

Upon reaching the classroom Encre checked the door window looking for Hope. He couldn't find her so he turned his head and suddenly he didn't have to look anymore.

"Hey, where'd you go" hope asked

"just to the bathroom" that wasn't technically a lie "You?"

"more student council work"

Encre nodded he knew that wasn't true but there was no reason to let hope know he knew

The two of them went back into class

when they entered the room Mr. Adelulf greeted them and after directing them back to their seats he continued with his lecture in the time Hope and Encre had been gone he had somehow transferred into talking about civics he was describing the structure of the government. The four senators who ruled each sector of the kingdom and the king's head knights who functioned as the guardians of the senators and were one of the few people who were legally allowed to use magic. Needless to say Encre learned a lot during this class eventually the bell rang and the class sidled out into the hallway where the black-blooded boy was confronted by Alex who had an excited (almost Hope like) expression on her face

"so, you ready for your sharpening?"

"what?"

"Oh you don't know, huh? It's just like her not to tell you"

"Hope?" Encre asked, following the girl to their next class

"yeah, Hope. I couldn't be talking about Wing, could I?" the girl sighed apparently about to explain something she didn't think she would have to "listen your rarity right now is like a huge chunk of metal, a high quality type of metal based on what I've seen, but still just a chunk of metal, mostly useless, but we can make it useful we call it sharpening"

"I'm not sure I understand"

“eh, you’ll understand later. We’re heading to the dome if you want to head on I have to go get some supplies”

Encre followed her advice and made his way to the rarity dome without too much trouble outside of the building he saw what was definitely trouble Mac and his group what were they doing...smoking...whatever if they wanted slowly kill themselves that was fine but they were throwing their butts at some kind of masked statue wait not a statue it was Kyle *sigh* tied to a chair. What was wrong with these guys. What was wrong with Kyle!!! Encre got closer to overhear there conversations

“I cant believe you sicked that blood freak on us” Mac raged “who do you think you are”

“next time I see that guy I’m gonna break his... “

“My what” Encre asked

“Your nose. I was gonna say your...” mac suddenly jumped noticing Encre was behind him “Blood Freak!? Just because you got lucky once don’t get cocky” Mac stated visibly tensing to make himself look more threatening.

“and you don’t be stupid” Encre stated bluntly, moving his thumb to his mouth as if to bite down and draw blood, of course he would never actually do that but Mac and his goons didn’t know that. As if on que they all backed up and nearly scrambled back towards the main building but not before Mac shouted “just you wait, blood freak Y-your dead!”

“sure I am” Encre mocked with a wave before turning to Kyle

“What. The. Actual. Fuck. Dude.” He asked moving to untie the other guy’s bonds

“S-sorry” Kyle whimpered “they caught me on the way out of class...Thanks for saving me again”

“don’t get used to it. I only intervined because it was kinda my fault this time” Encre said beginning to walk away

“are you on your w-way to sharpening?” Kyle asked

“I guess so...” Encre said with a shrug, not really looking at Kyle “why?”

“I’m on my way there too, maybe I could walk with you...”

“ whatever” Encre sighed. Genuinely not caring and continued walking “what do those guys have against you anyway”

“Hm?” Kyle responded, before murdering “well my rarity affected one of the members one time It hurt him pretty bad”

Encre nodded, he knew the feeling well... though no one had tried to directly hurt him since that would just put them in more danger

“what’s your rarity anyway” Encre asked

Kyle responded by taking off his glove, under it was a strangely gnarled hand it’s skin was cracked and gray like concrete and Encre could visibly see it flaking away only for the dissipating parts to reappear only to crack away again “anything I touch with this hand is well... is turned into particles like the ones coming off it, lucky it doesn’t effect these gloves, but it can destroy almost anything else... the only upside is I can control The particles With hand gestures and form them into things” Kyle said moving his hand slightly. Encre watched amazed as the particles falling off of Kyle’s hand turned into a small knife “ I n-need more to make bigger things and they only l-last for an hour or so right now but that’s a pretty up upside, huh”

Encre had to agree that was a pretty impressive ability even if it came with a curse.

Kyle continue chatting until they reached the dome Encre nodding and responding shortly when needed before Kyle pointed to the door

“this is where we p-part ways for now, you need to get some te-tests done on your rarity so t-they can understand it’s power better”

Nodding again Encre entered the building inside the space he saw the cubicles He had seen before. Soon after entering Encre met eyes with a bird looking woman, she half glared at him and Encre nearly jumped at the hostility

“um...hello, I’m here for the tests...or something” he stated unsurely, then hastily added “i-I’m new”

Uhg, he sounded like Kyle...

The woman's face softened slightly, though she still looked annoyed "this way" she hugged

She lead Encre to a cubicle containing a scale after having him step on it she wrote down his weight and moved on next cube it contained a stadiometer which the nurse used To measure Encre's height Encre could swear she was judging him he had always been shorter Then the rest of the kids his age and he knew it she didn't have to bring it up with her eyes...

They skipped the next cubical the woman explaining " will you just do a blood test next but... we'll need some proper equipment to do that with you" Encre nodded does kind of test were always a horrifically difficult thing the next cubicle they entered contained a strange machine It looked almost like an hourglass made of metal but had a glass vile inside that contained a translucent reddish orange-liquid and a large hole in the bottom half about the diameter of a soda cup the nurse told Encre this was an old MSD or mana source detector that had been attuned to scan curses it would tell them the rank of his curse

"the ranks are F,E,D,C,B,A,S and, SS with F being the lowest and SS being the highest. Higher ranked rarities tend to be more harmful to its host but are much more powerful when sharpened, they take a magic user of the same rank or higher to inflict them so A to SS are pretty rare"

She instructed Encre to stick his hand in the machine and the boy felt the machine whir to life as it heated up and the fluid began to change color from orange to gold to silver to blue to pink and stopping and darkening before lightening into a pale blank white

"what?! That's not right!" the woman exclaimed

"what?" Encre asked confused

" it shouldn't be white That means it's not detecting a curse"

"that's...impossible" Encre stammered he had been cursed all his life there was no way that he wasn't

" I know, this old piece of junk must be broken, We'll send out for repairs as soon as possible" she said hitting the contraption on it's side causing the liquid to take on a tv static like pattern. Anyway what's your name I check your file and place

you in the group based on your rarities presumed level” the woman said pulling out a tablet

“my names Encre, Encre Stiller”

“Encre...Encre, Ah found it. An A rank pretty impressive” the woman said still wearing the annoyed expression

”do you have a name for your rarity”

“what?...”

“your ‘curse’, it seems to be pretty unique Mirrordrop hasn’t seen anything like it before or at least we haven’t a recorded it in any case definitely doesn’t have a name.”

Huh, Encre could name his cur-er, RARITY... hmm, what about Life ruining blood hands? No, too on the nose, Encreism...? No, too pretentious. Plus, it made him sound like a cult leader... Dark Gash? No, but he felt like he was getting somewhere... suddenly a voice rang out in Encre’s mind what it said felt more like a dream than words. The voice felt familiar like he had heard it before, recently. The voice whispered “Inkbled...” in a strange airy tone then was gone and Encre knew the answer

“Inkbled” the young man repeated somehow sure of his answer

“Ink...bled” the nurse parroted as she typed “ok its in the system. Head into the gym the you’ll be in the A group with the other A ranks.” She opened a door near the table and pointed into the gym and too a group of people sitting up some equipment upon approaching them he realized the group was made up of his acquaintances

Hope, Alex, Wing, Zeph(...?) and even Kyle were A ranked Encre supposed that was impressive or maybe he should feel bad for them he didn’t know. Hope was the first to notice him

“Hey it’s Encre! I knew that rarity of yours was *at least* B level, nice to see you’re with us!”

Alex approached next “see what did I tell you about it being high quality” her hair sporadically untying and retying itself into a bun at the back of her head

because it was quite heavy. Instead he settled for a smooth and sharp looking black dagger with a clear gem at the center of it's hilt

"Oh," Alex mused "I think that knife's perfect for you. Do you know what it is?"

"No...?" Encre answered honestly

"it called a 'Witches-cut' and technically it's cursed, you see that gem in the center it's hollow"

Encre tapped on the gem it was indeed hollow and it was giving off those strange waves of energy

"when it cuts something or... someone the knife draws blood from the target and uses that to fill up the gem... usually witches would use that blood later For the darker stuff in magic like writing in it but... YOU, with your rarity it could be a incredibly effective weapon...Oh, I almost forgot to tell you the best part" she said gesturing at the dagger this was the first time Encre had seen this girl Actually get excited "press the back of the knife" Encre did and suddenly the knife disappeared And in his Palm was simple black ball point pen with a small clear gem in its center

"Woah" Encre gasped

"See!" Alex cooed "its inconspicuous, light and easy to carry, isn't that amazing?"

"yeah" Encre agreed pressing the top of the pen and watching it turn back into a dagger he immediately began to mentally call them pen knives because he had heard that somewhere And he thought he was clever " you sure know a lot about weapons, Alex" Encre noted,

she laughed rubbing the back of her head in an embarrassed manner "well, heh, training is my specialty. Don't get me wrong, I'm not stupid, but I've never been one for studying. I just don't feel like I'm getting anything done..." she shrugged "but training's different. I can feel myself improving and I can see those improvements making a difference. So I guess I end up knowing a lot about this stuff. Call me muscle head if you'd like but that's my truth"

Alex stretched forcing Encre to recognize how well toned the muscles on her arms were, he wasn't particularly into that in a girl but he could still recognize the hard work that was put into them

This also forced Encre to notice how much he lacked that kind of build. Maybe this training would benefit him after all,

"now that we have your weapon picked out we need to figure out your role in the team, as will be working together on this missions as well, of course we can't really find that without training you and figuring out what you're good at"

At that moment Hope walked towards them picking up the sword Encre discarded moments ago giving it a few practice swings before fitting it to a sheath tied around her waist.

Encre gawked how had she wielded that sword so easily it had to be a least a third of her weight! No, it was many times her weight... but, it must have been a third of what her weight would have been if she wasn't cursed!

"does your rarity give you super strength or something" Encre asked the lightweight girl

"no... but kinda, it makes things I carry lighter but doesn't remove the weight..." the girl mused "although, it does remove the weight from anything I try to weigh myself down with" she grumbled

"Hope" Alex called "check out the weapon Encre picked"

"hm? A witches-cut?"

"what's wrong" Encre asked concerned

"nothing, it's just weird that it was there we would usually keep it with the other cursed items" the girl suddenly turned around and jogged to another shelf at the other side of the room before rummaging around And jogging back to them

"*huff* *huff* h-here" hope said breathing heavy "if you going to be using that knife You're going to need it's partner" she said handing Encre another knife that was an exact replica of the one in his hand. Encre took it wielding the blades much like he had seen assassins on TV hold them

"Is that really how you're going to hold your weapon...?" Alex asked

“he has a lot to learn” hope stated “ luckily There’s no time to start like the present!” she said leading the other two back to the main training area.

The next few hours were filled with basics for Encre. After stretching, Alex led Encre through the basics of knife wielding. After that hope put him through a simple practice spar to test his natural abilities, after blocking hopes first 3 strikes Encre thought he might be a prodigy before he was suddenly smacked in the face by the side of hopes sword. After plugging the nose bleed before hands could appear Encre worked with Zeph, who was wearing some strange full body tracksuit, on basic exercises and yoga poses, wing instructed him in some light weight training while shouting what Encre assumed were words of encouragement Next was the part of the training that Encre hadn’t even known he’d been dreading, rarity training

The group thought Kyle was the best fit to teach Encre this both of their rarities where in errantly destructive and Encre had already worked with everyone else

“first you’ll need to activate your rarity” Kyle told Encre, taking off his glove and touching some empty cans of soda the group had brought for this very purpose.

Encre watched as the aluminum cans turned to purple and gray dust that began to orbit Kyle

Encre wasn’t particularly looking forward to cutting himself open, but if it would help him control his curse he would give it a shot...

He slowly lowered the edge of the dagger to his wrist and...

“STOP!!!” Zeph cried his unseen hand clutching Encre’s wrist before he could break the skin “ I had a feeling something like this would happen, that’s why I got permission to give you this” though Encre couldn’t see it he could almost hear the wink in Zeph’s voice. He handed Encre a silver arm band with zigzagging symbols carved into it, it radiated the same waves that Encre had come to recognize as magic

“this bracelet is enchanted, not cursed, when you get cut this should stop the bleeding before it gets too bad,” Zeph explained “but it won’t heal the wounds or anything and they’ll probably still scar”

Encre put it on “Thanks, I was a bit worried about bleeding out, this is better than nothing”

“we also have bandages for when you’re done” Alex added “Wing knows how to dress cuts so we’re ready”

The girl in question nodded and waved the wrapping in the air

“O-ok,” Kyle continued “now, Th-that’s settled activate your rarity”

Encre nodded as he put the knife back to his wrist... the back this time, and with a quick motion he broke the skin, cutting himself open, the slit was clean reflecting the smooth sharpness of the dagger, so clean in fact Encre didn’t even notice the pain at first, but then he did and it *HURT!* It actually hurt more than Encre was expecting it to. He gritted his teeth trying not to cry out but couldn’t help but let out a small yelp of pain. The sensation of the blade absorbing his blood only added to his discomfort. As troublesome as it was he had, had blood drawn before, this was nothing like that, it felt like the blade was taking from him, stealing an energy he could never get back. Finally just as he was starting to feel woozy, the drain stopped, he looked at the knife to see that the gem was now dyed the inky color of his blood, both of them were, good, at least he wouldn’t have to do that twice, the cut stopped bleeding too. The wound still stung but not nearly as much

“Good” Kyle noted with a nod “glad to see the knives work. N-now let me teach you how to use them”

“Use them?” Encre asked raising an eyebrow

“yeah, you just need to command the knives what you want them to do...like with your mind”

Encre looked at the daggers “these things can read my mind?”

“Um... no? they just um... r-respond to your intention, as long as the item’s magic can do it, it should do it” Kyle explained “try telling them to drip”

Encre shrugged. Mentally telling the knives to drip and... that’s exactly what they did. As dark droplets fell from the blade void-like hands grew from the forming puddle.

“don’t worry w-we planned for this” Kyle said, throwing rocks into the grasp of the inky arms. Who after receiving sacrifice pulled themselves and their prizes into the ebony sea.

Encre stared at the knife it wasn’t a sword in a stone but he had to admit it was pretty cool.

“g-good now try creating a spray”

Again Encre succeeded and again Kyle fed rocks to the grasping paws of Inkbled

For the next few minutes Encre tried a few different things with the witches-cuts and managed to get a feel for their limitations.

Hope clapped “Great now that you have started to get a knack for this, we can start the real training”

“this wasn’t real training!?”

“Nope.” Alex answered with a smirk

The group led Encre to another room. In said room was a man ctanding next to a large crystal ball with a model of a large fiield next to a forest with what looked like two fortresses on either end. “a snow globe with no snow” Encre thought

The man intoduced himself as coach Crashenbern and told them to wait for another group to arrive. The group that enterd was made up of six people. The first was a girl with scaly skin coating her hands and running to her forearms small patches of scales dotted her face like freckles. Encre also came to notice she had tail, the next person was a guy wearing gloves but even though them he tell the boys hands glowed, then there was a girl with her arm in a sling the fingers Encre could see were green and pointed the arm was jerking and moving as if of its own volition as if trying to escape its slingy prison. Encre couldn’t tell what the other two guys curses were but the marks on their arms showed they had them- wait who had he been thinking about again...whatever it didn’t matter.

Crashenbern began to explain what they were supposed to do

“welcome to your first trial of the year. As we have two new faces here let me explain what’s happening” he glanced at Encre and the girl with the weird moving hand “using this globe your soul will be transferred into its internal world. While

in there you will be the enemies of the other group. Your objective is to capture the flags of the other team through any means necessary there are 5 total. don't worry about dying if you are killed while in the soul space you will be returned to your real body here. In fact this is one of the rare cases in which I encourage the murder of your classmates each kill is worth 25 extra points and a flag is worth 100 points. You will in there for 30 minutes but while in a soul space time moves at a ratio of 1 to 10 so you will experience five hours of time. Now put your hands on the crystal." Both groups did as they were told and with a flash they entered the trial.