

Extras 551

Chapter 551 A Brief Search

With Rey no longer having any real Spatial Skills at his disposal, getting to the Grand Calamity Dungeon would be a hassle.

He would have to locate the place somehow, and with the obscure nature of the entire structure, that was going to prove to be an extremely difficult task.

... At least, that was how it was supposed to be.

~VWUUSH!~

With a mere outstretched hand, and a thought invoked in his mind, a swirling purple gateway appeared right in front of him.

'Looks like the Spell activated; which means it's going to lead to my determined coordinates.' He said with a smile as he stared at the portal

'Having [Perfect Divine Magic] and [Divine Magic Supremacy] really is useful...' Not only did he have access to a variety of abilities that would have previously been represented as Skills, but he could cast them without much effort thanks to the effects of his Passive Skill.

'I can probably still do stuff like Summoning, Healing, as well as other neat tricks. That makes this Magic my most versatile ability at the moment.'

Yes, using Magic had its downsides compared to Skills. For one, each Skill already had a specialized function, so there was no need to sort through its multifarious functions in order to get just one effect.

Activation of Skills had to be a lot faster and direct. However, since they took more space in the limited slot of Skills he was allowed to have under [Doppel], Rey felt having one umbrella Skill more than made up for the non-specificity of Magic.

'Also, using Spells has been somewhat mitigated thanks to [Divine Magic Supremacy]. If I had to start chanting Spells or learning their intricacies before using all the abilities I previously had as Skills, this would be a nightmare.'

Thankfully, having both Active and Passive Skills relating to Magic made his use of it as easy as possible. It also helped that they were in the Divine Tier, so there really was no ceiling on what he could or could not do with Magic.

'Since I have enough Mana to use it, then there really is no complaint here...' He found his lips slowly curling to form a smile.

The glowing portal that stood in front of him was a testament to his current reasoning. His exposed right eye reflected the purple light, while the black eyepatch shielded his left from any of the radiant display. Ater stood right behind, watching his Master's display of power.

Based on how he fidgeted, it was clear that Ater was trying his hardest to render an applause to his Master for swiftly grasping his sudden switch from the use of Skills to Spells.

"Let's go." Rey said, slightly turning his head to look at Ater.

The latter instantly nodded, and they both stepped into the purple portal, instantly leaving the pristine comfort of their room to a dreary and ancient Mansion.

~VWUM!~

The transition was instant, and the scenery transitioned into the ground floor of the Grand Calamity Class Dungeon.

"Looks like we're here..." Rey said with a sigh as he looked around him.

"I was briefed about everything that happened, so I should have expected this much. It seems your classmates weren't exaggerating at all when they spoke about its size."

Rey flinched a little when he heard Ater mention his classmates, but he quickly recovered while maintaining his stoic demeanor.

"Yeah. It's quite massive, isn't it?"

The ancient stone walls, incredibly high ceilings, and long flight of stairs—all of which greeted their sight—seemed a little too dreary for comfort.

"It almost feels like a new experience..." Rey muttered as he stepped forward, looking around him with misty breaths escaping his lips. "Maybe it's because there aren't thousands of people behind me."

"Perhaps the Rey who stepped in here the last time isn't the same one who is here now." As Ater added those words, still standing still behind him, Rey found himself chuckling a little. "Well, you're not wrong." He muttered.

His sight made him aware of everything around him, so he could see everything in a sense. The walls, their texture, their moldy scent, the properties that made them up... he could sense them as he took everything in.

'It feels bigger...' Rey closed his two eyes, allowing the darkness to shroud the brilliance of the world around him.

In Dark Mode, he viewed everything as mere outlines, so he could easily see the structure of everything without being distracted by the details of their properties.

He could also see through barriers and layers, so he could see the upper rooms, and the surrounding areas.

He couldn't detect Esme's presence despite spreading his perception as far as he possibly could.

'Looks like the whole structure is bigger than my base sensory range.' He made a wry smile, opening his right eye to return his sight to Normal Mode.

"Then..." His Mana bubbled up as he activated the sole Skill that could assist him in such a predicament.

It almost felt like providence—how he now had to rely on the very Skill he obtained from this place.

"[Perfect Domain Of The Divine]."

The moment he activated this Skill, what felt like a pulse of invisible and intangible energy radiated from Rey's position, instantly consuming every facet of the Grand Calamity Class Dungeon.

It was so easy and effortless; reaching into the deep recesses of this place that had thousands of rooms and corners.

'I can go even further, but... there's no need to.' Since Rey could sense literally everything within the Grand Calamity Class Dungeon, he could tell that there was no one present in it—friend or foe.

The whole place seemed to have been cleaned up as well.

Rey did notice one thing, though, and by instantly swapping out zones, he was able to send himself and Ater right to the location where he left Esme.

"She isn't here..." Ater's words echoed in the air as Rey looked in front of him, at the writing on the walls that caused his heart to skip a beat.

Once he was done reading the writing for the umpteenth time, a small smile formed on his face, followed by a bead of sweat.

The writing read: ~I AM COMING FOR YOU!~

"Yeah..." He muttered, chuckling as he felt a peaceful sensation wash over his heart.

Something told him Esme was probably fine.

"... Let's go back."

Chapter 552 Consequences Of Privilege [Pt 1]

'I'm worried...'

Rey's face still had the same stoic demeanor as he had been displaying since he got a grasp of what was happening around him. His heart was still, and he didn't look the least bit concerned about anything.

Not about his classmates, Esme, or the other person he couldn't afford to think about at the moment.

His mind was still, and his body acted accordingly.

But somewhere within him--perhaps one could call it his soul or conscience--Rey knew he was being dishonest.

'A decent perk of this new body is that I feel fully connected to myself, so I can choose to halt natural reactions that may cause me to lose myself. But, I suppose that is also quite disadvantageous...'

After all, he was more connected with himself more than ever, so he knew this was all false.

Still, he couldn't afford to let it go.

... Not yet.

~VWUSH!~

Rey opened a portal and gave one final glance around the Dungeon, using his whole senses to even check the areas around the building.

He found no one present, though.

'It's been over two months since I fell asleep. I don't know when she left this place, but... isn't that more than enough time to reach me if she comes at full speed?'

These thoughts echoed in his head, nearly tempting him to begin an active investigation for Esme. But--

'No... no wait...'

Rey stopped himself as he held his head while sighing.

'What am I doing right now? What am I thinking? I shouldn't be too impulsive. Let's try to get a full grasp on everything that happened first...'

He winced a little, realizing quite a few of his previous actions had been a lot more sporadic than now. His choice with [Sacrifice] as soon as he woke up was one.

'I'm beginning to regret that one. But... I made the right choice, didn't I? Or did I? I...' For a moment, he stared at Ater, who simply looked back unassumingly.

'Should I... no, no wait.' He slightly held his head and sighed once again.

Rey felt a conflict somewhere within him.

However, before the overflowing feelings--fear, anxiety, pain, sadness, worry, regret, among many others--overwhelmed him, they were instantly suppressed.

In an instant, he felt nothing but a slight wave of relief that made him a lot less tense than before.

'What's going on?' Rey wondered to himself as he narrowed his gaze.

'[Dead Calm] isn't even active, yet why am I like this? Is this some kind of subconscious wall?'

"Give me a moment, Ater..." He raised his hand and the portal he created instantly vanished.

"Something isn't right."

Ater nodded and remained silent, watching his Master as he figured it out on his own.

"Status Window." Rey muttered, letting everything pop up before him.

[STATUS WINDOW]

- Name: Rey Skylar.
- Race: Human (Otherworlder)
- Class: Singularity (S-Tier)
- Level: 201 (10.03% EXP)
- Life Force: 13,000
- Mana Level: 29,000
- Combat Ability: 21,550
- Stat Points: 0
- Skills (Exclusive): [Doppel]

- Skills (Non-Exclusive): [Merger]. [Dead Calm].[Sacrifice]

- Alignment: Neutral

[Additional Information]

You have done the impossible and stand at the precipice of power. As such, you now possess the interest of this World.

[End Of Information]

'Something is off...' His eyes narrowed as he looked at his Stats.

'Why has my Alignment suddenly changed? It wasn't like that moments ago!'

As soon as Rey began to have worrying thoughts, something within him had it all suppressed in an instant.

'What the hell? What's doing that?!'

It wasn't him! Yes, he had complete control over his body, and he indeed ensured he would remain calm at most times. But, he needed to actively perform this trick on his body, which made the passive effect of [Dead Calm] still useful.

But this... this was a different sensation. It didn't seem to stem from his body, but something like his mind—perhaps even deeper.

"I don't get it. Is an external force affecting me? I'm supposed to be immune to... negative... hold on..." Rey's eyes widened as he instantly had a gnawing suspicion.

One glance at Ater's unassuming smile, seeing as he nodded slowly, told Rey that he was onto something.

"Class Privileges." He managed to say before yet another wave of relief washed over his body.

Everytime it happened, a subtle change occurred within Rey that he wasn't aware of. Only when the constant changes built up did the slow transformation become much clearer.

Rey could see it now: he was becoming less like himself.

... Less human.

'And it's all because of this.'

[Class Information]

- Name: Singularity

- Tier: S-Tier

- Cause: You have done the impossible, defying the balance of this world and forever changing its nature. Your existence is an aberration, and your power has reached a frightening degree.

This world's very fabric is forever altered by your existence.

[Class Privileges]

~ 50+ Subsequent Stat Points for every Level Up.

~Perfect Resistance to Appraisal and any other ability of the sort.

~ Equalizer Effect can be activated (When facing someone much stronger than you, a balancing effect will come into play)

~Immunity to Curses or all Ailments and Negative Status Conditions in the world.

~Soul Preservation is in Effect. Nothing in this world can kill you, as the world itself offers you guardianship.

~[\$@@%] Effect can now be available to you (You can only use it once).

[End Of Information]

"Do these human feelings qualify as Negative Status Conditions? Is that why they're being suppressed?"

His worry about Esme, his concern for his classmates, and the overwhelming cluster of emotions that threatened to break loose within him.

All of them were recognized as harmful by the System, so they were being blocked off.

"What's the deal with this Ater?"

"This is for the best, Master. You no longer need to be concerned about those vermin, so you can set your mind on the more important matters."

The moment he heard his classmates being referred to in such a derogatory manner, he felt a surge of annoyance rise up within him.

But, that was instantly fizzled out, replaced by relief.

'I can't get angry too? What the hell?' Before, he had chalked it up to his desire to calmly assess the situation one step at a time, but now Rey recognized his situation as completely different.

"The System is regulating my emotions. How is that ever a good thing?"

"Emotions tend to get in the way of good judgment, Master. If you are unshackled by them, perhaps that would yield the more optimal result."

"No. You're wrong!" Once Rey raised his voice, he was suppressed once again. "Damnit!"

"Are you alright, Master?"

"I'm not, damnit! It k-keeps... interfering..."

Even the fear that Rey was supposed to feel, as he watched vestiges of his personality slip away, was absent.

His heart wasn't racing quickly, and his mind was perfectly calm.

"Just how many emotions would it deem to be Negative? Why qualify emotions as Negative Status Conditions to begin with?"

"Perhaps it's because you are more in sync with your entire self now. Surely, even the System recognizes how detrimental your emotions can be to your development."

Rey's eyes widened as he looked at Ater's mask of a face. Somewhere within him, he began to ask a very fundamental question.

'If Ater is an advocate for this, then does that mean he's the same?

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Chapter 553 Consequences Of Privilege [Pt 2]

When considering things logically, humans are often bound by emotion.

Feelings of lethargy, or mental fatigue—perhaps depression and other negative states—tend to get in the way of productivity.

Objectively, humans could function for twelve straight hours—being productive throughout, as long as they had the sustenance and the barest minimum of rest to keep them going.

Eight hours of sleep, then four hours embedded in chunks between the twelve hours of constant productive work. These four hours would include feeding, excretion, resting, and the likes.

Every day. All day. Humans could achieve so much if they dedicated twelve hours of their time to their task. But... that is rarely the case with people.

How much smarter would the average student be if they constantly dedicated twelve hours to their studies for the years they spent in school?

But, more often than not... they do not do this.

How much more money would be made by the average man if he chose not to take time off work, or indulge in needless breaks?

They simply can not help this, however.

Because inbuilt within humans is the poison of emotion, that makes it impossible to be productive a hundred percent of the time. There's always something that interferes with the constant stream of productivity. Positive or negative... they still interfere with the necessary activities.

Students engage in pointless discourse, play games, watch movies, and fret over those they cultivate feelings for.

Workers get burnout and mental fatigue, even if their physical self is in a perfect state, if they monotonously focus over a single task for too long.

These shackles of emotions, especially the more negative aspects, make them overall harmful to productivity.

As such, they ought to be culled.

To make the ideal person—one who would be perfectly aligned to their goals—useless feelings would need to be eliminated.

... Permanently.

"Is that really how you feel, Ater?"

"Like I said, Master... feelings are irrelevant when it comes to this matter."

As Rey stared down on Ater, constantly having his rising feelings being suppressed by the system, he finally loosened his clenched fist and sighed.

"No... you're wrong."

Rey turned away from Ater, but that didn't mean he couldn't see the expression on his face.

"What do you mean by that, Master?"

"My emotions play a key role in how I function." Rey sighed, raising his head as he stared at the ceiling.

It was why he tried his hardest not to rely on [Dead Calm] too much.

"My fear of the future and my anxiety allows me to critically examine everything around me to make what I deem to be the best decision."

It didn't matter that the process would take longer than a more automated version of himself. He would be able to act on what he thought was best after examining all the possibilities presented to him.

That was his preferred method of operation.

"Before I took my first life in this world, I had a long series of deliberations, and then I finally made that choice."

Yes, he used [Dead Calm] to make it easier to kill, but the choice was made before the Skill was activated.

As such, he bore all responsibility for his actions.

"Regret and Pain... my aversion to those allows me to think a lot of my actions through before I engage in them. They also allow me to learn from my mistakes and make better choices."

Whenever his plans went belly-up, he would feel the pain that came with it and prevent such a thing from happening again.

"Losing access to those emotions will make me act without consequence." Rey could already see the signs.

His decision to feed two of his Skills to [Sacrifice] was indeed something he was beginning to regret, but even that emotion was slowly slipping from his grasp.

'Perhaps it would have ultimately been the best decision, and this suppression made me get to it faster, but... I would have thought things through a lot more if I was myself.'

Something about the System controlling his emotions, even without his consent made the whole process seem wrong.

"At some point, I'll stop being myself. My worrying, scared, insecure... but also critical, skeptical, and caring self... they'll be gone."

What would be left could only be described as a machine—a hollow version of himself.

"I don't want that. And I don't think you want that either."

For a moment, Ater remained the same. He didn't say anything, but keenly stared at Rey with glassy eyes and a mask-like expression.

Then, he raised his brows and asked:

"Why do you think that?"

Rey smiled as he heaved a sigh, his dark gaze piercing Ater's crimson one.

"Because I would no longer be the Master you swore loyalty to."

Upon hearing this, Ater quickly broke into a smile and nodded, even going as far as rendering a round of applause to Rey.

"What a splendid answer, Master!" He beamed brightly. "You never cease to impress me!"

"E-eh...?"

Rey's eyes widened slightly as he looked at Ater's surprisingly pleased expression. He expected some other kind of reaction, not this.

"I thought you were on board with the whole emotional suppression..."

"No way. I feel all kinds of emotions, Master! I'm not some kind of heartless Monster. Whenever I cause chaos and calamity... I revel in the satisfaction that brings me."

Once again, Rey was reminded of the kind of entity he was speaking to; a Chaotic Evil Beast.

"Haha... is that so?" He strained a smile.

"O-of course, I derive my greatest sense of fulfillment from serving you, Master!" Rey nodded, still not removing the forced smile on his face. It almost seemed like he didn't believe Ater.

"So why were you trying to convince me otherwise? Why were you advocating for this suppression as if it's the best option?"

Ater's smile slowly vanished as he adopted a more serious demeanor.

There are two reasons for that. The first and most obvious is that I wanted to test your resolve and make you face the emotions that you are subconsciously trying to avoid."

Ater was no fool.

He had been observing Rey since he fell asleep, and even after he woke up, so he already knew how Rey didn't want to address the tragedies that had befallen the city.

"Your first instinct was to check your Status Window, and to distract yourself with the comfort of your strength. That was not something the System prompted. It was an action you enacted of your own free will." He started.

The System wasn't controlling Rey's actions, but merely regulating his emotions. Yes, some of those actions would be a direct consequence of his emotions—or absence thereof—but certain choices were Rey's burden to bear alone.

"Your decision to use [Sacrifice] is something I didn't know of until you mentioned it, and it indeed points to the flaw of the System's methods. It's something I disagree with wholeheartedly..." Ater's smile returned, and he nodded at Rey.

"Emotions are necessary for growth, Master. They're the catalyst for change. It makes me happy that you recognize that."

The positive feeling that Rey got from Ater's words were, thankfully, not suppressed by the System.

He wanted to say something—perhaps a word of thanks—but before he fully opened his lips, Ater continued speaking.

"The second reason is because I suspected it was probably best for you to see some positive aspects of this Suppression. After all..." Sighing, he stared seriously into Rey's eyes, a sullen expression plaguing his face.

For a moment, tense silence took reign. It didn't last long, though.

"... You can't do anything about your Class Privileges."

Chapter 554 Gift Of The World

A person's Class is tied to their identity—in essence, their role in the world.

Commoners were hardly worth anything; collateral who were meant to fill up the space in a large world. In essence, they were Extras by default.

The higher the Tier of one's Class, the higher the value attributed to them. ... And with this value comes Privileges.

These Privileges are not innate abilities, but special treatment granted to the person by the World. Just as billionaires back on earth were granted some special authority and benefits by governments and the people around them—all due to the legal tenders in their possession—this world of H'Trae rewards those it deems to be worthy.

It isn't something you can reject or change. For powers like [Limit Transcension], a choice can be made to use this power or not. But, for characteristics that the Class provides, there is no way to evade it.

It was simply the free gift of the World.

"So... I'm stuck with this?" Rey asked as he raised his brow, looking at Ater who shrugged and sighed at the same time.

"Pretty much."

Just as Rey could not change the number of Stats he would be getting from every Level Up, he couldn't alter the properties of his other Privileges.

That included the one he dreaded most:

~Immunity to Curses or all Ailments and Negative Status Conditions in the world.~

"On the bright side, Master is pretty much protected from all kinds of harm, but the downside is that you'll stop being yourself..."

"Then there's no bright side!"

"..." Ater rubbed his chin, almost as if thinking about what to say, but a smile radiated from his face as he finally responded.

"Let's try to be optimistic, okay?"

"Y-you...!"

Before Rey could get upset, his feelings were suppressed again. He was already getting used to the constant shift in his emotional state—almost as if his current self was acclimating to what the System was doing.

It wouldn't be long until he was completely desensitized to it.

"The good news is that the System should already have a threshold and a standard for what it deems to be a Negative Status Condition. As a result, you should try your best not to go over that limit." Ater responded.

Indeed, Rey also noticed that his more basic emotions were still intact. It was only when he felt something sudden or intense that the suppression kicked in.

"I guess I'll actively do my best to keep my body and mind under check so the System doesn't do it for me." "Precisely. That should slow down the erosion." Ater's choice of words should have been quite frightening for Rey. After all, this meant he was slowly losing himself due to the System's interference, but... "Calm. Gotta stay calm." Rey told himself.

Worrying about things would only make matters worse. He had to stay under the radar while also trying his best to use his logic and emotions to figure out a solution.

"Is there a solution?"

"Maybe get another Class. Though, I reckon some kind of control will still be placed on you if the Class is somewhat similar to this or better."

Rey felt a frown forming on his face.

"Does that mean that Adonis' Hero Class is also—?!"

"Not really. That is a special case indeed..." Ater said with a dismissive smile on his face. Upon hearing this, Rey smiled in relief.

'So that means Adonis didn't have to deal with this. That's good to know.' Feeling this good sensation wash over him, Rey didn't feel any suppression take place. He realized that the System probably didn't see relief as something Negative.

'As long as my mind isn't in distress, it won't kick in, huh? That's both bad and good.'

If he could feel good sensations but not bad ones, that meant his emotional perspective would be somewhat skewed. But, the good side was that he hadn't completely lost his feeling of empathy.

'At least I can still enjoy some good things in life...' The issue now was figuring out how to get rid of this current Class of his and get something that would allow him to become a much more complete person.

Yes, Rey appreciated the power that came with having an S-Tier, but the consequences were too great.

He couldn't bear it.

"Do you have any idea how to get a new Class that has good Privileges but doesn't control me like this?" In the end, he had only Ater to turn to for help.

Once again, Ater placed a palm on his chin, deep in thought about the question proffered to him.

"I'm not sure of the conditions necessary, so it's hard to say. The people that design these things make it quite difficult for an accurate guess to be made about stuff like this..."

"H-hold on... the people that designed these things? You mean Seraph and the whole Domain of God thing?"

"Seraph? Pfft... no, not her."

"E-eh?"

"My memory is a bit foggy on the details, but I know it's best to simply go with the flow for now. Your mission is to save this world, right?"

Rey nodded his head very slowly.

"Then let's focus on that for now. One task at a time, right?"

"Y-yeah..."

"You should be able to see and understand more after that is complete. I don't know much either, and I am not sure if I can trust these memories of mine all that well."

All of Ater's words rang true within Rey, so the latter knew he wasn't lying to him.

"I understand." Rey smiled and nodded. "Let's take it one step at a time."

A portal opened in front of Rey, leading back to the room where he woke up in. As the purple distortions shone brightly and reflected on Rey's body, Ater stepped forward with a question.

"So, what is the first order of business?"

His entire emotions were in check, so Rey's stoic face turned to meet Ater—his single eye brilliantly shining with light.

"Well, it's been nearly three months since I went to sleep..." There was a lot to unpack, and if this was how much his own body had changed, Rey knew there was no way everything could have remained the same.

"... I'd like to hear all about everything I've missed."

Chapter 555 The Changes He Missed [Pt 1]

Rey sat on his bed in silence, his gaze directed at the floating Ater who sat in midair.

He hadn't forgotten that his Familiar could do that, but something about seeing him get so comfortable in the air seemed bizarre every single time.

Still, other than a slight smile of amusement, he didn't display any other emotion. His exposed eye simply stared blankly as he made himself comfortable on the luxurious bed that Ater had prepared for him.

'It's just like Esme's bed. How did he know that I prefer this...?'

Right now, Rey was in a black long-sleeve shirt, with dark trousers covering most of his legs. He was barefoot, though, so his feet and hands were exposed as he sat and waited patiently.

"So... you can start now."

Rey had prepared his heart. He made sure to remain calm no matter what news he heard, though he already knew it would be impossible for him to fully suppress everything.

'I just need to try my best to calmly analyze everything I he—'

"Alicia is currently under a coma. She hasn't been able to wake up since she fell asleep due to the Curse."

"Curse?" Rey raised an eyebrow. "Alicia also went into a deep sleep?"

Was it because of her use of the [Divine Beast Summon] Skill? She didn't have enough Mana to pull off summoning an entity like the one that emerged back then.

'That means...'

"She used The Unknown Box that I gave Adonis. As a result, the after-effect of using such an Item—a random curse—befell her."

"A curse? There was a curse attached to it? I didn't see it when I used my Appraisal on the Item, though..." Rey was trying his best not to let his feelings of worry and anxiety overflow.

Of course, he was very concerned about Alicia. If this was indeed a curse, and she had been asleep for so long, then her current condition was beyond worrying.

He was even feeling hints of fright.

But, through it all, he had to swallow the negative emotions and handle things as calmly as possible.

If he didn't, the System would do it for him.

"Certain Curses aren't normally registered under standard Appraisal effects. They apply more like cause and effect; the natural consequence of an action."

Just as Rey could not perceive the Curse that was bestowed on the members of the KariBlanc Group at the time, even though they would perish if they did not make it to the Dark Gathering, he couldn't see the effects of Curses that were yet to be active.

"If they had neglected the Dark Gathering, and the Curse began to affect them negatively, that's when the Negative Status Effects would have popped up..."

"Precisely." Ater responded. "Curses function in a very distinct manner from Magic, since the more subtle ones take root without any recognition."

"I see..."

"But that shouldn't be a problem for you now, Master. I'm certain all of your abilities have been heightened to an incredible degree, so you should be able to perceive things that you were previously unable to." Ater said with a knowing smile.

"Is that so...?"

"Yes. It wouldn't be surprising if you can finally detect the Curse on this object."

Out of nowhere, Ater brought forth the Unknown Box. His smile broadened as he raised his brow, looking at Rey with a prompting gaze.

Rey took a moment to properly understand what he was looking at before even saying anything.

"It looks... different."

In the past, Rey only perceived a box that warbled; one which had incredible power. But now... he was seeing something completely different.

"It's giving off an ominous vibe."

"Indeed. I made this Item myself, to see the limits of what I could create in this world."

"You... made it?"

"Indeed. Though, it seems this is my limit. The flaw of this tool has far too many downsides to be considered truly viable."

"But... since I'm immune to all Negative Status Conditions and Curses, that means I can use it... right?"

"Hm? What for, though?"

Rey sighed as he looked at Ater, unsure of how to answer the question. He already had the Skill of the Item at his disposal, but after [Sacrifice], that was gone.

"I can't use the Skill any longer. So if I had the Item..."

"You don't need this defective thing, Master. Pretty much all of your Skills are already at the maximum level. Besides, it only has a few more tries on it anyway." Ater responded with a nonchalant demeanor.

"I'll figure out some use for it, though, so do not worry."

"Oh? I see..." Rey muttered. "Can you make a similar Item like that, though? Something that can perhaps alleviate Alicia's Curse?"

"..." Ater narrowed his gaze as he looked at Rey.

Tense silence simmered between the two as the Master waited for his Familiar to give a response.

"No. I deal with Chaos, so it's pretty much impossible for me to possess powers that can positively affect entities... at least, not without even more consequences."

"Tch..." Rey clicked his tongue as he closed his eyes.

He took a few seconds to process all the information he had received, searching for several alternatives in his head.

After coming up with a few, he calmed himself down and let go of the remnant vestiges of anxiety and guilt that threatened to swallow him whole.

'It's all my fault that she's like this. But... I can't focus on that now.' Tightening his fist, he decided to focus on a solution rather than dwell so obsessively on the problem.

"After this conversation, I'll have to see her for myself..." He whispered, a slight glimmer of light flashing in his eye.

'If it's me, I should be able to do something to fix her.'

Since that was somewhat partially addressed in his mind, Rey returned his focus on the topic at hand—that is, the changes that had occurred in the months of his absence.

Alicia was just one key change, but what of the others?

"How about my other classmates? Adonis and everyone else."

"About that..." Ater seemed a bit more serious as he began to speak on the matter.

"Adonis mysteriously vanished a week after the incident, and there has been no sighting of him since then."

'W-what...?!' Rey's eye widened as he heard the shocking news.

"He's gone, Master."

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Chapter 556 The Changes He Missed [Pt 2]

"I don't understand..." Rey murmured, stroking his chin as his narrowed eye depicted hints of disbelief.

"Adonis would never bail on the group."

Rey knew he was very cynical and distrusting most of the time. He found it difficult to trust most people—especially after all he had experienced. But, there were a few people who managed to break through that wall of his.

Adonis Levi was one of those people.

'He genuinely wanted to help this world. He's always had that personality since we were in school, and he still hasn't changed... at least, not by much.'

Sure, he was dealing with some issues of inadequacies, but Rey always knew he would overcome them. No matter what, it made no sense for him to escape.

"Perhaps I ought to inform you of the incidents that led up to your battle and eventual collapse in the Capital." Ater offered. "That way, you can get the full perspective on everything."

Right now, Rey was extremely limited by the information he had.

He didn't know anything about the struggles of his classmates before his arrival, or the aftermath of his battle with the strongest foe he had ever faced.

This absence of sufficient information was bound to skew his understanding of the current situation; hence, influencing his judgment on them.

Since Ater had been taking care of things for nearly three months, he would have gotten the full story, making him the perfect person to inform him of the details.

"I think that would be good." Rey nodded.

And so, without any further tangents, the Familiar began to divulge everything.

... The calamity that befell the Capital.

'The hell?'

With a bulging eye that seemed like it would explode at any given moment, Rey listened very attentively until the conclusion of Ater's exposition.

'I knew Billy was dead, and I suspected that Snow died too. But Eric? Him too?'

Just like with most of his classmates, Rey wasn't particularly close with Eric. They hardly spoke to each other, though they had a few things in common.

'We both loved this world. I liked that about him.' Rey cast a sad smile as he sighed, finding yet another reason to blame himself.

'Unlike me, he was a very smart guy too. Even when we were in school, he usually got near perfect grades.' Sure, he acted smug a lot of times, but Rey never really disliked him. Eric wasn't among the people who mocked him, and while they were completely different, they had very similar sets of ideals.

For that alone, his death seemed a little more impactful than the demise of Billy and Snow.

If that was all, then perhaps Rey could rest easy.

Unfortunately... that wasn't the case.

'Nearly twelve percent of the population died in the entire incident. Thirty nine percent were badly injured, with a good number of them in critical state.'

Some Capital denizens died after the calamity was over, which extended the number of casualties to a whopping twenty-three percent of the population.

'That's tens of thousands of people... all of them dead.' Rey couldn't allow himself to feel guilty, even if he wanted to. Still, he found it disrespectful to the dead that he couldn't even cry for their sake.

Sure, he could manipulate the glands in his eyes to secrete tears, but that would not be genuine.

He wanted to feel bad.

So many deaths; so much catastrophe... and yet he had to feel nothing.

"I hope you do not blame yourself, Master. Even if you had arrived early—"

"More people would have been saved, at the very least." Rey whispered, his head downcast as he squeezed his fingers against each other.

Emotions had to be bottled in, but merely going through the casualties—as well as the consequences of the demise of all those people—was enough to conjure such a reaction out of Rey.

"I'm not saying people wouldn't have died. Based on the nature of the invasion, it would have cost lives either way. But... I could have saved even a couple thousand more people."

"...." Ater said nothing, simply staring at his Master.

"It was due to my hubris. After killing that Commander, I should have known the Dragons would make their move eventually. For the first week or two, I steeled my mind in preparation, but they never showed up. So... I somehow wrote it off without realizing it."

Even if they had shown up during those two weeks that he expected them, would he really have been able to stop them?

Four Commanders and a General—if it was left to the version of him from back then, how would he have fared?

'Not to talk of a Dragon Lord showing up...' Rey shook his head and laughed at himself. 'I would have lost badly.'

'Yet I spent my time worrying about Adrien's manipulations, playing a silly game in the Adventurers City...'

He should have stuck to the goal he had from the start.

'Grinding... I should never have stopped grinding.' He thought to himself, staring at his two hands.

'I'm not as strong as I can possibly be. So there's no reason for me to stop now.'

"I admire your resolve, Master, but you still shouldn't blame yourself. The enemies are to blame for putting you in such a position, so you should focus your rage on them."

Rey chuckled in response to those words. "Is that what you did?"

"Pardon me?"

"I mean, I'm sure you also had the same thoughts I'm having. If you had arrived earlier, perhaps these things wouldn't have happened the way they turned out."

"Well..."

"Of course, I know you had important business to attend to, and we'll get to that eventually. But... didn't you have those thoughts of regret?" Rey asked, a broad smile playing on his face.

"It would be a lie to say I didn't. Things would have been quite different if I had been present at that moment."

"So you're saying you could have defeated that thing? If you were present, that is."

"Haha... it would be a rather difficult fight." Ater scratched his hair, causing the crimson strands to dance in the air.

He had a playful smile on his face, though.

"But would you win?"

For a moment, the atmosphere soaked up silence. Rey cast a piercing gaze on Ater, while the latter finally ceased his joking look and took on a more serious demeanor.

"I... am not sure." He finally responded. "I still have no clue what manner of Beast that was, or what power he used against you in the fight."

"..." Rey remained silent as he watched Ater go on.

"Since it's a Divine Beast, though, I'd expect it to be stronger than I am. I'm very weak, after all."

"... But would you win?" The question echoed once again.

"I would." The tension evaporated in the air as Rey nodded as he stared at Ater.

"I could tell somehow. After all, now that my perception of everything has changed, you look entirely different in my eyes now." "Oh? How do I look to you, Master?" Ater asked with a brilliant smile.

"Well..." Rey's narrowed eye glowed brightly as information about Ater popped up in an instant.

[STATUS WINDOW] - Name: Ater (LQ#i&3r)

- Race: Bakeneko (Unknown)

- Class: Absolute Summon (S-Tier)

- Level: 101 (09.12% EXP) - Life Force: 1,000 (500) [insert]

- Mana Level: 1,500 (750) [insert]

- Combat Ability: 2,500 (1,250) [insert]

- Stat Points: 10,000

- Skills (Exclusive): [Shapeshift]

- Skills (Non-Exclusive): [Dark Magic]. [Magic Supremacy]. [Possession]. [Compulsion]. [Illusion]. [Undead Summon] [A\$!!?¥\>.€£\K].

- Alignment: Chaotic Evil

[Additional Information]

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

Stay away from it.

[End Of Information]

"... I don't understand it myself."

"I can now see the glitches that Esme was mentioning back then. I guess it's because of my upgraded Appraisal, but what about Esme's case?" Rey wondered to himself.

Before he could fully process things, however, Ater interrupted his thoughts.

"Well... I did tell you, Master, that I was the only Familiar you really need." He puffed his chest out and smiled proudly. "And I still mean that!"

"Without those two Summons I would have died, though..."

"A-ah, well... they're exceptions." The floating Familiar chuckled nervously.

Upon bringing up the Phoenixes, Rey swiftly remembered something else—the final Familiar that he summoned back then.

"Now that I think about it, the purple egg should have hatched now, ri—?"

"Master, with all due respect... We should stick to the topic at hand. One thing at a time, right?" Ater swiftly interrupted, smiling as sweetly as possible.

Rey felt an awkward tingle on his skin, and he could see the slight unease that twinkled in Ater's eyes as he stared at his face.

"Fine then... let's go back to Adonis." He sighed, his thoughts on the other things mellowing out as he focused on the Hero's disappearance.

"What's this you say about a letter?"

Chapter 557 The Changes He Missed [Pt 3]

The day that Adonis was confirmed to be missing, they found a letter in his room.

The thing seemed to have been written in a hurry, and it was addressed to everyone—his classmates, the Royal Council, and all who cared to see.

It was:

~I am deeply sorry it has to be this way, and that it took me so long to see, but I finally realize my mistakes.

I thought I could help everyone, and save this world, but my calculations were wrong. I made so many errors, and those miscalculations cost us so many lives.

I can see those mistakes now... and I know I have to rectify them.

Don't bother searching for me. You won't be able to find me. I now recognize that for me to truly save everyone—even those who have fallen—I need far more strength than I currently possess.

A journey beckons to me. It will be fraught with danger, but I shall overcome. I shall survive and return once again; a much more experienced and capable Hero.

Do not fear... Rey, Lucielle, everyone. You no longer need to worry about me or yourselves. Even though I will shoulder this responsibility alone, it will yield the best of results.

Wish me good fortune. I will save you all!~

"H-huh...?" Rey found the gears in his head turning as he read through the contents of the letter.

He was stunned by what he was reading—what appeared to be some sort of childish manifesto from Adonis.

"Is he stupid? How can he think to do this alone?" Those were the first words that Rey uttered after seeing the letter's contents. It was a rhetorical question, considering how he was well aware of Adonis' intelligence.

'He's always been the most intuitive out of all of us.' Rey itched his head as he re-read the message on the paper in his hands.

'Even after seeing everything that went down, he really wants to go at it alone?'

In the end, he could not resonate with the Hero's reasoning. The most logical solution to the matter at hand would be for everyone to recoup their strength and figure out a way to ward off the inevitable external aggression to come.

"And what's this BS about us not worrying about him and ourselves? If an invasion happens now, what are we supposed to do?"

Should they just fold their hands and wait for his 'return'? Rey shook his head, handing the letter back to Ater after reading it one final time. "What do you think he means by this letter? Do you have any idea where he went, or where he's going?" He asked.

"I have no idea where he's headed to, or where he is at this moment, Master." Ater said with a slight bow. "As for the meaning of this letter, it is possible that he feels somewhat responsible for what happened in the Capital and desires to atone."

"Atone? By running away from the problem?"

"Most likely, he'll be running towards the problem..." Ater said with a smile.

"Wait... you mean the Northern Continent? The Dragon Kingdom?!"

"Draconic Empire, actually. It's merely a guess—an observation on my part, if you may." The way the Familiar shrugged in nonchalance made Rey slightly agitated.

Ater never really seemed to take most things seriously.

"Even after my power was exposed... he still chose to leave? Is it because I was unconscious?" The teenager muttered, a crestfallen expression on his face.

"...." "I don't get it, honestly. With Alicia in her coma, and everyone in the current state they're in... I expected Adonis to at least... be there for them." To leave everyone and everything behind... it didn't seem like something the Hero would do.

'I guess I didn't know him as much as I thought I did.' Rey smiled sadly, once again interrupted by Ater's deep voice.

"He isn't the only one that left, though. Trisha also went to the Adventurers City just a few days ago. She said she was done with the training she could receive here, and she wanted more practical experiences with large monsters over there."

Apparently, even after the appearances of the Dragons and the Divine Beast, Rey's classmates had yet to lose their courage.

They didn't plunge into despair or quit the mission.

"Clark and Justin have officially joined the military and are soon going to conclude their training with Brutus. Once that's done, they'll be heading to the front lines."

They weren't the only ones who were busy, though.

"Belle is currently an Apprentice under Lucielle, and she's also almost done with her Magic Training. Once all of them are done, they'll pick up Trisha on their way to the front lines and head straight to the battlefield."

All of this information bombarded Rey as he still tried his hardest to process the information he was receiving.

Of course, mentally processing it was incredibly easy for him, but the emotional weight of everything had to be addressed very slowly in order not to rush past the significance of the events that had taken place.

If he treated the matters too heavily, the System would come in, but if he dismissed them too swiftly, he would miss out on the true meaning behind their actions.

As such, he had to constantly chew the details he was receiving in order to understand them well.

'How strenuous...'

"How long before they head to the front lines?" Rey finally asked after a few seconds of silence.

"Less than a month."

"Ahh... I see." Rey didn't seem very surprised. In fact, he was more surprised that they could have waited that long despite what recently happened in the Capital.

"I assumed the Dragons would be breathing down our necks, but the fact that Brutus and Lucielle could have stayed back for so long means that the situation at the front lines isn't as severe as I imagined."

"It was severe. But, surprisingly, the attacks dwindled significantly after the calamity that befell the Capital."

"For real?" Rey was met with another surprising news.

He wasn't expecting this one.

'Why would they suddenly stop, especially after the death of a Dragon Lord?' Rey expected a full-blown retaliation from the Dragons, but there was no such thing.

"Perhaps they're being a lot more cautious with the humans; taking time to amass their forces to prepare for an all-out war. In any case, we should also begin to make preparations on our end." Ater said with a slight nod.

Rey nodded back at him.

"You're right. Since we have the window of opportunity to prepare, we should get ready for war."

He didn't let the grim state of things bother him that much, though. If things had gone according to plan, everyone would have been in the front lines at this point.

Rey knew he didn't have the luxury of worrying too much about auxiliary issues—not when there could be an overwhelming crisis brewing in the background.

'Sorry, Adonis... but I can't deal with your desertion right now.' Rey heaved a sigh.

There was too much to worry about at the moment.

"Is there any good news, at the very least?"

Ater beamed as the question was asked.

"Well, the Capital's reconstruction is almost finished. We should be done before your classmates depart for the war."

'E-eh? That quickly?!' Rey's eyes nearly bulged.

Most of his fight with the Divine Beast was a blur, but he hadn't forgotten the destruction that was wrought as a result.

It was too much to be fixed within a few months.

'What in the world did you do, Ater?'

"Also, the Royal Council finally made the existence of the Otherworlders known to the public." All of Rey's previous thoughts were put on hold once he heard this.

After all, this revelation only meant one thing.

"Everyone knows who you are now, Master."

Chapter 558 By Her Side

After the Capital fell; first at the hands of the Dragons, then to the might of an unstoppable beast, the denizens fell into despair.

Humanity was reminded of its place—they were nothing but weak meat waiting to be harvested.

The destruction of the largest city in the Alliance caused many to lose hope. The failing economy was the least of their worries, as security and stability became what everyone desired.

Those who had some means desired to move South, while the impoverished majority had nowhere else to go... but they were bound to try anyway.

In this cesspool of horrors and uncertainty, a beacon of hope was necessary.

Which was why the Alliance finally made their move and announced the arrival of the Otherworlders.

They revealed how the Otherworlders were the ones who stopped the Dragons, and also that the strongest of them all had defeated the Divine Beast.

That public announcement, with the remnant Otherworlders standing on stage in front of the Capital's denizens, shook the populace.

It was able to rekindle the dying flames of hope that humanity had in their survival.

All hope... was not yet lost.

In a blank, vast room, a girl lay on a bed.

She was covered in a thick blanket, and the bed she was in seemed to swallow her while with its sheer size.

What seemed to be a veil of thin-layered fabric covered her from all sides, all dangling from the ceiling of her bed.

Sparkles of energy danced around her, like miniature stars, and her complete white attire made her almost seem like a lucky bride on her wedding day.

She even had a ring on her finger, displayed thanks to her posture; with both hands on her stomach as she lay peacefully.

This girl was no bride, though, neither was she lucky.

Her long brown hair was scattered all over the bed, and her eyes were tightly shut due to her slumber. With how she barely moved her body, though, one would think she was dead.

But no.

She was very much alive; the fact that she was still breathing, albeit very slowly, proved it.

Alicia White had only fallen into an eternal slumber.

"I'm sorry..."

The voice that echoed within the room came from the boy who knelt next to her bed.

His right eye rested keenly on her as the other one was covered by a black eyepatch.

Something moist formed, glinted within his eyes, but that was all that happened. No tears flowed, even as he tightly held the white blanket atop the bed.

"I know me saying this changes nothing. You probably can't even hear me. I just..."

He forced his heart not to race, and he used all his strength to ensure none of his physiological reactions passed the breaking point.

Rey feared what would happen if he allowed it.

'I'm so sad, but... I can't allow myself to be.' He so badly wanted to cry, but he already knew the tears wouldn't come.

Rey, at this moment, was in agony.

"If I hadn't been so cowardly, you wouldn't have been forced to do this."

After Ater told him everything, Rey had to analyze everything by himself.

After their discussion, he asked for some alone time and decided to finally visit Alicia.

Just as Ater said... she was still asleep. f(r)ee

Her body still looked perfect. She had immaculate skin, and incredible beauty. Rey couldn't see her amber-colored eyes, but he already knew they were guaranteed to be amazing too.

His vision trailed all over her body until he spotted the ring on her finger—the very ring he gave her back in the Library.

'I... fuck...'

Rey tightened his face as he squeezed his hands even tighter on the sheets. His heart felt like it would burst, but he kept everything under control.

'What were you thinking about when it all happened, I wonder...' He sniffed, looking at her with a teary eye.

'When I was declared dead, when Snow died, when the Capital went up in flames... what was going on in your mind?'

All the guesses Rey made just caused him to feel all the worse.

'I didn't want things to end this way. You might even hate me now. But...' With a single blink of his eye, all the signs of tears vanished, and a determined gaze appeared in its stead.

"I'll fix this. I'll bring you back."

With both [Perfect Divine Magic] and [Divine Magic Supremacy], Rey had access to any and all kinds of Magic.

For Magic that were previously assigned as Skills to him, he could now use them even without their corresponding Skills.

However, for new and unknown Magic, he would have to learn about them—at least, to some degree.

However, there was something else.

Based on his pre-existing knowledge of Magic, his experience witnessing its use, and the powers at his disposal, Rey was not only capable of using Magic without chants or delay... he could also somewhat create his own Magic.

'All I have to do is visualize its effect... to do what I want it to do.'

Rey already practiced this in his room, by creating all sorts of models with Wind Magic despite having no knowledge of the Spell prior to activation.

By visualizing the effects he desired, he could mold his Mana into the desired result and practically make a Magic Spell from scratch.

And now...

'I'm going to make a Healing Spell that will cure you of this ailment.'

Since his Magic was on the Divine Level, there was pretty much nothing that could resist it. Perhaps another Divine Tier could, but [Perfect Divine Magic] would still have some effect for sure.

As a result, Rey was at least confident of systematic progress even if he couldn't heal her all at once.

'Visualize what you want...' He removed his eyepatch and allowed his full vision in Light Mode to take over.

With this, he could see everything in the room at full capacity.

Mana Flow, Patterns, their Origin, Destination, and the excess particles—even the ones invisible to him before.

Perceiving all of these allowed him to look at Alicia in a completely different light.

Her entire body was shrouded in some kind of darkness: it looked dreadful and horrid.

'Why would Ater give Adonis something that could potentially lead to this result?'

Rey was tempted to blame his Familiar, but he desisted from it. Adonis was incredibly resistant to curses, so using the Item would have had no downsides for the Hero.

'Enough about that.' He narrowed his eyes as he sighed shallowly.

[STATUS WINDOW]

- Name: Alicia White {Cursed}
- Race: Human (Otherworlder)
- Class: Absolute Tamer (S-Tier)
- Level: 112 (34.90% EXP)
- Life Force: 110 (+110) {Sealed}
- Mana Level: 210 (+310) {Sealed}
- Combat Ability: 200 (+200) {Sealed}
- Stat Points: 0
- Skills (Exclusive): [Divine Beast Summon]. [Absolute Healing]. [Greater Ice Magic]
- Skills (Non-Exclusive): [Quick Casting]. [Mana Sense]. [Mana Eruption]. [Intimidation]. [Instruction]
- Alignment: Lawful Good

[Additional Information]

A pet-lover who desires to return home, but can not afford to see others in a state of distress. Her Skills and Class are in perfect synergy with her.

Negative Status Condition: Permanent Sleep

Cursed Level: Extreme

[End Of Information]

'Let's begin!'

Chapter 559 Curse From The World

~BWUUSH~

Echoes of wind danced all around the room, as torrents swirled all over Rey.

Green light sparked, followed by bright white, and eventually gold.

All this energies kept evolving, until they finally reached the level that Rey desired—Healing Magic that was on the Divine Tier.

'I no longer have my [Absolute Healing] Skill, but this is much better...' He smiled as his hands flowed with bright golden light.

They seemed to invigorate everything around them.

Sparks of white still danced around the golden glare, and before he realized it...

"Haha... yes!"

... Rey was chucking to himself.

"This is it!" With widened eyes, his irises reflecting the golden light on his palms, he neared Alicia's sleeping body.

"This should do it!"

He was well aware that Ater was much stronger than he previously gave him credit for, but there really was no way an imperfect item that he created would be able to resist the Healing Magic birthed by his two Divine Skills working in tandem.

Without wasting any further time in thought, Rey pushed his hands forward and touched Alicia with them.

The darkness surrounding her tried to resist, but he was most definitely stronger.

His power made it through, and the golden surge of light made its way all around her body.

In a single moment, she was brimming with golden light.

"Haa..." Rey's eyes widened as the bright glow remained evident in his eyes.

He watched as his Magic did its wonders and waited for her to flick her eyes open.

But—

[System Notice]

~Healing Magic failed: Target's Curse can not be healed by Magic~

[Would You Like To Try Again?]

"H-huh?"

Rey's eyes slightly widened as he saw the panel open up in front of him.

Exactly at that moment, the golden light that had been surrounding Alicia was engulfed by the darkness, causing it to vanish forever.

He failed.

Before Rey could even think about it, or process the implications of what he had just seen, his lips practically moved on their own.

"Try again."

Once more, the golden light appeared. It went through the same process and covered Alicia from head to toe.

But—

[System Notice]

~Healing Magic failed: Target's Curse can not be healed by Magic~

[Would You Like To Try Again?]

—He received the same rude awakening.

"Try again."

The same thing happened.

"... Again!"

Nothing changed.

"Try..."

No matter how hard he tried, or how many times he used his Healing Magic, it didn't work.

... Until finally, he nearly ran out of Mana.

'Why isn't it working? I'm missing something, aren't I?'

For all he knew, [Absolute Healing] as a Skill couldn't cure Curses.

He faced that problem against the Dark Undertaking.

That was why, in making his own Healing Magic, he factored that and made it so that his method would cure all negative status conditions and even alleviate curses.

The fact that his Magic activated meant those conditions had to have been fulfilled.

Yet... why wasn't it still working?

"A-Ater... what's going on?" Rey finally had to utter, after trying hard to think of something to no avail.

~WHUSH~

A swirling dark mist appeared behind Rey, and instantly Ater emerged with a solemn look on his perfectly carved face.

"Curses are internal manifestations of the world's laws, Master. Healing Magic, no matter the tier, won't work on it."

Laws such as Gravity and Time existed, and with Magic... those laws could be harnessed and bent to the whims of the user.

But that didn't change the fact that those laws remained.

Another kind of Magic—say Fire Magic—could not interfere with those laws, but would have to operate within the bounds of it.

"Curse Magic exists to somewhat shape the invisible and downright dangerous nature of that law, but it's impossible to dispel it with Magic like Healing." Ater said.

Somehow, the explanations only made Rey feel all the more frustrated.

"You created the item, didn't you? Why can't you dispel the curse yourself?"

"I indeed made the item, but the curse wasn't mine."

"What?"

"This world inflicts a curse as a consequence of certain things. It usually comes as a result of breaking certain bounds; like the natural law of existence—"

"I don't understand a thing you're saying!" Rey growled as he turned back to look at Ater.

His overflowing anger was instantly removed—most definitely by the System—leaving him with nothing but a glare that had lost its luster.

"In simple terms, it's similar to how gravity dictates that whatever goes up comes down. In terms of curses, when you do something unnatural, a negative consequence follows."

It was the same way overusing a Skill would end with a negative status condition of exhaustion. Or by overstraining one's muscles, a ligament could tear.

Commit a crime, and you would get punished.

These were examples of the consequences that followed extreme actions.

A natural way of life.

In that same vein, by forcefully reaching the very heights of a Skill, one would have to be cursed as a response from the world.

"It's like cheating and getting scolded at the aftermath."

Adonis could avoid it due to his Privilege as the Hero. Rey could also do the same since he had been granted similar Privileges by the World.

But... not Alicia.

"What if I had a Skill? A Curse Magic Skill... maybe it could work."

"I doubt it. It would be different if someone cursed you with Magic, but this is pretty much a curse that comes from the world itself."

It was similar to how Class Privileges could not be altered unless someone changed their Class.

"Though... if you had a Curse Skill, that would be different." As Ater said this, he rubbed his chin.

"Curse Skill? Isn't that what I just said?"

"No. Curse Skill and Curse Magic Skill are different."

"Huh?"

At this point, Rey was slightly confused.

He looked at Ater in a strange way, as though expecting an explanation from him.

As expected of the Familiar, he picked up on this very quickly.

"Magic is a product of sentient understanding and evolution. Humans, Dragon... they learn Magic which is how they understand the laws of the world and how to bend it to their whims. Once they reach a certain level of proficiency, a Skill is unlocked. Sometimes, they are naturally born with this ability as well... so you'd get something like [Wind Magic] or [Curse Magic] as a Skill."

So far, Rey perfectly understood.

Frustration still tugged at his heart, and he found himself slightly distracted by Alicia and his concern for her.

Still, he paid attention.

"Skills in themselves are not sentient dependent, and they are simply given by the world. They're similar to privileges in a way, and so they're not limited to the sentient capabilities."

"I... don't get it." Rey muttered.

"For example [Divine Beast Summon] is a Skill in itself, and it's not Magic. It relies on something beyond the reach of Magic, since it summons creatures from another world. [Divine Sword Summon] is another example. These are all Skills that transcend the limits of what Magic can do."

Rey began to rub his own chin before realizing it.

"So... there's a difference between [Fire Magic] and [Fire] Skill?"

"Yes. Other than the fact that you'd need to cast a Soell to generate the first, unless you have a Skill like [Magic Application] or [Magic Supremacy], and you are restricted by those Spells, the [Fire] Skill allows free rein over fire, depending on Tiers. It's basically a pass given by the System to use that which is within its bounds."

"I see. So a [Curse] Skill would allow me to interact directly with the Curse that's afflicting her, while [Curse Magic] would only be able to affect Curses within the bounds of Magic itself."

"Correct. You learn fast, Master."

Rey couldn't feel happy for his achievement even if he wanted to. He still didn't understand the details of what Ater was talking about, and frankly... he didn't have the strength to.

All this time, he thought he was only delaying the inevitable so he could prepare his heart when he finally met and woke Alicia up.

But now, he realized he couldn't do it—at the very least, not as he was.

'I'm such a joke...' He smiled at himself as he removed his hand from Alicia, still seeing the darkness overshadow her.

He covered his his eye with the eyepatch, causing his vision to return to Normal Mode.

With that, he could no longer see the depressing sight of the girl he loved being consumed by darkness.

"Is there really no way to wake her up now? Anything I can do at all...?"

"Well—"

Before Ater could say any further, both he and Rey sensed something beyond the door of the room, and they instantly knew what it was.

Ater stared at Rey with curious eyes, as if asking him;

"What will you do now?"

Rey sighed and rose to his feet, still remaining by Alicia's side, as the doors were pushed open and the people outside were granted a view into the vast expanse.

It was the first time in months that Rey had seen them, and he could feel the building tension as he rested his gaze on the group that stood outside the room.

'Justin, Clark, Belle, Lucielle, and Brutus...' All of them had surprised expressions on their faces, and rightfully so.

This was also the first time in months that they were seeing him.

'... It's been a while.'

Chapter 560 Reactions [Pt 1]

"REEEYYYYYY!"

The tense silence was easily broken by Lucielle, Grand Mage of the Alliance, as she charged forward, her crimson eyes shining brightly while she did so.

In a single breath, she was already away from the rest of the group, her robe trailing behind her.

"It's so great to see you! How long has it been now? Three months? You look so much different from before? Did you grow taller? What's with the eyepatch?"

She kept bombarding Rey with questions as she circled around him like a shark, her silver-white hair dancing in the air as she did so.

As Lucielle did all of this, Rey found himself standing still—almost like a statue—completely bamboozled by Lucielle's reaction to seeing him.

The rest—Brutus, Clark, Justin, and Belle—were still transfixed in their position. Just from looking at them, it was clear that they hadn't yet recovered from the shock.

But not Lucielle.

She looked giddy as a child, with slight tints of pink on her face as her wide eyes ogled Rey from various angles.

She kept bombarding him with questions, but Rey could not even answer a single one. Before he fully processed one, two more would appear. Plus—

'It's a bit overwhelming having her so close to me. Why does she smell so good too?'

—Rey could feel his perverted thoughts rising.

Lucielle was in her early twenties, and she was by far the prettiest human he had met in this world. Her cheery personality, and the way she didn't seem to care about boundaries also made it difficult to keep a straight head.

Of course, with Rey being a lot more in control of his body, he was able to suppress all of his carnal reactions towards her. His outward display did not, in any way, reflect what went on in his head.

And, even though he was captivated by her beauty and... well, proportions... due to her sudden action, he soon got a firm grasp of his thoughts and calmed it all down.

'Still...' Rey felt her poking his body with her fingers. '... I'm not the only one that finds this weird, right?'

Lucielle poked his arm, chest, back, cheek, leg, and forehead—almost as if she was examining his body in every way.

"Amazing! This is... you are...!"

It finally got to a point where Rey couldn't take it anymore, so he lifted both hands and held her from both sides of her shoulders.

"Relax, Lucielle." He mumbled, still finding it a bit strange that she was staring at him so intensely.

Since Rey was average, he hardly got the attention of pretty girls—especially back on Earth. Even upon arriving in this world and forging connections with many ladies who were top-tier in their own right, none of them ever looked at him the way Lucielle was.

'She's too close. And those eyes... just what is going on in her mind?' In all honesty, it seemed Lucielle had more perverted thoughts than he did, merely based on how she was behaving.

That was weird, considering how little he had interacted with Lucielle since coming to H'Trae.

Other than Magic Training, which he did his best to remain lowkey in, he never really spoke to her directly. Well, he had some interactions with her as Ralyks, but even then... they were somewhat distant.

'So what's with this change in personality? And also...' Rey realized it once he held Lucielle in place, but he was surprised that he didn't notice it a lot sooner.

'... I've gotten pretty tall, haven't I?'

His well-built arms were arched nicely, and Lucielle's arms seemed small in his firm grip. Her slender frame, save for her chest and backside, seemed much smaller to Rey than he remembered.

That only made sense if Rey had somehow hit a growth spurt while being asleep.

'I remember she was much taller than me before. But now...' A small smile formed on his face as his head was bent a little slightly to look at the Grand Mage.

"Why are you looking at me like that? It's a bit creepy." The moment Lucielle said this, Rey snapped back to reality and swiftly let go of her arms. Thankfully, she didn't move much after that.

"I should be the one saying that." He let out a sigh, intentionally taking a few steps back from Lucielle. Casting a quick sideways glance at Alicia, he felt a wave of shame permeate his entire body. It seemed to him that he somehow desecrated her room.

"In any case... It's nice to see you all again." Rey did his best to smile as he switched his attention from Lucielle to the others.

He could still see her clearly, and she was still staring at him intently, but he ignored her.

Right now... he had bigger things to worry about.

"Apologies on Lucielle's behalf." The first to speak was Brutus, and he took a few steps forward as he did so.

"She's the kind of person who goes crazy when she discovers someone or something strong. That someone being you in this case."

Brutus' words reminded Rey that everyone in the room now knew his secret: that he was secretly the strongest person in the kingdom.

He was Ralyks. He defeated Dragons, helped the Otherworlders in the Royal Dungeon, and defeated the Divine Beast that would have laid everything to waste otherwise.

Not only had he been hiding his strength this whole time, but he purposefully made himself seem like the weakest of the group when the opposite was actually true.

"You were amazing back then, Rey! I've never seen anything like what you did!" Once again, Lucielle's voice buzzed in his ears.

"Hey, could we have a private discussion later? I want to..."

She kept on speaking, but Rey zoned out of everything she was saying completely. Lucielle seemed to have a burning passion for Magic and powerful things.

'It explains why she was closest to Adonis during training. Now that I'm the strongest, it seems her interest has shifted to me...' Rey shook his head internally.

'Sorry, but I'm not interested in having the talk.'

Rey couldn't say it to her face, though, so he simply said nothing and instead turned to the three others who still stood at the door's entrance and watched him keenly.

"Hey, guys... please say something."

Justin, Clark and Belle. Rey wasn't close to any of these people, but they were still his classmates.

The three were allies with him, and he had intentionally kept his identity hidden from them. Not only that, but he actively lied to them about some details about himself—like how he felt weak and powerless compared to them—just so he could maintain his facade.

They all had their perspectives regarding him, and it wasn't until the rude revelation that that perception was shattered.

Personally, Rey still didn't think he should have told them his identity from the start.

Even now, after thinking very clearly about all that happened, he wasn't sure he could have ever trusted everyone enough to reveal his identity—not after the treatment he received, and his perception of them.

'But...' Rey's thoughts trailed as he sighed, waiting for a response—any response—from them.

'... The consequences of my silence is something I deeply regret.'