

Extras 271

Chapter 271 Prelude To The Raid [Pt 1]

"Well done, everyone."

The man of darkness himself, Ralyks, clapped as he gazed upon the group of nine who stood before him.

No one could see what was hidden underneath his dark mask, but based on the tone of his voice, and his gesture, it was clear he was pleased.

The expanse above showed a bright sun that sharply contrasted with his black aesthetic, and the ground around him had been shattered—destroyed by the just-concluded battle.

"You exceeded my expectations." Ralyks nodded in approval as he formally ended the round.

The Otherworlders—or rather, students under Ralyks—had just passed the final phase of their test with the Dark Adventurer.

This was something they had been undertaking for the past few days, so the smiles and expressions of relief that pervaded their faces was understandable.

Everyone was exhausted, but they couldn't help but laugh energetically as they collapsed on the ground in satisfaction.

They really did it! fre(e)webno(v)el

"You've defeated the last of my Elemental Summon. I can see you're now ready for the next step."

The Otherworlders all looked at Ralyks from wherever they sat on the devastated ground.

They knew what was to come.

"Tomorrow... we will venture into the Royal Dungeon." He declared.

The equipment that they needed was finally ready. Their practice had paid off, and they were deemed prepared enough for the rigors of the Dungeon Raid.

Everything had been set in motion.

"Any questions?" Ralyks asked, both hands behind him as he did so.

No matter the situation, this man always maintained an air of elegance and prestige.

... Also power.

"I have one. How long will we be spending for the Raid in total?"

The person who asked this question was Justin, and he had a goofy smile on—as usual.

His question was serious, nonetheless, and the teenagers around him seemed to resonate with it with their curious eyes.

Ralyks shrugged the moment he heard it.

"I previously thought it would take two months or more, but..." He narrowed his eyes as he looked at the bunch in front of him.

"Right now, one month should be fine."

If they spent an average of ten hours a day in the Dungeon, they were definitely going to finish things within a month.

"You've all grown exponentially in the past couple of days."

Some depicted more growth, but each individual had their respective kinds of progress.

It was a beautiful thing to see.

The innocent and helpless teenagers that came out of that Summoning Circle were not the same as the ones who now sat before Ralyks.

They had all grown.

[Moments Later]

"What did you think about the final training? Was it difficult?"

"Man... I'm so exhausted!"

"Gotta get back inside to snack on something real quick!"

"Eww! Dude, take a shower first!"

Once Ralyks left the bunch of students by teleporting away, everyone instantly began to talk about random things.

They were still teenagers, plus Ralyks had told them to take the rest of the day off and relax, so being this loose and carefree was only natural.

As one would expect, each person had their preferred group:

Belle, Justin, Eric, and Clark hung out together very often.

Adonis, Billy, and Trisha often trained together, or just walked together.

Then finally, Rey and Alicia were a clique of their own.

The two were practically inseparable.

Even now, as they all rose from where they sat and decided what to do after, the both of them were discussing among themselves.

If the first group could be said to be "the boys"—with Belle being the center of attention around them—and the second group was essentially the "hardcore training club," then the final group was essentially the "nerd group."

Rey and Alicia were known to frequent the library pretty much every day.

A few students—usually naughty ones like Justin—postulated that they were definitely doing something more than 'reading books' there.

However, with no proof, nothing he said could stick.

Even when he decided to spy on them, he couldn't get his hands on the evidence he desired.

In the end, he was forced to leave due to how boring and eerily quiet the place was.

Rather than discouraging him, the experience only solidified his beliefs that Rey and Alicia were definitely doing something extra for spending so long in the library.

"They can fool everyone, but not me!" He often declared aloud, though that was always followed-up by some kind of slap on his back by the rest of his friends.

Inevitably, this led to a rumor about Rey and Alicia in the class.

The match-up was surprising—considering how incredibly beautiful and powerful Alicia was, and how average Rey appeared—but no one could deny their connection.

Some called it mere friendship.

Others referred to their relationship as one-sided, with Alicia essentially controlling Rey.

While others made no comments on the issue.

People had their various perspectives on the issue, but it wasn't like they really dwelled on it.

Not with the Dungeon Raid starting the coming day.

Right now, everyone just wanted to return to their rooms, wash up, and spend their time doing whatever they wanted for the time being.

Reading, eating, sleeping, or basically anything else that didn't involve training.

Even Billy and Trisha—the training junkies of the class—didn't look like they were up to that for the day.

As for Adonis, he currently stood in front of everyone as they slowly rose to their feet in order to leave the training field.

"Everyone, may I have your attention?"

As one would expect, everyone turned in his direction that very instant.

He had a smile on his face, the kind that made him look like a god sculpted into the form of a man.

It captivated everyone and drew them in.

"I want to express my thanks and gratitude to all of you here! Despite the tough training, none of you quit or gave up. You kept up the hard work, and we've finally made it this far as a result."

Unlike the initial number of twenty-nine, who were functionally a disorderly bunch, this small squad of nine members was far more coherent.

It showed the benefit of quality over quantity.

"I want to congratulate all of you, and wish you safety, regarding tomorrow."

Adonis' white teeth were displayed for all to see, and he gave his genuine heroic smile so all his classmates could join him in his celebration.

And they did.

Every single one of the eight that stood opposite Adonis gave their versions of smiles.

All of them were beyond excited.

"I wish you all good luck on the Dungeon Raid!"

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Chapter 272 Prelude To The Raid [Pt 2]

Within the inner sanctum of the Royal Library, two students were making a bit of noise.

"Rey, stop!"

"Why? You like it, don't you?"

Their voices and pleasant sounds echoed within the vast world of books and knowledge.

The Library was meant to be a world of silence and discipline, but the sounds that these two teenagers were making wasn't at all akin to that.

There was no prestige in their words; no hush accompanying their tone.

They laughed and giggled—forbidden activities within the four walls of the sacred hall.

The only reason they got away with it was because no one else was present in the Library.

It was just them.

"Stop! I'm serious, Rey!" Alicia's face was beet red as her body trembled.

She swiftly covered her flushed face with her hands, but that only caused amusement for the boy who was next to her.

"You're saying that, but you don't really mean it, Alicia..." He made a wide grin as he advanced closer.

A somewhat sadistic smile played on his face as he playfully spoke.

"Your body is honest, Alicia. You can't deny it!"

Indeed! Despite telling Rey to stop, the girl couldn't deny that she was enjoying every fraction of this moment.

After all...

"Rey, please transform back!"

... Rey was currently partially transformed as a rabbit—thanks to his special ability.

"Pfft! It's too... it's too funny! Hahahaha!"

His two legs were entirely similar to that of her Familiar, and they looked incredibly weird being attached to his human torso.

His hands were also human, so one could only imagine how odd he looked with such a strange appearance.

Ah, yes... he also had bunny ears.

"Hehehe! I bet Snow thinks of me as one of her own." Rey turned to the white rabbit who sat on Alicia's desk.

The Familiar looked at Rey for only a few seconds before snickering in its rabbit sound. It rolled over and laughed to its heart content, most likely making fun of Rey in its animal language. "I guess even your rabbit thinks I'm a joke." Rey chuckled as he hopped forward with his rabbit legs. Of course, he fell flat on the ground thanks to having no proper balance. "O-ow...."

"Pfft! Kwiiii... kuwiiii!" The rabbit laughed even more, uttering some unintelligible words. "Hey, Snow! Be nice!" Alicia said to the rabbit in disapproval, quickly turning to Rey and sighing. "I warned you, Rey! Serves you right for hitting your face on the ground."

Even though Alicia folded her arms and closed her eyes as she uttered those words, there was no denying that she really cared. The red hues on her cheeks, and the fact that she slyly opened her eyes and looked at him in concern just a second later, proved how much she cared. "Are you... fine, though?" She eventually had no choice but to murmur. Rey slowly rose to his feet—human feet now, since he already changed them back upon his unexpected impact—and nodded his head. "Yep! Just a bit sore on my head..." He stretched his body as he rose upright. "This guy... well, I guess that's what you get for making me laugh too hard."

Alicia flailed her hair and looked away from him, once again acting all disinterested. "Well, I aim to please." Rey bowed curtly, a mischievous grin appearing on his face. Both of them found themselves laughing not long after. "Kwii...?" Snow bent her head a little to the left, not really understanding the interaction between the two parties. Who could blame her? Not even the two teenagers really knew what they were doing. They were simply having fun.

"I'm glad you were able to learn more about your powers and how to properly control them." Alicia smiled at Rey as she rubbed his reddish forehead. When he fell, his head essentially hit the hard tile floor of the library. It wasn't anything serious, but Alicia insisted on taking a look at it. She even offered to heal it, but Rey said it was no big deal, and he managed to escape her care. After all, there really wasn't anything to heal. "Y-yeah... I mean, I'm a lot stronger now." Rey laughed a little awkwardly. Alicia was currently rubbing his head, and she was also very close to him.

... Too close to him.

"I noticed. The fight with the Elementals... I was surprised with how you fought."

Rey's movements were a lot more fluid than anything Alicia had ever seen him do.

In the past, he moved a little too awkwardly—almost as if he was trying too hard, or not trying at all.

But this time, he felt more natural.

And, he was a much better fighter as a result.

"I can't wait to go to the Dungeon Raid. Are you excited?" Rey smiled as he looked at Alicia's face.

She was done checking his forehead, so she backed away and he did the same.

They both returned to their seats, directly facing each other as was their habit.

They hadn't even started reading; and they probably wouldn't even need to.

There were a lot more interesting things to immerse themselves into than mere literature.

Like... talking.

"I can't believe you're so excited. I heard what happened to everyone the last time." Alicia's response was that of hesitation.

It was as if she couldn't understand the appeal of the Dungeon Raid, despite recognizing its necessity.

"Yeah. But we'll have Sir Ralyks with us. He'll protect us."

Rey's response was the stereotypical kind any classmate would give when the issue of the Dungeon's safety came up.

In the past, their trust used to be on Adonis, but now it shifted to Ralyks.

"Your expression changed when I mentioned Sir Ralyks. Do you really dislike him that much?" Rey asked.

Everyone could pretty much tell that Ralyks and Alicia didn't have the best of relationships.

Perhaps it was because Alicia always questioned everything and was usually more critical about Ralyks' unlimited authority over them.

Unlike everyone else, she had challenged some of his positions and actions.

It caused some friction between the two of them.

"I don't dislike him per se. It's just... I don't know how to put it..." Alicia murmured as she looked away.

Anytime she saw how Ralyks treated everyone—especially Rey

—so roughly, she just couldn't help but not like his methods.

So it wasn't like she disliked or even hated him. She simply didn't like him.

"And I don't think that's going to change." She sighed after explaining everything to Rey.

"Of course, I recognize how much he has helped you. He helped me too, with Snow and training. He was practically the one who rescued me as well."

In more ways than one, Alicia owed a lot to Ralyks.

Yet...

"I just can't bring myself to like him. I don't know why..."

Rey smiled at her and shrugged.

"I'm sure Ralyks understands, wherever he is. I don't think he's doing this to make us like or respect him."

The guilt on Alicia's face slowly evaporated as she heard this.

"Really...?"

"Yes. He simply wants to help us. I just feel like as long as we trust him and utilize his help to the utmost, nothing else matters."

It sounded a bit cold-hearted, but Ralyks never showed any intention of getting close with any of them.

He only expressed one thing: his desire for them to grow.

"Let's just do our best in the Raid and get stronger. That's the best way to show your thanks to him for all his help."

Both Rey and Alicia smiled at each other as they made eye contact. The former nodded at her and had a confident glint in his eyes.

It caused whatever uncertain feelings within Alicia to die out. In the end, she also nodded her head in agreement.

"Okay. I'll do my best."

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Chapter 273 Talk On The Dark Gathering [Pt 1]

Night soon arrived, and for most that meant turning to the comfort of their beds and venturing into the realm of sleep.

However, for one man, the night held a different meaning.

It was a call to shed his natural identity and don another one.

From an average nobody... to the most powerful man whose power was shrouded in mystery.

Thus, under the shade of the dark clouds and dull moon, the Dark Adventurer was born.

—The one known as Ralyks

'Looks like I can finally return to the KariBlanc Group...' Rey thought, already completely outfitted as his alter-ego.

As he stood in his room, ready to open a portal to his rendezvous point with his other allies, he mulled over a few things.

'Alicia and I really took our time talking today. I guess she really is nervous about tomorrow.'

Rey had explored every nook and cranny of the place, so there really wasn't anything to be worried about.

He already knew how strong everything was, and he had designed the perfect map that would lead them down the path of the Dungeon.

'She doesn't know that, though, so I understand her nervousness.'

Rey knew he would never put her life in any kind of danger, though.

'We still haven't talked about the incident... but I think she still has some trauma from then.'

In all fairness, he also hadn't revealed the truth about him being Ralyks as well. In a way, they had their secrets that they were hiding.

That didn't in any way diminish their friendship.

'I guess we both have our reasons for keeping secrets.'

Based on everything he had seen thus far, he could clearly say that it didn't matter whether she told him about the incident or not.

They were still good friends.

Nothing much has changed, and Rey liked it.

Even now, with the Dungeon Raid and a bunch of other things coming up, Rey felt a strange sense of calm wash over him.

'She'll be fine. They all will be.' He smiled to himself, though it was all hidden underneath his mask.

Their proficiency in both individual and team abilities over the past few days had improved drastically.

'I let my clone act as Ralyks while I operate as Rey. I can clearly see how fluid the combat flow has gotten.'

After what they did earlier in the day, he was thoroughly convinced that everyone was ready to Level Up like crazy and keep up the grind.

'I won't fall behind too...!' His grin became wider, and a swirling portal appeared in front of him.

Rey ventured in with his hands in his pockets.

'I wonder what's currently going on with the KariBlanc Group...'

Tension.

As Rey sat opposite Rebal, Asher, and Kara, he could feel the tension oozing from their bodies.

Something was definitely wrong, and the atmosphere suffered because of it.

It took a lot to scare denizens of the underworld, so Rey could only wonder what could be the reason behind the pale and downcast faces of the people before him.

Sooner or later, though... they had to speak.

"There has been a... ahem... a new development, Sir Ralyks."

Rey nodded slowly and waited for an explanation.

"We received a letter very early this morning, almost right after you left. It was from the Triumvirate, and it concerns the Dark Gathering."

Rey slightly raised his brow as soon as he heard the name. He was very confused, and once again thankful that his mask prevented anyone from noticing it.

"The Dark Gathering. Hmm..." He muttered, giving a vague sense of understanding.

'Why aren't they elaborating? Do they expect me to understand it with just that?'

A head of sweat fell from Rey's face as he waited for Rebal to keep speaking.

There was no way he would say anything inaccurate or stupid and risk embarrassing himself.

The burden was on his interlocutor.

"As you well know, this means that the Slave Union, the Obsidian Council, and the Mercenary Gang have to gather in the Allied Merchant City for a meeting. We are expected to show up as well." Rebal said with a deep sigh.

Rey didn't know how they expected him to figure that out on his own, but he simply responded with a "Hmm..." and allowed Rebal to continue.

"The venue for the Dark Gathering is the same as every year, and this isn't the first time we'll be having it, but... as you can tell, there's a lot that is suspicious about this invitation."

As soon as Rey heard that, he made a deep sigh.

There was no way he couldn't tell this much about the current situation.

"Indeed. It's most likely a trap, is it not?" Rey smiled as he spoke almost amusedly.

It was clear that Scylla and her New Order were trying to make a big move to eradicate the KariBlanc Group by using this Dark Gathering as an excuse.

"My suspicion is that they intend to take over my territory and also the Verte properties during the Dark Gathering, where we'll be too powerless to do anything." Rebal spoke with a grave tone.

"They'll also take your lives there, won't they? Tying up all loose ends."

The older man nodded at Rey's additional statement, and the expressions on both Kara and Asher's faces showed that they recognized the current situation very well.

Everything they had worked for was in danger.

'There's a lot I don't understand, though...' Rey's thoughts trailed as he looked at the bunch.

For days now, they had been going all over the United Human Alliance, securing the properties of the Verte House.

Rey had also said used that chance to check out the Slave Warehouse along the way.

'So far, all those Warehouses have been empty, and the properties were secured with much of an issue.'

Things had gone pretty smoothly—without incident at all—for the past few days.

... Almost as if Scylla's New Order was biding their time for the moment to strike.

'If that's the case, then I'm pretty sure this Dark Gathering is their endgame.'

If that was the case, then Rey knew it had to be something incredibly serious and well thought-out.

One of the reasons why he spared two Heads of Destruction was so they could report back to the Mercenary Gang—and by extension, Scylla.

Doing that would make them see the KariBlanc Group as a threat, while also ensuring they would be distracted by other factors.

'I don't know how they handled the Eastern Warehouse matter, but I suppose they should already know that there's nothing inside.'

Everything that had happened was culminating into this moment, but Rey didn't understand the fundamental reason that made the Dark Gathering so threatening.

"Can't you simply choose not to go?" He asked the people before him.

Everyone in the room already knew that Scylla and her New Order couldn't be trusted.

They were already pretty much enemies, so whether they accepted the invitation or not, terrible consequences would follow.

'So why don't they just ignore it and start preparing for their inevitable attack—?'

"I can't do that." Rebal Blanc interrupted Rey's thoughts, causing him to widen his eyes a little.

'E-eh...?'

"If I don't go... we will all die."

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Chapter 274 Talk On The Dark Gathering [Pt 2]

The Dark Gathering was a compulsory symposium that could only be initiated by a consensus by two-third of the parties involved.

In essence, of the Triumvirate's body—the Slave Union, the Mercenary Gang, and the Obsidian Council—two had to arrive at a unanimous consensus for initiation.

Also, the last party had to have at least half of the members agreeing in favor of the meeting.

Once all of these conditions had been fulfilled, all parties involved had to meet up—without any room for exception or excuses.

Refusal to participate would result in the death of the Head of the deviant group and their seed.

These were the rules of the Dark Gathering.

"Hmm...."

As Rey listened to the explanation given by Rebal, he couldn't help but feel a tight feeling in his chest.

'These guys are too hardcore!' His thoughts echoed within himself.

"Based on the rules, it's very difficult to even establish a Dark Gathering, and it has been quite a few years since the last time we met like that."

Rebal's face turned grave as he explained further—especially on how the Triumvirate enforced non conformity to the rules.

"It's a curse. Curse Magic. There's a certain Enchanted Item that grants curses, or more like binding vows, on targets based on certain conditions." He said solemnly.

The older man turned to his right and left, looking at Asher and Kara.

"The Curse passes on to the seed of the target as well, so these two aren't safe from the punishment if I disobey the rules."

Rey could understand things a lot better now.

'He really has no other choice, huh? I don't have any Skill that counteracts Curses, so I can't do anything about it.'

Even with [Appraisal], he couldn't see any signs of curses on any of them.

'Since Rebal is sure about it, though, I suppose it has to be true.' He shrugged internally

"It seems we'll have to tweak our plans a little, then. How long is it before the Dark Gathering?" Rey asked calmly.

"Four days."

'Wow! That's pretty soon. I guess they really don't want to give us any time to prepare.' His thoughts echoed as he smiled.

Despite the fact that he hadn't yet met this Scylla lady, he was sure she did all of this on purpose.

"Based on what you told me, it's safe to assume that Scylla and the Mercenary Gang were the ones who unanimously agreed to this Dark Gathering. Is that correct?"

"Yes. That is correct." Rebal responded to the question almost immediately.

"That means they need half of the Obsidian Council to agree with the proposal... correct?"

"Indeed."

Rey felt a smile tugging on his lips as he considered a somewhat malevolent proposal.

"What if I eliminate one or two of the Obsidian Councilors? That way, the Dark Gathering won't hold?"

He could see surprised expressions on the faces of the audience, but Rey didn't let that deter his line of logic.

By eliminating two Obsidian Councilors, it would remain only one on Scylla's side.

'With two on our side, we can just disagree with the whole thing.'

"Unfortunately, it doesn't work that way." Rebal sighed, bringing Rey back to reality.

'E-eh...?!'

It seemed like, despite trying his hardest so he wouldn't embarrass himself with ignorant words, he ended up doing so.

Rey remained still, though. There was no way he would ever allow his mortification to show.

"The Dark Gathering has been initiated. There's no way to reverse it. Besides, Kara hasn't been formally recognized as a Head. She's just a provisional one, so she'll have to come to the Dark Gathering and receive the approval of the rest of the Obsidian Council."

Once Rebal was done explaining, Rey realized just how cornered the KariBlanc Group really was.

'I was thinking of even controlling Fernand to disrupt the Mercenary Gang's unanimity if the situation called for it, but it seems like there's nothing that can stop the meeting.'

It was all too late.

'Besides, I'm sure the Mercenary Gang would just hang up on Fernand and eliminate him if he went against the wishes of the majority.'

Rey remembered how Ogun died just by spilling simple information.

'It must also be due to the Curse Magic. I should try to figure out what it is and how to get access...'

For now, though, there was a situation that required his attention.

'How should we deal with this Dark Gathering?'

If attending it was clearly a trap, but it was an unavoidable setup, then there was only one option for the KariBlanc Group.

"I suppose we have no choice but to attend the Dark Gathering."

The expression on Rebal's face soured as he nodded with a sigh.

"Indeed."

The hopeless expressions on the faces of Rebal, Asher, and Kara were amusing to Rey as he sat and watched them while critically mulling over the matter.

He couldn't help but widen his smile.

"It's the perfect stage to conclude everything, don't you think?"

The moment Rey said this, everyone looked at him with shock.

"Everyone will be there. At least, all the important figures." He added.

If the same rules that bound Rebal applied to everyone else, then he expected to see all the main players in the Dark Gathering.

"It'll be the perfect moment to strike them down."

Of course, he expected attacks on the KariBlanc Group especially.

'From what Vida and Conrad told me about their plans on the Underworld, they plan on launching a large-scale sweep on the Allied Merchant City. The date coincides with the day of the Dark Gathering...'

Was that a coincidence? Rey didn't think so.

'Scylla must already be aware of the sweep, which means she has a way to avoid the Royal Council's attempt to flush the Underworld out.'

As if that wasn't enough, the fact that it would be a very tasking effort, most of the manpower that would otherwise be concentrated in the capital was bound to be poured on the mission.

'That leaves the Capital vulnerable. It's the perfect chance for Scylla's New Order.'

The only reason the KariBlanc Group hadn't yet been swallowed was due to the intense security and power concentration in the Capital.

Once all of that vanished, Scylla would definitely take down the KariBlanc Group.

'So, they plan on completely eradicating the KariBlanc Group on the day of the Dark Gathering, while also wasting the time and efforts of the Royal Council's full sweep attack.'

It was a smart move, and Rey found himself impressed by all the things he was piecing together.

'There's only one problem with this plan of theirs.' The realization was more than enough to make Rey leak out a crooked smile.

'It's the fact that I'm involved.'

Rey had no doubt that Scylla and her Undertaking would succeed if he didn't take the side of the KariBlanc Group.

However, the mere fact that he did already proved to be a fatal flaw in their perfect plan.

"I will come with you to the Dark Gathering, and I will take care of things behind the scenes as well." He stretched out his two hands, as if expecting an embrace.

His crimson eyes glowed very brightly, contrasting the darkness that was his mask.

"You just need to do as I say." Once he made this declaration, Rebal nodded in agreement, and so did the two beside him.

They all knew what was good for them.

The only hope that the Blanc and Verte Houses had was Ralyks.

He was the dark horse of the Underworld.

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Chapter 275 Emergence From The Depths

"Sir Ralyks... there's another issue to address."

Rey could already feel himself getting excited about the upcoming event that he barely caught what Rebal said.

"Is it still about the Dark Gathering?" He asked.

"Yes."

Rey felt interested, so he perked up his attention and gestured for Rebal to continue.

"The Dark Gathering is in four days, and the journey from here to the Allied Merchant City takes about three days. If we want to leave, we have to go as soon as possible."

With the tone Rebal used, Rey could already figure out the undertones that were implied.

'It's possible that Scylla tries to delay our arrival so that we end up missing the Dark Gathering, hence killing Rebal and everyone else.'

It was a pretty easy way to get rid of their adversaries.

'If I thought about it, there's no way they didn't consider it too.'

In order to be safe, it was easy to leave as early as possible, and even that wouldn't ensure they would make it in time.

But...

"There's no need to concern yourselves with that. I can easily teleport you to the Merchant City when the time arrives." Rey shrugged.

"A-ah! That's true!" Rebal beamed, and so did the rest of his audience.

Seeing such a sheepish expression from the older man made Rey feel a strange sense of satisfaction.

'I haven't been to the Merchant City yet, but I have traveled somewhere close. If I teleport there and navigate my way to the City, I should be good...'

It probably wouldn't take more than three to five hours, so Reyn wasn't particularly concerned about it.

"You can begin your preparations, though. We can also trick the enemy by pretending like you left early so they can make more obvious moves."

In the end, it was beneficial for Scylla and her New Order to believe that the Blanc and Verte house were at their mercy.

'Let's see how it goes. For now, though, there's something else I want to try.'

Rey decided it was time to wrap things up with the KariBlanc Group and venture somewhere else.

Once he rose to his feet, everyone followed.

After they bowed to him and thanked him profusely, he waved them farewell and teleported away.

To the three who observed him leave, they only saw a dark hero who would save them from certain doom.

However, the true man under the mask was a tiny bit different.

Rey was shaking in excitement.

All the news he had just heard was making something within his body boil, and his heart was racing with anticipation.

He wanted it badly! To experience this Dark Gathering and create the perfect conclusion to the situation he placed himself in.

'But first...' Rey's thoughts flowed as he appeared in an entirely different space.

It wasn't anywhere close to the KariBlanc Group's residence, or his own room. This was a place of immense danger, obscured from the rest of the world.

—The 99th Floor of the Royal Dungeon.

'... Let's take care of business.'

He smiled as he looked all around at the massive space he now occupied.

Most of the Mana Crystals that caused the place to glow had been mined, so the area was shrouded in darkness.

With a single Light Magic Spell, however, illumination filled the entire expanse.

Like fireflies or dandelions floating in the air, balls of golden light danced all around the 99th Floor. They banished the darkness, creating a solemn ambiance that was nearly divine.

The only stain on this perfect canvas was the one who stood at its center.

Ralyks—or rather, Rey.

"I've been too busy to properly do this. Or maybe that's just an excuse I've been giving myself..." He smiled to himself.

He had more than enough Mana, and he had all the necessary Skills for it.

All he needed was a good reason.

"And now I have it..." Rey muttered as he looked at the empty space before him.

"It's time to summon my Familiar."

Since he was about to do something so radical, this was the perfect place to go about it—an isolated space that only he had access to.

'The weird time-displacement thing isn't effective anymore thanks to most of the Mana Crystals being harvested.'

Rey learned this by reading up on a lot of books in order to learn of the phenomenon. He also experimented on the spade during the past couple of days.

The results made it certain!

'Places with phenomenally high density of Mana tend to express some conceptual imbalance.'

Either gravity was too weak, or time was too fast: there were many effects that could be a result of the overwhelming output of Mana in an area.

'Now that we've gotten rid of all that raw Mana, though, it's all back to normal.'

Rey took a deep breath and prepared all his Skills for the moment of truth.

He activated all of his Buff Skills, ensuring bountiful Mana flowed through him. All his Items complemented his current abilities, making him all the more powerful.

With his eyes glowing crimson, and his body leaking out his excess Mana, he felt ready for the challenge.

"[Divine Beast Summon]." He whispered.

The moment he said so, a System Window appeared in front of him.

[Select Category Of Summon]

~Divine Tier (SS)~

~Absolute Tier (S)~

~Grand Tier (A)~

~Lesser Tiers (B - C)~

[Warning: You are not a Tamer, so unless you have a Skill that can subdue the Beast you are Summoning, there will be no way to control it.]

[End Of Information]

Rey looked at the System Window and smiled to himself.

He already knew this process thanks to Alicia.

'She chose the Grand Tier due to the limits of her Class, but... I want to go a step higher.'

He desired the Absolute Tier.

'The problem is how to Bond with something of that caliber.'

Rey had Alicia's [Bonding] Skill, but it was only A-Tier.

To get a Beast in the Absolute Tier, he needed something stronger.

'I'll utilize the effects of [Absolute Mental Control] and [Bonding] using [Fusion/Fission].'

With them working in tandem, Rey reasoned he should be able to achieve his desired results.

'Even if it fails, and there's no way to control it, I'll just have to kill the Beast.'

That would give him some EXP, and he would get new Skills for free.

'I hope that's not the case, though. I don't want to settle for an A-Tier Familiar...'

Rey took in a deep breath and chose his option.

The Absolute Tier.

Then—

~VWUUUUUUSSSHHH!~

Energy began to gather around the space in front of him. It formed a Magic Circle, one so complex and intricate that Alicia's own didn't even compare.

A powerful pressure surrounded the circle, and Rey began to see something emerge from its depths.

Sparks of black and white light flashed all over the glowing circle.

Crimson auras surrounded it as well.

"T-this... this is...!" Rey's eyes nearly bulged as he watched the creature that emerged from within the summoning Circle.

It was nothing like what Rey expected.

"... Meow."

The Absolute Beast was none other than a CAT!

[STATUS WINDOW]

- Name: (Currently Nameless)
- Race: Bakeneko (Beast)
- Class: Absolute Summon (S-Tier)
- Level: 1 (00.00% EXP)
- Life Force: 1,000
- Mana Level: 1,500
- Combat Ability: 2,500
- Stat Points: 0
- Skills (Exclusive): [Shapeshift]
- Skills (Non-Exclusive): [Dark Magic]. [Magic Supremacy]. [Possession]. [Compulsion]. [Illusion]. [Undead Summon]
- Alignment: Chaotic Evil

[Additional Information]

An Absolute Beast whose true form remains unknown, but takes the form of a cat. It is a great trickster with malevolent desires. It is a wicked entity.

[End Of Information]

*

Chapter 276 The Bonding Process

When Rey first saw his conjured Beast, he couldn't help but have a single thought.

'Why?'

Why did it have to be a cat?

Could it be due to some influence from Alicia? Perhaps he had some affinity for them that he didn't recognize.

Either way, it was totally unexpected seeing the creature sitting at the center of the circle.

It had jet black fur, with purple eyes, and a pretty long tail that curled around it.

It stared at Rey with a calm look, its eyes glowing with a strange power he could not decipher.

'Is it using a Skill?'

It was at this point that Rey decided to use his Appraisal Skill on the creature.

Thankfully... it worked!

[STATUS WINDOW]

- Name: (Currently Nameless)
- Race: Bakeneko (Beast)
- Class: Absolute Summon (S-Tier)
- Level: 1 (00.00% EXP)
- Life Force: 1,000
- Mana Level: 1,500
- Combat Ability: 2,500
- Stat Points: 0
- Skills (Exclusive): [Shapeshift]
- Skills (Non-Exclusive): [Dark Magic]. [Magic Supremacy]. [Possession]. [Compulsion]. [Illusion]. [Undead Summon]
- Alignment: Chaotic Evil

[Additional Information]

An Absolute Beast whose true form remains unknown, but takes the form of a cat. It is a great trickster with malevolent desires. It is a wicked entity.

[End Of Information]

The first thing this confirmed to Rey was that he could use his S-Tier Absolute Appraisal Skill on those with an S-Tier Class.

So the reason he couldn't use it on Adonis had to be some other reason.

'Most likely a resistance to Appraisal...'

Once that thought settled and Rey actually read through the Status Window of the creature before him... he trembled.

'W-what is... this?!'

This Beast was just in Level 1, yet its stats were already higher than the Dragon Commander that he had faced back then.

'The Skills in its arsenal are also insane!'

However, the most jarring thing that shook Rey to his core was the Beast's Alignment.

'Chaotic... Evil.'

That was the worst kind of Alignment imaginable.

It practically meant that the creature before him had no redeeming qualities and simply desired to do evil and wreak havoc.

A true force of nature that desired destruction.

'How could I have summoned something like this?!'

As Rey had this thought, he saw the cat move from its initial position.

The creature stepped forward a little.

Then, it touched the barrier caused by its Magic Circle.

Space around it distorted, and the more it pressed its darkened claw on the barrier, the more distorted it seemed.

In the end, it couldn't break free.

'This is a Magic Circle made by an SS-Tier Skill. No S-Tier Summon should be able to break through.' Rey thought silently.

If the cat had broken through it, then he would have lost all confidence in his plan to control it.

'This isn't the time to silently observe, though. It's time to begin the Bonding Process—'

"Greetings, my summoner." The feline suddenly spoke, causing Rey's thoughts to experience pause.

'E-eh? Is it talking to me?'

How was that even possible? According to Alicia, she couldn't communicate with Snow until they experienced the Bonding Process and she became her Master.

Even then, they didn't communicate in basic language, but rather it was simply a feeling within her that told her everything her Familiar was feeling.

And the same applied vice versa.

'Yet it's speaking to me normally. This thing is definitely not normal...'

On one hand, Rey desired to have the creature as his subordinate. However, he also feared it in a sense.

Still unsure of what to do or say, he didn't offer the cat a response and simply waited for it to say something else.

"Don't be so cold, mister. You summoned me here, didn't you? The least you can do is say something."

Rey remained silent.

And then—

~VWUUUUUSSSSHHH!~

The cat suddenly transformed into a massive torrent of blackness, its misty body confined within the barrier that surrounded him.

It snarled as its feral eyes and sharpened teeth were on display despite the smoke-like form it had taken.

"ANSWER ME, YOU IMBECILE!"

As the creature roared and its contained power swelled, Rey could only smile to himself.

"So you've finally revealed your true nature. Well... it's too late."

Rey felt like a priest or some kind of exorcist, standing before a Demon of unimaginable power and evil.

He stretched forth his hand as the cat growled and roared in its disgust and rage.

"[Absolute Mental Control || Bonding]."

As Rey whispered this, his crimson eyes began to resonate with the creature's purple eyes.

"W-WHAT ARE YOU DOING TO ME, YOU BASTARD? YOU WANT TO CONTROL ME? ME?!"

It snarled, trying to attack Rey, but it couldn't get past the barrier that surrounded it.

Rey felt like the creature would rip him to shreds if given just a single second of leeway.

It had a look of hate and disdain.

"I AM A SERVANT OF NO ONE! I AM DARKNESS INCARNATE! WHO ARE YOU TO THINK YOU CAN CAGE CHAOS ITSELF?!"

Rey smiled as he listened to the creature's tantrums.

"If you are darkness, then I am the one who tames that darkness." Rey stepped forward, drawing closer to the barrier.

"I will be your Master. And you will submit to me."

He stretched forth his hand and touched the barrier, causing more distortions to appear all over its surface area.

"ME? SUBMIT? WHY WOULD I EVER?!"

A single smirk formed on Rey's face, hidden behind his mask, as he stared at the helpless creature.

Only one answer could be given.

"It is my will."

"YOU IMBECILE! YOU COWARD! BASTARD! PERVERT! RELEASE ME AND LET US HAVE A PROPER MATCH! COME ON! YOU FOOOOOOOOLLLL!!!"

The tantrums went on and on, but Rey's crimson energy spread all over the thick darkness until it closely receded and returned to its form as a cat.

The cat writhed and shot its paw into the air, as if fighting an invisible foe.

Alas, it was too late for the Absolute Beast.

Soon, the cat sat still, its entire being now overrun by the combined power that subdued its will.

[Bonding Successful]

[Congratulations! You have acquired a Familiar, and a secure 'Bond' has been established between the two of you.]

[Please Name Your Familiar]

Rey grinned steadily as he looked at the silent creature.

Its purple eyes were now crimson and it looked so docile that one wouldn't think it had been causing such a ruckus before.

"I'll call you Ater."

Rey had read somewhere that it meant darkness, and it fit the cat well.

So, why not?

[Your Familiar will be named 'Ater']

[You and 'Ater' have become linked by your Bond, so you can completely understand each other]

[End Of Process]

Rey could feel a great chunk of Mana escape his body as he completed the Bond, but it wasn't enough to make him collapse.

'The amount of energy it takes must be quite a lot... especially for something of this caliber.' He mused.

Regardless, Rey was glad that it was finally over.

The Magic Barrier that surrounded the cat vanished, and Rey stood before it like an imposing pillar of greater darkness.

"Speak."

As soon as it heard this, Ater—the Absolute Beast—hung its head low and uttered words of reverence.

"I greet you, my new master. I, Ater, will do my utmost to serve you... and I shall personally wreak carnage and utmost chaos upon your enemies."

'So intense...' Rey thought awkwardly.

Since the System had confirmed Ater's loyalty, and he could also sense the sincerity of his Familiar within him, Rey knew there was no need to doubt it.

There was just one thing left to do.

"Show me your true form."

*

Chapter 277 A Wild Card

Ater was a Bakeneko.

It was a creature of utmost malevolence and deceit.

According to legends, it often caused mischief and wrought misfortune upon any land it trod.

Its desire was nothing beyond absolute chaos.

But now, under a Master it could not resist, the creature had been tamed.

Its will was tied to its master, and for the first time... it had to follow an order.

"My true form..." Ater had no choice but to utter words of honesty to its master.

"... I can't remember."

As a creature of darkness and chaos, it had changed to so many forms that it couldn't even remember what it looked like from the beginning.

"I can be whatever you desire." Ater whispered, its head still bowed very low.

It could feel the weight of its master's gaze upon him.

No one needed to tell it before it could realize the gap in the abilities—how powerful its master truly was.

In a way, it came as a relief to the Absolute Beast.

At the very least, the one who subdued it—whom it was forced to call Master—was much stronger than it.

"I see. Take on another form, then. I don't feel very comfortable seeing you as a cat."

The Bakeneko nodded instantly.

It could feel that its master was being genuine with it, and so it had to obey.

It scoured its thoughts, searching for the perfect form to please its master.

The best thing that would make its master comfortable.

'I see...' The Absolute Beast grinned as it began its transformation.

Darkness swirled around its body like a mist, completely shrouding its full form as it began to grow in height and weight.

It lost its tail and fur, instead taking on the skin of a human.

Blood red hair danced on its humanoid head, and its eyes were now human.

Other than its slit pupil that looked like that of a cat, it had crimson irises, and the whites of its eyes were filled with blackness.

Then, its slender form began to grow some muscles, and its naked form was shrouded in a pure black suit.

It had black shoes, a black tie, and a completely darkened appearance.

Its skin was immaculate ebony, and from head to toe, it was sculpted to perfection.

Ater had become a handsome man, shrouded in mystery and a forbidden allure.

"Haaa..." Steamy white breaths escaped from his perfect lips as he stared at his master with a calm demeanor.

He fell to his knees and bowed his head almost immediately, expressing genuine respect to the being that transcended his absolute self.

"I hope this form pleases you well, Master."

Ater waited in silence as his Master didn't say or do anything.

'Did I do anything wrong?' He wondered, puzzled by the lack of response he was receiving.

Was he perhaps meant to turn into something else? Did his master find this form to be insufficient?

As Ater began to panic, he felt the overwhelming presence of his Master close in on him.

"M-Mast—!"

Before he could react, his shoulders were being held by the masked monarch before him.

He dared to raise his head and look upon his master's eyes. They were filled with an emotion Ater couldn't decipher.

"You've done well, Ater..." Was what his Master said.

There seemed to be some other emotion hidden within those words, but Ater could not understand them.

He could only nod and smile at his Master's kind words.

"Thank you, Master."

Thus, the creature of untold horror and carnage—now called Ater—became completely tamed by the man he would eventually know to be Rey Skylar.

'He's too handsome!'

Those were Rey's initial thoughts when he saw Ater's appearance.

The man had a charm that exceeded most women and even trumped Adonis by far.

'He's the most handsome guy I've ever seen. What the heck?!'

Rey could only imagine what would have happened if Ater had transformed into a girl.

'I'm so thankful he didn't.'

Before Rey realized it, he had begun to address Ater as a male. It was at this point that he understood why Alicia decided to attribute feminine qualities to her Grand Beast.

Since it was convenient anyway, and Ater would be taking on this form for the duration of their interaction, Rey decided to go along with it.

"Rise to your feet." He commanded his new Familiar, and the latter obeyed instantly.

'He's taller than my form as Ralyks, and he appears to be in his early twenties. I suppose that's doable.'

There was no need to hide Ater's identity with a mask since he could always change it anytime.

Plus, whenever he was 'Rey', and didn't need Ater around, he could always send him on an errand or keep him in his Grand Inventory.

Anything like that...

'According to Alicia, you can only have one Familiar at a time, so it seems I'll be stuck with him for a while.'

Rey figured with Ater's abilities, he wouldn't be a liability to him at all.

Especially once he started to Level Up.

'His Alignment is still Chaotic Evil, so I can't let my guard down around him.'

As his Master, Rey knew Ater wouldn't harm him in any way. However, there were still other factors to consider.

'There's a chance he'll cause damage and destruction if I order him too carelessly or I don't supervise him too much.'

As Rey stole one more glance at Ater's smiling face, he couldn't help but think about a devil.

'Looks like I've got myself a wild card.'

It all depended on how he used him.

"Since you're my Familiar, there's no use hiding my identity from you." Rey sighed, removing his mask.

He revealed his face as Ralyks, causing Ater's smile to widen even more.

Rey felt like the man wanted to devour him, but based on the 'Bond' that they shared, he knew that Ater was simply happy.

"I am honored to gaze upon the face of your transformation."

Rey's eyes flickered a little as soon as he heard that.

"So you noticed?"

Ater nodded with a smile. "I wasn't sure if I was supposed to mention it, since I am not meant to question my Master in such a way."

Rey—his face still as Ralyks—narrowed his eyes and broadened his own smile.

"So why did you mention it?"

"I thought you could be testing me in some way. Also... by showing you my capabilities in perception, I felt you would grow to trust and depend on my abilities even more."

According to what Rey felt as a result of their 'Bond', he knew Ater was telling the truth.

He couldn't help but be impressed by his Familiar's intelligence and personality.

'Compared to that Rabbit, having someone like this is a lot more useful.'

Rey didn't regret his choice to choose the Absolute Tier for his Summon.

"I understand. Before I show you my real form, though, I'd like to ask you a question."

Ater bowed his head, showing subservience to him.

Rey then went ahead to ask;

"If I decided to kill you, right here and now, what would you do?"

*

Chapter 278 Perfect Understanding

Silence.

Pure, unbridled silence radiated within the vast expanse.

As the golden lights danced around the room like fireflies, Rey stood in front of his Familiar—his question echoing in both their minds.

Ater's face remained the same. He had a calm smile, and despite the dangerous question he was asked, nothing changed in his demeanor.

"What would I do, huh...?" He slowly raised his hand to his chin and rubbed it while closing his eyes for a moment.

"Need some time to think about it?"

"No, no... that's not it." Ater responded swiftly to Rey's question, inhaling deeply as if absorbing the question.

"It's just that... I find it to be a pretty straightforward question."

Rey's curious face sharply contrasted the completely resolute expression that Ater gave.

"As your Familiar, everything I possess is yours. If you desire my life... it is yours."

His face no longer had a smile or any hint of amusement on it.

It was purely that of a serious disposition.

"I see. Good answer." Rey smiled and nodded.

Their 'Bond' confirmed everything Ater said.

It was still surprising to see such a hateful, uncontrollable Beast become so tame, but what Ater just had made all the remnant skepticism within him vanish.

Rey couldn't deny it any longer.

"I have confirmed your absolute loyalty to me." Rey's body slowly began to change, and his tall, imposing form vanished.

Replacing his 'Ralyks' form was his mundane appearance as Rey.

He had a plain face, and his dark hair complimented his dark irises. His height had grown to be a little above average, but he was still considerably shorter than Ater.

He had a baggy shirt on, and he wore plain shorts.

This was Rey—master of Ater and tamer of darkness—in all his glory.

"This is my true form. Pretty underwhelming, right?" He placed both hands in his pockets and smiled.

In response, however, Ater slowly shook his head and smiled.

"True power need not flaunt. Those who judge outward appearances are merely superficial fools."

He placed a hand on his chest and bowed very deeply to Rey. It was an awkward sight, one that seemed like a grown man was bowing his head to a mere teenager.

However, those with knowledge would know who was the truly superior one among the two.

This was what Ater meant by his words.

"The power within you towers mine by an infinite degree. I can not comprehend the depths of your strength, nor can I compare to the magnitude of your greatness."

The power Rey had was one that transcended the Absolute and even the Divine.

It was Primeval.

Ater didn't know what level it was in, but he was perceptive enough to recognize the true nature of his Master's power.

He knew it was impossible for him to overcome.

"If you so permit it, I would be honored to learn of my Master's name."

His head was still bowed as he uttered those words.

He took on a reverent tone, and he remained still like a statue... waiting for his Master's words to grace him.

"My name is Rey. Rey Skylar." As Rey spoke, he placed his hand on Ater's crimson hair.

"You will do well to remember it."

"Thank you, Master. I will forever cherish this moment, as well as your honored name."

The moment lasted for a few more seconds before Rey removed his hand from Ater's hair.

'Too cringe...' His thoughts flowed as he smiled nervously.

He could feel that Ater was a bit forlorn by his action, but Rey didn't care at this point.

What mattered was the understanding they had between each other.

And now...

"There's something I need from you, Ater." Rey broke the awkward silence between them and began to walk away.

After taking a few steps back, he used his [Divine Elemental Magic] to make an earth throne to sit on, collapsing on it as soon as he did so.

"Yes, Master." Ater slowly raised his head and looked at Rey's majestic form.

His physical form was, of course, unimpressive, but Ater could see beyond the natural.

He knew the existence before him was no longer in the realm of the natural.

Rey Skylar was a god!

"A lot will be going down in about four days. I'll be needing you to take care of a few things for me."

"Understood, Master. You can count on me."

"You don't even know what I want to ask of you. How sure are you that you can do it?" Rey's question caused Ater to smile a bit broader than usual.

"As long as Master is the one who orders it... there is nothing I can not do."

Rey nodded in approval, as if saying "That's the spirit!"

Ater's response was by no means a sign of hubris.

Rather, he was essentially placing Rey at an intellectual precipice, implying that if his Master chose an assignment for him, it meant that he believed Ater was up for the task.

Rey was no fool.

He wouldn't send his subordinate on a mission that was beyond their capabilities.

"Well said. Now then, I will explain the details of your assignment."

Ater nodded carefully and awaited his task in excitement.

He couldn't wait to lay waste to his Master's enemies.

[The Next Day]

"The time has come."

Conrad stood before all the nine Otherworlders, with Vida and Ralyks standing beside him.

Every Otherworlder was outfitted in armor and special attires, carrying weapons and Enchanted Items which had been provided by the Royal Council and also Ralyks' generosity.

They were equipped to their maximum Equip Limit.

For most of them, that was about 9-10 Items. However, Adonis could equip 15 Items at once.

Hence, he remained the strongest of the group.

"You are about to venture into the Royal Dungeon to commence the long-awaited Raid." Conrad smiled at the nine who stood before him.

Their resolute faces and obvious determination made his heart race in excitement and pride.

He glanced at Ralyks, and nothing short of overflowing gratitude radiated from his heart.

The moment of truth was now upon them, and once again... the fate of the Alliance's future rested on the success of this mission.

Praying inside, and smiling outside, Conrad's loud voice marked the commencement of the Royal Dungeon Raid.

"I wish you all the best in this endeavor!"

*

Chapter 279 The Dungeon Raid Begins

~VWUUSH!~

A swirling disturbance in space appeared within the darkened halls of the Royal Dungeon's First Floor.

From within the spatial distortion, ten beings emerged. They donned armor, had special wears, and possessed various weapons located in specific parts of their bodies.

These were the Raid Team, consisting of the nine Otherworlders and Sir Ralyks—leader of the team.

As soon as they came out of the portal, it closed, forcing darkness to take over the expanse surrounding them.

Thankfully, this was only temporary, as several balls of light floated in the air—courtesy of Ralyks.

As a result, everyone could clearly see the world that they had entered.

"Gather around, everyone." Ralyks' voice interrupted the serene silence that had pervaded everything.

The nine looked at him and did as he instructed. They formed a cluster opposite the Dark Adventurer, eyes alit with resolve.

"Let us begin the briefing."

Adonis. Alicia. Belle. Billy. Trisha. Justin. Clark. Eric. Rey.

Each of these participants were outfitted very differently, with weapons and attires that were unique to them and their abilities.

Broadly speaking, those who had warrior-like builds—like Billy, Clark, and even Adonis had armor for gear.

Billy's armor was the most elaborate, focusing solely on strength and power. He had dual swords behind him, as well as two daggers on his hip.

His helmet had a visor that allowed him to see, but aside from the few other openings in his armor, he was covered from head to toe in black and blue armor.

Clark, a natural Tank, had the bulkiest armor.

Based on his criteria, there was a red cape attached behind his armor that made him seem like some kind of legendary hero.

He didn't really have any wieldable weapon, though he had spiked knuckles, and he could also bring out claws from his wrists if he desired.

His armor was also colored blue and red for some reason.

As for Adonis, he had light armor on. His requirements ensured the items he wielded were more Enchanted than they were heavy.

This caused his Stats to jump as a result of their boosting capabilities.

His armor was golden, with small hints of black—a perfect fit for someone like him.

Everyone could attest to the fact that he looked like a true Hero in full gear.

For the speed-based types—like Justin and Trisha—they were outfitted in much lighter attires to better boost their abilities.

That way, they got boosts on their Skills, as well as multiple star boosts, without compromising their specialty in speed and stealth.

Trisha had a black skin-tight wear that covered her entire body. Then, she donned a blue jacket and short pants that had the same color.

Her shoes, gloves, and choker complimented her outfits perfectly—all enchanted in one way or the other.

Finally, she had her Enchanted Blades—one by the sheath on her waist, and the second one was behind her.

The one on her waist was a new weapon, while the second was the same weapon she bought during the first excursion.

It went through an upgrade that turned it Enchanted, so both her blades were strong enough for the task at hand.

For Justin, he was dressed in all-black—a standard for thief-related roles.

He had a hooded jacket, with a dark inner shirt, black trousers, and a cloak that had a series of daggers fixed inside.

He had daggers on his hips, behind him, and in various other hidden positions.

All the Daggers were Enchanted as well, and since he wasn't strictly equipping all of them at the same time, they weren't particularly subject to the 'Equip Limit.'

The Mage-types—Alicia, Belle, and Eric—had more emphasis on Items; like rings, bracelets, necklaces, staffs, etc.

Alicia, for instance, had five rings on her right fingers, as well as a long cloak that served as an Enchanted Item, two necklaces, and a bracelet.

She also had the White Amber on her left finger—making a total of ten Items.

Belle had a similar build, but with two bracelets, four rings, a long staff, and a tiara on her head.

As for Eric, he opted for a stave rather than a staff, and he had Magic Gloves, Magic earrings, a Magic Ring, and a Magic necklace.

They also had respective colors.

Belle opted for a more pink and amethyst vibe, while Eric had a more green-like taste.

As for Alicia, she had a white and blue color choice.

The last among the group was Rey, and his Equipped Items were restricted to only five.

He had a horned helmet to protect himself, though it still gave room for his face to show.

Frankly speaking, the helmet appeared a bit oversized, but Rey managed it well.

He also had goggles for increased perception and boots for swift movements, while also equipping an armored gauntlet on one hand—which doubled as a shield and a counter-type Item.

The final Equipped Item he had was a necklace that absorbed energy and boosted his Stats. It also released bursts of energy after a set period of time. It was going to be helpful for long-range attacks, so that was included.

Rey's equipment ensured he had both offensive and defensive capabilities, precisely matching the nature of his sole Skill.

With Enchanted Items, even weaklings could become strong. As a result, Rey's Items—despite being only five—boosted his abilities to an unreal degree.

Right now, he wasn't the nobody that he used to be. Everyone could tell too.

In his own way, he too was strong.

Then, standing before all of them in his usual raven-black attire was Ralyks.

"I already sealed off the First Floor, so no Monsters exist here." He began the briefing.

"From the Second Floor and below, there will be several kinds of Monsters. Their strength will be unpredictable, and their abilities would have evolved."

Everyone's expression remained stern. They were already prepared for this much.

"I will be with you, so there's no reason to fear. However, I will not deliver the Monsters to your hands. You'll have to do that yourselves." Ralyks paused and looked at everyone.

Then...

"Is that understood?"

"YES!"

... He nodded in approval.

"Let us begin the Raid."

*

Chapter 280 First Day Of The Raid [Pt 1]

Heavy breaths.

Flickering eyes.

Racing hearts.

The nine Otherworlders stood tall, prepared to descend down the Floors as they stared at the entrance to the second one.

"Ready?"

They all gulped and nodded, prepared to begin their mission.

Of course, some showed a lot more courage than others, but they all advanced forward.

Rey Skylar was among the ones who showed less courage than his compatriots. Still, the fact that he kept moving forward showed his dedication to the cause.

His eyes shone with determination.

"Let's stick together, Rey." Alicia whispered to him, a small smile on her face.

It was clear she was nervous as well, but after noticing Rey's anxiety, she wanted to cheer him up.

"No way! You'll take all my prey and I won't be able to Level Up." Rey responded.

He then looked beside her and spotted Snow—her Familiar.

"You have to Level Up Snow as well. I'll be fine, don't worry." Rey murmured while nodding slowly.

Alicia gave a knowing smile, and they both exchanged nods.

In the end, this was still some sort of competition.

Leveling Up wasn't going to be fair to all, and if certain individuals were lazy or pampered, they wouldn't be able to grow as strong as their comrades.

"Huu... I got this!"

With Rey's words appearing to settle him down, he finally joined his comrades in descending down to the Second Floor.

"Take your formations!"

The moment they descended to the abode of Monsters, they were greeted by a group of anthropomorphic creatures.

These entities had fur like gorillas, but their appearances—at least, their upper bodies—resembled wolves.

They had sharp claws and powerful jaws, with saliva dripping out of the latter the moment they laid eyes on their targets.

Their legs looked like that of a spider—or maybe an ant? It was weird describing these weird beings who seemed monstrous, even for monsters.

These were 'Evolved Monsters.'

Though, based on their appearance, it was clear that these creatures didn't turn out quite right.

"KURRRRIIIKKKK!!!" They made strange noises as their massive forms approached the nine Otherworlders.

This was the moment of truth.

Fight or Flight—perhaps neither, and simply paralyzing fear.

The Otherworlders had to decide their path.

"Attack!"

The nine—ten, if one counted the Rabbit—moved fluidly, as if they were born and bred for this very moment.

For some reason, they showed no hesitation.

Perhaps it was because of their constant training with Ralyks. Maybe they had grown so accustomed to this world that they didn't realize how much their minds had changed.

It could also be due to their bizarre expectations and preparations for this day.

And so, now that they were in the thick of it, they felt nothing like fear.

They knew their mission... and they executed it.

"Arrows Of Light!" With Adonis beginning the assault with several projections using his Light Magic, he was able to aim for the eyes of the opponents.

Once that was done, the rest was easy.

Since this was meant to be an opportunity to Level Up, the group couldn't completely rely on roles for teamwork.

They all had to venture out to slay their enemies.

EXP wasn't divided based on Party Contribution or any kind of arbitrary means.

You had to kill the thing to gain EXP!

As a result, it was 'Every Man For Himself.'

~WHOOOSH!~

Otherworlders like Trisha and Billy swiftly ran ahead, brandishing their blades with utmost precision.

Billy had advantage with his Weapon Summon, so he summoned several blades, which he in turn thrust towards several of the Monsters in his path.

He equipped his Enchanted Blade and sliced through the bunch as easily as a hot knife would cut through butter.

Most of the armor and weapons the students had on was made from the corpse of the Dragon that Ralyks defeated.

Adding the Mana Crystals of the 99th Floor, as well as the several Monster Cores to the mix, it was easy to see how powerful these Items would be.

Other than that, Billy—like all the members of the Alpha Class—
was also an incredibly strong warrior.

With all of these culminating together, the Otherworlders didn't have a very difficult time executing the Monsters.

Trisha utilized her [Greater Lightning Magic] alongside her recently improved [Greater Combat Application] to swiftly eliminate her foes.

[Danger Sense] allowed her to detect attacks before they hit her, granting her more time to dodge and counterattack.

Smell of burning flesh and cooked blood danced in the air as she danced in a frenzy of chaos.

Her and Billy weren't the only ones to partake in the action, though.

Every Otherworlder was on it as well.

Justin easily glided through the Monsters as a result of his [Stealth] Skill, while using his [Marionette] Skill to choke the Monsters with his strings.

In situations where his position was compromised, he would utilize stronger threads to tear through the very flesh of the Monsters and turn them into mincemeat.

In no time at all, gore filled his vicinity.

As a result of his swift, unpredictable, and deadly moves, he hardly had any problems at all.

Of course, he was being boosted by a lot of his items, but his abilities made his job a lot swifter and easier than most.

Alicia, Belle and Eric were the type to stay in a single position and spam attacks.

As Alicia stretched forth her hands to cast her [Greater Ice Magic] on the targets she chose, Belle cast her [Absolute Wind Magic] on the opponents in her own area of influence.

Eric also had his targets, and [Greater Explosion] did the job against them.

Ultimately, it was a cinch for them.

Unlike most of the Otherworlders who fought on land, Clark took to the air and rushed the enemies with a bombardment of Heat Vision and his brute strength.

One would think his heavy equipment would slow him down, but that wasn't the case at all.

It looked like he was faster than normal.

With bursts of strength. He cut down the Monsters with sheer power, sending small shockwaves echoing throughout the space around.

As he did this, Snow—the Rabbit—also got a bit of the action, thanks to her ability to jump very high.

It almost looked like she was flying based on how she leaped high in midair.

Her task was simple—Level Up.

She was a Grand Summon, but she was merely in Level 1. If she Leveled Up alongside the Otherworlders, even the rabbit could get a lot stronger.

With everyone killing their fair share of Monsters, there existed one of them who was mowing them down.

Like an unstoppable bulldozer he cleared everything in his path with his mighty sword and overwhelming aura of light.

Adonis, The Hero, easily killed his enemies with slashes and swings, testing them apart in sheer moments.

None of them stood a chance.

"K-KURGHHHH!"

The Monsters began to scream at some point, but there was no room for mercy.

Despite their superior numbers, they were no match for the golden executor that sent them to the realm of death.

He did all of this with ease.

They all did.

All of this carnage... so much of this destruction... and the perpetrators showed no remorse.

Instead, they were all smiling.

Yes, they grinned with relief and delight, indulging in their own strength to cut down their enemies to grow even stronger.

Such was the nature of the Dungeon.

... The nature of this world.