

Senoxus Zero

Chapter 2

Zerocrane: Uhaaaahhhh....!!

He mightily yawned as he woke up. Stretching the lungs and its tissues, as well as allowing his body to flex its muscles and joints. The act of yawning after waking up is said to improve blood circulation, allowing for oxygen to be delivered more aggressively, thus, kickstarting the functions of the organs.

Zerocrane: That was quite the quality sleep. I'm brimming with energy!

Zerocrane lifted himself up in a cross-legged sitting position. While caressing his bed, he uttered these words

Zerocrane: Man, what scary bed... I feel like I'll become even lazier at this rate.. Let's not go out until someone knocks.

he spent some time rolling around the bed as he pleased without a single care in the world.

A thought welled up as he was playing around like a child. He figured that perhaps, unlocking the door would allow for certain exciting scenarios to occur.

Zerocrane: that should do it. Now, if someone were to knock, I'll keep myself quiet, silently reach the door, and wait for the person beyond the door to run out of patience. Once they figure out that the door is unlocked, they'll probably try to sneak a peek. That's when I'll surprise them. Heh heh heh. This is going to be fun.

It took approximately 20 minutes for someone to come knocking at the door. The person knocked once, twice. They received no answer. They knocked a third time, adding a bit more power into it in the hopes that the person from the other side would hear them. Nobody answered yet again. Finally, a click could be heard.

Zerocrane: here we go... someone fell for the trap~

The one who was knocking decided to open the door ever so slowly. When the door was already half opened,

Zerocrane: Ggrrraaauuuuhhhh!!

With his face contorted as to imitate a scary appearance, and with his arms in a clawing position as if copying a cat in the middle of a fight (albeit poorly), he screamed, or perhaps it would be better described as a roar.

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A short silence befell the room as the people behind the door processed what was going on. After a very short while, a "ppffttt" could be heard.

Ulroy: GaHaHAhahaha! W-what are you doi~ pfftt... you're so ugly!! Hahahaha

Embarrassed, Zerocrane took a moment to reflect upon his own actions. He placed both of his palm on his face as if to hide his embarrassment.

???: Aww~ you are so cute, master Zero. Eheheh~

Meanwhile, someone of short stature would speak consoling words for Zerocrane, furthering his embarrassment.

Zerocrane: aaahhh!! Ulroy you retard, why did you have to bring Mythria with you?!

Ulroy: well, I knew something like this would happen. It wouldn't be right not to prepare. Besides, Mythria was quite mad at me for not telling her that you have already arrived yesterday.

Mythria: It has been a while, master Zero.

Zerocrane: well, that's true. I'm glad you seem to be doing fine, and wow. You've grown these past two years. Last time I saw you, you were like this small.

Ulroy: Sorry to break your bubbles, but she didn't grow even a single centimet~
owwwww

Mythria elbowed her father before he could finish his words, followed by an intense glare that could kill.

Ulroy: ahm ahahaha! Right, she's really grown up to be a wonderful person. Now, now, let's come down and eat breakfast. We can also talk about the teaching job as we eat.

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The dining table was large enough to fit up to twelve people eating all at once, but as their breakfast would also act as a work meeting for the trio, none but them were seated. There were a handful of food selections that one could choose from the menu.

Egg bacon sandwich with chili mushroom sauce, the small but numerous algaan fish, curry dishes, berry fruits, apples and bananas were just a few of what one could request from the kitchen staff.

ZeroCrane: wow, some of these are surprisingly heavy for breakfast...

Ulroy: what are you talking about?! There's no such thing as too heavy when it comes to breakfasts. It is arguably the most important meal in a day as we really only truly start our day after that point. What will you do if you run out of energy in the middle of the day? Besides, you aren't even in the right position to talk.

ZeroCrane: fine, fine. Let me get my all-time favori~

Before he could even finish his sentence, the kitchen staff had already delivered his egg bacon sandwich, paired with some apple, banana, and broccoli on the side for nutritional balance.

Zerocrane: I'm amazed people still remember my preferences, but... Is it really necessary to include broccoli...? I don't get along with broccolis.

The kitchen staff weaved a gentle smile,

Kitchen staff: of course. Master Zero is of great importance to the Guild. Even more so than the Guild Master himself. There's no way we will ever forget you. With that said, it's important to eat some vegetables every now and then. Please enjoy the broccoli to your heart's content~

Ulroy: C-can anyone please show me some love?

Zerocrane scratched his head out of habit. He would often do it when he felt embarrassed, or when he didn't know how to react.

Zerocrane: hehe... thank you. I also kept thinking of you guys while I was gone. Being a traveler is nice and all, but I really missed the atmosphere of a closely knitted family.

He said all that while playing a staring contest with the broccoli.

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Zerocrane: by the way...

Zerocrane pointed his gaze towards Mythria's direction. The girl who had been keeping herself quiet ever since she sat at the table, wholly focused on the food in front of her.

Ulroy: aaahhh, I can't remember when it started, but she's developed quite the appetite.

The Mythria who had been quietly shoving food down her throat tried speaking incorrigible words

Mythria: Ish awayt. I dwnt gt fat.

Zerocrane: I see... Well, I guess that's perfect for the training course that I've planned for her. It includes rest days where she would need to eat a lot of food to build muscle mass and stamina.

Ulroy clapped his hands, saying

Ulroy: Hoohh! Is it finally time for my daughter to become a macho girl?

Mythria: **\*\*sharp, murderous gaze\*\***

Ulroy: e-eerrmm.. I mean, it's my daughter's time to be gorgeous and pretty. she's always been cute, but now she'll be even better, don't you think?

Zerocrane: y-yeah... I don't actually plan to make her into a macho gorilla like her dad. I'd like to take advantage of her short stature, so rather than bulky power, I'll focus on bringing out her talents in agility and maneuverability. The advantage of people like us lies in our speed, and I take pride in that.

Ulroy: a sound argument

Zerocrane: Was there really even an argument?

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30 minutes after breakfast, Zerocrane and Mythria were supposed to spend their time alone in the garden, which was where Zerocrane would explain the training plan, and was also where the training itself would be conducted. At least, that was supposed to be the case, but according to him, he couldn't be bothered to do anything in the mornings, so the explanation and master/apprentice meeting didn't start until around four in the afternoon. In truth, however, he just wasn't feeling confident about his training plan, which compelled him to take the time reviewing the plan before explaining things to his apprentice. Something also bothered him regarding the word **admiration**, which instilled some kind of fear from within him.

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Seated on their own respective chairs facing one another, the apprentice-master meeting began with the mansion garden as their meeting place.

Zerocrane: Alright. First of all, our training will always start at around one at noon, and will always end at sunset.

Mythria: Wouldn't trainers usually conduct their training in the mornings?

Zerocrane: typically, yes. I just prefer goofing off in the morning. And besides, if we start our training in the afternoon, it would mean finishing right before night comes. The thing

is, I'll always have you eat and take a rest immediately every time the training ends. It's part of the fundamental theory in strength and skill building.

Mythria: I see~ that does sound very convincing.

Zerocrane couldn't help but notice Mythria's incredibly great mood. Particularly the smile painted on her lips. There was an undeniable sense of contentment in her.

Zerocrane: you look happy.

Mythria: I have every reason to be happy~ after all, you came back to us. Ehehe.

Zerocrane let out a sigh of contentment, without even realizing that Mythria's mood is positively affecting him, and that he himself was making a smile then.

Zerocrane: anyways, getting back on topic, your training will be three times a week. Monday, Thursday, and Saturday. Around ten to fifteen hours of training time every week. If it sounds like too little, don't worry because we'll slowly increase your training days and duration as you get used to it. Overworking your body without first letting it adapt will stagnate your progress rather than help you push further.

He stopped explaining for a few seconds to get a feel of Mythria's understanding. They need to be on the same page, after all.

Zerocrane: next, the actual training itself. For the next three months, you will be doing muscle training to strengthen your foundations.

Mythria: hmm? But can't we utilize mana to temporarily break our limits? I figured that's what everyone is doing.

Zerocrane: that is true, but suppose that you can double your performance by amplifying your body with mana. Double of one is still just two.

Raising her right hand with her forefinger shot up, combined with her mouth mildly opened agape.

Mythria: Oh! So I'll be strengthening my body to make performance amplifying techniques more effective!

Zerocrane: Correct! So, after the 3-month muscle training, we will proceed with the swordsmanship training. The swordsmanship training will be divided in multiple phases, and will likely take anywhere from a year to two. Although some talented individuals could potentially learn at a much faster rate. As part of your training, we will also be emulating a real combat scenario so you'll slowly be accumulating battle experience. I'll tell you the rest of the training plan once we are there. If you've got any questions or things you don't understand, don't hesitate to ask me. Asking questions is the job of the apprentice. So, questions?

Mythria: hmm... during my rest days... what should I do? I heard that I would be eating a lot of food, but is it really just that?

Zerocrane's eyes widened in surprise as he thought to himself, "how could I have forgotten to expand on that."

Zerocrane: right. For the muscle training period, you'd be eating A LOT, be relaxing A LOT, and sleep A LOT. But it's not like you'll just be lazing around all day. We'll do **Active Rest**, which is a form of resting while you're moving your body.

Mythria had her head slightly tilted with imaginary question marks floating on top,

Mythria: Resting while moving the body?

Zerocrane nodded.

Zerocrane: **Passive Rest**, which includes sleeping, is good for recovery. But being sedentary for long periods of time impedes our blood circulation, which is why we need to apply mild exercise routines to make sure our blood is flowing efficiently, and that oxygen is properly delivered where they should be. A bad circulation will result in slower recovery as nutrients aren't properly carried to our cells. Don't worry, because even something as simple as brisk walking for ten minutes will suffice.

Mythria pondered about it for a short while with frowned brows along with a hand on her chin reminiscent of her father's habit.

Mythria: I think I got it~ no, it makes a lot of sense, hehe!

Zerocrane: then, I guess we can call it a day.

Zerocrane stood up, first doing a mild stretch as he had been sitting for a while.

Zerocrane: I'll go back to my room. If you need anything else from me, just come up.

Zerocrane had already turned his back from Mythria at that point, but he was stopped on his track by her voice.

Mythria: Umm..!

He once again faced her direction, waiting for the hesitant Mythria to formulate her thoughts into words.

Zerocrane: I only just told you, right? If you've got something to ask, don't be afraid.

Mythria began to fidget as she spoke

Mythria: b-but... it isn't a question...

Zerocrane gave her a gentle smile, often called an affiliative smile.

Zerocrane: I'm being paid to look after you, so if there's anything that I can do for you, as long as it's within my ability, I'll manage.

Mythria: then... Can we remain here for a bit longer? Just like this, I want us to stay together.

*"Because I feel like you might disappear again like you did two years ago if I let you go..."*

Zerocrane was oblivious to the internal dilemma of the girl, but the request was simple enough that he found no reason to refuse. Besides, he really did miss the days when he would look after the always energetic Mythria.

*"Come to think of it, she was always attached to me like a tail is to a cat back then. She was also who would often escort me back to my room when I'm lost. Nostalgic."*

Zerocrane: Alright.

The two had decided to stroll around the large mansion garden together. Intaking the relaxing aroma of the flowers, and registering in their minds the beauty of nature within their vicinity. It was a peaceful and quiet leisurely walk. Mythria appeared content, but something had been bugging Zerocrane for a while now.

Zerocrane: Your dad told me that you've always admired me...

Mythria nodded.

Zerocrane: Why exactly?

Mythria: I-it's difficult to explain >.<

Zerocrane: I see...

He hesitated to speak about what was bothering him for a moment, but decided that perhaps, it was the right time to find out the extent of her admiration for him. After all, whenever people told him that they admired him, it brought him nothing but pain.

Zerocrane: I'm not trying to bring down the mood, but... I really dislike it whenever people tell me that they admire me. Admiration? Being idolized? That's bullshit.

Those words caught Mythria's attention. It wasn't that she was being told not to admire him. It was more about something else. Perhaps it was regret on the part of her conversation partner, or maybe it was **fear**.

Zerocrane: I've had a lot of people tell me that they admire me. Some even idolize me, wanting to walk the path that I have walked. You'd think that's nice and all, but really. It's more of a mental torture than anything. People will push their expectations on you, and those expectations and ideals will grow tiresomely quickly as you keep delivering positive results. It won't be long before you find yourself carrying an unreasonable burden. Keep doing great, and people will praise you, but make just one mistake.... Fail just once, and it will be like your achievements in life never happened at all. You'll be like a pure white paper with a tiny ink stain at the center. It doesn't matter how small, once there's a stain, people are inclined to focus on that tiny dirt. Forgetting the fact that the vast majority of the paper is still clean. Some people treat me as if I'm some god. Some people, despite telling me that they admire me, would purposely avoid any interaction with me. The reason? They aren't worthy of basking in my presence. Seriously... I'm no different from everyone. I'm also human. I'm also just a mortal. In the end, I'll have to welcome death as equally as everyone. At the end of the day, I'm just as imperfect as anybody else. The thought of being unable to shoulder people's dreams and ideals is scary. That's why I wish people would never do that. I wish people would stop.

Memories of when he was still an Elite Knight serving under the 26th Squad: Light of Liberation came crashing down on him like a massive waterfall threatening to erase his whole existence. People had expected him to always fight for humanity's sake. They thought that the Knight named Zerocrane would lead them into victory against the strongest force in the World. They sang his praises, until he renounced his position as a Knight. He was branded a traitor. A coward, who despite having the skill and power to push forward, would value his own life more than those of his own kin. Chased away from every establishment, being thrown rocks at whenever he was seen outside. That was what it meant to shatter people's ideals. He felt hatred not to those who chased him away, nor to those who called him a coward. He felt hatred toward himself, who took upon his shoulders the dreams of the people, only to shatter it afterward.

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Zerocrane: sorry, I seem to have ranted about something useless.

Mythria shook her head,

Mythria: I can't claim to understand what you are going through. It would be irresponsible of me to claim to know. If there's one thing I can say, the feelings I have for you *might* be different from the others. I've never once thought to avoid you for the same reason that those other people had. I've also not once treated you like a god. To me, you've always just been Zerocrane the Knight. The Knight who would do his best to protect those who are important to him. A bit irresponsible, lazy, and sometimes, clumsy. But at the end of the day, when push comes to shove, he will do his best. He might succeed. He might fail. But **he will no doubt do his best**. All in order to secure a promising future for all of us. To me, you are like the moon. Giving us hope, and guiding us in our times of need. A gentle light with soothing warmth.

Mythria would do a twirl, while at the same time, advancing forward. Providing some distance between her and Zerocrane. She would then stop. Facing him, she would speak these words.

Mythria: Sure, I too, have something I expect from you. I'm pretty sure that it's impossible not to expect anything from someone, unless they are completely useless. But I don't believe that there's such a person in this World. Yes, I expect you to act like Zerocrane. Always getting lost in the hallway, needing someone to guide him to his room. I expect you to always be the last person to wake up because you love sleeping. I expect to see you giving your best in your training. Even though you're already skilled, you don't stop because maybe... Just maybe, you don't think you are capable enough. You are not a god, nor are you some kind of unreachable existence. To me, you are Zerocrane. Just Zerocrane. The Knight who has always been with us like he was part of the family. Yes, to me, you are family. It's alright for you not to always succeed. Nobody is truly perfect. It's alright for you to fail. With every failure, comes a lesson, and with every lesson, comes knowledge and experiences. Rather than focus on what went

wrong, and what you could've done right in the past, isn't it better to look forward to what you can do today?

She let out a wide smile upon ending her speech. Giving him a reassuring, lively thumbs up. How she appeared, with her long, black hair freely swimming back and forth as they followed the flow of the wind with such a warm, energetic smile showing her teeth without hiding a single secret. To Zerocrane, it was akin to being **saved**. Yes, he had been saved from his eternal cycle of self-hatred, and fear of people. The fear of people who would unconditionally put their faith in him, and the hatred he feels toward himself whenever he fails to live up to expectations, disappointing and shattering the dreams of those who idolize him. He realized that his worries were naught but worthless. In this relationship, Zerocrane was supposed to be the Master, and yet, before he could even teach her anything, Mythria had already gone out of her way to teach him something. Something much more valuable than violence. Something much better than picking up the sword. Something more precious than anything he had learned as a Knight.

*"I thought it was just my imagination, but she really did grow up. Haahh, this is quite frustrating. How come she sounds so much more mature than I am. Look forward to what I can do today, huh... I guess... If I have only been more open about myself, people would have learned more about me, and that they'd realize I'm just like them."*

Thus, Zerocrane made a decision. A decision to stop shouldering more than what he could, and actively seek help from those around him. After all, no man is an island. If someone treated him like a god, then tell them, *"I'm human."*, and if someone told him that he could save humanity, tell them, *"I am but a single piece of soul in the grand scheme of things. Humanity can only truly be saved if everyone works together to achieve salvation."*

However, he didn't want humanity to be selfish. Whenever people said to save humanity, they were only strictly speaking of humans. Whenever someone says to save the World, they oftentimes only mean themselves. The salvation that Zerocrane desired was one that didn't discriminate.

Zerocrane: I guess I still have a long way to go. Thank you, Mythria.

He placed a hand on Mythria's hair with a sincere, solemn smile.

Mythria: S-stop..! I'm not a child anymore.

Zerocrane: Haha. I see. Well, I believe we have spent enough time already. What do you think? Should we call it a day.

Mythria nodded

Mythria: you aren't going to disappear, are you?

Zerocrane: oh, so that's what this is about. Haha, didn't I tell you? I'm being paid to look after you, and it will be quite a while before you can graduate from the apprenticeship. I'll be here for some time.

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A couple hours later, dinner was underway when everyone noticed that Zerocrane was missing...

Zerocrane: W-where am I? Damn it, this is no mansion... This is an accursed maze!!

~~~~Author Notes~~~~

I did my best to write this in such a way that everyone would understand, but as I am not one would call a professional, not to mention I don't really have an editor, I would like to ask your forgiveness for any mistakes that went unnoticed during my edits and revisions.

Also, to anybody wondering about why the story's format is weird (narration + movie scripting format combined together), I and a friend dream of one day being able to develop our very own RPG game (preferably blockchain game). While there's still a long way to go before my friend could be called a professional programmer, it doesn't hurt to actually start writing the storyline now. But then again, I would like to believe that I have a pretty decent idea for the story, so rather than focusing on just the dialogues like what we would often see from the typical game, I decided to transform this story into a scripting+third-person narration novel format.

One last thing I'd like to tell my readers (if I even have *any* reader at all) is that while I know a little bit about fitness and tidbits of other science-esque stuff, I am in no way an expert. Treat the Science in this story as B*lls**t Science.

Thank you very very much!! =)