

Senoxus Zero

Chapter 3

It was noon on Monday. Mythria's first training session was about to begin. Both Master and Apprentice having finished their dynamic stretching, all that was left was for Zerocrane to explain and show what his apprentice would be doing.

Zerocrane: We will focus on push ups, planking, and squats for today. Targeting your upper body, core, and lower body's frontal muscles. We will aim to do three sets of each. The repetitions I still haven't decided as I would like to first figure out your current limits. You'll be performing your first set up to your failure point.

He explained,

Zerocrane: Let's go with push ups for starters. I'll show you how it's done, and then you can go give it a try.

He demonstrated how a push up would be done. From the correct posture, to the proper movement. He assumed a prone position with his hands on the floor, at about shoulder-width apart. He then carried his whole body using just his arms. His whole form in a straight line, feet aligned close together. He repeated the movement a few times.

Zerocrane: It's important to know that when you are doing push ups, you should let it so that your chest is close to hitting the floor before you push back up. Doing it like this greatly increases the muscle resistance, which makes the exercise a lot more effective. Try to also not go too fast. Just do it at your own pace. Slower is even ideal because it ups the difficulty even more. Always remember that only your arms should be moving. Don't move your lower body. Let your arms carry you whole. Don't forget to breathe. You'll require more and more oxygen as your muscles start to feel tired. Breathe in on

your way down, and breathe out as you go up. Rinse and repeat until you reach your limit.

He invited Mythria to her first set after the demonstration, which signalled the official start of the training session.

1.... 2... 3.. 4. The apprentice showed no signs of difficulty. Perfect form with a perfect rhythm.... Until the 17th repetition.

Mythria: Ughh... 18..... 19....

Zerocrane: Keep your eyes open. Don't break your form. Almost there!

Mythria: 20... 21... 22..... I... I can't.. Anymore..!!

Zerocrane: Alright, great job! Take a two-minute rest.

Mythria's ears twitched at what she heard,

Mythria: Whaaaa?! Only two minutes?!?!

He laughed at the protesting Mythria, telling her that letting her muscles cool down for too long isn't very efficient, and that the effective portion of the training is when she's already having a difficult time. The so called **Effective Reps**.

"But really, that's quite impressive. Twenty-two reps on her first try? Wow. Looks like we are about to give birth to a brand new beast. At this rate..."

Zerocrane made an expression of smug. A smile of pride, as the thought of Mythria potentially being able to surpass him in the future entered his mind.

In the end, Mythria finished her second set at seventeen, and her third set at ten.

Mythria: I'm tired...

Zerocrane: Don't take a seat right after the exercise. Wait at least a minute.

Mythria went with an unmotivated "Okay." that sounded like she was telling him the opposite of her words. Meanwhile, Zerocrane tossed her a bottle of cold water.

Zerocrane: Drink up and take a seat after a minute. You need to stay hydrated throughout the training. We'll continue after ten minutes.

Next on the training plan was the Plank. It wasn't a particularly difficult exercise. The Plank is an Isometric Exercise, which is a type of exercise that doesn't rely on the lengthening and contracting phases of most other exercises. Basically put, an isometric exercise challenges one's muscles with a static contraction where one has to strive to keep their body stable. However,

Zerocrane: Hmm... I'm not sure if I should have you planking right now. You'll pretty much be in almost the exact same pose as the push ups, so it might be a little difficult given that some of the same muscles would still be working.

But Mythria reassured him that she'll be fine, and that she won't be giving up. If she didn't even have what it takes to clear the initial training phase, then how would she be able to truly become strong?

Having received a good answer, Zerocrane had put up a satisfied smile. Lightly scratching his head out of habit.

Zerocrane: Alright. Great response. Exactly what I'd like to hear from my apprentice.

Zerocrane proceeded with the demonstration. As was already stated, the Plank wasn't a particularly difficult exercise to learn. However, it could get challenging to keep one's body stable for a set period of time, not to mention, weights could be added to make the exercise even more effective. However, in Mythria's case, no weights would be added.

The objective for the day's training was to drill the proper form of the exercises to Mythria, along with figuring out where her natural limits were at. A proper form boasts a lot of more important benefits than people would usually consider.

This time, Zerocrane decided to exercise together with Mythria. That would mean that they would both be planking. Perhaps, his apprentice would feel more motivated to train if he trained alongside her.

What the two of them did was the standard plank. Also referred to as the Forearm Plank. Prone position, with the elbows directly under the shoulders with the forearms resting on the ground. The whole body in a straight line from head to toe was the ideal form. The goal would be to flex the abdominal muscles, along with other supporting muscle groups like the quadriceps to keep the body stable.

Zerocrane: Keep your eyes down. Don't crank up your neck. Focus on keeping your body aligned and stable. Don't stick your butt out.

Zerocrane had a 5-minute hourglass, which would act as his timer.

At the end of Mythria's first set, her recorded plank time was at almost exactly five minutes.

"What the hell... She's already this good? I wonder if this isn't her first time doing something like this. Has she been trained by Ulroy before?"

Those words ran through Zerocrane's mind as his apprentice continued to impress him.

Although as one would expect, Mythria's performance would get lower with each subsequent set.

Mythria: Puuuuahhh!! I think this water tastes better than usual. Is this different from normal water?

Asked Mythria after chugging what seemed like half a liter of water at once.

Zerocrane: It's what we've always been drinking. It tastes better after a workout because your body demands more liquid to keep you hydrated.

Both master and apprentice would sit on a chair as they make the most of their short break.

Zerocrane: The next one will be the last for this training session. Are you still alive?

Mythria let out a thumbs up in response

Mythria: Of course! Eheheh!

Naturally, the short break ended quickly. Zerocrane warned Mythria that the Squat might be on the difficult side in terms of getting the proper form, but Mythria's positive outlook meant that there wasn't anything to worry about.

As is the usual pattern, the master would demonstrate to his apprentice the makings of the exercise. Squats was known for placing emphasis on the quadriceps, along with the glutes. The hamstrings also get affected as a supporting muscle in this exercise. The

thing with squats would be that it is a lot heavier on the legs and butt compared to the other two exercises that they've previously done. Leg workouts would also be the highlight of Mythria's training because, as her master had already previously said, it would be great to take advantage of Mythria's small stature to maximize her speed and maneuverability. There had been a lot of debate about whether power or speed would be the most important characteristic to a swordsman, but to Zerocrane, those do not matter. The most important factor was the latent potential of the trainee, and for Mythria, that would be her maneuverability and speed.

Assume a squat position with the feet about shoulder-width apart. There wasn't an actual rule as to the exact positioning of the feet. It would actually vary from person to person, but the demonstration was for the sake of showing his apprentice the basics. Having his apprentice adjust later would be easier once she already knows what to do. In the squat position, the whole feet should be dialed on to the ground, and the chest should be puffed up with pride. At that point, the exercise was ready to be initiated. Bending the knees while pushing the hips back, flexing the core muscles as one goes downward and keeping it braced throughout the movement. It would also be great to take one's time to perform the downward movement as it would increase the time under tension, which would then allow the muscles to work harder, making the exercise a lot more effective. Inhaling as one lowers their body, and exhaling as one goes completely back up. There was a lot of discussion as to how far one should take their squat, but Zerocrane chose to stop the movement as the back of his thighs paralleled with the floor.

Zerocrane: Make sure that your feet remain fixed to the ground as you go through the movement. Focus on your heels on your way back up.

It felt as if there was no need for him to go through all that detail as Mythria proved to be capable on her first try. As usual, she had great form, not to mention, a truly mind-blowing performance for her first time.

Zerocrane: We are done. Congrats, you did great.

Mythria: Yaayy! I did it! My first training session is a success!!

She spun and jumped around like an excited little child as she celebrated her first training's conclusion. Her body seemingly filled with energy even after all that she did. Meanwhile,

Zerocrane: Don't celebrate just yet. While the training is indeed finished, there's one thing we must not forget.

Not knowing what he meant, Mythria tilted her head as a reaction to her master's words.

Zerocrane: Mythria, hurry up and escort me. We have to get to the dining table as soon as possible. We gotta eat!

And Mythria's eyes shone like never before. Yes, the thought of food made her almost drool. She hadn't noticed it in the middle of the training session, but she was really hungry.

Zerocrane: That's normal. You worked your body to the limits. Reward yourself and eat a lot. You need it for faster recovery.

The duo only had to traverse a few minutes worth of distance to get to the dining table, but the layout of the mansion was still quite difficult to navigate for a person with a bad sense for direction.

Mythria: It's making me worried...

She whispered to no one in particular as they took their time walking. Still, Zerocrane's ears caught her words.

Zerocrane: hmm? Worried about what?

Mythria went with an "Eheheh, you heard that?", with her eyes swimming around as if proven guilty about something. Zerocrane nodded in affirmation.

Mythria: Umm... I just had a thought...

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Mythria: Were you also sometimes getting lost in the woods or some place whenever you go out to do your missions?

Zerocrane pulled out an "Ah!", laughing at Mythria's question. He wasn't making fun of her. It was more about surprise than anything.

Zerocrane: Let's see. Despite having a bad sense of direction, I'm still an experienced swordsman who's also a former Elite Knight. I have no trouble navigating through a place I've already been through multiple times before, especially if it's a place with a simple layout without much obstructions.

"I see. That's good to hear." replied Mythria, who wore a gentle smile as she hummed a song unfamiliar to her master.

"She might actually be a good singer." was what he thought, but that was a story for another time.

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Seated at the dining table were six people in total. Mythria, Zerocrane, Ulroy, along with the three newbies previously seen stationed at the mansion gate.

Guard B: Umm... Is it really alright for us to be sharing the same table as the great Master and.. **The Zerocrane?**

Ulroy pointed his gaze at Zerocrane's direction. Ushering him to give the guards a satisfying answer.

*"Come on, now. You know very well that I'm not very good at this..."* Zerocrane thought to himself before reluctantly giving in.

Zerocrane: Ahem... I don't think there's any reason to be worried about. We are all part of the same Guild. Well, I mean, I'm not actually an official member of the Guild currently. But you get the point. You guys are part of the family. You don't have to be so reserved.

As an additional bonus, he gave them a smile.

Guard C: I can't believe this... Bottom feeders like us, sharing meals with you...

Mythria: Evrywan strtz s a nwbey. Dey r whre they are naw becoz of hrd wok end affort.

Ulroy: M-my daughter, nobody understands what you're talking about. Don't speak when your mouth is full. Come on, you've got sauce on your cheeks. Let me wipe it out.

Mythria violently shook her head with an >.< expression as she refused her father's offer.

Mythria: I'm not a child anymore...!

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Mythria: As I was saying, Everyone starts out without any experience. Both master Zero and da-... master Ulroy worked hard to reach the point where they are now. They are not gods, so don't treat them like one. They are just like any one of us. They were also at your position once before.

The expressions on the guards' faces lit up as they heard her words.

Guard A: They are humans just like us... They aren't unreachable...

Ulroy and Zerocrane looked at each other with a mild grin on their faces. One proud of his daughter, and the other, proud of his apprentice.

Guard B: I know it m-must be presumptuous of me to ask this, but...

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The guard hesitated to speak for a moment, but it was too late to go back on what he wanted to say.

Guard B: Will it be alright to ask one of you to train us...?!

The atmosphere froze around the dining table as the guard trio awaited an answer. Each of them praying for the best possible outcome.

Ulroy: Alright. Zero will be busy with Mythria, so I'll take the three of you as my apprentice instead.

The guards all celebrated in joy as they received the answer they most wanted to hear. Ulroy, feeling good and also wanting to celebrate, went to gather a few wine bottles to share among the diners at the time.

Ulroy: I know we are a few days late, but drink to your heart's content. We are celebrating **Senoxus Zerocrane's** return. Welcome back to the family.

Everyone kept quiet in anticipation of Zerocrane's response. Hesitant at first, but gave up from the pressure.

Zerocrane: Errm... I don't really know what kind of thing to say in situations like this, but umm... Thank you for accepting me into the family a second time. This Guild...

Blushing from the embarrassment, he stopped for a moment to catch his breath before continuing.

Zerocrane: This Guild has been a really important part of my life... That's not an exaggeration. This family accepted me when I was at rock bottom. Thank you very much.

Everybody screamed at the top of their lungs, singing the returner their congratulations. Ulroy would also call the kitchen staff to eat and celebrate with them. Meanwhile,

Mythria: Wine... I'm no longer a child, so maybe... Just maybe... I can take a sip.

She set her sights on one of the bottles, but before she could grab the said bottle,

Zerocrane: You're not drinking any of these.

Mythria: W-why not?!

With a pout, she protested.

Zerocrane: Alcohol will reduce your protein synthesis rate, so you can't drink. Besides, aren't you still only sixteen?

Ulroy: Hahaha! Why not? Let her take a sip at least.

Zerocrane frowned for a second, before agreeing.

Zerocrane: Just a little!

Mythria went with a "Yay!" as she got the permission to drink.

Zerocrane: As usual, your wines are of quality.

Ulroy: Of course, I consider myself to be a wine connoisseur.

Inhaling the aroma of the wine, one could sense the appealing smell of the grapes, with a mild pang unfamiliar to the inexperienced Mythria. Taking a sip, there's a sweet, fruity flavor which tickles the taste buds. As the wine slowly goes through to the throat, there would be a slight heat accompanying every swallow. Mythria could feel that heat slowly traversing from her throat, and then to the esophagus, and finally. It would settle down at the stomach, where the sensation would complete its round. And then, She'd notice a peculiar aftertaste that she found to be quite likable. *"This is how wine tastes like."* was what she thought. It was an entirely new experience to her, much like her first training session with Zero. Thinking about how many new things she's done that day, a smile of contentment would form around her lips, but

Zero: No more. Any more and it will affect your recovery.

Mythria went with a simple "Okie!", with her smile of contentment still pasted on her face.

*"I expected her to put up more of a fight..."* but Mythria wasn't about to defy her trainer yet. After all, she was the one who wanted for him to train her. It was only right that she followed instructions.



Two hours later, the celebration had ended, and everyone headed back either to their own rooms, or to their stationed positions. Mythria volunteered to accompany her trainer to his room before going back to her own. If she wasn't mistaken, then her job for the next two days would be to eat and rest.

Zero: Mythria is quite something. She might actually be better than me when I was still starting out.

He spoke to no one in particular. He had simply been reflecting upon the happenings of the day. He can't get off the feeling that he made the right decision to accept the job.

**\*\*Knock, knock\*\***

A few minutes later, a sound could be heard coming behind his door.

Zero: The door is unlocked. Feel free to come in.

The persona who opened the door turned out to be Ulroy, his employer, and someone he could consider a best friend and a big brother.

Ulroy: Yo! Still awake, I see.

He spoke in a friendly manner as he dragged a chair close to Zerocrane's bed.

Zerocrane: Well, I usually sleep quite late, so yeah.

Ulroy: Aren't you bored having nothing to do?

Zerocrane: Well, quite a bit, I guess.

Ulroy: Gahaha!

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Ulroy: How's the training?

Zerocrane: Let's see... I'd say I enjoyed it. I was never really confident in teaching someone else because I was never the type who's easily understood by those around me, but... How can I put it? I guess I'm on the same wavelength as Mythria?

Ulroy: That's good to hear. How about her performance? Did she do well? Did she give you a difficult time?

Zerocrane: **\*\*scratches head\*\*** I only just told you that I enjoyed the training, so of course everything went well. In terms of performance, let me ask. Have you already trained her before?

Ulroy went with a quick "nope" before asking "why? What's up?"

Zerocrane: Mythria might be a genius...

Ulroy: hoohhh... For the great Zerocrane to be saying that, she must have left you quite the impression.

Zerocrane: stop with that great stuff! But yeah, for her first workout, she easily beats the average person. No, she might even be better than some Knight School entrants who have already received a bit of training.

Zerocrane then presented to Ulroy the results of the training.

Ulroy: Impressive, indeed.

A short silence visited them as Ulroy focused on reading the results of the day's training.

Ulroy: hmm, but she might wake up quite perplexed tomorrow, don't you think?

Zerocrane: Haha, once the delayed pain onset kicks in, she might end up bed ridden for the whole day.

Ulroy: Then she needs someone to take care of her.

Zerocrane nodded in affirmation,

Ulroy: Don't just nod as if this has got nothing to do with you. You'll be her caretaker tomorrow.

Zerocrane's brows twitched at what he had heard.

Zerocrane: what?! C-can't I take it easy?

Nope

Zerocrane: Come on, I'm her trainer. Not her caretaker.

Nope

Zerocrane: WhY?!

Ulroy let out a sigh before explaining

Ulroy: As usual, you didn't thoroughly read the contract details. Or perhaps, you are playing innocent so you can have it easy. But this is my daughter we are talking about. Even as someone I can call my best friend, you have to abide by the contract one hundred percent. You are to supervise Mythria's training, at the same time, you'll be acting as her guardian. You are to take care of her for the entirety of the training duratio~

Zerocrane: fine, fine. You don't have to read the whole contract details aloud. I'll be checking on her tomorrow morning.

Ulroy stood up readying to leave the room,

Ulroy: give me a shout if you need someone to bring you over to her room. Good night.

Ulroy gave him a thumbs up before leaving.

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Ulroy: Haha, he hasn't changed one bit. Guess I'll let him to his own devices from here onward. I only came to mess with him a little. Only an idiot wouldn't miss someone like him, after all.

Both master and apprentice fell into a quality sleep that night.

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****Knock Knock****

Zerocrane was in front of the door leading to Mythria's abode. He knocked once, but received no response.

****Knock Knock****

Zerocrane: Mythria, it's me, Zero. Are you awake?

He knocked twice, followed by a call out.

Mythria: It's unlocked... Please come in..

What he had seen when he entered was a Mythria who had been writhing in pain, or perhaps, that was an exaggeration. Anyhow, she had clearly been having difficulties moving around as the delayed pain onset from the previous training session had already kicked in.

Mythria: I'm sorry. I was still fine before I went to sleep, then when I woke up, everything hurts. My body feels so heavy.

Zerocrane came closer to the Mythria who remained down on her bed. He took a chair in the distance closest to him, and took a seat in front of his apprentice.

Zerocrane: Don't worry. That's normal. Too normal, in fact. You can take it easy today. Just eat and sleep. You don't have to do anything else.

Mythria: how about the active rest?

Zerocrane laughed

Zerocrane: Do you think you'll be able to do it in your current state?

Mythria shook her head, confirming that she couldn't do much in her condition. Meanwhile, Zerocrane placed a palm on her forehead

Mythria: W-what is it?

Zerocrane: Just checking your temperature. It's normal for first timers to get feverish, especially after a harsh training session.

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Mythria's cheeks had been mildly reddened from the moment he entered her room, and her temperature served as the final affirmation needed to establish the fact that she was indeed feverish.

Zerocrane: Looks like you need some medicine. I guess I pushed you a bit too far. Say, do you think you can eat breakfast?

What answered his question wasn't Mythria herself but...

****Grrroooooowlll****

Zerocrane made a "ppfftt" while Mythria's face reddened even further from the embarrassment.

Zerocrane: I'll come back.

Mythria: wait...

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Zerocrane: hmm?

Mythria: are you... going to be alright?

Zerocrane: Haha, your room is positioned at a very convenient place. Don't worry, my sense of direction isn't that bad.

He gave her a warm smile before leaving.

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Zerocrane: Can I get a portable breakfast table for Mythria?

That was the first thing that he asked upon reaching the kitchen.

Kitchen Staff: Of course~ anything for the young Guild Princess. But isn't this rare, may I ask what might have happened?

Zerocrane: I pushed her a bit too much with yesterday's training. She's sore all over. She also has a fever.

Kitchen Staff: my, my. \*Giggles\*. Then I'll prepare all her favorite food with the right servings for the princess. I'll also get the medicine.

While the kitchen staff was preparing, he got himself a few egg bacon sandwiches with chili mushroom sauce. Placing them on a plate without eating. He had planned to eat together with his apprentice. People who are sick tend to get lonely rather quickly. That was what he believed.

It didn't take long for Mythria's breakfast to be prepared. Zerocrane promptly headed back to the room to deliver the things that his apprentice's stomach must have been waiting for.

Zerocrane: your full course meal, ma'am.

But Mythria didn't seem happy. She kept looking at a certain leaf, which purpose was to calm the nerves and reduce the body temperature.

Zerocrane: Even if you stare at it with such a scary look, it won't budge. Go eat, and then munch on the leaves.

Mythria: i-isn't there a liquid medicine that I can mix with a flavored drink..?

Zerocrane: this was what the kitchen gave me. Deal with it so you can get better quickly. You need to get better so we can proceed with your training according to schedule.

The mention of the training was surprisingly effective at convincing his apprentice. With all of that said, it took all her might to keep munching on the leaves without crying. She kept doing a >.< Expression all throughout the ordeal.

She would be in perfect condition two days later, and the training would proceed according to schedule. Zerocrane introduced three new exercise routines. In total, she would be doing six different workout routines for three months, with each training session alternating between different exercises.

Not before long, the training phase would move from the initial muscle training, to basic sword techniques.

## ~~~~Author Notes~~~~

I may have pushed myself a bit too far with this chapter. 4383 words?! That's a new personal record for me in terms of chapter length. I'll keep this note very short for now because the chapter is already really long xD.

Thank you very much!