

Extras 331

Chapter 331 The Dark Gathering [Pt 9]

'Looking at this guy's Status Window, he has a bunch of interesting Skills. Same as the other two...'

Rey began to consider the possibilities of what could be as he looked at Fenrir, Ladon, and Enry.

'All three possess nice abilities.' A smile coursed through his face as he finally stopped his advance.

"You three should work together. If you can land a single hit on me, I'll let you go."

Instantly Fenrir shot him a look of surprise, as one would expect, but Rey didn't bother explaining himself any further.

Using his [Absolute Spatial Domain], he teleported Ladon from where he was—away from the bunch—and brought him right beside Fenrir and the Black Magician.

With all three characters right in front of him, he repeated his words.

"Attack me. If you can land a single hit on me, I'll let you live."

"B-but how could we possibly..." Enry stuttered, making this the first time he was hearing the Mage's voice.

It sounded so pure and innocent, a sharp contrast compared to the kind of person they were.

'I don't have time for this.' Rey rolled his eyes and decided on the second option.

'[Absolute Mental Control].' His eyes glowed as he activated the Skill.

The moment he did this, Fenrir and co fell under his ability.

"Rise."

They all rose to their feet, like puppets that were being expertly controlled by a professional.

"Fight me like you mean it. Use every Skill at your disposal."

The three, all having blank expressions on their faces, instantly took stances for combat. It felt a little invigorating seeing them act this way.

'Now I see why Belle was so obsessed with using her [Grand Charm] on everyone. It's pretty useful.'

Rey didn't really like using mental attacks on people, since he found it to be intrusive. However, he had already solidified his resolve against people like these.

If he could kill them, then surely controlling their minds wasn't out of the options for him.

Besides, with [Dead Calm] still activated, he didn't feel any emotional or moral weight based on his actions.

He just did what had to be done.

"Begin."

Fenrir was frightened.

'W-what am I doing...?!'

He found his body to be moving on its own, with him being powerless to stop it.

It felt like he was seeing with his very eyes, and he was feeling every sensation that occurred within and without his body.

But... he could not control anything.

He was paralyzed, forced to see everything that would play out; a prisoner in his own flesh.

"[Greater Fiery Power]. [Greater Pure Boost]. [Greater Iron Fortress]. [War Cry]. [Beast Mode]."
He heard himself mutter.

As expected, power swole within him, sending ripples of energy dancing all around his immediate surroundings.

As shockwaves rushed from his position, white fur took over his toned skin, turning him into a partial beast.

This was Fenrir at full strength!

From his peripheral vision, he could see his subordinates activate their respective Skills.

The Black Magician's Skills focused heavily on debuffs and curses, which would essentially be lethal. Skills like; [Poison Magic], [Distortion], [Fear]. [Degrade]... with his only purely offensive Magic being [Shadow Magic].

If they could slow the enemy down with these heavy-hitters, then it was possible to win this battle... or so Fenrir hoped.

As for Ladon, he was mainly focused on offense.

He had the [Weapon Summon] Skill, as well as [Enchant Weapon], [Blazing Strike], and [Amplify].

These Skills, added to the incredible density of his armor, made Ladon incredibly destructive and versatile in multiple weapons and fighting patterns.

Fenrir could already see the Obsidian Blade summoning a few blades, holding one in each hand, while the rest floated in the air as a result of an effect from his [Enchant Weapon].

[Blazing Strike] allowed his blades to go up in flames, increasing their offensive abilities, while [Amplify] improved all of his physical abilities.

With all said and done, Fenrir was still much stronger than Ladon, but the latter was pretty strong himself.

Enry was also done casting his Spells, which caused a shroud of shadows to cover him as a defensive cover while an extremely Poisonous Magic would be sprayed on the target.

'Enry's strike will come first...' Fenrir knew his subordinates well enough to predict that.

After all, The Black Magician would usually use [Fear] to paralyze the enemy—sometimes leading to their deaths—and then alter their perceptions using [Distortion], which practically tricked the mind with auditory and visual illusions.

Afterwards, he would use [Degrade] to wear down the defense or vitality of the opponent, while finishing them off with lethal poison.

For some reason, despite having the ability to make people suffer with his poison, Enry preferred a quick death through a deadly dose.

'I doubt he'll die if he's attacked with the poison, but if Ladon and I strike immediately after, then maybe...'

If they landed one hit, then they would live!

Fenrir wasn't in control of his body, but he desperately prayed for the success of himself and his allies.

~BOOOOOOOOOM!~

The attacks were initiated, and Fenrir's two captains struck in tandem while he followed suit and dealt the finishing strike.

The entire building trembled, and it even tore the ceiling open.

The Chandelier that was above them came crashing down, sending its glass fragments flying everywhere. The beautiful Crystal-like shards soon became sullied by the blood and gore beneath them.

But none of those mattered.

~WHUSH!~

~VWUUUUM!~

~BOOOOOOOOOM!~

More strikes and explosions rippled through the area, devastating the furniture that once stood glamorously at the center of the room.

The chairs were devastated, ripped to shreds by the shockwaves alone, and the table was broken into multiple pieces before burning down.

Several more strikes and the ground began to send forth debris.

Fenrir attacked ferociously in wolf form, utilizing a hundred percent of strength in each strike.

However...

"Okay. That's enough."

... It was all to no avail.

"I've seen enough." The man called Ralyks told them, his tone a deep lull that told of nothing.

"Farewell then."

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Chapter 332 The Dark Gathering [Pt 10]

~SWISH!~

That was the last sound Fenrir heard before his body turned into mincemeat and his consciousness was plunged into darkness.

Before dying, though, Fenrir could only ask himself one question.

'Why... did I ever think I killed a Dragon Commander...?'

He didn't understand the reason why. Perhaps... if he didn't have such thoughts, he wouldn't have been so careless with his actions.

'I... we were just previous soldiers drafted into war back then...'

The founding members of the Mercenary Gang were merely ex-military officers who decided to defect and become fugitives instead.

They stole a lot of resources from the Alliance—especially weapons—before defecting. This was instrumental in starting their own organization.

They initially started out as mere bandits, but slowly built their influence up to this point.

Sure, they spread the rumors of their exploits—killing Dragons being one of them—but even Fenrir hadn't killed anything above a Two-Horned on his own.

There was no way a single man could win against a Dragon Commander.

Sure, his squad had encountered a Dragon Commander in the past, but they were all wiped out—save for him.

It was all due to luck!

Yet, somehow his mind had interpreted it as him winning the battle somehow.

Why...?!

Fenrir didn't know why he thought that.

But, it was because of those foolish thoughts that he had made so many wrong decisions which led to this downward spiral.

In the end, his arrogance led to his fall, and the hubris of the leader caused the end of the Mercenary Gang.

'I really was... a fool.'

And so, Fenrir's head and entrails fell amongst the countless others that lay strewn all over the area.

They formed a grotesque landscape for the senses.

—A painting of death.

'Not bad Skills at all.' Rey thought to himself, happy to have gotten something valuable from the entire exchange.

His expression quickly soured, however, after thinking about the fact that there were still a few members of the Heads of Destruction whose Skills he hadn't yet obtained.

'Even if they're not useful on their own, I could fuse them for maximum efficiency.'

Rey sighed, realizing there was no use making a fuss of such matters.

'I have no long-distance communication Skill, so it's not possible to tell Ater to spare the Heads of Destruction until I return.'

Besides, knowing his Familiar's personality, they would already be dead at this point.

The most he could do at this distance was feel what Ater was currently experiencing, and based on those vicarious emotions, Rey could only feel delight and satisfaction.

It felt so raw that Rey was convinced that Ater was doing some pretty nasty things back in the Capital.

'As long as it's only directed at the bad guys, I suppose there's no issue.'

He cast his gaze on Rebal and Kara, who were still seated in their seats.

They had been constantly protected by Rey, so none of the echoes of destruction touched even a minute part of their outfits—talkless of hurting them.

"Are you all good?" He asked, especially looking at Esme, who remained behind Kara.

"Y-yes. I'm fine." Kara nodded, though based on her trembling tone, it was clear she was somehow afraid.

'Why is she frightened? Ah... I understand now.'

Rey looked around them and realized just how messy everything had gotten. This was the result he was going for, but he could see how that could be a problem for Kara.

'Her family was brutally killed, after all. It's possible she still has trauma.'

Rey had hoped seeing the people responsible for the death of her family would bring her some sort of satisfaction, but that seemed a little too much to hope for.

'But, even Rebal also looks anxious. Does he have trauma too?'

"S-sir Ralyks... the remaining two are—" Rebal began, pointing at the seat that Scylla had previously occupied.

"I know."

As Rey glanced in its direction, he could only see a wrecked seat, with no one seated there.

"Scylla and her guard slipped away while I was busy with Fenrir and his allies."

Despite the severity of what he was saying, Rey's voice didn't display any ounce of worry or anxiety. In fact, it seemed like the opposite.

A terrible calmness coursed through his words.

"On to important matters, I suppose your role here is done, Rebal."

"I-I suppose so..."

"I'll be transporting you back to the Capital. As for you, Kara, I'll be reuniting you with the Alliance Forces that are likely on their way here already."

Once Rey said this, Kara's eyes widened a little in surprise.

"On their way here?"

"Yes. They're almost done with their thorough investigation of this city. Besides, my recent fight with Fenrir and the other two blasted a hole in the ceiling, which compromised the barrier that keeps this place hidden."

Of course, Rey had ensured all of this was done intentionally.

It was to send a signal to the Alliance Forces so they could reach the location of the enemy on their own.

"For good context, this is what will happen..." Rey went on to explain the plan going forward.

"I'll be going after Scylla and her guard, while Rebal returns to the Capital, and you'll rendezvous with the Alliance Forces directly outside this building and explain what happened—of course, you'll tell them what we agreed on."

"U-understood!" Kara nodded in response.

"What about me? What should I do?" Esme's voice was low, containing none of the life that they had all experienced before the mission started.

It sounded like her voice was hoarse, almost as if she had been crying her lungs out for hours.

"I can sense a Cellar downstairs, and I can sense a lot of people there. You should go down there and look for the merchandise that we seek."

Of course, he meant her friends, but with Rebal and Kara present, he had to change his wordings a little bit.

"I-I see..."

Rey couldn't help but notice how detached she seemed to him.

'Did my recent actions frighten her? Maybe...'

He didn't regret anything he did, though. Besides, he had already told her how bloody things would be, and she signed up for it anyway.

It wasn't his fault at all.

'Still, I don't think she'll feel very comfortable around me right now...'

Rey sighed and shrugged a little. With a few thoughts, he summoned two Grand Elementals beside her.

Earth and Wind.

"They're going to defend you down there." He told her.

'I doubt there is anyone who can beat a Grand Elemental down there, but just in case... I chose the two who would be best for protecting her.'

The Earth Elemental was the perfect Tank, while the Wind Elemental was swift and could be used to escape in case of awry circumstances.

In any case, both would be perfect replacements for a clone of his.

'Besides, I'll probably need to be at a hundred percent for what comes next.' Rey told himself as he looked at the three people who stood before him.

"You all did good today. We're almost done already. All that's left are some loose ends."

The last ounce of Rey's smile vanished as he recognized the next phase of what he had to do.

'Even I am not certain about how this will go.'

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Chapter 333 The White Mask [Pt 1]

~VWUSH!~

Once Rey finished transporting Rebal and Kara to their respective destinations, he activated the secret lever hidden on one of the walls.

It instantly caused the ground to open, revealing stairs that led underground.

One would expect it to be eerily dark, but luminous stones brightened the path, allowing the stairs to give off a majestic aura.

"If anything happens to my Grand Elementals, I'll come after you right away." Rey assured Esme, to which she nodded.

He still didn't know what kind of expression she had under her mask, but he decided not to pry.

'We can talk about this after...'

"Thank you, Re—I mean, Sir Ralyks..." Usually, they would both chuckle at this, but not a single echo of laughter could be heard.

Only something akin to awkward silence loomed around.

"Later then."

Rey broke the silence and waved her farewell, to which she whispered her response.

He turned away, hearing how the Earth Elemental ventured into the underground area first, followed by Esme, and finally the Wind Elemental.

This formation allowed for maximum security on Esme's person.

'With that out of the way, it's about time I catch the final prey, huh?'

The honest truth was that Rey never lost sight of Scylla and her guard. In fact, he had intentionally delayed in dealing with them so he could see what they would do.

Sure enough, the bodyguard was a Spatial Magic user who teleported himself and his Mistress to a secure location—though still within the same building.

'Not that I didn't know he would do that...'

Even now, with his perception spread throughout the building, he could sense exactly where they were inside.

'It's about time.'

Clenching his fist in resolve, Rey's crimson eyes glowed beneath his black mask and he vanished from his position.

~VWUUSH!~

The world blurred as he was instantly greeted with the new area he would appear in.

Rey had already braced himself for the worst when teleporting. He expected to even be plunged straight into battle once he appeared in front of the enemy.

He had planned for traps and all sorts of preparations that his adversary would have set up in order to deal with him.

However...

'What the—?!'

... Even Rey never expected what he saw in the white and red room.

Scylla was standing about fifty meters from him, kneeling before the man in the white mask.

The moment he appeared, she turned to look at him, and he saw her wretched face—one filled with tears and melted makeup.

Black lines fell from her eyes, and a particularly horrified expression consumed her face. It was both perplexing and satisfying to see.

But, before Rey could fully savor or understand what he was witnessing, the next surprising thing happened.

~SWISH!~

Her head was sliced off her neck in one swift motion from the white masked guard.

'...?!'

There was a certain emotional detachment from the man who committed the act. His action was fluid, precise to the letter.

As he used his hand as a blade, swinging it with sharp momentum, and the head flew from the body, Rey maintained his silence and watched.

Scylla's head ascended high, her blond hair dancing in midair as bubbles of blood followed her.

Then, her lifeless body crumbled to the pure white tiles, with a red pool already forming underneath it.

Not long after, the decapitated head followed.

As Rey stood there, watching all of this with widened eyes, he only had one thought.

'What the hell?'

[Moments Earlier]

"Haa... haaa..."

Scylla nearly vomited as she felt herself get pulled away from the sight of horror into a white room and red room.

'T-this place is...!'

She recognized it well as her dining area.

Why would her guard teleport her to a dining area instead of the Safehouse?

'No... not even that. I didn't even know he could use Spatial Magic.' Scylla's thoughts flowed.

"Haaa..." She tried to speak, but only heavy breaths came out.

She felt very nauseous, and her body was still trembling from the leftover fear that the man in black had inflicted on her.

Right now, it didn't matter that her guard could use Spatial Magic without her knowledge.

Only one thing was of concern to her.

"C-can you beat him? That monster in the form of a man... can you win against him?"

"Hmmm..."

The guard placed his hand on his chin, located directly behind his white mask. He seemed to be thinking very deeply about it, which gave Scylla some glimmer of hope that it wasn't too absurd.

'I-if he can win... or even if they're even, then it's possible that I can escape while he tries to hold him back!'

"It's a possibility."

"Huh?"

"Me winning against him... it's a possibility."

Scylla's anxious face transformed entirely the moment she heard this bit of good news.

"Then stop him! Fight him off while I escape!"

Once again, the guard rubbed his chin for a few seconds.

'What's there to think about? I'm your Master!' Scylla wanted to scream, but she patiently waited.

"No."

Her eyes widened as soon as she heard that response.

"What did you just—?!"

"[Command Code: Kneel]." Words flowed from his lips, and the next moment, Scylla felt her body descend.

'E-eh...?!'

Her eyes began to widen as she found her body unable to move in the slightest. She merely powerlessly knelt before the man who was supposed to be her guard

—Her slave!

"W-what is the meaning of this? What's going on?"

Her question fell on deaf ears. Not only did the guard not answer her question, but he didn't seem to be paying any mind to her.

The confusion written on Scylla's face only got even more palpable by the second.

Her heart raced and a certain fear began to surface.

A fear that perhaps... she was not in control of the situation.

'No! No! No!'

"I command you by the Slave Crest to explain yourself."

No response.

"Release me!"

Nothing.

"Protect me!"

No word was given back.

Scylla wheezed as she looked at the man in the mask with shock and downright confusion.

None of this made any sense.

"W-why... isn't this working...?"

"You're quite the idiot." His voice suddenly echoed in the air, and for the first time since they arrived in the room, he looked straight into her eyes.

His glowing blue gaze caused her body to tremble in a feeling she could only associate with fear.

No... despair!

"You still haven't figured it out?"

Scylla didn't know what he was talking about. Figured what out? Who could possibly understand this paradoxical event?

He was her slave, yet not only was he not responding to her Slave Crest, but he was displaying abilities that she never knew existed.

The man before her was already beyond human when he was loyal to her, but with these new sets of Skills that he was displaying, she didn't know where to place him.

Scylla didn't understand him.

"W-who... are you...?"

Wasn't he her slave? Wasn't his name...?

'H-huh? His name? What is his name? What is... huh?'

As Scylla stared at the white mask with nothing short of stupefaction, the man behind it spoke.

"Who am I? Well... you're about to find out."

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Chapter 334 The White Mask [Pt 2]

'I'm about to... figure what out?'

As Scylla had this thought, she saw a finger of the masked figure draw close to her.

'N-no! Stay back!' Her thoughts echoed as it neared.

Unfortunately, she could do nothing to stop its advance. Before long, it completely closed the distance and reached her forehead.

~Tut~

Nothing but a gentle tap reverberated through her head as the finger made impact.

However, the moment Scylla relaxed her body...

~ZZZTTZZZZ!~

... The true inflow arrived.

"ARRRGHHHHHHH!!!" Her screams filled the massive room, followed by convulsions all over her body.

Her head particularly swayed as her hair whipped all over. Like a madman, she constantly bobbed her head and her face showed hints of insanity.

Tears descended down her eyes, causing her mascara to melt. The cause was a dream of black lines streaming down her cheeks.

Perspiration covered her face as well, which caused most of her makeup to be ruined.

After a while—countless months, if not years, encapsulated in a single moment—Scylla finally stopped her throes of insanity.

It was only when she stopped screaming that the finger left her forehead, and the strange buzz it had exited her brain.

"Do you remember now?"

The strange voice of the man in the mask wafted through Scylla's ears as she looked up at him with a perplexed and apprehensive expression.

"I-I don't know who you are. You're not... you're not my guard. Who are you? Where's my guard?" Her voice began to climb as she gazed upon him.

"Oh? So now you remember!"

"Who are you? Where is my guard! Who are you? Where is my guard? Who are you? Where is my guard?!"

She kept screaming, almost like a broken doll.

"[Command: Silence]."

That very instant, Scylla stopped talking, almost as if she was never shouting to begin with.

"Perfect."

Her pained expression made it obvious that she had a lot more to say, but that didn't seem to concern the man in the mask at all.

"Don't worry about all of it. None of that matters now..."

Scylla didn't understand what he meant by that, but it didn't seem like he had any intentions to explain any further.

"You know... I've only known you for a relatively short while—though those false memories told you otherwise—but you've always disgusted me."

Scylla's shock didn't vanish. It only intensified upon hearing that.

"Your twisted habits and questionable tastes... I don't understand how people who are so weak and pathetic end up being so cruel." He drew closer to her, the blankness of his mask adding a sense of dread to the lady's mind.

"Ruthless, yet weak. It's incompatible, I'd say."

The man in the white mask took another step closer, and this time Scylla nearly jumped out of her skin.

She was frightened beyond words.

Her muffled voice pleaded for mercy, and the tears in her eyes flowed even more.

'Anything... I'll do anything!' Her face screamed as she watched him advance even closer.

Of course, the man in the mask ignored this altogether.

In fact, he seemed to be chuckling.

Suddenly, the chuckles stopped, and the guard seemed to look behind Scylla for some reason.

He was staring at something; she could tell.

"It's finally the time I've been waiting for. Looks like there's no need to delay any longer."

Scylla didn't know what he meant by that. She did her utmost to move her body, and much to her surprise... it moved!

Her head turned behind to see a man standing in front of a closing portal.

'Eeeeeek!'

It was the man in the black mask—the Reaper himself!

"Farewell." With those last words echoing in her mind, Scylla felt her head being separated from her body.

Everything went blank nearly instantly.

The last ounces of her tears floated in the air with her blood as the violet colors of her eyes dulled.

Just like that... she, who had planned everything from the start, ended up suffering such a humiliating and thorough defeat.

Where did she go wrong?

She knew it already! The nexus point that kickstarted her entire undertaking.

'H-he did this...!'

Scylla had always been somewhat dissatisfied with her position in the Slave Union. As an ambitious human, she constantly desired more.

However, she never acted on this desire.

Not only was she too weak, but her resources wouldn't allow her to swallow the others in the same trade as her.

Besides, if she ended up failing, or if the other factions ganged up on her, she would be completely done for.

As a result of these factors, Scylla never made any real moves.

Not even after the capture of Evals Redart and the deaths of the Councilors who truly ruled the Underworld.

But... all of that changed when she got power.

She suddenly obtained more resources and an invincible guard. She was confident in her ability to win, and she acted on it.

As a result, she was able to pull everyone she wanted as an ally to her side and get rid of her enemies.

None of this... none of it was her fault.

'I never wanted all of this!'

It was too late, though. Her cries could be heard by no one at this point.

Scylla only screamed at the abyss as it called for her.

And she had no choice but to answer.

Silence.

Pure silence pervaded the world of white and red that the two masked parties occupied.

They stared at each other in quiet observation.

However, before this entire confrontation went any further without a single word being spoken, the man in the white mask spoke out.

"It's understandable if you're confused about what just happened."

"There's no need for you to explain." The one in the black mask—

Rey—responded.

He stared at the corpse at his opponent's feet, before trailing his gaze back to the white mask.

"I know this is the sort of thing you would resort to..." With narrowed eyes and creased brows, Rey spat out his name.

"... Adrien Chase."

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Chapter 335 Revelation [Pt 1]

'Adrien Chase... it all makes sense now.'

As Rey's thoughts trailed, he wondered why he never pieced together all of the information beforehand.

'Back then, when I first saw him standing behind Scylla... I instantly knew he was involved. I just didn't know why...'

However, now that they were standing opposite each other, Rey had a good idea of what was going on.

"Did you manipulate the events thus far? Pretending to be a part of the Criminal Underworld... acting like someone you're not... just to gain all the benefits?"

Rey thought along these lines because they were the kind of things he had done and would do in order to get what he wanted.

What were the chances that Adrien had a similar thought pattern as him?

'He has been controlling Scylla without her knowledge. He probably wants all the resources of the Underworld for himself.'

This was an elaborate way to set things up, but he was able to orchestrate the events thus far.

'Or am I the one overthinking it?' Rey thought to himself.

"No, you're not overthinking things."

The moment Rey heard Adrien's voice and saw the boy move, Rey instantly took an offensive stance.

"Relax..." Adrien reached for his mask and began to pull it away.

"... I don't want to fight."

As Adrien revealed his face to Rey, it precisely matched the smiling boy who turned back back then.

His black hair swayed as his blue eyes gleamed with some sort of hidden motives.

He instantly got shivers when he remembered that event, but [Dead Calm] suppressed everything in an instant.

"I know what you're thinking, and you're not completely wrong... but you're not completely right either."

Rey still maintained his offensive stance as Adrien began to advance forward.

"I indeed orchestrate these events, but it wasn't wholly for personal gain. I mean, look at the results? The Black Market, the Mercenary Gang, and the Slave Union... they're all in shambles."

"And?"

"I mean... isn't this the perfect conclusion?" Rey narrowed his gaze as he listened to Adrien speak. He didn't believe a single word the boy uttered.

"That's because I was here to ensure whatever plan you cooked up didn't work."

In response to Rey's words, Adrien chuckled.

"It's funny how you think I didn't account for your presence at today's event."

"What?"

"I mean... you're the main player today, Sir Ralyks."

Rey didn't know what to believe any longer. Adrien was skirting around the issue, or perhaps he was being straightforward.

"I only set the stage for you."

"To what end? If you truly wanted to reap the maximum profits, you wouldn't have involved me." Rey narrowed his eyes as his glare deepened.

"True. But, like I already said, I did all of this for a good reason."

Rey's skepticism was obvious in his silence.

"The Black Market and this entire Criminal Empire that the Triumvirate founded is stupid. It'll only get in the way of the Alliance's progress in the long run." Adrien drew even closer, until he got to the place where the head of Scylla landed.

"They were a cancer eating away at this Nation's resources and potential. They're a detrimental force... an overall liability to the mission."

Adrien stepped on Scylla's head and instantly turned into a bloody paste.

"That's why I had to cut them off."

'So he did this for the sake of the Alliance?' Rey had already had the exact same thought about the Criminal Underworld some time back, so he knew Adrien wasn't lying about that.

The wealth of the Underworld would be best distributed to the Alliance in order to improve its economic state and ensure better social welfare.

Goods and special items would be more helpful in the mainstream market—especially in times of scarcity and warfare.

Of course, those profiting from it would disagree, but if the Underworld kept hoarding things from the mainstream, it would lead to the overall detriment of the Alliance.

Slave Trade was also incredibly vile, and the Mercenary Gang also committed atrocities for the other branches of the Triumvirate.

This created an entire cesspool of wealth that would eventually burn itself out and eat itself up.

It was just as Rebal said.

'The entire enterprise isn't sustainable.' Rey agreed on all of that.

However...

"Do you really expect me to believe that you did all of this for altruistic reasons?"

Summoning a blade from seemingly nowhere, Rey pointed it towards Adrien.

'I can't be an idiot and just accept whatever he says.'

If he could pretend to be a heartless killer as Ralyks, then it was possible for Adrien to act as a concerned philanthropist.

"Haha... you really have such a low opinion of me, huh?"

'Yes. Yes, I do.' Rey gritted his teeth and glared.

Anyone who could orchestrate a scenario to frame a classmate, steal from them, cause someone else to die in their place, and so on... deserved his full skepticism.

There was no way he would let Adrien off the hook just from hearing a few words concerning his selfless deeds.

"Believe it or not, I'm not an enemy. I'm not even the villain here; the Dragons are."

Rey found his blade wavering a little.

"I'm also very much against the Dragons, just like you. Just because I do things a little differently doesn't mean our interests do not align." Adrien added.

"By differently, you mean creating a bloody mess by messing with people, don't you?"

"Says the guy who killed all those people. You're welcome, by the way." Adrien casually shrugged as he spoke.

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"I'm just efficient is all. If you want to get rid of the Dragons, then you'll have to be prepared to do anything necessary to achieve that goal."

Rey couldn't disagree with the words Adrien was saying.

In fact, he found them to be alike in a lot of ways.

But... there was something about Adrien that made Rey feel a sense of repulsion.

"The difference between us is that I'm willing to do whatever it takes to win, but you still hesitate..."

As Adrien said this, he smiled at Rey.

"... For now, at least."

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Chapter 336 Revelation [Pt 2]

Rey felt something rise within his chest every time Adrien spoke, but it was always suppressed by [Dead Calm].

His words struck some kind of chord within him.

'If it wasn't for this entire incident, I wouldn't have killed anyone...'

It was Adrien's fault that he became a killer.

'No. That's not fair. I might have had to do it eventually...'

Rey knew he had to take responsibility for his actions. However, looking at the boy before him, he couldn't help but dread something.

'Will I become like him eventually?'

Was that so bad?

It was mostly thanks to Adrien that the Criminal Underworld was crumbling.

'No! He went about things the wrong way. His actions were too extreme!'

But... were they?

Rey dug deep within himself and asked himself a very difficult question—one that he was just considering at the moment.

'Who was hurt during all of this?'

It was only the members of the Underworld. They were the ones affected by Adrien's actions.

The Obsidian Houses that suffered heavy losses, like Kara's family, were not innocents. Objectively, they were a part of the cancer eating into the wealth and progress of the Alliance.

All the dead relatives of the Councilors were also deemed guilty of knowledge and connections to the Underworld thanks to the investigation he personally did.

The victims of the entire Dark Undertaking... they were criminals—the scum of the world.

And so, with all of this flowing into his mind, Rey had to ask himself once again.

'Is he really wrong?'

Rey desperately wanted to say "No" but he couldn't.

That would be hypocritical.

After all...

... He would have done the same if he was in Adrien's shoes.

"I still don't trust you." Rey spoke, almost whispering his words.

"Is that so? That's a shame..."

Adrien's face seemed to show genuine disappointment. Something akin to regret was also mixed into his eyes.

"... Rey."

The moment Rey heard his name, his eyes snapped open.

'Hold on... he knows I'm Rey?!'

Throughout their interaction, he had spoken as Ralyks, and Adrien had also addressed him the same way. fr eewebn ovel.com

Rey wasn't completely sure, but he always thought Adrien didn't know who he really was.

But all of that was now shattered.

Thankfully, Rey's anxiety and shock were suppressed by [Dead Calm], so he didn't react at all despite hearing his own name.

He was just quiet.

"I understand why you don't trust me. It's about Adam's death... right?"

'Among other things, yeah.' Rey felt his heart pounding, but it slowed down almost as quickly as it started.

His mind was strangely clear, though that didn't do away with all of his unease.

"Adam would have betrayed the class eventually."

'Do you expect me to believe that?' Rey nearly scoffed at the words he was hearing.

Adam was a loose cannon, and he was very rebellious, but he wouldn't go that far.

At most, they could have just sent him off—the same way the Council eventually did to all of the Otherworlders.

Death was too much for one of their classmates.

"I don't expect you to believe me, but it's true. This is probably not relevant anymore, but you should know that Adam is a serial rapist and sex offender."

'What?!'

"It's weird how he's already such a shitty person despite being so young, but it's true. All those crimes were swept under the rug by his rich and influential family."

'How do you expect me to believe such outlandish claims?!' Rey's thoughts nearly burst out.

There was no way for him to verify any of the claims that Adrien was making.

The only thing he knew for sure was that Adam indeed had a rich and influential family.

That was why he was such an asshole to everyone, able to get away with bullying and the likes. Despite his terrible behavior, he was still very popular and constantly surrounded by people.

It was all due to his money and influence.

'He did a lot of shitty things in the past, but... isn't rape too far?'

"What if I told you that he also killed someone?"

Rey didn't want to believe him.

"I prompted him to kill Adonis, but why do you think he readily accepted my offer?"

'Because you influenced his mind... maybe.'

"No. It's because he's done it before."

"That's enough." Rey sighed, refusing to make any comment that would cement his identity as Rey.

For all he knew, Adrien could be guessing his identity.

"I have no idea what you're talking about." He added.

Adrien chuckled, shrugging casually once again while nodding.

"I understand. Fair enough."

For a moment, no one said anything. Both parties merely stared at each other.

Then—

"I also want to apologize for the entire ordeal you had to go through in the trial."

—Adrien spoke once again.

"I also want to apologize for stealing those Monster Cores. I needed resources to obtain a bunch of things for my plans back then. I know it's not an excuse, but... I had good reasons for doing what I did."

Rey was rendered speechless by what he was hearing.

He had always thought the Mastermind was a heartless machine who manipulated everyone and orchestrated scenarios to suit his selfish whims.

After Adam's death, that concrete image had been imprinted into Rey's mind.

'But this... this is unexpected!'

Adrien seemed very reasonable, and in fact he was more similar to Rey than the latter could have imagined.

It was almost freaky how identical their views were.

'But...'

Rey searched within himself for a way to justify his skepticism towards Adrien, but his mind came up blank.

Just like Adrien, he had also gotten his own resources through somewhat illegitimate means.

Did that make him evil? No...

"Apologies are shallow, I know. So why don't I compensate you now... for all your troubles."

"What are you talking about?" Rey asked, realizing he had been silent for too long.

"I'll leave the remaining resources Scylla had, as well as all the resources of the Black Market members at your disposal. I won't touch anything."

Adrien's response would have come as a shock to Rey if he didn't already know the kind of person he was.

"You've already taken what you need, haven't you?"

In response to that, Adrien merely deepened his smile and shrugged.

"If you feel like that isn't enough, then why don't I give you some information? Consider it as a reward for getting this far."

Rey didn't like how he was being strung around like a child. It seemed like, even now, Adrien was manipulating him.

Perhaps that was what rubbed him the wrong way when dealing with this boy.

—The fact that Adrien held the advantage here.

Rey hated feeling like prey... like the underdog. However, in all their interactions, it always seemed like he was one step behind Adrien.

It was despicable.

He hated every second of it.

Perhaps he wasn't particularly angry at Adrien for his actions as much as he was upset that he never thought about them, or maybe was just one of the pieces being played by someone else, rather than being the chessmaster himself.

Even now, as he was piecing together all of the information before him, Rey couldn't help but feel like that was exactly what Adrien wanted.

It left him at a crossroads, with two equally detestable options

"I know about the whereabouts of our classmates. I can tell you that if you like."

*

Chapter 337 Revelation [Pt 3]

'Our classmates? The ones who left the Royal Estate?!'

Rey had no idea where they were, and he frankly didn't even bother finding out. In all honesty, none of that mattered to him.

They were liabilities, and save for Noah—who he considered a friend—there was no value in looking out for any of them.

Rather than that, he focused on making sure the current roster of capable Otherworlder were as formidable as possible.

That way, he could cut his losses and take his chances with the winning team.

'But he means to tell me that he knows exactly what they've been up to?'

"Most of them are working closely with merchants and reputable agencies. With their Skills and basic combat training, they can pretty much handle all the bandits they have to fight to guard properties." Adrien explained.

Of course, there was still no way to verify what he was saying, but Rey was running out of reasons to believe Adrien could be lying.

He didn't even know why Adrien would lie.

"A few are already dead. It's a shame, but it's quite the cruel world that they found themselves in."

"Who killed them?" Rey found himself asking.

Adrien smiled as soon as Rey replied with that, and for a second, he said nothing.

However, his silence was short-lived.

"Monsters. They didn't stand a chance against powerful Monsters."

"Why would they just encounter Monsters?"

"They didn't understand the geography of this world. It's not difficult to imagine them going to a forest or region that had been deemed to be a Danger Zone."

Rey felt a tight feeling in his chest.

Adrien was right about a bunch of regions where Monsters spawned. Careless travelers or those who were ignorant of that fact could be attacked by them and meet cruel ends.

"As for your friend, Noah, he's currently an Adventurer in the Adventurer's City."

Rey's eyes widened the moment he heard that news.

'What the hell is he doing as an Adventurer?' That wasn't at all the hat Noah had said in his letter.

What changed?

"I believe that should be enough repayment for one day." Adrien sighed, almost as if he was already tired.

"I've spoken too much for a day. It's really exhausting. I guess being a silent guard really suits me, considering I don't have to say anything for most of my job."

Perhaps this was meant to be a joke, as Adrien laughed a little, but Rey's stern face showed how unamused he was.

Once again, an awkward silence filled the room.

"Now that we're done here... I think I'll take my leave—"

~WHOOOSH!~

Before Adrien could conclude his statement, Rey sped towards him and grabbed him by the throat.

He rushed towards a nearby wall and slammed Adrien on it without a care in the world, forcibly imprinting a massive crack on the wall.

~BOOOM!~

Shockwaves of the sudden action caused everything in the room to tremble, but Rey's grasp remained firm.

"There's no use trying to wiggle out. You can't teleport out of here, and none of your Skills will affect me." Rey said, tightening his grip on the still Adrien.

Despite being treated so roughly, the boy continued to smile.

"I really don't like you, Adrien."

"I... noticed." Adrien leaked out a chuckle before being forced to keep quiet thanks to Rey squeezing his throat harder.

"You're full of bullshit. You could have just destroyed the Criminal Underworld more efficiently without going through such an elaborate scheme."

"What... do you... mean?"

"You can't fool me. You are strong enough to destroy all of them by yourself, and you've had the chance to do so. Yet, you went through all this length and risked so much damage to achieve the same results? I'm not buying it." Rey drew closer to Adrien and growled.

"You have other intentions. Tell me what they are."

"Haha! Damn... you really have me all figured out, don't you?" Adrien coughed, maintaining his strained smile.

Rey pressed him against the wall, his crimson eyes glowing greatly.

"Perhaps I was curious about you and wanted to see how strong you were. Alas, this event wasn't too challenging, so I couldn't see the depths of your power."

"Is that so?" Rey's intensity increased.

"Relax. It's all hypothetical." He coughed once again. "The thing is... I don't want to make my existence known to the world. That's why I chose to blend in with them and organically destroy everything from the inside out, inviting you to deal the final damage."

"What?"

"If I went about the destruction of the Criminal Underworld more straightforwardly, it would alert everyone of a higher power. I don't think I want that kind of attention."

"I thought you wanted what's best for the people." Rey mused.

"There's that too." Adrien widened his grin. "Think about it. How would people react if they found out there's a second Ralyks running around, with enough power to completely decimate an Organization that has been operating from the shadows for a decade?"

Rey could think of a list of reactions, though it all depended on the circumstances, or nature of Adrien's approach when purging the filth.

"No matter how you slice it, I consider the whole thing unnecessary. There's no need for a second Ralyks when there's already one."

"Is that why you made it so that I was involved?" Rey asked.

Adrien nodded with a brilliant smile playing on his face.

"I want you, as Ralyks, to take full credit for all this. You can be that overarching figure that will serve as a higher power."

"I don't think so."

"But you've already started. All your actions so far have been in that line. You saving the Otherworlders, killing the Dragon, and even the way you're currently assisting our devoted classmates to grow. You've done so much, so just add this one to the list."

Rey could once again see the sense in Adrien's words. But he knew, instinctively, that there had to be some kind of catch.

A deep benefit that only Adrien knew about and would profit from.

"Do you think I'll let you use me like this?"

"Yes, I do."

Rey growled and squeezed harder on Adrien's neck, but the boy still spoke normally regardless.

"It's for the greater good, after all."

"I think you'll need to define what you mean by 'greater good', Adrien."

In response, Adrien raised both of his hands in an "I don't know" or "You tell me" fashion.

"We're both on the same side against the Dragons. I think that already speaks for itself."

Rey chose silence this time.

He had run out of things to ask, and Adrien seemed pretty harmless at this point.

"If you're so worried about me, why don't you just kill me now and get it over with!"

"..."

"You'll be able to stop my plans, and you'll be able to save the world your way. Pretty neat, right?"

Despite saying this, Adrien was smiling so confidently. You'd never think he was being pinned down by Rey from the way he was acting.

And the honest truth was... he wasn't.

"I already know this isn't your real body. It's a puppet, isn't it?"

*

Chapter 338 This Is Farewell

"I already know this isn't your real body. It's a puppet, isn't it?"

Adrien's brilliant smile broadened and a twinkle flashed in his blue eyes as Rey said those words.

It seemed he was waiting to hear them.

"Your real body is most likely somewhere safe, far away from this location." Rey added, his tone teetering the point between curiosity and disinterest. .com

Once again, Adrien shrugged.

"Far away, yes. Safe... I'm not very sure."

Upon hearing this, Rey narrowed his gaze and found himself smiling.

"Why don't you tell me where you are? I'll go right there and kill you, just like you asked me to."

"Haha! I don't think I want to die just yet." Adrien chuckled, shaking his head slightly.

"Besides, what's the fun in giving you the answers just like that? It's a puzzle, so figure it out yourself."

Rey already knew he was going to get that kind of answer, so he never put much stock into his question. If he had some sort of Skill that would allow him to track Adrien's real body, that would have probably worked, but he currently had no such luck.

All he had was a marionette whose death would be inconsequential.

'I can't use [Absolute Mental Control] or [Compulsion] on a target that isn't in my immediate vicinity, so it's not possible for me to force him to spill the beans. None of my Skills can allow me to reach him in any way either.'

Rey gritted his teeth, realizing he was stuck.

... Just as Adrien desired.

"You did well, you know? Killing these people, I mean."

Adrien's voice spurred Rey from his maelstrom of thoughts.

It caused Rey to suspend his mind from going over as many possible alternatives to the situation at hand, instead gazing into Adrien's azure eyes.

"If you consider me vile, then I wonder how you'll react once you see..."

"See what?" Rey asked in a bit of frustration.

"Underground. Check it out for yourself."

'The Secret Underground area? Isn't that where Esme went?'

"I don't see your partner with you. The weakling who was hiding behind that armor."

Rey's eyes slightly twitched the moment he heard those words. [Dead Calm] was active, so he hardly reacted to anything Adrien said to him.

'Does he know Esme's true identity, or is he just trying to pry information from me? I'm not sure...'

Either way, he decided not to say anything.

"Your priorities are misplaced. I don't think you should be wasting any more time with me downstairs when your partner is down there."

Rey flinched a little more.

'I definitely didn't sense anything dangerous down there. Nothing too dangerous for my Grand Elementals.'

Sure, there were a lot of people that occupied the spaces underneath, some of which were most likely hostile, but they wouldn't be too dangerous for his Elemental Summons to handle.

'He's just trying to mess with me, isn't h—?!'

Before Rey could finalize his thoughts, he felt something instantly die out within him—like a connection which was suddenly severed.

It was the link between himself and his two Summons.

Despite the effects of [Dead Calm], Rey felt a surge of panic for about a second, before finally regaining his composure.

'Impossible...!'

There was no way the connection between himself and his Grand Elementals would be cut off given the circumstances he had calculated.

Only two things could cause such a development.

One would be the appearance of some Skill or Magic which could hijack his control over the two Elemental Summons.

As for the other option... it was the death of the Grand Elementals.

Both options were equally terrible because they essentially pointed at the existence of a much more powerful foe than he anticipated.

An S-Tier threat, at the very least!

'Damnit! I should have left a replica with her, after all!'

The reason he didn't do so was because he wanted to be prepared when facing Adrien—or at least, his puppet.

He had no way of telling if the actual Adrien was going to show up, and given the fact that he had an SSS-Tier Skill, just like Rey, the latter knew that he couldn't be too careful.

As a result of that, he ended up leaving Esme in a vulnerable state.

"Hahaha! I suppose this is farewell, Re—"

~SQUISH!~

Before Adrien could conclude his message, Rey crushed the throat of the puppet, instantly turning the entire thing into dust through corrosion.

"I'll deal with you later..." He whispered under his breath, a bright crimson hue radiating from his slightly frustrated eyes.

Despite the effects of [Dead Calm], Rey found himself growing increasingly desperate.

'I should hurry!'

~WHOOSH!~

In a swift blur, he teleported away from where he was and instantly made his way to the very bloodied hall where he slaughtered his enemies.

He didn't care to look at the dismembered corpses and quickly rushed inside the gaping entrance that was yet to close.

'I hope I'm not too late...' His thought trailed as winds brushed past his face as he combined his use of teleportation and swift flight, rushing as quickly as he possibly could in such an enclosed space.

If he was too fast, he could compromise the entire structure and cause everything to collapse.

That would further ruin his plan.

He couldn't allow that—especially after all the meticulous planning that went into the entire event that was the Dark Gathering.

Rey was sure that this was due to the influence of [Dead Calm], but he found himself unwilling to risk his plans for a chance of arriving earlier to save Esme.

It felt... disgusting.

And soon as he made that connection, Rey turned off his [Dead Calm], which just coincidentally turned out to be the perfect time when he closed in on Esme's location.

Then...

~BOOOM!~

... He burst through the walls, turning everything into dust and entered an incredibly large room—far more spacious than the hall used for the Dark Gathering.

'Esme!'

He was thankful to see her still alive, though a second later, his joy transformed into something else.—Something awry.

'W-what... what in the world is this?'

*

Chapter 339 Definition Of Despair

Red.

Rey saw red all over the room.

The succulent color of blood, and the warm moisture of the liquid dropped from every corner of the room.

It occupied every facet of it.

Then, sitting atop the endless river of blood—one that flowed without end—were heaps and heaps of corpses.

Like mincemeat, their bodies were riddled with holes and squashed beyond recognition.

It seemed they were initially diced into multiple pieces, and then crushed in many areas until they became nothing but pounded flesh.

It was this very flesh that decorated the room, hanging all over like strewn spaghetti covered in tomato sauce. It was both an absurd and horrifying sight.

Yet... there was a certain beauty about it.

This painting of death, however, had one fatal flaw—the living still remained on it.

This, perhaps, was what made Rey's eyes widen in absolute shock.

Because, even if he didn't expect to see a scene of bloodshed, it wasn't at all new to him. However, this would be the first time in all of his existence that he would witness this...

... This scene of absolute depravity.

He saw humans being treated like cattle.

Young ones who looked like they were barely adults, were having intercourse despite the blood and gore that was bound to overwhelm the senses.

They were naked, like beasts, and they carried out their duties with utmost precision.

The male swung their hips, thrusting their tools into the holes of the women whose bodies dangled with each move as they received their dues.

It was a twisted scene.

Their faces told Rey that none of them were enjoying this. It seemed more like they were in a trance rather than reality.

They had dilated pupils, with drool oozing from their mouths and snot dripping from their noses—all signs of doping.

One check at their Status and Rey could easily confirm that they were on some kind of drugs, though he didn't even need to go that far to arrive at that conclusion.

What he was looking at weren't humans anymore.

They were nothing more than broken dolls whose activities had already been predetermined for them. Overcome by lust, and without barely any cognitive function left, the only thing they could do...

... Was to breed.

"W-what in the world is this?!"

Rey's perplexed eyes took in this abominable scene and could barely even speak, talkless of move.

Gore mixed with an unsavory orgy left a bad taste in his mouth—almost driving him to vomit all over the place.

However, he stopped himself since that would only make things worse.

Then... amidst all this, he heard a sob.

It came from the girl who knelt right in front of the horror that pervaded the room.

Her pale, naked skin was dipped in the crimson blood that flowed endlessly, and she seemed to be still—like a statue without life.

"E-Esme...?"

Rey's tone contained a lot of worry, but also a slight hint of confusion.

But, that was understandable.

For the girl who knelt in the pool of blood was different from the one he knew just a few moments before.

Replacing the black hair she had was an angelic bloom of white hair that flowed ever so beautifully.

They were partially covered in blood, but their beauty radiated through even that.

They appeared soft—softer than silk—and each strand seemed to be made from the most beautiful of gems. However, this wasn't the only change.

Esme's normal ears were now pointed, like that of an Elf. In this moment of tragedy and horror, her true beauty emerged—like a flower surrounded by dirt.

In all its majesty, her pale body bloomed like the most perfect depiction of beauty, only to be shrouded by the world's greatest horrors.

The sobs continued.

As Rey took a single step forward, the girl's body began to move.

Her beautiful hair swayed as she turned to face him, who stood from behind. .com

"Rey..." Her lips uttered his name in a way that completely melted his heart.

The pain in her tone, and the agony on her face as she said his name and hot tears streamed down her cheeks, was enough to paralyze him.

He couldn't go any further.

Rey could only pause and watch as she looked at him with a maelstrom of emotions.

Fear. Rage. Sorrow. Pain. Horror. Disdain.

A lot more existed on this spectrum, but before Rey could process any more of it, Esme opened up her lips and spoke once more.

"... What have I done?"

[Moments Earlier]

'I'm so nervous...'

Esme was right in between two reliable guards, but that didn't make her feel any safer. Even her very sturdy armor only felt like paper as she stepped into the brightly lit stairwell that led to unknown depths.

Each of the Grand Elementals with Esme could easily crush her in a second, and she wouldn't be able to resist at all.

She knew they wouldn't do such a thing—since they were Rey's summons—but her intrusive thoughts kept winning in her mind.

In the end, she could only nervously trod down the path set before her.

They finally reached the bottom of the stairs, and all Esme saw in front of her was a massive red door.

Atop the door, a message was shown:

[WARNING: Powerful Aphrodisiac Usage ahead. Please wear a face mask]

'Aphrodisiac? What is that?'

Esme was quite innocent in that regard so she didn't know what such a commonplace term for a chemical stimulant for one's sex drive meant.

'Is it a poison or something...?' She glanced at the Elementals who were with her.

Thankfully, she didn't have any need to worry, since the Wind Elemental Summon instantly shrouded her in a sphere of protection.

This sphere protected her from any attacks or poisonous air around her. As a result, whatever this 'Aphrodisiac' was, it wouldn't affect her.

'I have the perfect nose mask with me!' Esme smiled to herself, feeling a lot more confident.

Elemental Summons didn't need to breathe, so she doubted they would be in any trouble beyond the doors of the room.

'I guess it's time to advance.' She told herself.

Esme didn't like keeping her hopes up for too long, considering how she had been disappointed in the past up until this point.

They had explored dozens upon dozens of warehouses, but Esme was yet to see a single friend of hers. None of her surviving family was in any of the places they visited, so she didn't want to think that this particular place would be any different.

However, something told her that this time would be different.

She genuinely believed that it was possible... no, likely to see them here.

Perhaps it was just wishful thinking—an irrational expectation she placed on the situation due to how far she had come.

However, Esme chose to believe it all this time.

And so, she took a step forward, filled with purpose and determination.

'Allie, Charles, everyone! I'm coming for you!'

Esme flung the red door open, and she was greeted with a squeaky clean white hall—much larger than the room used for the Dark Gathering.

It was so big and tall.

But...

'H-huh...?!'

... It was very occupied.

Esme had witnessed a lot of horrors—one of which just recently concluded above his very facility—but this one trumped everything.

It was the ultimate punishment for one not deserving at all.

The true definition of despair.

*

Chapter 340 Metamorphosis

Esme saw something horrifying that day.

'Allie...?'

She saw her friends and family, just like she wanted. But... they weren't the same as she left them.

'Charles...?'

She found them to be positioned like beasts, mating in the most disgusting way possible.

'E-everyone...?!'

Their vacant pupils and drooling mouths were wide open as they absentmindedly moved their body to engage in activities they wouldn't normally get involved in.

Such vulgar actions... the filthiness of it all—Esme nearly didn't recognize these people as her family.

But they were!

Not all of them were here, but she could see a lot of familiar faces.

The bodies of the young ones she knew had been forcefully matured somehow, and their previously flat bellies were swollen.

"A-ahh... ahhh..."

Esme felt her mind was tearing apart.

She always wanted to reunite with her family, but now that they were right in front of her, she couldn't take a single step forward.

This wasn't her family at all.

They were... different... from how she remembered them.

"Intruder!" Esme heard voices echo from all over the room.

Suddenly, sirens began to blare and a lot of guards began to rush in through the double-door at the furthest end of the room.

Some had blades, as well as other weapons, while some had staffs. They clearly seemed to be veterans, and according to protocol, they had their nose masks on.

Esme was too shell-shocked to utter any word.

She just looked at the entire scene that played right in front of her in bone-chilling horror.

'H-how... why...?'

Her eyes began to grow wide, and her racing heart couldn't go any fast, so it practically stop beating; for that moment, at least.

Then—

"No..."

—Her voice began to manifest.

~BZZZTZZZ!~

"... I should have expected this..."

~ZZZTZZZZ!~

"You're all monsters. Every single one of you." Esme raised her face and looked at the people who cautiously approached her.

They must have been quite worried due to the Elementals that guarded her.

If they took any step closer to her, Esme knew her protectors would easily get rid of them.

But... she didn't want that.

~ZZZTTTTTZZZZZ!~

Esme wanted to be the one to do it.

She wanted to kill them.

[SYSTEM NOTIFICATION]

[The World Has Listened To Your Cry, Lost One]

[Inferior Gene Limitation Has Been Removed]

[New Skill Unlocked: Absolute Elemental Control]

[All Pre-Existing Skills Will Be Upgraded]

"Haaa..."

As misty breaths escaped Esme's lips, she looked at the approaching enemies with only one thought in mind.

"Please die."

~VWUUUUUSSSH!~

The Orichalcum armor that covered her body instantly broke apart as a result of the inflow of such incredible Mana.

Her current power was too much for it to contain.

That wasn't all, though.

The two Grand Elemental Summons beside her also shattered, and their bodies became nourishment for her new Skill.

The violent winds from the Wind Elemental, coupled with the broken shards of the immensely powerful Earth Elemental, gave Esme strength.

She sent the winds forward, easily slicing through every single defense that her enemies could erect to protect themselves.

Within a single moment, their diced up bodies floated in the air— all of them without exceptions.

Then, Esme sent the shattered rocks towards all the dismembered corpses, using the debris to point their flesh until they became pasty entrails and grounded meat.

They splattered all over the room—both blood and flesh—all of it creating a disgustingly beautiful landscape of death.

In that single moment, Esme killed over a hundred guards, seeing their flesh and blood cover everything in the vast room.

Once her violent outburst was over, Esme plopped to the ground, kneeling in utter defeat.

She had indeed killed her enemies, but her victory rang hollow.

No... was it really a victory at all?

Despite everything, Esme could still hear the sounds of flesh pounding against flesh—an action carried out by the thousands in the room.

Some were familiar, some were not.

They were not moaning in pleasure, but grunts and squishes could be heard all around.

Esme could see it all—with her [Absolute Appraisal]—that their mental and cognitive functions had long been corroded.

'They're too far gone...'

Yes, they looked like people, but they were far from it. These were empty shells that only knew how to do certain things.

Machines disguised as living beings.

Or rather, living things that had become nothing more than machines.

'I... what did I...? I...'

Before Esme could complete her thoughts, she heard a sound behind her.

~BOOOOM!~

A familiar presence appeared behind her.

She was naked and absolutely vulnerable, covered in blood. Her shame consumed her as she knelt there, unable to look in the eyes of the man who had now appeared behind her.

Tears streamed down her eyes as she felt his gaze settle on her.

'I... I...'

Then, she heard his footsteps, how they advanced towards her.

'No! Don't come near me! I'm too...' She turned to look at him at that moment.

'... Too filthy!'

Esme had become the very evil she hated—killing and enjoying every bit of it.

She knew a smile was on her face when she cut up those men and women and crushed their meaty flesh and solid bones with her power.

It was terribly fleeting, but Esme had felt indescribable pleasure back then.

She was a horrible person.

"W-what... have I done?" She whispered as she looked at Rey.

His dark mask prevented her from seeing his face, but she was so scared about how he now perceived her.

Perhaps as a monster... or as evil.

Back when he had executed all the members of the opposition side, Esme only felt disgust and repulsion—towards him and the entire dance of violence.

But now... now it was her turn.

She was so scared to be gazed upon with such eyes.

If only Esme really knew what Rey was currently seeing through the lens of his sight.

He never perceived a monster.

All he saw was a beautiful gem surrounded by tragedy.