took him to a village within the forest.

A few people enter the room, the features are evident, long ears, pale skin, thin complexion, great height and long silky hair, bright eyes, they are in the Elf Village. They give him a very brief explanation, saved him from the poison of the fluids of the man-eating centipede with herbalism and brought him to the village, but confiscated his sword due to the nature of the intrusion.

It's been two days since that night, Chris gives them the same explanation as Guilian, they are just travelers who were curious about the legendary elf village and have no bad intentions. Once Chris can get up and walk around unaided, he strolls around the village to see what none of the human do.

Elves are very neat beings, impeccable manners, air of intellectual superiority, although that is only an opinion, but they have great signs of living from nature, nowhere do you see signs that they deal with meat, they are vegetarians. The route of the village of pleasant becomes monotonous, and Chris moves away to the ends, before entering the forest.

—How much more are you going to keep watching me? — Chris has been on alert for a while for a piercing gaze that has haunted him since he left the cabin.

—I'm surprised you perceived me. —a voice is heard from various angles.

A girl with long, braided emerald, green hair appears from among the trees. Chris is now sure; she is the one who finished off the centipede.

The girl asks what he is based on for such a claim and the answer is clear, Chris noticed that her hair is styled to not obstruct her archery, in addition to having clear habits of walking on the branches, literally, her outfit blends perfectly with the wooded environment, and if it were not obvious enough, she gives the same presence of elemental power of Air as on that night.

—What puzzled me the most is that you don't share a single elven trait, you look too human to be one of them. —Chris's words offend her without such an intention.

—Do you have a problem with it? —the archer asks with a lot of irritation in her expression, apparently Chris found a very sensitive complex.

—You see, we risked our lives to find the village of elves and the strangest thing is to find a human here, and more than that, an adept. What can I do but find it fascinating?

—Well, excuse me, my name is Tsubaki and forgive me for not being an elf like the rest of the villagers. —rants the archer who at least maintains the manners to present herself first before doing anything else.

—My name is Chris, a simple traveler who almost died on his first day of travel. —he presents himself with a bit of embarrassment and disappointment towards himself.

—Much pleasure, Chris. Also, elemental power? Adept? What are you talking about? Is it something from the outside world? —she asks with a face full of innocence and ignorance, eating a snack he took out of a pocket.

—Wait, where did you get that? —Chris asks, a little puzzled.

—Oh, I stole it from the provisions of the village, as I always must look for my food, I usually steal their food before they eat it. —Tsubaki replies while enjoying the food.

—«Those were my provisions; now how do I explain her that she's eating smoked beef leg? »

Picking up the thread of the conversation and to prevent Tsubaki from vomiting the food she just enjoyed, Chris explains to her with complete honesty as the two sit behind the cabin, she used elemental power to

fight with her archery, an adept recognizes another if they witness their abilities in use. Although they are of different and even opposite elements, the elements react with each other.

—I detected your presence today just as you located us that night. It happened to me a lot with my friends in the temple where we grew up and trained. —mentions Chris to build trust with Tsubaki, although it really worked because of the expression she sees on his face, a lot of nostalgia.

—«He tells me the truth, it's the same expression that villagers use when remembering their families when they were little children centuries ago» —Tsubaki reflects for a few seconds to process the truth that Chris revealed to her—«Also, his scent is peculiar to me, he's not lying, of that I'm sure»

Tsubaki apologizes to Chris, her temperament is very volatile because of the environment in which she grew up. There have been no children in the village for centuries, so she is literally the youngest villager and some even discriminate against her for being human. Being on guard all her life in a village from which she cannot leave and not having a family with which to shelter is very hard for anyone and Chris understands that.

For as long as he could remember, Chris was living on the streets, watching people come and go while sitting and very still. He always came to wonder where they were going, how they had fared in their day, how the food they carry tastes, why children laugh when they are carried by the hand or carried in the arms by adults. The only time he wasn't alone was when two boys older than him would pick him up and give him food, sleep and travel together.

To him, they were his world, a very small one, but it was all he had and nothing else mattered. Some memories he had from that time were very vague, inside boxes, hidden in the merchandise of carriages and boats. The most vivid memory in his mind is his arrival at the temple.

One day he was very sick, his head was spinning, and the two boys were desperate to take him to a place. Since he had a very high fever, Chris couldn't walk, so the two children took turns carrying him. Right in the middle of the forest the two children left him lying by the road in the middle of the lush forest.

The two boys gasped with tiredness and asked him what he wanted to eat, for it was his special day, the fourth time it was celebrated. Chris only asked for one thing, delicious food, no matter what, just to have the three of them eat it together. The two boys went out in search of food and Chris fell asleep, and by the time he woke up he was already in the temple.

Chris asked the whereabouts of the two boys, but the monks who attended him stated that there was no one in the vicinity. Out of concern, Chris asked them to search more, they would eventually show up because they still have to eat together, and the monks agreed to search and be on alert in case they find any clues to their whereabouts.

He was waiting at the door of the temple for days, watching the monks come and go in search of the two children whose existence consists only of Chris's words. The days turned weeks and the weeks into months, under the sunlight, in the pouring rain, Chris was waiting to eat together, but they never showed up. That was his fourth birthday.

The monks told him all the time that there was no sign of those two boys, and on each occasion, he refused to leave the site. But with the passage of time his heart was weakening, every day his flame was extinguished until eventually... stopped waiting.

Chris didn't get up from the door, he didn't wait anymore, but he stopped living, when the monks inspected him they noticed his empty look. The only thing alive was his small childish body, the monks did not dare to touch him, they did not know what to do about it, they had all entered the path to enlightenment, so they did not know how to deal with a child who was left completely alone.

When one of the monks tried to talk to him, he received no response, he tried to encourage him by telling him some philosophical reflections, but he received no reaction. It was then that Yamamoto, the great priest of the temple, did not say a single word, he just sat next to him, to pass the time he was meditating. So much time passed that the little animals in the forest were on top of the old man, but Chris still did not respond, until he received a little touch.

A small bird was prostrate on the back of his hand, it was that small external interaction that made him respond at last. Yamamoto couldn't comfort him because of his own philosophy of detachment from the mortal world, like his students, so he warned Chris that going so long without eating or drinking would lead to an inevitable death.

When Chris turned his gaze directly into Yamamoto's eyes, the old man could notice something in the little guy, the Path of Mu, because in the time that the child was completely motionless, he was suffering hell in his mind. He was thinking why the two boys haven't appeared, why they left him alone, if he did anything wrong so that they have abandoned him. He himself was digging his own grave inside his mind to drown in his own thoughts. Eventually something broke within him and disconnected from that part of his mind, becoming completely empty, without any thought, having reached the world of Mu.

For the next 3 years, Chris was serving in the temple, not as a disciple, but as a simple servant in order to deserve some food and lodging. Like any temple, they received orphans to raise them and possibly train them, all of them were abandoned children, refugees, but none could break Chris's barrier. Together, they came to despise him as "weird", only confirming to Chris the nature of humans.

Over the course of time, he ended up learning herbalism, cooking, and some meditation tips by listening to the teachings received by the students receiving the rigorous trainings. The routine was methodical, getting up at dawn, preparing breakfast, watering the plants and orchards, cleaning the numerous halls, rooms and gadgets. More than the quiet lifestyle of the monks, Chris's life was tasteless, colorless, he

just stayed alive, with no attachment to anything or anyone, even Yamamoto's teachings were nothing more than knowledge of no use to him. He himself knew how he lived, but there was nothing to do about it.

Back in the present, after remembering the past, Chris can only sympathize with the girl next to him:

—Don't worry, we all have sorrows and the heavier they are, the stronger a person can become. —Chris's words are wise, but he doesn't deserve any credit—«I hope your words help her as much as me, Teacher»

Tsubaki breathes a sigh of relief, as if she has freed herself from a great burden, and a cool and pleasant breeze runs through the village. After seeing that reaction in the environment, Chris proposes to teach her about elemental power as a thank you for helping them with the centipede.

—One of my friends explained to me that the Air element is manifested by the freedom of a person. This very pleasant wind, is this how you feel now? —Chris asks as he closes his eyes and enjoys the wind like he hasn't done for years.

—I'm not sure what you mean, I've always had good smell and hearing. I can listen to the villagers talk about me, so I prefer to be alone, even if I spend all day alone. —Tsubaki explains as she begins to hug her knees.

—«She is not yet aware of it, her elemental power has taken root in her senses, her potential is dangerous if she does not master it soon» —Chris deduces as the conversation follows a casual course.

—You know? That is why I was that night in the forest, when I feel calmer it is far from the village, among the trees. Its aroma and the tranquility of the distance give me peace of mind. —Tsubaki is filled with longing as she expresses her lonely feelings —Of course, that was until you arrived, heh, heh.

—Well, excuse me, I just wanted to find a certain elf who saved the life of a human decades ago. —Chris lets go of his purpose by letting his guard down for the pleasant talk.

—You don't have to apologize, you're the first humans I've ever met, so I feel better than ever. I can't feel alone now anymore. —Tsubaki's smile leaves Chris somewhat uncomfortable.

—«Don't put on that smile, I don't want the same thing to be repeated as it was four years ago» —Chris's expression leaves Tsubaki somewhat confused and worried.

—An elf who saved the life of a human decades ago, won't he refer to...? —Tsubaki tries to connect the dots, but the sunset light interrupts them.

The talk was longer than they anticipated, but Tsubaki is sure she can talk again another day. Before returning to her duties as a night hunter, she thanks Chris for the talk, but she must first get information from the village chief about her elemental power while she has time. The chief oversaw raising her, because he has a certain attachment to humans unlike the rest of the elves, she has great respect for him since he taught her to be a hunter.

They both enter the chief's house, Tsubaki is nervous about talking about something so delicate, but Chris stands behind her to provide her with moral support and support her if the situation gets out of control. But the chief immediately points them out and explains that the village is in grave danger because of the two of them.

They defeated the alpha predator of the forest and, although it is cause for celebration, the most serious consequence is the change of the ecosystem. Without the presence of the man-eating centipede the food chain has lost its balance, the frenzy could not only destroy the elf village, but expand to the surrounding villages.

—How come you can live in a monster-infested forest without being devoured? —Chris asks, trying to understand the situation on a larger scale.

—The trees that surround the village are special because they scare away monsters with their scent, but with so much chaos some of them will find a way to cross the barrier that protects us. Those who fly will surely arrive first. —explains the Chief of the Elves—Tsubaki, first you

harass the herd of werebears just to prove your worth and now you end up killing the great predator of the area. Fix it at once. —the words of the chief of the elves are stern, but fair.

The rest of the elves vent their anger on Tsubaki, which leaves her tense by the blunder. She continues to receive the hatred of the villagers and the boss does nothing about it, but she just stays still, silent and with her gaze down, Chris immediately knows that she is used to such a conduct.

Chris notices that it is too much antipathy towards a simple young hunter, the village chief feels a very stinging presence, to the point of putting his whole being on high alert. Chris retrieves his sword and before he can wield it Tsubaki stops him. He can't understand why she doesn't answer them but decides to go with the flow.

Understanding the situation, they have caused, Chris and Tsubaki decide to shoulder the responsibility for their actions. Guilian enters asking what the ruckus that is heard from outside is about.

—Thank you for volunteering, firebrand. —Tsubaki says, a little irritated by the guilt the three of them share.

Now the trio of adepts will have to work very hard for the good of many without anyone knowing what happened.

## Chapter 3 – Process

During the last few days, Chris, Guilian and Tsubaki face off day and night against the monsters of the forest, without a single moment to stop. The ravages that the elves of the village and the villages around the forest would have lived, all of them, face them without doubt, covering their backs. During each confrontation, Tsubaki is observing the smallest detail of the power she uses to hunt, every arrow shot, every jump between trees, every stab, always with Chris' words in his mind.

—«How long have I had these powers? » —Tsubaki thinks as she can only do that on the subject, in addition to concentrating on the task at hand, but she cannot overlook the true nature of her being.

Most of the beasts they faced were not so big, but they made up for it with the quantity and ferocity due to the circumstances. From goblins armed with stone axes to orcs attempting to kidnap women from the elf village, Tsubaki's ear detected and identified the monsters and gave Chris and Guilian advice to defeat them in as few attacks as possible.

Guilian adapted the fire of his blows to concentrate it completely on the point of impact of the blow, trying only to burn the corpses of the monsters he attacks. Meanwhile, Chris moves quickly among the orcs surrounded by small flashes of his sword.

The movements are fast and precise, the huge bodies of the orcs collapse from cuts on the legs and when trying to writhe in pain their arms do not respond, as they were also mutilated. Shortly after falling to the ground, each orc is beheaded with Chris's sword, leaving the forest covered in blood and Tsubaki and Guilian intimidated by the scene that leaves his mastery of the sword.

Only one type of monster managed to go unnoticed to the hearing of the archer, the harpies, its stealth flight is one of its best predation characteristics and taking advantage of the blood smell of the other monsters, the barrier of protective trees was reduced to almost nothing.

The claws are so sharp that they manage to easily cut the trunk of the leafy trees. Jumping through the trees, Tsubaki intercepts the flock of harpies, leaving the two outsiders surprised with her great speed.

—«Considering the difference in thickness between the upper and lower parts of her body, it is to be expected that she will focus on speed.  
» —Chris deduces when he sees the figure of Tsubaki in combat.

With her archery, Tsubaki pierces their wings and lets the harpies be bait for attracting more monsters. Chris and Guilian take advantage of the lure to kill the hordes of monsters who are very distracted fighting each other, but they can't overlook Tsubaki's experience to hunt the monsters.

She confirms that she has been exterminating monsters since she was a child because the elf village has been isolated for centuries.

—Someday I want to get out of this doomed forest and see all that the world has to offer. —says Tsubaki as the three of them hide to ambush the next horde of monsters —Life in the village is tedious, I want to leave anyway, even if I must kill each monster myself.

The continuing frenzy and the few opportunities they have for exchanging dialogues are becoming more and more scarce. When they finally finish, after a week, they collapse in the house where Chris woke up at the beginning of his stay and talk after a well-deserved nap. Tsubaki asks Chris and Guilian about the power that comes out of her weapons taking advantage of the tranquility after finishing their duties.

She channels the power in one shot and the pair of adepts confirm one hundred percent that she used elemental power. More specifically, the power of the Air element, the rarest of the four elements.

As far as the two outsiders can tell, elf weapons channel her elemental power to enhance the capabilities of each attack. Guilian begins to understand the situation in which he has been included without any context but decides to stay on the sidelines and let Chris handle it.

—«I don't know what's going on, but she's a bundle of nerves. I better not do any stupidity. » —Guilian thinks as he lies on the bed where he slept and starts eating of the meat he carried in his provisions.

—«Disgusting, to eat meat in a completely vegetarian village. Is it your habit to eat out of stress? » —Tsubaki thinks as she stares at Guilian with disdain.

Chris notices the tension in his two companions and resumes the conversation. Confused and at the same time dismayed, Tsubaki begins to have more and more questions about her powers and asking the villagers is not an option because of so much discrimination she has received from them during her lifetime.

This is how she decides to ask Chris to teach her how to use this power that she had never heard in her life, elemental power, which he accesses with some discomfort. The next day, Chris takes Tsubaki to the village training camp for privacy and they start immediately.

This would be the first time Chris was going to be the teacher and not the student, so he would teach her what he learned in his old home.

—There are four elements: Water, Earth, Fire and Air. Each of them represents an aspect of nature, life and everything that exists in our world. As the elements are the foundations of the world, the elemental power of an adept is the expression of the force of nature through the adept and at the same time the adept expresses himself through how they interact with the world.

Tsubaki pays close attention to Chris's words but gets lost in the abstract and even philosophical things. Even so, she follows his explanation to the end.

—The way to express oneself is through ideas, with which one comes to create words and actions that shape the world in which we live. It all starts with that, an idea, a thought. The sharper the mental image, the greater the effect the idea will have on elemental power.

Tsubaki, being an experienced hunter, clears her mind and concentrates on a particular mental image. The wind begins to blow, the leaves of the trees make noise in the surroundings by the movement. Tsubaki began to generate wind through the forest and Chris was amazed at how quickly she had learned to activate elemental power.

Chris perceives that the wind is different from when they met, even the aroma is different.

—You awakened the power, but now comes the most crucial part, you must express your inner self through your elemental power. —Chris explains, because he knows that the answer is not easy, but he can't do anything else. After all, each adept is a unique world.

—«Express my inner self? How do you want me to do that? Do you want me to think about something in particular?» —Tsubaki thinks as her mind wanders through questions that become heavier and heavier in his mind and the wind expresses turbulence.

—«You can do it, don't give up» —Chris looks at Tsubaki as he begins to remember one of his friends. —«Fanny made it look very simple, she was always a prodigy after all»

Some voices begin to be heard in the distance; the wind is altering the villagers by the unusual atmosphere. The concentration of Tsubaki begins to falter more and the wind turns into a gale that hits the houses and everyone remains on alert. Chris advises her to take a break, as starting to use elemental power tires the mind and the performance will be worse.

—«After so many years using these devices, it's expected that her container is very developed. She'd better take it very cautiously or it could lead to disaster.» —Chris remains alert so that Tsubaki will not lose control —The last lesson of today: Always remain calm, because the slightest sign of fragility can cause our powers to explode and cause disaster.

The last lesson leaves Tsubaki more worried about her powers. After an afternoon of training, Tsubaki was able to learn to activate her

powers and generate a gust of wind strong enough to push somewhat heavy objects. The tiredness of all the training together with the success of having made significant progress put her in a very good mood.

—Hey Chris, what's the world like out there? —asks Tsubaki very curiously, though with some discomfort.

—I have no idea, I just finished training with my teacher and the next day I almost died with that centipede we killed that night. —Chris replies thoughtfully —«What have I been doing? Four years in constant danger of death with the master and almost died in one night? »

—So, what if I go with you? No one can stand me in this village for as long as I can remember. Surely no one will be bothered by me going with you. —Tsubaki is determined to leave the forest, her eyes full of brightness trying to reach the outside world.

Motivated after a day of training, she goes to the village chief's house to ask him questions.

—Sir, I need answers. What am I really? I can control the air, I don't see much immediate utility, but now my world has expanded too much. Please, I just want honesty.

—I knew this day would come. —says the village chief on the air as he turns his back on the two adepts —Sure you want to know the truth?

—«This scent, he is very tense. » —Tsubaki perceives with his developed sense of smell.

She nods and her mentor, although he continues to turn his back on her, knows perfectly well what answer he has given her.

—On a cold and windy night, from among the autumn leaves appeared a silhouette, a woman carrying a sleeping baby. The woman handed me over the infant with an amulet and asked me to take care of her, who would eventually grow into a powerful warrior. A strong breeze lifted the leaves and disappeared without a trace.

Tsubaki in other circumstances would have thought that "powerful warrior" means she would be a monster hunter, but after fighting

alongside Chris and Guilian she realized that there is something more, there is a purpose for which she ended up isolated in the village of elves.

—I knew you couldn't learn like everyone else, so I handed you my old equipment. —says the chief of the elves quite seriously —You know that since I received the wound on my shoulder, I could never make a proper shot again.

Chris opens his eyes and mouth in surprise that he has found his target. But he can only restrain himself by watching the scene unfold in front of him.

—The whole village has treated you badly and I apologize, the air is very vitiated when we all live isolated here for so many centuries. You were the breath of fresh air we so badly needed, but it's time for you to take flight.

Tsubaki's voice begins to break, all her buried feelings come to the surface.

—Of course, you took care of me, raised me and trained me, no matter how harsh you were with me, you will always be my family. —tears fall like a river as she hugs the elf from behind and he can no longer maintain his facade.

The two stay crying for several minutes until they calm down, the two feel completely liberated. After finishing hugging, they realize that Chris is still in the room, he witnessed everything and can't look more uncomfortable.

After resuming the conversation about fate and stuff, there is only one last matter left.

—Where is the amulet with which I was given? —Tsubaki asks and the boss hands her the amulet that hung from his neck for so many years and gives it to her in her hands. A small semicircular amulet with

strange symbols and an elongated dragon twisting, as if a part was missing.

—I don't know what plans destiny has for you, but it will be better that every step you take, you do it with all the security in the world. —now the chief says goodbye to his student with a smile full of affection.

—These symbols are very unusual, surely somewhere in the world you will find someone who can translate them for you. —Chris mentions when he sees the amulet in Tsubaki's hands —What do you plan to do now?

—Well, of course I'm going on a trip, does it bother you if I go with you? It would be better to start traveling with someone you know. —Tsubaki asks, being a little embarrassed for asking the first boy she met for a very big favor.

—Do what you want. —Chris responds by looking away when he is uncomfortable with such a request.

With a clear goal and two new friends, Tsubaki decides to start her journey into the outside world. Now Chris, Guilian and Tsubaki get together to travel the world.

Chris remembering his original goal to enter that forest, he asks the chief if he remembers that he saved the tailor's life and indeed remembers it, although it is somewhat bittersweet. Chris immediately asks him to go to the village so that he can thank him after more than 50 years of what happened and after a period of disagreement and being persuaded by Tsubaki, he agrees.

Once they reach the village, Tsubaki and the chief will part ways and she begin to say goodbye to everyone in the village. It is not a goodbye, but a see you later, because it is certain that one day she will return, not permanently but she will tell you all kinds of stories from the outside world.

The departure of the chief and the extermination of the monsters were incentives to open a direct passage to the village to open to the world and trade, because surely the place is more accessible and safer.

As he is touring the new step, the chief mentions how intrigued he is about the outside world. It has been 400 years since the village was locked up by the sorcery of one of their own.

—The elves were always a noble and proud race, but an internal conflict led Alipheese to take revenge against us for expelling her from our community. —the chief mentions of the story before he was even born. —Well, now is a good time for the elves to know the world. It will surely be different from that time they remember. —Chris replies seriously.

Once arriving at the village from which Chris and Guilian were initially kicked out, Tsubaki and the chief separate, but the farewell is interrupted by a scandal on the outskirts, bringing bittersweet memories to the two guys.

A group of travelers are expelled from the village in the same way as the two of them and end up approaching the party. It turns out that these travelers are also adepts and after a moment to catch their breath, they begin to talk as they move further away from the town.

Chris and his friends don't have a fixed destination so anywhere is a good start. The travelers tell them that they are heading to a nation of adepts, and it immediately catches their attention. It turns out that they are close to a series of mountains that protect a nation of adepts, each one of its inhabitants has powers just like them and it is the best option to live quietly in such a hostile world.

This place is a few days away and they immediately choose it as their next destination. There will most likely be more resources to guide Tsubaki in her training and it will be an interesting place for Guilian and Chris.

During the night, travelers tell them about their experiences at the hands of humans from their homelands. Chris and Guilian understand their words and have a few drinks with them to swallow the sorrows.

Tsubaki only watches them while having dinner, she is disgusted by the rabbit stew while Guilian approaches her from behind and spoonful in her mouth. At first it burns her mouth and palate a little, but she begins to feel the taste of rabbit meat, which absorbed the flavor of the vegetables and edible herbs they used as spices.

She only manages to hold back a little but begins to almost dance to how delicious the dinner was. Tsubaki had never tasted something so rich, because elf gastronomy does not have great variety due to it's based on ingredients such as plants, fruits and vegetables.

—I helped in the temple kitchen since I was a kid, so I know some secrets if you want to include meat in your diet. —Chris says when he sees Tsubaki so pleased with the food.

—Really?! —Tsubaki asks with glowing eyes and high expectations.

—Sure, I cook for two girls for years, I'm sure you'll like it too. —Chris replies with an air of pride.

The days pass, as the caravan moves forward Chris teaches Tsubaki some tricks with kicks and pirouettes, while Guilian watches them bored. He teaches her about the center of gravity, synchronizing the contortions of the abdomen and spine with kicks to ensure effectiveness.

—Why do you teach me kicks if I've always used my bowing?" asks Tsubaki as she catches her breath.

—You should always assume that your main fighting style will not always be the best option, your bow can be broken, you run out of arrows, you are ambushed despite your incredible smell and hearing.

—Chris explains to his partner —You should always have a backup plan.

—Do you have a backup plan? —Tsubaki interrogates Chris.

—Of course, if my increased strength and sword are not enough, then I will use the earth, and if that doesn't work, you two can cover me.

—«Do you trust us so much? If we've only known each other for a few days. » —Tsubaki thinks touched.

—Sure, that last one is unlikely to happen, it's very likely that, if a situation I can't handle, I'll probably run away to find a more viable option —Chris explains, breaking Tsubaki's illusions, but hinting her his degree of honesty, which makes it easier for her to trust his words even more.

In the daily routine, Guilian gets used to hanging around the vicinity of the camp to hunt creatures for Chris to cook. Because of this, Tsubaki began to compete with him in hunting, by the time sunset came the two returned and counted the number and size of the prey obtained.

During the evenings, Tsubaki enthusiastically helped Chris in the cooking of the food and Guilian played pranks on her, so Chris puts him to prepare the ingredients, season, cut, take advantage of all that energy to spare in something productive.

—Hey, peel the vegetables well! We need them to have no piece of skin. —Tsubaki says in judging Guilian's performance in the kitchen.  
—Yes, yes, I'm doing it, I'm doing it. —Guilian replies to the rebuke, being a little stunned by Tsubaki's ability to raise her voice —God, you scream even more than my grandma.

Chris sees how animated his two companions were and can't help but remain self-absorbed whenever he sees them interact. He almost takes a small step towards them but decides to concentrate on continuing to cook.

Everyone gets used to the routine, Chris always judges the meat that Guilian and Tsubaki bring them excited about what food he is going to prepare, their eyes shining with expectation make him strive to cook.

—Chris, I caught a deer, can you cook it? —asks Tsubaki, drooling with hunger.

—Ah, yes, I can roast its legs with... —Chris tries to reply.

—Chris! I caught a black bear; can you cook it? —asks Guilian with fire in his eyes.

—Oh yes, I can smoke his flesh and... —Chris explains, always drawing on the repertoire of food he collected during his training years.

Every night they have a big feast due to the performance of the pair of hunters, they end up sleeping peacefully with full bellies. Chris watches them sleep while he fights daily fatigue.

—«It would be much easier just to cook for myself. » —Chris thinks as he continues to see his two companions —«Although it's comforting the noise they make during the day. The silence I spent these last years, eating alone, had enough of it. I guess I'll keep cooking for them. »

Not disappointing his two companions is his daily struggle.

Once they reach the first mountains that surround it, they find a doubt, how to get into it. There are no signs of lookouts, roads or anything resembling an entrance or exit from the territory. Chris immediately decides to inspect the place as they enter the mountain.

After a few hours climbing the mountain Chris detects some constructions inside the stone. It would be imperceptible to non-Earth adepts, and immediately Chris moves the earth to dig into the mountain. Can't see much from the outside because of the change of light so Chris and one of the travelers decide to come in to look.

As soon as they enter, they are pointed by spears of some men in armor and they decide to tell the truth, that they only want to enter the territory because they are adepts and show them their powers. The others enter and proceed to do the same and one of the guards guides them through the premises.

It turns out that they entered the tunnels restricted to civilians through which they watch the outside and the way to the territory and finally understand the behavior of the beginning.

—«How many attacks will they have received in the territory to need to make a surveillance network inside the mountains? » —Chris thinks

as they move forward and begin to see a light at the end of the tunnel and immediately begin to accelerate the pace.

When they reach the outside, they realize that they are right in the place they had been promised, the nation of adepts, Vodheim. The citadel they see from the top of one of the inner mountains looks like nothing they imagined, perfectly aligned paths, buildings much taller than any construction in any town and village connected by bridges.

In the distance, more mountains that surround the territory and look completely green and when they move away from the mountain through which they arrived from they realize that the surface is worked to have crops throughout its surface. Feats like that are impossible if you are a farmer without powers.

When they arrive at the entrance of the citadel the guard who led them tells them that they must "register", create an identity with which to live within the territory. The registration is not very demanding, name, element to which you are related, alternative skills, but the curious thing is that, in a totally optional way, you are asked your origin.

Once the registration is finished, they are given a small letter with the information they gave, something called a "credential" and that they must always carry with them. Something curious are the symbols that are in the upper corners, the one on the right is the Vodheim badge.

—«A dew drop surrounded by mountains, making a clear allusion to the mountains that surround the territory, but the drop in the center, what does it represent? » —Chris is puzzled as he keeps thinking. In the upper left corner, there are six circles of different sets of colors, one of them with the colors of Vodheim, blue and gray green.

After looking at the credential, they are directed into the citadel and suddenly the sky lights up for a few moments and they hear a rumble. Something happened, just entering the territory and following the noise to its origin. A crowd of people are surrounding a strange man, carrying

a huge sword and armor and around him are some fallen guards and civilians, the damage in the area indicating that there was combat.

A single young man is barely standing up, with all his strength he concentrates the last of his elemental power in his fist and throws a blow at him. The mysterious man deflects the attack with his sword and lashes out at what is left of his life. In less than a blink a metallic sound is heard, Chris unsheathed his sword and blocked the attack on the young man.

The increased strength and his sword are barely enough to stop the sword of the mysterious man, in a single crossing of glances it is clear, both retreat and announce that they are now in a duel, and as is the custom of warriors, they exchange a few words. The mysterious man is introduced, Caellach, the Tiger's Eye and Imperial General, some civilians confirm that their villages were attacked by people in those armors and uniforms, so his presentation is more than reliable.

—My name is Chris, a man lost and with no clear future. —he kicks the body of the badly wounded young man back from him and falls to a girl with long dark hair and tells her to take him immediately to some healer.

Immediately Guilian carries the young man and Tsubaki asks the girl to guide them, and she starts talking tremblingly and starts running, and they end up following her.

Chris puts a posture with his sword and receives the attack of Caellach, the sound of the clash is enough to know that both have the same strength. One, two and even three more blows and all of them are blocked by Chris, he does not deflect them, he stops them head-on. One more clash and they keep pushing the swords to destabilize the other, a misstep and it would be defeat.

Caellach stops putting strength and makes Chris lose his balance, in that single instant he lashes his sword directly to his chest, but Chris also had planned to pretend to lose, because he turns his body face up,

passing Caellach's sword a few centimeters in front of him, hits his sword with such force that he ends up breaking it and falling to the ground on his back.

Immediately Caellach retreats and tries to assimilate what happened, while the crowd around is stunned. Chris stands up and tells him that the fight is over, as he no longer has a weapon with which to fight his sword. Caellach only smiles, with a very clear expression, because his whole face said that he wants to continue fighting, but he agrees with him.

Caellach takes out of his armor a small circular object and throws it to the ground, this generates a circle with symbols that releases a column of light that goes far to the sky and gives the order to his men to retreat. These are introduced to the column of light and address a few last words to his new rival:

—It's a pity that I didn't bring my real sword, the Dragon Fang, but rest assured that next time we will fight until only one is left standing and wielding his sword. Until then, Chris.

—Do what you want, Caellach. —Chris beckons his sword to him, implying that he accepts the challenge where and when they meet again.

It is said that when two people fight, they are expressing their true interior, without any lie, therefore, regardless of gender, age or culture, in a duel there are only two people in their exclusive world, and it is inevitable to develop some sympathy, so both warriors usually become rivals.

With a new rival in the world and marking a before and after in Vodheim on their first day, Chris and his friends could never imagine that this meeting would only be the beginning towards a series of events that would change the world to an uncertain and excessive future.

## Chapter 4 – Push

After an unexpected battle for both Chris and the Vodheim community, Chris asks the people where his companions went, probably with some healer and they answer that a few "blocks" away there is a building with a triangular roof, there they surely went.

Whatever a block is, Chris heads to the roof of a nearby building to see the triangular roof building. Entering the right place Chris reunites with his classmates and asks how the young man who kicked is doing.

—The young man is fine, the injuries were a bit serious, but not fatal and I treated him quite soon. You saved his life, even if he was very foolish. —the words resonate as a woman very different from the others enters the room, long, blond and wavy hair, tall, with a one-piece dress and hair held by a black ribbon.

The funny thing is that she always keeps her eyes closed and talks from the door she walked through as she heads towards them. The woman stops next to the young man and slaps him on each cheek, although it is not much use, he does not wake up, but her spasms a little of the pain, a sign of recovering.

After her only sermon to the unconscious, in more than one way, she introduces herself:

—My name is Lillian, healer of Vodheim. —said with total humility and her words are so calm that Chris feels uncomfortable.

As soon as she pronounced her name, Guilian gets up from his seat with a surprised expression and immediately Tsubaki asks him what his problem is. He comments that Lillian is the name of the leader of the nation of Vodheim and one of the Six Lords.

With a face of misunderstanding on their faces, Chris and Tsubaki ask him what he is talking about, who those are and what relevance they have. Guilian only sighs and proceeds to explain to them.

—There are six nations of adepts in the world, one on each continent, sheltered in natural fortresses so that only the adepts can enter. Each of them is led by an adept of incredible power, together they are called the Six Lords and lead the most powerful military force in the world. — Guilian explains what he has learned from rumors after years of living adrift.

It is something they had never considered on the way to Vodheim and from the stories they heard from the adepts who guided them to that place, if a simple inexperienced adept has enough power to defeat and even easily kill a group of people without powers, a nation of hundreds of thousands of adepts is enough to change the climate and cause a natural disaster, not to mention the number of people who would perish from an attack of that scale.

As if reading their thoughts, Lillian replies that it only depends on the person who runs the nation, in all her time as Lord she has emphasized not attacking any nation or human settlement but establishing trade routes and international relations with the other adept nations of the world. For more than 400 years, each Lord has written a part, from isolation from the rest of the world to a fondness for conquest.

—Personally, I just want a quiet life, drink tea and cure the sick, that's why the army is only in charge of defending the mountains and the inhabitants are not forced to train and be militarized like 5 years ago. —Lillian says very seriously —Taking the power of a nation is demanding, but with demilitarization it is no longer so much tiresome. The arrival of adepts from abroad gives us a lot of information about the lands near and far and trade is more prosperous than ever. It was a good idea that Karen proposed to us three years ago.

Hearing that name Chris swallows his own saliva and turns pale. After all that Guilian and Tsubaki have experienced and the struggle they had a few minutes ago, the two are surprised by the unexpected reaction. Immediately Chris asks Lillian where she knows her from. She returns

the same question, adding that by his reaction Chris must know her in another sense.

—She is a childhood friend with whom I grew up and trained. Well, until four years ago as we took separate paths. —Chris replies with some discomfort and his words show a face that Tsubaki knew halfway but that Guilian knows perfectly: the expression of a hurt man ... in the heart.

Immediately Chris insists to Lillian to give him an answer to his question, Lillian analyzes Chris' answer for a few seconds and agrees to speak.

—Karen is a friend, but we are in the same circle, because she is also one of the Six Lords, the leader of the nation of Cundraria, on the continent to the west. I met her three years ago when she came passing through with her companions and we met while healing one of her own. She told me about an idea she had of establishing international relations between the Six Lords to unify the adepts of the whole world and open us to the human world.

Chris is somewhat confused at first but regains his composure and only immerses himself in his thoughts.

—«Well, I guess she's got on with her life. But why do you do this? I hope you have a good reason. » —Chris tries to understand the events that happened while he was isolated while training.

This revelation only leaves Chris thinking about his old friend, he is so immersed in reflection that Guilian and Tsubaki begin to worry about the expression on his face. Even the atmosphere became very tense.

—«Was it so easy to forget about me, Karen? Now you rub shoulders with the Six Lords and after what you experienced; I don't think I can believe the words of a colleague of yours. Even if your reasons are good, we both know you have a darkness that you can never get rid of, just like me. »

—Do you really think she will still be the girl you met? Her nickname is Shinigami, which in a certain culture means Goddess of Death, as she

is said to harvest the souls of her opponents. —Guilian's words leave Chris with an empty look for a moment, he thinks for a few seconds. That kind of rumor starts to raise Chris' suspicions and make him more thoughtful.

—Well, eventually I will meet her again and we can treat each other cordially because of our past, there is no reason to look for a fight with her, even if it is me. —that's the only thing Chris gets to say after a few moments of silence, although the last thing he said leaves his companions somewhat confused, while Lillian is uneasy as well as serious.

Without realizing it, Chris sees that Lillian is already sitting and serving a rare drink to Tsubaki and Guilian, a Vodheim native tea made with plants unique to its mountains and the water with medicinal properties that flows throughout the city. Chris just sits with them at the same table and after a few moments asks Tsubaki where the dark-haired girl he commissioned the young man to is.

Tsubaki puts on an expression of discomfort and tells him that, in fact, that girl ran towards the building they are in, but once they entered, they could not find her, and Lillian told them not to look for her. Chris asks her the reason for this, and she responds cordially.

—She's an old friend and has her... Peculiarities. Come to think of it, from what I was told and heard, you forced her to do something, even if it was with good intentions. Most likely she ran here for me and not to save the young man. Don't grudge her, please. —Lillian's answer is unusual, but it is enough to show the three foreigners that she defends her friends, which speaks very well of her.

Chris is intrigued by such an answer and decides not to inquire about it anymore, he reclines on the back of his seat and takes a momentary look at the end of the stairs and notices a small black silhouette hiding as if it were watching him until recently. It was clear that it was that dark-haired girl, but he desisted from doing anything.

After a brief chat with Lillian about his confrontation with Caellach, Chris begins to talk to his companions about what they are going to do, on the one hand, there is Chris with the challenge of King's Mountain and on the other Tsubaki wants to investigate about the power of the wind, then Guilian mentions something interesting, Lillian told them that in a neighboring kingdom a unique competition of its kind will be held, a Tournament of Adepts. That kingdom in recent years has been promoting the image of adepts by accepting them into its military forces, whether for combat or for medical services, and the tournament is an excellent opportunity to earn a high position in its inner circle or simply because of renown.

It is the first tournament of its kind not only for that kingdom, but worldwide, as the kingdom in question belongs to the Union of Kingdoms, an association of kingdoms exclusively of humans without powers with the aim of equating the nations of adepts. Among its members there are some nations that do allow the adepts to be in their lands if they do not use their powers under any circumstances or join their military forces.

They do not hesitate to decide, as the tournament arrives Chris and his teammates will train to polish their skills and participate. Chris will learn quite a few new perspectives from his opponents, Tsubaki will be able to gain renown and have more clues about her amulet and Guilian will be able to fight and have fun. The only drawback is that the tournament starts in two months and the fastest route to reach the kingdom of Heinburn where it will take place is passing through a volcanic region and a desert of black sands that will take about two weeks.

Lillian warns them that they shouldn't stay so long in Vodheim if they plan to get to Heinburn:

—I recommend you go out through the north tunnel and avoid the Maxim volcano and the desert; the two sites are very dangerous and would be an unnecessary risk. —the leader knows many secrets of the area, so she advises them.

—If we take time to train, it will be our route, but if we finish soon, we will surely take your advice. Thank you. —Chris replies with some cordiality.

—«Why is there some tension between the two of them? » —asks N Tsubaki and Guilian as the conversation begins to stall.

The silhouette peeks out once again, Chris notices and decides to cut off the conversation, although he apologizes to Lillian for possibly disturbing her.

—«Is this the guy you told me about, Karen? I think you are the blind one, that sword almost hurts me with its presence alone. » —Lillian thinks as her guests retreat, leaving her drop cold sweat and letting out a sigh when she is left alone in the room.

Once they leave the building, they decide to go their separate ways, Guilian and Tsubaki will train their combat styles and Chris will train on his own. In a nation of adepts there must be styles that could be of use to them, so they will be a little more than a month at most doing as they please. They check into an inn near Lillian's house and to their surprise Chris pays with a fist-sized piece of gold and Guilian and Tsubaki are surprised.

—«Where did you get something like that? » —The two think simultaneously as their eyes shine with the golden light.

Chris only tells them that his teacher gave him a bag full of gold from the cave in which they lived. Unknowingly, Chris already had a good amount of money for his travel expenses and the bag, practically a sack, is indeed heavy enough that Chris is the only one who can carry it during the trip. They devour a great dinner before bed and plan their working day.

The next day, the three foreign adepts leave the inn just dawning to look for aspects to polish for each of them. From the gazes of passers-by, Chris decides to go on his own and leaves Guilian and Tsubaki alone to take their own paths.

The two stares at each other for a few moments in an awkward silence and begin to walk aimlessly. Eventually they return to the square where Chris confronted Caellach and contemplate the daily routine of the town. Guilian notices a good number of workers going in the same direction and he decides to ask about it.

—We are going to the quarry; we must continue removing land to continue the renovation and expansion of the city. If you have time to ask, come with us, boy. —answers the foreman as he forces the hands of fire to work.

Tsubaki can't help but make fun of what happened, and her laughter turns into a windstorm that shakes people. Everyone complains about her, and the children mock her lack of control, Tsubaki sends them to silence with a scream that almost blows them up and the teacher who guides them to their morning classes asks her if she wants to receive guidance.

Meanwhile, Chris heads to a forest outside the city, and walks around town on his way to the woods and notices some activity in people, they begin to avoid it. He thinks it's because he confronted Caellach and stopped his plans while everyone only showed helplessness in the face of such a situation.

His decision was correct, training isolated by the shock of his arrival is his best option to avoid conflicts. Meanwhile, Guilian in the quarry spends his time destroying rocks with his fire fists and receives guidance from the workers there and Tsubaki receives from the novice teacher books on wind and combat styles, many of them require a high degree of skill and control because she must shape something that has no form and is intangible, things have only begun.

Chris just by walking around the city already gave an idea to how they built buildings, the earth has been compressed and shaped so that they come together like a puzzle, that way each piece is fastened to the others and vice versa, obtaining resistance against tremors. The union makes the strength, and that they apply it in that way indicates that truly they

have been refining this type of technique for a long time. Without further hesitation, Chris begins to try to imitate the bricks of buildings with common earth.

After half a day of failed attempts, Chris begins to feel something strange, being isolated from everyone it is easy to feel when they are watching you, so he begins to walk through the forest, to the deepest part, created some false traces with the earth and covered himself between the branches of a tree. It did not take a minute for the person responsible for his concern to appear, or, rather, the girl responsible.

Hiding behind tree trunks, loitering, the dark-haired girl was clearly looking for him, so she decides to give her what she wants. When she is looking in another direction, Chris comes down from the tree and stands behind her.

—Can I help you with anything? —says Chris directly to her ear and she turns very fast, jumping from the surprise that easily causes a heart attack.

Chris laughs slightly at the funny reaction and apologizes for the mischief he did to her. Once calm, the girl, stuttering, tells him that she wants to know where he got his power from. Chris only replies that he got it with a lot of effort:

—You want me to teach you to be strong? —Chris' question is straightforward, but completely honest. She remains silent but nods her head.

After returning to the outskirts of the forest they realize that it is getting dark, so they decide to camp where Chris trained. After a simple roast meat on the campfire of an animal that Chris hunted, he begins to tell a story to the girl.

—My teacher was a peculiar man; he was a hermit who lived in a mountain cave and used to live alone for a long time. Just by seeing him you can tell that he is strong, and I do not mean brute force. The first

time I saw him he attacked me, and because he survived, he decided to train me. Not as an adept, but as a warrior. Every day I brandished a simple wooden stick and many times I fought him and received many blows. He would hit me whenever he saw some weakness in my postures and movements, he would even hit my abdomen for "not breathing properly", and now my breathing has a constant rhythm and I hardly exhaust myself. He made me hunt my own food to survive, sometimes attacking and chasing me in order to keep me awake and alert. I can truly say that I came close to dying many times. What I am going for is that, under his teaching, I lived a long time in fear, mainly to him, but it was precisely that that taught me to feel alive, not to be a predator with a thirst for blood, but to value the life that I have and that I can have.

Listening to that brief but interesting story, the girl is left with her gaze lost, trying to imagine all the lessons that Chris lived and how he can talk about it as if nothing had happened. The girl, upon regaining a little attention, realizes that Chris has a look of nostalgia, that nostalgia that is expressed with affection.

Contemplating the flames of the campfire, Chris begins to immerse himself in his memories:

Four years ago, in a mountainous area in the middle of nowhere, surrounded by lush forests, Chris falls from the sky next to Hama. She tells him that an old friend will take care of him, but Chris doesn't care at all.

—Come on, you have nothing to do or where to go, it will be good for you to get away from the temple with all the memories you must have there. —Hama tries to cheer Chris on, although he's not as effective.

—I don't have much choice, do I? —Chris replies very discouraged — Anyway, I don't know where exactly I am.

—But you must admit that traveling through the skies is so fast and efficient. —Hama mentions optimistically—It's something that no one in the world could experience firsthand.

—Sure, whatever. —Chris replies as he sighs.

Advancing through the forest, they reach the base of the mountain and Hama says goodbye, she has matters to attend to and that her friend is easy to find. Before Chris can say anything, Hama flies:

—Don't sweat it, my friend is the only person in this whole area, there is no chance to mistake. —Hama shouts carefreely as she disappears into the vastness of the sky.

Alone and in the middle of nowhere, abandoned by everyone for one reason or another, Chris faces a new challenge from life itself.

## Chapter 5 – Forged in steel

Being in the middle of nowhere, Chris decides to go into the mountain and makes his way against some fierce animals such as wildcats and bears ending their hibernation. For any human without powers, it would have been a very dangerous journey, but for Chris it was very easy to build solid stone walls to block the attacks of wild animals.

Having wandered the mountainous region throughout the day, he eventually reaches a cave to shelter from the rain:

—Wow, here it starts to rain more suddenly than in the temple, even the air feels less dense. —Chris says loudly panting despite being alone, trying to catch his breath so quickly—Walking up a hill almost makes me faint.

—If that alone is enough to exhaust you, you will not survive. You'll die. —says a male voice, much lower than that of the monks of the temple.

—The only person in the whole area, you must be the old friend of—but Chris is abruptly interrupted.

—Hama must have left you here, she always does what she pleases, I seriously don't understand the Air element. Everyone justifies their actions by being "free," only causing unnecessary problems. —complains a man at the bottom of the cave.

—I don't plan to make trouble; I just want to rest. —replies Chris with a very much exhausted expression in his eyes —«One thing after another, Karen leaves the temple, Fanny gets fed up with me, Yamamoto kicks me out of the temple, and Hama leaves me in the middle of nowhere. Now a man complains about my very existence. I'm fed up. »

The hermit sees Chris carefully, the awkward silence lengthens, the docility of the young man in front of him makes him more uncomfortable than watching a man kiss a dog on the muzzle. The man's piercing gaze makes Chris stay defensive while trying not to be a nuisance.

—How disgusting. —the hermit replies as he looks away from his figure—I hate unnecessary problems, but what I hate most are weak people like you.

—And who cares about that?! You are just a filthy man in a cave in the middle of nowhere!!! —Chris explodes when he receives a strong criticism.

As soon as Chris finishes speaking, he notices the atmosphere around him, the environment is flooded with a suffocating pressure that makes all his senses indicate the same thing: Death. The hermit wields a sword, and the pressure increases as he wields it in his direction.

All the animals of the region ran in terror with the pressure and throughout the area all can see an immense flare rising from inside the mountain to the skies, splitting the storm clouds and interrupting the torrential rain. Just outside the cave, Chris is all badly injured, his clothes have almost been completely incinerated, and his whole body is smoking.

The hermit comes out of the cave with the sword that almost destroys the entire area and is a little surprised that the young intruder has survived his attack. He claims that even a powerful adept would not be able to withstand an attack of that magnitude, so it will give him a chance to survive.

—«Chance? What the hell are you talking about? He almost killed me just for being in front of him. » —Chris thinks as he tries not to lose consciousness.

—I hate the weak, I'm not going to repeat myself. —says the hermit who prostrates on top of him while the twilight sky clears over them—I can't stand a world where you are weak, so either you get stronger, or I destroy you.

—«I'm fainting, I don't understand what he's saying anymore. » —Chris is already finishing fainting.

Chris wakes up in the same place and the hermit has dinner prepared at the campfire in front of him. With his body sore and his guts roaring

from not eating all day, Chris extends his arm to reach for a piece of meat from the campfire, but the hermit hits his hand in reprimand.

—That's my food, get yours. —says the hermit with his mouth full of delicious deer meat —One more thing, I am disgusted by the primitive way in which you use your elemental powers, do not move the earth again or I will kill you on the spot.

Chris didn't eat that night or the next day, he was at the awkward point of his body healing while demanding nutrients to carry out the work. He collected water from a nearby river and seeing fish swimming against the current he tried to catch one, but was unsuccessful, plus huge bears appeared even hungrier than him.

Automatically, Chris was about to fight with them with the power of the earth, but he remembered the words of the hermit and before he could make use of his powers, he could feel the same pressure fall on him practically from the sky. The presence was just as overwhelming, but it was enough for the bears to come out terrified and Chris was able to continue catching the big and juicy fish.

Still unable to make use of his innate abilities, practically Chris' day flies away as he roamed the area in incognito, looking for resources to survive: berries, edible plants, animal habitats that he could hunt and develop the means to get hold of the precious meat.

For the next 2 months Chris was living in the open, living more as an animal than as a person. Sometimes he could see the hermit in the distance, even if he showed no signs of it Chris could feel his piercing lookout over him.

At a certain point, the hermit arrived at Chris' camp and incinerated with his fire what he had built:

—Is that how you plan to survive? Are you satisfied with meeting your needs like an animal? —asks the hermit—Is it that you don't have a shred of pride in being a human?!

But Chris didn't respond, he was just immersed in staying alive, although it was strange to him. As lonely and dangerous as his current life was, he was still struggling to survive, the hermit knows the answer, but there is no point in telling him directly.

Wielding his sword, the hermit begins to attack Chris and chases him all over the place:

—You try so hard to survive that you forget to be a person. —the hermit says as he wields the sword —You better not sit still, because at the slightest opportunity you will end up dying. How much will you be able to resist?

For the first time Chris' expression stopped being dull and apathetic, for the first time in a long time his gaze was shiny, although he was completely terrified and running for his life. Sneaking through the foliage of the forest, receiving cuts all over his body by the branches of bushes, Chris' whole body was covered with wounds and dirt as he tries to catch his breath.

In less than a minute the hermit finds him and resumes the persecution, and the situation remained for about 2 months. Figuring out to survive, Chris couldn't stay in one place for long, plus the intervals for the hermit to find him didn't have a pattern, sometimes he found him right away and at other times he could spend a few hours.

Due to the constant persecution, Chris had to learn to analyze and predict, if the hermit chased him, then it meant that he could prepare in advance some traps to facilitate his escape and ensure his survival. On each occasion that he received attacks with the sword, he analyzed the movement patterns of the hermit, the postures and occasions in which they were used, sometimes imitating them in order to discover weak points and openings.

Chris went so far as to confront the hermit in order to get more information about him, although on each occasion he ended up seriously injured. It even hurt to breathe, but he was already so used to the pain that it did not affect him, although he still considered the

condition of his body. Making use of his knowledge in herbalism, Chris made ointments to treat his wounds, avoid infections and rest his body as much as possible.

Over the course of an entire month, Chris gathered the materials to make his own sword, carved from the wood of a very large and imposing tree. He had to prepare a hiding place and return to work the weapon without the hermit noticing. Knowing that it was impossible to confront him, he had to learn to brandish it by taking full advantage of what he observed from his attacker.

Having trained on his own for 5 months, Chris finally wielded his wooden sword to face the hermit, although he had no chance of winning. No, his main goal was to make use of his sword to improve his chances of survival in pursuit. The hermit let out of his presence a little when he saw Chris's brazenness, causing him to attack him with more ferocity.

From the first few seconds of the fight, it was evident, all of Chris's attack attempts were easily blocked. Every clash of the swords told him that he was hitting a "mountain", something immovable. Every time Chris received a blow, he remembered it with frustration, having allowed an opening caused him multiple injuries and a lot of pain.

After a more severe beating than ever, Chris analyzed the new repertoire his opponent demonstrated, even if he couldn't lift his arms from all the blows he received on them, still, he wielded the sword in his mind. This new phase lasted just over a year, during which time Chris began to become more and more accurate and precise, improved his hunting abilities and even drove the bears away from the river where he fished on his first day.

Without realizing it, Chris had gone through a metamorphosis and was no longer the sniffy young man who fell from the sky. Looking at his face in a pool of water he could see that even his gaze changed, although he didn't care at all, his only idea in the mind was to survive.

Feeling a presence, Chris feels something falling from the sky and investigates the point of impact, only to realize that Hama arrived after such a long time. She only apologizes for having taken so long, after all one thing led to the other and flew by a year and a half. Although that two-way comment is very bold to tell Chris covered in recent wounds, scars and dirt as far as it is not reached.

As compensation, Hama decides to instruct Chris, because it is practically a miracle to have survived so long with Charles. That's when Chris realizes that after all that time, he did not even know the name of the hermit who besieged him.

While receiving martial arts instruction, Hama noticed how Chris had changed, but turned a blind eye. She taught him some basic techniques, such as cutting punch with his hand, circular punches, and applying perpendicular force to deflect an attack.

For Chris, all those lessons connected quite easily with what he learned analyzing Charles:

—Well, it's a good sign that you realized that. —Hama says somewhat uncomfortable by epiphany—It means that what you have learned is marked very deep in your being, you absorbed the essence of something intangible such as an action.

—Something intangible? —Chris asks with great interest.

—How to explain it? —Hama asks herself for a few moments until she gets to the answer —Anyone can explain to you how to do something, from fastening your laces to making a tie knot, but when you do it for yourself you realize the difference. That is the essence of an action, and only the one who carries it out will gain experience, true knowledge.

—Experience...—Chris mutters thoughtfully of Hama's teaching.

—You Earth adepts always have your feet on the ground, but the adepts of Air are good at letting our minds fly. —Hama says with a smile.

After a short break, the two resume training and sessions always began when Charles retired. Chris found it strange that Hama would appear

whenever Charles was away, but she says he noticed her presence, only that it must seem to him a hassle to deal with her.

Hama's reputation has never been the best, but it's not something she can control, it's what she earns accordingly to being herself. Those words sank into Chris as he stands up from the ground, understanding what she meant, remembering his past in Yamamoto's temple.

With great focus on training, Chris spends a couple of months connecting Hama's teachings with what he learned by observing Charles. The combat sessions with Hama were summarized in that they were mostly exchanges of blows and kicks, Hama always allowing him to find openings for him to take advantage of and learn to block and counterattack.

In a single one-hour session, Chris would block and strike close to 1000 punches and kicks, leaving his body incredibly tired, but with each attack and block he could feel it strengthening. Deflecting attacks with the back of his hand, attacking openings with elbows, knees, forearms, Chris learned a very complete repertoire of how to use any part of his body to block, deflect and return attacks.

One night, while Hama watched Chris devour an entire leg of deer, she tells him that Charles was used to loneliness, even more than he was. That's why she decided to put them together, the two are ingrained loners, but together they may come out of the cave of their lives.

Chris does not agree with her, he received many beatings to get along with Charles, but something good could come out of this situation:

—I've never felt more alive than I do now. —Chris says with overwhelming serenity as he gazes at the campfire.

Two years after falling from the sky, Chris faces Charles again, this time with a strange fire in his gaze. The two do not speak at all and ram into each other with their swords, initiating their combat.

There is an abysmal difference in brute force between the two warriors, while Chris' body trembles from exerting with his whole being, Charles is completely still, as if he were a mountain. Chris backs down from being pushed with Charles' sword, but Chris' gaze is analytical, proving that he has no intention of giving up.

Hama watches the two men's fight from the top of the mountain:

—Heavens, Charles is still lousy holding on. —she says out loud, even though there is no one to listen to her.

—«I can't break his defense, so I'll have to elude it to catch up with him.

» —Chris plans in a matter of seconds before pouncing on his opponent.

—Do you only know how to go in a straight line? —Charles asks annoyed by how boring Chris' strategy is—«After two years of achieving to survive in the open, it's obvious that he plans something.

»

As soon as Chris enters range, Charles watches as Chris' body settles in to launch his attack. He recognizes the pose, so he blocks his sword from his right flank, a diagonal descending cut of opening, a simple but effective move, if it is blocked then the attacker has a chance to block the counterattack.

Charles knows that Chris is mimicking his swordplay, so he doesn't hesitate to raise the level of combat. He stops holding the clash of swords, causing Chris to lose balance and prepares to hit him directly in the abdomen, but Chris takes advantage of his fall to attack him from the right side instead.

—«He retaliated the attack that was going to strike him, he has studied me extensively. He is not imitating my movements; he is using them against me. » —Charles deduces in the instants it takes for the wooden sword to come into contact with his body.

—«There are only two options left: 1) You dodge leaning forward, turning your back on me and giving me moments to attack you; and 2) You dodge leaning back, backing up and giving me a chance to attack you again. » —Chris thinks as he is focused to his opponent.

However, Charles is a more experienced warrior than Chris can imagine, opting for a third option. He hits the wooden sword with his knee, deflecting his attack and opening an opening to kick him with the sole of his foot, causing Chris to vomit blood.

The young man is thrown by the force of the kick and twists from the pain, for the first time in a long time the pain affects him, but that only makes him feel more alive. His breathing is heavy, he gasps as he resists continuing to vomit blood, but his gaze is more piercing than before.

As Charles lowers his leg, Chris can't help but smile as he stands up, wielding his sword which was clearly weakened by the knee. He realizes that the wooden sword will not endure much before it finishes splitting in half, so he must finish the fight as soon as possible.

Chris approaches Charles once again, he knows that the swords must not collide or his wooden sword will break, so he must dodge all attacks and attack him as soon as there is an opening in his defense. Using the experience gathered over the past two years, Chris recognizes Charles' habits when it comes to attacking and defending, all he has to do is be quick enough to react in time.

—«His dominant arm is the right, he never hits with his left arm, which makes him seem slow, but he's actually fast enough to need only one arm to fight. However, the left arm moves it first to prepare for the movement of the right arm. » — Chris analyzes being back in range — «He never wears a defense pose because he encourages attacks...Does he fight using counterattack always? »

—«Too late. » Charles thinks, having found a slight sign of distraction in Chris's expression.

Charles raises his sword and attacks from above, causing the same pressure as at the beginning of the training, as if the sky fell on Chris, but the experience helps him in times of crisis. Having experienced that situation on multiple occasions, Chris' body reacts by instinctively connecting his knowledge with his impulses, Chris jumps and turns horizontally, deflects Charles' sword with his own and exposes him.

In an instant that seems to last minutes, Chris has Charles in reach, lands his left foot after the rotating attack and Charles realizes the intention of the young man. As soon as he lands his right foot, which he normally uses as a pivot, he will give a thrust directly to the heart.

For the first time in two years of knowing him, Charles can feel in Chris something he just woke up, Killer Instinct, Chris has every intention of killing him and does not blame him, but he is not even close to letting him do it. Charles lets out his own murderous instinct, very different from the pressure exerted by his powerful attacks, trying to make Chris doubt.

What Chris decides to do at the last moment will define his path, if he backs down out of fear, he will never have such a chance again and will leave a scar on his being in formation; if he ignores the imminent threat to which he is putting he will be discarding his own life uselessly, throwing away the quality that defined him for the last two years, the survival instinct.

However, like Charles, Chris opts for a third option: he will continue with the attack, evading the threat to the greatest extent possible. He can't dodge the counterattack completely because of the momentum of his own attack, but he can use his pivot to take a side jump.

Taking advantage of both impulses, front and side, only his sword is below Charles' attack, breaking his sword in half, but he still has a blade. With what is left of his sword and the great proximity, Chris directs a sword attack at his neck, Charles tries to kick him once again, but with the side jump Chris has both legs in the air.

Chris lands his feet on Charles' knee, knowing that the kick is not circular, the leg serves as a platform. Squatting, Chris tries to end the fight with beheading, but Charles leans back, dodging the sword and retreating in combat for the first time in the two years they have been together in the mountains.

—You almost killed me twice in a single second, something no one has achieved in many years. —Charles declares to Chris that he was left lying on the ground after his last attack failed—Are you satisfied, Hama?

—Of course, I told you that this guy has a lot of potential. —replies the sorceress that descends from the sky —But you have not said the words I seek.

—I will train him, but not because you want him, but because he has earned it. —Charles clarifies annoyed towards Hama.

—Aren't you happy, Chris?" —Hama asks his badly wounded student relieved—Anyone in the history of the whole world would kill for an opportunity like this.

—Train me? Wait a minute, and why should I train with you? —Chris asks the hermit who has tormented him so much.

—Because I say it, so don't question what I say. I will not repeat myself. —says Charles quite imposing towards Chris who is all emaciated by the fleeting fight —Also, the change in you began from before you got here and if you don't complete it, you will inevitably get lost. It's not something you should go through alone.

Those last words really impacted Chris, they weren't an attack, it wasn't blunt, they were the first words of real support he's received in a very long time. Something he thought he had lost began to ignite within him, different from the survival instinct or the Killer Instinct, it was something more, it made him feel... Not bad.

Back in the present, Chris looks at the campfire as if it were at that time: —He was the kind of person who wants you to be strong for yourself and no one else, because you can't take care of others but take care of yourself at least. Even though I separated from him a few days ago, a part of me misses all the training, every step, every exercise. Once I finished my training with him remembering the whole tour makes me feel truly grateful. —Chris says as he gazes at the flames of the campfire, remembering that time— "Someday I will see him again to express my gratitude. He welcomed me into my darkest time.

The girl was left with a look of being completely immersed in his words and begins to ask if she will do all that and Chris immediately clarifies that no, it is not necessary, just to maintain the concept of his training, more than to lose the fear is to let fear drive you to survive adversity. The girl begins to tell him back a story of hers.

—I'll start with my name; my name is Ha-Hanna. — says the girl as she looks at the campfire.

That the shy girl begins to open her heart to Chris is the first step toward an uncertain path, one that will take shape with every step she takes from there.

## Chapter 6 – The Girl Inside the Flame

Hanna, the girl with long dark hair, shy, stutters whenever she talks to people, her long-sleeved blouse outfit and pants, giving a conservative appearance, her hair hiding much of her face and reaching up to her waist, no matter if she is standing, sitting or walking, always inspires insecurity. From Chris's perspective, from what he has come to observe, she is an introverted, insecure and even unstable person, but that doesn't matter to him at all.

What Chris sees in her is a spark, one that can ignite a very bright future, while she clearly grabs determination from anywhere Chris just accepts anything she is going to pronounce with her little mouth. After the ritual of preparing to talk so long that you could cook a full meal, she starts talking:

"As a child I was normal, I attended school, I got together with other children, I always helped my parents with household chores. Nothing out of the ordinary, until I awakened my elemental power. I always had a lot more elemental power than the other kids, so much so that the teachers at the school constantly talked to my parents about training me to greatness... My mother always refused. She defended me from all the bullying and my father told me to do things at my own pace, to take it easy.

I really felt safe at home and eventually stopped attending school and my parents didn't care about it, on the contrary, they felt safer with me inside. But one day it was all over, the Lord of that time came to the door and tried to convince them and again they refused. My parents were all night arguing about what they were going to do, eventually the Lord was going to take me by force, and they were going to end up suffering.

Being so young and in that environment, I ended up falling asleep and had nightmares and by the time I woke up the house was engulfed in flames. The more I was upset and scared, the more the flames were

fanned, my parents came into my room and sheltered me, and then I lost consciousness. By the time I woke up I was covered in bandages and the healers told me that my parents saved me from the fire. They sacrificed for me; the fire was so intense that their elemental power was not enough to make it out alive. "

She, with her right hand trembling, showing that her heart beats quite hard and fast, discovers her face in its entirety, showing scarred skin in little more than the right half of her face and with the light of the campfire it is clearly seen that her right hand and neck are also in those conditions.

Chris maintains his composure, while listening carefully only the almost certain possibility that this state extends through the entire right half of his body passes through his mind. Meanwhile, Hanna, gradually filling herself with a lump in her throat, begins to speak more fluently:

"Ever since, I went to live with my grandfather and no one tried to approach me again, the children treated me very badly, saying that I killed my parents, the only person besides my grandfather who treated me as a person was Lillian, she wanted to help me heal my scars, but she never could. But I do appreciate that she treats me well for so long.

She doesn't even care about my appearance, for she was born blind. Even after gaining the leadership of the nation, he continued to improve his skills to heal my scars and makes time to be with me. He truly is the best person I have ever met."

Chris stood his ground and asks her to stop, that she doesn't have to force herself so hard. He just puts a hand on her shoulder and tells her it's enough, she doesn't have to say more. She begins to let go in tears and he ends up comforting her for a long time, until she fell asleep.

While Hanna sleeps, Chris keeps looking at her face, calmer than the forest where he surprised her and begins to shudder a little, clearly having a bad dream. Chris just puts one hand on her forehead and calms

her down a bit, and gradually wakes up. It's barely dawning and she's a mess, and he just gives her a faint carefree smile.

—You'd better prepare, it'll a tough first day. — says Chris with motivation trying to convey to Hanna —«I will help you; I promise you. I don't want to see you cry like that again, like Karen used to. »

With a face full of sleep and staggering half asleep Hanna is standing in the light of dawn and Chris positions himself in front of her at a short distance.

—«What will it make me do? » —is the only thing that goes through Hanna's mind as she tries to stay awake, slapping her cheeks to finish waking up, putting on a look of insecure determination.

From a bag Chris takes what she needs to make a campfire and a flint and a piece of iron. He places them on the floor and asks Hanna to turn it on, and with a body expression of total discomfort she sets out to do so. With a little of Chris' guidance, she gets to turn it on and stoke it. Once lit Chris asks her to sit in front of the campfire and he sits on the opposite side.

With an air of security Chris is ready to address some very important words.

—My teacher, even if he taught me to be a warrior, was actually a Fire adept, and an old friend too, so believe me when I tell you that I have some real experience with fire, in a sense.

He asks her to take her hands, left with right and right with left and tells her to close her eyes.

—What do you visualize in your mind at this very moment? Can you imagine the fire in your house, or do you imagine only fire?

These questions begin to rumble in Hanna's mind, and she begins to get upset.

—Stay calm, pay attention to your current surroundings. Not with your gaze, but with your whole being. The campfire, although it is warming our bodies, is a relatively small and quiet flame. With your hands feel my pulse, listen to my breathing and follow the rhythm.

Hanna begins to calm down, concentrating on following her rhythm, paying full attention to Chris' voice, speaking lower and lower.

—Imagine a candle, that small, uniform flaming candle, one that is disturbed by just our breathing. Visualize it between your hands and in them you feel the beat of your heart. You feel your breath and realize one thing, a simple but great thing, the flame begins to grow, but not violently, no, it grows slowly with your breath. It is feeding on you, but at the same time you can feel its heat, it gives you a warm feeling that relaxes your body, you are feeding on the flame.

Chris lets go of Hanna's hands and watches her closely.

—Keep that image, keep that feeling, record in your being the feelings you have right now.

He asks her to open her eyes, and to her surprise the campfire is out.

—Look in your hands. —says Chris and Hanna realizes something impossible, between her hands lies the flame of the campfire, but it has a uniform and calm shape, as if it were on a candle.

Hanna stays watching the flame, her gaze submerged inside it, and Chris utters a few words that would be engraved in her soul.

—That flame represents your being; your elemental power maintains and feeds that flame and depending on what you feed it with it will take on a certain form and intensity. If you feel fear the flame will be unstable and if you are full of passion the flame will be intense like the sun.

Hanna's gaze, still stuck in the flame, begins to show that spark that Chris saw from the beginning, he even begins to show a slight but very sweet smile and Chris decides to record that moment in his heart. He has just fanned a flame that could illuminate the world and begins to feel something.

—« Did my teacher feel the same when he was training me? They're difficult things to explain in words, so I don't have to think about it much, if it makes you feel good, what's wrong? » —Chris meditates and decides to follow the most important advice given to him by his teacher: Follow your instinct.

After a long time keeping the flame in her hands, Hanna rests a little and Chris puts her to meditate on it, she must record and reproduce that feeling naturally, because, after all, it is part of her and denying her fire power means refusing to be herself. Chris puts her to turn on the campfire again and repeat the exercise, this time without his help and after being a few minutes in front of the campfire she achieves the same result, and Chris makes her repeat the exercise more than twenty times throughout that day.

Exhausted from collecting firewood, lighting it and "grabbing" the fire from the campfire, Hanna retreats to her house with Chris accompanying her. Hanna apologizes to Chris for taking his training time to train her.

—I've been training for more than 10 years; training you is much more fun. —Chris nonchalantly says, what he wants least is to kill the motivation of the girl who asked him for help.

—«Is it really amusing you that I am exhausted from so much walking in the forest?» — Hanna thinks seeing Chris' smile at not having to put so much effort into teaching her, although what he said leaves her intrigued —«Chris has trained for more than 10 years, how many years was he with his teacher? Did he have more than one teacher? What things will they have taught him to move so securely and naturally? Even without being a Fire adept he knows very well the bases, his teacher and an old friend, is he talking about Karen, the Shinigami?»

—all of those questions go through Hanna's mind as they walk to her grandfather's house.

Once they arrive, Chris says goodbye to her and tells her that she can train with candles if she wants to practice more. Once away Hanna retires to her room and Chris reunites with his companions at the inn and they prepare for another day of hard work.

Chris, Guilian and Tsubaki have a feast at the inn and talk about the places where they are training. Dinner feels more alive than before, Guilian and Tsubaki see how Chris is in a good mood and ask him if anything good happened in the past two days.

—I wouldn't, say it happened to me, I just found a good way to pass the time. —Chris replies before choking on food and leaving his two companions without food for themselves.

Meanwhile, at Hanna's house, her grandfather asks her where she was, she didn't tell him she was going to stay outside, but she doesn't want to talk about it. After spending years supporting her in her darkest moments, Grandpa can only resign himself to giving her space, though she apologizes:

—Sorry to worry you, it's just that there is something I seriously want to do. When I'm ready, I'll tell you. —Hanna's words seem too important to her grandfather to interfere.

—Okay, just don't overdo it. Remember that, in excess, even the best medicine can destroy someone. —Grandpa's words are wise.

Grandpa finishes some details and gives Hanna a box with typical Vodheim sweets. He asks Hanna to take it to the young man who walked her home, as a thank you for his help and she agrees with great encouragement.

The next morning, Hanna is surprised to see Chris at his post:

—It's time to start, come on. —says Chris with a smile of "Today I won't let you rest a little bit", and Hanna prepares as quickly as possible

with a lot of nerves, although it was she herself who asked for the instruction.

Instead of going to the same camp near the forest, he takes her to run around the city, Hanna really notices that she is not in shape compared to Chris. Almost out of breath, Hanna asks him why that exercise.

—It doesn't matter if you exercise physically or elementally, what you are forging is your mental state. Even if it is in combat or in a quiet place, you must maintain your mentality and tranquility. Another lap and try to keep up. —Chris' words are said so confidently that Hanna stops panting for the marathon.

With Chris' guidance, Hanna begins to take her rhythm, inhales through her nose, one step forward, exhales through her mouth, another step forward, tries not to land her foot with her heel. After finishing the second lap around the city they arrive at the camp of the previous day, and he puts her to light the campfire. This time she's not just going to grab the fire, she's going to light more campfires from one. That raises the difficulty for Hanna, but the goal is clear, each time she will require more control and the mentality that makes her forge is fundamental.

As Hanna struggles in her training, Chris tastes the sweets he received from Hanna. He loved what, according to Hanna, are called chocolates with almonds, in addition to having a "caramel" cover, Chris enjoyed the sweets very much and that made Hanna happy while making it difficult for her to focus.

And so, the days became weeks, every day they ran, every day she lit bonfires, every night she played with the flames of the candles in her room, even on rainy days she kept the flames lit for the campfires, now she had familiarity with the fire she held in her hands, protected them and fed them so that they would not be extinguished. One day, Chris asked Hanna to do the first exercise, from day one... no campfire. Hanna was confused, but still tried.

She imagined the flame, fed it with his elemental power and...boom! There was a flame in her hands, Hanna had created fire with her elemental power, instead of stoking and controlling the fire that already existed. That fire was totally hers, and she looked at it as the first time, "That flame is you" are the words that go through her head, the words that Chris said to her from the beginning, and she feels, for the first time, that she begins to know herself for real.

Chris sees in her a brighter smile than the first time, maybe she is not a warrior, but her spark is getting bigger, now it is a quiet flame, it shows from afar in her eyes. But it's not time for sentimentality, Chris raises a wall of earth and puts Hanna the next exercise: "Go through the wall and reach me."

Hanna is a gentle soul, but she knows full well that when Chris says it, everything has some purpose or meaning. She throws the flame and goes out immediately, barely moved away from her hand and disappeared. Now the difficulty lies in keeping the flame away and Hanna has it clear about the goal just with the first attempt. Already with weeks of daily training, Hanna and Chris can understand each other without needing to speak directly.

Days go by and finally the flame reaches the wall, but it does not do much, it barely has a few embers in the impact zone, she must make the flame larger and more concentrated, throw it with more speed, not with force, but with power. And she throws over and over again for days, until one morning, after trying all night before, without sleeping or resting for a minute, Chris is asleep on the other side of the wall and a tremor wakes him up. The wall was not only pierced, but it was also destroyed, and each piece is covered in flames and from among the dust in the air Hanna comes out with a fireball in one hand and easily any adept can tell that a large amount of fire is concentrated in the ball the size of a fist.

Her gaze, full of determination, suddenly changes to an expression of concern when she sees that Chris is covered in the rubble and begins to

apologize multiple times for the disaster. What a change of attitude, but that only makes Chris start laughing out loud.

—Destroying that wall was not only an exercise, but it is also an analogy, going through any adversity and moving forward. That was my teacher's last teaching. —Chris' final lesson to Hanna, a treasure she will keep for the rest of her life.

With a Hanna starting to bring tears for finishing her training, Chris is full of satisfaction to see how far his student has come and the tournament a few weeks away from starting is how a new life begins for the shy, but gentle Hanna.

## Chapter 7 – Attachment

After crying for a few minutes, Hanna wakes up with a smile that would make any young man her age fall in love with and gives her mentor the sincerest thanks in the world. Chris just smiles and backs down a bit because of the discomfort of having someone thanking him, for having successfully helped someone and receiving a reward, that's right, his reward is that strange feeling of having taught someone well.

Going back to the city in the middle of the sunrise they enjoy the walk and the landscape, something that almost nobody does, although it is a dream land. The silence is awkward so Chris invites Hanna on a walk around town as a reward for her hard work and she happily accepts. Although by the time they are in the middle of the day it is Hanna who directs the walk since Chris is a foreigner and never had the opportunity to know much about the city.

Food, clothing stores, utensils, libraries, all the places Hanna had already gone and also those she could never go to for fear of getting out of control she visited with a huge smile on her face. People, although they were already more than familiar with the rumors about Hanna's past, were always watching her with her new personality. Was she really such a cheerful person? It's the question they had practically written all over their faces.

During their journey throughout the city, they ended up wandering to the quarry, Guilian was already famous among the people who work in there and even admired him for his power of destruction. All the workers have a lot of respect for the firebrand that have been getting stronger by working longer and harder than everyone on the site.

Hanna is a little uncomfortable with Guilian's behavior but trusts Chris's opinion that he is a good boy. An explosion arises and a huge rock fall from the cliff, the Earth adepts use their powers to stop it, but it is too big, and they cannot stop it completely.

If it is not landed properly, the 8-meter-diameter stone will roll down the hill until it reaches the city. Suddenly, Chris and Guilian jump into action, with their powers the two take care of one half of the stone, making it explode into smaller stones and freeing the workers.

Hanna sees Chris in action for the first time and is impressed as she cheers the pair of foreign adepts for saving the day and begin to inspect what caused it. No one can explain where the explosion came from, but some workers acknowledge that gunpowder was used, a resource they do not have in Vodheim, which raises even more suspicions.

With a dead end, Chris and Hanna say goodbye to Guilian and proceed to visit Tsubaki, who was training on top of one of the mountains surrounding the city, at a training camp for Air adepts. The staff and students speak highly of Tsubaki, being a prodigy in air control, as she completed the beginner and intermediate level courses in just one week. She is currently finishing the advanced course to proceed to forge her own style. That leaves Hanna impressed, though she has always heard how difficult the course is.

Chris observes the facilities, which are three towers connected by thick ropes, while on the platforms that hang in the intermediate zone there are a series of rectangular panels which must be rotated in a certain way according to the level of difficulty of the exercise.

The most advanced level is to rotate all the rectangular panels while the three circular panels in each of them rotate in the opposite direction. Tsubaki is still somewhat stuck in controlling air gusts in a millimetric way, but she has become accustomed to dancing with the flow of the wind.

—Some masters change the drafts, and you have to keep yourself unharmed as you progress through the rotating maze. —explains Tsubaki as the three of them watch the students practicing the exercise —Although being a foreigner, I noticed that the teachers made it more difficult, and I was getting a lot of blows for weeks.

A huge tempest hits the mountain and causes some students to fall, Tsubaki reacts and generates drafts to cushion the fall of inexperienced adepts. Chris realizes how complex it must be to control the air to make spinning gales that protect young people from even scratching their knees when touching the ground.

The teachers protect the area from the tremendous current of air that whips them, it does not seem normal to them at all. Tsubaki sensed some disturbances in the air and was able to react to the event. The students are forced into shelter and Tsubaki says goodbye to Chris and Hanna.

—See you at the inn to plan the trip to Heinburn! —Tsubaki shouts so that his voice is not lost to the wind.

In the afternoon, while they were still walking, Hanna began to think in her head that detail, that the time she had with Chris was limited, and as if he were reading her mind, Chris immediately asks her about her future.

—What are you going to do now? Did you plan what to do when I finished training?

As if that were not enough, Hanna begins to fill herself again with the memories of her past, of how everyone wanted her power, not her for who she was, but she was no longer the shy and fragile girl, now she had confidence in herself, she only needs a goal.

—You'll make it, whatever you set your mind into. —Chris says as he sees his student's expression to lift her spirits.

The moment is very intimate, although something interrupts the moment, rain. It starts to pour abruptly, and they end up taking refuge in a restaurant. The two ended up soaked and laugh when they see each other and because of the noise the cook calls their attention but stops when he sees Hanna.

Due to the obvious awkward silence in the business owner, Chris orders him to prepare them a hot drink while they dry up. The cook refuses to attend to him but realizing that Chris is the young man who fought the invader of the Empire loses all authority and obeys.

—«Maybe you don't realize it, or you don't want to admit it, Hanna, but there is still discrimination against you, I hope you break that barrier. »

—Chris thinks as he eats a very interesting drink called "hot chocolate."

While the minutes pass, they conclude that the rain will not stop in a while and end up eating in the restaurant. After a whole struggle against cutlery, Chris gives up and eats with his hands in a moderate way, Hanna laughs and wipes a stain of food from her new friend's cheek.

Chris is not at all uncomfortable with the familiarity with her, it is as if they had lived together all their lives, but he realizes something. He doesn't want to admit it, but his heart starts to speed up.

—«Don't approach me, please don't. I don't want it to end up like with Karen. » —Chris thinks as he looks away from Hanna. She realizes what she was doing and walks away, not knowing that she is misinterpreting what Chris is processing.

After a few moments of awkward silence, they begin to worry for the weather, not just for the rain. All the adepts are perceptive about the weather and such a wild storm only leaves bad vibes in the body, ends up making the skin bristle and even leaves the mouth dry. In a totally unexpected way, there begin to be strange noises throughout the city, barely and can be perceived by all the noise of the water falling from the sky and walking the streets, some sounds begin to be distinguished, voices of people and by the tone anyone would tell that it is not a good thing.

Chris, without even thinking twice, leaves quickly thinking about the possible damage that may be in the city that people are so upset of.

—«Something for sure is that there must be flooding. » —Chris deduces as he enters the city center, but he begins to see an intense light and from the reddish tone it is more than clear that there is a fire. —«In the middle of a storm? The fire must be too strong so as not to be extinguished by the rain, although according to my teacher, there are only two ways for the fire not to be extinguished by water: a powerful Fire adept or a very incendiary fuel. »

Upon arrival it is completely remarkable that it is not a single building, there are many, the fire is massive and worst of all, you do not see the end of the fire. People are evacuated, but it is very dangerous anywhere, there is the fire spreading through almost half of the city, and in the canals, there is water overflowing everywhere. Some rumblings are heard everywhere, landslides in the mountains. During the daily morning races Chris observed that the canals carry the water throughout the city, so if the land is too much it will end up obstructing the canals, leaving the city submerged in a lake in the middle of the mountains.

Running to the center of the city is Lillian, she is using her power to create a safe zone and evacuate people into the mountains, but landslides are very dangerous and even more so staying inside the internal structures of the mountains. The channels overflow, but Lillian keeps them at bay with her incredible elemental power, though she is too focused to guide her people.

Suddenly an entire mountain begins to collapse, the amount of rain was too much for the structure inside it to resist and ended up crumbling like a castle of cards. People begin to go into hysteria and begin to use their powers indiscriminately trying to fix what they can to be safe, but it is in vain, it only generates more panic and there begins to be violence everywhere.

—«To avoid a revolt, the former Lord of Vodheim demilitarized the inhabitants for decades. By the time our parents were born, no one had combat experience. This is the consequence of this, although they use their powers for day to day, in their jobs mainly, no one has the courage

to face this type of crisis. » —Lillian is frustrated, she alone cannot save an entire nation that collapses from within.

Being in the middle of everything, totally distressed, Lillian only expresses one word, one name:

—Hanna. —Lillian pronounces worried about her best friend's well-being.

—She could save the city; I have an idea of how to overcome this crisis.

—says Chris as he gazes at the ruins of the mountain —«That was the mountain where Tsubaki was, I hope he is well. » —he thinks as he tries to stay calm.

—What about me? —Hanna asks right behind her two friends around the world.

Chris is surprised with almost a heart attack by the unstable concentration, Hanna is the only person who looks calm in such a situation. After years of anxiety, fear and harassment, a natural disaster is like a walk in the park. Chris orders Hanna to go to the buildings and steal the fire, as with the campfire, and Hanna immediately realizes what he means.

—One last detail, release the fire into the sky. —is the last thing Chris says to Hanna.

Hanna walks the streets, at the front door of each building she begins to gather the fire in her hands and leaves no trace of the flames, people are surprised by the ease with which she does such a feat, one building after another is completely extinguished. Fire adepts try to imitate her, but they don't succeed, they don't have enough control to compress such quantity of fire. They must suck all the fire out or the remaining will end up expanding until it covers everything again.

Lillian followed Chris' advice:

—Concentrate all the flow of water from the canals to the area without fire and that the Earth adepts try to keep the channels clear. —Lillian

orders with her eyes open despite her blindness, which makes everyone take her very seriously.

Rapidly all mobilizes receiving these words from Lillian. With the joint efforts in unison, the water begins to descend, and the fire light begins to constantly reduce, Hanna is getting faster and faster at stealing fire from an entire building. The constant practice combined with her enormous elemental power allows her to have enough experience handling a large amount of fire.

The rain begins to stop, the constant fire released into the sky caused the clouds to begin to dissipate. The constant hot air released by the fire stolen from the buildings by Hanna heated the clouds, raising their temperature and reversing the condensation of water and the sunset begins to be seen.

Lillian was exhausted for sheltering her people and thanks Chris for giving her a strategy when she couldn't even think due to all the focus she required to use so much power and keep it stable. Everyone applauds and cheers their Lady Lillian, but she just wants to rest peacefully in her little house with a cup of tea.

It's almost getting dark and there is little time left to end the fire, just a few more houses and everything will be over. One of the last houses to be extinguished is familiar to Hanna, her grandfather's house.

Ignoring the others, Hanna runs quickly to put out the fire and desperately tries to find her grandfather, does not find him on the street with the neighbors and fears the worst. Once inside the burning residence, he begins to compress the fire almost automatically and tries to see each room and does not find it. But something is not right, there is one last place she has not inspected, the basement.

Hanna opens the gate in the middle of the room and finds her grandfather lying on the ground, barely has signs of still being alive. She tries to take him out of the house, but it is useless, she has used her powers so much as to have enough strength to climb the stairs, and,

even so, she keeps trying. She suddenly hears footsteps and realizes that Chris got to where she was and helps her get her only family out of such a dangerous place.

Once outside, they try to make him recover, but it is useless, he inhaled too much smoke and for his age it is a miracle that he did not die inside that hellish furnace. With too much difficulty he begins to pronounce a few words for his beloved granddaughter:

—You are identical to your mother, fly away. —and just like that, he loses consciousness and inevitably... Dies.

She breaks down in tears, the people around her begin to move away because of the terrible sensation, a great elemental power begins to overflow, but a person comes to her aid, Lillian hugs Hanna and with her water power counteracts the fire power, until the poor girl loses consciousness from crying so loud. Lillian asks Chris to take Hanna with her to her house to treat her and without a second of hesitation agrees.

After a whole night full of crying while sleeping, just dawning, Lillian tells Chris that it is too late, stress and trauma have made Hanna's great elemental power hurt her body, the scars have expanded. Eventually her body will be consumed by her own fire, and she can't do anything about it. Chris has his mind full of bad images, Hanna crying uncontrollably, Lillian's expression for the terrible fate her dear friend has, the words Hanna said about her past, her grandfather's last words, it's too much for him.

Chris kicks Lillian out of her house and is left alone with Hanna, makes a few movements with his hand on his own body and then directs his hand towards Hanna. The whole room begins to light up and then a great silence. Lillian immediately breaks the door with water and enters along with Guilian and Tsubaki, the two of them were safe in the quarry. Inside they find Chris lying next to the couch where Hanna is resting, he is somewhat agitated and exhausted, but manages to get up and head towards the exit, while Lillian is stunned by what happened.

—You didn't have to go that far, —Lillian mutters as Chris passes right next to her.

—I strengthened her power by training her, I bear at least some of the blame. —Chris responds trying to take away some remorse for not protecting his friend's smile.

He retreats and endures fainting with every fiber of his power so as not to worry his companions. After a while, Hanna wakes up and begins to assimilate what happened, there was incredible damage throughout the city, a mountain was totally destroyed, but none of that really matters to her, she has lost the last of her family. And the cherry on the cake is that Chris and his teammates are about to leave for their tournament in Heinburn.

So many things in her head make her stay disconnected on that couch, and she begins to remember every day she was locked in that house with Lillian, pitying herself for her past and remembering her grandfather's last words, "Fly away." The next day a funeral is held for all the victims of the natural disaster and Lillian gives a few words for the whole town, while, in a totally invisible way, Chris and his companions head towards the tunnel where they arrived, as it is the road in better condition.

Arriving at the beginning of the tunnel they notice a familiar silhouette in the darkness of the tunnel, and taking a few steps reveals herself the mysterious person, Hanna was waiting for Chris on his way out of the territory.

—Are you determined? It's about traveling the world, it's not an easy thing. —Chris asks Hanna without even having to ask her the motive.

—Yes. —Hanna replies with an intense flame in her gaze, figuratively.

—Do what you want. —Chris doesn't want to touch on any sensitive topics for now, and he likes the idea of her accompanying him.

And without further ado, they all go through the tunnel together, Tsubaki starts talking to Hanna to get to know her better, finally another

girl in the group, and Guilian tries to join the conversation and Tsubaki starts to get upset about it and again the group is full of arguments as it usually is.

—How funny, you get along so well. — Hanna says without restraint while laughing a little.

—By the way, why were the two of you in the quarry? —asks Chris to break the tension a little.

—After so much training, I wanted to teach Guilian a lesson and have that prankster side removed. —Tsubaki replies with great frustration.

—Well, you'll have to wait for the tournament for me to show you why you can't even touch me. —adds Guilian, mocking the rookie who usually makes mad.

The fighters begin to get more upset with each other, trying to deny that they get along, and Hanna just starts smiling more and more. Meanwhile, Lillian has just finished her speech to those affected and begins to remember everything Hanna said the night before, about her thoughts about her future, what she thinks about Chris' teammates, the training she went through, what she accomplished for the city, and about her grandfather's words.

Once inside her house, Lillian begins to remember all the time she spent with Hanna, since they were little girls, she prepares the tea she used to drink with Hanna on those busy mornings for those who work on the streets. Listen to the deafening silence all over the place, as if the rest of the world ceases to exist.

—You must really have a great determination to have embedded a fragment of your soul in order to protect her from her own power. You are now linked beyond life. —Lillian says on the air while alone in her house.

At the same time Chris begins to remember the night before:

—Where did you learn how to do such a thing? —asks Lillian to Chris at the inn the two alone.

—Learned about it in the temple of old Yamamoto, where I was raised and trained with Karen. If you know her, you should know that what I say is true. Tell me, how do you know what I did? There are not many spiritualists in the world with our level of perception.

—A student of him, Elizabeth, she taught both the power of Water and the spiritual arts and thus developed the power to perceive the surroundings through the flow of energy.

At her home, Lillian receives the damage report, the fire was sparked, the marks note that fuel was used to ignite the buildings. After inspecting the ruins of the mountain, they realized that there were detonations as in the quarry that same day and that they found very peculiar explosives in other mountains, but the staff located them in time and cast them away.

Had they been detonated; the city would have been completely flooded by rain. After that revelation, Lillian receives one more fact. The air currents reported at the Air element training camp were triggered by a dust burn identified by refugees from the desert near Anthar, the Empire's tech city.

When that special dust is burned, rain is generated, but it causes drought in the surroundings. One of many disastrous wonders created by the science of the Empire. Lillian processes the information and does not want to admit it in front of its staff.

—«It seems that they want war in the Empire, but for Hanna's sake they won't make me give in so easily. I will not give you our greatest treasure, the stone will stay in Vodheim. » —Lillian thinks with a very serious expression, making her assistant uncomfortable.

Both Chris and Lillian have learned very important information, now he is heading to a new destination with a new companion on his journey and has obtained a new goal, to strengthen Hanna until she completely controls her power.

# Chapter 8 – Travel Journal

## Day 1

Today I started my journey with Chris and his friends, Tsubaki and Guilian. They get along very well, they are always talking, Guilian always plays pranks on Tsubaki, and she fights him, they even argue verbally while fighting with her elemental powers. The two know each other well enough to weigh in on anything the other says.

Chris always keeps seriousness, it seems as if for him there is no noise of discussion, but in reality, he pays attention to details, if anyone shows tiredness from traveling a long distance, if they take the discord too far, he will always be watching you, he will always protect you from the shadows. It's as if he doesn't want to show concern for his loved ones, but he does it in secret as long as he doesn't abandon something inside.

After a whole day surrounding the outer mountains of Vodheim we arrived in a small village and stayed in an inn, it seems that we will have to travel a long way due to the storm damage in the mountains. Today I will sleep next to Tsubaki and not with Lillian, I hope I can sleep even a little.

## Day 2

I just had the most agitated night of my life, it turns out that Tsubaki has a lot of anxiety when sleeping alone, so she was a long time squeezing me to sleep and did not let go for anything in the world. Was I that way with Lillian? I'll be sure to apologize and thank her when we see each other again (even if she doesn't really see). Although... it makes me happy to be the one who helps someone, I feel that we are already good friends.

I asked Tsubaki how she slept until now, it turns out that if she can't sleep on the branches of the trees, she ends up having nightmares. If she doesn't have trees at her disposal, she simply chooses to stay awake until she finds one and forces the group to camp nearby.

We all left the village as soon as dawn began, not even the sun had come out. Although it feels strange that the horizon is so low unlike Vodheim, where daylight lasts less than half a day because it is between mountains. Guilian gave us more problems when getting ready to leave, it turns out that it takes too long to collect his five senses when he wakes up, is that called being heavy sleeper?

Once again, we were running all day, but we didn't get to any village, so we ended up camping, we all helped so it didn't take us more than an hour to start having dinner and sleeping. It is in this kind of situation that Tsubaki and Guilian make a truce. After trying Chris' cuisine, I think I already understand the motivation of the two of them when it comes to preparing food.

Since Tsubaki took me quite the confidence sleeping together, we bathed together in the moonlight. She takes her privacy very seriously, as she used her Air power to perceive the sounds and aromas and verify that Chris and Guilian did not spy on us, although I think she is being too cautious with them, she does not give them enough credit.

I used to bathe with Lillian at her house, but with Tsubaki it was very different, my heart beat a thousand for showing her my body covered with burn scars. She was very uncomfortable, but I don't blame her, I explained and understood very well. Tsubaki is a great person, she accepted my past just like that, just like Chris.

It wasn't as hard for me to talk about my past with Tsubaki as it was with Chris, I think I'm really stronger than I was back then. Although I'm not as strong as I'd like, nothing would prepare me for the biggest surprise I've ever had.

Grabbing confidence, Tsubaki undressed, and I could see her attributes, her great attributes, as big as Lillian's, I think a little bigger. My body gained muscle mass and toning thanks to training with Chris, but those floats, God, that was a very hard blow to my self-esteem.

Tsubaki explained to me that she hides them so that they don't get much in the way of the archery, but that restricts her a bit when she breathes. I understand, my hair is my biggest risk when it comes to using my powers, so sometimes I think about cutting it, but I don't do it because of my scars, although I hope that I finish developing my body and reach her in that area.

### Day 3

As soon as we got up Tsubaki and Guilian started arguing, even while we were getting ready, they spent it bothering each other, I can't help but start getting used to all this noise, or I won't keep up with Chris. What worries me a bit is that Chris remains just as distant with me as he is with the two of them. He was a completely different man in Vodheim than traveling together, what is his problem? It would be easier for him to simply open up with them as with me.

As we ran Chris mentioned that we should start seeing the Maxim volcano during the afternoon, he always gives us details of what is coming according to the plan, although he starts talking too much in his explanations. Guilian always interrupts by saying that he pays attention only to the beginning and the rest is unnecessary and Tsubaki does not waste to complain about him.

We arrived at the volcano earlier than expected and it was not at all what we expected, it was erupting non-stop to the point of darkening the whole sky and the air was too vitiated by the ash. I proposed to surround it to Chris, but he flatly refused, we had to reach the Heinburn kingdom in the next days or they were not going to participate. The way he told me was cold and made me feel bad, but I realized that Chris really wants to participate in the tournament, almost instantly I felt motivated not to delay them.

As we approached the base of the volcano the air was getting heavier and heavier, but Tsubaki created drafts and Chris controlled the ash so that we could breathe without problems, although it stalled the pace. As we ascended, we noticed that the eruptions became more and more

intense and chaotic, to the point that the fumaroles began to expel lava instead of steam.

Every minute I thought, "Oh! I'm going to die here right now." But my body always reacted, and I stole the heat from the lava, and without realizing it I was in front protecting them all. It really made me happy to be of use to them and they tried to take care of the rear so that I would advance at my own pace.

When we reached the top, we realized that the eruptions had stopped, but Chris was more alert than ever. We realized that in the very air there was enormous pressure, as if the sky were falling on us. And then something came out of the crater, a reptile.

Red-hot scales, its breath turned into fire from the heat and with outstretched wings it looked more than imposing, then it attacked us with a huge shot of fire breath and Chris covered us with the earth but being too hot we began to see the light of the earth being melted by the attack and we ended up underground, being an oven by the temperature of the place and the conditions.

Chris immediately came up with a plan to escape and keep moving forward, descend from the top, and hopefully escape the monster. But neither Tsubaki nor Guilian agreed and proposed to defeat it to advance, and Chris agreed with relief. His answer perhaps concealed the possibility that Chris wasn't going to move forward. Doesn't he trust us? Or is it that he easily resorts to sacrificing himself for others? If so, with more reason we should not leave him alone, who knows what crazy things he can do if we are not to worry about him.

As soon as we got out, Tsubaki shot out from being thrown by Chris with his strength, she controlled the wind to position herself on top of the monster and shot wind to make it descend, Guilian concentrated the fire from his hands and released it by striking the blow to its abdomen, maybe the fire is not hot enough to damage its skin, but the force of the shock wave was effective in hurting it.

Chris got into position while they were doing their thing and it was surprising that he could impose as much pressure as the monster, he was concentrating his strength in a single blow and the way he moved his arm in conjunction with his body unleashed a current of air that cooled the monster and managed to weaken it. But it immediately began to wreck everywhere and threw its fire breath directly at Chris, that way our formation was undone.

I jumped to protect him and as if it were someone else's work, the fire deflected and formed a dome on us and hit the monster head-on, dropping it into the crater and we stayed without moving for a few moments. Then that creature came out once again, bigger and with more power than ever and just as we were about to resign... it spoke!

It turns out that it is a salamander that protects that territory and a strange man hit him with a kind of spell and he began to feel strange, he could not distinguish reality, it was a complete chaos inside his head. The fire that I returned to him accidentally made him come to his senses and stabilize his power, although he was hurt so I felt sorry.

From his gaze I would say...that he like it? to receive such a powerful attack, and it was not even mine. Once the conversation was over, he took us to the end of his territory, he carried me on his back, but he held the rest with his hands and Guilian held his tail. Surprisingly his body did not burn us, the salamander told me that with enough training you can control the heat so that it is not transmitted to other things and therefore does not burn. Choose what things burn and what doesn't? It's something I want to achieve definitely.

When we said goodbye, he mentioned that we will most likely see each other again and he left without further ado, but I doubt very much that we will return to such a place in a long time. We walked a bit and decided to camp after such a desperate fight. We were all exhausted and couldn't even enjoy the food, even Guilian and Tsubaki didn't argue, that's what it means we went through a lot.

Day 4

We advanced a lot of thanks to the salamander, so we kept the pace constant until we began to notice the black sands of the desert. It was something surprising, I had never imagined that something like it existed. But at the same time, I felt something strange inside me, I don't know how to describe it in words, only that... I felt it up to my guts.

We were walking for half a day until we began to find fragments of buildings scattered around the land and to our surprise, we found some ruins. The symbolism in the structures alluded to fire and the union of the community, as crowds of people were portrayed in a pose of connection and what seemed a kind of ritual with fire elemental power.

When we arrived at the main building we discovered even more things, a library, relics and what seems to be the site of the ritual, because in the center of that room there was a magma spring and the designs on the floor indicated the positioning of the people. The feeling of discomfort I had when I arrived was more and more intense, I began to feel very sick, and they had to get me out of there while I lost consciousness.

Chris stayed to inspect the place and at dusk, during dinner, he explained that, in fact, the designs of that hall indicated that there was a ritual, and it was a large-scale one. Throughout that ruined city were everyday objects eroded by the conditions of the place, but the strangest thing is that, inside the castle on the site of the ritual, the deepest and most isolated rooms seemed as if people had simply disappeared, there were even the clothes in places where people had normally been, in chairs, corridors, beds.

We almost couldn't sleep in a place like that, it was too gloomy to rest even a little. I confessed to them that my father was an archaeologist and his greatest hobby in life was the study of the Phoenix Clan, which turns out to have lived in these ruins.

From Vodheim I brought my father's diary that Lillian stored in the Great Library, more as a memory of my family and home than anything

else. Although I don't understand much about the diary, I have a lot of information about this culture thanks to the stories my father told me.

In fact, it was precisely because of his fondness for legends about this place that he ended up making my mother fall in love. One more reason to keep the diary with me, I wish they could have come to this place.

## Day 5

At dawn, Chris gave me some books from the library because they seemed interesting and asked me to research them, maybe we'll get to know what happened there that long ago. Although in the surroundings it is said that the desert appeared overnight, I had never heard about these ruins, these kinds of mysteries are what encourage me even more to travel with Chris and company.

Something I noticed as we walked away from the ruins is that in this desert there was no wind at all, it was as if it was frozen in time, nothing changed except for what was exposed to sunlight. And the strangest thing of all is that, despite all the discomfort I experienced in that place, as we moved away, I began to feel nostalgia, as if something wanted me to stay there a little longer. At least now I have something else to tell Lillian when I come back.

By the time it was noon we managed to see on the horizon a castle glowing with a vivid bright yellow, almost like gold. It was the distinctive land from which the Heinburn kingdom was founded, after so many difficulties we came to our destination, to begin to write our destiny.

We arrived at sunset at the gates of the wall, but we met a young man who had broken the front of his wagon and it was impossible for him to carry his cargo with his horses. Then Chris offered to push from behind and the young man helped us through the door full of security.

The young man turned out to be the most competent blacksmith in the kingdom, all the people greeted him as if he were a kind of hero, he was

somewhat embarrassed to receive so much attention in front of us and without realizing it we arrived at his premises. We helped him unload all the material he was carrying on the cart and while we were at it, the young blacksmith was very struck by Chris' sword.

According to what Chris said once we were all inside, that sword was forged by his teacher (maybe it's the one he told me when training). He aimed to create the most powerful sword in the world, one that could go through any adversity in the world, I think it's something symbolic. As Chris was his disciple, he ended up inheriting that dream and with it, the sword.

We were all silent to hear something of Chris' past, even though it's actually about someone he knew. But it was at that moment that an old woman began to scream inside the blacksmith shop, turned out to be the young man's grandmother and repeated over and over again that Chris was cursed because of the sword and asked him to retire immediately, to get away from everything.

It turns out that her grandmother has special abilities, something called ki, the energy of the body according to the Far East, which is where she comes from. Chris didn't want to sit idly by and asked her for an explanation of what she meant and if possible, learn from her. Grandma refused because the curse made Chris reek so much, although in my opinion, even if he is sweaty, he smells good, especially his hair.

Chris lowered his sack and paid her with all his savings for the trip, Guilian and Tsubaki tried to convince him otherwise, but he made use of his authority for the first time. The blacksmith's grandmother flatly refused and then Chris used the most unexpected method: blackmail.

Using his sword, Chris proposed to leave it in the blacksmith shop if he were to die in the tournament or because of the curse. If he does not learn about ki, about his curse, about the sword, then the sword will serve as a curse as revenge for not helping him. While he said all that the grandson blacksmith was holding back the laughter, I think even her own family considers that she exaggerates.

So, Chris left his sword in the blacksmith shop while he was going to train with grandma, and we stayed in an inn to wait for the tournament. There is only a week left for it to take place, I hope he manages to get there on time, after all, he trained me instead of training by himself.

## Day 6

Tsubaki and Guilian signed up for the tournament and invited me to do the same, but I decided not to do it, I still think I am not prepared for such a big thing, it is said that adepts from many kingdoms and nations of adepts have gathered so everyone is expected to be quite powerful.

No matter where you are going to register, there are always many adepts doing the paperwork, some of them are quite famous as adventurers and world travelers and even as part of the military force of some kingdom. I think I heard that there are some people from the Empire loitering with the aim of recruiting them to their Guard.

I haven't seen Chris since yesterday afternoon, but I'm sure he must be trying hard, although according to the regulations it is not allowed to carry weapons so Chris will not have his sword during the fights. Still, I think something big is going to happen, there's something in the air, that pressure, just like before the storm in Vodheim.

## Chapter 9 – Presentation

It has been several days since Chris and his companions arrived to Heinburn kingdom, Hanna and Tsubaki were walking around the city to pass the time until the date of the tournament, the two of them became close enough to talk openly while Guilian was training inside the Colosseum, where the fights will take place, because many of the participants, to try to be in the best conditions, do practice fights in the last days before the big event.

One day before the tournament, on a plain on the outskirts of the city, Chris was training with the young blacksmith's grandmother, an old woman named Xian Tao, with the strict policy of staying 10 meters away from her because of his "curse". She was somewhat impressed with the ease with which he etched into his body the habits of perceiving with it.

—You have some experience in this. —Xian Tao said, being the first compliment to Chris —The more trained your body is, the easier it is to awaken the notion of ki. Who trained you, kid?

Chris tries to follow the postures, to do it fluidly, without tension in the muscles, maintaining a constant rhythm in the breathing. "Be like water, formless, in constant flux and change." Despite being an adept of Earth, he has the facility to learn very quickly with his body.

—Actually, I trained with two teachers, who handed me the sword taught me to be a warrior. —Chris replies as he remembers his last four years training tirelessly—My second teacher taught me martial arts, always emphasizing me to follow the flow of the wind.

—«Four years? It seems as if his body has trained for decades and considering how young he is, he's brimming with life force, he is more terrifying than those creatures of the night. » —Xian Tao thinks as she observes Chris very closely—«If he gets to dig up the secrets of ki, he will be unstoppable, a real monster. »

Having trained for days without much rest, without his instructor practicing what he learned until he does it instinctively, she gives him the go-ahead that he has managed to "perceive" the ki, barely, but he is still far from "using it" and Chris runs away to register first thing in the morning of the competition. His companions are surprised to see him made a mess, not even the clothes were neat and immediately Tsubaki takes him to the bathrooms of the Colosseum to clean up and give a good first impression.

The hot waters relax his worn muscles, and, in the meantime, the playoffs begin. Due to the alarming number of participants, it was decided to divide them into blocks of 100 people and the winners shall clash in duels 1 against 1 until they reach the top. Chris, Guilian and Tsubaki were in different blocks among the 8 in total. Another rule is that participants are not allowed to watch the other bouts, even in the playoffs.

Having just started the bath, Chris does not worry about being late because his block is the last one and then, a huge tremor is felt throughout the structure, even brisk Chris' skin while drying his hair. Battle royale of the first block, the whole public was speechless to witness a crushing victory, just after a couple of minutes the field was burned, and all the adepts were in terrible conditions while a man stood up with an expression that says "not worth my time" in all the face.

The presenter announces the first victory of the playoffs, the man with black hair, clothes from the East and an ironic look that would freeze the blood of any experienced warrior, according to his inscription form, by the data entered, is shouted to the four winds: Fire Adept, one of the Six Lords, Fist of Dragon Ryuken.

All people start to get out of control knowing that one of the six most powerful adepts in the world, both individually and collectively, is right in the center with the intention of fighting. Immediately the bugles sound everywhere with a characteristic tune, the queen, Alice Heimburn XVI, addresses a few words:

—If he had wanted to do destruction like Volt he simply would have done, but even now he followed the rules of the tournament and abides by the code of the warriors, so his intentions I recognize as not hostile. Right now, he is just a warrior in search of a worthy opponent. —the queen's voice reached all her subjects, who have calmed down a little. —«That woman, gives me a bad feeling. Her inner flame is unusual, as if it were not even human; and her voice makes me sick, it gave me a bad vibe when going through my body, something hidden. » —Ryuken analyzes when he looks at the queen from the center of the arena.

And with that, the people are left speculating while that man is guided to his dressing room to wait for his next fight.

Twenty minutes later the winner of the second block is announced, and the people are thrilled, Alexander of the Whirlwind, disciple of Faust, one of the six Imperial Generals. Unlike the previous participant, this one had a good reputation for the inhabitants of a kingdom that is allied to the Empire. The repair of the Arena is carried out and immediately the battle of the third block begins.

The battle royale begins and immediately a hurricane of explosions is released, Guilian, after training for weeks the destructive power of his flaming fists, developed his technique of compressing flames and releasing them with each blow. His body of chunky complexion allows him to withstand the force of explosions and after so much training his body was strengthened in addition to his elemental power.

Blow after blow, the opponents' attacks are swept away by him, and a second blow is enough to knock out every adept who dares to attack him. Most adepts do not train their bodies, so Guilian's attacks of great destructive power are enough to render their attacks and attempts to defend themselves irrelevant. The crowd cheers as Guilian defeats an adept every 5 seconds and after half an hour there are only two participants left against him, in an allied attempt to beat him.

They combine their attacks, a large rock shoots out and is engulfed in flames, and Guilian, while anyone would think of dodging the powerful

attack, decides to jump directly at the front. He concentrates his power, his fists are engulfed in very intense flames, and he strikes a double blow, pulverizing the rock and debris shooting out with enough force to hurt the last adepts. People scream excitedly at a frenzy where they didn't even have time to take a breath because of the excitement.

40 minutes later the fight of the fourth block ends and the fourth participant rises, Senna de las Rosas, the right hand of Sellenne, one of the Six Lords, of the nation of Freia. Gracefully, this beautiful woman defeated all her opponents with roses growing from her body. The men in particular were ecstatic to celebrate their victory.

Then, the start of the fifth block takes place, Tsubaki enters the arena with a bit of nervousness, but she remains calm as best she can and remembers the hunt she did with Chris and Guilian, in addition to her training in the Vodheim fields. And so, begins the next combat, she quickly slips through the crowd as if she were running through the forest of the elves, dodging the attacks that crosses her path by perceiving the aromas and knocking out each adept jumping on them as if they were tree trunks.

It is after about twenty defeats when adepts gather to work as a team and defeat her, but she decides to stay close to them, makes them attack each other and even use their attacks to maneuver in the air. The tension rises between the participants, and they begin to attack rampantly and all she has to do is keep dodging and get closer to those who will receive the attacks for her.

When there is only one left, 10 meters from her, while she is in the air, he throws a fireball at her and then, she makes a maneuver, throws a kick and the wind shoots out like a fine line, cutting the flames and gaining heat, giving the opponent directly and obtaining a crushing victory. She gets the applause of all the people and begins to feel a little embarrassed and quickly withdraws.

Viewers are fascinated by the rookie who has just made herself known, as Tsubaki retreats to her dressing room she can hear people's voices praising her for her victory.

—«My training was not in vain. » —Tsubaki thinks, crying with joy as she moves through the corridors.

20 minutes later the fight of the sixth block ends, a mysterious Water adept, Pierre, won easily dodging all attacks and firing pressurized water, knocking out the few that remained in the last minutes. That young man did not have any kind of document, identification or affiliation with any nation, in addition to a battle without much noise, the public did not celebrate him like the rest, but they recognized his abilities.

Just after 10 minutes the combat of the seventh block ends, who rises with the victory is Morgan the Skull Crusher, one of the commanders of Volt's army, one of the Six Lords. His powerful technique of hardening the earth allows him to attack and defend himself at the same time and as a distinctive mark of his fights he always aims to crush the heads of his enemies. Once again, the audience is somewhat uncomfortable with the appearance of another... wild character.

And at last, it was time for the eighth block combat, everyone enters the arena and receives the ovations of the people. Chris, in the middle of the crowd, starts to contemplate how big the place is, how small the people look being in the center, the deafening sound of the crowd excited by the expectations they have for the result. He can't help but let out a smirk, a small smile after feeling in his body how the blood begins to boil from the pressure that is felt around him.

Takes a deep breath and the signal sounds, the combat begins. Someone attacks him from behind and ducks, some small rocks fall into his hair, and he immediately realizes that it was an Earth adept, jumps with his legs and flies over a few individuals and finds the person responsible, lands in his face with a kick, leaving him unconscious.

Everyone is too busy fighting each other to pay attention to him until various attacks from different directions begin to arrive, fireballs, compressed water shots, rocks the size of his head, some enemies wanted to attack him thinking he was clueless. Then Chris takes about three steps back and to the right and at a normal pace, without hurry, and each attack passes almost reaching his body.

People begin to pay attention after the rumble of the surprise attack, and the announcer begins to talk about the center of the commotion, Chris spends it hitting each opponent and dodging all attacks, even those that come from his blind spot, always attacks those who launch attacks at him, only in response. The audience gets excited, but at the same time there is starting to be restlessness, they are not seeing any kind of power in Chris.

He is not increasing his strength; he hits them with his normal strength and nothing else. The participants begin to make it the center of their attacks and another massacre begins. Blow after blow, Chris knocks everyone out with minimal and necessary force and ensures that the fallen do not receive collateral damage. He doesn't want the attacks that target him to hurt them if they've already been defeated.

In the stands, Hanna is stunned to watch Chris' combat, suddenly feels a small pulse and sees Chris react at the same time to dodge another attack from behind. She can't help but begin to feel doubts about what she is literally feeling.

Having passed just over 10 minutes there are no more than ten participants including Chris, they are all with chaotic breathing and he is calm like a fisherman in a river on a summer day. Hanna senses the pulse going through her body again and Chris leaps on one of his opponents.

He dodges the attacks while cutting the distance between them and passes right next to him, Chris stands on the wall of the arena and then everyone realizes what is happening, Chris has in a single straight line all the opponents and begins to feel a great pressure for an instant.

Chris shoots out after jumping off the wall and rams everyone in one move. Then, a silence begins throughout the place and as quickly as it arrived the cries for his victory begin. Everyone is impressed to have won the playoffs without even using his powers. He decides to go to his dressing room to mentalize for the next round and is guided by the event staff.

Once inside, he cools off with water and Hanna enters the room to congratulate him, telling him the results of Tsubaki and Guilian and they begin to talk about their fight. He did not use his powers as a form of testing, he wanted to know how much he managed to learn from his intensive training on ki.

According to the old lady Xian Tao, ki, the energy of the body, is an essential part not only of life, but of everything in the world. In animals it can be observed that they have heightened senses due to the environment in which they live, but still demonstrate a kind of instinct that makes them avoid danger, they are closer to perceiving ki.

In the same way that insects become restless one day and soon storms or earthquakes happen, Chris tested his perception of ki to avoid attacks, because those who threw at him were of material element, not elemental power.

Hanna is a little confused by the last part in his explanation. Chris realizing this decides to explain a little how the bases of the adepts work:

—Elemental power lies in the soul, we control it with emotions and thought, it is precisely the elemental power that gives us control over an element. —explains Chris, recalling his training in the temple— Hanna, you generate fire by concentrating elemental power in the air and causing combustion. Once turned into fire, it ends up under your control and from there you decide the course of action.

She is somewhat thoughtful with that explanation, she did understand it, but another question jumps, how does Chris increase his strength? The answer is simple and explains it even more simply. He uses his own elemental power to propel his body, the greater elemental power he concentrates on one limb, the greater the increase in his strength.

All that is possible thanks to the training he had with his teacher, trained his body, got to know it thoroughly, formed discipline and concentration until he was able to control his body to such extremes. There is "earth" inside the body, minerals and metals, so he managed to add his elemental power, which comes from the soul, with his body, combining his abilities up to that point.

Without realizing it, because of the long conversation, the break ends, and the individual rounds begin. Hanna retires for Chris to rest and prepare, but halfway through she remembers asking him about the "pulse" she felt during their fight but decides to postpone it until the tournament is over.

The classification is over, and the branching of the fights is shown: the first fight is Fist of Dragon Ryuken against Alexander of the Whirlwind, the second is Guilian against Senna of the Roses, as third Tsubaki against Pierre and, finally, Chris against Morgan.

On the outskirts, inside the blacksmith shop, the old lady Xian Tao can't help but feel that the pressure in the surroundings begins to increase and decides to take her grandson with her away from the city with the excuse of having a bad feeling, something that worries her to the bone.

## Chapter 10 – First Round

Clear sky, the Sun rises at noon, the fresh wind gives the area the perfect environment to be outdoors while witnessing the fights in the Arena, as an opening ceremony to the rounds 1 against 1 all the competitors in the center are presented to start the four initial fights.

Chris, Tsubaki and Guilian can't help but stare at each other with the thought of facing two of them in the finals and checking the results of their trainings. However, without giving many indications, the other competitors observe each other to analyze the others who are famous, in order to make strategies in advance and be able to finish quickly with the combats.

Ryuken, in a totally immutable way, never opens his eyes, he remains totally immobile and without the need to analyze the situation. Hanna, from the audience, begins to feel a strange sensation in the body, it is not tension, it is not the "pulse", it is not unpleasant, but it does not feel good either, despite this, it feels that there is something that does not add up. She begins to observe the surroundings, but finds nothing peculiar, except for the center of the Arena, almost imperceptibly Ryuken gives a small glimpse at something.

That leaves her intrigued, so she decides to try to discover the goal of such an action and realizes that it was Chris, and she realizes that he is also on alert and after a few seconds she turns to observe Ryuken, as if there is "something" between them. He begins to feel a pressure again, this time Tsubaki and Guilian begin to feel it because they keep watching Chris on alert.

It's just a presentation, but they can't help but feel the danger. After a few minutes, Queen Alice gives a speech on how the adepts have become in recent centuries one of the greatest forces in the world, how nations have begun to unify and how the world is transforming into a peaceful one due to the efforts of the leaders of both human and adepts kingdoms.

Once the speech is over and a few minutes of emotional applause, all the participants return to their rooms and begin preparations for the first fight. Ryuken and Alexander go out to the field from opposite points, the whole Arena is silent as they observe that the fight is about to begin, the tension in the air is overwhelming and the signal sounds, the fight begins.

Alexander throws whirlwinds from his arms and Ryuken dodges them minimally, barely moved his body, but Alexander decides to increase the pace, begins to launch more attacks, more often and bigger and Ryuken continues to dodge them while taking steps to approach. People are stunned to see that Ryuken shows no sign of difficulty and is now only 5 meters away from his opponent.

That's when Alexander, totally desperate, decides to take his ace out of the sleeve, begins to form whirlwinds in both arms and Ryuken starts to feel that the air begins to become lighter, the whirlwinds shoot out with great power and speed, spinning in opposite directions, these cause between them a vacuum chamber where its walls have wind loaded with dust traveling at high speeds, crushing everything in its path. Ryuken moves at high speed to dodge it but ends up receiving a little damage to his clothes, the vacuum chamber ends up suctioning the target with great efficiency to be crushed, his maneuver must have been quite powerful to have been practically unharmed.

Alexander recharges to use his technique and Ryuken begins to get into position, the tension is felt in the air as his gaze gathers concentration. The whirlwinds come out even bigger and then, Ryuken disappears into them. He received them fully and everyone is impressed to see that there was absolutely nothing left.

But something is not right, Alexander begins to fail breathing, that's when a voice sounds near his ear:

—You're still a newbie if you get carried away by appearances. Your attack certainly is easily deadly and of great power, but it is of no use

if it is directed at a mirage. —Ryuken is right in front of Alexander, who is barely standing with a frantic breath.

Ryuken heated the air imperceptibly and created a mirage in his position to serve as a decoy while taking a safe route. Alexander's breathing is failing because of how hot the air he inhales is, he can't help but fall to the ground, and as he loses consciousness, he sees how Ryuken just stays watching him, defeating him without even touching him or setting any fire.

—«I couldn't even touch it; this is the level of a Lord? It's a monster, I will never reach your level, Master Faust, I have failed you. » —thinks Alexander as he loses consciousness.

The fight is over in less than 5 minutes and Alexander is quickly taken to the medical ward. As Ryuken heads out of the Arena he quietly pronounces how pathetic he is like an Air adept, for he didn't even notice the change in the air around him.

Hanna watched Ryuken's combat, ended up fascinated by the skill of the man from the East, but at the same time worried that at least one of her friends is going to confront him. She can't find a way to defeat him because of what she knows about her fellow travelers.

Being immersed in her thoughts, Hanna realizes that the repairs of the sand have finished and the participants of the second confrontation are already entering. Guilian never tires of greeting the audience, he loves the attention and support after all his practice matches last week.

Senna enters the stage; the men acclaim her for her beauty and even throw flowers at her on her way to her opponent. She walks the path of roses, but never steps on a single flower, instead, she looks at them with disappointment.

—«Fools, they were all alive and happy where they were. They didn't have to kill them just to do something so useless. » —Senna can only contain her outrage until the confrontation begins.

The signal sounds and immediately the second fight begins, Guilian against Senna, Guilian keeps watching her, absorbed by the beautiful woman he has right in front of him. She can't help but feel some discomfort and makes no qualms about stating how he makes her feel. Senna, at only 17 years old, has climbed positions within the military force of Freia to always be at the side of Sellenne, who is her idol.

Senna opens her mantle, discovering her body and the thorny stems of crimson roses that characterize her so much come out. Guilian tries to dodge the surprisingly fast attack, but receives some scratches on his left forearm, then he jumps on her, burning the thorns with a series of punches.

He harnesses the force of each explosion to roll back his arm and releases the fire backwards by fully loading the fire for the next explosion, resulting in a series of high-speed punches. Guilian manages to get close enough to Senna and stops his last blow just by rubbing her face, tells her in a calm voice that he wants to avoid hurting a woman with his fire, especially one as beautiful as her, and she lowers her thorns.

Just as Guilian lowers his arm and puts out his flames, thorns come out of the ground under him and, barely reacting in time, manages to avoid a fatal wound, leaving him injured in the abdomen and part of his face. Senna, with a sadistic look, reveals that she enjoys torturing men, because they seem to her disgusting, she does not want his chivalry and if he continues, she will not hesitate to take his life for belittling her power.

Thorns begin to come out of the entire battlefield and launches towards him, barely maneuvering thanks to the fire in his fists, Guilian walks away and burns all the plants that are directed at him. But Senna never took a single step, he is still in the same position and does not even turn to see him.

Guilian decides to gamble, the answer comes to light when you face adversity. He, again, throws himself directly at Senna, while dodging the thorns and burning them again and again. He prepares his fists of fire and throws a large explosion at her, but she covered herself with thorns coming out just below her, forming a thick wall. But Guilian had only begun, for he immediately releases another explosion and another and another, until there are no vines left.

He launches one last explosion, hitting Senna hard, throwing her a few meters and as the smoke and dust dissipates, her naked body to be seen. Guilian managed to discover the secret of her thorns, Senna's clothes were covered with rose seeds, which he grew with his elemental power of Earth and controlled them with it.

As she ran away to her room, embarrassed, Guilian is declared victorious at the cost of his reputation for stripping a girl naked in front of hundreds of people. That day would be condemned by all women, not only of the kingdom of Heinburn, but of the world, but applauded by men. Inside his dressing room, Chris can't help but feel the different emotions within the scandal outside.

—They must be having a lot of fun out there to make so much noise.  
—he says loudly to himself as he prepares.

The holes in the sand soil were filled in and the flowers from the previous combat were collected. The next opponents enter, Tsubaki is full of confidence and greets her friend Hanna in the stands. Pierre enters calmly, as if he were at home, that gives the Air adept some uncertainty.

The third fight begins, Tsubaki against Pierre, she stays watching him carefully before making her first move. Everything in him is strange, no intention is perceived, neither of attack nor of defense, he is only completely inert, calm, serene. It gives a feeling that leaves her uncomfortable for not matching the circumstances.

She throws a series of slashing wind attacks at him and dodges them all, moving unnaturally. It's as if he's dancing, jumps back and forth and

dodges each and every attack without making any effort and she can't help but shorten the distance to try to strike a simple attack.

She begins to move at high speed with the help of the wind, drives her every movement and attacks with a sharp wind in her limbs, attacks him from all angles, but dodges everything and while doing so, imperceptibly, ends up causing her cuts in some areas of arms and legs.

She can't figure out how he could do it, Hanna begins to worry about her condition and yells at her from the audience to observe the pattern of her movements, not his but hers. Tsubaki does not remain calm and rushes, she begins to run around Pierre and raises a cloud of dust, leaving him without much visual field. She attacks again in a non-frontal way and dodges him again.

As soon as she takes his first step after his last attack, she loses his balance and notices that her heel was also hurt, meanwhile, Pierre begins to approach with great confidence, as if he had won the fight. She decides to throw herself head-on and attacks from both sides, with both arms and Pierre launches his counterattack.

His hands are covered with water flowing at high speed, as if it were a stream circulating throughout the extension of the palms of his hands. His water stream follows the flow of Tsubaki's wind and destroys both attacks, grabs her hands and takes her as if they were dancing, she can't help but feel embarrassed for having been manipulated so easily, Pierre asks her to give up, and she agrees.

Unlike Guilian, Pierre ends up winning the hearts of women by being so gentlemanly and elegant, and the men in the audience boo him for it. He leaves with a face of satisfaction at the reaction of the public while Tsubaki dies of shame for his defeat, as well as feeling strange after the final attack.

As she retires to the medical ward she meets Chris on her way to the Arena, she lets him know about her defeat and his curiosity rises. That

Pierre avoided her fast and difficult-to-see attacks because the wind is not visible, is the dangerous thing in addition to his cutting ability.

Morgan enters the arena, and the spectators remain silent, they do not know whether to boo him for his well-deserved reputation or throw objects at him because of his hostile nature. Then Chris comes to light, and everyone sends him support to defeat the barbarian.

The last battle begins, Morgan against Chris, his earth hardening ability allows him to attack with spikes and Chris dodges them feeling the vibrations of the earth, by perceiving the ki he can identify which zones he is hardening and predict his exit trajectory. As the entire Arena is filled with peaks Chris decides to start attacking and realizes that super hardened peaks come out of the peaks already out, in addition to starting to turn so they are no longer vertical attacks, but horizontal from all sides.

Morgan's strategy paid off, he can't move freely and he's not safe in one place either. Chris can only dodge the spikes that come out around him and makes his way straight to his opponent, jumps over the spikes and propels himself by kicking the tips from the sides, falling straight up on Morgan.

Being exactly above him, Morgan cannot see him in the sunlight and kicks him directly in the face, causing the beaks to stop coming out and turning, as he lost concentration to keep his ability active. Chris grabs his skull and with his strength begins to squeeze him until he begins to scream in pain, saying loudly that for people like him the adepts get a bad name.

Once he begins to bleed from his nose and ears, with no sign of remaining conscious, Chris is declared victorious, and the audience hails him for subduing such a powerful barbarian. And he still didn't get to use his elemental power, which makes him increasingly popular in the competition.

The results of the first round are set and the contests that follow are shown, the semifinals will be Ryuken against Guilian and Pierre against Chris. Hanna can't help but worry about the battles becoming bloodier and bloodier and decides to visit them in their rooms.

First, she decided to go see Tsubaki in the medical ward, they have already treated her wounds that were quite superficial and will not leave any scar. She is frustrated that she has shown ineptitude, but Hanna encourages her to use that experience to grow more. Just a few meters away she manages to see that Guilian went through a more serious treatment, because his wounds were close to being deadly, nothing that the healing wizards who came from the Empire cannot treat.

With Guilian, she sees how focused she is, as he is about to face one of the Six Lords and talks a little with him to help him calm down. With Chris, he just stays thoughtful, he is somewhat dismayed by what Tsubaki could know about Pierre, that he is so strange is what makes him so dangerous in combat.

She can't tell him much more because she didn't get much information from his perspective, but she can tell him about the other matches and he is glad for Guilian, who has come as far as he has and has a lot of desire to face him in the finals. In a sense, the two of them always competed with the power of their fists.

The rest between rounds ends up being one hour and in that time the Arena undergoes a few modifications, the floor was separated from the walls, leaving channels full of water and the Arena has less extension. The Colosseum has technology from the Empire that allows it to modify the terrain at its discretion.

With all the people gathered, ringing the excitement throughout the kingdom, the two competitors of the first semi-final battle, Ryuken and Guilian, come out. Hanna and Tsubaki, from the audience, send him support, each in their own way. Smiling, Guilian begins the battle of his life.

## Chapter 11 – The Semi-Finals (Part 1)

Guilian, 19 years old, a tall, strong young man, eyes full of that spark called courage, but he was not always someone like that, "We are the result of our whole journey, each of the steps taken and still to be taken defines us." Although he never talked about important things about his past with his traveling friends, we will dig into his story.

Village of Veiru, 6 years before the tournament, in one of the houses there was a young Guilian still asleep almost past noon. His grandmother wakes him up by throwing a few blows to his face with her broom as old as she is, with his five senses recovered in a single instant he realizes that he fell asleep for quite some time because of his special regimen of night exercise.

He runs out in the direction of the fields to help his father and grandfather and almost bumps into his mother at the door and outside the house with his 2 little sisters but dodges them in a hurry and shoots out for his colossal delay. While he is focused on running, his entire family sees him with smiles on their faces as they see him full of energy and vitality.

It is at this time that, as is evident, Guilian was a carefree young man, all the discipline in his life was due to his older relatives, because being the only son of the family in a farming community, he had the responsibility of carrying the family farm in the shortly distant future. Because of his younger sisters, he developed a sense of buffoonery to amuse them, and it was those moments that he enjoyed most in his entire life, something that his parents and grandparents rejected him for not taking his instruction seriously.

It was precisely on this day, when his life was going to take a 180-degree turn, either by fate or by chance, that his world would end in just an instant. While he struggled to plow the land with his own body instead of using cattle for his delay, outsiders would arrive in his village.

All the villagers were a little skeptical at first, but the stories they told about the outside began to captivate them to the point of becoming very popular among the community. Guilian's grandfather was the most skeptical of all, he was always keeping an eye on them, especially with the harvest season almost knocking on the door.

During the night a marriage took place, the son of the village chief married and the whole community celebrated them. Guilian was, as usual, choking on the feast while everyone had a partner to dance to, eating his feelings while feeling betrayed by his friends with a partner.

Because of how late the end of the party was, the young children stayed to sleep in their homes while the older ones celebrated. As Guilian could hardly continue eating, he decided to go to sleep in his bed for a new day at work, the sermon of his father and grandfather actually reached to him that morning.

But there was something strange, there were signs of struggle at the door of his home, and the strange movement of the candle lights could be seen from the windows. Running without even giving a break, he entered his house and as he moved, he could see that everything was a mess. With the worst of his thoughts taking all space in his mind, he arrives at his sisters' room only to find the perpetrators.

Outsiders held his sisters captive as they searched for any valuable items, and he couldn't help but throw himself at them with great fury. But that only caused them to throw him with wind and water, those two were adepts. "Don't take it personally, we just wanted something to sell to survive. We will settle for selling them as slaves." And they started laughing sadistically.

The anger was taken to exorbitant levels, so much so that he lost the notion of reality and by the time he regained his senses, he was outside his house totally covered in flames with his sisters behind him, watching the flames rise to the heavens. While he tries to know what had just happened, he realizes the reality, from his hands is coming fire

and that's when, in a totally unexpected way, the whole community is contemplating what he did.

His family is shocked because he is an adept and his little sisters have their eyes totally lost, what they have seen during his explosion of anger left them totally traumatized. That only "added fuel to the fire", because without knowing what really happened, everyone concluded that Guilian provoked it and began to attack him.

Shattered, Guilian rushes out of the village, and his hands keep being covered in flames. After a whole night of running, he manages to stop hearing the sounds of persecution and begins to understand what happened. His fury awakened his Fire power and set the house on fire, leaving the outsiders inside and by the expression in the gazes of his little sisters, he incinerated them before the house... in front of them.

Alone, with nowhere to go or return to, Guilian began to wander in the open until he reached a small town, where he worked for a few days until, unintentionally, his hands lit up again and attacked him as at home. And history repeated itself from town to town, over and over again, for years, until he learned to control his power.

It was his entire journey that made him forge the determination to use his power regardless of whether people rejected him, in order to save as many lives as he could, like his sisters. It is all these events that pass through Guilian's mind every time he uses his Fire power, they are his catalyst.

Back to the present, Guilian is face to face with Ryuken, they look each other in the eye, the tension can be felt in the air as everyone waits for the first fight of the semifinals to begin. It is precisely in this type of moment that the nerves make your senses sharpen to the point of being sensitive to anything, even the slightest variation can make you give a false move, the greatest psychological war.

However, Ryuken sees clearly that Guilian's gaze has not an inch of doubt, just as anyone is sure that the rain goes from top to bottom. A

single word coming from Queen Alice's mouth is more than enough to cut through the deafening silence, "Start!" and the bell rings.

Guilian is propelled with explosions of both hands to throw himself directly at Ryuken and at the last moment he makes a third, flying over him, but Ryuken throws a kick from the ground to above his head, thanks to great flexibility and his foot ends up approaching Guilian's face.

One more impulse and Guilian maneuvers to avoid the blow, turns and makes the first attack, throws an explosion from close, giving him directly. But once he lands a few meters away with the remaining momentum and the smoke dissipates, there is no sign of his formidable opponent.

—You have really worked on the development of your power. —  
Ryuken says calmly as he stands right behind him.

He barely manages to react and fires explosions in his direction, as Guilian's hands point at the target, no matter the position or posture, he can fire his explosions to attack and distance himself at the same time.

What Ryuken did was completely different from his previous match, Guilian can't help but simply lose sight of his opponent. He changes the strategy, his hands are covered in flames, and he begins the combat at close range, a very dangerous bet, but with no alternative.

He uses his explosions only to boost himself and try to launch quick and forceful attacks. Blow after blow, Ryuken dodges them all with little body movement, without even taking a step back at any time. Despite the wild attack, no attack is effective in the slightest.

—This will be more than enough. —is what Ryuken says with a few flames in his bare palm to make him ridiculous with himself.

Again, Ryuken dodges all of Guilian's fiery blows and puts his hand right on his face and releases the fire in a small but strong burst.

Guilian is left suffering on the ground from the damage to his face, he can't help but let go of his hurting voice, and tries to recover as quickly as possible, but it's useless, he can't see clearly from the damage, no matter if it is permanent or not, but he is determined to keep fighting. His hands are engulfed in even more intense flames and the heat begins to be felt all over the battlefield.

From the audience, Hanna can't help but panic about seeing her friend suffer from the fire and with the possibility of being left with permanent damage like her. She screams at the top of her lungs that he doesn't have to go any further, that he please takes more care of his life than a silly competition and starts to break down in tears.

Tsubaki can't help but be affected by Hanna's condition and she screams next to her something totally opposite.

—Finish it at once! Get him off its cloud with blows! —Tsubaki shouts unexpectedly with an expression of concern.

Guilian can't help but smile at being irritated by the words of the girl he is always fighting with. Ryuken is somewhat surprised to see that his opponent has such composure, even in the deplorable state of his vision. Guilian goes straight on the attack and is getting closer and closer to even rubbing him. Combat performance is becoming more intense and accurate. Ryuken can't help but be forced to use more and more forces to "play" with his opponent.

How can Guilian be more accurate now than at the beginning? It's what everyone is wondering in their minds. Deprived of sight and by the "heat of the moment", Guilian's senses have been sharpened beyond the limit, his exercised body responds quite well to varied stimuli, including the heat of his own fire, by emitting large amounts of heat in his surroundings, Ryuken avoids being affected by it, leaving a defined form of lower temperature than the rest of the field.

Were it not for his body trained since childhood and the influence of his friends in being more perceptive and detailed, this kind of skill would never have awakened in him. As he approaches his target, he notices an unusual movement, refrains his last blow a bit and, in effect, manages to dodge Ryuken's second attack.

—I see that you have grown quite a bit in the short time of our confrontation. —is the praise he receives from Ryuken —What is your determination for? —it's the only valid question between two warriors crossing attacks.

—Of course, it's my friends, but above all, my desire to return to my village with my family. I will gain fame and renown and be accepted back into my home. —Guilian responds honestly and openly, giving a smile to the two girls who support him from the stands.

The silence is immediate and after a few seconds it begins to feel how the atmosphere full of emotion changes to an ominous one in a few moments.

—Disgusting. Family? Being accepted again? You can't count on anyone except yourself. —says Ryuken with total disgust at that display of emotions.

An incredible power arises from Ryuken and in a single instant he is hit by a direct kick to the abdomen, leaving Guilian completely lying on the ground, unable to give any breath. Without giving him a chance to defend himself, Ryuken begins to beat Guilian with his hands outstretched, clearly with the intention of injuring him as much as possible without concluding the fight.

After a few minutes, Guilian is completely bloodied and covered in burns and the entire audience can't help but be intimidated by such an act of brutality. Hanna and Tsubaki do not stop screaming for their fallen friend and as a final touch Ryuken gives a flaming blow to Guilian's face to finish him off, falling into the water on the edge of the Arena.

The fight is over, Ryuken moves on to the final round and Guilian is rushed to the medical ward to at the very least save his life. The two friends do not hesitate to accompany him during the intensive treatment, while the call of the next semifinal match is sounded. Chris is on his way to the Arena as the healing team passes by him with his badly injured friend.

For a brief moment, Chris feels as if his heart has stopped beating and decides to go to the medical ward before the fight. The medical team does their best to heal his wounds while Guilian's friends can only watch the fight for his survival. Meanwhile, Tsubaki tells Chris what happened in detail.

The imperial wizards have tried their best to stop the internal bleeding, but Guilian calls Chris for a moment. He tries to say a few words despite his injuries, but he does not have enough strength. Chris takes Guilian's hand and for a brief moment Hanna feels the pulse through her body.

Guilian loses consciousness and the healing team begins treatment again with alarming urgency as Chris heads to the Arena, without even looking back. The only thing that goes through Chris' mind are Guilian's memories, their souls were connected by the heat of the moment and Chris could see his friend's memories.

He has felt his pain, despair, anguish, all from having his dreams trampled on by a stranger, he can't help but feel something inside him ignite with great intensity, but he must remain calm for now and concentrate on what is in front of him. Chris arrives at the Arena and meets his opponent, Pierre.

—I'm sorry, I really wanted to enjoy the tournament and get on my way no matter the result, but now I can't even stop thinking about winning this fight and going to the final. My friend will never rest in peace if I don't give him a lesson. —with an extremely bitter feeling and a look full of cold and repressed anger, Chris begins the second semifinal match.

## Chapter 12 – The Semi-Finals (Part 2)

The wind blows as the opponents wait for the signal, despite everything that invades Chris' mind, he has only one thing clear: to reach the final and avenge his friend. Pierre can't help but be surprised by the words his opponent said, but it's not time for an emotional chat.

The bugle sounds all over the place and as exciting as all the previous fights have been, neither of them takes the first step yet. Chris remains completely static, the information he received from Tsubaki and Hanna about him makes Chris cautious, while Pierre continues with his atmosphere full of mystery.

The tension increases so much that the audience begins to feel short of breath, and then, Chris takes a pose he has used before, prepares his body and throws a punch into the air. The same pressured-air punch he used against the salamander is perfect for attacking while keeping his distance. Pierre can't help but be forced to dodge, but it's too late, Chris has disappeared from his sight.

—Never start a fight you can't win, prepare your strategies before you even take the first step and never use your best cards until the end. — are the words his teacher taught Chris while training him with.

Despite having incredible strength if he sets his mind to it, Chris always tries to avoid using all his power, as he understands how easily elemental powers can cause death to other people.

Distraction and disappearance are basic elements to destabilize the enemy's mind, but Pierre remains calm, no matter what happens, no matter what his opponent does or when, he maintains composure. Right between his feet the earth begins to climb, and Chris comes out quickly with his fist covered with dirt up to his elbow.

As Chris expected, Pierre "reacted" to his strategy and uses his water stream to destroy the earth that covers his hand. The speed of his water

is impressive, as it almost instantly destroys most of his improvised protection, but before reaching the skin Chris raises a wall between the two, deflecting his arm and pushing him back.

It is the first time in the entire tournament that even something touched Pierre, also to push him back. Preparing a defense in case your attack fails sounds logical and sensible, but it's something that no one really considers. "You do this, and then what?" The less you leave to chance, the better.

As the two analyze the "greetings" they just exchanged, Chris can't help but highlight that he didn't perceive Pierre's movements, what good was his training? How does his ki manage to be imperceptible? "The answer is always in plain sight; you just have to change your perspective." They are the words he remembers whenever he doesn't understand something at the first opportunity.

Immediately, Chris sets out to cut the distance, increases his strength more and more, and just as he takes his last step before being one arm away from Pierre, he throws another blow of air, and another, and another, consecutively, without any pause. The pressurized air is shot in a concentrated way by the combination of movements in an attempt to hit his target, but he dodges them anyway.

His movements are very strange, despite how violent the series of attacks is, he moves with great tranquility and harmony, as if he were dancing without a single worry in this world. Chris does not sit idly by, he pays special attention to Pierre's movements, not with the ki, but with the sight.

He knows exactly the trajectory of the air from his blows, so he can know where his "projectiles" are and how he dodges them. Habits, movement patterns, analysis and prediction, the more you use the mind to analyze information the more you prioritize using the head instead of the body.

Chris was distracted, he was paying so much attention to Pierre's movements that he didn't notice how the distance was shrinking between the two of them. Pierre's hand passes almost rubbing against his cheek and leaves him with a series of cuts, barely the area turned red from losing a thin layer of skin.

A small opportunity, with so little distance between them it is impossible not to deal him a blow. However, it was too big and risky, Chris tries to hit him with air on the head and abdomen, but Pierre backs up and dodges both attacks.

A small pebble on the ground trips Pierre, causing him to lose his balance and Chris immediately rushes to give him a direct blow, but Pierre has a face of "I got you". As he falls, Pierre lifts one of his feet and covers it with his stream, hitting it directly on the left side.

The momentum from the kick is enough for Pierre to fall to his feet as Chris tries to endure the pain he feels from even trying to breathe. If his wound is not treated within minutes, his life may be in danger.

—«Don't lose your cool, a single moment can make you lose more than the fight. » —Chris tells himself as he tries to recover from the damage.

Chris barely manages to stand up and tries to regulate his breathing rhythm, yes, that same breathing he taught Hanna at the campfire. Each breath with a big breath of air, not paying attention to the intense pain, just watching it fade away. It is not that you stop feeling pain, but by controlling your breathing you can create intervals of lack and great oxygenation.

The head begins to spin, his heartbeat begins to fade, but the pain is successfully mitigated, allowing Chris to begin to clear his mind. Yes, he has the fervent desire to reach the final, but sometimes being too cautious can close the door to an opportunity. It's at times like this, when people start remembering seemingly random things.

Yamamoto Temple, five years ago, on a sunny spring day the breeze is filled with the smell of pollen from many flowers. Chris, with 16 years, is practicing with mud from a small lake to try to squeeze the water, without much success he barely manages to make it move as he wants a part of the mound, the rest shooting out everywhere and his face covered as if he had gone to a spa.

Discouraged, he remains thoughtful as he contemplates the ripples in the water next to the sound of tree leaves. A woman's voice sounds from behind, among the trees:

—Why the long face? —says a beautiful woman who appears with a kind smile and eyes with a strange glow, as if she were contemplating a pair of precious gems.

Everything is strange in that woman; she has a strange air that makes the calm overwhelming. She is right in front of him, and at the same time it is as if she does not exist, and despite this, she continues to speak to him. With a strange sense of personal space, the strange woman suddenly stands right next to Chris as she sees the mess with the mud.

With a lot of shame Chris ends up admitting that he can't control the mud well and doesn't do what he wants. He ends up resigning himself to moving dry land and is embarrassed lying on the shore of the lake.

—But mud is easier to move than dry land, it is soft, versatile and you can give it freer and more aesthetic shapes. You can even make beautiful sculptures with mud. —the strange woman interrupts him in a cutting way.

Chris ends up screaming, admitting that he doesn't control the earth well and tries to leave, but the woman takes his hand and holds him very tightly.

—Do not try to escape so soon, you can do it now, but sooner or later you must take the reins and achieve it. —the strange woman's words dig straight inside Chris, as if stabbing him straight to the heart, but without feeling any pain.

As if something inside him were taking hold of him, the woman takes him back to the mud to try again.

—Grab mud with your hands. —says the woman, something simple that anyone can do and Chris listens to her —Squeeze your hands tightly. — she says immediately and Chris replies saying that he knows the mud will fly out and the woman forces him to do it.

With mud all over his face, Chris asks what the point is to end up the same way.

—The answer is at first glance; you just have to change your perspective. —says the woman as she puts more mud in Chris' hands and guides them, taking on an increasingly defined shape, until she becomes a bird.

He is fascinated with the detail with which it is made, it is small, and he feels how fragile it is.

Once cleaned, the woman proposes a challenge to Chris, to try to catch a tree leaf. She climbs a tree, tears off a leaf and releases it, he tries to grab it and slips out of his fingers at the last moment. It seems simple, but there's so much more to it than just grabbing it. Hours pass, he tries to grab the same leaf over and over again without any success and his fingers extremely tired.

Returning to the present, he begins to remember the tiredness of that particular day, he feels the same, despite having forgotten it for so long, Chris manages to recognize the situation. He remembers all the frustration he felt at being eluded by a simple leaf, but he begins to understand one thing, the simplicity of the leaf floating in the air.

Chris' mind begins to plunge into darkness, the sound of the audience fades until there is no trace left. Realizing too late, he comprehends that everything around him has disappeared, there is absolutely nothing in the world, there is only him. But he does not despair, on the contrary, it seems as if there is not a single concern in its entire existence.

Despite his unfortunate goal, at that very moment, Chris, for the first time in his life, is at peace. The ki is calm, serene, as if he were water from a puddle, without waves that disturb it. He has stopped feeling, thinking, it's just that leaf soaring the wind in his hands that day.

His body moves without even reacting, despite perceiving absolutely nothing, within a non-existent world, he records in his mind the sensation of not feeling anything, the sensation of his body moving without having to react, only action, without apparent cause. He opens his eyes and to his surprise, there is Pierre right in front of him, short of breath.

As it seems, while he was in that trance, without knowing it, Chris was dodging Pierre's attacks until he was a little tired. Even if he tries, it is certain that Chris will not be able to repeat that feat on that occasion, so he decides to leave it for after the tournament.

—Who are you? You are an Earth adept, your technique makes you control the air, you have an internal fire about to explode and, above all, you moved like water. —declares Pierre completely surprised.

That confirms it, the reason why Chris could not perceive Pierre's ki was because he "moved like water", letting himself be carried away by the current, Pierre becomes imperceptible because he becomes one with the environment in motion, being the river that guides him.

Pierre's condition is not optimal, and Chris cannot repeat that state, so he must take advantage of the situation and circumstances to end the fight immediately, he is beginning to feel that his body does not react due to the loss of blood.

—Why don't you try to attack me? It never hurts to try your luck, maybe you'll finally get it right. —a provocation, that's more than enough for Pierre to lose his cool.

Taking the bait, Pierre begins to lose his character, he feels angry, but Chris can see that his spirit begins to ignite. The water surrounding the Arena begins to gather in his arms, he has accepted the challenge. A direct clash is what will determine the outcome. With effort, Chris increases the strength of his wound muscles enough to stop the bleeding as much as he can, despite the constant stabbing pain.

Chris begins to concentrate his elemental power, he remembers that day, how he witnessed the birth of that little mud bird. How much he trained to be able to mold the earth efficiently, how many months he was trying, leaving his face covered with mud.

Chris begins to smile, the spirits of both participants begin to ignite like burning flames, waiting to see which of the two emerge victorious. That strange desire to fight and win, something he hadn't felt in a long time, something that feels addictive, Chris can't help but get carried away for the time being.

Pierre runs out at high speed amassing large amounts of water in his hands, Chris puts his hands on the ground and a large number of compressed earth walls begin to emerge, one after the other, pushing each other. Their forms are arranged in such a way that they appear to be a single barrier becoming thicker and thicker.

The water finishes forming, the stream completely envelops Pierre, turning into a vortex of water. The sound of the stream is enough to tell that it is more powerful and cutting than before. Pierre collides with the earth wall, smashing the walls one by one as if nothing had happened.

The debris begins to shoot out and leaves a trail of dust around, until Pierre destroys the last wall and arrives in front of Chris, who did not move from his position at any time because of the amount of concentration he needed.

Just as Pierre is one step away from touching Chris with his current... Fwooooooshhh!!! All the water he gathered dissipated in an instant, Pierre is stunned by what happened, and Chris throws a punch at him.

That last second begins to become eternal, Pierre realizes what happened, he did not lose control of the water, Chris took it away. The earth of the walls mixed with the water of his stream and destroyed the flow that kept the water together and moving.

Pierre decides to dodge Chris' blow but realizes that his body does not respond as he wants. The earth was not only in the water, but it also reached his body. Pierre has his body covered with dirt and does not allow him to dodge at ease.

Pierre takes Chris' blow to the face, with enough force to resonate throughout the Colosseum. A single punch, just what Chris needed to knock out his opponent, but his skills made the fight very complicated for him. The fight is over, Chris reaches the final round.

## Chapter 13 – Final Contest

Chris has been in his room for almost an hour, receiving medical treatment from the imperial wizards, although he wants to ask about Guilian, he knows that it is not the right time. He must concentrate on his next opponent, Fist of Dragon Ryuken.

The diagnosis is not very favorable, may his wounds have been completely healed, but if Chris receives enough damage they will reopen, he lost a lot of blood and is advised not to move on, his life is already in danger in his current conditions. But that's not enough to overlook what happened.

Hanna returns to her seat in the stands, what she has felt lately has been more and more intense, and she can't feel calm. She contemplates how excited the audience is for the final round to begin.

The preparations during the break are according to the height of the competition, the drums greet Ryuken as he walks towards the Arena. He is waiting for his next match as if it meant nothing, while in the distance a gloomy figure is seen in the hallway, Chris comes out into the light of day.

Hanna can't help but see Chris' gaze full of determination, she is not full of anger, only conviction in reaching the goal, victory. The fight he had against Pierre taught him a lesson, anger will not be enough to win the final, he must overcome any obstacle that comes his way to rise victorious.

The audience is completely silent, the tension increases too much, Queen Alice can't help but watch the two warriors fight with only their presences, at least until she gives the signal. Barely hiding the trembling of her hand by nervousness she begins the final fight.

Chris goes straight to his opponent, kicks his upper body and is stopped with an effective block. Both have experience in martial arts, kick

against kick, deflected punch and counterattack, each action is effectively stopped against each other.

With only a few seconds since the battle began, there have already been at least 30 attacks and neither of them gives up an inch of ground. Having spent a few minutes, both stop and back at the same time, they are already done with the warm-up.

Ryuken is somewhat exalted, even without powers, there have not been many people who can keep up with him. It had been a few years since he had last been able to fight someone so much.

Chris is just analyzing what happened, his times were perfect, the postures before, during and after each type of attack, everything is similar. It's too much of a coincidence that they're both at the same "level" of skill in hand-to-hand combat. It is not time to think about solving those types of doubts, so he always has to postpone things.

It's time to raise the level, Chris increases his physical strength and throws a blow of pressurized air, he plans to use the same play as with Pierre. However, Ryuken wraps his fist in flames, becoming wild and very compressed and expels them, consuming the air and leaving the effect totally null.

Chris realizes that his strategies must be improvised and never repeat things, because Ryuken has the total appearance of being analytical with the details, that he could stop the pressurized air is proof of this.

Ryuken breaks the silence between the two:

—Did Hama train you? —a question that perplexes Chris for a few moments, that name reminds him of that time when he was useless in controlling the earth. That woman who taught him how to make the mud bird, the strange woman who supported him in the past.

—Posture, times of attack, defense and counterattack, deflecting the trajectory of attacks, being fast as a hurricane and elegant as a spring breeze, is totally the style of that woman. —every word of Ryuken to

describe her leaves Chris more stunned by its accuracy— Hasn't she died yet? It never seems to age one bit.

Ryuken speaks as if he knew her all his life, Chris can't believe he met an acquaintance of hers. A teacher who taught and supported him so much and he talks as if he holds some kind of grudge against her. Chris can't help but lose his temper.

He runs out to attack Ryuken for speaking ill of his teacher and increases his strength to the limit allowed not to kill. But Ryuken stops his angry attack, despite being a Fire adept, he has enough physical strength to continue to stop Chris' attacks.

Incredible analytical and deductive skills, physical strength, speed, tremendous elemental power, and still not seriously fight, one of the Six Lords, Fist of Dragon Ryuken. With a direct kick to the abdomen, Chris ends up being pushed back by the force of the attack. Strength and speed combined in an effective and accurate attack. He can barely keep his breath going.

He attacked him directly at the site of his wound, making it difficult for him to recover from the blow, but he further increases his strength, enough to tighten his muscles so that the "relaxed" body is totally rigid and thus not lose stability. If losing control of his body, Chris may not move it again for a while, that is the consequence of demanding too much on the past combat.

Ryuken decides not to let him rest until he is totally defeated, and begins to attack Chris with his real strength, fighting seriously. The blows are sharp, despite blocking the attacks, Chris begins to stop feeling some parts of the body by receiving the accurate blows.

Remembering the image of Guilian badly injured while calling him, Chris fights back with his whole arm and, despite blocking him, Ryuken begins to back off. Chris' strength increases more and more as he connects with his opponent's body, causing Ryuken to end up being pushed straight to the ground.

—«Fight, fight, fight. » —even without saying anything, Chris' expression shows off his determination to make his opponent suffer. That spark that ignited ended up becoming an inner hell.

—«He ignored the stabbing pain of the pressure points; he is more of a beast than a man. » —Ryuken is amazed by his opponent's unexpected ability as he suffers from the impact.

A direct lariat, despite not connecting with the neck, the real damage lies in the impact with the ground. Chris' strength causes Ryuken to collide with the ground strong enough to lift dirt from the Arena.

One of the weaknesses of martial arts based on speed and precision is high-impact attacks. Because of Ryuken's incredible physical strength, Chris had to suddenly increase his own strength as he whipped him towards the ground, for an instant reaching his maximum strength without hurting his own body.

As Chris watches his opponent on the ground for a moment, he senses a disturbance in the surroundings. Hanna warns him to turn his gaze and Chris manages to react in time, he gets kicked by someone else while Ryuken was on the ground.

He defends himself from the blow, but as soon as he receives the impact the foot becomes a flash and explodes, throwing Chris away from his opponent. Despite having increased his strength throughout his body, the impact of the explosion is enough to hurt him, not to mention the heat damage of the explosion fire.

He manages to recover from the damage and understands the scene, as Ryuken rises from the ground, the smoke dissipates and the identity of the other opponent, a second Ryuken, is revealed. Chris is amazed at what is in front of him. He sees it and can't believe it.

The Ryuken of the explosion runs on the attack while the injured Ryuken is left watching alone. Chris can do no more than respond to any attack, no matter from whom he receives it. He easily evades the

blow of the Ryuken from the explosion, directly attacks his body and as soon as he receives the damage that Ryuken ends up lighting up, detonating in an explosion.

That Ryuken did not defend itself much, its purpose was to receive damage to explode, or to attack with explosion on contact. As Chris recovers from the damage from the second explosion he notices that there is no longer that Ryuken, but now there are more of them around the initial Ryuken.

No doubt, Ryuken is creating clones of himself with his own elemental power. It is a technique of too advanced level to clone in detail, but there is something that does not add up, it seems as if they have their own consciousness, because they do not seem to be controlled by the original Ryuken.

Perceiving the ki, Chris avoids contact with all the Ryuken, evading all attacks, they do not seem to have as much physical strength as the original during the "warm-up". But there is something more alarming than his abilities, there are starting to be more and more clones. While evading almost automatically, he notices how clones are divided into more clones.

One is divided into two, they attack a certain number of times and each of them is divided into two, repeating the cycle. In just one minute since he began to evade the clones, from being about 3 they multiplied and became more than fifty.

Sharpening his perception of ki, Chris can notice how the clones' bodies "heat up," getting to enough activity, have twice the heat, and divide. Because the clones are splitting at an alarming rate Chris decides to blow one up and have the explosion eliminates others around him.

BOOM!!! Chris is thrown by the explosion, because at the time of attacking a clone he was without making contact with the ground, letting himself be carried away by the force of the explosion. He lands

and repeats the process, but that attack did not make more than 4 clones disappear and the others do not let him catch a breath.

As the combat progresses, explosions are more frequent, Hanna can't help but feel worried about her friend and his recklessness. Even though he's fighting the clones, the original Ryuken is resting and recovering from the tremendous damage he received.

Twenty minutes after the fight began, Chris has lost count of the explosions he has received all over his face, his body is fragile and very hurt by the fire of the explosions and very exhausted. The aftermath of his fight with Pierre begins to be felt even with his muscles strained by the increase in strength.

His clothes are also shattered and begin to fall off his body, once he is left with his top uncovered it can be noticed how defined his muscles are and covered with multiple scars. That's when Ryuken contemplates his opponent and notices something particular, Chris wears his necklace with a crystal pendant.

Ryuken is perplexed to see the pendant and begins to ask him where he got it from, but Chris does not answer, as he is too focused on staying conscious to pay attention to his questions. It is just at that moment that Chris begins to feel lighter and lighter, the pain of his wounds and the feelings he has vanishes, while Ryuken from his perspective notices how the pendant begins to emit a small light from inside.

The faint light envelops Chris' badly wounded body, his mind as it becomes cloudy, losing notion of reality, it becomes clear by digging up something that was very deep in his being. Chris manages to visualize a man on his back carrying two ill-behaved children while noticing that next to him he is being held by the hand of a beautiful woman, from her great height he deduces that he himself is very small.

The five are walking in a field of grass gilded by daylight as a mountain rises on the horizon. Everyone eats on a picnic; everyone smiles and the woman hands Chris the pendant with great affection. He, being a very

young child, is ready to bite the crystal that since that day hung from his neck and everyone laughs out loud.

Ryuken keeps trying to get answers from Chris but is surprised to see that drops are falling to the ground. Chris is crying rivers while Hanna feels something inside, the pulse is no longer instantaneous but continuous. She feels a warmth that she thought she had forgotten since she was a child, causing her to start crying too, but it doesn't last long.

Chris is increasingly relaxed despite the atmosphere, so much so that his muscles are no longer tense from the increased strength. One of the clones rushes to attack him and Chris dodges him easily, attacking right in the abdomen with a punch, but it does not explode, it just vanishes.

Hanna is totally shocked by what happened, the clone disappeared unexploded and the original Ryuken is showing pain, he received the damage from the clone. As the light disappears from the pendant, Chris regains his senses and sets out to attack the clones.

Blow after blow, the clones disappear as if nothing, and Ryuken takes in pain every time a clone is destroyed. He doesn't understand what's going on, something like this has never happened to him, so Chris explains that he now manages to understand the mechanism of fire clones.

—«I don't know what happened to me, but ki and my elemental power have been mixed. » —Chris reflects as he contemplates the power emanating from his body —«One thing is clear to me, those fire clones are still tied to Ryuken, the spiritual arts don't lie about something like that. »

Ryuken is cornered, despite having recovered a little from lariat, he has received quite a bit of damage from having lost many clones. He pounces on Chris and unleashes a flare that covers the rest of the Arena, his goal is to incinerate Chris to prevent him from attacking him further.

—«Had you not learned the secrets of ki you probably would have defeated me with a single attack. » —Ryuken thinks as he loses sight of his target lost in the sea of flames.

However, from the flames comes an arm and holds it by the neck, Chris is unharmed from the fire:

—Combining ki with my Earth elemental power has a second application, covering my body like a thick membrane and protecting me from your fire. —Chris shouts, which leaves Hanna surprised by Chris' solution to the fire damage.

Chris lashes out at Ryuken and starts beating him with a clean fist. As he tries to fight back, Ryuken can only notice that Chris' strength continues to increase as time goes on, which makes him understand that his new "ability" is adapting, discovering a limit in which to stay.

Ryuken's injured body does not allow him to attack with all his strength, so he uses fire to propel his movements, while the flames on his hands and feet intensify, all with the aim of breaking Chris' protection. Blow after blow, the two of them are giving and receiving damage by the force of the impacts.

The excitement of the audience echoes further as the two fighters are fighting as equals. Hanna can't believe what she is witnessing, she realizes that they both have a smile from ear to ear as they fight, while the look they have in their eyes shows that life-filled glow.

—«His blood boils from the fire of the combat, where do those two come from? » —thinks Queen Alice as she sees the two men fighting with an elemental fist—«I thought that clan of warriors was extinct. »

Throughout history a pattern was repeated for certain figures who made history, men who come out of nowhere, whose fervor for combat comes to light at the moment of truth. Knights, martial artists, bandits, pirates, after much effort gathering information from those legends, a clan of warriors with superhuman capabilities came to light.

That clan is scattered throughout the world and only one lucky exceptional individual comes out once every century. But what came to be repeated the most is the end of their stories, none of them grew old, all had deaths in battle without leaving offspring. They shine brighter than anyone of their generation, only to die prematurely from their thirst for fighting.

—«That that clan has appeared again, what is going to happen to this world? » —Queen Alice is so immersed in her thoughts that she does not process the fight right in front of her eyes—«The world has not yet recovered from what happened 400 years ago. »

Both spirits are no longer on fire, they are now shining as bright as the Sun, the passion of battle is turning them into animals with a thirst for battle. It is then that both hit with the right fist and stop with the left hand to each other, being tied once again.

—I haven't fought like that since I faced Volt. —says Ryuken, covered in sweat and panting slightly as he was regulating his breathing.

—I just sweated like this when I trained with my teacher, only he was more powerful. —Chris replies as the two continue with a smile on their faces.

The two of them are stuck in that situation, staying connected by attack and defense at the same time. But the seconds become minutes, and they don't change, and the audience is surprised, something is not right.

The expression on Chris' face is more and more tense, as if he is resisting with every fiber of his being. Out of nowhere the ground under the two of them starts to crack and flames come out, Hanna realizes what's going on, Chris is using his elemental power to contain Ryuken's fire, and it's getting harder and harder to keep it at bay.

Chris tries to appeal to reason with Ryuken, to let go of everything, innocent people will die, the public has done nothing to deserve that, but it doesn't work.

—That they have done nothing to deserve this? It is quite the opposite, by doing nothing they allowed injustices to happen to real innocents. Powerless humans are just blind cattle, before the Six Lords system they almost caused the extinction of the adepts. It was poetic justice that the Demon King arose because of them.

—«What is he are saying? » —it's the first time Chris hears something about it, but it's not time to ask for the details—If you plan to release it, then direct it all to me! I will receive everything for them.

Ryuken is surprised by Chris' decision in that situation, as he wants to sacrifice himself for people he doesn't know. He refuses, but Chris decides to throw him into the skies to burst away from the crowd.

—Do you think I can't control all this fire? That I am an inexperienced Fire adept who would just burst out? —says Ryuken as the flames are released from within and begin to converge on his right hand.

Everyone contemplates the exorbitant amount of fire that is condensing just above them, it even ends up changing the color of the sky, and the brightness can be contemplated throughout the realm, the old lady Xian Tao can see it from the outskirts and feels the danger to the bones from so far away. Queen Alice can't help but worry about what's about to happen, but it's too late, it's a calamity about to fall from the sky, literally. Hanna can't help but be immersed in the figure that takes the fire, eyes, fangs, scales, horns, a fire capable of incinerating anything in the world and even the afterlife: the Fist of the Dragon.

Chris can feel how everything from that fire dragon is being directed towards him, he can feel that that fire is fueled by the same thing that destroyed his friend's ideals. A darkness beyond reason, shining freely consuming everything in its path. Being between a rock and a hard place, he begins to feel that everything connects in his being, conscience and subconscious.

The pendant of his neck begins to glow, radiating his whole body, Chris can feel how his elemental power comes to the surface, but he is not

aware of what happens to him, for he has only one thing on his mind: to stop Ryuken's attack.

The only thing he gets to hear are the words of his master that he heard continuously for four long years: Fight, fight, fight. His mind is clouded, and he can only see the huge fire dragon fall on him.

Chris' elemental power emerges as a fierce current and runs through his entire being, a current that he releases with a punch with all his strength and flies straight out towards the Fist of the Dragon, colliding in a blinding flash that shakes the entire kingdom. Hanna can feel the power that shakes her body as Queen Alice watches as Chris gives his all to fight the sky itself.

People think the two fighters are screaming as they give their all of their power, but Alice notices what's going on. Ryuken watches as Earth elemental power roars Chris' will, making her spine shudder. A few moments that become eternal is all that lasts that clash of wills, leaving everyone disoriented by what happened and trying to know what resulted from it.

Everyone is shocked by the result, Ryuken quietly falls into the Arena while Chris is totally withered with his arm raised by the attack he launched. As everyone watches the two opponents in the arena, they are stunned by the scenery that was left, the cloudy sky above them with a huge hole through which the sunlight descends.

That day would be marked in history as Chris' rise into the world, and the day the world witnessed a fist split the sky in two.

## Chapter 14 – Clues

It's been three days since the tournament, during which Chris has been sleeping without a stop. Hanna has not been separated from his side at any time, she only spent it contemplating his friend after what happened. Beyond the simple admiration of power, what she feels is concern, that expression he had, the emergence of an unknown power, the feelings that exploded during the final shock, everything she could feel with great intensity and fills her heart with insecurity.

Everything she desires becomes reality, he opens his eyes, totally serene, but bewildered by the situation. Hanna explains what happened after losing consciousness. The damage to the Colosseum was minimal, it was limited to the combat arena, there were no injuries after the final blow and Queen Alice made his victory official, but Chris' expression is the same, discouraged.

She also explains that Guilian managed to recover from his injuries and is rehabilitating, but Tsubaki does not allow him to visit Chris because of all the ruckus he would cause for his buffoonery. At least one piece of good news, the only one that makes his shoulders a little lighter.

She is surprised by his reaction, it is then that Chris confesses that he does not consider it a real victory, because it was a matter of luck to have defeated Ryuken. Had he not figured out how to defeat the fire clones, he would have lost inevitably, plus it was that miscalculation that caused Ryuken to receive the vast majority of that day's damage.

It was precisely that damage that prevented him from properly using all his power, that final clash, despite having been colossal, was only counteracting a weakened attack, he was not at his best. Chris can only look forward and become stronger, enough to stand up to him once again, in his ultimate form.

The Six Lords will never be something taken lightly, they hide large amounts of power and abilities that allow them to handle almost

anything that obstructs their path. But the words Ryuken said that day are still hanging around in his head.

Three days ago, after the final crash, Ryuken was lying on the ground and Chris was about to faint from exhaustion, but he clearly hears how Ryuken in the matter of a blink is back on his feet. Despite all the damage, he tries to keep his consciousness a little more and keep fighting, but Ryuken raises his hand to surrender.

He admits to having been defeated on that occasion, if he continues, his own power will tear his body apart, so the best option is to surrender. Chris is relieved that he doesn't have to keep fighting and gets some questions from the good loser.

—Where did you get that pendant? —Ryuken asks very curiously.  
—I've always had it, for as long as I can remember, maybe even before.  
—Chris replies openly.  
—Why did you fight so hard against me? —his curiosity is lighting more and more.  
—For my friend who you beat up, I will never forgive you. — Chris' voice alone is not enough to express all the anger he still has inside.  
—Do you care so much about his dream? Why? —Ryuken's disgust emerges a little in his tone, but the fight leaves him with no strength to attack even verbally.  
—Because it's a lot like my goal. —Chris' answer seems empty.  
—Enlighten me. —Ryuken asks without the magic words.  
—I'll go to King's Mountain. —Chris' answer doesn't explain much.  
—And how does that resemble your friend's dream? —Ryuken begins to get exasperated by the lack of details.  
—Becoming king of the world is only a step, my real goal is my full name, the one that is engraved in stone, with it I will be able to find my family. —Chris' eyes as he declares his goal without any filter are filled with a strong determination, one that is difficult to carry, one that can kill you if you don't carry it out.

Ryuken simply retreats silently, and quietly replies that there are things that are better not to know, they are not known for something. Chris

manages to perceive his message by the ki, but he cannot answer him, his consciousness is fading.

At present, Hanna finds herself preparing fruit for him to eat something, in the words of the healers, Chris' body is unusually slow to recover from the wounds, despite having received uninterrupted intensive treatment for a whole day his wounds closed, but he has not healed completely. His body is still fragile and being unconscious for so long left him in precarious conditions in terms of his health.

After a few days Chris' health is more favorable, at which time he was transferred to Queen Alice's castle as a courtesy for his championship, where he met influential people who witnessed his "victory". The ki does not lie, he could perceive bad vibes from most of them, so he decided to seclude himself in his room most of the time and with the presence of Hanna he was able to rest properly.

A month after the tournament Chris was finally able to carry himself, although by professional opinion he was advised not to make unnecessary effort for at least a couple of weeks. Throughout his recovery time Chris had enough time to analyze that new power he gained during the final.

The combination of elemental power, ki and spiritual arts, the materialization of earth power, doing experiments being static as rock, as if doing nothing, but in reality, he was training without anyone noticing it. It has incredible efficacy because it is power with a high degree of purity, but it has an equally enormous weak point, by making it flow through his body at a higher density, the lower the recovery rate.

It greatly increases the effectiveness of strength gain by making his body heal slower, which is dangerous in any circumstance. No doubt Chris must continue to hone his skills if he wants to keep moving forward.

With only his right arm still recovering, Chris is finally reunited with Guilian and Tsubaki and they all guide him to his award ceremony. All

of his friends are proud of his victory, but Chris keeps an expression that says "I don't deserve it, really" while Hanna is just watching him.

The royal guard welcomes him to the Throne Room, while Queen Alice meets the champion. As she performs the knighthood ceremony Chris can sense her incredibly low voice, but manages to perceive the message by the ki, "don't be discouraged, a victory is a victory."

When she tells Chris to look up following the ceremony, he understands that she is watching over him. The day turns to night and a grand banquet is held in his honor, many of the competitors, who stood out the most, are celebrating, sharing drinks with Guilian and Tsubaki, while Hanna is sitting in a corner, keeping a low profile.

Chris stays away from the crowd, not feeling proper to the festivity, so he goes out to the balcony and from the shadows she appears, Queen Alice was waiting for the moment to be able to talk to him without restrictions. He doesn't shy away from throwing straight in her face that there are few people he enjoys company with, while she simply listens to his complaints.

A victory is a victory, no matter the circumstances, as she explains to him that she does not belong to the royalty of the country, she sheds her disguise, the queen was actually a dark elf, caramel-colored skin, blood-red eyes, silky knee-length black hair, he can't help but feel a little uncomfortable witnessing too much beauty. But he cannot understand why to hide her identity, reducing her existence to that of a simple human, why of course, Chris does not discriminate between royalty and plebs, for him they are all the same, people.

The queen does not give many details, only that her true existence cannot be accepted by the current world, especially for what happened in recent centuries. She hid as a human and ended up as Queen of Heinburn.

She explains that the Heinburn royal family has made all sorts of deals and is currently affecting what remains of the lineage. She, as a mother,

can't help but worry about her husband and son, to her they are worth countless more than any nation.

—Why me? You might as well choose one of the adepts you recruited.

—Chris asks curiously —There's no chance I'll find him.

—You reminded me of a certain man I admired, one who devoted the whole world and was not afraid to fight heaven, earth and sea, if necessary. —Alice replies with much nostalgia. —Please treat him well, he needs a break from time to time.

Alice can't directly explain what's going on with the nation, but she implores him to please carry on a message for the two most important men in her life, and Chris accepts.

While the sound is lost in the silence of the night, the feast continues until the sun rises over the horizon. Chris immediately takes his party away, as long as he doesn't continue in those lands, first thing in the morning.

His first stop, the blacksmith shop, Chris picks up his sword and the young blacksmith can't help but tell him that he couldn't resist the temptation and set about investigating the properties of the sword given to him by his teacher. Certainly, it carries a curse, a very powerful one, and as Chris wields it with his only available hand, he realizes that his words fall short.

Before he wielded it as the treasure he received from his master, but now, with the ki, he can feel a weight from deep inside it, something that wants to enter him. The training was effective, even if he did not perceive it, the concentration and mentality he forged for so long makes him have the reins, he is in control of the sword and not the other way around.

The blacksmith informs him something else, according to his investigations, the sword is forged with very exotic and even legendary materials, but the most relevant is something called Soul Ore. Everyone is intrigued by the name, and the young man explains that it is too rare

of a material, every object that has this material in its composition is legendary because of its properties.

From the Spiritual Mirror of the distant lands of the East that is said to send you to another world to the Spear of the Fallen that is said to have made a god bleed, all of them have stories of what has been done with them. This rare material is named this way because it has a high conductivity of the energy of the living being that comes into contact with it.

The power not only varies depending on the object in which it is used, but also the user and their abilities, and in the case of the sword it is also the case. There are merged weapons, which change from one dominant weapon to another, but the sword itself changes, adapts to the user, but the curse makes it difficult to deal with, it is its insurance against the unworthy.

Chris only carries his sword as he always does and says goodbye, thanking him for treating his sword with so much dedication, and being outside the premises the old lady Xian Tao says goodbye to her student, giving him a small vase, she says that inside there are some medicinal herbs from her homeland, these serve to revitalize the tired body and will be a great support.

Such a gesture of kindness from the old lady that always kept him away from her, he feels very grateful and leaves with his friends towards the door through which they arrived. Just before saying goodbye for good, the old teacher notices Tsubaki's amulet:

—Where do you get that amulet? —asks Xian Tao quite intrigued.

—I was abandoned as a baby in a forest with this. —Tsubaki replies sincerely. Any clue helps.

—Well, I come from Shengkun, but some symbols are similar because they are neighboring regions, I'm sure it's Cerean language —Xian Tao says when she sees the amulet up close because of her tired eyesight.

—Cerean? And where is that from? —Tsubaki can't deduce things.

—The kingdom of Ceres, in the Far East, literally on the other side of the world. —Xian Tao replies annoyed because of how dense Tsubaki is in her head— It doesn't matter if you go east or west.

Now Tsubaki has clues about her origin, everyone is intrigued about what she is going to say about it, but she reassures them. She confesses that, first of all, it is first to travel with the group, her priority is the delicious food of the places where they go.

Everyone laughs at Tsubaki's simple answer, but everyone supports her decision. The group chats happily as they walk away from the old lady who prays for a safe ride.

Leaving the city, they meet someone they know, Pierre is right in front of them, Tsubaki fails to remain calm and is left with a small gesture of discomfort and asks what matter he has with them. Because of what happened, they all believe that he wants a rematch against Chris, but nothing could be further from the truth, Pierre himself says to the four winds that he wants to leave with them. Everyone takes a few seconds to process what he just said, a second, two seconds, until 9 seconds pass and the first reaction is one of confusion on Chris' part.

Pierre explains that he has his reasons for having arrived at the tournament, practically by the work of fate, because a priestess saved him from a shipwreck and guided him to land to the Colosseum. —You will find the path you want to follow, frog of the well. —is what she told Pierre.

After his fight against Chris, it became totally clear to him that he must go with him, no matter where, he will rely on fate. Chris remains skeptic, because he replies that destiny is not written in stone, you write it with every decision you make, and more with those you do not make. Pierre is more exalted by his words, and puts more emphasis on wanting to accompany him, there is no one but Chris who is the river by which he is carried away.

—Do you want to be free, even from fate? —Chris asks.

—Yes, there is nothing better than freedom, and even more so if you free yourself from the destiny forged by others. —Pierre's words have a lot of weight behind them, so much so that even Chris can feel it through his eyes.

—Do what you want. Chris replies with some resignation.

Pierre has joined the group and starts conversations to get to know everyone. Chris can't help but look up at the sky as he blurts out a few words in his mind:

—«Teacher, are you seeing me? Now I have one more friend, I think I am ready to fulfill my ambition, I will go to the King's Mountain and fulfill our dreams, yours and mine. »

Hanna strangely feels something inside, a warmth, makes her feel cheerful and at peace as the scandalous group moves away from the city and takes one last look at the land where many things happened.

They arrive in a port city and after a day of rest from the journey on foot, Chris guides them to a boat that recognizes the picturesque group.

—So, you're the champion, huh? Come on board. —the group calls the young adepts, and they are puzzled by the situation and Chris surprises them.

—This is a small gift from Queen Alice, she has made it easy for us to travel by sea to the western continent, Meri, and from there we will go to King's Mountain. —Chris reveals to his friends.

All of them show emotion in their eyes and accept that no matter what happens the journey will continue, beyond their dreams farther away.

## Chapter 15 – Travel Diary (Part 2)

### Day 49

Today has joined our journey Pierre, the Water adept who faced Tsubaki and Chris in the tournament a month ago. Apparently, he is quite polite and gentlemanly, although Tsubaki can't help but have the nerves on edge near him, that's why I'm always between the two of them. That has given me the opportunity to get to know him a little, as he gets carried away by the current, he usually supports Guilian's jokes.

He is quite nice, if you ask him for help with something, he will not hesitate to agree, but I am worried that someone will take advantage of that. I'm sure Chris will protect him from that by having him in the group, although he should look more out for his own health.

Even with two weeks of rehabilitation remaining, Chris was able to withstand the journey to the port and we are surprised by a trip to a new continent, Meri, far in the west. As much as I want him to rest, he doesn't pay much attention to me and wants to keep up with the pace of the trip.

### Day 50

It's the first time we all woke up at sea, Guilian and Tsubaki spent a long time vomiting overboard, while Pierre tried to help them with the dizziness. Tsubaki preferred to remain dizzy rather than being close to him, but Guilian surprised me by refusing too, he had no reason to deny help. Does he dislike Pierre that badly?

After a whole day learning about sea navigation, we were all exhausted and I took the opportunity to ask Guilian his opinion about Pierre. He replied very clearly that he dislikes his personality, he does not seem like a bad person, but it is not possible for him to get along very well with him. I don't understand why that is, maybe it's men's stuff, I

remember that my mother used to get crazy about aspects of my father, will it be something similar?

Tsubaki is more aware of Pierre for his nervousness than in Guilian for his jokes. Will my first impression finally be fulfilled?

## Day 54

Today I finally achieved a bowline knot, although I do not dare to climb the mast of the sail to use it, I will trust that it is well done, I have to admit that it was easier to understand with the small story so as not to fall into forgetfulness: We have a lake and a tree, a snake comes out of the lake, he surrounds the tree from behind and gets into the lake.

I felt like a child again as I recited it chanted. On the other hand, Tsubaki has been training her fishing skills and even got the dinner of the day, a bluefin tuna, IT WAS HUGE, and Pierre took care of cooking it, a recipe from his home, the food was too delicious, and the crew on top of him to learn how to cook the fish, so we had him away for a long time and I began to notice that he was missing. It's amazing how quickly he's integrated into the group.

It's ironic, we're always traveling on foot, and we don't think much about it, but on such a long trip on a conveyance there's always something to do and you don't get bored at all, and the days fly by like nothing, even the sound and movement of the tide becomes the best lullaby, becomes hypnotic.

## Day 62

We have been almost two weeks at sea, and we have almost become accustomed to the environment, even Tsubaki and Guilian started fighting each other to stay in shape. Although it all ended when Pierre wanted to face both simultaneously, because neither of them could put a finger on him.

During dinner the two of them were swallowing their feelings with food, they didn't even get in the mood to yell at each other as they usually do. Will it be a common enemy? As for Chris, he has been recovering in his room, twice a day I make him a cup of tea with a couple of leaves of Grandma Xian Tao's medicinal herbs.

His recovery is almost complete, although I had already become accustomed to seeing him rest and tell him stories of all the books I read in Vodheim and Heinburn, their folklore, myths and legends, novels by local authors, he even came to ask me how I read the books so quickly. He was overwhelmed and it was funny, because he doesn't usually read, just think and stay quiet.

He also got into the habit of sleeping in that position, not lying on his back, but like a fox, rolled up oneself and it is even easier for Tsubaki to sleep together.

## Day 63

Today we had a long day barely waking up, it hadn't even dawned at all and the whole ship collided with... something. The crew thought it had been a reef, but to our surprise we ended up discovering what it really was, or, rather, it discovered us.

The ship had been attacked by what the sailors call, a kraken. A creature from the depths of the sea, its tentacles were easily thicker than the mast of the sail and its suction cups' really disgusting.

Tsubaki and I were so disgusted that we would attack it non-stop in order to keep their tentacles away from us. Guilian kept burning sections of the tentacles and Pierre instantly attacked those weakened places to wipe out their limbs.

Guilian and Pierre are very compatible working together and that displeased Guilian, he didn't want to admit that the two of them can be good friends. Having ended up with at least 5 tentacles, they ended up coming out more and more and I believed we wouldn't get out of it.

Then Chris came out of his room and grabbed one of the tentacles holding the ship, and pulled the kraken out of the water, as if he was pulling a sack of clothes up and down.

He whipped the kraken against the water repeatedly and Pierre finished it off while its main body was flying through the air. We were all amazed by Chris' incredible power, but that effort only ruined his recovery, as he exceeded even if he had been in excellent condition.

We were all quiet dining for allowing Chris to fix it without having fully recovered. Even with the control I have of my elemental power I could not do much for him, I must make myself stronger so that he does not have to overdo it.

Day 66

At last, we reached the mainland, we were exhausted from the whole trip and our incompetence, although Chris spent every day trying to cheer us up by saying that it is not our fault his current condition. That only made us more depressed.

This time it was Chris who was energetic, even cheerful, trying to make us feel good. Maybe he's not a buffoon like Guilian, according to Tsubaki, but he really went out of his way to ventilate the matter.

Only in this port we already saw fish that are not found in any book in Vodheim, one is called salmon, and its red color is due to the mollusks it eats, its whole body, even inside, is dyed that characteristic red due to its main food. I would never have believed that if I didn't see it with my own eyes and it's not even from this side of the continent, it's from the west side while we're on the east.

This country has transportation means that allow them to take fish from one end to the other by land and still be fresh to consume them. They even have something called "refrigeration" to keep the inside of that machine frozen and preserve food. Thanks to that we were able to have

a very varied dinner before planning our route from tomorrow, although we were already somewhat tired of eating so many fish and they warned us that we can die because of it, they call it mercury poisoning. Curious word, I think I heard that name in the folklore of somewhere.

Chris told us to rest in this city for tomorrow to leave on a transport called railway, I am very excited.

Day 67

After a quick assortment of local clothes, we ended up in a caravan of wagons to Palm Beach, where we took the famous railroad. It is as big and noisy as the kraken and is made entirely of metal.

It is propelled using earth, water and fire, THREE ELEMENTS for something so powerful, although according to the opinion of the station staff that kind of "engine" is about to perish before new "technology". From what I've read in the books Chris bought me outside the station, the country has been constantly changing in recent decades, especially in politics, economics and technology.

In addition to that, something does not look good in the population, it is very hardworking and helpful, even with us who are adepts, but something feels strange, as if something is affecting them. Apparently, the enormous industrial development is due to great scientific minds not only of this nation, but also of other countries that have joined forces with it for development, and to the lack of adepts.

Non-adept countries have developed by leaps and bounds in their own way, something like a railroad is too complex for a nation of adepts, which is mostly isolated territory.

The trip is incredibly relaxed for the size and power of the transport, making the time very enjoyable, although it feels our destiny still far away. Although the view of the Gulf Coast is beautiful at sunset, it is a journey like no other.

## Day 68

We didn't sleep much during the night, even though the trip lasted so long. Despite going so fast as to cause a new kind of nausea in Guilian and Tsubaki, the journey is quite long, and the multiple stations make us quite unsure about which one to climb, as we are not on the same railway for the entire trip.

At one station we got on a railway, two stations later we got off and boarded another, we got off at the next station and got on another, if we didn't pay enough attention, we could board the wrong railway and end up in another part of the country.

In fact, due to the dizziness, Tsubaki ended up in the wrong way being alone on the platform and Pierre had to quickly get on the wagon, carry her and jump before it was too late, during which Pierre lost his top hat. After that Tsubaki was red-faced for quite a while, while we waited for our next boarding. Did her dizziness get worse from the acrobatics?

Practically Chris and Pierre are the ones who lead this journey to be more attentive to the details of the trip, I can hardly avoid losing sight of the group every time we are in a station.

By sheer luck, the last railway we boarded to reach King's Mountain will pass by 5 stations, although this is not good news for those two who cannot enjoy the food cart.

During the night, while we were all sleeping, something woke me up suddenly, although it was only my case. As I refreshed myself in the dressing table, I began to feel a strange presence, something I could feel from Palm Beach.

I got out of the wagon and ended up advancing through the roof a few more, as the clouds cleared and the moonlight came out, that presence appeared, a thin man with a coat and top hat, like the one Pierre bought, because, in fact, it was the same.

That guy was following us from Palm Beach, and by Pierre's hat, he was most likely on the railroad where Tsubaki almost went alone. He pulled a very strange knife out of his outfit and attacked me, but to my surprise it wasn't so quick as to get me hurt.

I ended up throwing a flare straight in his face and beat him. My heart was racing very much, but it was my first fight alone and I won. I ended up questioning him to know his goals and I couldn't get much out, but he had several jobs.

One of them was the murder of Chris, because he was in the sights of some organizations after having defeated Ryuken and the other was to kidnap Tsubaki, the perfect opportunity was when she got on the wrong railroad alone, where he got Pierre's top hat.

As he was about to reveal his client's identity to me, an object began to light up between his clothes, causing a small but powerful explosion, throwing me off the roof of the wagon and Chris ended up catching me in his arm, preventing me from falling outside.

By the time we got back to the roof of that wagon, the body was nowhere to be found. I ended up explaining what happened to Chris and he asked me not to reveal it to anyone, unless something very serious happens. The really strange thing is that he asked me, it wasn't an order, it was a favor. I think he's finally starting to open up as a person.

Day 69

At last, we arrived at the City of King's Mountain, from afar you could see how much that mountain rose to the sky, while the moors were completely deserted, there was an abysmal contrast with the city that surrounds it. It is not a metropolis like some cities we saw during our rail trip, but you can tell that it has adapted to the inhospitable area.

It is a huge impact that you receive when you see it from afar, even the sky changes according to the height and the area with respect to the mountain. The blue sky turns gray as you approach the mountain, and

everything fades between the clouds that surround the top. Is Chris supposed to go through all of that without powers?

We arrived at the station and were finally able to stretch our tired bodies. We checked into a decent inn and started preparing for the evening, replenishing supplies, exchanging the gold from Chris' sack for the local currency, all in order to focus Chris on his recovery.

While we were shopping, we heard that there were hot springs to the west, so we passed some hills during the wagon trip and went straight to the hot spring, the trip was hard and a small impromptu trip was what we least wanted, but the reward was worth it. We were in genuine hot springs, separated by gender, but we were relatively close together.

All the tiredness went away instantly, and it was impossible to get out of how wonderful the water felt. On the way out we saw how Chris was brimming with energy and vitality, at the same time looking completely serene like the rest of the guys.

It was quite a surprise to see Guilian so calm, even the dinner at the hotel was very quiet for being in such a good mood, Tsubaki was so relaxed that she didn't care about the presence of Guilian and Pierre, Guilian didn't play games or jokes, and Chris started eating too much, almost to the point of making the staff close the kitchen.

During the celebration, while Guilian was having his typical dance on the table for drinking too much, Pierre asked Chris what the plan is in the city. He made it very clear, as soon as he fully recovers, Chris is going to take the King's Mountain Challenge. His answer was very honest as he wielded his precious sword.

Despite the seriousness of the situation, he was actually full of motivation, Chris claimed to be full of life more than ever in his entire life. That gave us great relief, for the first time we can see that he is at peace with himself.

So many days of travel, each full of new things, we pass through places outside our imagination, we face hardships, and everything seems to have gone far away with a single night in hot springs and food until we burst. We all get along well and completely at ease and happy. It was too good to be true.

As we were on our way to our bedrooms, a voice behind us stopped Chris completely as he uttered his name which made him pale. Chris turned and pronounced her name with a lot of weight in his gaze: Karen.

## Chapter 16 – Reunion

There she was, right in front of him, Karen of the Six Lords, the famous Shinigami, her eyes did not stop looking at each other, an extremely beautiful girl, her dark brown hair at the height of the neck, her dark gray eyes shine like a pair of lakes under the light of the full moon, white complexion skin that at first glance you can tell is soft like baby skin, everything in it makes her irresistible to the looks of both men and women around her, even her short stature makes her tender to look at. Tsubaki and Hanna are amazed at how beautiful she is, while Pierre and Guilian are totally mesmerized by her beauty.

—How beautiful that girl is, totally my type. —whispers Guilian hypnotized.

—Do you have a fetish for baby faces? —asks Tsubaki irritated by her partner's lack of decorum.

—Well, of course I wouldn't try anything, the Shinigami has a reputation for traveling the world to avoid being in her own nation receiving marriage proposals every day she spends there. —says Guilian still blushing and drooling a little—I heard that some did not accept a no for an answer and when they challenged her to a duel they ended up incinerated. There weren't even ashes left of them.

Chris, however, has an empty look, the silence is noticeably awkward as the seconds go by, they both have things to say, but no word comes out. After processing the presence of the person right in front of him, the first thing he thinks about is greeting her, but the words come out before he notices it:

—What are you doing here? —Chris' question has a somewhat aggressive tone, putting tension in the environment.

—I saw the news of the tournament, knowing you would go here after such a great victory. —Karen knows Chris perfectly—Are they your friends?

—«What do you care? » —says Chris inside his head as he tries to keep his composure, but Hanna begins to notice how upset he's getting.

Chris immediately takes Karen with him to his room to talk alone, while the rest of the group were still stunned in the hallway. The room reserved for Chris, a single bed, in the dark, the two are sitting, silently, as they each formulate what to say. He returns to speak dominantly towards her, it was obvious that she wanted to talk to him, so he forces her to tell him her intentions, she does not put up resistance.

—Why are you here? Don't make me repeat myself. —Chris asks, holding back to how it happens.

—I just wanted to see you, I have so much to tell you, the things I've been through, surely you also have a lot to tell. —Karen's awkward smile betrays that the two of them have unresolved issues.

—You have no right to it; you were the one who left and did not come back at all. You abandoned us, you abandoned ME, and even if it was not the case, in these four years you and I have become very different people, haven't you, Shinigami?, we have had our own lives. There is nothing to do. Chris' words are blunt, affecting who was an old friend.

Her voice begins to break and agrees to him, but she asks, begs him to know if there is an opportunity to be on good terms. Not even he knows, it depends on what happens next, so she understands and withdraws silently and when she leaves the room everyone sees her walking with her eyes down, covering herself with her fringe to hide her crying eyes.

The whole group peeks out the door to see Chris and they keep wondering what kind of relationship the two have, as they remember his words with Lillian in Vodheim, "she's my childhood friend, but we part ways 4 years ago." They had never seen him that way, but Chris sends them to sleep and leave him alone for a while, his gaze full of repressed feelings.

That night was difficult for everyone to fall asleep; Hanna decides to go for a night snack to relax and while exploring the reception she can hear some very familiar sounds, uncontrolled crying. It is new for her to hear it from someone else, so she has mixed feelings and decides to investigate who it comes from, so she checks the surroundings.

Leaving the inn, she finds the person responsible, Karen is crying out loud on a garden bench next to the pond. Hanna can clearly see how much she is suffering, but a doubt stops her, what should she do? As much as she wants to comfort and encourage her, it is not her business, because she is a very close person to Chris and the affair is with him.

Interfering would mean digging into Chris' past, something he still doesn't trust her, his previous personal life, beyond his training. She decides to retire while still listening to the heartbroken cry, carrying a great regret in her chest.

We all have a past; it is our decision to make it a burden, discard it, face it or turn it into a source of motivation and inspiration.

While Karen cries uncontrollably, Chris can sense the scandal with the ki while lying on his bed. He closes his eyes and rests his left forearm on his head and his mind is clouded until he relives the past.

11 years ago, in the temple of Yamamoto, Chris wakes up very sleepy and while recovering his senses he notices a figure above him. One face is right on his:

—Good morning, Chris, it's dawn. —Karen greets her good friend with great energy and enthusiasm.

—You know how to make your own breakfast, let me sleep. —Chris doesn't want to get up despite his youth.

—Come on, today is the big day, we will finally start training. —Karen is excited to the point that her smile dazzles Chris and ends up ruining his sleep.

Already up, Chris is semi-awake as he tries to stay aligned with the line of orphans who will start training. Yamamoto appears and inspects the children by putting his hand on top of their heads, without touching them. In a matter of seconds, the teacher identifies the element to which the student is related, which he has done every year for many years.

Some children murmur about his looks, how his bald head is not shiny because of how old he is, his long beard that flows like a waterfall past

his waist and the mustache and eyebrows that are so long that they hang from his face. His trembling hand passes over them, and they close their mouths so that he does not reject them.

When the old master arrives at Chris, he is a little puzzled, even the children notice that he is having some difficulty. After some awkward silence, Yamamoto instead of continuing with the other children remains thoughtful in front of Chris until he comes to a conclusion: —Interesting, we'd better be careful while instructing you. —Yamamoto's words leave everyone confused, especially Chris.

Of the 19 orphans only 13 were accepted in the course of adepts, as their latent powers are high enough to begin at such a young age. The remaining 6 have the option of training the spiritual arts to one day have a "container" large enough to activate the elemental powers.

—This year has been the most fruitful for Master Hama, she has brought so many children with good potential. —the monks mention seeing that the number is more than double that year.

At the end of the inspection Karen runs to Chris impressed with what happened and asks him what Yamamoto meant by what he said, but Chris knows as much as she does. Although he doesn't really care much about the training, it was Karen's idea to take the course after all.

—By the way, what element are you related to? —Karen asks very curiously.

—Ah, I think he forgot to mention it to me. With what tires me to address someone, now I have to ask him. —Chris says as he begins to search for an answer.

The first class was an introduction to the fundamentals of elemental power:

—The power of an adept depends on three factors: container capacity, purity of elemental power, and affinity to the element.

An adept harbor the elemental power of nature in their soul, so the size of the container is the first trait to take into account. The larger the size, the greater the amount of elemental power. Like the muscles of our bodies, as we use our powers our container will be strengthened, and we will be able to house more elemental power.

As the soul of an adept is equal to that of any human, depending on the current state of the individual, their elemental power will have as much purity as their soul. A soul in balance does not ensure purity, but the fidelity of desires. If your will coincides with your deepest desires, the elemental power will have more purity and therefore greater capacities. An adept with a small container with high-purity elemental power can easily match the capabilities of another adept with a large container of low-purity elemental power.

Elements are capricious, no one can fully understand their true nature, as happens between people, so your affinity to an element depends largely on the essence of your soul. Two water adepts will not be equally related to their element because of the differences in their essences. One of them will be more so because it coincides more with the Water element.

Affinity to the element is the great difference between adepts and humans, they came into the world without the ability to connect with the force of nature, although that does not mean that they do not have a chance and does not mean that your path is so narrow.

The element to which you are related is called the 'Main Element', because it is the one with which you have the greatest affinity and therefore it is the easiest to awaken. As you gain experience throughout your lives, expand your horizons and points of view, there is a possibility that the essence of your soul will change, and you can connect with a second element that is called the 'Secondary Element'.

Normally when an adept awakens a Secondary Element it is usually an element adjacent to its Main Element: an earth adept will be more likely to awaken the Element Water or Fire than to do so with Air. Although

it is very rare that it happens, because carrying two elements already makes you belong to a very small circle of people in the world and even smaller if they have opposite elements."

Over the next few weeks, the monks set the children to activate their powers, getting only splashes of the water in buckets, disturbing the flames of candles, spinning a pinwheel inside a room or moving the fine sand of a Zen Garden. Chris has no motivation but sees Karen struggle with the candle she was given.

Seeing her face turning red from such concentration, Chris mentions that "those things are done in the bathroom", a joke that makes Karen embarrassed and the outburst of anger just after causes the flame to fan so much that it consumes half of the candle. The spontaneous flame was so great that everyone was shocked, and a monk extinguishes the embers left on the ceiling and floor with the water from the buckets.

The session ends prematurely, and everyone looks at Chris angrily, if it weren't for him everyone would continue training. But Karen jumps on Chris, hugging him with great excitement to discover that she has so much power to make such a big flame. Her joy protects Chris from receiving hatred, but neither of them realizes it, they are immersed in their exclusive world.

In a matter of months Karen gained enough skill to generate flames from her small hands and since then she was at the top of the adept course and her enthusiasm led her to be popular with the orphans. Meanwhile, Chris did not give everything in training, so he could hardly move the sand with great difficulty, being him completely oblivious to the words hard work and effort.

Karen's popular life distanced herself from Chris, who had no friends or sought any attention. But he couldn't help but feel the emptiness in his life, those outrageous mornings where she woke him up began to miss them. It was then that something lit up inside Chris, something as unnatural as finding fish in a volcano, motivation.

After starting to take the instructors' teachings seriously, Chris realized the long and rough road Karen traveled. To even manipulate freshly flattened land required so much concentration that Chris' head almost exploded.

—Why don't you try the spiritual arts? —Yamamoto asks when he sees Chris exhausted on the garden floor—Sometimes it's better to leave something for a while to develop other skills.

—Do you think I won't get it? —Chris tries to keep his motivation alive.

—Certainly, being so young your container is not so large, and even if you have a good degree of purity in your elemental power you will not be able to use your powers properly. —Yamamoto's words are like knives sticking into Chris—That's why I recommend the spiritual arts, the more you know about your own soul, the easier you can advance on the path of the elements.

The next day, Karen noticed a void in her life, Chris was not in the elementary training session. Meanwhile, he was learning about the soul of humans, how it manifests itself in the world of the living, the very meaning of life and death.

Over the next year learning daily from ancient scrolls in the temple, studying while the other orphans of the spiritual course mocked Chris behind his back for leaving the elemental course, spending much of the time meditating, introspecting, he came to a revelation: his soul is broken.

Chris remembers Yamamoto's words, that care had to be taken when training him, that no matter how much he trains, he will not be able to use his elemental powers properly. So much effort, so much motivation, none of that matters if the soul with which he controls the element is broken.

—Master, how can a soul be broken? —Chris asks Yamamoto as he approaches him in the Zen Garden.

—You can't say it would be broken at all. —the old monk replies trying to make the child understand something that even adults often do not

understand—A soul is not only a container of elemental power, but it also has a nucleus, a center that keeps our being complete.

—«Complete? Will there be a way to repair me? » —thinks Chris with Yamamoto's information.

—It is normal to think that the soul is like a vessel, if we receive a sufficiently deep damage our soul fragments. As the energies of the fragments are exactly the same even after the damage, they are kept together inside our container. —Yamamoto explains by showing a teapot that is about to break —The fragments remain united; despite being completely separated. Most people would think that's what heart is meant.

—«Broken heart? Like when I came to this temple. » —Chris tries to understand his situation.

—That you try to become an adept with a fragmented soul is as if you dedicate yourself to learning to run a marathon with crippled legs. — Yamamoto finishes destroying Chris' motivation"—But that doesn't mean it's all over for you, I propose you this: Until you finish the advanced course of the spiritual arts, you're not going to use your elemental powers.

With that, Chris put the elemental training aside flatly and went even deeper into his own soul. Receiving direct teaching from Yamamoto, something that even experienced monks did not have the honor of receiving, even though the temple itself is detached from civilization, Chris isolated himself from everyone he knew.

Meanwhile, Karen had managed to reach new heights with her elemental power, though she misses spending time with Chris. Before she would pick him up in the mornings, but with her popularity growing and him isolating himself in his spiritual training the two have become too far apart.

—«Where are you? » —asks Karen as she lies on the bed where he slept in the middle of the night, inevitably hugging his pillow.

## Chapter 17 - Meeting

A few months after Chris' training course change, Priestess Hama returns to the temple with a new orphan to host: a scruffy girl named Fanny. In a matter of minutes Hama leaves the temple again and the monks have no choice but to lead the newly arrived girl to her new life.

On her first day, Fanny met the rest of the orphans, but she didn't respond positively to all the attention of the other children, so it was easy for them to keep their distance. "It's a very big temple, we won't even see it all day." It is what they think when they discard it.

Having once again arrived on the most important day of the year, Yamamoto again appraises the orphans, but that year only Fanny was untested, resulting in the rarest element of all: Air.

Having a solo training for the great advantage that the other orphans took her, she took the lessons at her own pace, with great freedom as indicated by her element, which gave her a lot of opportunity to fill her empty agenda like the pockets of her clothes.

Exploring the temple on her own, Fanny runs into a boy as lonely as she is:

—... —she doesn't know what to say or do, but she stumbles when trying to take a better look at the young man.

—Excuse me, I'm trying to meditate. —Chris says without even bothering to look at the source of the noise.

—Sorry, ehm, I was just walking around and. —Fanny doesn't stop babbling trying to explain herself.

—«Please stop talking, I just want to meditate » —Chris cries internally.

—Ah, my name is Fanny, I arrived at the temple a couple of days ago.

—the newcomer who Chris never asked about it is introduced—What do you do so much?

—I just want to meditate, in fact, every word I say is a step back towards my goal. —Chris replies, trying to get rid of his distraction.

—Oh, you're meditating, I'm sorry, and why? —Fanny's curiosity overshadows her manners.

—Because I want to. —and while he doesn't mention it, that's all Chris is going to say in the rest of the day.

Fanny watches as Chris meditates, even as the hours pass, she stays more immersed in Chris' meditation than he does. Even if he doesn't do any action, Chris can feel the look of the girl his own age. He gets fed up and takes Fanny out of the meditation room and she realizes what she had done.

Just as she begins to withdraw from the place, her stomach roars quite loudly, which embarrasses her in front of Chris and causes him a slight laugh. While Chris laughs his stomach also roars and there is no choice but to eat after a fruitless day.

As the two skipped a meal and Fanny is a newcomer, Chris has no choice but to cook for two. A simple white rice and some boiled vegetables is all he could get at such short notice, but Fanny enjoys the food. It is very different from the food prepared by the monks, she fails to understand why, but it is the first time she can enjoy the food since she lost her family.

Seeing Fanny vent with the food, Chris decides to prepare the food for her from time to time and she thanks him wholeheartedly. Karen is sneaking through the halls in search of a nightly snack as she has always done since she arrived at the temple and sees the two friends having dinner and after a few minutes of continuously looking she retreats back to her bed.

From then on, Karen tried much harder in her training, while Fanny supported and encouraged Chris in his meditation, and they always ate together. Having got close enough, Chris reveals to Fanny that he left the adept course to concentrate on the spiritual arts and Fanny upon learning this begins to take her own training seriously.

In a matter of months, the adept course became a daily competition between Karen and Fanny, as the two became the most outstanding of the course. Although this rivalry was only declared by the other orphans and not by themselves. The daily spectacle that caught the attention of both orphans and monks became a daily life.

Two years after Fanny's arrival, the course has begun to conduct combat exercises. The two prodigies instead of competing with each other are responsible for keeping the rest of the group in shape while they, to make progress, fight against the instructor monks, exposing to a notable difference in experience ensures the development of the student.

Having reached the age of 13, Chris finally finished his spiritual training and resumed his training as an adept. But seeing the class from afar, he realizes that the road to reaching them has become much longer than before, and even more so when he sees Karen and Fanny give their all in their training.

Without saying a word, Chris stopped eating with Fanny and went to train alone in a lake at the foot of the mountain surrounding it. The journey was too much to do in a single day, so Chris prepared rations and did not return in days and only did it when everyone was busy in their affairs, so he did not interact with anyone.

During that two-year span, Karen decided to dig into the spiritual arts in hopes of seeing Chris, but she studied it alone until the end. Fanny missed eating with Chris a lot to the point of trying to cook like him, but she never succeeded, so she decided to concentrate on her adept training until Chris ate with her again.

Alone, Chris relentlessly trained his skills, learning every step of Earth's elemental power. Reviewing the knowledge of the scrolls about his element, he became familiar with that aspect of nature.

Sleeping on the solid stone floor of a cave or the soft earth of the lakeshore, being covered in mud due to his training, he even learned the

smell and taste of the earth from different places, accidentally. Although all of that didn't serve to better control the earth, it wasn't until Hama's intervention that Chris made significant progress.

By the time Chris returned to the isolated world of the temple, everyone saw him very differently, for most of them it was a noticeable difference of 4 years, they are all teenagers, but the most drastic change is noticed by Karen and Fanny: their eyes have a brightness that they had never seen in him. Even out of the usual. Yamamoto that day had decided to keep an eye on the young apprentices close to becoming true adepts.

After so long of being separated from the course, Chris knew nothing about the dynamics of the group, so Yamamoto explains that the session that day was elementary combat. Instead of fighting the adepts, they make the elements fight each other, no one gets hurt and evidence is left of who makes the best use of their power.

Hama appears just behind Chris and proposes that he get a showdown with Karen and Fanny in one-on-one duels and Yamamoto agrees. As the two of them are the best of the course, they will be the most effective to know his level and prepare an adequate regimen for him to train with supervision.

All the students are excited to see the top two in the class beat Chris, but he keeps his composure. Karen is happy to see Chris again, but she knows that she should not be distracted from training and even more so being an undefeated student in any kind of duel within the course of adepts.

—Don't think I'll hold back just because it's about you, Chris. —Karen says with an expression full of emotion as she lights a fireball in her right hand.

—That's what I want, Karen, come with everything! —Chris replies, holding his ground.

She throws her fireball, and it expands as she moves, proving that Karen has control over the fire even after she has released her power. Chris

responds by molding the earth to encapsulate the great fireball but seeing that the wall begins to break by the great power he is trying to stop he blows the earth under the fireball, leaving the entire site covered by a cloud of smoke and dust.

Chris can't see anything, but he feels something coming and when he looks up he sees how several fireballs are coming towards him, this time smaller, but they all move more elegantly than the first giant one. He puts his hands on the ground and molds the earth to generate arms from the ground and grabs the projectiles, returning Karen her own attack.

She uses snaps from her hands to defuse each of the fireballs as they head towards her. With the sound, Chris identifies the location of his opponent and sends pieces of land using the arms he molded. The first projectile does not hit Karen but alerts her and begins to move to dodge the rest.

When Karen gets to where she remembers Chris was, she realizes that he's not in place before the explosion either:

—«Surely he went to where I was, we exchanged places. » —Karen deduces as she tries to predict Chris by the years she has known him.

Chris is looking for Karen, but can't find her:

—Here I am, Chris! —Karen shouts from above.

—«Did we exchange places? » —thinks Chris when he seeing that Karen used the fire to jump from where he was before and shoot him down with a moderately large fireball.

He molds the earth to block Karen's attack, but with the difference in speed, Chris can only generate a wall very close to him and not thick enough. The others conclude the duel when they see Chris' inevitable defeat, but Fanny realizes that he has prepared a way out.

When the fireball falls on him, the ground below collapses, and the two fighters sink into the earth.

—«He softened the earth to cushion the impact of the fire attack. » — Fanny is impressed by Chris' improvised strategy.

—It's not over, Chris. —Karen says as she resumes the attacks of her flaming element.

She throws flares and Chris blocks them with extremely thick walls, but they only manage to cover enough to prevent the attack from hitting him directly. Being exposed to the heat released from the fire, Chris begins to get tired and knows that at that rate he will end up defeated by heat stroke.

While he concentrates his hands to build walls and protect himself, his feet are responsible for molding the earth in the surroundings and attacks Karen from all sides. She was so distracted attacking that she didn't realize the counterattack that was going for her. Karen quickly concentrates a lot of fire on a tiny incandescent ball and releases the fire into a whirlpool that incinerates everything around her.

At the end of Karen's defense, she is exhausted from using so much elemental power suddenly, and Chris come out of the earth and gobbles her up until she only exposes her head, being buried almost completely: —You almost killed me with your fire, plover head. —Chris says exhausted.

—But you survived, so make do with breaking my perfect record. —Karen replies in frustration.

All the students and monks can't believe that Chris defeated Karen, having been an unattainable figure and an uncontrolled mess for them respectively. Fanny is called to fight, and Yamamoto re-establishes the training ground with his power. All the wrecking that the two young did in a duel was undone with a simple swipe of Yamamoto's finger, showing that he is far above them in skill.

Now Fanny confronts Chris and one of the students gives the signal to begin the elemental duel. He prepares for whatever comes, but she gives up:

—I don't need to fight you, I'm just glad you come back. —Fanny confesses with a sweet smile.

—«Good thing, I was completely exhausted after Karen, I wouldn't have been able to deal with Fanny so soon » —Chris thinks relieved as he endures the tiredness.

The whole group of students was dissatisfied, but they cannot cope with the one who defeated one of the prodigies of the course. Chris now has prestige among his peers, but he stays away from everyone, he just wants to rest after a big win.

In the dining room, Chris is cooking his own food and eating with Fanny after so long. While enjoying the meal Karen approaches the table and Chris offers her a seat next to him:

—You must be hungrier than me, you're more gluttonous than me, after all. —Chris says as he brings her food plate closer.

—Thank you, Chris. —Karen thanks while crying a little while being with her old friend after so long.

—«Were the two of them so close? » —asks Fanny to herself as she sees them together in front of her as she continues to eat quietly.

The three eat happily, talk about everything they have done for the past two years, while Chris was isolated from everything and everyone. Karen had a hard time with spiritual meditation and Chris agrees, it is extremely difficult to enter the inner world. Even if you manage to immerse yourself in your own soul, you can get lost in the huge ocean of your own thoughts, emotions, and memories.

—When I meditated, the first thing I thought about was how lonely I was when I arrived at the temple. —tells Chris to his only two friends —My life was so empty, then I unearthed the memories of my life before I got to the temple. How I was abandoned here, I don't want to live it again and I have realized that this is how I made you both feel. I'm really sorry.

—That's not true! Of course, I missed spending time with you a lot, but I knew that you would return sooner or later, although I tried to look for you I could not get close to you and I understood what you felt when you stayed behind us. —Karen replies, showing her true feelings.

—You still owe me a lot of meals; you better be prepared. —Fanny says as she carries one more bite of food in her mouth— Ah, how I missed this food.

—«It's true, I'm not alone anymore, now I have the two of them in my life. You made me happy for so long and I didn't know it. » —Chris thinks as he sees the two girls eating and talking in front of him —«I hope I can be with you for the rest of my life. »

Back to the present, a new day at the hot spring hotel, everyone is exhausted from not being able to sleep much, so they decide to sleep late in order to be well. Although Hanna decides to look for Chris to find out if he is resting properly for his final recovery... He's nowhere to be found.

Back in the city, Chris is wandering until he finds a huge building, upon entering he finds a large number of people coming and going, contemplating the architecture and relics that are on display. He is in a museum, but not just any, it is the Museum of Legends, Chris listens from the vicinity to a guide explaining the tour and decides to keep a low profile and mix with the crowd.

As the group progresses Chris can see relics from many places and times, from swords, armor, to documents written on parchment. Each and every artifact present was used by the legendary warriors who rose victorious at the top of King's Mountain.

It is practically contemplating the history of the world, heroes who managed to forge a path to the future of the world, monsters that almost destroyed it in their desire for domination, each and every one of them had fixed objectives about what to do with so much power. As he moves deep into the showroom, Chris begins to fill himself with melancholy and insecurity about whether to take up the challenge.

Then they arrive at the most important piece of the entire museum, the Twin Stone. It is a huge indestructible monolith, prostrate in the sight of anyone who shows the names of all the Kings of the World, those who reached the top have their names immortalized in it.

There is a reason why it has the word "twin" in its name, its counterpart is at the top of King's Mountain, and legend has it that you must be recognized by the stone at the top for your name to be engraved on both.

Everyone retires after a while, but Chris is left seeing the last names written, only the last two are marked, according to the guide means that those people are still alive. When they die, the mark will fade, but the strange thing is that they have been alive for centuries.

There is also a legend about those last two names: The War of the World. Four hundred years ago, a man came out of nowhere, gained adepts throughout all the lands, and reached the top of the world, became the most powerful of all, and eventually his power reached every last corner of the world.

One day he showed his true identity and betrayed the whole world. Brandishing his sword shrouded in the flames of hell, commanding hordes of demons with pure intimidation of his determination, he almost destroyed the world and was called the Demon King.

It was then, when heaven, earth and sea were submerged in darkness, that a light pierced the skies of the whole world, and a woman confronted the Demon King. That woman was known as the Heavenly Queen, and the two fought for four uninterrupted centuries in different places around the world.

For more than thirty years none of them have been seen fighting again, some fearing that the fight will continue very soon, while others trust that the Heavenly Queen managed to defeat the Demon King and thus save the world.

On the ceiling of the room, at the top, that legend is described in painting, the author remains unknown, but witnesses affirm that she was a direct witness of the last of her legendary battles and therefore immortalized it in that painting on the ceiling. The clash of good against evil, light against darkness, the two sides of the same coin, a

confrontation that has lived in people's hearts since the beginning of time.

A story that leaves Chris stunned, he remains silent, processing what he just noticed in the painting, the illustrated Demon King's sword is very similar to his own sword. The dots begin to connect, the sword carries a powerful curse, his master handed him the sword, the dark arts are mostly curses, the Demon King wrapped his sword in the flames of hell and his master was a Fire Adept, incredibly powerful does not do him justice.

Chris becomes increasingly confused, everything points to that conclusion, his master is the Demon King, but why? What motives did the Demon King have to stop fighting and isolate himself on that mountain like a hermit? What happened to him to end that legendary battle?

—«That they have done nothing to deserve this? It is quite the opposite, by doing nothing they allowed injustices to happen to real innocents. Humans without powers are just blind cattle, before the six-lord system they almost caused the extinction of the adepts. It was poetic justice that the Demon King came out because of them. » — Chris recalls Ryuken's words during their confrontation.

One thing is for sure, the Six Lords have some connection to the Demon King, so Chris heads once again to the resort, to talk to that person once again. Karen is on the same bench as the night before, totally exhausted by what happened.

As he approaches her, the rest of the group begins to gather around him, fearing for what might happen. "As one of the Six Lords, what do you know about the Demon King?" She is left with a blank look; everyone is surprised with what has just been mentioned.

Chris puts Karen in context, about what he just discovered about his teacher. Despite what happened in the past, Chris is asking for Karen's

help, and that is already an advance for her, so she decides to accept her request, in order to improve her situation.

"About four hundred years ago the Six Lords System was founded, each of them is a powerful adept with the ability to guide all his people and defend the territory from humans. But who was the founder?"

Chris knows where the story is going, but he keeps quiet so as not to jump to hasty conclusions.

"A boy lost his family in an adept hunt by the Imperial Inquisition, growing up, the young man became a powerful adept, brandishing his sword engulfed in flames. Back then the Adepts Creed was that elemental power was to interact with the world, never to attack our fellowmen.

But one day, while some adepts were being sent to the stake, the young man rescued them using his powers, fighting to prevent their deaths. The struggle of the young man became that of more and more adepts, they began to unify into a movement instantly, they organized, allied, got resources with the jobs they could do in a simple way and expanded the influence of the movement by each continent.

Thus, in a matter of a few years, around the world, the adepts designated their territories in natural fortresses, which were only habitable and accessible to the adepts. The Territories of Adepts were founded, the nations that today are world powers for their great military potential and skills impossible to reproduce with current technology.

That young man could not be everywhere, so he appointed his most faithful and powerful allies as the leaders of each territory. It was in this way that the Six Lords System was born.

There is only one leader, the most powerful has the highest authority, but no one could know what would happen next. Once the territories were established, the nations of humans began to ally themselves in order to try to match the power, but they could not do anything, the

massive armies had inevitable deaths due to the extreme conditions and the difficulties of access.

When each continent had lost the vast majority of its soldiers, the human nations were left at the mercy of the Six Lords, but the young man decided not to attack them. Instead, he decided to forge alliances with them, in order to prevent more adepts from dying at the hands of humans without powers.

The whole world was amazed by such a display of kindness, "Goodness is not measured by good deeds, but having the power to do something bad without consequences and still not to do it.", those were his words. World leaders agreed without complications.

On the day of the agreement, just as the world alliance was about to take place, the place was completely destroyed. That man destroyed all the leaders, kings from all over the world, and the Six Lords remained as accomplices of that betrayal.

But the power of them was enough to take the reins of the situation, the Six Lords turned against that man, who would show his true facet as the Demon King. The hordes of demons were too powerful for all the unified adepts against them, but then the Heavenly Queen appeared and fought alone against all the darkness.

Since then, the Six Lords isolated themselves from the rest of the world, and with the passage of time the Nations of Adepts distanced themselves, leaving the world increasingly divided.

That's all Karen knows as one of them, Chris analyzes what happened, but there are still no clear answers about his teacher's current motives. That the Demon King founded the Six Lords System is already too hard to believe, Chris thanks Karen for revealing the information he wanted, but he remains confused with what to do with his life.

She just puts her hand on his shoulder and makes it clear that she will support any decision he makes. But then she speaks quietly in his ear,

asks him where his teacher is, but Chris does not answer, despite being the Demon King he is still his teacher, he is the one who will fight him if necessary.

Karen leaves but not before making one last comment:

—Was it Ryuken who gave you a clue about the Demon King? If you made him speak during his duel, then maybe you have a chance against his brother, Volt. —the childhood friend asks seriously in Chris' ear.

As Karen moves away on the horizon, Chris asks Guilian about Volt, as he was mentioned on several occasions at the Adepts Tournament in Heinburn. Guilian claims that Volt has a great rivalry with Ryuken, they have fought deadly duels on many occasions.

Also, that the guy with whom Chris fought in the first round, Morgan, is one of his commanders, Volt is also known for being the most warlike of all the Six Lords, as he uses his people as an army to destroy the kingdoms of humans and expand his territory and influence.

Chris processes the information for a few moments, but before he gets going someone suddenly arrives, somewhat familiar boy:

—«He's the guy who faced Caellach in Vodheim. » —Hanna admits to the young man.

—Hey, hey, did you follow us from Vodheim? —Guilian asks —You should consider building your life around yourself.

—Close your mouth, Guilian, don't you see that he is tired of traveling to find us? —Tsubaki rhetorically asks —What do you want, child?

—«Child? If we are the same age. » —the young man thinks as he tries to catch his breath.

—He managed to withstand a one-on-one fight against an Imperial General, Tsubaki, you have to give him more credit. —Chris says of the young man in front of him.

—I need your help, Chris. —replies the young man, trying to explain himself between gasps —I want you to help me defeat Volt.

—«Is this for real? If just a few minutes ago we were talking about him.  
» —the situation is strangely convenient for Chris —«With so many  
coincidences, it's surely 'her' doing. »

## Chapter 18 – Reminiscence

Chris and his friends are with the young man from Vodheim in a room, apparently his request has very personal motives. He explains that rumors have been circulating about Volt's next target, the kingdom of Ceres in the far east, the royal family is of great importance to him personally.

As hard as he try, he doesn't quite convince Chris, it's none of his business, he has no reason to fight a war for a country that has no relationship with him. Although there will be many innocent deaths, he is only one man and conflict is inevitable in human nature.

—Please, please help me save Ceres. Maybe you are one man, but I am also just a man, I can't defeat him by myself. —the young man bows his head while begging for help —I heard you defeated Ryuken, so you have a better chance of defeating Volt than anyone.

—No matter how noble your goal is, I will not march into a war that does not concern me. If I did, I could end up dragging my friends, and if something happened to them I wouldn't forgive myself. —Chris replies as he leaves the scene.

Everyone feels somewhat uncomfortable about such a statement, Chris considers them his friends, not just companions, and that makes them happy, but they feel guilty for being the reason he does not try to save countless lives. It's a very complicated position.

The young man tells the rest of the group that he will stay at the resort in case he changes his mind, and everyone leaves. Chris is walking around as his friends catch up with him to try to talk about it.

—Wow, you've become more insensitive, mud mask. —a woman's voice sounds from behind, interrupting the desperate attempt to convince him

—Of all the places in the world, what are you doing here, Master Hama? —Chris recognizes the unequivocal voice of the teacher who helped him so many years ago.

—You know that I am like the wind, I roam the world free, I know people, fate plays tricks from fun to bizarre. —Hama explains with a carefree smile next to his smug attitude.

Despite having a respectable face, her attitude is completely carefree, making Tsubaki uncomfortable, but Pierre is brimming with happiness. Everyone is surprised by his anticlimactic attitude.

—Priestess, I didn't think I would find you again so soon. Thank you so much for guiding me to the tournament. —thanks Pierre with a dazzling smile, making Hama somewhat uncomfortable.

The reason Pierre came to Heinburn is because he was guided by Hama.

—I'm glad I hit the nail on the head, by the way, Chris, I met Karen recently, isn't she a beauty? She grew up pretty well since you two were kids. —Hama mentions while making gestures about the "curves" — Ah, youth, you should take advantage now that you can, otherwise you will die a virgin.

Chris sends Hama to silence, her sense of freedom takes away all common sense, decorum and even respect for personal space. Everyone can only watch as Hama lays on over Chris' head as she continues to speak without any discretion for intimacy.

The young man from Vodheim meets the group again and recognizes Hama:

—Mrs. Hama, thank you for the information, although I could not convince you to help. —the young man is disappointed that he failed in his task.

—«Apparently she knows so many people who coincidentally have a tendency to find each other. » —Chris deduces from what has been revealed during the conversation.

—Don't worry, I've known him since he was a little tadpole, if you want some respect, challenge him to a duel. —mention Hama as she plays with Chris' cheeks and rubs his hair—Prove your worth to him and maybe he will take your family situation into consideration.

She knows Chris like an open book, so it is inevitable that she will push him into her game, it is even possible that he has already fallen from long before.

Despite the last remaining of his injuries, Chris accepts the challenge, winning the first to strike a direct blow. Everyone watches as they wait for the fight to start while Chris' gaze is fairly calm.

—Get started! —shouts Hama as everyone walks away from the area.

Chris stands still as the young man rushes straight out to him, his body wrapping itself in elemental power and taking the form of armor.

—Fascinating, you also materialize the elemental power of earth, and it is incredibly dense and with high detail, but... —

He dodges the first blow, and the next, and the one that follows, no matter how much he fights, Chris dodges all attacks, because they are useless if he can't catch Chris at all.

—This is not even the speed with which I dodged Ryuken's attacks. You just waste energy. — Chris' stern words are full of disappointment.

Dodging another blow, Chris hits him in an armor opening, and maintains the strategy. With normal blows and evasion, without any elemental power, the young man is put against the ropes in less than 3 minutes.

Panting with tiredness, the young man lashes out one last time at his opponent and Chris decides to end the duel once and for all. Just as the young man throws a punch, Chris deflects him with his palm and twists him towards his back, reduces him to the ground and uses his legs to press against his back, almost completely paralyzing his mobility.

—You will die uselessly if you do not find a more effective way to fight. —Chris declares upon seeing the young rookie wasting his potential.

The young man, lying on the ground, unable to get up, can only feel helpless as Chris walks away after destroying his hopes.

—Well, you tried, better to try and fail than not to try. —says Hama as she watches Chris and company go —Don't worry, I have a hunch that "that place" will make him change his mind.

As they walk, Chris talks to his friends about his insecurities, the truth about his teacher, the origin of the sword, his goals are no longer so clear, reuniting with Karen, he is at a crossroad. No matter how much experience you have, it is one of the most difficult decisions you must make, what to do with your life.

They all try to support Chris, no matter what he decides, they will accompany him without regrets. Guilian appreciates that Chris avenged his dream by fighting Ryuken, Tsubaki thanks him for taking her out of the woods, Hanna admires Chris for helping her take charge of her life and Pierre... he just finds Chris' direction fascinating, there's no decision he makes that leaves him regrets.

Chris is truly grateful to be able to open up to his friends, but once he starts paying attention to his surroundings again he realizes that they have returned to the city, they are in the market. He contemplates his reflection in an apple, very appetizing to the eye, Guilian desperately wants to eat and Tsubaki begins to scold him.

Normality returned and Chris smiles, slightly relieved, although the noise causes an old woman to complain about it, turning out to be the owner of the fruit stand. Chris apologizes for the disaster of his friends and reluctantly the lady accepts the apology, as long as they buy merchandise from her.

Having been blackmailed into buying fruit, Guilian enjoys how juicy the fruit is, too delicious to be normal. As they talk about food of uncertain origin, the old woman begins to look close at Chris' face, making everyone uncomfortable without exception.

—That alignment of moles around the left eye, you even have the mole in the right tear. There is no doubt, you are that child. —says the old lady of the fruit.

An unknown person recognized him; among all the people he may have encountered there is a clue about his origin.

Chris gets straight to the point; does she know me from somewhere? "Yes, you are that child, your mother used to buy me fruit, she had a very peculiar personality. It's a shame what happened, at least she left you her pendant." He immediately remembers Ryuken's question, "Where did you get that pendant?"

"She used to say that the pendant was a kind of protective amulet. Despite that, she could not avoid that misfortune." It's not enough, he needs to know more.

"18 years ago, there was an adept hunt by the Imperial Inquisition, the entire valley south of King's Mountain was destroyed. You used to live there." Chris holds her too tightly and asks for the exact location.

He runs out and his friends follow him until he stops in a field full of grasslands, "This color, this scent, the butterflies, the scenery, ..." Chris starts running again and everyone follows him while worrying about his condition, he is too upset.

They arrive at a shattered house; it is clear at first glance that no one has lived there for decades. Chris enters slowly, sees the shattered furniture, walks around the site while sliding his hand through the wood walls.

Vague memories resonate in Chris' mind as he contemplates every detail of the house, climbs upstairs and reaches a bedroom where he finds a crib next to a large bed, or at least the remains of it. He falls to the ground, sad, everything inside him begins to fall apart again.

His friends, worried to the point of not being able to ask him about it. Chris decides to reveal to them the most hidden of his past, his "origin". Something only a childhood friend would know.

"The most distant memories I have are of having lived in the open, on the streets of towns and cities. I used to see people having normal lives while I was completely still.

Where are the adults headed? Where are the other children going? What does the food everyone has taste like? These were questions I couldn't answer. I used to be with two children older than me, they took me by the arm and at last I was allowed to move.

Sometimes they would come running, short of breath and hiding food among their clothes and we would eat together. If it was cold we slept together in containers. As time went on I realized that I was an orphan, most likely those children were too.

We would get into boxes inside wagons and even on a boat, we were stowaways. They took care of me during those hard times. One day of many, I felt very bad, I did not stop coughing, my head was spinning, and I could hardly breathe.

They told me that that day was my day, it was the fourth time they celebrated my day. They asked me if I wanted something special, anything I wanted they would take care of getting it, so I ordered delicious food to eat the three of them together.

They walked away and I fell asleep, I don't know how long it was, but when I woke up I felt better and was in a monk's temple. I immediately asked about them, they must be looking for me to eat together, but they told me that they found no sign of the two of them.

Currently I don't know if they were real in the first place, I don't know if what I lived was real, but for such a small child, just four years old, they were my world. I waited at the door hoping to see them again, the day was over, the days turned weeks, the weeks in months, even if I no longer expected them to appear I kept waiting at the entrance of the temple in case anyone knew anything about me.

As I learned basic things I began to wonder if I had parents, if those children were my older siblings, we all have family in this world inevitably, so why am I alone? Why didn't anyone care about me? Am I so insignificant that no one will seek me?

Since I was a child I was broken, empty, hollow, the only thing I had to hold on to were those questions. Eventually I aimed to find the answers to those questions. I will find my family, I will find my origin, and once I have all the answers... I will make a decision. "

That last sentence left the group chilling from the tone with which he said it, adding the somewhat gloomy look on Chris 'face. Whatever the final decision, it is something he still keeps none of his friends feel entitled to ask about it.

The concept of family forges our identity, Guilian was separated from his family by circumstances, Tsubaki was raised by the head of the Elves and at least has a clue to her origin, Hanna lost her family to the fire leaving her permanently scarred and Pierre... just support his new friend.

It has been a rise and fall of emotions for Chris, the worst day of his life, his only pillar with which to sustain himself are his friends: —I would fight the whole world as long as I don't lose you. —Chris says openly as his expression stops being gloomy but shows as great a determination as when he fought Ryuken.

Everyone smiles and lets Chris know they feel the same way.

They end up returning to the resort, it has been the longest day of their lives and the most exhausting, especially for Chris, but the young man from Vodheim tries to convince him once again, although this time it is all his friends who reject his request. Although Chris asks him about his identity, since he appeared he has felt that he is hiding something, if he doesn't reveal everything she will never consider it.

"You win, my name is Heinrich Heinburn VII, Prince of Heinburn and sole heir to the throne. For centuries the kingdoms of Heinburn and Ceres have had a close relationship not only politically but also mythologically."

Everyone is shocked by the revelation and Chris uses what's left of his strength to say, "Your mother gave me a message for you before leaving the kingdom: Don't go home and stay hidden."

"Ouch", is all Guilian says after a few moments of awkward silence. Chris does not know the reasons that Queen Alice has for sending such a message to her only son, and he is not interested, but he is fed up with the King's Mountain, about his past, his unknown origin, he wants to get as far away from that place as possible.

—Also, if none of the Six Lords have succeeded in the King's Mountain Challenge, then I'm not so sure I can do it yet. —Chris has resigned himself to his hasty destiny—First I will travel the whole world; will you accompany me?

Everyone responds vividly with a strong yes.

Heinrich doesn't understand whether he agreed or not, so Chris lets him know that he expects a big reward for fighting a full-scale war for two countries that have no relationship with him. He takes that as a yes, the trip will take about three weeks, so Chris is going to be in top shape by the time they reach their destination.

Meanwhile, at the city market, Karen finds herself buying supplies to go on a trip and the fruit old lady approaches her:

—Did you visit the ruins of your village after all? Your parents have been waiting for you for a long time. —asks the old lady very curiously.

Karen replies that it was very difficult, many things have happened to her on The King's Mountain, both past and present.

—I can only say that, despite the pain of tragedy, I was able to meet him, and I can't imagine a life without having met him. —Karen says with a bittersweet smile, filled with both happy and tragic memories.

She says goodbye and both Karen and Chris move away from King's Mountain in opposite directions, not knowing that they will eventually meet again.