

Extras 391

Chapter 391 There's Something About Esme

"Let's go, Esme."

Rey took her hand and drew her close to him as he flew away from the scene.

With his Spatial Skill, he could have easily teleported the two of them out of there, but instead, he chose to ascend to the skies with her.

They both floated in the air, the ground far beneath their feet.

"W-what about Aldred? What will happen to him... and them?"

A single glance at Esme's face showed that, despite being hurt by the Elves, she still cared about them. Rey didn't understand if it was some kind of racial camaraderie, but he found it odd.

'Would I have been the same if the humans treated me like shit?'

He wasn't sure, but he doubted it.

Even when he was considered the weakest of the Otherworlders, and he sort of still was, the Royal Council didn't treat him with any kind of bigotry.

The only reason they separated the students into two classes was in order not to rush the training of the lesser skilled students and also to prevent the impediment of the growth of the more talented students.

It was a pragmatic approach, and Rey wasn't even the only one who was in Beta Class. Most of the students were there.

Promotions and demotions also existed, so it wasn't a strict hierarchy.

There were initially nine students in the Alpha Class, but they eventually got whittled down to seven. If Trisha continued her intense training, Rey had a feeling that she would have undoubtedly reached Alpha Class.

All of that was in the past now, but the bottom line was that he wasn't harshly treated by the humans in H'Trae. Lucielle and Brutus—as well as any other trainer in-between—were pretty fair to him.

He was treated pretty much the same as everyone else.

In fact, most of the scorn he received was from his fellow Otherworlders. A lot of them made fun of him in the beginning, but even that didn't last very long.

Everyone had their own thing, and so they soon ignored him.

No one really bullied him. Perhaps that was due to the influence of Adonis, but Rey also felt like they simply had their struggles and challenges to keep busy.

"I haven't really had it that rough, so I wouldn't know how you feel right now... Esme." Rey said as he looked at her.

For a moment, they stared at each other in silence.

Then—

"It's fine, Rey. They don't want to have anything to do with me, and I understand that." Esme spoke calmly.

Rey thought she would cry or display some kind of emotion, but her slightly stoic demeanor was not within his expectations.

"I also don't want to have anything to do with them."

"A-ahh... I see." Rey chuckled in slight embarrassment.

It seemed like, rather than Esme, he was the one who took things too seriously.

"Thanks for having my back, though. I really appreciate it, Rey." She smiled, slightly using her fist to bump him on his shoulder.

"Jeez... it's no big deal."

Rey rubbed his shoulder as he muttered the words.

Of course, he didn't feel any discomfort from her action.

It was the opposite, actually.

He was blushing underneath the mask, so thankful that she couldn't see his beet red face.

"You're a good friend, Rey. I'm lucky to have known someone like you."

Rey felt something move in his heart as she said those words. He felt a bittersweet sensation within him as he heard those words.

'Friends, huh? I guess... we are friends.'

"I still remember the first time we met. In that dark room..." Esme's voice was soft and sullen, but it wasn't sad at all.

She smiled despite bringing up the terrifying event.

"I had to strain my voice to call your name, you know? I said nothing initially, since I thought you would save everyone. Imagine my shock when you just started walking away with those two."

"Haha! I was going to report to the authorities, and they would have rescued you." Rey responded with a nervous smile as he watched Esme shake her head.

"That's not what I thought back then, though. I was like... 'This jerk is just going to leave the rest of us like this? I can't believe he has a Good Alignment!' that sort of thing."

"Pfft! Well, I won't deny being a jerk." Rey laughed even harder.

"Yeah. You made a fragile girl like me struggle just so you could save me..." Despite saying that, Esme's smile only grew broader.

"Who would have thought that jerk would end up being such an amazing friend?"

The two stared at each other for what felt like a minute, allowing the winds to blow on them as they shared the silence.

"You're not half bad yourself." Rey finally spoke up, replying in a playful tone.

Esme giggled the moment she heard that. "Well, isn't it very rare to have such a pretty friend like me? You can show me off to your other friends, you know?"

Rey didn't have a lot of friends, so only one image really came to mind once Esme said what she said.

'Alicia...!' He gulped the moment he thought about what would happen if he tried to show Esme off to her.

'What will she say, I wonder?'

The right answer would have been that Alicia was going to be happy for him. Making another friend was not an easy task for Rey, so—naturally speaking—she would be glad to see him bonding with someone else.

But...

'That didn't work out last time, with Trisha.'

Somehow, the thought of introducing any female as his friend gave Rey goosebumps when he imagined Alicia's reaction.

'That means she likes me, right? Maybe I can ask Esme about that!'

"Don't look so dull, Rey." Esme's voice brought Rey back to reality. "If it's for your sake, I can pretend to be your girl so you can look cool."

"H-huh...?"

"I understand, Rey. My friends also made me feel a bit jealous when they had boyfriends and I had none."

'E-eh? Esme didn't have guys fawning for her?! Impossible!' Rey's thoughts echoed.

"But wait... you have a girl, right? Ah, yes... the one you got the Amber Ring for. I almost forgot about tha—"

"S-she's not... my girlfriend."

"Yet." Esme completed Rey's sentence and winked at him.

"Yeah... yet." Rey muttered, laughing at himself as he scratched his head in embarrassment.

Esme really caught him off-guard with all of this. But, Rey didn't mind it at all.

In fact, he quite enjoyed every moment.

"Can you tell me who she is? This girl that my friend is so in love with." Esme nudged, raising her brows a few times so Rey could spill.

It was so funny that he wanted to laugh, but he swallowd it instantly.

"W-well, you've met her before..."

"I have? Hold on... was it one of the two people you saved back then?"

"Yes."

"I couldn't properly see their faces since it was dark, and I was weak." Esme began rubbing her chin as she thought back to the incident.

Then, a wide smile formed on her face.

"I see. Well, I look forward to seeing where this goes." Rey nodded and replied with equal fervor.

"Me too."

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Chapter 392 Rey's Outcry

Rey and Esme flew side by side, enjoying the brilliant sight that only they could see thanks to their high altitude.

Esme didn't have any Flight-based Skill, but her [Absolute Elemental Control] Skill allowed her to freely manipulate the elements around her.

Since the winds constituted that, she had no problem freely navigating her way through the air.

When Rey asked her how she was able to fly so easily, she responded:

"I was floating for most of my time in those two weeks of solitude. Learned a bit about my new abilities too..."

Rey was certain that Esme learned a lot more than just a bit, but he decided not to push it any further.

"You have immense potential, Esme." He could only say. "Maybe even more than those Elves we saw."

Rey noticed that Esme's smile only deepened. She didn't argue, so he knew she must have also checked their Status Windows.

'From the looks of things, they get 10 Stat Points from every Level Up. That's incredibly broken...'

Compared to humans, Elves were on another Level. Of course, someone like Adonis easily trumped them.

'They also have a ton of Skills. That Aurora lady had nearly fifteen Skills. That's like three times the limit of the strongest humans in H'Trae.'

All in all, Rey was impressed by the Status Windows he saw.

'Aurora looks like a young woman in her late twenties, and the others look like teenagers. Their Level difference is like night and day, as it should be...'

'If they were actually good people and Esme went with them, then it's possible that they could help her grow incredibly strong.'

All of that was lost now, but it was by no means thier fault.

'And now...' Rey glanced at Esme, whose eyes were on the landscape below them.

Once he gave her his attention, however, she looked at him and tilted her head to the side in curiosity.

"What's wrong? Is there something on my face?" She asked.

He shook his head.

"Oh? Whew!" She heaved in relief. "So what's up?"

After flying for a quite the distance, Rey felt like it was time to ask the difficult question that had been on his mind for quite some time.

"Where do you plan on going now?"

Esme didn't look surprised once she heard the question. She must have been expecting him to ask it eventually.

"Hm. I'm not sure..." She answered, her white hair flowing behind her like a river. "I'm sure I'll think of something."

Rey had somehow predicted his answer.

He already knew it was coming, and yet... he wasn't satisfied with it.

His silence spoke volumes, but it wasn't enough. He clenched his fist and gritted his teeth as he stared intensely at Esme.

"Don't leave."

Rey ceased his motion and instantly paused in the air.

Not long after, Esme also did the same. She looked at him with surprise as he stared hard into her eyes.

"I don't want you to leave."

Rey knew he sounded like a brat.

He knew Esme was her own individual, and as such, had her own life to live. He knew they hadn't really known each other for very long, and their friendship was still too young for him to make such a request of her.

She didn't even know what he looked like! Yet... YET...

... Rey couldn't help his selfishness.

"Where will I stay? The Reaper Group? There's really nothing waiting for me there."

Rey knew that very well.

"I... I am the leader of the Reaper Group. Staying with the Reaper Group means staying with me..." His voice trembled as he uttered those words.

He had never been so scared to open his mouth and speak in his life, yet somehow he found the courage to tell Esme what he truly felt.

Perhaps it was because he recognized that he could lose her forever if he didn't.

That fear gave him strength.

"Stay with me, Esme. I want you to... stay with me, even if just for a bit longer. I want us to talk together, laugh together, grow together, fight together... even if it's just for a while longer."

Rey was in love with Alicia, but he never had a friend like Esme before.

He didn't want to see their friendship dissolve so quickly—not when it was just starting.

"Don't... leave me too."

He cast his gaze downward, unable to look Esme in the eye.

Was he being manipulative? Was he trying to guilt-trip her by appealing to her emotions so she would have no choice but to stay with him?

Esme was a kind person, so maybe she could pity him and remain by his side.

Rey didn't want that for her.

He didn't want to force his selfishness on someone else. For all he knew, all of these rabid feelings that threatened to consume him were only one-sided.

'H-how can I live with myself... knowing I forced her to stay?' Despite his strong inclination to hold on, he knew that some thing had to be forfeit.

Perhaps... he just had to let go.

"Esme, I'm sorry for—!"

~WHOOSH!~

Like a blur, Esme's body rushed to Rey's, and she hugged him very tightly.

"What are you apologizing for, you jerk?"

Rey felt paralyzed—unable to move in the slightest.

All he could do was inhale the sweet aroma that Esme exuded, allowing the tears in his moist eyes to dry up and his trembling lips to part wide open.

"I... I also don't want you to leave me." Esme's words caused Rey's eyes to widen.

He had neevr heard those words in his life.

All of his friends... they left him at one point or the other.

Billy betrayed him. Noah abandoned him. Even Alicia wanted to leave this world that he loved so much and return to Earth.

He didn't despise any of these people, and to an extent... he understood why they made the choices that they made.

But Rey was human too.

He wanted connections that wouldn't expire. He desired a bond that would last.

He craved someone who would stay.

And right now... he was trapped in her embrace.

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Chapter 393 Premonition For What Is To Come

"U-urgh..."

Aurora felt a sharp sensation in her head as she woke up in a flowery expanse.

The place was lit by fire-fly like sources of light that floated all around the garden that seemed to exist in a cave.

'We're back here...?' Aurora's thoughts trailed as she looked around.

She could see her sisters still asleep. There were twelve of them in total.

'What happened back then? What did the humans do? My memory is fuzzy...'

The last thing she remembered was the exchange of goods with the humans, and then they went their separate ways.

'Did we get attacked on our way back? Was it a Dragon?' No, if that was the case, they would already be dead.

Besides, Aurora still had the pouch which contained the Spatial Rings in her possession. All the items were secure, and her twelve sisters were safe.

A Dragon would not show that sort of mercy.

'This place is accursed. We shouldn't have come here, to begin with!' Aurora chastised herself as she rose to her feet.

Still, they had no choice thanks to their desperation.

'Now that we have recieved these Items, we can return to our home.'

Aurora stole one final glance at her sisters and felt a surge of bliss. It had been a long, ardous, and frustrating journey, but they were finally done with their mission.

A subtle feeling within her told her she was forgetting something, but Aurora could hardly notice it. Not while her heart raced and she remembered the sisters who were busy fighting against the scourge of the world.

'Wait for me, everyone!' Aurora clenched her fist in resolve and smiled with sheer determination.

'I'm coming back!'

[The Next Day]

The Otherworlders were busy in their living quarters, all of them enjoying their time off by either moping around or engaging in interesting conversations.

Even Adonis, the training obsessed one, was taking a break. He also urged Trisha and Billy to take the day off. As a result, all nine of the Otherworlders were in their residence when a neck came from the door.

Naturally, everyone's attention was drawn to it.

Before long, the door was opened and the Royal Council Members entered in their majesty.

Surprise was plain on the faces the students as they watched the two enter their living quarters. After all, they had all been informed that there would be no official business for at least a few days.

They were to enjoy their time as they saw fit.

Seeing the sources of official business enter the room, they felt a bit tense. Unfortunately, their concerns were valid.

The Royal Council came to visit for an ominous reason, after all.

"Could you all gather around, please? We have a very serious announcement to make." Vida spoke up first.

Somehow, hearing her nice voice set up a somewhat friendly atmosphere in the living room.

The students who were in thier rooms were called for, so before long all nine Otherworlders were in the same living room.

There were a few murmurs, but most of them were silent.

They looked at the Councilors with curiosity and tense expectations. Somehow, most of them already had a good guess of what this meeting was all about.

Without a doubt, it was related to the very reason they were summoned in the first place.

"We are here to inform you that we have finally recieved a response from the front lines of the battle. Lucielle and Brutus will be arriving in about about ten days to fetch you all for your confrontation with the Dragons." Conrad spoke up.

He tried his best to be calm and warm in his voice, but even if he did so, it didn't take away the heavy meaning that his words implied.

The time for war was near.

It didn't matter that they had spent the last three months preparing for this moment. The mere fact that it had come was enough to cause most of the Otherworlders to shudder.

There was fear.

Anxiety was written on the faces of everyone present.

However, this was only temporary. Once they overcame the initial apprehension, most of the students leaked out a smile.

A certain glow could be seen in their eyes.

It betrayed the initial apprehension from before. Their gaze transcended mere excitement or anticipation.

It was sheer exhilaration!

They seemed to be saying with their faces "I CAN'T WAIT!"

"In ten days, you say..." Adonis raised his hand, causing everyone to look in his direction. "And what should we be doing before then?"

Claudius leaked a sigh of relief as he heard those words, so Vida took it as her cue to respond to the Hero's question.

"You can do whatever you like pending that time. Consider it as a little vacation before the main work."

The students understood this well, and so they nodded at each other.

"Once again, we would like to thank you all. Brave champions like you, visitors from another world, who have chosen to remain here in order to save us..." Claudius bowed his head before them.

Vida did the same with a bright smile on her face.

"You have all grown so much stronger in such a short span of time. Your power is unrivaled among we humans, and your potential for growth never seems to end."

In this awe-inspiring moment, the Otherworlders showed the courtesy of silence as they watched the Councilors appreciate them with all their hearts.

"For all you have done and are about to do... THANK YOU!"

[Meanwhile]

[10 Days before Front-Line Deployment]

In the barren lands, west of the Adventurer's City—directly in its outskirts—a rumbling sound echoed.

The capable men who guarded the City's borders, and the patrol officers who just happened to be walking nearby at that exact moment, experienced the amazing thing that occurred.

The wasteland, which occupied everything in the south—as far as the eyes could see—was trembling violently.

The sands parted, giving way to something...

... Something beyond normal.

Emerging from the deserted land was an ominous building, one so black that it far surpassed the gift of the night.

Strange energies poured out of this colossal establishment, and moments after it rose from the earth, the rumblings ceased. Everything went silent, and the wasteland entered a lull.

It was as if nothing had even happened.

Other than the massive dark structure that stood in the distance, nothing else changed.

Every guards and patrol officer present stared at all of this happening, their eyes wide and sweat dripping down their faces.

They all thought the same thing.

"I-It's a Dungeon!"

For the first time in about a Century, a new Dungeon had appeared within the Western Continent.

This was an amazing discovery—one worth celebrating.

However, just as a Dungeons was known to bring great prosperity, it was also terrible omen... a harbinger for the great tragedy to come.

And this particular Dungeon was no exception.

For within ten days after its emergence, a great evil would befall the United Human Alliance.

It would be forever known as the Grand Calamity Dungeon.

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Chapter 394 World Of The Lost

Death.

The world was covered in the stench of it.

No matter where you looked, there would always be a dead body—a gaping corpse whose wretched form stared back at you.

The skies seemed to be shrouded in an eternal night, and a nonsensical mix of freezing heat pervaded everything.

Chaos was rampant.

Destruction became trite.

Humanity, after fighting the long war for fifteen straight years... was finally on the brink of extinction.

In this despairing world, three silhouettes sped across the devastated battlefield.

They trampled on the bodies of their fallen comrades, their feet splashing around the blood of the dismembered corpses around them.

Despite such obvious desecration, they didn't seem to care.

Their goal—The Chamber of the Ancients—was far too valuable for any kind of hesitation in their march.

Also, they were in a bit of a hurry.

~WHOOSH!~

Like the very personification of wind, they flowed through the area, ensuring they could reach their goal in time.

And, by some absurd miracle... they did!

The Chamber of the Ancients—a dome-like structure that existed at the furthest ends of the domain they existed in—accepted their entry.

The three were able to get in, just in time for the Solstice to begin.

The Celestial Solstice that took place once every hundred years—the short window that caused the veils of reality to thin out considerably... creating the perfect chance for a miracle.

The three silhouettes were bathed in the light that shone from within the dome, revealing their true identities.

There was a white-haired Mage, immensely beautiful, with crimson eyes and several charms placed all over her enchanting body. Her Mage Attire had many torn all over, a sign of the dreary experience she had to endure in the war.

Her hair was cut short, but she still had the same bright smile as the first day—five years ago—when the first miracle of mankind happened.

"Lucielle, we're finally here! What now?" The voice of the second man rang with boldness and readiness.

There was a hint of pain in his tone, but he hid it all in the bravado he displayed.

He had black hair and dark brown eyes. He was of average looks, but his well-built body and incredibly long blade were far from average.

In the past, his hair was of natural length, but it had now grown long due to being unkempt for a long period. It used to be packed together, but their journey to this dome was by no means a smooth one.

As a result, his long hair roughly covered his face, and by extension, the scar on his left eye.

... A mark he received in order to save the life of the comrade next to him.

"Patience, Rey. We just got here." Lucielle mumbled as she began to look around the dome's interior.

Of course, Rey knew that Lucielle was busy observing the runic language that covered the walls of their surroundings, matching it to what they had learned over the past year.

The Oracle's words rang true, so that meant the power they sought was also present.

—The power to change everything!

"I think what we have to do lies over there. With that Magic Circle." Lucielle pointed forward, towards an altar.

There existed flaming torches that surrounded the stage, and rune-like depictions warbled as if they could go off at any given moment.

"You think?" Rey responded, raising one of his brows.

The three in the room rushed towards the altar, and Lucielle observed it some more.

"Based on what I'm seeing here, I'll have to augment the Magic Circle in order to suit our purposes." Lucielle rubbed her chin as she spoke.

"So... you can control how far back we can go?"

"No, not really. The further back, the more time and energy will be required to activate. Plus, remember what I've been warning against."

"Yeah, yeah, the butterfly effect."

"Butterfly? It's the Dragonfly effect, though."

"In our old world, it's called the Butterfly Effect. Same difference."

This exchange by both parties was observed by the third member of the trio. He silently watched everything, unable to contribute even a word to the conversation. He had an oddly cut yellow hair, his very lean appearance, and his face could be defined with one word—ugly.

He was unsightly in appearance, so he often bowed his head to hide his full face from anyone who was in his presence.

"I-in any case, we can't afford to make too many big changes since it'll derail the events that'll happen even more." Lucielle sighed, her eyes still on the runes in the Magic Circle.

She had to understand everything about them—their arrangements, formation, up to the tiniest details—or else there could be a fatal error.

"So... your point is that we don't make changes?"

"No. If we desire to change this outcome, we need to make changes. We just can't make significant ones except at given points in time, so we can predict exactly what happens and how to best respond to them."

"...."

"Altering the future, or should I say, this present, by going to the past... that in itself will make changes that are significant. I suppose it is unavoidable." Lucielle muttered, finally rising from her crouched position.

"That's what I've been trying to say." Rey responded with a sigh.

"Well, we'll figure it out as we go. For now, it's best we get started." Lucielle smiled.

She grabbed the hands of the lanky blonde and pulled him over to her side.

"Come on, Adonis! Let's get to work."

Lucielle's smile caused the boy to beam, and Rey watched this exchange with a sad smile on his face.

"Your Master and Disciple relationship makes me a bit teary, you know?" His chuckle rang hollow as he strained a genuine smile.

"Makes me wish my own Master was still around."

For a moment, there was silence.

Then—

"Brutus' sacrifice won't be forgotten. He made the right choice. If he didn't do what he did, we wouldn't be here."

"I know... I get it." Rey sighed at Lucielle's words. "It's not just him. Everyone's sacrifice has brought us to this point."

All three stared and nodded at each other.

"... To this place."

Rey tightly gripped his tall and broad sword—his Master's final gift to him—and made a smile oozing with nostalgia.

Brutus called it his late present to Rey for finally surpassing him and reaching the realm of the Absolute.

He had become an Absolute Knight King.

"Looks like all of that is about to be reset, though..." He chuckled as he made the joke.

Rey turned and smiled at Adonis in particular, whose face was so gloomy that it contrasted the other two in the room.

"Don't look so gloomy, my friend. We're going to change everything!"

And then, those words became a blur.

The world became distorted, and the dream that was once so vivid turned dark... dark and red.

The dreamer slowly opened his eyes in his room, and tears streamed down his handsome face as he placed his hand on it.

"You were right, my friend..." Adonis muttered, his voice barely able to come out as a result of the choking emotions.

"Everything is changing."

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Chapter 395 The Dungeon Notice

The Royal Estate's open field, which was empty just yesterday, was packed to the brim with all the nine Otherworlders.

Well, eight of them—since Adonis went to meet the Royal Council after making the announcement that all of them should all rendezvous at this point in time.

As such, the students all waited for any sign of the Hero and the leaders of the Alliance.

"What's going on now?"

"Why's there another meeting when we just had one yesterday?"

"I'm supposed to be chilling in the town today, you know?"

"Hopefully, this doesn't take too long..."

Thankfully, the latter's statement was answered by the appearance of the Royal Council Members and Adonis from within a swirling portal.

Everyone instantly recognized the portal, so they kept their eyes peeled on its entrance, but the spatial rift just closed as abruptly as it opened.

There was no sign of the Dark Adventurer at all.

"EHHHHHHHHH...?!"

The students all responded with surprise, seeing only three—rather than four—to emerge from the warped space.

"We just concluded a meeting with Sir Ralyks, but he had to quickly attend to something so he couldn't stop by." Adonis quickly addressed the voices of the students, but it wasn't enough.

"N-not even to say hi...?" Belle's face was particularly crestfallen.

"W-well... he does send his regards." Adonis quickly added, hoping it would help lighten up the mood.

Thankfully, it did!

"I-I see! I understand now!" Belle's blushing face connoted that she misunderstood Adonis' words, but he had no intention of correcting her.

Instead, he left the girl to her giggles and squeals, focusing on the most pertinent matter.

"Sir Conrad and Miss Vida have important things to say, so I'll leave it to them."

Despite saying this, Adonis did not join the rest of the students—most of which were already seated in the open field. Instead, he took responsibility as one of the people who had to make the decision that was about to be revealed.

His face was solemn, but it oozed of confidence.

"Please listen to them attentively. Participation is optional, but it would be for the best if you hear us out first."

As expected, the hearts of everyone softened, and they hearkened to their leader's voice.

Then, the Councilors took the stage.

"Just yesterday, we received news of something unexpected. It hasn't happened in over a century now..." Conrad began.

He could see the tense, but attentive faces of the students. That gave him the strength to continue.

"A new Dungeon has appeared in the Adventurer's City. Not just any kind of Dungeon, but the Adventurers have labeled it as a Grand Calamity-Class Dungeon... the highest class a Dungeon can have."

Adventurers had a different lingua to explain certain phenomena and concepts. They labeled their ranks, missions, and even places.

This presented as close to accurate a representation as one could get.

If a Dungeon was labeled as a Grand Calamity Class, that meant only one thing—it was impossible to clear.

"The first Grand Calamity Class Dungeon appeared about three hundred years ago, and nearly half of the Adventurers were wiped out in the Dungeon Raid. That was when the infamous name was coined." Vida added, emphasizing the dangers of this Dungeon.

"So how was the Dungeon cleared?" A random, but pertinent question, rose from the audience.

Several positive murmurs and nods of agreement were directed at the one who raised the question—Alicia White.

"It wasn't cleared."

Once Vida said this, shocked expressions filled the faces of the Otherworlders.

"Just as suddenly as it appeared, claiming the lives of half the population of Adventurers within the span of a week, it vanished just like that."

"A... week?"

"Well, more like ten days."

"That's a small amount of time. Strange too..." Alicia murmured while placing her hand on her chin to think.

Vida nodded and smiled wryly.

"Indeed. We have no proper explanation for it, but there have been cases of Dungeons disappearing into thin air. That shouldn't be too surprising, considering how they also appear out of nowhere sometimes."

The Otherworlders didn't know too much about Dungeons—

save for a few who actually studied—but they knew this much thanks to a lot of explanation from Ralyks during their Royal Dungeon Raid.

As a result, they could all relate to what Vida was saying.

"It's likely that, just the same way the Grand Calamity Dungeon of the past disappeared after ten days, this one will also do the same." She added.

"Any specific reason for that?" Alicia asked.

"None whatsoever. However, it's only logical to expect similar results from similar objects of investigation."

It was merely an act of association.

If one encounters a Dragon for the first time—having no prior knowledge of the beast—there tends not to be any kind of expectation towards the thing.

However, after the first encounter, if one observes the violent tendencies of the creature and associates it with danger, then the next time they are to see a Dragon, that bias is bound exist.

Of course, other factors could have contributed to the first Dragon being dangerous, which may not exist in the second instance. For example, the first Dragon could have been a terrible entity who was banished from the rest of the kind Dragons.

However, when associating with the second Dragon, none of those variables will come to mind. The safest assumption to make is to associate Dragons with danger.

"As such, it's safer to bet that the Dungeon will act a certain way, the same way we have determined that it is very dangerous."

"I see. Makes sense." Alicia returned to her seat once she was done with her clarification.

Hence, Vida continued.

"Usually, the Adventurer City has a certain level of autonomy, so they do not report most of the activities that go on there to the Capital. But, the appearance of a Dungeon of this scale is an exception. We received a report of this yesterday night, along with something else..."

Conrad stepped forward to complete the words of his partner.

"The Adventurers want to challenge the Grand Calamity Dungeon this time, and they are requesting our assistance."

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Chapter 396 The Epitome Of Freedom

Three hundred years ago, things were very different.

Human civilization was fragmented into various nations, and so there were various opposing factions with their individual self-interests at play.

The only exception to this... was the Adventurer's Guild.

Adventurers were neutral parties amongst the scuffle among nations. They weren't involved in politics, and their simple lives were unaffected by the embers of conflict spreading amongst the other nations.

They were strong enough to make their own city—a haven free from the rigors of nationalism—and became the very embodiment of freedom.

"An Adventurer serves no one but himself."

This embodied the spirit of everyone who chose the path.

As long as you obeyed the basic rules of conduct necessary for living in a civilization, there was no restriction to what you could or couldn't do.

As far as their economy went, individual Adventurers sold Monster Cores and special ores gotten from their land to the highest bidder. The Guild received their cut and maintained the City in return.

Jobs gotten through the Guild made them entitled to more profit, but the payment and security of the job would also be guaranteed.

There was more to the trade, but that was essentially it.

While the ideal of freedom had a lot of benefits to the Adventurers, there were some consequences to their hubris.

When chaos struck, or calamity arose... the Adventurers would find themselves alone.

Without any affiliation to a nation, they could not opt for support or seek out aid. As a result, the Adventurers were doomed to fall on their own.

This was especially true when the Grand Calamity Class Dungeon emerged.

Of the five thousand and ninety-nine Adventurers who charged in for the Raid—no, the Dungeon Conquest—only two-thousand and nine hundred made it out alive. A few hundred were unable to recover from their injuries and died not long after they escaped the Dungeon.

It was the greatest loss the Adventurer City ever faced in history, even till date.

They suffered a heavy blow that day, and when they requested the aid of the neighboring nations—the same nations that often used the strength of the Adventurers to get rid of Monsters or assist in all kinds of tasks in their respective territories—they completely ignored the Adventurer's City.

Perhaps they thought if the Adventurers became desperate enough, they would finally succumb and sign an Affiliation Treaty.

When that didn't happen, out of frustration, the Nations decided to take what they wanted by force. The Adventurers were a major threat, since they were too strong for any sole Nation to handle.

However, in their weakened state, they were easy prey.

... Or so the Nations thought.

The Nations found out that day—at the time of their invasion—that they were dead wrong.

The main reason why the Adventurers could form a faction of their own, without any external interference, was not simply because of their collective strength.

No... it was due to the power of one man.

The man known as the first Heroic Rank Adventurer... the strongest Adventurer in all of history.
—Jet Zephyr, the Sword Saint.

He singlehandedly warded off the armies that charged at his beloved city.

It was only thanks to Jet Zephyr that the Adventurer City was spared that day. He saved them all... the dream of freedom that the brave men and women had.

He was a true Adventurer; an ideal that all aspired to be.

"Forgive my long rant, but you get the point, right?" Conrad sighed, feeling a bit drained after going on and on about the complicated history of the Adventurer City.

The Otherworlders didn't know of it, so he thought he could explain it in a few words.

Well, it ended up being a little more than that.

"So... what you're basically saying is that the Adventurers hate your guts despite being an Alliance, and they often act as a separate entity from you even though you're on the same side against the Dragons." Eric spoke up, flexing his glasses as he did so.

"Yes. Precisely tha—"

"Let's not forget that the reason for that is because of what the Nations did to them all those years ago." Clark added, interrupting Conrad.

"Dick move, man. Dick move." Justin nodded.

"Y-yes. We know it was a... dick move, you called it? But, a lot has changed since that time." Conrad said, finally sighing as he appeared deflated.

Dealing with Otherworlders was not his forte, so he shifted his gaze to the expert and pleaded for some support.

"Guys, it's a messy history for sure, but times have changed." Adonis stepped forward and addressed the students.

"I'm sure we can all think of atrocities that some nations have committed against one another back on Earth. That didn't stop the UN from forming, and for alliances to be made later in the future."

In the end, letting go of the past and embracing the future was the most optimal path for progress.

"It seems like the higher-ups in the Adventurer City can see that now." Adonis added with a smile.

The contents of the discussion between the Royal Council and the Adventurer City's highest authority were then spilled.

"The Adventurers want to begin a Dungeon Conquest on the new Grand Calamity Dungeon."

"WHAT?! Even after what happened before?!"

The shock from the students was expected, so Adonis wasn't fazed. Instead, he took his time to further explain his position.

"There are currently three Heroic Rank Adventurers and more high-ranked Adventurers in the City. Their numbers are a lot more than what they had three hundred years ago. They believe they have both the quality and quantity advantage—

enough to ensure the success of this Conquest."

Of course, this was no guarantee that they would win. However, they had the biggest chance to succeed now, more than ever before.

"The Dungeon is assumed to close in nine days. They want to begin the Conquest as soon as possible in order to guarantee maximum results and success." Adonis paused upon seeing a hand raised.

"Is it really necessary to risk their lives like this? Can't they just wait for it to go away?"

The concerned face that Belle gave made everyone's heart melt. It was obvious how worried she was about the fine Adventurers of the city.

"If only it was that simple..." Adonis sighed.

"I think preserving your life is pretty simple, though." Justin added, but Adonis shook his head slightly.

"You should all understand by now... the rewards that a Dungeon can offer to those who challenge it."

No one spoke after that. They completely understood Adonis' words.

"Adventurers seek fortune and glory. A Dungeon with the highest difficulty rank also means it has the highest reward available. Many will risk their lives just for a chance to get that."

Many of the students could not relate, since they were sheltered by the Royal Council from day one, but such was the nature of this world.

To survive and thrive... one had to risk it all.

"Besides, the Adventurer City is not a monolith. The Guild is the central hub, sure, but there are various factions in the form of Parties. There is no rule stopping an Adventurer from exploring a Dungeon, as long as they have the qualifications necessary for such."

A Grand Calamity Class Dungeon was not even regulated by any kind of rule, since it was an outlier.

That meant anyone could venture in.

"There are bound to be Parties who challenge the Dungeon regardless of warnings. As we speak, there will already be casualties." Adonis spoke sternly. "In order to reduce the amount of fatalities that will ensue as a result of this Dungeon's appearance, it's better to organize a Conquest where Adventurers attack the Dungeon en masse."

And it was in this plan that the Otherworlders came in to play.

"Simply put, the higher-ups of the Adventurer Guild want us to send some of our best to help them out in this Conquest in order to make it a success." Adonis continued, casting his gaze on each and every one of his comrades.

"They require our assistance, so after some deliberation... we decided to pitch the entire thing to you all."

The Otherworlders had mixed expressions on their faces, but Adonis wasn't done with his address.

"Like I said earlier, this is entirely optional. If you don't want to participate, then that's fine." He added. "But, I would advise you to consider it, as it would not only help out the Adventurers, but also each and every one of us once we reach the front lines."

"What do you mean by that?" Alicia asked.

Adonis smiled upon hearing this. "We won't be in the same unit in the battlefield, just as we won't be in the same party if we accept the request of the Adventurer City."

In essence, this could be regarded as their final training before the real thing ten days from now.

"So... what do you say, everyone?"

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Chapter 397 Unanimous Agreement

A battlefield is chaos.

It is a wide layout of destruction. And as such, it requires capable soldiers spread out in the canvas of carnage in order for it to be called a battle.

Different brigades are led by competent leaders, and they handle various battle positions while properly sticking to the established formation.

Every role is important, and is required to remain firm—from the vanguard, to the flanks, to rear defenses and support—else, failure is certain.

That is the nature of war.

"We won't be together? For real?" Justin's voice echoed among the students as he raised his brows and voice in shock.

"You didn't know that? I figured it out pretty early."

Eric sighed as he flexed his glasses. To him, all of this was just common sense. Anyone could see why the Otherworlders couldn't just be one elite force when the front lines had various areas that required attention.

Plus, Otherworlders weren't invincible as well.

The Dragons were a lot, and they were just nine. In order to win, just like they learned in the Dungeon, they required a functional strategy.

"Ehh? You already knew, Eric?" Justin asked with widened eyes.

"Yeah. It was obvious."

"I sort of figured it out too."

"Yeah... me too."

It turned out most of the Otherworlders had at least an inkling of suspicion about the nature of their dispatchment. This had to be because they thought very critically about the battlefield and what they would be doing there.

And , well, thinking wasn't Justin's strongest suit.

"In any case, everyone, let's get back to topic." Adonis drew the attention of the students back to himself, and he folded his arms as he looked at them seriously.

"If we take on this mission, we can use the last days preparing for the battlefield rather than just having fun and getting rusty. I understand the temptation to take a break, especially after all we've been through. I also understand if anyone wants to remain in the Royal Estate, but... I really think this is a good opportunity for us."

The fact that Adonis emphasized this point made it all the more curious.

"We'll register as Adventurers and join different Parties. Our identities as Otherworlders from the Capital will also be kept a secret. If some found out about it, it could lead to some unsavory results."

Not all Adventurers had forgotten the past. In fact, it was safe to say that most still clung to it, and would never respect any established government.

In that vein, it was of utmost pertinence—as important as it was to succeed in the Conquest—to keep the deal a secret.

"So, who's in?"

The Otherworlders looked at each other, one by one, trying to gauge on another's response.

Unlike in the past, this choice had no major consequence. Even though some chose to remain back, some could still go for the mission. In the same vein, everyone could choose to accept or reject the mission.

For a moment, tense silence pervaded everywhere.

The students seemed to be waiting for something—or at least, someone—to break the inevitable decorum.

Then—

"I... I am in."

—The voice of someone from behind echoed, causing everyone to look in his direction.

It was Rey Skylar.

"I don't want to be left behind. The EXP and experience everyone will gain in the Conquest will be lost to me if I don't go. To better myself and not be a burden, I would like to participate."

Once he gave his reasons and shared his resolve, there wasn't much silence after that.

"I'll go too."

"Me too!"

"Count me in!"

"Hehehe! This should be fun."

"I'm supposed to be resting, but okay... why not?"

One after the other, the Otherworlders accepted. Alicia, Belle, Billy, Justin, Eric, Clark, Trisha, Adonis, and Rey; all of them unanimously agreed to the challenge.

Conrad and Vida watched this sight with even more relief in their hearts.

Seeing how Adonis always managed to succinctly explain the situation, and convince everyone to follow him... these two adults couldn't help but be envious.

The Hero had everyone's trust.

It was a wonderful sight to see, regardless.

'What an interesting development...' Rey smiled internally.

He had been planning on visiting the Adventurer City one way or the other during the break since he planned on getting stronger before the deployment, but he never imagined such a unique opportunity would pop up.

Of course, this wasn't the first time he was hearing the news. That would be moments ago, when Adonis and the Royal Council called for him about a pertinent issue.

He had left a Communication Device that they could use to contact him in their possession, so he got their call and headed there immediately.

'To think things would turn out this way...'

[Moments Earlier]

"So... how bad is it?"

Ralyks sat opposite the trio, having only an elaborate table to separate their equally prestigious and comfortable sofas.

His question remained in the air for a few moments before receiving an answer.

"The situation isn't too bad yet, but it is projected to become uncontrollable. The Grand Calamity Class Dungeon itself isn't the issue, but the Adventurers. About a hundred have already ventured in, based on what we last heard, and there has been no word from them."

As Conrad spoke, his face became crestfallen.

"Adonis suggested we deploy the students as backup, but we would like to get your input—as the one who observed them throughout the Raid. Do you think they're ready to take on such a challenge?"

Ralyks chuckled almost instantly once the question was posed to him. His arms were folded, but his body shook gently as he stifled his laughter.

"Such a needless question." He replied, his tone still containing hints of amusement. "All nine of them exceed even the most powerful Adventurer."

Adonis smiled and nodded, a spark in his eyes. It seemed he was in agreement with all that Ralyks said.

"I can guarantee it."

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Chapter 398 Behind The Scenes [Pt 1]

"S-since you are so confident about them, then I guess there is no issue..."

Conrad stroked his chin as he looked at Vida, who also nodded at him. They both appeared relieved, and it seemed their intention was to convey some details of what they told Ralyks to the students.

Of course, some details would have to be exempt.

"The Royal Dungeon was originally designated as a Disaster Class, but it evolved into an unidentified Class." Conrad asked, looking straight at the masked man. "What Class would you choose to give it, as an Adventurer."

"Grand Calamity Class."

"F-for real...?!"

"Yes. The Monsters there were of the highest caliber, and with only nine of them, and a bit of assistance from me, it was cleared in a month."

Granted, they desired to clear this new Grand Calamity Dungeon in nine days—preferably seven—but from the way the students had grown, it would suffice to say that they were capable of a Conquest on their own.

"At their current level, they should be able to take on a Grand Calamity Class Dungeon on their own. Is that something that can be arranged?"

Not only would it prevent any needless deaths, but it would also guarantee some form of victory. Last of all, it would allow every one of the Otherworlders to go all-out and face the new challenge with all their wits and abilities.

"Unfortunately, that isn't possible..." Conrad shook his head and sighed.

"The Dungeon is on the property of the Adventurers City, and so it is well within their right to choose how they handle it. The only reason we are considering going is because they have chosen to seek our assistance."

Normally, the government of the United Human Alliance could not tread on the Dungeons belonging to the Adventurers City. The only reason taxes and levies were imposed on them was due to the 'cause' that was the war with the Dragons.

The Adventurers City had to pay their dues as part of the contribution in the good fight.

"If we choose to bypass the rules and make sneak the nine of them into the Dungeon, it will only be a repeat of what happened three hundred years ago..."

Many people still hadn't forgotten the treachery of the Nations all those years ago. If they tried to do something so vile once again, it meant they hadn't learned from the mistakes of their ancestors.

"Even if it will be faster and easier for the nine to singlehandedly handle this Dungeon, I doubt any Adventurer would agree to such a proposal. Even if we decide to forfeit all the rewards, they wouldn't be satisfied."

The EXP gained from a Dungeon, the thrill of risking one's life to get stronger and richer... and the pride of Adventurers in their livelihood—these factors were hindrances that would prevent Ralyks' suggestion from being remotely considered.

"As an Adventurer, you must understand how stubborn those in your occupation tend to get. I mean no offense, Sir Ralyks." Conrad smiled nervously, to which the Dark Adventurer simply shrugged at.

"I take no offense at words of truth. I personally find most of them to take on old-fashioned positions, but it is not in my place to critique their values."

Ralyks exhaled loudly, his gaze raised to the ceiling as if he was deep in thought about something. After a few seconds, he then spoke.

"Have them integrate with the Adventurers then, preferably joining different Parties. It should offer at least some benefit that way."

"Pardon? What do you mean by that?" Conrad asked, his brows raised slightly.

"I get it, Sir Ralyks! You want us to get accustomed to fighting without each other. If we're in different Parties, we'll learn how to function with others rather than just one another." Adonis beamed, instantly severing the confusion in the air.

Conrad and Vida weren't warriors and fighters. They weren't much of strategists either, though they tried their best in that regard.

When it came to war, however, they were nearly incompetent.

After all, experience was the most important factor in that field, and sheltered leaders had very rare opportunities to witness the evils of battle.

"Indeed." Ralyks nodded at Adonis and responded calmly. "Even if you have to share EXP with the Adventurers, and probably forfeit most of the rewards gotten from inside a Dungeon, you can still learn valuable things there."

They were practically making lemonade with the lemons being thrown at them.

"Ahh, one final thing about the report, Sir Ralyks." Conrad spoke up. "I didn't think to mention it since it was just a passing comment that hasn't been confirmed yet. But..."

The worried look on the Grandmaster's face made it clear that it worried him a little.

"They mentioned a disturbing, negative pouring of the Dungeon. There is speculation that this energy could be Miasma."

Upon hearing this, a powerful surge of energy swept across the room. For only a mere instant, it felt like the entire space was coated in bloodlust.

Everyone was paralyzed under the pressure that came from one man.

"Did you just say... Miasma?" Ralyks asked, his voice low but deadly.

Conrad gulped as he nodded, beads of sweat proceeding from his lips. Vida appeared equally uncomfortable, though shock mostly filled her face.

"I-is there a problem, Sir Ralyks?"

"Huu... no. None at all." As he calmly exhaled, the pressure vanished, and the ambiance in the room returned to normal. "Just be careful. The existence of Miasma makes this Dungeon more difficult than I previously estimated."

"No worries, Sir Ralyks. I'm sure we can handle it."

Adonis' words oozed confidence, and for a moment the Hero and Dark Adventurer gazed at each other in silence.

After the next few seconds, Ralyks nodded and shrugged.

"Very well. I trust in your judgment."

Adonis smiled in relief, but it also seemed like he was proud of himself after hearing such praise from the strongest man he knew.

"By the way, Sir Ralyks, I have been meaning to ask..." Vida spoke up, her tone as cautious as it was mellow.

"Hm? What is it?"

A few seconds passed before a response, in the form of a question, was posed.

"Are you going to be participating in the Dungeon Conque—?"

"No. No, I won't." Ralyks answered bluntly, not even waiting for the question to be complete.

"You all are on your own this time."

The words he uttered surprised everyone. They couldn't even hide their surprise if they wanted to.

"W-why...?" The inevitable question leaked out of Adonis' lips.

Ralyks was the most powerful ally humanity had at the moment. If he went to the Grand Calamity Dungeon, he would be able to prevent the unnecessary deaths of possibly thousands of people.

Plus, since he was an Adventurer, there would be no complaints from the authorities.

He had every right to challenge it on his own too.

"I have my reasons. Reasons I cannot disclose." He answered, swiftly rising to his feet.

"I wish you the best of luck, though."

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Chapter 399 Behind The Scenes [Pt 2]

"If I may be so impudent, could you please tell us the nature of what you have to do?"

The one who asked the question was Adonis.

Yes, he respected Ralyks immensely. The man was incredibly powerful, and he was selfless in many regards. Despite all his good qualities, Adonis could not remain blind to a few of his suspicious traits.

For example, his unwillingness to participate in a Dungeon Conquest that would definitely be a betterment to humanity.

"I have some private investigations I will need to conduct, so I won't be around for an extended period of time." Ralyks responded calmly, still on his feet.

"And it can not wait?"

It pained Adonis to press on this way, but he had no choice. As someone who had seen the future—one where there was no Ralyks—he had to understand this man very well.

"It cannot." Once Ralyks gave this response, Adonis felt deflated.

He had no right to pry any further, and in all honesty, Ralyks was doing him a big favor by even responding to the questions.

"Sorry for asking so many unnecessary questions." Adonis bowed, but the Dark Adventurer shrugged it off.

"It's fine. Also, while I won't be around, I don't mind transporting everyone to the Adventurers City tomorrow."

Upon hearing this, everyone in the room beamed.

The Adventurers City was very far. Even on the fastest carriage, it would take nearly a week to reach the location. The fastest way to get there would be through Magic, but since none of the students had Spatial Magic, it wouldn't be an easy feat.

If they boosted their transportation with Items and the likes, they would still need a few days to reach the location.

"The higher-ups at the Adventurers Guild also recognize this, so they are probably not expecting much from us despite requesting for our assistance." Conrad thought to himself, smiling intensely. 'But with Sir Ralyks, we can bypass all of those problems.'

That was one of the major reasons why they called him in.

'Still, it's strange. Even the higher-ups don't know who Sir Ralyks is...'

It boggled the mind, but Conrad had learned to simply let the complicated matters go and just focus on the good aspects of life.

'Right now, we have everything ready for our participation in the Conquest. All that is left is, of course, the consent of the Otherworlders.'

Whether or not they would accept was a different ball game entirely, but it didn't concern Ralyks in the slightest.

"I'll return in the evening tomorrow, so please be prepared by then." As he said this, sparks of energy manifested, followed by a distortion of space behind him.

"Understood!"

Conrad, Vida, and Adonis rose to their feet and nodded.

"Thank you once again, Sir Ralyks."

"It's no problem." He shrugged as he began entering the portal.

Then, out of nowhere, a panicked voice rose from among the trio—its origin still a mystery.

"Ah, could you also transport us to the Estate Fields? I think we're a little behind schedule on..."

"Sure..."

And that was how the Royal Council met up with the waiting students while Ralyks gracefully made his exit.

[The Present]

The students dispersed after the entire announcement, and most of them decided to make the most of their time before heading to the Adventurers City.

Since they would be leaving on the evening of the next day, they still had considerable time to have fun. For different people, that could be defined in various ways.

Regarding Rey and Alicia, however... it meant one thing.

—Reading in the library.

The two of them sat in silence, within the four walls of the library. They were surrounded by the fresh smell of paper and parchments, soaking in the decorum that only the inner sanctum of knowledge could provide.

The result was absolute immersion in what they found pleasure in most—at least, this was true for one of the two people in the room.

While Alicia was busy consuming the contents of the book in her grasp, hungrily devouring the knowledge within it as if there was no tomorrow, Rey's distracted gaze merely rested on his own book.

His mind was elsewhere.

'Miasma, huh? Could this be Adrien's work? Is he somehow related to this entire incident?' Rey wasn't sure what to think.

For one, it didn't seem likely that Adrien would orchestrate some big event like this that would attract the attention of so many people. Besides, Dungeons popping out of nowhere—even Grand Calamity ones—had happened before.

As such, it wasn't some unknown, unexplainable phenomenon.

Trying to pin it on Adrien Chase, just because Miasma was involved, felt a bit far-fetched to Rey. But...

'Adrien has found ways to manipulate even the most ordinary-looking scenarios and made them all work for his benefit. Perhaps he caused the Dungeon appearing, but it's also possible that he didn't cause this Dungeon's appearance, but he has plans for it.'

Either way, Rey couldn't help but feel like he was being lured in.

'I don't like this one bit.'

It was one of the major reasons why he chose not to appear as Ralyks. He would be taking too big of a risk, and that could be playing into Adrien's hand.

'I'll have to think of another way to go about this...' Rey sighed.

With the Conquest happening, and so many things about to take place at the same time, Rey felt a bit overwhelmed with all of it.

'I actually kind of miss Ater now. Who would have thought...' He smiled to himself and shook his head.

'I wonder what he would have done if he was in my position.'

As Rey lay on his bed and closed his eyes, he sighed and imagined everything that could happen to him and his classmates within the City and inside the Dungeon.

'I've never been to the Adventurers City, so...' A brief smile crept on his face and he internally made a decision.

'I'll have to ask around a bit before reaching my conclusion.'

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Chapter 400 City Of Adventures [Pt 1]

Distant footsteps could be heard as two individuals trod down the path that many took.

Yet, for some reason, only these two currently walked it.

They wore contrasting attires, easily drawing the attention of the people around them. A few individuals even trailed behind them, maintaining their distance of course.

One or two of these people had been watching these two strangers from the moment they stepped into the city through the South Gate.

It wasn't strange for the Adventurers City to have guests or visitors, but something about these two made them stand out, and it wasn't just their well-made and pristine outfits.

They had a unique aura about them, and any veteran could tell just from a glance.

Whoever they were, the two were strong.

After walking for a while, they finally arrived at their destination—the only place strangers in the City would be interested in.

—The Adventurers Guild.

The place was a tall, massive building. It had at least five separate Floors, not counting the Ground Floor. It also had an intimidating aura about it to ward off those who were too weak-willed to take a bold step of faith.

This was the effect of an especially powerful Enchanted Item, so it wasn't news to see one or two fools attempt to join the ranks of Adventurers, only to piss themselves and run away scared.

Not everyone was cut out to be an Adventurer. The Item's effect was meant to prove that by exposing the frauds among those who wanted to give it a shot.

Only those who were truly cut out for the task could step into the Guild.

Usually, amused grins would be let out by spectating Adventurers, but no one said or did anything this time.

They already knew that these two were more than worthy to step in.

And yes, just like that... they both walked into the Adventurers Guild without any issue whatsoever. Though the duo didn't realize this, they had already passed the first test of the Adventurers City.

Whether they would be able to overcome the next hurdle, however, was yet to be decided.

Burke was a frustrated woman who worked in an equally frustrating place.

The loud noise generated by the Adventurers who occupied the pub upstairs could be heard even in the Reception, which was practically the whole of the Ground Floor.

She, among about a dozen others, stood behind desks as they waited to be approached by Adventurers and Clients.

Opposite where their desks were situated was the 'Big Board', as it was called by the Adventurers, where the available Quests would be displayed.

If an Adventurer was interested in a Quest, they only needed to identify the Quest Number and register their names and badges with any of the Receptionists in order for their acceptance of the mission to be officially recognized by the Guild.

This way, once they were done with the Quests, they could obtain their reward straight from the Guild without any issues.

There was also a time limit given, for accountability, so if an Adventurer registered for a Quest and was unable to complete it within the specified period, they would be penalized.

Of course, as was the nature of humans, many tried to bypass this hurdle by starting a Quest and only registering their acceptance when they were almost done completing it, or when they were already done.

While a few got away with it using this method, most could not. This was because each Quest had an entry limit, and as such once the limit was reached, no one could register their acceptance.

Several stories had been told of Adventurers who tried to play smart with the system, but ended up working for free due to being too late to accept a Quest after doing most of the work beforehand.

The lesson here was to do things the proper way to avoid any complications, and that was what most Adventurers in the upper ranks did.

Only scramblers in the lower ranks resorted to such underhanded means.

Burke mulled over all of this information she already knew as she sighed internally. She had a slight frown on her face, which she quickly corrected so that her face wouldn't age too quickly.

For some time now, the lady had been making sure to pay close attention to her appearance—especially since she wasn't getting any younger.

Burke was in her mid-thirties, but one glance at her would make you think she was in her twenties. That was the wonder that Enchanted Items and a lot of skincare could do.

Her goal was simple—one day marry a strong man who would take care of her and not allow her to work for the rest of her life.

Workers of the Adventurers Guild met with strong people all the time, which was why she chose this career path, but after working here for over ten years now, Burke found herself regretting that decision.

'These Adventurers are too crass. Other than a few exceptions, they're ruffians!'

None of them were gentlemen who could treat a woman right. Even those who were gentlemen weren't the type who supported her dream of perpetual retirement.

Pretty much every Adventurer she met and had an interest in thought that their partner had to work somehow. Their line of reasoning made sense, considering how there were tons of female Adventurers who were in the City.

Burke couldn't accept it, though.

'Women should just be pretty and stay at home, while the men work and protect them!'

That was her philosophy, and it remained unchanged despite how long she had spent in the Adventurers City.

Her mindset only did her a disservice, though.

No veteran desired her, as most of them sought after strong women who would understand the rigors of being an Adventurer.

The only Adventurers who paid her any attention were new and inexperienced Adventurers who didn't have a penny to their name. They couldn't even take care of themselves; talk less of a non-working partner.

In the end, she felt trapped somehow.

"... Excuse me, Miss."

The deep voice of a man in front woke Burke from her thoughts, and so she lifted her gaze to attend to the next customer.

Unknown to her, this one encounter would change her life forever.