

[Quan Hyun] Round 1: Underestimation is a Two- Way Street

The massive Coliseum rises above his head, and gathered at the very front of the building are the competitors- far fewer of them than he expected! Quan huffs a laugh quietly as he ducks his head.

He'd always wanted to be somewhere like this- full of noise, full of attention, excitement, and everything in between. He relishes the confusion and the determination in the others, and he *breathes*.

This is nice.

A cheerful voice echoes in the streets above his head, causing heads to turn to the- lady? Girl? With pink hair, a poofy skirt, cat ears, a teensy little cape thing- it must be awful to try and steal something from her, considering how *tight* everything is to her body. Damn. Quan's eyebrows furrow as he starts thinking more coherently. *Is that a girl?* It's always questionable, it's not like he can tell. "Alrighthttttty guys! I'm Miss X, your faithful commentator and judge, and today is our first! Day! Of! Matches! Our tournament is not only full of the best competitors from the multiverse, but also contains a grand prize! A wish from our lovely leader, your Madame Chief!" She waits a few seconds for applause- eagerly given by the people in the streets, and are quickly joined by the competitors.

"To start, we'll announce the rules of the competition! Each of you special little competitors have a tag, something small to signify you being here- I'm sure all of you know what yours are." That much was obvious. "And to win your match is simple! Get your opponent's tag for a full 30 seconds, and you win!" She smiles with a slight teasing grin. "And yes, knocking out or killing your opponent is perfectly fine. Nothing is too much for the best tournament in the multiverse!!"

That seemed to raise people's attention. Quan could see creased eyebrows and downturned lips all over the place- sure signs of being worried, or displeased. Though, he had to agree. Killing? That

seemed a *bit* excessive, especially for the level he wanted to play at.

She starts rattling off names, none of which were much of interest, except for the fact they were all pretentious as *fuck*.

Pembroke? Angelique? Man, if he had to fight anyone with *that* kind of name he'd win the tournament in about an hour. Those prissy rich kids with stupid prissy names. And then he hears his name- and possibly the prissiest name of them all.

"Quan Huynh, our resident speedster, seen roaring across the entirety of Crossroads in the span of a minute- versus Prince Armius Tu El Kaligos, the proclaimed strongest man in the universe!" He frowns slightly at the use of his real name, but there was little he could do to prevent it now.

Quan quickly scans the crowd for his competitor- checking faces for reactions and- ah, there he is! With the black hair and gold eyes and an awesome cloak Quan is certain is hiding something cool- aw, he's taller than Quan. Sad. It's quick enough- in a flash, while X still babbles above their heads- he rolls his eyes, this lady was *slow*- up he zips, straight to Armius's side, tapping him on the arm.

"Armius, right?" He dodged the delayed flinch of an arm in his direction. It *looked* like this prince guy was trying to smack him, but honestly. Too easy. "I think I'm fighting against you! I'm not so sure what I can do against you considering-" a pantomime of a sword, whilst also gesturing at Armius's sword at his waist, resulting in a flailing from Quan- just to double check that the flinch was real, considering this guy was supposed to be the "strongest man in the universe". "-Swords are really not fun to be stabbed with, or so I've heard- you can call me An!"

Ooh yeah, from the impact against Armius's skin, he seemed at least a *little* above average. Quan studies him, and waits for a response from the tall man- who was simply blinking at him. Quan opens his mouth to reassure him that yes, Quan is very stupid and clumsy when the prince's face widens in a giddy grin transforming him into the face of a little kid.

"I didn't quite catch all of that- but yes, I'm Prince Armius." His eyes shine with what Quan is vaguely certain is happiness and relief- and Quan flinches back from Armius's hands reaching towards him, causing that glimmer to fade. "And I suppose you're right! I wouldn't know, considering a sword has never pierced my skin, and I am surely cursed in this place, but maybe if you grab ahold of it, we can both have experiences we've never had!"

Uh. What a weirdo.

Even with that, Quan doesn't miss a beat. "We definitely will! I mean, I've never been in a fighting tournament before but I've won most of the fights I've been in in the past- From the sounds of it, I might just be a real underdog if you don't get me out of the first round! I think we have some time before the matches start- why don't we get to know each other? I mean, around here, it's really boring-"

"Yes! Yes it is-"

"- unless you're doing something, and I don't think anybody is going to take a kid like me on for a job or anything soon- plus, the people here are all so thorny! Except for that one lady with the red hair- she was so drunk but it was fine- what?"

Quan can see Armius nodding along with his admission so far- hand moving away from the sword holder thing on his hip, and into his pockets. He holds up a hand for silence though- an incredibly condescending move, but it didn't seem intentional. If anything, it seemed instinctual, and Quan supposed he could forgive that.

"Dark hair, right? And big fox ears? I believe I met her too."

Quan tugs on his scarf, trying to think of the name. "Chifu! That's it, Chifu. Yeah, I'm pretty sure she's the little god of the world or whatever that's supposed to give out the prize. Maybe."

"You really think so?"

"I think so! I mean, she's exactly how I imagine an arrogant god would be like- but you didn't hear that from me." That pulls a laugh out of Armius, and Quan mentally pats himself on the back.

"Well Qua-" a pause. "An, I think it would be entertaining to spend some time together before the match- what do you say we explore the town?"

"I already did!"

"You already-" His eyebrows pinch together and he frowns slightly. "Ah, right- the announcer *did* mention something about that- at my full capabilities, I could do something very similar."

Quan starts walking, gently pulling Armius away from the crowd as well. Best to keep his enemies closer, and away from other people. "Oh yeah? Strongest man in the universe?"

"In my world, yes." he says with a softness that seemed uncharacteristic. Maybe he was sad about something? "I think I may have even been faster than you."

Oh, a challenge. "I don't think so! See- can you go as fast as *this*?" And that's all the warning

Armius gets before he's yanked by the arm through the streets and with a blur of light and dizziness and faint laughter, Armius is deposited on the beach where he arrived, lungs heaving from exhilaration- and there's Quan, skidding to a stop before the surf- who as soon as he smiles, falls over with a plop, face first into the sand.

..... and there are some Crossguards disgruntledly brushing themselves off from the wave of sand that just hit them.

"Kid! Watch where you're going! Our esteemed Madam Chifu may have invited you, but you are not forgiven for the mess you caused in town! It was nothing but an extreme public disturbance and the next time-

Quan raises his head and waves them off before laughing and spitting out sand. They're still ranting when Quan playfully speaks up.

"Whoops! I think I might have missed the target by just a bit~"

... and yeah, they just flipped him off. Whoops.

Armius is sat wide eyed and grinning on the sand when Quan finally gets himself out of the sand, carelessly spraying sand everywhere. "That was *incredible*. I cannot imagine the sheer scopes of your abilities with this display! However...."

"I still bet you couldn't have gone that fast."

Armius is hesitant to speak. "Well..... I could go probably faster than that." And then he almost seems to wince at the slight pout on Quan's face- that shifts into a large smile.

"You've gotta tell me more- faster? Are you also stronger? What about how long can you go? Or can you go through walls? I ran through a wall one time! Ooh, or could you run over the ocean? Is it only your physical strength? Or are you also super magical like me? Or is it both? Or-"

Quan smirks a bit internally as he continues to ramble- it's always a little funny to watch people try and keep up with how fast he speaks. But to his surprise, Armius simply nods and seems to be listening carefully.

"I was fast enough to be able to travel to other planets in seconds-"

"Planets? What's that?"

"Like the sun, but it's solid. Another world, sort of."

"... right."

"I killed Yvrius, a god threatening to end our entire universe, I could be stopped by nothing, I had to train myself to hold back, actually!"

"Oh me too!"

Armius gives him an unreadable look, complete with a wrinkle of the nose and a slight narrowing of the eyes which Quan does *not* understand beyond telling that Armius seemed annoyed, according to the bite in his tone.

"And yes, I am the strongest man in the universe- I've been informed it's because there's so much extra magic in my world. I am not nearly as strong here- but far more skilled than most of the other competitors, I think!" He finishes with an odd puff to his chest, and Quan just nods before he plops down on the sand besides Armius.

"I had to control my own powers too. I even have fancy- rings? Bands? To hold me back! I've been trying to get it off but I can't figure out how, no matter what I do!" He tugs down his scarf just a bit to show a piece of gold wrapped tightly around his neck. "I think I could beat anyone if I only had the ring off..." He sighs quietly, tugging the scarf back up.

Armius pauses. Quan is willing to wait just a bit longer for him to speak.

A little bit longer...

Armius speaks up finally, curious. "You said you had multiple. And you cannot get rid of any to lessen the burden?"

"Can you break curses? Or can you take the amount of power on these stupid things?"

Armius shifts carefully. "I may, yes, as far as the second option goes. I would be willing to try. But there is nothing I can do for the first one."

Quan raises an eyebrow skeptically. "Here." He slides another gold ring out of his pocket and tosses it to Armius.

He watches coldly as he watches the man freeze up, body going tense as if prepared for a fight. He scoffs.

No one's ever dealt with it. Nobody but him.

He plucks it out of a shaking Armius's hands and frowns, feeling yet another layer of magic suppression wash over him, feeling more of his energy and power drain away to simmer under the surface. "Told you."

"I- I did not- Was that your tag?" Armius manages to get out finally, hair still on end.

"Nope! My tag is *these* things-" He taps on his hands with the ring-chains on his fingers, easily picking up the desperate change of subject Armius had thrown to the floor. "Aren't they pretty? I've never seen such long chains on an accessory like this! I think because they're so like- long and you would trip over them and also maybe use them as a weapon to choke someone to death, I mean, it seems like a good idea and it might happen to you during our match but also it wouldn't make that much of a difference, because it looks like it might break! I think it'd be super sad if that happened! I mean, can you imagine losing something this valuable-"

Good, Quan was starting to lose Armius's attention to the predicament of his utter powerlessness granted by Quan's rings. Good riddance, thinking he could take something like that. Weak. Maybe he finally distracted him enough to make him miss the threat in his words.

"- ANYWAY, what's your tag?"

Armius hesitates, before speaking. Possibly a lie? “My tag is my belt, I believe it was replaced when I arrived here.” He clears his throat, and looks away slightly.

An awkward silence descends for all of two seconds, before Quan starts blabbering again. “I want to see how strong you are now! If you’re still the strongest man in the universe- I mean, the title has to carry over at least a ‘lil, right? We should race or something-”

“That is an excellent idea! Last one to the end of the beach, perhaps?” he says, pointing towards a small cropping of trees at the end of the shoreline. “On three? One-” a slight shift of weight, while Quan kinda stares at him. “Two- THREE-!”

Quan is off like a rocket, and he doesn’t turn back to look at Armius. If he’s racing against- he’s already there. He looks around for a trace of Armius- a smoking trail, perhaps, or falling sand. He can’t find *anything* and he’s about to concede defeat when Quan sees Armius trailing in the Quan’s wake- fast, yes, faster than most, but not nearly fast enough to keep up with Quan- and he even has to stop in the middle to breathe! Jeez..... His world must be incredibly wimpy if that’s all the strongest man could do. Instead, he waits impatiently for Armius to finally catch up, which he does, panting and wheezing like he had run a marathon instead of a short three or four mile run across the beach.

Quan zips over to him, consolingly patting him on the back. “You okay? I thought it shouldn’t have been that hard.”

A few gasps and coughs later. “I may- be- more out of shape then- I realized-”

“Let’s try something else then- c’mon! It’ll be fun!”

Quan waits for a few more minutes, pulling out a bag- which is evidenced to have dried cicadas inside, quickly eaten like chips, which Armius carefully avoids.

“Maybe we can try hitting something? You might not be fast-”

“How about magic?”

“I can’t do magic.”

“Oh, nevermind then-”

"You should try and punch me or something- I can probably take it!" He stands up tall, and offers a hand to Armius- which he refuses, to Quan's distinct distaste. What, too good to touch the dirty kid?

"I don't think that would be wise."

"No?"

"No. I might kill you." He pauses again. "And your magic is blocked, yes? It must be difficult for you to defend yourself."

"I don't think you will! I'll even smack you first so it's fair!"

"Well..... Alright."

Quan gently whacks Armius in the shoulder- or he thought so, and it's enough for Armius to stumble back a bit. But his mouth is a thin line, and his eyebrows are raised- he must be thinking about something. Maybe how strong Quan is?

"Interesting... you pack quite a punch for someone so skinny." He remarks, before winding up just a little bit- about as much as Quan would-, and goes for a light punch.

So light, in fact, that when Quan braces himself, squeezing his eyes shut, waiting for a burst of wind, or a sonic boom or something instead of the slowly moving punch, all he feels is a very light tap-

A very, very light tap.

Neither of them speak for a moment.

"Uh."

"..... You're alive!"

Quan tilts his head with a frown, and nods. "Yeah? Of course I am?"

Armius had ducked his head a bit. "In my world- that would have killed you instantly, I'm afraid. My new power levels are just a bit more difficult to handle."

He rolls his eyes. *My world* means nothing when he clearly wasn't in Armius' world. It's just an excuse. "Well, we're not in your world."

Armius' face twists in distaste.. "I think it might be a good idea to move on." he mutters.

"Will Armius Tu El Kaligos and Quan Huynh please report to the Coliseum for their match?"

Quan perks up. "That's our cue!"

He grabs the prince once again, and they zoom to the entrance, separating at the door. "May the best man win?"

"May the best man win." He says tightly, brushing off his clothes. "Good luck, An."

"Have fun Kaligos!" He says with a large smile before waving and walking through the hallways to the place he was supposed to report to.

There's no "good luck" for someone who's about to lose.

It's all a blur before they arrive in the coliseum. Empty and flat, not even weapons scattered around- nothing but a muttering audience high in the stands above, and the announcer from earlier, Ms.X, entertaining the crowd by commentating on the round before them. Quan doesn't think about that. It would be simple enough to focus on Armius before he starts moving.

He snorts, tilting back to lean his head up to wave at the crowd with both hands and a sheepish smile- as though he's simultaneously cowering and appreciating the attention.

"Alright competitors, do your best! This round's terrain will be~" A drumroll echoes from the speakers scattered around the arena.

A little screen pops up, with a symbol of a palm tree surrounded by water. "Island style! Hope you brought your floaties!" She giggles, before the ground Quan is standing on slowly rises, water rushing to fill the spaces between his island and Armius's and the many other islands scattered around, connected solely by slim wooden bridges.

"On go!"

Quan tenses and from far across the water, he sees Armius doing the same. Quan smiles. There's no way Armius will be able to get across the bridges before Quan does. He wraps the chains around his fingers in a tight fist.

"One." He makes eye contact with an audience member and winks. They sniff at him and tuen away and- ah shit, yeah, that's the lady who's fruit cart he knocked over. Whoops. Anyway, there's not any way he can lose, so why not have some fun?

"Two." Ooh, there's the crossguard he knocked over. She's wearing Armius merch. Oops.

"Thr-" Quan shoots off, halfway across the arena, ready to make the best of his headstart and if he fails, well-

When he finds himself on his starting platform, Miss. X floating in front of him with a disapproving look on her face but a glint in her eye. Huh?. "No, no, no! I said on go- I'm glad our wonderful Madame Chief was able to stop you- but I'll let it go just~ this~ once~ you clearly don't quite understand yet. See, you wait till the whole word is out of my mouth, and then you can go. It's very simple, alright? You should have told me you don't understand these kinds of things!"

Quan smiles sheepishly. "Sorry about that-" No headstarts allowed. And it looked like his acting had paid off- treated like a child? Check. Treated like he doesn't have any thoughts in his head? Double check. Subtle insults relating to his stupidity? Triple check. He's on a roll.

Well, that was entertaining, boy.

Quan jolts. Or maybe not.

She clears her throat and turns back to the booing crowd, and a very uncomfortable looking Armius. "Let's take it again from the top, now that the instructions are all cleared up!"

"One- Two- Three-" Ah, here we go again.

"GO!" Quan shoots off- not across a bridge, but across the water leaving a high arching wake in his path to the delighted roar of the crowd.

He basks in the attention- but Armius isn't rushing to meet him, sadly. Maybe he would have if Quan hadn't run at him earlier. It would have made this such an exciting match. But perhaps...

Quan has whipped out a single small knife- a pocket knife- from his pockets, while Armius leans forwards in a guard, catching Quan's knife barely before the knife hits his belt.

He shakes his head. "It won't be that easy, I'm afraid."

Quan only smiles more, and goes for another swing- once again, easily predicted and caught by Armius. "Wait, wait- How about this? You can try out my sword- I mentioned that earlier, yes?"

Quan backs up. A trap perhaps? But no, Armius is offering the sword out, hilt first. "Here." Quan barely hesitates for a second before his curiosity wins. The chains fall from around his fingers as he reaches out- and the sword is simply placed in his hands-

That's heavy. That's really heavy. He grimaces.

Quan looks up and around. The crowd is hushed, and Armius is looking at him with a patient smile, much like how Rian-

He almost misses it.

He jams his fingers shut with a yelp. Quan's suddenly pinned on the ground, a knee resting heavily on his chest, Armius trying to pry his hand open.

Oh no. Oh no, no, no this can't just be *happening*- Armius was supposed to be weaker than him-

"Open your hand."

"No." He lashes out, trying to- he has to try something where's his knife- "Get *off* me-"

"Once you give me your tag." Armius says softly. "I know you thought you could beat me- but I outrank you in skill level. Give up now, I don't want to hurt a child. Especially not one like you."

Quan keeps yanking. Yanking harder, and harder in *rage*- and Armius isn't distracted from his task at *all*, besides muttering a "Stop." at Quan when a particularly hard yank starts tearing it.

He's almost there- Quan's grip isn't *that* strong and- his rings- they're slipping off his hand and Quan's still making a fuss-

Seconds before the rings come off his fingers- Quan kicks *up*-

There's a loud tear as Armius is forced away from Quan- And his belt.

Armius stares.

Quan runs.

Breathe. Breathe. He's stronger than you realize if you get caught again-

He doesn't think he could pull that off again.

Quan tears across the water in a blank haze. He doesn't hear the ringer go off. He doesn't hear the crowds roar in disbelief. He doesn't feel the water recede beneath his feet, and he for sure doesn't hear Chifu's giggles in the crowd.

"And there's our underdog turned winner, taking his victory lap!"

Huh?

He skids to a stop, still clutching the belt. He scans the audience, trying to spot Miss. X and instead makes eye contact with the lady with the wine red hair. She smirks, and slowly raises her hand in a thumbs up, holding it deadly still, until she bursts out into laughter and waves him off.

Quan shudders.

"And there! Is! Our! Winner! After a close match with "The Strongest Man in the Universe," He pulls out a close win, using clever tricks to steal Armius's belt while he was distracted! Talk about a tough match!"

Armius approaches, sopping wet as he sticks out a hand for a handshake. "Good match, An. You fight well- you even saw through my ruse! That was quite clever of you even if your opening move was a bit dirty."

"I mean, it's one that won! So I think it still counts!" Quan laughs off, ignoring the hand. "Besides, I didn't know you were going to do anything. I didn't expect you to do something like that against a kid like me, heh."

Armius blushes a bit. "Well, an opponent like you deserved it! And I was paid back by my deception by my defeat."

“Oh really?...”

The conversation ambles on, a conversation between friends, rather than one between adversaries, and when all is said and done Quan stands by himself, looking up at the Coliseum.

Too close.

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