

Advent of the Three Calamities

#Chapter 1: Prologue [1] - Read Advent of the Three Calamities Chapter 1: Prologue [1]

Chapter 1: Prologue [1]

Emotions.

A strong feeling (reaction) deriving from one's circumstances, mood, or relationship with others.

I never fully understood them.

They weren't foreign to me—Anger, Sadness, Fear, Guilt...—I've experienced them all. Plenty of times before.

As humans, we were inherently designed to feel them.

...But merely experiencing them didn't equate to understanding them.

[Don't worry. I'll make sure to make it quick.]

A certain voice hung in the air. It was gentle, yet carried a gravity that drew my attention.

Two lackluster gray eyes seemed fixed on me.

Or... felt like it. I knew that it wasn't possible since the one talking was inside the TV screen.

However, as I gazed into those eyes, I had a sudden thought—'Why does it feel like they're looking right at me?'

"Pfft."

I shook my head.

Stupid.

[This is the last step, right? ...The last step before my hell is finally over?]

He stood solitary, amidst the wreckage. The landscape lay strewn with debris and shattered structures. The world around him seemed to have halted, frozen in a moment in time.

In that instant, the dullness in his gaze faltered, and what appeared to replace it was something akin to... anguish.

Grief?

[...Hah]

The man clutched his shirt, slowly wrinkling it as his lips slowly curled into a hazy smile.

[I'll do it.]

His head lowered to meet another gaze.

[...]

With black hair, this person knelt on the ground with their back faced against the screen, gazing up at the gray-eyed man. No words escaped their lips; they simply stared.

Perhaps he wanted to say something, but couldn't. After all, a large gaping wound was present on his back.

[Ah, yes... I shouldn't drag this out.]

The gray-eyed man lifted his hand, unveiling the cold gleam of a sword. His lackluster gray eyes quivered ever so slightly as the blade descended down in one fluid motion.

SHIIING—!

[I've waited far too long for this.]

The screen turned black.

"Umm... So what do you think?"

I heard a familiar voice call out to me, and I lowered my gaze.

"Not bad, I guess."

While I inherited more from our father, it was evident that he had drawn more from our mother. His auburn locks cascaded gracefully to his forehead, and his green eyes gazed back at me.

This kid, who was my only remaining family, was my brother; Noel Rowe.

"Not bad? Just that...?"

"What do you want me to say?"

I wasn't much of a gamer. In fact, I never had the time to play games. There were things that I needed to prioritize in my life and never had the time to spend on leisure.

It shouldn't come as a surprise that I found the game uninteresting.

"I mean... You can lie."

"And why would I do that?"

"Because it's my favorite game."

"Right..."

What sort of reasoning was this?

I blinked slowly before reaching for my drink.

"You know... I think it's best if you don't drink."

"I don't care."

Taking hold of the glass cup, I felt its coarse texture beneath my fingers before slowly bringing it towards my lips.

As the glass drew nearer, my attention fixated on the brownish liquid it contained. It was whiskey, a choice that seemed fitting for the moment.

As I cast my gaze downward, my reflection stared back at me, giving me a glimpse of the person I had become.

Hollow eyes, a vanishing mane of hair, protruding cheekbones—my visage had become something I wasn't able to recognize.

Even my hand quivered as I clutched the cup.

'I've had better days...'

I smiled bitterly to myself.

Stage IV Lung Cancer.

Not a pretty disease.

I still remember to this day the numerous emotions I felt during the day I received the news. I was just 24 years old. How was it possible for me to get cancer? But there was no denying what was inside me.

So...

I just accepted it.

Acceptance didn't come quickly. At first, I fought. I changed my diet and underwent Chemotherapy. But my life became miserable from that point on.

All my savings started to drain, and each day seemed more hollow than the other.

That was when I accepted my situation and just stopped everything.

Okay, fine. I'm dying.

Still.

Sip

Why make what remained of my life a torture?

I might as well enjoy what remained of it. Even if it made my life shorter.

"B..itter."

My chest burned and my hand trembled.

Despite that, I kept a firm grip on the glass and continued to sip on it. Every breath I took was laced with pain, yet the pain at the back of my throat held a strangely comforting allure.

So I focused my attention on it.

Relished it.

"...Brother, are you really just going to drink like that?"

Noel's worried voice reached my ears.

But despite his worry, I continued to drink.

"Let me... be."

I closed my eyes and savored the pain at the back of my throat.

Only this way could I forget about the other pain that was constantly invading my body.

Sip

It hurt.

I felt so tired. I could barely move. And I felt so useless.

But...

"Haaa..."

I felt comfortable.

Yes.

This is how it should be.

"Cou...gh."

I was caught off-guard. I wasn't able to hold it. My chest pounded fiercely, and my hand visibly shook. It took every little bit of my willpower to not drop my glass.

"Brother!"

"I'm... Cough! F-fine."

I opened my eyes to see Noel staring at me with a worried look.

My vision shook, and my hand almost gave out, but I held it in.

Staring back at him, I only felt guilt. He was only 16 years old. Our parents had died a long time ago, and I was his remaining family.

...I didn't want to leave him alone, but what choice did I have?

If I chose to stay longer, with what money was he going to survive?

In a way, stopping Chemotherapy wasn't just because I didn't want to prolong my suffering. It was also a way for me to leave him something before I left.

Rather than leaving him in debt and dying, I'd rather die and leave him with something to lean on.

It was my duty.

My duty as his brother.

Drip. Drip.

Tears streamed down his face as he gazed at me. The incessant buzzing in my head made it difficult to discern his words, but it appeared he was trying to call an ambulance.

I stopped him and shook my head before pointing toward the TV.

"Tell me... Tell me about the game."

"Game?"

Seeing his reaction, I managed to force a smile.

"Yea-h. Tell me why it's your favorite game?"

He wouldn't stop talking about it.

"That..."

He looked unsure of what to say, but after glancing at me once more, he wiped his tears and started to recount everything.

"The game is called Rise of the Three Calamities, and the main character is called Leon. He's an orphan and the story starts at Haven. An institute, or more like an Academy where cadets are trained for the future of the Nurs Ancifa Empire. One of the four great empires..."

To be honest, I was only able to make out a couple of words. After a certain time, all I could see was his mouth moving, but I just nodded along.

For the sake of it. I had to pretend to be fine.

So just...

'Let me die faster.'

Time seemed to flow endlessly and before I knew it, Noel was standing by the door of the apartment.

"Brother, I'm going to go grab some Lunch. I'll bring you your favorite."

That... I could hear.

And just as his hand grasped the door, his feet came to a sudden stop.

"I'll see you soon... okay?"

"Okay."

I answered back, albeit weakly.

"Good."

Clank—!

The door closed and silence filtered across the room.

"..."

For some unknown reason, the silence brought a smile to my face.

My eyes slowly closed, and I relished in the silence.

"Cough! ...Cou..gh!"

Yet that tranquility proved fleeting as I was seized by uncontrollable coughing. When I reopened my eyes and gazed down, I caught sight of my hands which were stained in blood.

My blood.

"Sh...it."

A clink resonated in the air.

The cup in my grasp had finally tumbled to the ground, and the world began to whirl around me.

'Looks like I can't maintain the facade any longer.'

Whiskey spilled onto the floor, and my chest throbbed intensely with pain.

I had managed to hold back before, but such a thing was no longer possible as all energy drained from my body and I leaned back on my chair.

'It's good that he didn't see me in this state.'

Sometimes, one suffers in silence not out of embarrassment, but out of necessity.

How could I allow my brother to see this?

"Ha.. Aha..."

I felt my chest tremble as something pierced right at my heart. It wasn't the same pain that I was accustomed to, but a different pain.

Anger.

Regret.

Sorrow.

Sadness.

Emotions.

That's what the pain was.

I felt them vividly.

I could tell them apart.

I was familiar with each and every one of them.

But I didn't understand them.

...And with these last thoughts, my eyelids gradually closed.

"Ah..."

That's when I took my last breath.

Or so I thought.

Chapter 2: Julien D. Evenus [1]

'Uh... I'm still alive?'

There was no way. But... I was starting to doubt it. That was despite feeling certain that I had drawn my last breath.

It was the only logical conclusion I could make as I found myself standing on the remains of a city.

My sinuses clogged up as a result of the smoke that lingered in the air, and I heard a low, steady ringing in my head at the same time. Sort of like the buzz of a mosquito, but a lot more annoying than that.

With all of that taken into account, I was certain that there was something wrong with the situation. I felt there, yet not at the same time.

If that made any sense?

Must be some sort of hallucination one experiences before death.

It had to be.

I was more convinced of this when I found myself standing amidst the ruins of a city unknown to me, confused by the peculiar architecture of the buildings. They appeared to belong to a distinct era, unlike anything familiar to my own.

How weird.

The entire situation was weird and I had trouble wrapping my head around it.

Despite my eagerness in wanting to find out more about what was happening to me and what the city around me was, I couldn't.

I was stuck where I was.

Or more like, I was trapped.

I could see, smell, hear, taste, and touch just fine. It was just that, I had no control over my body. I felt as though I were a marionette, manipulated by an external force.

Rumble! Rumble!

My focus was captured by a distant rumble, prompting my head to turn toward the source of the sound. A voice unknown to me emerged, flowing from my lips.

"It's about time... I thought they'd be slower."

There was something about the voice. It sounded unnatural. Almost robotic in my ears, but I couldn't quite tell.

Just what is happening?

I was flustered, but what else could I do? There was no way out for me, and all I could do was just observe.

BOOOM—!

A distant building disintegrated, and from within its ruins emerged a particular figure.

Our eyes met, and I instantly sensed an overwhelming weight pressing down on my body, stifling me.

"I... finally found you!"

A screeching voice reverberated through the air and the sky turned a scarlet color.

The pressure that bore down on me increased, and she soon appeared before my very eyes.

She was... breathtaking.

More so than anyone I'd ever seen in my life, making me further question the validity of what I was seeing.

Adorned with flowing, fiery red locks cascading down her back, her hair danced in the sunlight, displaying hues of crimson, copper, and gold, as if flames had been artfully woven into the fibers of her hair.

But it was her eyes that truly caught my attention. Gleaming like golden orbs, they possess a depth and brilliance that seemed to reflect the distant sun.

'Just what is happening? ...and why is she looking at me like that?'

She seemed eerily familiar, yet at the same time wasn't. I more or less knew that I had seen her before, but I couldn't quite picture when.

"Is that all you have to say to me?"

Her gaze contained a little something. I couldn't quite understand what it was... perhaps longing? Disappointment? I wasn't too sure.

"H—"

My mouth had just parted open when all of a sudden, the sky which had previously dyed red, turned a purplish hue, and lightning began to crackle down from the sky.

Cracka! Cracka!

It tore at everything beneath, destroying the buildings and infrastructures with an unstoppable might.

In a matter of moments, the clouds ruptured, unveiling the silhouette of a woman. Her vibrant purple hair swayed gracefully through the expanse of the sky, while her piercing gaze, brimming with an overwhelming sense of animosity, fixated upon me.

Cracka! Cracka!

The sky continued to be ravaged by relentless lightning, intensifying the pressure that oppressed every inch of my being. The force was so formidable that my legs nearly buckled beneath me.

Yet, inexplicably, the individual I was presently "possessing" displayed unwavering stubbornness. My bones cracked, and I was having a hard time breathing under the extreme pressure.

Yet.

As if what I was experiencing meant nothing.

I remained standing where I was.

"So... you're finally here too."

His voice carried through the air, reaching the woman with lustrous, purple hair suspended in mid-air.

The lightning surrounding her crackled with increased intensity, while her gaze seethed with amplified hatred. However, she remained immobile, as if she couldn't move at all.

That was when I felt my lips curl, and the world underwent another change.

From Red to Purple... to Black.

Abruptly, darkness engulfed my sight, causing the distant city to vanish entirely. The sky dissipated, and everything in my surroundings vanished, leaving only the two women ahead of me.

Emerging from the depths of the inky abyss, a figure took shape in the distance. Her eyes, a vivid shade of crimson, radiated with an intense luminosity that pierced through the darkness, unveiling a cascade of snowy white hair flowing down her shoulders.

She too...

Looked at me with nothing but hatred.

Ah... I get it now.

Her appearance was what it took to make me understand.

Understand why they felt so familiar to me before.

'They're the same girls from the game that my brother showed me before.'

Just before my death. There was one game my brother continued to talk about. 'Rise of the Three Calamities.'

I didn't know much about the game as I never got the chance to play it, but it was something my brother was enthusiastic about.

He wouldn't stop talking about it...

The pieces of the puzzle fell into place as soon as all three appeared before me, triggering a recollection of the game's cover. Although I had only glimpsed it briefly without giving it much thought, it took me a moment to jog my memory.

But now, I was certain.

The three women who stood in front of me... glaring at me with such hatred that made my heart palpitate, were the same Three Calamities that belonged to the game my brother showed me just before my death.

Or what I thought was my death. Was I still dead? I wasn't too sure anymore.

They were most likely the older version of the girls on the background of the cover.

Contrary to their youthful portrayal on the cover, the women before me appeared considerably older.

Their gazes deviated greatly from the playful depiction on the cover, radiating an unrelenting aura of bloodlust that seemed to want to eat me alive.

"How long has it been since we've last been together?"

My mouth parted. This time, I could hear the voice more clearly. It sounded oddly calm despite the situation he was in.

None of the girls spoke. They just stared at me with the same expressions on their faces.

My lips curled further.

"I like those expressions."

My hand reached forward all of a sudden and a black chalice materialized, seemingly out of thin air, landing securely in my grasp. Enclosed within its confines, a peculiar black liquid resided.

Rumble—! Rumble—!

The appearance of the chalice seemed to have triggered something as the world suddenly started to quake fiercely.

The girls' expressions changed dramatically and the pressure that bore on me intensified.

Yet, despite it all. 'I' remained where I was.

"S-stop!"

"Fuck, stop this bastard!"

Strings of curses flew my way, but the only response was a slight raise of the cup.

"Nooo!"

As the chalice approached my lips, a fleeting moment allowed me to steal a glance at my own visage, mirrored within the depths of the dark liquid residing inside.

Handsome.

Was all I could think of as I stared at the man reflected within the liquid of the chalice.

'Is this me?'

There was an air of confidence and allure that emanated from him that perfectly matched the disposition he displayed.

His intense, hazel eyes held a mesmerizing depth, shimmering under the blackness of the liquid, matching his lustrous black hair. The strong, chiseled features of his face were accentuated by a well-defined jawline and a perfectly proportioned nose.

Never in my life had I ever seen anyone this handsome.

'Ha, I really must be dead...'

Rumble—! Rumble—!

The world around me seemed to completely crumble. Before I knew it, the three girls were already upon me. Coming from all sides.

Their power sent shivers down my spine.

But despite it all. 'I' remained where I was, feeling a slight curl at the end of my lips as the chalice drew to my mouth and I took a sip.

'It's bitter.'

Pfttt—!

At that very moment, as the initial sip of liquid touched my lips, a searing agony tore through me.

I felt something drip from the side of my mouth as my head slowly lowered. It was there that I caught a glimpse of a large sword.

It passed right through my chest.

Drip... Drip...

Red stained the top of the sword as it dripped from the corner of my mouth.

Slowly, my head turned, and it was there that I caught a glimpse of two dull grey eyes staring back at me.

"Right. I forgot about you."

The words came flawlessly out of my mouth. As if nothing had happened. But I knew. I knew better than anyone that he was merely on his last straw.

Yet.

I remained standing. Proudly. In front of everyone.

Gulp—!

And with a gulp, the world around me turned dark.

The next moment I woke up, I found a large screen floating before my very eyes.

— ●[Julien D. Evenus]● —

Level :17 [Tier 1 Magician]

Exp : [0%—[16%]—————100%]

Profession : Magician

└ Type : Elemental [Curse]

└ Type : Mind [Emotive]

Spells :

└ Beginner type spell [Emotive] : Anger

└ Beginner type spell [Emotive] : Sadness

└ Beginner type spell [Emotive] : Fear

└ Beginner type spell [Emotive] : Happiness

└ Beginner type spell [Emotive] : Disgust

└ Beginner type spell [Emotive] : Surprise

└ Beginner type spell [Curse] : Chains of Alakantria

└ Beginner type spell [Curse] : Hands of Malady

Skills :

[Innate] - Foresight

— ●[Julien D. Evenus]● —

Chapter 3: Julien D. Evenus [2]

'It hurts...!'

The vision shattered, leaving behind a raw, unrelenting pain that refused to leave. It felt as if someone had punched at my chest over and over again.

No...

It felt more like someone had stabbed right through my chest.

"Ukhh!"

A light groan escaped my lips as I tried to move my body.

'...Wait?'

My eyes flared open and light immediately entered my sight.

"I'm... alive?"

My voice came out hoarse.

But without a doubt, it was my voice. Albeit unfamiliar.

As my eyes absorbed the light, the world around me seemed hazy. I swallowed my saliva.

"This..."

— ●[Julien D. Evenus]● —

Level :17 [Tier 1 Magician]

Exp : [0%—[16%]—————100%] fre(e)

Profession : Magician

└ Type : Elemental [Curse]

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Spells :

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└ Beginner type spell [Emotive] : Disgust

└ Beginner type spell [Emotive] : Surprise

└ Beginner type spell [Curse] : Chains of Alakantria

↳ Beginner type spell [Curse] : Hands of malady

Skills :

[Innate] - Foresight

— ●[Julien D. Evenus]● —

Something floated in front of me. I only caught a small glimpse of it. By the time I blinked, it was gone.

"Ukh."

My head continued to throb.

How am I still alive...?

It didn't make sense.

The last memories I could recall were the last moments before my passing.

The exchange with my brother, the lingering scent in the room, and the bittersweet, yet smoky taste of the whisky coming down my throat.

"How is this possible...?"

As my vision cleared up, I tried to make out my surroundings.

It was an unfamiliar setting.

Nothing like I'd ever seen before.

My initial focus was drawn to the large desk right before me. It loomed large, dominating the space with its gleaming, well-polished wooden top.

Strangely, there appeared to be nothing resting atop the desk except for a vintage, antique night lamp, which emitted a soft, subdued glow, casting an eerie light across the room.

Clank—!

"...!"

A sudden noise jolted me from behind, and my body tensed. The back of my hair stood on end, and I flicked my head to look behind me.

Expecting the worst, my legs tensed as I readied to move out of my spot, but...

"...No one?"

I frowned.

There was nothing behind me except for a tall wooden bookshelf, adorned with a diverse array of books in various sizes and colors. Beneath it was a small book that seemed to have fallen to the ground.

It must've been the source of the noise.

"Looks like I—Ukh...!"

A sudden pain jolted me out of my thoughts. It pounded fiercely at my chest, and whatever words I was about to utter stopped.

"Akkh...!"

The pain was intense.

More than anything I had ever felt before. Every part of me shook, and my muscles started to spasm.

"Ha... Akh...! What the...!"

It was at that moment that I at last laid eyes on the sword jutting out from within my chest.

My entire body tensed as I felt every inch of my mind freeze at the sight that bore before my very eyes.

"H... how?!"

As if the scene from before replayed in my mind a sword appeared. It slowly clawed its way up from my back and into my body.

Horrified, I could only watch as the sword drew deeper into my body and pierced right through my chest.

I wanted to scream. Cling to something. Run.

But...

My body was frozen. I could only watch as the sword pierced through me, and pain invaded every inch of my body.

Blood trickled down my pristine white shirt, delicately drawing webs on my forearm before staining the wooden floor beneath, forming a muted puddle that gradually spread.

Drip. Drip.

Like the repetitive tick of a clock, the blood persistently trickled down to the ground.

The sight turned my stomach, and I could feel the color draining from my face.

It was the first time I had ever witnessed something so gruesome.

"Haa... aha..."

My breath started to feel heavy and my vision started to blur once more.

But before I knew it, the pain stopped. I didn't know when. I had long lost track of time.

I extended my hand towards my back, where I could feel the hilt of the sword.

My fingers brushed against the soft leather grip that encased it, and for a moment, I contemplated pulling the sword out. But then, slowly, I withdrew my hand.

Despite the pain and the situation, I remained rational.

Yanking the blade from my chest would probably kill me. I knew that much.

"H-haa..."

My chest trembled as I took another break. As if I had swallowed lava, my chest burned with each breath.

Drip. Drip.

And blood continued to drip down from my chest.

When I finally found my voice again, I managed a soft mumble,

"Is... this what hell feels like?"

I wanted to laugh then and there.

Because.

"It feels like shit."

But pain. I was used to pain. Every part of me hurt, but... compared to what I had been through the past few years, it was manageable.

I could take this much.

Sizzle~!

I believed it was over, but suddenly, a faint sizzling sound caught my attention. At that moment, a searing pain shot through my right forearm.

The pain was just as unbearable as the pain from before. It was entirely focused on my forearm.

But.

"..."

I kept my mouth shut and stared at my forearm.

Pain I could deal with.

It wasn't anything new.

What grabbed my attention was the faint glow that formed on my forearm. On the spot where the pain was radiating.

Gradually, my eyebrows furrowed, and the glow on my forearm subsided.

"...A tattoo?"

A four-leaved clover was deeply etched on my forearm.

It looked like a cheap tattoo. It was all in black, and besides the soft glow that was slowly subsiding, there seemed nothing special about it.

The more I stared at it the more I felt like there was nothing special to it.

Uh...?

That was until all four leaves lit up with a strange white glow.

Stunned, I felt my eyes widen, and just before I could do anything, the world around me froze. I lost control of myself. I could no longer move, and everything around me gradually lost its color.

From the pool of blood beneath me, as though time were unwinding itself, the blood began to defy gravity, trickling upward and returning into my body.

"...Uh."

Yet again, I was shocked. But I could do nothing.

I was stuck in place.

All I could do was watch as time seemed to reverse.

The elaborate blood patterns woven on my forearm began to shift and retract, seamlessly returning to my chest. Simultaneously, the sword that had penetrated my chest initiated a similar backward motion, gradually withdrawing from my chest.

I struggled to come to terms with what I was seeing and all sorts of thoughts flashed my mind, but...

Clank—!

They all shattered when I heard the clanking sound of the sword behind me.

"Haaa... Haaa..."

The world regained its color, and I felt my breath again.

"What...?"

Everything around me was back to normal. From the book that fell from the bookshelf to the floor which was no longer stained in blood.

I remained seated where I was. Confused and dazed. It took me a moment to recover my bearings, and when I did, the first thing I did was stare at the sword that was lying on the floor.

There was something about it that felt unsettling to me.

It was as if there was a certain connection that linked between it and me. One that I couldn't explain.

Just as I was about to move to pick it up...

Clank—!

The door to the room opened.

"Young master."

A cold and even voice echoed within the confines of the room. It was a familiar voice. One which I vaguely remembered hearing before.

When I turned my head, my hair stood on end.

What...

Two dull gray eyes stared back at me.

For a moment, my thoughts stopped. Why is he here? Who is he...? And where am I?

The man from the vision.

The man from the game.

And the man who killed me in the vision.

"They've called your name. It's your turn to take the test."

Why was he standing before me?

And why did it feel so real?

"Ah."

I've finally lost it, haven't I?

I wanted to laugh but found myself unable to.

"Young master?"

As if my actions seemed weird, he tilted his head.

"Are you okay...? Your face looks a little pale."

He took a step to approach me but I raised my hand to stop him. Recollections of the last memory kept replaying in my mind over and over again. As if it was a tape on repeat.

I had so many questions I wanted to ask him but kept my mouth shut.

My instincts, or more like, brain, was telling me that it wasn't a good idea.

"Young master...?"

And just as my name was called out again and he was about to approach me, I helped myself up from the chair.

"Lead the way."

Chapter 4: Julien D. Evenus [3]

Lead the way... To where?

The echo of my footsteps rang in my ears as I followed the man from the vision from behind.

He seemed younger than the vision, and was it just me, or did he look pale?

Still.

Thinking back to my actions, I had acted purely out of instinct.

I knew nothing about the situation. Nor who the man in front of me was. No, not quite... I had an idea. One that I refused to believe.

However...

If there was something clear to me, it was that whoever the man in front of me was, he could kill me at a moment's notice.

One wrong move and I was dead.

"Master has asked that you manage to pass the examination. In case of failure, he is prepared to exonerate you from the family."

His cold and even tone resounded across the empty corridor as he moved ahead of me.

I remained silent throughout the entire time.

"It's important that you pass the examination. I can't stress that enough. For my sake as well."

"..."

Examination?

What examination?

I strained my ears and listened attentively. Every piece of information was vital for me.

"That said, I don't believe a situation like that will happen. You're more than capable of passing the examination. At the very least, you shouldn't be worse than the commoners who only had one year of practice."

He continued to speak along the way. As I listened to his words, my eyes couldn't help but trace toward my surroundings.

What sort of place is this?

The corridor seemed vast. Large windows lit up the corridors with purple curtains draped around them. It gave off a medieval vibe.

But there was no way, right? How could it...

"...We're here, young master."

I had no time to adjust myself to my surroundings before I found myself standing in front of a large wooden door.

My feet came to a halt and he pushed the door open to reveal a large hall where hundreds of people stood. They all lined up in an orderly manner, facing another door at the very end of the hall.

"You are...?"

A woman with short black hair and glasses approached me. She held a clipboard in her hand and scanned me up and down.

My heart grew tense at her appearance.

I thought back on her question, 'You are?' and found myself unable to answer.

I'd like to know that as well.

"..."

Even so, I kept my composure. We stood like that for a couple of seconds before her eyes fell on my chest where realization finally hit her.

"Ah, you must be from the Evenus Barony."

She glanced at her clipboard.

"Julien Dacre Evenus. I see you."

Julien Dacre Evenus?

Tapping the board, she smiled.

"Please follow me. I'll lead you to the examiners."

I secretly sighed in relief before glancing back for a brief moment. My eyes met his for a moment and he nodded. I looked away and followed the lady.

She seemed to be leading me toward the large door in the distance. I could feel the gazes of those around me as I moved. However, I paid them no mind.

Not because I didn't want to, but because I couldn't spare them the thought.

The closer I was to the door the faster my heart started to beat.

The only thing I knew was that I had to take an examination. What sort of examination, I didn't know.

My palms felt sweaty and my legs felt like lead.

Each step felt heavier than the last.

The only reason I followed along was purely because the situation forced me to.

It felt like I had to move.

But what now?

What was I supposed to do now?

"We're here. Please don't be too nervous. They won't bite."

The woman graciously opened the door, unveiling the expanse of a generously decorated room. Elegant paintings adorned the walls, flanking the space alongside pristine white pillars.

What grabbed my attention was the large wooden desk that sat in the middle of the room where four individuals sat. In front of them was a boy with blonde hair and blue eyes. He wore a strange uniform and stood upright in front of the four individuals.

I felt a terrifying pressure coming from the four of them, and amongst them, a woman with long flowing black hair grabbed my attention.

She seemed the center of the four people, not just because of her looks, but because of the aura she gave off.

She had something beyond her beauty... Something I couldn't quite explain.

Just what sort of...?

"You must be Julien."

Her lips curled slightly as she glanced at the papers before her. Looking away, she pointed ahead.

"You must be here for the examination. Please make your way toward the center."

"..."

I had no choice but to follow along.

It only became more evident to me that there was something wrong with the people in front of me when I closed in on them. I couldn't quite describe it... but just standing close to them felt extremely pressuring.

As if boulders were being pressed against my back.

Even so, I held onto my composure and kept my face firm.

But that only lasted a second before I felt my right forearm sting. What's going on? When I looked down, I realized that one of the four leaves from the tattoo had lit up.

Why was it...

As if bewitched, my body moved on its own and my finger hovered over it. I was surprised by the sudden development, but before I could snap out of it, my finger went down.

And.

I pressed it.

.

.

.

"...Huh?"

The world turned pitch black.

All my senses seemed to disappear. Silence pervaded over the pitch-black space with nothing in sight. It felt as if I was levitating in an endless and lonely space.

It felt suffocating.

I was stuck in place, floating in this endless darkness that seemed to stretch endlessly. My consciousness was blurry, but I was aware of everything that was happening around me.

Was everything I previously saw another vision?

Is this what death feels like?

...It felt lonely.

And cold.

'Ah.'

The sensation didn't carry on for long. All of a sudden, a current ran through my body, jolting my consciousness awake.

When I came to, I realized I could finally move my body again.

Even so.

My surroundings were still dark.

'Hello?'

I tried to speak, but my mouth refused to open.

"..."

I held onto my composure and pushed away the anxiety and fear that was creeping up on my mind. I didn't let the darkness eat away at my sanity.

Not yet.

'Hm?'

Just as I regained my composure, I spotted a bright light in the distance. A light...? It grew brighter by the second, its glow basking me in warmth.

It felt comfortable.

To the extent that I found my eyes slowly closing in relaxation.

'...Uh?'

When I opened them again, I was stunned by the sight before me and I held my breath.

'A wheel?'

Six colors, and six words.

?| Red - Anger

?| Purple - Fear

?| Blue - Sadness

?| Green - Surprise

?| Orange - Love

?| Yellow - Joy

A long red arrow pointed upward, currently resting on the color red.

Anger.

'What is this...?'

The six basic human emotions? I remember studying this back in psychology class, but why...

Trrrrr—!

"...!"

The wheel began to spin on its own.

'...What's going on?!'

The colors alternated between red, purple, blue, green, orange, and yellow... They spun and spun and spun.

A deep sense of unease held me rooted. My eyes were fixed on the red arrow that remained firm.

The wheel continued to spin, and the colors continued to alternate. Gradually, the wheel lost its momentum before finally stopping.

'Purple.'

Fear.

Now what? My palms were sweaty, and the deep sense of unease that gripped my body seemed even more prominent.

Swoosh—!

And I was right to feel that way.

All of a sudden, the ground beneath me quaked. I almost lost my footing, and just as I regained it, I was shocked to see buildings sprouting from the ground beneath.

"What...? Uh?!"

I held my mouth.

"I can speak again?"

No, not just that... I looked around me. I was surrounded by buildings. No, not quite. They seemed to be ruins. The architecture reminded me of the one from the vision, but they were covered in vines and moss.

I couldn't quite get a good grasp of it since it was dark outside. However, from the corner of my eyes, I could make out faint figures in the distance.

Shadows?

Swoosh—!

A shiver ran through me as the cold wind caressed my skin. I grew tense, feeling a sensation that was akin to the gentle touch of two fingers slowly crawling their way up my arm.

"Haa... Haa..."

I felt my breath grow heavy, and as I tried to swallow, I found myself unable to. Something had gripped my throat. Something imaginary.

It prevented me from swallowing.

"H-hah."

My chest trembled.

'There's nothing in front of me...'

So why...?

Why did I feel so scared?

"Haa... Haaa..."

I gripped my shirt, slowly wrinkling it in the process. There, I could feel the beat of my heart.

It was fast.

Ba... Thump! Ba... Thump!

And loud.

"Ha..."

My breath followed its rhythm.

It went faster.

And faster.

faster....

"Haa... Haa.. Ha..."

I was hyperventilating.

My palms were sweaty and sweat trickled down the side of my face.

Fear had gripped me.

It was slowly consuming me.

I could feel it.

But why?

'...I need to run. Get away from here.'

My legs started to move. All thoughts disappeared and I just ran. Faster. And faster. And faster...

Soon, I found myself sprinting forward. I ran as if my life depended on it. I didn't know why I was acting like this, but if there was something I knew it was that I needed to run.

Get as far away as possible.

"Ukh..!"

I stumbled several times, scraping my knees in the process, but each time, I'd pick myself back up again and continue to run. I ignored the burning sensation that came with each breath that I took.

The only thought I had in my mind was that I needed to run.

I needed to get away from the shadows.

"Haaa... Haaa.... Haaa..."

I'd look back from time to time, catching sight of them each time. The distance between us remained constant. Are they not running out of breath as well? ...I can't keep this up for long.

The pain that gripped my lungs intensified. It was as if I was breathing fire.

But I had to hold on.

Not yet.

Not...

Bang—!

My face came smashing against a hard surface.

"Uakh...!"

Ignoring the pain, I looked up.

"No, I...."

A shadow appeared. Its appearance remained a mystery to me. It wobbled in front of me, staring down at me as if I were some sort of prey.

"Ah... Don't..."

The sense of fear that gripped me intensified.

It was almost suffocating.

"I... I..."

The words refused to leave my mouth.

And then.

"Uekh!"

The shadow reached out for my throat, gripping it tightly. My eyes bulged, and I felt my body grow limp.

Ah, no... I'm going to die. I'm going to die. I'll die...!

The feeling of helplessness under its grip, the steady thump of my heart, the weakness, and the gripping fear—all of it was etched deeply into my mind during those last moments.

What I was experiencing...

It was real.

And then.

Cr Crack—!

I felt my neck snap and the world turned dark again.

Only for a brightness to suddenly engulf me.

"Examinee? Examinee?"

"Ah...?"

I slowly raised my head. Four figures sat not far from where I was standing. They all stared at me with frowns while a young man with blonde hair stood not far from me.

'Isn't this...?'

Slowly lowering my head, I stared at my right forearm where the tattoo was. It no longer hurt, and it wasn't glowing anymore.

But.

My arm was trembling.

The emotions I felt before... They continued to linger over me. I couldn't get rid of the sensation. It felt suffocating.

I needed an outlet.

An outlet to let everything out.

"Examinee? Is everything alright? We don't have all day."

One of the people seated in front of me, a bulky man with a red beard raised his eyebrow, pointing at the young man in front of me.

"...Show us what you've got."

"Ah."

My feet moved on their own.

As if I had finally found what I needed, I moved toward the young man in front of me. He was staring back at me with a frown. As if he was trying to say, 'What is he doing?'

But I didn't care.

I paid him no mind and continued forward.

Before I knew it, I was standing before him. Just as his mouth opened to say something, my hands reached out for his head, grasping both sides solidly. My hands were still shaking but I kept a firm grip on his head.

His expression changed.

"You, what are you...!"

But I didn't care.

Feeling the sides of his face, my mouth parted open as I softly mumbled,

"Fear."

My mind blanked from then on.

I lost myself in the moment.

When I came to, I was standing in the same spot I was before. My hands were no longer shaking, and my mind seemed calmer.

Or so I thought.

"H-help...! Haa.. Haa...!"

When I looked down, I was stunned to see the young man from before on the ground. His face was pale, and he held his head with both hands while mumbling things like, 'Ah... I'm sorry...! Ah...'

As our eyes met, his expression distorted and his pupils dilated.

"Ahhh...! N-no...!"

He hastily moved back.

What is going on...

"Ah."

A small screen appeared in front of me.

That was when I understood.

?| Lvl 1. [Fear] EXP + 10%

I did this.

Chapter 5: Julien D. Evenus [4]

Expectations were minimal before his entrance.

Behind their desk, the four examiners conversed with each other, reviewing the files of the examinees.

"The overall talent level is lower than last year. It's rather disappointing if I'm being honest. At this rate, the other institutes within the empire will catch up to us."

The man with the red beard mumbled—Herman Chambers, a High-Wizard, and a man known for his discernible eye for talent. As such, he was put in a position of recruitment for the upcoming year at the Haven Institute.

Just by visualizing the flow of mana coming from an examinee's body, he could more or less tell if they were talented or not.

From the thickness, and its purity... He'd be able to discern the overall level of the examinee before they even performed.

"Please bring the next examinee."

Compared to last year, the talents were severely lacking.

But.

"We've found a couple of little monsters, haven't we?"

There were a few exceptions.

And those few exceptions were far above the norm.

"...I guess you're right."

Herman crossed his arms and leaned back on the chair. From the corner of his eyes, he glanced at the woman sitting beside him.

She adorned herself in formal attire, exuding a near-perfect aura. Her captivating presence left a profound impact on those around her. The flawless combination of appearance and clothing made her stand out from the rest.

Delilah V. Rosemberg.

There were no imperfections or voids in her, to the extent that she appeared to embody perfection itself.

Elegance seamlessly permeated her every action, word, and facial expression, defining her entire being.

She was an unreachable being to many.

Apprentice at 18.

Master-Mage at 19.

High-Wizard at 21.

Arch-Wizard at 24.

And one of the Empire's Seven Monarchs at 27.

Many foresaw her as the future of the Empire, destined to fill a position that had remained vacant for centuries—the most formidable mage among them all.

The Zenith.

'How can someone like her work here...?'

Such a question stumped many, Herman included, but whenever someone asked, all she'd return was an empty smile.

She wasn't a woman of many emotions, but when she did show emotions...

One'd feel chills.

"...Our next examinee should be from a Barony."

Her crisp and clean tone rang in the room. It lacked substance and yet seemed to pressure at the same time.

"Julien Dacre Evenus."

She mumbled a name, almost chewing on it as her eyes lingered over the document in front of her.

"Talent. Elemental and... Emotive."

"Emotive?"

Herman raised his brow and picked up the document in front of him. *'Indeed, he has talent in the emotive field...'* His expectations diminished.

It wasn't that he hated Emotive Mages, or looked down on them.

But.

"It's tough."

Muttering with crossed arms and a dismissive shake of her head, Cathrine Riley Graham, a middle-aged woman with long flowing brown hair, expressed her thoughts.

"An emotive Mage deals with the manipulation of emotion. It's not a rare talent, but..."

Pursing her lips, she halted mid-sentence, allowing for another voice to complete the sentence for her.

"...One might lose themselves if they immerse themselves too much into the study of emotions."

"That's right."

The Emotive field was a dangerous field. To study emotions... Understand them. One had to immerse themselves in them.

Immerse yourself too much... and you might end up losing sight of yourself.

"I've seen my fair share of talented ones lose their minds trying to further their path. It's unfortunate. Really unfortunate..."

"Well, at least he's talented in the Elemental field. Curse Magic? Not a bad field."

There were no bad elements.

Only bad people.

Closely examining the paper in front of him, the door to the room opened. A young man in his late teens entered.

"You must be Julien."

Delilah spoke, her crisp and clean voice ringing throughout the room.

His appearance grabbed the attention of all present.

'He's handsome, but... disappointing.'

Herman's first impression of Julien was one of disappointment.

'His mana flow is irregular. The density is light and he doesn't seem to have control over it.'

Was he really a noble? As if he wasn't the only one who thought this, Catherine mumbled,

"Seems like this one is a bit of a bust. Disappointing considering that he's a noble."

Herbert Newberman, sitting on Herman's right, shared similar thoughts with her.

"His mana flow is all over the place. At first glance, he doesn't seem to know how to properly utilize mana. What a rough batch..."

In the mind of the examiners, Julien seemed to have come in vain. His performance was going to be one that they'd need to erase from their minds.

But if there was one thing to take note of, it was his demeanor.

The way he carried himself... His expressionless face, and calm even steps...

It seemed to exude boundless confidence.

An overconfident idiot?

'Well, whatever. Let's get this over with. I've seen worse.'

Herman nudged the young man that stood in front of them.

"Jason, go test him."

He was a first-year, or more like second-year now... cadet. He wasn't exactly the most talented cadet, but to test new examinees he was good enough.

"Yes, sir."

Jason began to move, but just as he had taken a step forward, his face changed.

So did that of all the examiners.

"What is he doing?"

"...Is he checking his pulse?"

"What sort of nonsense is this?"

With a blank expression and finger pressed against his forearm, Julien stared ahead. He seemed out of it.

His face was blank.

Like that of an empty sheet of paper.

"What is this guy doing...?"

"Examinee? Examinee?"

Herman called out for him several times until he snapped out of it.

"Ah...?"

"Examinee? Is everything alright? We don't have all day."

He irritably pointed at Jason.

"...Show as what you've got."

Just as Herman pointed at Jason, a sudden change occurred with Julien. His pupils dilated. His face paled, and his arms began to tremble.

His sudden change took everyone aback.

Julien's eyes trembled, darting around hastily with an air of desperation. He seemed to transform all of a sudden, a complete difference from how he previously was.

His shoulders shrunk and his breathing quickened.

"Haa... Haaa... Haaa..."

Everyone could feel the rhythm of his breath.

It was getting faster with each breath.

He seemed to be the embodiment of a certain emotion.

What emotion...?

Ah.

It soon became clear to everyone.

'Fear.'

He had started to embody fear.

Herman felt a chill run down his body.

Not just him, but the other examiners too.

"You, what are you...!"

Julien walked up to Jason. Perhaps taken aback by the situation, he wasn't able to react on time. Julien's hands came pressing against his skull, squeezing almost.

And,

"Ahhhhhh...!!!!"

A scream shook the room.

It pierced through it and reverberated loudly in the ears of everyone present.

Suddenly, everyone in the room was motionless, not just Herman, Herbert, and Catherine, but Delilah too.

The impact of Julien's action was just that powerful.

With one single action, he left everyone in the room frozen.

"Ah...! No! Ahhhhh...! I don't want to die, no!!!"

It was intense, and one could vividly feel the fear that Jason was feeling.

Goosebumps.

Herman felt goosebumps.

"Ahhh...!"

Thump!

Jason fell liplessly to the floor.

Shaking uncontrollably, he clutched his head while writhing on the floor. Saliva spilled from his mouth.

"H...Help...!"

Despite his cries, none of the examiners moved.

All eyes were fixed on the young man that stood before them.

What was in front of them was the embodiment of someone who threaded a path hardly anyone took.

Recalling, Herman mumbled out loud,

"For one to understand an emotion one must experience it."

To display such fear, one must experience it. Everyone in the room was well-versed and knew this much.

They had traveled all over the continent and met many Emotive Mages. From there, they learned of the harshness that one who threads such a path must endure.

To experience fear, one must relentlessly chase after it.

Many failed in their paths, dying in the middle of training, or simply not being able to understand the emotion.

And yet,

"What sort of gruesome training did he undergo to display such emotion?"

Julien was able to do what many couldn't. He was far from perfection, but to be able to do this at such an age...

'Just how harsh has he been on himself?'

Herman's evaluation of Julien underwent a drastic change.

'Not only is he able to perfectly portray fear, but he also seems to have mastered the state of immersion.'

A state many Emotive Mages chased after. A state where one could separate reality and immersion.

Was that why he checked his pulse beforehand?

To check his condition before immersion?

'A monster.'

He was a total monster.

"If I may ask..."

Catherine was the first to truly break the silence that took hold of the room, briefly glancing at the trembling Jason on the ground before settling her gaze over to Julien.

"What sort of training did you do to be able to do this? And is it only limited to fear?"

"..."

Her question was met with silence as Julien stood still.

He then lowered his head and shook his head.

"Ah."

'Was it so bad that he doesn't want to talk about it?'

The judges felt their expressions harden.

And finally, Delilah, who had been quiet the entire time, with her gaze seemingly never detaching from Juline, opened her mouth to speak,

"You're dismissed. We'll let you know your results after we've evaluated all the examinees."

Julien nodded his head and calmly walked out of the room. It was as if he hadn't done anything worth praising over.

When he left, Herman and the others looked at her.

"Why did you let him go like that? We were still busy ex—"

"Take a look at the floor."

"Ah."

And that was when everyone finally realized.

"Ah...! Pl-please help me... Ah..."

"He's in no state to continue with the examination. Tell someone to replace him and send him to the infirmary. For now, we'll take a break."

"But...!"

"I know what you want to say."

Delilah raised her hand to stop the other examiners from speaking.

"You want to know more about him, right?"

When Herman and the others nodded, Delilah turned to look at the door where Julien had left.

Her gaze told a thousand words.

Herman could tell.

Like the rest of them, her interest had been piqued.

Without a doubt, she wanted to know what everyone in the room wanted to know.

A question none of them dared to ask.

To what extent had he immersed himself?

Everything was a blur to me.

From the moment I poured out everything to what unfolded next, my mind felt shrouded in a perpetual fog.

I couldn't think straight.

"What sort of training did you do to be able to do this? And is it only limited to fear?"

My sole focus was getting out of here.

I could feel it from deep within me. I still hadn't let it all out. It was lingering within my mind, slowly creeping its way up.

'I need to leave...'

So, then,

"You're dismissed. We'll let you know your results after we've evaluated all the examinees."

When the chance presented itself, I spared no time and left. Coming out, I felt the stares of everyone in the hall fall on me, but yet again, I could pay them no mind.

'I need to find somewhere safe... A bathroom, or room. I can't...!'

My steps faltered momentarily. I felt something rising from my stomach. Swallowing back, I forced myself forward.

"Move."

I pushed everyone in front of me away and continued forward.

"Hey...!"

I didn't care about their protests.

A bathroom... A room... Something...

I continued to walk. I didn't care to look where I was. I only stopped when I found a room. Glancing around, I entered.

It was a small room.

"Haa... Haa..."

And most importantly.

Empty.

"Blergh...!"

The contents I so desperately held back came out all at once. My vision fogged, and I hunched over.

My stomach clenched with pain as I could feel the sweat on my forehead.

"Ha-h..."

I clenched my shirt, feeling the beat of my heart in the process.

It was fast.

Really fast...

I took deep breaths to calm myself down.

To calm my beating heart, but...

It wouldn't stop.

"Ah... Ah...!"

The fear that had gripped me moments before had come back to haunt me again.

I couldn't stop shaking.

It was as if something had possessed me.

"Akh...!"

I could feel it.

Clearer than ever.

I...

Was being consumed.

This chapter is updated by