

Extras 51

Chapter 51 In The Marketplace

The next day arrived very quickly, and the training of the Beta Students was not supervised by Billy this time around.

Instead...

"Hello, everyone! I'll be in charge of your Magic Training today!"

... Bella from the Alpha Class was the one responsible for their training.

Just the same way it was with Billy, there was a bit of pushback, considering how very timid and weak Bella looked.

She was always known to be a nice girl.

However, once the training began and she displayed her Magic prowess, all the Beta Students found themselves crumbling under the pressure.

Once again, an Alpha Student had made it clear that their level was far higher than even the highest standard of the Beta Students.

It was so absurd that it defied explanation.

If anyone was told that these students arrived in this world at the same time, they wouldn't be able to believe it.

The gap in power was just that huge.

Thankfully, the Beta Students didn't have to experience this despair for too long.

Once it was over, everyone was dismissed. They were able to return to the fun activities that had mostly lost their luster.

There were a few students who refused to leave, but continued training even after training.

Trisha was one of them.

Adam and a few others too were doing the same, but none of them had the intensity and devotion that the ebony girl had.

In any case, as they stayed behind for continuous training, the rest of the crowd left for their rooms to shower or have fun.

Among this crowd was a student who could be considered an average extra.

He blended very well with the crowd, and he too seemed to be on his way to his room.

... But was he?

"Alright. I'm here now."

"Eeep!"

Rey's voice startled Noah, who had erected an illusion around himself with the [Projection] Skill. He had currently disguised himself as one of the many bush clusters in the Royal Estate, situated close to the walls.

"Why do you look so shocked?"

Any random person who saw Rey would think he was talking to a bush, but it was actually Noah.

"Y-you can detect me, even with [Projection]?"

Noah's plan was to wait for Rey, and when he arrived, he would reveal himself.

It hadn't gotten to that final part, yet he was already spotted.

How...?

"That Skill doesn't work on people with Levels or Stats that are much higher than yours." Rey replied with a smile.

Pretty much anyone with over 10 Levels higher than the caster would be able to spot them.

In essence, he was just that much stronger than Noah was.

That's all there was to it.

"In any case, I apologize for being late. There's this girl in our class I was trying to avoid..."

"You mean Trisha?"

Noah was in the Beta Class, just like Rey, and he had noticed the two's odd dynamic ever since Rey defeated Billy.

Contrary to what his innocent-looking face would tell you, Noah was extremely observant.

That was probably why he was giving Rey some sort of knowing smile.

"Y-yeah..."

Rey rubbed his forehead a little before shrugging and sighing at the same time.

"In any case, now that we're here... we might as well start going."

Rey set up his own [Projection], but excluded Noah from its effects.

As a result, he made it appear as if he wasn't there despite standing out in the open.

"How do you plan on doing this?" Noah asked with a curious gaze.

He had an Invisibility Necklace that was useful for moments like this. He could also use [Phase], so he could pass through the walls.

As for Rey... he didn't have any of those Skills.

"Let's just go."

Noah watched Rey walk towards the Estate wall, and then pass through it like it was merely an illusion.

"E-eh?!"

Not only was he stunned out of his mind, but Noah rushed to the wall and touched it to confirm that it was real.

'It's solid! That only means... he has the [Phase] Skill too?!'

Noah found saliva clogging up his throat, so he swiftly gulped it down.

'Just how many Skills...?'

The short boy decided this wasn't the time to think about something like that—especially since he didn't have a way to answer for sure.

He could only follow Rey's lead.

~WHUSH~

He also passed through the wall, leaving the Estate for a far more troublesome place.

The Market!

'Noah seems like a sharp guy, but sometimes I forget he's only a teenager...'

As Rey walked down the town's street, he could sense the awkwardness in the air around Noah.

Sure, the boy was currently wrapped in his shadow, and was using [Projection] to make himself appear much taller than he was, but to Rey, he just looked ridiculous.

'I guess that's why they were able to take advantage of him so easily...'

For Rey, this was a confirmation of his decision to study this world very thoroughly before deciding to interact with its denizens.

Noah had jumped the gun, and as a result, he had ended up being scammed.

'I'll have to make sure the same thing doesn't happen again...'

That was why he was here, to begin with.

Rey was also currently donning what he considered to be a more fitting disguise compared to Noah's appearance.

He used [Mimic] to shapeshift into an adult, while donning a black mask he had designed in the Hobgoblin cave.

It was made from Orichalcum, and it fit his face perfectly. He had done this little side project to pass time, so he hadn't expected it to play such an important role now.

His cloak was raven black, obtained by sewing a dark robe he got from the Royal Estate together with the fur of the NightWolf he killed.

He had learned a lot of commonplace and handwork techniques from studying, so it wasn't very hard to do these things.

"Is that very comfortable?" Noah asked, glancing a little at Rey.

His face was currently obscured with his mask, so it was pretty much impossible to tell what kind of expression he was making.

'Not really...' Rey's thoughts trailed in response to the question.

The NightWolf's fur was very bristly, and they also didn't smell nice now that he was a little sweaty.

"It's better than shrouding myself in a shadow, at the very least."

Once Noah heard this, he instantly regretted asking his question.

"Touché..." He whispered.

After walking together for a short while, Rey couldn't take it anymore.

He glanced at Noah, who was now completely silent, and gave a short sigh.

"We should probably head to a store for a change of clothes first."

Noah nodded immediately.

The marketplace was awfully crowded, but Rey easily spotted a store where clothes were being sold.

It was in a building, and it seemed like a high-end shop.

'We need to look very presentable for the people we're going to meet...'

Since he didn't notice any other shop around, and also observed that only rich-looking individuals came in or out, he gathered that his suspicions were true.

As a result, he chose the place.

"Let's go."

Chapter 52 The Black Market

The store didn't hold a candle to its counterpart on Earth.

Perhaps that was why Rey was initially skeptical about it holding quality items.

It looked primitive, and while the design was fantastic, it didn't have that flamboyant ambiance that his homeworld's stores and malls had.

'I never went to high-end places on Earth, but even the places I went to are much better than this place.'

He couldn't blame the people here, though.

It was even unfair to compare them to Earth, to begin with.

'I'm sure places like the White House look much better than the Royal Palace. So, it only stands to reason that the marketplace would be inferior to Earth's.'

Both Rey and Noah were greeted by an attendant, who took them around and answered whatever questions they had.

Fortunately, they weren't asked to remove their masks or anything.

'They must be used to having anonymous customers...'

"I have Platinum Coins, so show me the good stuff." Rey blurted out as he found the lady showing him the common things in the store.

He wanted something better.

"A-ah! Right away sir!"

Rey and Noah were taken upstairs... to the true VIP Section of the Store.

In this place, all items began with 1 Platinum Coin. Not only was it much better designed than the ground floor, but the items all appeared better packaged—albeit they were fewer.

"Take a look around and get yourself a good-looking hooded cloak." Rey told Noah.

"Nothing more than 2 Platinum Coins."

For Rey, he planned on restricting himself to the same budget.

... That was until he actually began shopping.

'Damnit! I wish I had more money!'

He had seen so many luxuries in the short moment of shopping that he felt downright broke despite having what many would consider a lot of money

In the end, he selected a fur-coat for 1 Platinum Coin. It was specially enchanted to regulate the wearer's temperature—whether cold or hot—so he could stop worrying about sweating.

He also got a nice-looking pair of shirt, trousers, and boots for 1 Platinum Coin.

They came as a set, so he found that useful.

Finally, he got himself a ring worth one Platinum coin.

He was initially hesitant to get it, but after considering how luxurious it looked, and its special effect of possessing a Storage Unit, he decided to get it.

'Apparently, all rich people have something like this.'

Since he had to look the part, he got it.

Once Rey got to the checkout desk, Noah was already waiting for him.

Per his instructions, Noah had gotten a raven-black hooded robe which had an enchantment imbued to make him appear bigger and more intimidating than usual.

It cost 2 Platinum Coins for some reason, but Rey considered it to be a good investment.

'If we add its effects to Noah's [Projection], it could be very useful.'

It was possible that the person they were meeting could see through Noah's usual disguise. But with this, they wouldn't be so easy.

"Alright. Looks like we're all set."

Once they paid, Rey and Noah left the store and went their way.

"Come again next time!" They heard the voice of their attendant as they exited.

'Oh, I'm definitely coming back!'

There were a couple of things Rey liked there, but they were far above his budget.

Once he saved up enough, there would be nothing stopping him from returning.

"And you're sure this is the place?"

Rey and Noah were standing in front of a dark alleyway, crawling with shadows.

"Yeah."

Rey squinted his eyes in disbelief.

What kind of respectable business place would be situated in such a horrid area?

Unless...

"Hold on... is it the black market? You didn't tell me you sold it to the black market!"

"I... I didn't?"

Rey furrowed his brow in stifled fury as he listened to Noah's poor excuse for a response.

When Noah divulged everything about his adventures in the town and marketplace, he had conveniently left out the part where it was the black market.

"I mean... what respectable establishment would collect so many Monster Cores from a stranger without asking questions or verifying their identity?"

The moment Noah said this, Rey's anger sizzled out.

'Haaa... he's right! I should have thought of that...'

It was just like selling a bunch of very dangerous technology to a regular licensed store on Earth. Unless they could verify your identity, or you were also licensed to trade in such goods, no official store would accept such a transaction.

That was why the Black Market existed.

"No questions. No refunds. No guarantee."

That was why they were able to scam Noah so well. If one was inexperienced in the way of the Black Market, they would suffer great loss.

'Even I am not sure I know what I'm doing well...'

Still, Rey narrowed his eyes and hardened his heart.

His skull-like mask was scary enough, and he was also garbed in a pretty expensive outfit.

He looked like an important person that shouldn't be trifled with, and the same applied to Noah.

"We're set. Let's just get this over with."

The duo left for the alleyway—one that led to a whole new world of commerce.

Neither fully understood what was waiting for them.

As one would expect from the Black Market, it was a rowdy mess.

It also existed underground, almost like a much worse version of the marketplace above.

So many shady kiosks and stores hidden in the dark called for attention.

From mere stalls to massive establishments; all of them competed for attention as they sold the most illegal and obscure things.

Black Market buyers and sellers did not have the protection or limitation of the law, so this was a place where anything went.

However, since order was necessary here, both sides had to be civil with one another—as long as neither gave a reason for the opposite to be the case.

This was known as the Unspoken Rule of the Black Market.

And who regulated this rule?

Their true identity was unknown by most Black Market sellers and buyers, but they were a group of six individuals who were said to be the rulers of the Black Market underworld.

The Obsidian Council.

Thanks to them, the Black Market was a decent place of business, though still outside the purview of the law.

A jungle for business.

And now, both Rey and Noah had become one of the animals within it.

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Chapter 53 Bargaining Power [Pt 1]

"This is the place."

Rey and Noah stood in front of a massive building—one of the biggest in the area.

Of course, it wasn't more than three storeys, but it was very wide.

It was clear that a lot of activities went on in this building, and it wasn't for the faint of heart.

"You actually did business here?!"

Rey was shocked that someone as timid as Noah had the gall to try out such an intimidating structure.

"W-well, I was approached by an affiliate who brought me here."

"A-ahh... that's true."

According to Noah's story, he was initially just looking for a place to sell the Monster Cores when he was approached by a guy who told him he'd help him sell the goods.

The guy was the one who took him to this establishment and helped him through all the processes.

'That's most likely the one who was involved in the scam...'

The company must have dealt directly with the so-called Affiliate, who in turn dealt with Noah.

He probably pretended to be the seller and got to bargain with the real buyers. As a result, he was able to gain a lot of profit while relaying a smaller price to the gullible Noah.

'That's how those sorts of people make their money.'

"Shouldn't we be looking for the guy, then?" Noah asked Rey.

"Nah! There's no need. People like that are very slippery..."

Besides, it was a waste of time.

There was no real law in this place except the Unspoken Rules. As long as the seller and buyer came to a consensus about the price of an item and it was sold, that was the end of the matter.

Pursuing anything outside that would only be arbitrary.

"Now that we know exactly what we're dealing with, we can make a more informed decision."

The fact that no 'Affiliate' had approached them yet proved his point.

'We look dangerous and capable, so they won't even dare.'

Noah must have seemed like prey to the guy who duped him due to how uncertain and out-of-place he was back then.

"Well, the past is in the past. Let's go."

Rey took the first step, and Noah slowly trailed behind him.

They entered the store, and once again, were made to gawk at its grandiosity.

"Why are you gawking? You've been here before, haven't you?"

"W-well... not really..."

Once again, Rey was told something that Noah conveniently left out when he was explaining himself.

"What?! You waited outside and let the Affiliate do the entire thing for you?!"

"H-he looked reliable! I was also very intimidated by the structure! In hindsight, I can see how bad it was, but back then...!"

Noah did his best to justify his actions, but all Rey saw were excuses.

Pathetic excuses.

'My guy really got played...'

In any case, the main store was very large, and several products were sold—all Magically Enchanted.

'Noah must have gotten his Invisible Necklace from this place...'

Rey didn't even want to ask Noah if he had asked the 'Affiliate' to get it for him because he could already tell that was the case.

'That guy probably lied about the price as well.'

Once again, Rey whispered "The past is in the past." to himself as he walked on.

He quickly reached the counter, while glancing all across the room to study it thoroughly.

There were tons of cashiers, so no one really needed to wait in a line.

Once he got there, Rey placed one hand on the counter while bending slightly to improve his intimidating posture.

"I'm here to... sell some products." He said in a straightforward fashion.

His voice was deep, and his eyes glowed behind the black Orichalcum mask.

"I see. Please proceed to the far end of the counter and speak to the person there."

The woman behind the counter said with such a dull monotone that Rey was convinced his intimidation did not work at all.

'Oof! This is a little embarrassing...'

Workers in this store had seen all kinds of faces—some bad, some ugly, some far worse—over the course of business, so they probably weren't intimidated by Rey's mild efforts.

Besides, the Unspoken Rule existed, so it probably wasn't the wisest thing to stir up conflict in such a high-key establishment like this.

Rey could see his blunder instantly and awkwardly left the counter to proceed according to the instructions he received.

"I want to sell some items. It's very lucrative, so I'd like to discuss with a higher-up if possible—"

"Please state the type of sale. Wholesale or Retail." Rey was interrupted by the man behind the counter.

He had glasses on, and he was busy writing some things down—most likely the details of Rey's request.

"Wholesale." Rey finally added.

"Please note that Wholesale begins with over a thousand pieces. There's Bulk Retail if that's what you are—"

"I know what Wholesale means. Don't insult my intelligence any further." Rey snapped, his eyes glowing behind his mask.

"I-I apologize."

Rey understood that the man was just following procedure, but he had been looking for a way to assert dominance all day.

Right then seemed like a perfect opportunity to do so, and it actually worked.

'Whew! Looks like I'm not the one at the short end of the stick.'

"What kind of items are you selling? Raw materials or finished products?"

"Raw materials."

"Could you specify the—"

"Monster Cores."

"Could you name the Gra—"

"Like I said earlier, I'd like to speak to a higher-up."

Once Rey said this, he folded his arm. This showed he wasn't willing to proceed with further questions.

"This is just due procedure. Please answer the questions you are asked."

'Nah! I don't think so...'

In sale, there was something called bargaining power.

The one with the higher bargaining power got to call the shots and determine the price.

The sale usually benefited them the most.

'If I simply proceed with these questions like this, it's clear I'll lose the small bargaining power that I have.'

In order to be relevant, Rey had to properly exert his importance.

'I don't want to get duped too.'

Chapter 54 Bargaining Power [Pt 2]

Rey took in a deep breath.

He had actually never been in a proper sale before, but that didn't stop him from trying his best here.

There were a bunch of things he hadn't done before, and he managed to scale through them on the first try.

'Fighting monsters is a good example...'

Right now, he was treading on a fine line.

'I have to be careful.'

"The Grade is considerably high, and since this is a wholesale, you should know that I have over a thousand pieces." Rey finally spoke.

His voice was clear, and his tone was confident.

"I am well aware, but—"

"I am also well aware... of your procedures. However, I have mine. And that entails speaking to a higher-up when it comes to business of this scale."

Rey could already see anxiety creep in on the face of the man in glasses.

He just had to keep pushing.

"We're talking goods worth hundreds, if not thousands of Platinum Coins. Do you really think you are sufficient to handle such a trade? Will you take full responsibility?"

"S-sir, I'm just doing my job..." The man protested weakly.

'I know, man. I know.'

In all honesty, Rey felt a little bad for what he was doing. But so what?

He was sure that they would do the same to him if he showed even the slightest hint of weakness.

These people were the monsters of the business world.

He had to destroy them before they did the same to him. Else, he would be devoured before realizing it.

"I'm only stating facts. I can't compel you to bypass these procedures for me. You are well within your rights to refuse..."

Rey could see the hesitance in the man's face.

'Of course, he won't! He can't afford to drive me away and allow me to fall in the hands of a competitor.'

Rey drew a little closer to the man and whispered words that only the two of them could possibly hear.

"Thousands of Platinum Coins... can you handle such a loss? You'll take responsibility for all this, right?"

With a wide smile on his face, Rey observed the trembling form of the man.

'Gotcha!'

A company of this magnitude had to have arrangements for customers who were exceptions.

Outliers would not be subjected to the standard procedure that everyone went through.

Rey recognized this and desperately desired to be among the exceptions.

That was because they had the bargaining power.

"I-I understand..."

"Good."

Rey retreated his face and returned to his earlier position and waited for the decision of the man behind the counter.

"Please give me a moment."

The man scribbled a few more things on the piece of paper and finally raised it from the desk.

"I shall call someone to properly attend to you while informing them of the information you have given."

"Good."

Rey would be lying if he said his heart wasn't racing.

'I'm not going to get in trouble, right?'

He had heard a lot of unsavory things about Black Markets—including how tons of death happened there.

Without the reach of mainstream laws, he and Noah ran at a risk, especially if he crossed someone with authority in this underworld.

'I've never fatally harmed a human, talkless of killing them.'

Rey wasn't sure he could.

Still... he maintained his stoic face.

'I had to do this. I had to go this far.'

The man behind the counter tore the paper he was writing in, and it soon dissipated in the air.

'An Enchanted Item, huh?'

The information written within was most likely going to be relayed to whoever was going to attend to Rey.

"Please go upstairs. You may enter the first room to your right. Someone will come and attend to you."

Once Rey heard this, he smiled.

"Good."

He and Noah proceeded to do as they were told, leaving the dazed man heaving in relief.

'And that's how you do business!'

The room where Rey and Noah were directed to was finely furnished.

It was painted white, with tons of colorful murals decorating the walls.

A small chandelier hung from the ceiling, and comfortable sofas were waiting for them.

The sofas were placed in a 'U' fashion, and a very sturdy desk stood in between two pointed sides of the 'U'

"You'll have to stand." Rey told Noah, plopping to the chair.

"E-ehhh?"

They had both been standing and walking for a while, so Noah was very tired.

Rey must have known that.

"That's your punishment for stealing my Cores and getting scammed while trying to sell it."

All things considered, Rey was being extremely lenient with his punishment.

If Noah had any common sense, he would just swallow any complaints he had and take it in stride.

That was precisely what he did.

"This place looks nice. It's designed to make the customers comfortable, but also to intimidate them."

The designs that filled the room told of this establishment's incredible wealth.

Anyone who wasn't worth their salt would feel very uncomfortable and intimidated if they stayed here for too long.

'This won't work on me, though...'

Rey thought about his stash of Monster Cores in the Hobgoblin hideout, and a smile instantly coursed through his face.

With so much potential money in his grasp, there was no way he would allow these people to frighten him.

'Hehehe... hehe...'

Not very long after they arrived in the room and made themselves comfortable, the door slowly opened and a man appeared from behind it.

He had very smooth brown hair, and he donned a formal outfit, with his waistcoat complementing the formality he represented.

He was outfitted with a few Enchanted Items, and everything he wore had to cost Platinum Coins.

Frankly speaking, Rey could tell why the man at the counter was skeptical of his entire arrangement despite Rey being outfitted in clothes that cost Platinum Coins.

There were levels to these things, and right now, Rey was at the bottom of the food chain.

'Well... not for long!'

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Chapter 55 The Broker

Aldred Winsley was a broker for the KariBlanc Group—one of the leading commercial establishments in the Capital's Black Market.

As a sharp and handsome man in his early thirties, he had supervised and personally handled a lot of deals that went down in KariBlanc's businesses.

As a result, he had a good feel for sales and contracts, as well as how to gain the most benefit for his employers.

That was precisely why he was surprised when he stepped into the reception to meet the seller he was informed of.

'Who are these people...?'

From what he could see, they were not very impressive.

The one who was supposed to be the guard had a very lackluster posture—as if he was exhausted after a long walk.

His poor stance was unfitting for a guard. If an enemy struck surprisingly, he wouldn't be able to protect his employer properly.

But even his employer was just as unimpressive.

'He's dressed pretty cheaply. His sitting posture is also very crude...'

As Aldred Winsley approached the two, he kept up his cautious gaze.

'From what I can see, they're not special at all. But... ' He narrowed his eyes as he took his seat.

'... Sometimes, what is on the surface could be deceiving.'

Aldred was curious.

'Are they frauds, or are they the real deal? Let's find out.'

"Greetings, customers. Or should I call you sellers? My name is Aldred Winsley, but you can call me Aldred." He said with a broad smile

As a professional, he had to be polite to the ones he addressed.

"Call us whatever you like, Mr. Winsley."

Upon hearing that, Aldred shook a little on his seat.

'This guy...' He tried his best not to stare hard at the man who sat opposite him, but it was difficult not to do so.

Not only had he refused to be placed under a stereotype such as 'customer' or 'seller', but he had also refused Aldred's attempt at friendliness.

'He's choosing to remain formal. He also disregards my suggestions while maintaining his ideals...'

These weren't the signs of a fraud.

'But I can't be certain. Not yet!' Aldred smiled internally.

The biggest and most important telling as to the validity of a person's true nature was their worth.

A person could fake their demeanors and personality, but they could never fake the value they possessed.

"So, dear seller... what do you have to offer?"

Straight to the point—as business in the Black Marker should be—Aldred asked his question.

'Let's see. This is wholesale, so it should be at least a thousand pieces of Monster Core. From the quality of Spatial Ring he has, I shouldn't expect anything more than two thousand.'

Spatial Rings were used by the rich to carry money or property.

As one would expect, they were separated into many categories.

The one Rey had in hand was one of the cheaper ones; with the carry limit being very small.

It was still considerably expensive, considering how highly valued Spatial Magic was.

'If they only brought this much, then it's not that big of a deal.'

At least, number wise.

'That means I should look forward to the quality.'

Anything in the realm of Grade 6 or higher was preferred, but he couldn't imagine these cheapskates having such quality of Monster Core.

Not only were Grade 6, Grade 5, and higher Grades very rare, but those who had access to them only did so in Retail.

The maximum was bulk retail.

"Well, you look worthy of my time. I suppose I'll show you..." As the seller spoke to Aldred, he wasn't at all intimidated.

'Hmph! Big words! I won't be convinced until I see the goods.'

Based on his expert analysis obtained from his many years of experience in this business, he could already tell that these people couldn't be worth his time.

He was only humoring them by staying.

~WHUSH!~

In a flash, several sacs began to drop on the table.

'E-eh...?'

Aldred had been staring at the masked seller's ring all this time, but never once did it glow.

That meant he wasn't bringing these sacs from the ring.

If not from then... then where?!

However, before he could think about that, the numerous sacs that were still being brought forth began to spill on the floor in their dozens.

So many sacs... more than he could have expected, filled his line of sight.

'C-could he be...?'

Aldred knew that a Spatial Ring had to be exposed and pointed at its target location before it could release its contents.

The fact that no such thing was happening here only pointed at one thing.

'He can use Spatial Magic?!'

If that was the case, then judging him based on the value of his ring was the most unwise thing he could have done.

"All done."

At this point, more sacs had stopped coming. Their appearances had dazed Aldred so much that he didn't notice when the whole thing was over.

"A-ahh... I see."

From what he could count alone, there were over forty full sacs in front of him.

The kind that could contain at least three-hundred Monster Cores—of course, accounting for size and value.

'Let's not get too carried away here...'

Aldred was still not sure of the Grade of Monster Core he was being presented with.

'Could be a Grade 9... or maybe 8?'

Aldred had heard that this seller specifically said the Grade was considerably high, so maybe it was a Grade 7.

'That's the most generous I can be in my analysis!'

Grade 6 Monster Core and upwards were very rare; especially in the Capital.

In the Adventurer City, they weren't as rare, but the Adventurers hardly sold the Cores since they were used to better their equipment or improve their power.

In the other places where Monster Cores of such Grades could be found, the Royal Council had already set their sights there.

Due to the current conflict with the Dragons and the fire state of the Nation, resources like those were poured into the National Defense and Offensive Measures.

Hardly any were left circulating in the market.

As such, it was easy to see why Aldred was so quick to dismiss the possibility of it being such Grades.

"What are you waiting for? Open the sacs." The seller's voice calmly woke Aldred from his dazed state.

He could feel something itching the back of his throat.

"Open. The. Sacs."

Tension filled the air as he heard the repeated words reverberate in the air.

The seller seemed so confident that it scared Aldred.

A thought crossed his mind.

'What if... just what if...?'

No! That couldn't be!

Fueled by his desire to reject the impossible, Aldred finally mustered the courage to open one of the sacs.

"A-hhh! No way!" He had no idea when his thoughts escaped his lips.

He swiftly proceeded to open more sacs and had the same reaction.

Right now, the gleaming Monster Cores were reflecting on Aldred's clearly dumbfounded face, and he only had one thought.

'G-Grade 6?!'

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Chapter 56 The Deal Made [Pt 1]

'H-how...?!'

How possible was this? He had to be dreaming!

Aldred went to open even more sacs, and he was greeted with the same result every time.

His eyes had been trained from a very young age to detect the quality and quantity of items just from a glance.

As a result, he could accurately guess the Grade of Monster Cores without even using an appraising tool.

'They're authentic too!'

Aldred could spot fake products a mile away, but this... this was genuine!

He could even feel the Mana that pulsated within each Core.

'How does he have so many? This is just too—!'

"There's more where that came from." As soon as the words of the man echoed in Aldred's ears, his eyes bulged.

'WHAT?!'

"Here are fifty sacs of Grade 6 Monster Cores. You can confirm their authenticity for yourselves. Each sac contains a little over 300 pieces..."

The more the seller spoke, the more unreal it all sounded.

"That's over 16,000 pieces you have there. Feel free to count."

'Ridiculous!' Aldred would have had such thoughts if he wasn't currently staring at the proof.

'Who is this man?! He defies everything I've been taught... everything I've learned!'

Aldred felt as though all of his experience as an expert were nothing in the presence of the man before him.

'Did he do all of this intentionally? Is he messing with me? Did he...?!'

Aldred did not know for sure.

All he knew was that he had been wrong.

'He has value! More value than all of our present customers!'

On an individual level, this seller was far superior to their best client.

'He says he has even more? What kind of...? No, I should stop now!'

Aldred tried to recover from his shock and focus on the matter at hand.

He had to think about what was best for the business.

'It would be a major loss for us if he goes elsewhere with this much. Even if he sells to us, there's no guarantee he'll bring the next batch here...'

That had to be fixed!

'We need to have this man on our side. If we can have a monopoly on his goods, then...!'

Scarcity determines value.

If the market was flooded with these Grade 6 Monster Cores, it would be catastrophic!

'That's what makes this guy so dangerous. He's also a Spatial Magic User, which means he's a big deal.'

Aldred felt like a fool! He had fallen for the trap of judging a book by its cover.

If he had made a blunder early on, the company would have lost so much money.

And it wouldn't just stop there.

'For him to have so many Grade 6 Monster Cores, he must be a man of many means. He could be a powerful Adventurer for all I know.'

If that was the case, it would mean this guy had enough power to hunt down over 16,000 C-Tier Monsters.

The fact that he had access to more meant his limits were currently unknown.

'He's a Spatial Magic user, so transporting so many Monster Cores isn't a problem for him. In essence, if we can forge deep connections with this man...'

They could finally take their products to the next level!

'This is a bigger deal than the batch of Grade 6 Cores we got a few days earlier.'

That one felt like a miracle—so much so that they even gave the customer an Invisibility Necklace for free.

But this... this was just superb!

"H-how much..." Aldred found it hard to properly mouth the words, but he did so anyway.

"How much do you want?"

He gave a serious look at the masked customer and was prepared to hear an absurd price.

However...

"How much can you offer?"

... He was surprised by the reasonableness of the counteroffer.

'This is a good chance to forge good connections with him! If we grant him a good price, and he sells to us, we can draw him in and become his sole buyer.'

The KariBlanc Group dealt with the production and distribution of Enchanted Items and Luxury Products.

They had been running out of stock with the former—especially when it came to the high-end products—thanks to the scarcity of such high-quality Monster Cores.

With 16,000 of Grade 6 Monster Cores, not only would they be able to get back on track, but they could finally expand their business to the other places where their competitors had a monopoly.

This was a goldmine.

Aldred knew he couldn't let it go.

"H-how about... Six Gold Coins per piece?"

"What?"

"S-seven! I meant seven!"

He could instantly tell the dissatisfaction from the seller, so he quickly adjusted the price.

It was clear that he had all the bargaining power.

'With the authority I have, seven is the highest I can offer him. I doubt there's any other place that will cough up such an amount up front, but I can't take that chance...'

Even the last purchase of Grade 6 Monster Cores was priced at 4 Gold Coins.

This was honestly the best he could do.

"I see..." As the seller spoke, Aldred hoped his nervousness wasn't being displayed on his face.

He gulped down another round of saliva and awaited his answer.

"You want to be my sole buyer, don't you?"

"That's right! The KariBlanc Group would like to establish a long-standing connection with you, sir." Aldred spoke excitedly.

He was so glad that the masked seller understood.

"We have a lot of benefits for those we are in this kind of relationship with. Not only do you have massive discounts on any product you want to get—as high as 60 percent—but you also have first priority on the products we use your Monster Core to make."

Aldred went on and on about the benefits that he felt like a shady salesman.

But he didn't care!

He had to get this person on their side at all costs!

"I understand. Fair enough. I don't mind establishing such a relationship with you."

Aldred couldn't properly express how relieved he was to hear that.

He did his utmost best to hide his excitement.

'Yes! YES YES YES YES!!!'

"I just have one small favor to ask. Aside from the benefits, of course..."

The moment he heard that, Aldred felt a tight feeling clutching his chest.

'What favor? Will we be able to deliver...?!'

He gulped before proceeding to ask.

"O-of course! What favor would that be?"

"Hmm. A subordinate of mine came to sell a few Monster Cores a few days ago. Grade 6, naturally. It was just a sac..."

Aldred's eyes bulged the moment he realized what was going on.

'He was the one responsible for that too? Why? Could it be...?!'

Had he sent that one sac their way in order to test the waters? Just how many other establishments did he do this for?

"Apparently, it was sold to your establishment for 2 Gold Coins per piece."

'WHAT?!' Aldred could not believe it.

He was certain they bought those Monster Cores for 4 Gold Coins per piece.

"S-sir, I think—!"

The seller raised his hand to indicate he was not done talking.

"Let me finish."

Aldred gulped and nodded at his words.

'What is he about to say?!' Beads of sweat appeared on his face.

He could only brace himself for what was coming.

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Chapter 57 The Deal Made [Pt 2]

"My subordinate was approached by an 'Affiliate' of yours who ran the transaction while he waited outside."

The moment Aldred heard this, he was stunned.

'An Affiliate? Did his subordinate fall prey to one of those com-artists?'

There was no way this esteemed man did not know who this 'Affiliate' he spoke of was, yet he still referred to him as that.

Why?

'It's not our establishment's fault that his subordinate didn't exercise due caution in his trade. Nothing in the Unspoken Rules covers such a thing as that.'

In essence, it was his loss.

However, Aldred could not even dare to think—talkless of speak—such a thing.

"I-I see..." Was all he could say.

"It came as a surprise to me. I thought your establishment perhaps was unaware of the transaction, so I decided to forgive you and personally came to give you a second chance."

In essence, he was pushing the responsibility and blame for the scammer on them, while also seeming like a benevolent person.

'This man is too shrewd!' Aldred respected and feared him even more for that.

"Thank you for your patience with us. The matter was not known to us, so we'll investigate it."

"Hmm. That is good to hear."

Aldred already knew he was going out of his way. That was why the man called this a 'Favor.'

Normally, the KariBlanc Group would ignore such a thing, as it was just a part of business. But now... now things were different.

"I will personally see to it that all parties involved in this transaction are properly investigated... including this 'Affiliate' of ours."

There was no need for too many details. The two parties already had an understanding.

'And since I'm already going out of my way, I might as well throw in a bonus.'

"Of course, we'll also compensate you for the loss you encountered due to the disservice done to you. It'll be at the previous cost price of 4 Gold Coins, so I hope that is fine by you."

Aldred hoped this was enough to satisfy the masked man.

Fortunately, he was right.

"It is. Thank you very much."

"Haha! What are you saying? This much is only natural for someone who's getting into such a relationship with us."

"Hmm. Indeed.

"Hahaha!"

"Hahahaha!"

Both men laughed together, their voices echoing to the furthest recesses of the room.

It was already clear at that point that they had a deal.

'Whew! Looks like the deal is sealed!'

Rey exhaled heavily as he and Noah stepped out of the KariBlanc Group's building.

He had no idea things would go so well, and he was overjoyed by just how good the bargain was. However, he was also very exhausted.

'The tension... it was a lot!'

Breaking character even once would have cost him something, so Rey had constantly remained in his very draining persona.

'Still... to think we got such a sweet deal.'

Rey could not pinpoint how exactly he had been able to score so many good points with the man known as Aldred Winsley.

'Could it be because I initially addressed him with respect?' Rey remembered how he chose to call him Mr. Winsley rather than the casual 'Aldred.'

'He might have taken offense if I addressed him too casually...'

As the conversation went on, and Rey got more of a footing, he had become more confident.

In the end, he even got more benefits than he could have imagined.

'I signed an exclusive contract with them, which means I already have a reliable place to sell my Monster Cores.'

That certainty put Rey's heart at ease.

'The total number of Monster Cores ended up being 16,590. With the total price of 7 Gold Coins per piece, that's 116,130 Gold Coins.'

In essence... 1,161.3 Platinum Coins.

'I'm fucking rich!' Rey could not believe just how stinking rich he had become in such a short period.

It was too absurd.

'I initially had a goal of 4 Gold Coins and approximated the amount of Monster Cores to 16,000.'

That was a total of 640 Platinum Coins.

'Not only did I get nearly twice that amount, but I got sweet deals as well.'

Discounts on Enchanted and Luxury Products, as well as First Priority.

He could also make Custom Orders, which was an exclusive privilege given only to clients who belonged in the upper echelon of the Group's priority list.

Rey felt like a god!

'This trip was totally worth it! Hehehe!'

He was so glad he didn't leave everything to Noah. The boy would have fumbled everything!

'At this point, I don't even care about those few Platinum Coins I lost to that scammer.'

Not only did he get them back, but he got so much more.

It was too unbelievable!

'Hehehe! Hehehehehehe!! Hahahahahaahaha!!!'

"U-um... what now?"

Noah's voice woke Rey from his deep thoughts. Of course, the only deep thing about those thoughts was how deep his pockets had become.

He was filthy rich!

"What now? Well, first of all we go back to my place and discuss how we'll be arranging things going forward."

Rey already had a good idea of what he wanted to do, but he just didn't feel comfortable discussing it out in the opening.

'I would have thought you'd get that, Noah. Tsk tsk...'

His current plan was simple.

'I'll have Noah deliver the sacs of Monster Cores using a Spatial Ring. We'll only deliver one sac a day, considering how the value will reduce if we oversaturate the market.'

It wasn't like Rey was desperate for money, and he wasn't in a hurry to make any more than he already had.

Besides, if he wanted to, he could always increase the rate.

'Right now, I hold all the cards. I should dispense it slowly...'

Rey doubted the KariBlanc Group would keep buying Grade 6 Monster Cores from him forever.

It wasn't that he doubted their wealth.

No, not at all.

In fact, he was sure they would be able to make immense profits from every sac they bought from him.

The problem was greed.

'Eventually, they'll try to bypass me and get the Cores from their source.'

That was always the way business went.

'That's why I should be as loosely involved with this as possible.'

At least, until he found a more sustainable alternative, Rey had to maintain this relationship he already had.

'This is the Black Market. I can't forget that.'

The reason these people existed was because they weren't satisfied with trade under the governance of the laws of the land.

They didn't like being regulated, or taxed, or restricted.

This was all driven by greed.

'Soon that greed will make them turn on me. That's why I have to be prepared...'

To make sure Noah remained compliant to him, he would need to constantly give him his share of the money.

That was not a problem.

'But even that should also have its expiration date.'

Rey knew the one person he could rely on was himself.

'That's why no one can know my secret.'

No one could know the source of his wealth, and the depth of his strength.

He would leave them to speculate.

'That should delay whatever plans they have...'

For now, there were more important things to focus on.

'I have to get stronger.'

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Chapter 58 An Obsidian Councilor

Within a finely furnished office located in an unknown place, a man stood close to the windows, ignoring the fine chair and exquisite desk behind him.

The blond hair on his head was a lot longer than a man's, but a tad bit shorter than a woman's. He had a few wrinkles covering his face, displaying his age, and a short beard that was finely trimmed.

His outfit was also reminiscent of the room—grandiose and expensive-looking.

He was watching the events of the marketplace—the Black Market—and a smile was on his face.

As one of the six members of the Obsidian Council, it pleased him to see the community thriving.

As he smiled and sipped his wine, his moment of reminiscing was cut short by a knock on the door.

The man's green eyes darted to the door, and his curled up lips slowly fell.

"Come in."

The door slowly opened, and a man dressed in an expensive waistcoat, as well as an overall formal attire walked in.

He looked young—perhaps in his early thirties—but the experienced look in his eyes did not belong to a youth.

He was Aldred Winsley, one of the many Brokers of the KariBlanc Group.

"Lord Blanc, I have reports for you."

Blanc was his code name in the Obsidian Council. Each of the six had their pseudonyms, yet his managed to be the opposite color to what their entire group was named after.

"It's fine, boy. There's no need to call me that here. Just address me normally..."

Sure, the man who entered was younger than this Lord Blanc, but it wasn't enough to be called a boy.

Still, he nodded in understanding.

As this man slowly turned to Aldred, he could see him deactivate his Identity Concealment Item.

Soon, Aldred's appearance transformed into a younger version of Blanc.

"I understand... father."

The Aldred from before was now replaced by a boy who was barely twenty.

"Hehe... that's much better."

Blanc chuckled as he sat on his very comfortable chair and offered Aldred the same courtesy.

Aldred took it without a moment's hesitation and sat opposite his father.

"So... talk to me. Tell me what all this fuss is about."

Blanc was a man of many means. Even before Aldred had come, he had a faint inclination of what was going on in his company.

However, just how much did he know...?!

"Alright father. The thing is..."

"G-good heavens!"

Blanc's face contorted in downright shock as he listened to his son finalize his story.

"That's absurd!" He yelled.

"Right? I thought so too. But it was all real—everything I told you."

It seemed like a made up story... that someone of such caliber would just walk into their place of business like it was nothing.

'What kind of man is this masked seller?'

"Did he drop a name? Anything to identify him as?" Blanc asked, desperately hoping he could use some of his connections to dig up something.

The look on Aldred's face told him, however, that it wouldn't be worthwhile.

"He just told us to call him Yer. Even among the accomplished Adventurers, none bear that name."

Blanc squinted his eyes and pulled at his beards a little.

His son wasn't wrong.

'Adventurers either use their real name or have flashy titles and pseudonyms. This seems like the latter, but...'

If Yer was an extremely strong or accomplished Adventurer, surely they would have heard of him by now.

"What a mysterious fellow..." Blanc whispered. "You did good by bringing him to our side, boy."

There was just one more thing.

It was a matter of utmost pertinence that Blanc had to personally ask.

'This'll determine how we consider our future with him...'

"You used your [Eye Of God], right? What was the Type of Skill he had?"

[Eye Of God] was an Enchanted Item of the 4th Grade. It could detect a person's Stats to a limited degree, but not without the other party finding out.

The only thing it could do very subtly was reading how strong overall an individual was by measuring their Skill.

"What was the Tier?"

In response to this question, Aldred Winsley had a conflicted expression.

It wasn't that he didn't understand the question, but rather he couldn't decide on how to answer it.

As he gulped, he decided to throw aside his indecision and just be as straightforward as possible.

"It... it didn't work, I think."

"It didn't work? That's a Grade 4 Item. It has to work!" Blanc responded with a deep frown.

Grade 4 was the highest Grade anyone could obtain on the market right now.

Whether it was raw materials or finished products, it existed at the epitome of the current chain.

Why would such a sophisticated item be broken?

"I-I know! But... after our meeting, I tried to see what it picked up, but it was only telling me ~Error!~"

This had never happened in the course of doing business. Aldred didn't know what it meant, so he just chalked it down to a malfunction.

Blanc, on the other hand, had a different expression.

"D-did you just say... ~Error!~?"

The look of horror on the older man's face scared Aldred a little, but he did his best to nod regardless.

'I've never seen Father this shaken before...'

As he had this thought, Blanc rose from his seat as if it suddenly had a thousand needles on it.

He just wasn't comfortable any longer.

"The [Eye Of God] can detect Skills from the F-Tier up to the A-Tier..." He began, his breathing seeming a little uneven.

Even Aldred was growing increasingly restless just listening to his father.

"If the Item showed error, it means it had encountered something above its ability to analyze."

In essence...

"N-no way!"

"Indeed..." A grim frown tugged at Blanc's lips as he stared hard at his son.

"The S-Tier. Realm of Heroes and Gods."

Only the strongest of entities—like the Dragons—had such power.

Even their most powerful Mage only had an A-Tier Skill at most.

"Boy, I'll tell you this for free..."

Aldred had never seen his father this shaken before. Full caution, mixed with a grimness so deep that it defied explanation, shrouded his face.

It seemed even one of the Obsidian Councilors could show fear.

"Never... ever cross that man."

Aldred instantly nodded at his father's wise words.

"He could destroy us all."

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Chapter 59 Descent To The Next Floor

"Oh?"

Rey was currently looking at the new and improved Hobgoblin civilization he had helped kickstart, and a look of pride was radiating through his face.

"It's been like four days since I last came here. You guys are doing well for yourselves."

For the first time, the place didn't smell—at least, not too much—when he entered the clearing.

And even now that he was standing among the kneeling Hobs, he could notice a lot of changes.

'Everywhere is so clean. They've made the pots as per instruction, and they're properly taking care of their waste.'

Everything was in perfect order.

'A few more things—like good clothing and variety of food—would be nice, but it's not a necessity for them to be useful to me.'

As a result, Rey decided to leave that thought at the back burner.

Right now, he had bigger fish to fry.

'Right now, this is the safest place for me and my property...'

He had initially thought it was a good move to take Monster Cores from the Hobs and hide them in his room, but now he could see how foolish that line of reasoning was.

'There's no better place to keep them than this place.'

If he hadn't caught the perpetrator, or if the malefactor had been someone else, he would have been in a lot more hot water.

Rey recognized that very well.

'From now on, I'll be hiding my stuff here...'

Of course, it wouldn't be a temporary measure.

'Once I get enough Spatial Rings—apart from the one I gave Noah for business—I'll store them in there and keep them with me at all times.'

Since his [Subspace] had limited slots—fifty in total—and there was a limited size of objects he could place in a slot, Rey found the perfect way to cheat the system.

'I'll put as many Cores inside a Spatial Ring. I'll put as many Spatial Rings in a sac... and they'll only occupy one [Subspace] Slot.'

That meant he had to invest at least hundreds of Platinum Coins for the sake of getting all the Monster Cores.

However, for the sweet deal of finally being able to harvest all the heaps of Cores that greeted his sight every day, it was a good deal.

'For now, I'll just hide my stuff here.'

It would take a few days to completely clear all the Monster Cores in his room, but he was certainly going to do so.

'Now... on to the event for today...'

His attention wasn't on the Hobgoblins.

Though he was still concerned about them, the primary reason for coming to the Dungeon today didn't involve them at all.

'Right now, I need to get a lot stronger. I don't feel very comfortable stagnating for too long...'

Unfortunately he couldn't kill the Hobs at such an early stage since they would give him very little EXP, thus defeating the point of helping them in the first place.

Fortunately, there was another way.

'I just have to descend to the next floor!' Rey's eyes beamed with delight as he spotted the entrance precisely where the Hobgoblin Chief used to sit.

He dismissed the kneeling Hobs and used [Flight] to swiftly approach the throne.

The raggedy structure was firmly placed at an elevated position, and right under it was the entrance to the Eighth Floor.

'I guess they didn't know how to open it up, but recognized it was of importance, so they built their throne around it...'

Rey rubbed his chin as he became a little stuck in a decision he had to make.

'Should I go in now, or...?'

He took a quick glance at the Hobgoblins, and while they were on and about in their activities, they were also looking at him.

'That settles it. I'm heading in!'

There was pretty much nothing more he could do for the Hobs. He just had to plunder their reserve of Monster Cores while waiting for his investment to bear fruit.

What called for his attention now was the next challenge.

And he was ready to answer.

'Let's go!'

If darkness was what would accurately describe the natural habitat of the Hobgoblins, the Eight floor was the direct opposite.

"G-guh!"

Rey instantly shrouded his eyes and fell to his knees as he took in the unwanted stimulus for the first time.

His eyes had gotten so used to the dark that he needed time to acclimate to this new environment.

'I guess this is how it felt for them when I used [Flare]...'

Rey knew it had to be a lot worse since the Hobs had practically lived in darkness for most of their lives.

It hurt still.

Fortunately, it didn't take him very long before the pain and temporary blindness faded away.

'Tch. Well... it looks like my Resistance Skills are working.'

Rey rose to his feet and was finally able to see normally.

'Ahh...!'

His eyes were greeted by luminous tones—like the ones in the Sixth Floor—except these ones were much bigger and they glowed brighter.

They were also all over the place, so the intensity of their clustered energy caused brightness to pervade the entire space.

'It's interesting how every Dungeon Floor has a different terrain, and none really bleed into one another...'

This was another strong argument made by scholars that there had to be some kind of artificial hand in the Dungeon's formation.

In nature, things tended to smudge together if one observed close enough.

Layers of the soil might appear distinct, but if one looked close enough, they had points of convergence where they merged together in a somewhat compatible or incompatible way—as the case may be.

But Dungeons weren't like that.

They had designated zones for designated functions—with each Floor being like a completely different world of its own.

From a realm of darkness, Rey was instantly transported to a land of light.

'I hope there's no floor of poison gas or a world of lava here...' Rey told himself as he activated [Flight] and glided through the air.

With the Mana he currently had, he could afford to leave the Skill on for as long as he wanted.

Only when he wasn't using multiple other Skills, though.

It was one of the things Rey felt proud of.

'Well, enough about that...' Rey kept a decent eye out for everything around him.

[Danger Sense], [Perception], and [Farsight] were all activated at the same time as he advanced further.

There was no room for error.

"... Where are the monsters?"

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Chapter 60 The Eighth Floor [Pt 1]

"GRRRRR!!!"

As a feral beast growled and barked at Rey, he couldn't help but leak out a small smirk.

'Well, that didn't take very long...' He found his thoughts trailing.

The beast in front of him looked like a monkey—no, more like a chimp—but it had a few key differences that made it stand out.

For one, it had white hair all over its body. Secondly, its pale gray skin and bright blue eyes were definitely not primate-like.

Finally, while it was as large as a regular human, thanks to it squatting in a quadrupedal fashion, it appeared shorter than Rey.

'I guess the last one is pretty much in line with monkeys, huh?'

The beast before him had very sharp jaws, as if belonging to a carnivore, and its bright blue eyes exuded nothing but sheer hatred.

Despite all of these, though, Rey found himself calmly assessing the situation.

'I've never seen or heard of this kind of creature before. Is it only native to this Floor?'

Rey could see why, though.

'Bright blue eyes to adapt to the brightness of this place, and pale white skin most likely because of the lack of necessity to get a tan...'

The area was very cold too, so the excessive hair was a necessity.

'Then there's their teeth. If I consider what this monster was doing before I ran into it, then it makes sense.'

The Monkey Monster—as Rey decided to tag it—was nibbling on smaller chunks of the Mana Crystals around.

'So it's sharp teeth are that way because of how it has to grate through the hard rock and pierce it. I bet they're absurdly strong too!'

Rey shivered at the thought of being caught in the jaws of such a feral creature.

'Even though it looks like a monkey, it doesn't seem to have the kind of intelligence I'd expect from Primates. Well, I can't be too early to judge...'

This one could have been an outlier, or a savage variant of the rest of the species.

'It looks strong, though. If that's the case, there's no need to be bothered about any other quality that doesn't have to do with my safety or its viability as my EXP juice.'

With that thought in mind, Rey pointed its finger at the growling creature.

The Monkey Monster noticed this slight change in Rey's posture and instantly rushed towards him.

Its wide jaws tore open, and it was clear what its intentions were.

Unfortunately for it... Rey was faster.

"[Force]"

~WHUUSH!~

As expected, the Monkey Monster was instantly knocked back by Rey's attack.

It couldn't even offer much resistance.

"Get up. Come on..." Rey approached the spawning beast.

He knew the kind of power he put behind that push, so he knew it wasn't dead yet.

"The reason I've not killed you yet is because I want to see your Skills. So come on..."

There was no way a Monster who was living off chewing literal Mana Crystals wouldn't have Skills.

To prepare himself for what to come, Rey activated his [Safe Haven] Skill.

"Now let's see—"

~WHOOOOSH!~

The Monster growled as it shot from its position and lunged at Rey.

"Haha! That's more like it!" Rey grinned excitedly as he watched it rush towards him.

He could feel his heart racing as the beast neared. Its speed and power had increased exponentially, but that wasn't all Rey wanted to see.

'Show me your Skill!'

~SHWUUUU!~

Suddenly, the barrier that surrounded Rey began to break down—almost as if it was melting.

'E-eh...?'

Rey's eyes slightly flinched as the approaching beast's white fur glowed brightly and it tore through his defensive measure.

Despite seeing it with his own eyes, his [Danger Sense] also alerted him of the imminent danger that was closing in on him.

'It broke down my barrier? T-then!'

Rey swiftly used his [Greater Lightning Magic] Skill to generate a Lightning Arrow and send it towards his opponent.

That was when the most shocking thing occurred.

~BZZZTTTTZZZ!~

As soon as the Lightning neared the Monkey Monster, a barrier formed around it, shielding it instantly.

'Isn't that...!'

Yes, it was [Safe Haven]!

Rey's mind quickly calculated the implications of what that meant despite the jaws of the creature already being too close for comfort.

One more second and it would rip his head right off his body.

'It broke down and absorbed my Skill?!'

Before the Monster could finish its job, though, Rey sent it flying with [Force] again.

It was the only Skill he could rely on since he knew it was effective.

~WHOOSH!~

Once again, the Monkey Monster bounced back, but not with as much intensity as the first round.

'[Safe Haven]'s effects are protecting it, huh? This is unexpected...'

Rey could feel his heart beat faster now, but this time it wasn't due to excitement.

It was caution.

'I can't afford to take this one lightly...'

An opponent that could eat through his Skill and use said Skill for itself was nothing short of formidable.

'To think there's an entire Floor crawling with things like these...'

The most worrying thing about this entire arrangement was his lack of information.

'What kind of Skills can it break down? How long can it maintain the Skill it uses? What are the limitations?'

These were the questions that swirled through Rey's mind.

'The fact that [Force] affects it means it probably doesn't do well with invisible attacks or Skills that use natural laws like gravity to attack...'

And Rey had already figured out the Monster's glowing skin was somewhat related to its ability.

'The light is slowly dimming, so I'm guessing there's a time limit. Could there also be a cooldown period?'

While Rey had been hoping for the display of a really cool Skill, he never expected an outcome of this proportion.

'I'm also curious about whether it can break down and use multiple Skills at the same time...'

Try doubted that was the case, but he had to know for sure.

"Guess there's only one way to find out..." Rey's eyes began to glow crimson.

"Let's try something else."