

Extras 421

Chapter 421 Desire To Change

"Ahh, that..."

Noah's face fell a little, and something akin to a sad smile added to his clouded countenance.

His tale wasn't particularly a sad story. Many Adventurers in the City had more tragic experiences to share.

However, for Noah, a sixteen-year-old teenager who had been living a pretty mundane life on Earth until three months ago, his story was just as heavy.

"I think... I realized that I had no other choice but to become strong." His smile broadened as he uttered those words.

Many would agree with him, but most were probably going to miss the point. No one could really understand the depths from which he uttered those words.

People desired to get stronger for various reasons.

Some wanted wealth.

'I already have more than enough money to retire to some countryside and live the rest of my life without worrying about sustenance.'

Some craved power.

'I have enough strength to be in the one percent of humans in this world.'

Some lusted after influence.

'I find attention annoying, and most of the time... I like being left alone.'

Women.

'I don't think most of them are anything special.'

Thrill.

'Nothing about fighting Monsters thrills me. It's a dangerous job.'

Noah didn't qualify for most of the reasons why most people desired to be Adventurers. He wasn't like the average Adventurers, and he didn't relate to most of the things they valued.

Things like the ideal of freedom were lost concepts to him.

While he admired the sentiment, he found the whole thing too abstract and a little childish. In any pragmatic setting, there had to be established rules.

Restrictions molded society.

The only reason why the Adventurers were still coexisting pretty well within the City, despite the lack of solid rules and sufficient regulations, was because there were already unspoken rules that existed within the Adventurer Culture.

As much as they tried to deny this fact, it was true.

As an outsider, Noah could see patterns in their behavior which informed him that there were unwritten regulations that bound everyone together.

'That's why they're still together.'

If those rules didn't exist, or maybe the population of this city grew to an absurd degree—to the point where control became difficult—then the cracks would begin to show.

... The status-quo would crumble.

And so, the true reason Noah chose this path—despite a lot of easier options—was due to a much more primal and selfish purpose.

It was engrained within him; to the point where he could not escape or deny it.

"I wanted to change."

For a moment, there was silence in his tone.

"What?" Jet's inquisitive voice caused Noah to smile even more. Of course, no one would get it if he just said it like that.

"I used to be a very weak and cowardly person. I hid behind stronger people and always looked for ways to benefit without taking the most risks."

For the most part, he hadn't gotten rid of the latter part of his statement. He didn't think he needed to, considering how that was the hallmark of pragmatism.

Less risks, more reward.

The problem was with the former.

"I think I hated myself." Noah's solemn tone oozed through the still atmosphere.

"I had a friend before moving here. Before we became friends, I used to comfort myself by thinking he was more pathetic than I was. He was average in every way, and I always told myself—anytime I felt shitty or sad—that at least there was one guy who was worse than me."

There was a reason Noah spoke in past tense.

"I came to realize that the guy was secretly a lot better than I realized. He was stronger, smarter... better. He was better than me, than most people around us." A little smirk formed on the boy's face.

"I liked that."

"So what happened to this friend of yours? Why did you part ways?"

Noah shrugged as he rested his back on the chair that he sat on. "I wanted to run away. That guy was a monster who wanted to keep getting strong, and I knew he would drag me with him. I wasn't ready for that."

Jet chuckled a little, and Noah did the same.

He didn't know why he was revealing so much about his past to such a stranger, but somehow... he felt like going on.

He didn't want to stop.

"I left the Capital and initially wanted to travel South, since things are a lot safer there than in the North. But apparently, all the land there has been taken."

It was no surprise, considering how most people wanted to be as far away from the war as possible. If anyone could afford it, they would instantly leave for the South.

Sure, the cost of living there was ridiculously high. Many would consider the quality of life incredibly low for the amount they were paying.

But, at the very least, they were alive.

"I decided to settle down in any quiet town close to the Adventurers City, since having Adventurers nearby would guarantee some kind of safety."

That was when Noah began his journey to the North.

"My journey was cut short when I encountered a couple of Adventurers fighting a group of Monsters." Noah remembered the entire scene as if it was just yesterday.

He had been told of a shortcut by a traveler, so he passed the route and ended up getting lost.

That was when he stumbled on the fight.

His first instinct was to hide—then the next thing that came to his mind was to run.

But... he found himself refusing to do so. f(r)ee

Right in front of his eyes was a Monster he knew he could defeat if he truly tried. It would be difficult and dangerous, but Noah knew he would win.

At that moment, he felt something awaken within him.

'What if... I fight that thing?'

It wouldn't cost him anything. He would probably gain some money and thanks for his efforts too.

However, that wasn't his main incentive for doing so.

Right there and then, Noah simply wanted to change who he was.

"I didn't want to be that cowering bastard anymore."

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Chapter 422 Making The Change

Back then, Noah had three choices.

Stay and hide.

Run and escape.

Charge and fight.

His instinct had been to hide, and his next thought was to run as fast as he could—as far away as he could.

But... he wasn't listening.

'I-if I can win. Then... I can try, right?'

His entire being despised violence. He wasn't very strong too, and his Skills were mostly useful for evasion and defense.

Yet... why did he want to fight?

'Ahh...' He realized it at that moment. '... Is this your doing, Rey?'

Noah realized how dissatisfied he felt—with himself, and with the scene playing out in front of him.

He had felt this way throughout his journey away from the Capital.

Despite that gnawing feeling, he constantly told himself that he made the right choice leaving his only friend behind so he could run away from responsibility.

However, when he stood there, hidden from everything in the world, Noah was finally able to confront himself.

'I don't like this... this version of me.'

The time he had the most fun, and felt most fulfilled, was when he was pretending to be some kind of powerful subordinate of Ralyks.

He liked the way people looked at him. Their respect, admiration, their fear... it made him feel warm inside.

It wasn't even like he sought their validation.

He wanted his own.

"So, I decided to fight." Noah shrugged smiled, narrating the experience as if it was no big deal.

He stealthily charged at the first Monster and gave his all into generating the perfect surprise attacks.

He used all the Skills in his arsenal to fight, and he pushed himself a lot more than he ever had.

"Faster."

He hastened his movements.

"Stronger."

He strengthened his muscles and increased his force.

"Smarter."

He read the Monsters and came up with perfect counters at the spot.

"Better!"

He repeated the process—over and over again—until he ended up killing all the adversaries.

"I changed a bit of myself that day. I was able to become a little like the man I pretended to be."

Noah laughed as he began to conclude his story.

"After seeing the Adventurers in action, I realized my original perception of them was a little too generous. If I could defeat Monsters that Adventurers couldn't, then it was possible for me to become an Adventurer."

He followed the Adventurers back, and after the joint testimony of the people he saved, there was no need for him to even take a Test.

Noah had become an Adventurer, registered as Sherlock.

"The rest is history. I joined one of the most influential Parties, managed to defeat the leader, and became the leader myself."

In more ways than one, Noah changed. He found himself trying out new things, exploring everything he previously ran away from.

"Day after day, I keep changing in hopes that one day... I will become like that ideal image I pretended to embody."

"The errand boy of your friend?"

"Well... no, not that part." Noah laughed out loud once he heard that comparison. Jet's words weren't wrong, but they didn't properly embody what he strived to be.

"I want to be a better human being. Someone stronger, smarter, better than I used to be."

He wanted to be like his friend.

"Sorry for the long story, but that's pretty much it."

"The hell...?"

Rey was shocked by how much Noah had matured as a person. 'So his change was a lot more than what I saw on the surface.'

In a way, he felt a bit intimidated.

As happy as Rey felt for Noah and his personal growth, he couldn't help but feel challenged in a sense. Perhaps he didn't want to get left behind, or he felt like he wasn't as mature as his friend was.

Rey didn't understand it himself, but he felt a tinge of envy.

'I guess this is pretty normal. Still...'

People wanted their friends to do well. However, no one wished for their friends to do better than them.

It was human nature, and Rey was the embodiment of that principle.

"I'm happy you were able to change. That was a pretty inspiring story." He said, meaning every word of it.

Yet, something about his tone rang hollow.

"Thank you. I would have loved to ask why you became an Adventurer, but it's gotten pretty late and I don't want to take up too much of your time."

"Ah, how right you are." Rey responded, laughing in his gentlemanly tone. "I enjoyed every moment of it, though."

"Likewise. Still, I would feel guilty if I kept you any longer than I already have."

The parties from both sides rose to their feet, and Rey ended up shaking Noah once again. He also watched as Noah shook Esme—a little too much, in his honest opinion.

"You'll have to leave without me, Jet and Lux. I need to have a discussion with the owner of this establishment."

"I understand, Sherlock."

After exchanging pleasantries for the last time that night, Rey parted ways with Noah and left the pub with Esme trailing behind him.

The moment they exited the place, the first thing that caught Rey's eyes was the group of Adventurers who were kowtowing close to the pub's entrance.

'The heck?!' Rey instantly recognized them as Sango and his five stooges.

'How long have they been waiting here in that position?'

It was already pretty dark outside, and there were no Adventurers in sight—probably due to being chased off by Noah's Party.

Rey couldn't imagine it being very comfortable for them to maintain such a posture for very long, but since they were Adventurers, perhaps it wasn't as bad as he imagined it.

Still...

"WE ARE VERY SORRY FOR DISRESPECTING YOU!" All of them yelled at the top of their lungs.

It caused him to stifle a chuckle.

'Noah has gotten pretty harsh. To think he'd make his subordinates to this just to appease me.'

This was yet another change that amazed Rey.

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Chapter 423 Confessions Beneath The Moonlight

"Shouldn't you be in a hurry? You have to pick up some people, right?"

Esme's voice echoed in Rey's ears as they neared their Inn. Despite hearing it, Rey hardly reacted or changed the steady pace at which he walked.

"It's fine." He simply responded. "I sent a Duplicate a while back."

"R-really? I didn't notice!" Esme expressed surprise, to which Rey chuckled and shrugged.

"Yeah. I did it pretty quickly. Hid it well too."

With his wide array of Skills, it wasn't a difficult thing to do. In any case, the only reason he was able to talk to Noah for so long despite his busy schedule was due to that arrangement.

"I wanted to pick them up myself, but I guess plans change." He smiled softly, shrugging again.

Something about the atmosphere felt moody for some reason. Rey didn't even know why, but he suddenly felt a lull within him.

Perhaps a moment of silence was what he needed.

"Friend of yours?" Unfortunately, Esme wouldn't let him have that.

"Yeah. You could say that."

Rey didn't think he treated Noah as well as he should have treated a friend, but he genuinely considered him one.

After all, he was the first and only person who he revealed his secret to.

"Has he seen your face behind the mask?" Esme's question made Rey laugh a little.

He replied still.

"For him, and the people we had in common, the mask was my secret."

It was pretty ironic how the opposite was true for Esme. Regardless, he could say that Noah was the only one who knew both sides pretty well.

'Back then, I didn't think Ralyks would up playing such a big role. If I had known that, would I still have exposed my identity to him?'

Rey wasn't sure. All he knew was that Noah was incredibly useful at the time, and it would have been difficult to achieve the things he was able to without his help.

Difficult, not impossible.

"And you're sure your secret is safe with him?" Esme probed even more.

"You met him. What do you think?"

"I think he talks too much." Her response was blunt, but the smile on her face showed fondness towards that kind of behavior.

Rey noticed that, but he chose to ignore it completely.

"I don't think he'll spill my secret. Besides, I could always compel him to forget it."

"Really? Then why didn't you just do it back then? It would have been the safest bet, right?" It felt like Esme was driving at something, but Rey wasn't in the mood for it.

And so, he ignored the subtexts that existed underneath her words.

"There's no need to go that far. I plan on coming clean to the rest of my friends once this entire Dungeon thing is resolved."

"Really? What does that have to do with this situation, though?"

"The only reason I care about my identity being exposed is because I don't want them—no, her—to think negatively of me." Rey sighed, finally stopping in his tracks.

The moon's dim glow did a poor job at capturing his face, but thankfully the nearby lights that decorated the city were able to shine their light on it.

He appeared tired.

"I think I've had enough of the secrets. It's also going to get problematic explaining why Ralyks won't participate in the war despite his power."

"You mean 'your' power."

"You know what I mean..." Rey sighed in exasperation, to which Esme just chuckled at.

"In any case, it'll be better for everyone if I just told them the truth. I don't want to limit my strength on the front lines where actual lives are at stake."

He could see Esme nodding and smiling at him, so he quickly added something else. "That doesn't mean I'll show you my face, though."

"C-come on!"

"Pfft! You look cute when you pout like that." Rey teased.

"Well, I can't say the same about you since I DON'T EVEN KNOW what you look like."

"I know I won't be cute." Rey shrugged. "So there's no need to say it."

Esme sighed, obviously very deflated after hearing what Rey said. She clearly didn't want to push too much, and Rey really liked that.

"So the friend he was talking about, that was you, right?" As usual, Esme changed the topic to something more comfortable to talk about.

Rey didn't know how she was so skilled at conversing, but he liked that aspect of her as well.

"Yeah. I was really surprised, to be honest." He laughed slightly, staring high into the starless sky. "I didn't think I made such a strong impression on him."

"..."

Esme chose to remain silent, allowing Rey to soak in the quietness around him. It allowed him to think really clearly.

"I really wanted to tell him, you know? I wanted to tell him that I was Rey, his friend from back then..."

"So why didn't you?"

As her soft, barely audible answer danced in his ears, Rey parted his lips and let words accompany the cool mist that proceeded out.

"I... He looked happy. He looks like he's growing nicely, and this new life suits him. I think... if I showed up like this—out of the blue—it might sort of ruin that."

"I see..."

"Yeah..."

The both of them remained still, Rey looking at the blank sky while Esme stared at him with glistening eyes.

They stood there in silence for an unknown period of time.

But, someone finally spoke.

"He likes you, you know? Noah..." Rey slightly glanced at Esme as he muttered those words.

"I know."

Her response was brief, accompanied by a light shrug and a knowing smile.

"And?"

"And what?"

"Do you like him back?" These words followed each other in quick succession, but after this question, there was a long pause.

"Do you like Britta?"

"Huh? What does that have to do with the question I asked?"

"I mean, she likes you."

"Does she? I don't think so."

"Sure... keep saying that."

"Just answer my question." Rey said, slightly raising his voice.

He didn't realize this, but his cheeks were a little red as he stared intensely at Esme's clear blue eyes.

However, rather than answering honestly—as she normally would—the Half Elf pulled back, placing both hands behind as she playfully walked away.

"H-he—!"

"I'll tell you when you show me what's hidden underneath that mask."

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Chapter 424 The Otherworlders Arrive

~VWUUSH~

A swirling blue portal, like a vortex imprinted in midair, appeared a short distance from the Southern Gate of the Adventurer City.

For a moment, it merely stood still, merely illuminating the night with its bright hue and causing the air around it to tremble.

Then, silhouettes began to emerge from within it.

Nine humans, along with a rabbit, marched out of the spatial rift. There was purpose in their aura, and their footsteps interrupted the silence that filled the barren path.

Once they all came out, the warbling space collapsed on itself and vanished from sight.

In no time at all, the darkened path returned to the way it was, save for the ten strangers that now stood there.

"I can't believe Sir Ralyks just dropped us off without even bothering to show us around." The first to speak was, of course, Justin Blake.

His face dragged around as he complained, pointing towards the entrance of the city that stood at least a hundred meters away from them.

"The least he could do was transport us straight to the entrance."

Everyone ignored Justin's complaints. They knew the true reason why he was complaining, and that was because Ralyks didn't respond to any of his jokes.

Even when he was being serious, he was treated coldly.

Of course, the same applied to everyone, but it seemed Justin took it personally.

The only one who reacted as strongly as he did—perhaps a bit more extreme—was Belle Vanitas.

"Hicc... hicc... Sir Ralyks, why were you so cold to me?" Her muffled whispers quietly echoed in the night. "Even after we haven't seen for so long...?"

Everyone ignored her too.

Belle had been sobbing like this for a while now, and since she showed no signs of stopping anytime soon—despite the initial attempts to pacify her—they all gave up on the cause.

A few students still shot her concerned looks, but most just paid attention to the task ahead of them.

"Sir Ralyks was probably busy. He has a lot on his plate, and he did previously mention that he was going to be investigating some matters." Adonis had to speak up and address everyone, even though he already did so before they appeared here.

"So please, let us all cooperate and behave ourselves well."

None of the Otherworlders were aware of this, but the real reason 'Ralyks' didn't speak to them was because he was a mere duplicate hurriedly charged with bringing the students to the Adventurers City after a specified period of time.

Before transporting them to the checkpoint, the duplicate was to spew out exposition about the Adventurers City, as well as to once again guide the actions they were to take once they arrived.

Once it was done with the task, the clone transported them to the city and vanished itself.

"Hm. Even if he was busy, I feel like he should have at least lodged us somewhere." Alicia spoke up, her tone hinting a little concern.

"EXACTLY! Alicia gets it!" Justin yelled out, though he was ignored yet again.

"Isn't it a bit irresponsible on his part, as an adult, to just drop us off in a City we've never been to before? What do you think, Rey?"

"I completely agree with you, Alicia." Rey responded to the inquiry with a sharp, almost preplanned tone. "It's pretty late. It's not safe for us to be out so late at night without adult supervision."

In a way, Rey just rephrased everything Alicia complained about, yet somehow managing to make it worse.

"T-that's not really what I..." Alicia slightly slapped her palm on her face and sighed.

Rey had completely missed the point.

"We're adults in this world, Rey, Alicia. Sir Ralyks was generous enough to save us days of travel by transporting us here despite his busy schedule." Adonis spoke up, finally gaining everyone's attention once again.

"We should be grateful to him and focus on the mission we have been tasked with."

Once again, none of them realized just how wrong they were in their line of reasoning.

Who could blame their ignorance, though?

The real reason 'Ralyks' didn't transport them so close to the City, or lodged them into an inn, was because the man behind the mask didn't want his face to be seen in the Adventurers City.

Chances were high that he would be exposed as a fraud once the Otherworlders noticed that no one was paying him any mind, despite supposedly being a strong Adventurer.

Even if he could escape such accusations by claiming to be in disguise, Rey didn't want to take the risk of drawing attention to Ralyks—especially when he wasn't in full control of the version he sent to fetch everyone.

Besides, he was still unsure if Adrien was pulling the strings from the shadows.

For the safety of his plan, it was better to dissociate Ralyks from the Adventurers City, instead placing the focus on Jet and from the shadows.

For the safety of his plan, it was better to dissociate Ralyks Lux.

"Just as planned, we will have to change our names and faces before entering the city."

The reason for that was simple.

Since they would soon be officially recognized as the champions of mankind and heading to the front lines, they couldn't be seen as Adventurers.

As such, no one in the Adventurers City, not even the higher-ups, could know of their true identities.

Even if the Guildmaster and his posse were in support of the alliance now, there was no knowing how things would be in the future.

In order to play it safe, they had to take on different monikers and disguise themselves using the ultra-rare sets of rings that could cast a disguise on the wearer.

The set of nine rings was a courtesy gift from the Reaper Group, a newly established business that desired to forge a relationship of interest with the Royal Council.

Of course, many considered this incredibly convenient and guessed Ralyks was behind it. However, without proof—and with the need for the rings—they quietly accepted the presents.

"Alright everyone. Let's go!"

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Chapter 425 The Inn Incident [Pt 1]

The Adventurers City wasn't particularly known for its beauty.

It resembled a simple town, though there was an abundance of large buildings within its territories. This was to accommodate for the many residents that chose to live there.

Since Adventurers often spent their time away from the house, sometimes even traveling out of the City for Quests, many of them preferred to lodge in Inns rather than rent a place of their own.

There was also the option of buying land, or a house, but it was very rare to see Adventurers opt for this option.

Not only was land in short supply, since most people didn't care to sell their properties, there was no real reason for an Adventurer to be tied down to a property they would never use.

The only ones who would consider this option were Adventurers who had families, but even they preferred renting a house to buying a property.

At the very least, there was the chance of changing locations if one went with the former.

In any case, the allure of the Adventurers City wasn't in its external appearance, which was probably why the Otherworlders who now walked down the street of the big city didn't feel much of an electrifying sensation.

They appeared more lost than excited.

"Are you sure you know where to go, Adonis? Maybe we should just ask around?"

This question came from Eric, rather than the usual blabbermouth Justin. The latter had long taken the hint and was now sulking silently.

"I'm sure." Adonis responded calmly, not looking back to see Eric's frustrated face.

Unlike most of his classmates, Eric actually wanted to properly explore the Adventurers City since he had always been an avid fantasy fan.

He felt it was a shame they weren't being given the opportunity to split and explore on their own.

'I want to talk to some Adventurers and get a feel of this place!' Eric flexed his glasses and felt his nerd spirit being set ablaze.

He was the only one who thought like this, though.

Everyone else couldn't wait for Adonis to lodge them in an Inn, considering how uncomfortable they felt to be walking outside at night.

The Adventurers City was no slum, by any means, but compared to the Capital it was sorely lacking. It was easy to spot some safety and health violations, both of which would never fly in the Capital, in many areas of the City.

Plus, the stares they received from passersby was a little unnerving. Adventurers had a certain glare that made them appear threatening, so it wasn't strange for them to cast them on people—even if they were total strangers.

The students weren't particularly threatened by those glares. They were pretty confident that they could take on most of the Adventurers who shot them looks.

The fundamental problem was the fact that they were inexperienced.

None of them had ever left the Capital. Even when they explored the town back then, they never strayed too far from the central marketplaces and glamorous hubs.

They certainly never stayed out late either.

All of these rules were broken at once, and with so many new experiences clashing upon one another, the teenagers wanted nothing more than to find their rooms and relax.

They never thought they would miss adult supervision so much.

Fortunately, Adonis knew exactly where he was going. In a few minutes, they arrived at their destination—a prestigious-looking building by the standards of the city.

Compared to what the students were used to, the architecture was a little shoddy, and the overall design could use some improvements.

Beggars couldn't be choosers, though, so they simply swallowed any kind of criticism they had and trailed behind their leader.

"Excuse me, Miss. I'd like to lodge a Group Room for my party." Adonis approached the receptionist with such ease and confidence, almost as if he had done this a million times.

Honestly, most people in the shoes of his classmates would have displayed shock—considering how they were all strangers in this place.

However, everyone present was already used to Adonis being this way.

He always knew just what to do in every situation, and his ability to act on the spot was unrivaled. After displaying this skill so many times on Earth, and even when they were transported to this strange land, many people weren't surprised any longer.

The guy was just a genius.

"What Capacity would you like? We have—"

"Maximum Capacity." He said, cutting her short, though not in a rude manner. "Is that available?"

"Yes. That will be 10 Bronze Coins a night, plus free breakfast in the morning."

Many students marveled at the price of their residence for one night. They expected it to be a lot more expensive, considering what they were used to in the Capital.

Even the cheapest Inn cost a little more than what they were getting for a room that had maximum capacity.

They even added free meals for everyone to the mix.

Considering how the Adventurers City was as much a hub of activities as the Capital was, and it generated quite an ample sum of national revenue, one would have expected things to be expensive here.

But, they were ridiculously cheap.

That just went to show the disparity that existed the further South one went in the map. Since the Adventurers City was up North, the cost of living was—as expected—relatively low.

"Thank you, Miss." Adonis slightly bowed his head in courtesy and paid the money.

The young lady behind the counter instantly blushed, and even the others who weren't attending to them started whispering to themselves while giggling.

Once again, the students were reminded of just how charming Adonis was.

Perhaps it was because they saw him so often, they had gotten desensitized to his captivating handsomeness.

Even with his disguise, which only aged him up to a mature age, he looked very splendid.

"Come on, guys." Adonis turned away from the desk and dangled the keys in front of his classmates. "Let's go."

A few students exchanged knowing stares and threw their hands in the air while laughing to themselves.

"As expected of our Hero..."

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Chapter 426 The Inn Incident [Pt 2]

"Oi, oi, oi... did you see it, though?"

As the nine students walked away from the reception, they couldn't escape the loud noise generated by the conversation of nearby Adventurers.

It was rare to see grown men gushing so much, but that was simply a testament to the exciting topic they were talking about.

"Of course! You weren't there, right?" A bald man, easily the tallest in the group, grinned very widely as he addressed a more lanky man in the group.

"Yeah... I was on a Quest."

The lanky man's flat response made it clear how he regretted his decision to go.

His Quest probably ended up a bust as well.

"The thing was huge, I tell you!" Another person in the group of five exclaimed.

"Right? Insanely huge! That was my first time seeing an A-Tier Monster in my life."

"Can't believe they caught something like that."

"I suppose that's the level of Heroic Rank Adventurers, after all. Commons like us can't begin to compare."

"Dude, speak for yourself. I'm taking the Veteran Test next week, so don't lump me in with the likes of you."

"You said that last month and ended up failing. Pfft!"

"Shut up! This time will be different!"

The students ignored the bald man's reddened face as they walked past the group and made their way up the stairs.

"... Those two were exceptional. It's reassuring to see we have two new Heroic Rank Adventurers."

Adonis, who led the group, halted for a moment after those words echoed out from one of the Adventurers.

However, it wasn't long before he continued ascending.

A few of his classmates noticed his hesitation, but most of them were too tired or engrossed in their own conversations to care.

To them, it wasn't particularly interesting to hear low-ranked Adventurers make small talk.

A Group Room.

Just as the name implied, it was meant to house more than one person. Of course, depending on capacity, the number of occupiers could range from a measly two to more.

Maximum Capacity meant the room could occupy ten people, so it suited the nine students perfectly.

Well, that was what they initially thought.

But—

"H-hold on... we're actually staying in the same room?" Belle spoke up in shock.

She wasn't the only surprised person, though.

Literally all the students—save Adonis and Eric—looked stunned by what they were witnessing.

They were all expecting a similar arrangement as what they were used to in the Royal Estate, though, of inferior quality: A general parlor, and rooms dedicated to each of them.

That wasn't at all what they ended up getting.

Beds were placed in a tidy row, with more than enough room for a person to fit in the space between each one. Then, there were two study desks at the respective corners of the room.

There were three doors that led to the closet, the bathroom, and hopefully a second bathroom.

Sure, the room was quite massive—especially if they measured it by the standard of an Adventurer—but it didn't hold a candle to what they were used to.

It was, in simple terms, regressively degrading.

"Calm down. It's just for one night." Adonis sighed, gesturing for everyone to settle in. "We'll be going our separate ways tomorrow anyway."

The plan was to be assigned different Parties to join for the Conquest. And so, just as Adonis implied, they were better off managing the shared space for the night.

"I hope none of you snore!" Belle shrieked as she walked in, and while many people sighed and had neutral expressions on their faces, a few hid their guilty looks.

Adonis smiled, shrugging off casually as he proceeded to the door.

"Where are you going?" Alicia asked the moment she observed his attempts to leave the room.

"We're supposed to be settling in, right?"

Her amber eyes carefully looked at him as he slightly shrugged.

"Just want to figure a few things out."

"You're going to look for those Adventurers from earlier, right?" She probed even further.

"You got me."

At this point, their conversation had gotten the attention of practically everyone in the room.

"What's the point? You could just find that out tomorrow." Belle said with a whiny voice.

"They're low-ranked Adventurers, right? Even if you want to scout for information, aren't they a bit unreliable?" Trisha added.

A few others gave their two cents, so it fell on Adonis to respond.

"You're taking this a bit too seriously, guys. I'm just curious about what they were talking about. Nothing more than that..." He smiled, slightly raising his hands to show how casual his efforts really were.

"You sure you don't want to go link up with that receptionist?" Justin finally spoke, his eyes gleaming with excitement.

"Brooooo! I was literally thinking the same thing!" Clark added.

They both made a high-five and literally had stars in their eyes as they turned to Adonis, shooting him a thumbs up.

"Nice one, man!"

"Urgh, you guys... that's creepy." Alicia sighed as she shook her head. "She's like twice our age."

"EVEN BETTER!" Justin raised his voice, but was quickly met with a jab from Trisha.

"You guys are gross..."

"Guys? What did the rest of us do?" Billy and Eric practically said the same thing, their voices overlapping each other.

All through this, the only non-human in the room—the rabbit—
was already fast asleep on her bed.

Adonis watched his classmates through all this and gave a nervous smile throughout.

Perhaps it really was for the best that they split up.

"Anyway, it's fine. I wasn't stopping you from going or anything." Alicia said, finally walking away from Adonis as she approached the bed closest to her Familiar.

"Yeah. Thanks."

"Hey, can I come with?" Eric jumped from his bed and rushed towards Adonis, who pretty much gestured that he didn't mind at all.

"Well, we'll be right back."

The two exited the room, closing the door shut as they returned downstairs.

Both of them had a somewhat similar expression on their faces, which exposed the thought that they shared.

'I hope they've not left yet!'

*

Chapter 427 The Inn Incident [Pt 3]

"Don't you find it funny that they're complaining about the room?"

As Eric and Adonis made it down the stairs, the boy in glasses brought up the topic while smiling playfully.

"I wonder how they would?react when we finally begin the Conquest and they have to spend a week in the Dungeon." He added, chuckling.

There were no comfy beds or proper furniture in a Dungeon.

No bathrooms either.

"They'll probably have to sleep very close to their Party Members—total strangers. If they're reacting like this to a joint room with people they know... it's hilarious to think about what will happen eventually."

Eric was trying to break the awkward silence between him and Adonis. They had spoken a few times in the past, so he knew Adonis was a cool dude, but something felt off about him this night.

It almost felt like he wasn't really himself.

"You really know your stuff, huh?" Thankfully, Adonis responded back, smiling as warmly as he always did.

Eric laughed a bit nervously as he used his finger to itch a side of his face.

"Yeah. I might have read a few books and played a few games related to fantasy."

"Haha! Is that so? Well... you can't blame our friends for acting this way." Adonis smiled at Eric.

Despite saying that, Adonis' curled-up lips grew broader and he winked at Eric. "Though it will be funny to see their reaction, wouldn't it?"

"Right?"

Both boys laughed as they kept their eyes out for the group of Adventurers that were discussing with one another previously.

Thankfully, they were found without much effort.

"Hello there." Adonis approached them without caution or hesitation, a move that Eric felt a bit nervous about doing.

Despite his curiosity, he wasn't the type to boldly start off conversations with strangers—especially if they were in a group.

He was a tad shy, to be honest.

"Ohh? I haven't seen your face around? New here?"

"Yes. My friends and I just arrived yesterday. We came from the countryside to become Adventurers in search for freedom and fortune."

"Hahaha! Is that so? Well, that's good! Yes, it's good to have dreams!"

The conversation swiftly flowed in that direction, and Eric watched everything play out as smoothly as butter.

'The heck? Do you have some kind of charm superpower or something?' He stared hard at Adonis, his entire face oozing disbelief.

In just a few seconds—not even up to a minute—the boy was already laughing with everyone else in the group. They acted like they had known him forever, and this surprised Eric a little bit.

'I knew he was good, but not this good...'

Adonis had just displayed some next-level charm that pretty much made him an antithesis to socially awkward guys like Eric.

The only reason he started talking out a lot recently was because he had gotten a lot closer to the people around him.

They literally slayed Monsters together, so it wasn't an understatement to say that they were pretty much all friends.

Besides, he considered them Party Members, and knowing the importance of communication in a Party, he decided to be more expressive.

Thanks to that, Eric could say he had gotten relatively close to his classmates.

But—!

'Adonis seems to be closer to these people he just met a minute ago than I am with most of my classmates.'

It was that ridiculous.

"I was passing by and I heard some pretty interesting things you said." Adonis finally brought up the topic he was curious about, causing Eric's ears to perk up so he could pay more attention to the conversation.

"You mentioned two Adventurers becoming Heroic Rank today. What's that all about?"

Eric studied the surprised looks on the faces of the Adventurers they were speaking to.

"You really don't know?" One of them asked with a particularly exaggerated raised brow.

"W-well, my friends just arrived this night. I missed the whole thing, but I've been seeing how lively everyone is since I got here." Adonis itched his head and laughed warmly.

"Is it always this lively at night?"

They shook their head and smiled—perhaps at Adonis' ignorance, or his feigned naiveté. Either way, he had baited them, and now they were more than willing to spill.

"Well, I don't know all the details, but apparently... these two Adventurers—Jet and Lux—came here today."

"D-did you just say Jet and Lux?"

"Y-yes. Do you know them?" The Adventurers asked with raised brows.

"N-no... not really. Just heard of them a little." Adonis murmured. "Forgive my interruption. Please continue."

The Adventurers nodded their heads and proceeded with their words.

They explained what they heard about concerning what happened the previous day; with Jet and Lux proceeding to the Adventurers Guild upon arriving in the City.

They went on about how they requested to take on the Test of the highest order—that is, the Heroic Rank Test.

Then, how they defeated Sango, one of the strongest Adventurers in the City.

The main gist happened earlier in the current day, though, when the two Adventurers returned with their examiner with a captured A-Tier Monster, as well as sacks filled to the brim with unknown treasures.

It was crazy listening to them speak. Some of their words were vague and confused at best, and a few times they would make mistakes in the narration, only to be corrected by a fellow.

Needless to say, the information they provided was very flawed.

'Trisha was right...' Eric sighed to himself. 'These guys are too low-ranked.'

They probably heard secondhand—perhaps even thirdhand—accounts of what happened and were passing it off as if they saw everything with their very eyes. This, of course, was so they could look important and propped-up in the eyes of a newbie, but Eric personally thought it was pathetic.

'We should have waited to talk to a more reliable person.'

"I see. Thank you." Adonis bowed his head in appreciation as he graced everyone with his brilliant smile.

"I have to be on my way now. See you all later."

*

Chapter 428 The Inn Incident [Pt 4]

The journey back upstairs was less awkward.

Eric and Adonis discussed what the Adventurers spoke up, taking turns to examine what was true, false, or exaggerated in the entire conversation.

Adonis personally didn't care too much for that, as he told Eric not to take the whole thing too seriously. They ended up talking to a few Adventurers and made some connections while having fun.

That was all that mattered.

Eric couldn't help but agree with Adonis. They finally returned to the room, and they found all the students on the bed, all of them unable to sleep.

They were already dressed casually and had undone their disguise.

Many would question the intelligence behind such a move, considering they could be spied upon when inside the room. However, there was no sign of Image-Capturing Magic or Technology around.

Adventurers enjoyed their privacy and freedom, and since they did some pretty private things in the inns they stayed at, establishment owners knew better than to install something that would intrude on their private business.

Such Magic was rare too, and incredibly expensive.

"You're all still awake? What's the matter?" Adonis looked around to observe the faces of his classmates.

"You all look gloomy."

It was no surprise that they were this way, but Alicia decided to explain, all while staying close to her pet rabbit, Snow.

"Well, we have a lot on our minds, you know?"

For one, they had to pass the Adventurer Test the next day if they wanted to be recognized as such. Despite being assured that it wouldn't be a big deal, most of the students couldn't help but look forward to it.

However, the major thing that that held people awake was quite obvious.

"Seems weird that we've been left here all alone without adult supervision." Alicia said with a slight smile.

It felt like going on a field trip without the school staff, or like traveling abroad without knowing anyone at all upon arrival.

Most of the students still had the jitters that accompanied such experiences.

There was no way sleep could come.

"Well, I understand how overwhelming this entire situation is..." Adonis walked into the closet, coming back out in the blink of an eye in a casual outfit.

No one could explain how he was able to change so quickly, so they just pretended not to have seen anything.

"But we'll be fine. We have each other, and we're plenty strong and mature now." Adonis gave his signature charismatic smile and beamed brightly.

"I'm sure we can handle anything that comes our way."

Most of the students beamed at this, except maybe Belle—who was still not over the fact that Ralyks treated her so coldly.

"Hey! Since this is the first time we're in a room together, why don't we play a game?" Justin jumped from his bed and made the suggestion.

Many people needed to relieve the tension, so they didn't react aversely to the idea.

"Truth or dare! What do you say, everyone?"

The blushing look on Justin's face showed he had some pretty nasty intentions with this suggestion, but it was honestly a fun game that they all considered playing it.

Of course, they had to defer to their leader to see what he thought of the idea.

Adonis chuckled as he stepped forward. He gave a thumbs up and raised his eyebrow a few times in a semi-naughty manner.

"Count me in!"

Many expected Adonis to be the mature guy in the group—the closest thing to an adult—but even he wasn't immune to fun.

He wasn't a wet blanket, and honestly that added to his charm.

"Alright!" Justin beamed, being the most excited out of everyone.

"Gather around, everyone. Let's get this party started!"

It was a fun night while it lasted, but eventually everyone went to bed.

Well, almost everyone.

Adonis was still awake, his eyes stuck facing the ceiling in the room as he struggled to think.

Amidst the loud snores that Billy made and the "Sir Ralyks..." that Belle whispered while she dreamt, it would have been a difficult—nigh impossible—task for most.

But Adonis was different!

He zoned his mind away from all the distractions and focused on the voice that came from his own mind.

'Jet and Lux, huh...?'

He had certainly heard of those names before—but not in this life.

It was in the original timeline.

'They were the ones responsible for the Adventurers City Massacre...' Adonis' thought trailed.

There was no conclusive evidence on that, but they were the most likely suspects based on all the events that aligned up until the Massacre.

Back then, the Dead Zone—a haven for Monsters—began to show strange activity, and it unleashed an impossible horde of Monsters on the city of adventures.

The result? The massacre ended up wiping out nearly ninety percent of the Adventurers in the City, leaving only the ones who were either strong enough to survive, or cowardly enough to run.

By the time Adonis and his classmates were dispatched to help the City, it was already too late.

The place was in ruins—an empty shell of what it once was.

'It was a bloody sight. I still remember it so vividly...'

The worst part about the incident was that the Adventurers City had encountered yet another tragedy before this massacre.

The Grand Calamity Class Dungeon.

'The Conquest ended in failure, and a lot of the Adventurers who went in ended up losing their lives.'

Among those who didn't, had to retire from Adventuring due to too much trauma or irreversible damage caused by Miasma Poisoning.

That in itself was horrible.

Of course, Adonis hoped to change that horrid future, which was why he and his classmates were here in the first place.

'People will still die. I can't help that.' Adonis sighed. He wished there was a better way to go about the situation, but his limited experience couldn't afford him to make any radical changes.

Still...

'I'll save as many people as I can!'

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Chapter 429 Memories Of The Massacre

The Adventurers City Massacre.

Everyone called it the work of absolute evil due to how gruesome the event was.

It all started with The Dead Zone, which was consistently regulated, displaying abnormal signs.

One or two Monsters would escape from the forest and attempt attacking the City. This happened within the interval of days, so while it was worrisome, it wasn't particularly a threat worth taking very seriously.

Every time the Monsters tried to assault the City, they were killed. Usually, there would be no casualty. However, in the worst case, a few people would be injured.

Still, no one expected it to lead to a tragedy; especially since it was only a few months after the Grand Calamity Class Dungeon Incident, and people were still healing.

There were plans to launch a full-sweep on the Dead Zone at the end of the year, but that was still months away.

They still had time... or so they thought.

No one expected the carnage that came next—the huge influx of Monsters that defied human explanation.

The City was swarming with C-Tier Monsters. Several B-Tier Monsters also made their appearance, and finally... the A-Tier monstrosities showed up as well.

They surrounded the city, exhibiting overtly intelligent behavior that Monsters weren't known for. Everyone was trapped, almost as if the entire city was in a birdcage.

There was no escape.

The only reason there were survivors was because the Otherworlders showed up when they did.

This was their debut mission, and they were welcome with the horrid sight of carnage—a sight they would eventually get used to once they reached the front lines.

The Otherworlders were able to defeat the Monsters after a ton of effort, and while the city suffered a great loss that day, it wasn't completely wiped out.

And then, once the dust settled... the same question echoed in everyone's mind.

"Who could have done this?"

The answer was unanimous. Everyone chose the most likely suspects; two strange Adventurers who arrived in the city about a day after the first attack from the Dead Zone.

They registered as Adventurers and easily passed the Heroic Rank Test. They also displayed a lot of suspicious activities—especially in relation to the Dead Zone.

No one knew who they really were, and since their arrival coincided with the destruction of the city, blaming them was the only natural conclusion.

What cemented the case was the fact that, after the massacre, they completely vanished.

No one found their corpse, which meant they were still alive somewhere. Without a doubt, they were the ones involved in that incident.

But why...?

Why would anyone do such a wicked thing to their fellow man?

Well... what if they weren't human, to begin with? It was only until later that Adonis and his allies discovered the existence of something that they never thought was possible.

—Dragon Spies!

After this discovery, years after the Massacre Incident, the actions of Jet and Lux suddenly made sense.

They were both Dragon Spies.

That would explain their absurd strength, their malevolent decisions, and the fact that they couldn't be found after causing such tragedy.

'And now... they're here!' Adonis thought to himself, his deep frown impossible to hide.

The two despicable vermin that ruined so many lives had come to wreak havoc, once again. Merely thinking about it caused heat to rise in Adonis' chest.

Still, something wasn't right.

'They're early. Too early...'

The Grand Calamity Dungeon Conquest hadn't even started yet, so what were doing in the City so early?

'Damnit! Is this the Dragonfly effect again?' Adonis thought to himself. 'I thought, at the very least, the Adventurers City wouldn't be affected by anything yet.'

It seemed his hopes had been dashed before he even realized it.

Despite all the discrepancies, however, core facts remained the same. The people from the previous timeline were the same in this timeline.

'Adam was the mastermind, right? And for the most part my classmates are how I remember them.'

Of course, there were a few exceptions to the rule.

One of them was with Billy being a far more depraved person than he appeared; even in the past.

'Then there's Rey, who's considerably a lot weaker than he was back then.'

Thankfully, Rey had been making a lot of improvements and that was very exciting to see. If things went well, it was indeed possible for him to attain his prime.

'I hope that happens. After all, it's my fault that he isn't at that point now...'

For Adonis to rise as a Hero, most people had to take the back seat in popularity. As such, it was likely that Rey's Karma Points were somehow lower due to his interference.

'I'm a bit too anxious to ask him, but wasn't his Karma Point around 60 in the past?'

It must have really gone down if he ended up with the cards he ended up being dealt with at the start.

'I-In any case...' Adonis took his mind off Rey and focused on the primary issue at hand.

—Jet and Lux!

'How do I deal with them?' A bead of sweat fell from his face.

He didn't know how strong they were, so if he charged in recklessly, there was a chance that he could end up stirring the hornet's nest.

'I've grown to the point where I'm confident in my ability to handle any Dragon Commander by myself.' His thoughts trailed.

Unfortunately, if a Dragon General or Dragon Lord showed up, things would get astronomically more difficult.

'Depending on compatibility, I could end up trading a few blows with a Dragon General... even if victory is not guaranteed.'

However, Adonis knew... when it came to a Dragon Lord, it was impossible for him to win.

Not with how he currently was.

'If my opponents are Dragon Generals who are stronger than I am, then it'll be overkill for me to fight two.'

He never saw Jet and Lux in the past, so he couldn't have even seen them in action.

As such, Adonis was left in the dark once again.

'What... what should I do?!'

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Chapter 430 Adventurer Registration [Pt 1]

Adonis slept in a very confused state that night.

He still had no idea what he could do to prevent whatever catastrophe that Jet and Lux planned on causing, but he certainly had no intention of leaving them be.

In the worst case, he would attempt to expose them for who they were in secret, and then catch them off guard by launching a surprise attack with his classmates.

'I'm still not sure how it'll go, but...'

The safest option would be to call Ralyks, but Adonis had no way to contact him.

'I'm sure Sir Ralyks is as strong as a Dragon General... no, definitely stronger.' Adonis narrowed his eyes as he felt his brows crease.

He didn't see Ralyks winning against a Dragon Lord, but he also didn't expect a Dragon Lord to disguise themselves as Adventurers.

It was even a big stretch to say that they were Dragon Generals, but that still existed in the realm of possibility.

'In any case, I can't hesitate on this matter.' Adonis decided to himself in resolve.

After all, even if he was unsure of most of the details about the duo, he was guaranteed one thing.

'They are the enemy!'

[The Next Day]

The group decided to take turns going to the Adventurers Guild in an attempt not to be seen as a Party by Adventurers.

Their goal was to be recruited into separate Parties, so it would be problematic if the Adventurers already associated everyone as a unit.

As such, each individual had to proceed to the Guild, take their Adventurers Test, and come back out. It was that simple.

'That's why I chose the Inn closest to the Guild.' Adonis smiled to himself.

In the previous timeline, after the Massacre, he and his friends remained in the City for a few weeks. It was then that Adonis was able to learn most of what he knew about Adventurers and Adventuring.

'It's also why the plan is this way.'

Each student, with Adonis as the exception, would opt to take Tests within the 3-5 Star range, with Adonis taking the 6 Star Test.

Of course, just based on their level and capabilities, Adonis had no doubt that every single one of his classmates had long surpassed the criteria for becoming a Heroic Rank Adventurer. However, they weren't here to show off.

'If we have too big of a rank, it would cause more unnecessary chaos in the City. Plus, we probably won't get any offers to join a Party since Adventurers would distance themselves from us.'

That would completely defeat the goal.

'The only reason I'm taking a 6-Star Test is so I can pull my weight by joining the strongest Party.'

Everyone else could join any random Party they liked.

As Adonis was engrossed in thought, classmate after the other trailed inside or proceeded outside the room.

They all did this after breakfast, of course, so it wasn't particularly a chore.

Once they were all done, it was finally his turn.

'Alright! Let's get this over with.' Adonis smiled as he proceeded out of the room and walked quickly down the path that led to the biggest building in the city.

It didn't take long before he arrived at his destination.

~CREAK~

As he opened the door and allowed the stifling air of the Reception to wash over him, he felt a bit of nostalgia.

He glanced to his far left and noticed the 'Big Board', with quite a few Adventurers already standing there and looking at the Quests presented there.

'Pfft! Nothing has changed, I see...'

He allowed his nostalgia to guide him to the desk of a particularly fair woman. The tag on her chest read 'Lyvia'.

'That's strange. I don't see Burke...' Adonis quite remembered the lady that occupied this spot from his past life.

She was quite popular among the Adventurers, considering how she had been working in the same position for over ten years.

"Sorry, do you know where Miss Burke went?" Adonis asked in the most polite tone he could muster at the fair lady.

She gave him a smile and slightly shook her head.

"Oh, she got promoted yesterday. She's pretty much our boss now."

"Ahh... I see." Adonis said with a slight laugh. "Thank you fo—"

"I envy her, though. Don't tell anyone I told you this, but I think the reason she was able to shoot up the ranks so quickly was due to the last customers she attended to."

Adonis didn't really want to continue the conversation, but he was too nice to shut the lady down—especially when she leaned forward and whispered words to him as if they were somehow conspirators.

"Who were these last customers?" He asked half-heartedly, not expecting anything special.

The next words that he heard instantly caused his eyes to widen.

"Jet and Lux, the new 6 Star Adventurers who took this City by storm."

Over the course of one night, their names had become so widespread that they pretty much achieved celebrity status in such a short span of time.

"If only they had come to my desk that day..." Lyvia mumbled. "She was even getting lots of complaints before being promoted..."

Adonis filtered out all the unnecessary words that were bouncing around his ears, focusing on the crucial information he had just heard.

'She got promoted thanks to them? That's ridiculous. The Guild doesn't function that way...'

The more likely reason was due to being qualified for a much higher position—having worked there for over ten years—

though Adonis still suspected that her involvement with the two somehow prompted her to take the extra step.

'She never took any promotion back then. Did they make her do it?' Adonis wondered.

Perhaps they wanted someone in a higher position of power so they could have access to more information.

'No... Dragons don't work that way.'

They didn't trust humans that much, and they certainly wouldn't go after someone as ordinary as Burke. Her position wasn't even that important.

'I guess there's only one way to find out.' He inhaled deeply, finally resolving to silence the girl that kept rambling in front of him.

"Can I meet with her?"