

# Extras 561

## Chapter 561 Reactions [Pt 2]

Looking at the five, they all had training attire on.

Brutus wore light armor, the age and luster of his equipment pretty glaring to an observant eye. Justin and Clark wore similar-looking armor, with the former's looking a lot lighter, while the latter had more bulk to it.

Belle and Lucielle had some Enchanted Items on them, and Belle still had a book in her hand, which made it clear they were most likely practicing Spells. While Belle had the attire similar to a student, Lucielle wore a Mage's cape, with her inner attire being a loose white shirt and long trousers.

Based on everything about their appearance, coupled with the slight looks of exhaustion on the faces of the three Otherworlders, it was easy to deduce that they were just finished with training.

Justin and Clark were with Brutus, while Belle was with Lucielle. They rendezvoused and decided to visit Alicia's room together.

~They come here every day, Master. Ever since she fell asleep and was admitted here.~

The moment Rey heard those words in his head, he felt a little startled and also slightly suspicious.

'Ater, you... did you know they would come here at this time, yet you didn't tell me beforehand?'

Rey's initial plan was to approach them after properly organizing his thoughts. However, that didn't mean he was actively avoiding them.

After all, once he sensed their presence approaching the room, he had more than enough time to leave. They wouldn't have spotted him at all.

But... he didn't.

Perhaps that was because, deep down, he just wanted to get things over with. He didn't want to run anymore, and he simply wanted to see how they would react to him after all this time.

And now... '... It's the moment of truth, I guess.'

Rey watched as the three finally got over their shock and looked at one other. They nodded, clearly in agreement on something.

Then—

'Here it comes!'

—They finally stepped forward, entering the room while walking towards Rey.

They had serious expressions on their faces; a sharp contrast to the jolly reaction that Lucielle opened up with. Brutus had a fairly neutral expression on his face, and after apologizing for Lucielle's behavior and dragging her away from Rey, he was silent.

Rey was grateful for Brutus getting the Grand Mage away from him, and also for his non-judgmental gaze. His warrior-like aura remained the same, and while he had a stern demeanor, there

was no anger or malice in his eyes. He simply stood in a corner, his hand tightly holding onto his colleague so she wouldn't interrupt Rey's interaction with his classmates.

They hadn't seen each other in nearly three months, after all.

'According to what Ater told me, he didn't allow me to have any visitors during my coma. It was for my safety, so I can't particularly get upset at him...'

Once Rey was done making this thought, his classmates were already right in front of him already.

He was already taller than Belle, and about the same height as Justin. However, Clark still remained the biggest in the group.

The resolute faces on their faces slowly began to break as Rey watched them part their lips. Everything seemed to slow down, and he prepared his heart for whatever he would hear.

"Thank you for saving our lives, Rey." Clark spoke up first, his calm tone completely surprising Rey.

He never expected that kind of response.

Not from them!

"Yeah man... we would have been toast if you didn't come when you did. Thanks..." Justin proceeded with his own words, a whimsical smile on his face.

Once again, Rey found this to be odd.

'Ater, did you mess with the minds of my classmates? Why are they being so nice to me?' He swiftly sent a message to the Familiar who stood a distance from him and watched everything unravel in silence.

~Master... of course not! You already told me not to.~

Rey knew Ater was telling the truth, but that only made the situation all the more unbelievable.

'Why are they saying this? Eric and Billy died because of my negligence. Adonis left... Alicia is in her current state... and thousands of people are dead.'

It was only human nature to seek who to blame for such a misfortune.

The Dragons were the obvious targets for the anger and scorn of the humans, but for his classmates, Rey knew they would find it easier to fault him.

He lied to them. He made them risk their lives. His carelessness caused so much tragedy.

~If I may, Master...~

Ater's words echoed in his mind, just as Rey was about to listen to Belle's words.

~... For every life that was lost due to your supposed carelessness, several more were saved from your actions.~

"You could have chosen to escape without us. You got hurt so badly... and yet..." Belle's eyes were surprisingly teary as she spoke.

Rey had never seen her this emotional. He probably didn't even know she was capable of such feelings.

"... You fought for us and saved us."

'Well... not really. I was practically fighting for my life for most of the battle.' Rey thought to himself.

Belle wasn't strictly wrong, though. If Rey wanted, he could have indeed abandoned the Capital completely to save himself.

But...

'That would mean abandoning Alicia...' He clenched his fist and felt his heart tighten a little.

There were over a hundred thousand people living in the Capital. Rey was no saint, but he understood enough about life to understand that he couldn't just let them die.

... Especially when he could save them.

'By the time I realized I was no match for that Beast, I couldn't even escape any longer. It was after my life.'

Rey could now understand why his classmates were going easy on him despite how hard he messed up.

'I fought tooth and nail to protect the city and them. How could they blame their savior who risked it all, and entered a two month coma to protect them?'

They would be the assholes if they did that.

In a way, it was convenient for Belle and the rest to believe their side of the story.

But...

"No, you're wrong. It's not what you think at all."

... Rey was not satisfied. He couldn't be satisfied with the way things were going.

"I didn't trust you all, which is why I didn't say anything about my abilities. Even when I finally decided to say something, I postponed it, thinking it wasn't necessary."

Then, when it became a necessity for him to reveal his true identity, it suddenly became complicated—an action that would probably make some of them dislike him.

"The same people I previously thought of as inconsequential suddenly began to matter to me. I previously didn't care what you thought of me, which was why I decided to remain weak in your eyes..." Rey clenched his fists as he looked at them.

"But after getting to know you all more, both from the perspective of Rey and Ralyks, I guess that changed."

He became acknowledged by them in both regards, and he also acknowledged them.

"That's what made it so hard..."

But what did all of that matter now? People were dead, and everyone had to find out in the worst possible way.

Yet... YET...!

"Rey... we're sorry for everything."

... Why was no one blaming him?

## **Chapter 562 Consensus**

Rey didn't know this, but after the calamity that befell the Capital, his classmates had a meeting.

It was just between the five of them—Adonis, Trisha, Belle, Justin, and Clark.

They discussed many things; including their powerlessness against the enemies and how they felt regarding that.

Adonis apologized for his gross error and his terribly flawed plan that cost the lives of two of their classmates and ended up cursing the third.

Of course, the rest did their best to dissuade him from blaming himself, but they could see how the guilt ate at him.

They could also guess how much guilt Rey had to be carrying.

Many were tempted to ask why his supposed clone didn't do more to help in the situation, or why Rey wasn't alerted of the problem, or why he didn't arrive sooner.

But, no one gave in to that temptation.

All they knew was this... "It's our fault that Rey decided to keep his identity hidden."

A lot of things made sense now. The fact that, even though he was among the first to choose a Class and Skills, he ended up with such a meager sum, and also how that corroborated with how most people perceived him.

Karma was measured by the perception of others.

The mere fact that no one questioned how he got such a basic Skill and a poor Class meant they all—for the most part—didn't have good impressions of him.

They didn't like him; at least, not at first. It wasn't like they made their position on him a secret either. Justin was among those who laughed at Rey when he showed his pathetic Class and Skills, and a few members of the group couldn't deny feeling envious when Rey was chosen alongside Alicia and Adonis to have the first pick.

All of these factors culminated into the distrusting nature that now formed within him.

In no way were they justifying his lies and deceit, but who was really in a position to talk?

They all had things to hide.

Belle had her secrets. Adonis had his own. Justin did as well. Clark and Trisha were no different.

Whether they were insecurities, hidden motives, goals, or overall personality traits—everyone was keeping something in.

"Even though he hid his power from us, we can't deny the good he did."

When critically examining Rey and his actions, it was clear that he meant no harm. Even though most of his classmates didn't really care for him, he still looked out for them.

As Ralyks, he made them a lot stronger than they would have been.

He gave the Alliance all the spoils and glory, and he constantly helped them in one way or the other. They would be fools to throw stones and blame him.

Rey clearly cared about them and the Alliance. But, the honest truth they all recognized was... they didn't care about him.

At least, not enough.

His actions when facing the Divine Beast was irrefutable evidence for his position.

Over and over again, he suffered. They couldn't even lift a finger to help, yet even though he should have died—or at least been severely injured—he didn't stop fighting.

Rey Skylar was a liar and deceiver... but he was also a Hero.

That was all.

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It took a lot of convincing.

There were even hints of emotion here and there, most especially from Belle.

On one end, Rey kept blaming himself for the tragedy that struck. It surprised everyone else how much he cared about them and what his actions caused.

Perhaps that was what fueled their resolve even more to apologize to him for their earlier actions and perceptions of him.

"Rey, I'm sorry for making fun of you."

"Sorry for ignoring you when you were clearly in need of a friend."

"Sorry for... well... you know."

Justin, Clark, and Belle all apologized to him with their heads down, which downright flustered Rey.

Still, he showed no such reaction on his face, and he simply suppressed all the bubbling feelings that were rising from his chest.

Usually, most people would enjoy moments like this. They would savor the sight of the very people who looked down on him finally acknowledging their wrongs and swallowing their words.

But Rey felt no satisfaction.

He was too busy suppressing his emotions to feed his own ego.

"You guys..." He smiled at them, drawing closer to the three. "... Thank you."

Before he realized it, all four of them were in a group embrace. Rey had seen a lot of things that had desensitized him from most events. He had killed several people, witnessed unimaginable pain, and even died twice. He had seen the wickedness of man, and he had involved himself in abominable acts.

Even through it all, he was still a teenager.

While his emotions were in check, so they didn't overflow, he could still feel vestiges of it dancing in his heart.

Relief... and gratitude.

'They understand why... I didn't expect that.'

After he first saw his Karma, and then witnessed how everyone treated him, he had a negative view on his classmates—no, people in general.

Even before then, he already saw the signs, but the experience definitely decided it for him.

But, when moments like this surfaced, he couldn't help but think he was wrong.

'Maybe... I was a bit too quick to judge.'

Just as he was able to form bonds with Alicia, get along with Trisha, and still understand Adonis... perhaps he could have gotten a lot closer to the rest of his classmates.

'I'm not sure I could have befriended everyone, but... maybe Eric wouldn't have been a bad choice.'

It was too late for that now, though.

'I can only think of the possibilities.' A sad smile coursed through his face as he closed his eyes.

The warmth of his classmates—no, friends—kept him company.

Rey could see everything around him. He could see Ater's proud smile, Brutus' satisfied nod, and Lucielle's overenthusiastic grin.

Something told him that if Brutus let go of her, she would also join in the hug.

'A lot of people have died, but many more are still here. I can still help them, protect them... save them.'

Something rose within his heart—a desire that permeated his whole body.

'I won't give up so easily anymore.' Rey's focus shifted to Alicia and he nodded within himself.

There was a lot he remained unsure of, but one thing was an irrefutable constant.

'I won't give up on you too!'

## Chapter 563 Conversation Among Friends

[Moments Later]

The group switched locations from Alicia's room to a private suite—the new residence of the Otherworlders.

As one would expect from the heroes that were now officially recognized by the Alliance and all of its citizens, it was pristinely designed and spacious.

It had a base color of silver-white, with gold linings and purple fabric as designs. There were murals and structural choices that made the entire area pop out more. A glowing chandelier hung high on the ceiling, and a constant aura of royalty oozed in the space beneath it.

Just as in their previous living quarters, there was a common parlor, with each Otherworlder having their rooms.

Rey was shown his room, and it was at least three times bigger than what he previously had. He had to ask if this was how everyone's room was, and they all shook their heads.

"Mister Ater refused to place you on the same level as everyone, so he personally took responsibility for your room."

"I... see..."

Rey couldn't really complain about the room, though.

Not only did it have the kind of bed he always desired, but the fragrance within the space was so good that he felt like he was floating just from taking a whiff. The minimalist design, study desk, and mini-library that were positioned appropriately there were also sublime.

It seemed Ater truly understood his tastes and made sure his room reflected that.

As such, despite the uncomfortable idea of his room being much larger than his friends', Rey couldn't say anything bad about it.

It was perfect for him.

'No one seems to be complaining about it, so... I guess it's cool...' He thought to himself in silence.

He could always blame the decision on Ater while enjoying all the benefits his space had to offer.

'Though, I'm still interested in turning that Grand Calamity Class Dungeon into my fortress.

It would just take quite the makeover to convert it into a suitable place for him, but the idea still lingered in his mind.

After he was shown around his room, and the entire premises in general, Lucielle and Brutus had to take their leave in order to inform the Royal Council of Rey's revival, as well as organize an official meeting between the Otherworlders and the Alliance's upper echelon.

Once they left, Rey and his three friends-along with Ater- decided to settle in the parlor and have a casual discussion.

Despite all of them having their proper seats, Ater stood behind Rey's sofa; almost like a well-trained guard who meant business.

Even after he was prompted to loosen up, Ater still didn't sit with anyone. Instead, he sat in the air, right by his Master's side. Thankfully, he didn't have a scary expression on his face, so neither Clark, Justin, nor Belle could get intimidated.

... Or so one would think.

"They keep staring at Ater in a cautious manner-especially Clark and Justin. Just what did this guy do to them?" Rey wondered to himself.

He couldn't have them being so stiff around him too, all things considered. Not only was he more powerful than them, but his Familiar also seemed to strike fear into their hearts.

All of a sudden, it felt like Rey was being subconsciously ostracized by his mates.

Thankfully, that didn't last very long.

"You know, we tried to see you, but... well, HE wouldn't let us."

Justin's words contained a hint of annoyance as he spoke, but it was suppressed by the playful manner that he was known to indulge in.

This did a lot to break the tension, and the wheels began to turn from there onward.

Clark sighed and nodded in agreement to Justin's words, but Belle flared up the moment she understood what was being implied.

"S-Sir Ater was just trying to protect Rey! Besides, we were busy with our training and the revival of the city. It was for the best!"

Almost everyone sighed the moment they heard Belle's reply, but it wasn't like she cared for their perception of her.

There was only one person she stared at once she was done speaking.

"Thank you, Belle. Indeed, it was all for my Master's sake."

The moment Ater rendered words of thanks, even going as far as flashing her his smile, her face turned beet red and she quickly hid it in both of her palms.

Once again, almost everyone sighed.

It had become pretty clear that Belle was crushing hard on Ater. At first, they weren't really sure that was the case, but after observing their interactions for the past couple of months, it was obvious. 2

Ater didn't seem particularly interested, neither did he seem to be encouraging her feelings. However, he wasn't actively discouraging it either.

As a result, it appeared to be a one-sided infatuation.

"Well... it's probably for the best that you didn't see me until I woke. I was... ahem, not decently dressed." Rey coughed, remembering how purely naked he was when he first woke up.

He couldn't even imagine everyone seeing him in such a state.

"Oh... you know we've seen you naked already, right?"

'E-eh?' Rey's eyes nearly bulged the moment he heard those words from Justin.

"Yeah... back when you fought that thing. You... well, you were naked after you were first killed..."

'Oh fuck...'

Justin addressed it with levity, while Clark seemed a bit bashful when speaking about it. But what about Belle? What did she think?

"Don't look at me. I looked away before seeing anything like that." She responded, swiftly returning her gaze to Ater.

Despite her provocative appearance, it seemed Belle was a lot purer than one would expect. Perhaps it was simply because she didn't want to sully her eyes with the nakedness of another person.

One could only wonder what she would have done if it was Ater that was stripped naked.



Well, she must have wondered it, considering the fact that her face turned even redder and she shook her head violently despite not being asked anything.

As she did this, and the others ignored her, Rey felt himself trying his hardest to suppress his emotions of mortification.

'If everyone saw... does that include Alicia?'

He struggled to come to terms with it, but he had to—at the very least, for his sake.

Rey already knew he was average down there. No matter how toned his muscles were, and how in-shape he was in general, he still hadn't been able to get rid of his average face and average 'equipment'.

He knew he couldn't be greedy; after all, he already had so much power—far more than anyone he knew.

It would perhaps be too much to ask for if he also desired a pretty face and a large tool. Still, the idea of Alicia seeing his... his...

'Argh... I can't deal with this!' He locked those thoughts in a vault somewhere, and right as he did so, he remembered something.

'Trisha and Lucielle were also present. Oh damn...'

He also chose to lock those into his mental vault. He couldn't have them as intrusive thoughts at such a moment of his life.

'Let's change topics, please! His entire being pleaded as he stared at his friends.

'Anything but my nakedness!'

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## **Chapter 564 Learning New Things**

They talked about a lot of things that day—going on and on for hours without end.

The conversation trailed until nighttime, and the group was still engaging in interesting discourse. Talks on training, their experience working with—or rather, for—Ater, helping out in the recovery efforts of the city, and their thoughts on the upcoming march to the front lines.

It was a very stacked discussion to be had.

"Apparently, the Dragons have slowly been increasing their forces in the Front Lines, so it's best we return before anything serious happens." Clark said with a calm tone.

Rey didn't know whether it was just his imagination, or the boy was looking a lot calmer than he remembered. 'Is Brutus rubbing off on him or what?' He couldn't help but think.

Justin was still the same: cracking jokes—sometimes inappropriate ones—but all in all, being a pleasant person to be around.

Belle spoke sparingly, especially regarding her training with Lucielle.

"That woman is tough when it comes to training. Don't let her cheerful demeanor fool you!" That was Belle's verdict.

Apparently, Lucielle was incredibly strict when it came to the practice of Magic, which was why she never really had a direct disciple. She did help train and guide very talented Mages, but none was close enough to have an intimate 'Master and Apprentice' relationship with her.

Belle was chosen because she had an A-Tier Class—same as Lucielle—and her power as an Otherworlder could not be ignored.

In all likelihood, she would even surpass the Grand Mage at some point.

"But it seems I still have a lot to learn about Magic. Either way... I'm a lot stronger than I was before!" Belle concluded with a beam.

The girl didn't realize it yet, but her cheery attitude—especially the smile—was awfully similar to Lucielle's. Anyone would agree that they suited each other perfectly.

"Funny how Sir Brutus is a lot more considerate than he looks." Justin laughed heartily.

"Right?" Clark agreed with him.

For over two months, they had trained and studied—even without Adonis' encouragement and presence.

When Rey asked them why they still stayed and chose to work hard despite every reason not to, they all had their unique responses.

"I want to help the people around me. To do that, I must become strong."

"Those Dragons took Eric's life. I'd be an awful friend if I didn't try my best to at least avenge him by finishing what he started."

"I guess... I just want to see how far I can go. I have this power, right? It would be a waste not to use it."

Clark, Justin, and Belle all had their reasons for moving forward. Trisha and Adonis must have also had theirs, but it was a shame that they weren't present.

"You should definitely visit Trisha if you can. Out of all of us, she seemed the most devastated after seeing your hidden power."

Rey smiled as he heard those words.

'I had a feeling...' Trisha had always sort of shared a level of camaraderie with Rey, considering how—despite the both of them being weaker than those at the top—they strived to improve and grow stronger by hard work.

'She must have felt betrayed that I was only lying to her. I made it seem like she could become very strong if she just worked harder despite me already being a lot stronger than I let on...'

According to what he was told, Trisha left for the Adventurers City only a few days ago, so by this time she was probably just settling in there.

'It's better I let things settle for a while before seeing her. Perhaps tomorrow...'

Inevitably, they also discussed their opinions on the letter Adonis left before he departed from the team. Based on the reactions of everyone present, they still seemed slightly upset that he would leave without at least saying it to their faces.

"I mean... I know Adonis was the one who carried us through most of the fights, and he must have a lot weighing on him, but it's like he always told us: We are a team!" Justin sighed, shaking his head.

It was rare to see Justin upset, but he clearly felt betrayed by Adonis' actions.

"Eric sacrificed himself because he believed in Adonis. He believed in sticking together as friends and saving the world as its champions. Even Billy... "

These were all ideals that the Hero had imparted in all of them. But now that they had fully accepted their responsibility... where was he?

Where was Adonis?

"He probably has a plan in mind... but I just feel like he didn't trust us enough to divulge it to us. Maybe he didn't want to burden us any longer..."

Clark felt more disappointed in himself than Adonis; almost as if he was blaming himself for the departure of the Hero.

"Burden us any longer? Dude... what do you think he did by leaving us in a damaged city? He literally left the Capital for us to take care of while he went somewhere no one knows." Justin replied, clearly annoyed by Clark's interpretation of the whole thing.

"He did tell us in the letter not to bother or struggle any longer, and that he would take care of everything from this point on."

"Well, he can kiss my ass." "Dude..."

"What? My ass is clean, so it's fine... probably."

Once again, the tense atmosphere went back into a more lighthearted haven.

Rey engaged in a few more shared ideas here and there, until finally he couldn't hold back his curiosity any longer.

He had to ask...

"Why are none of you asking about my Skills or Class? I thought you'd be curious."

The truth is, he had been expecting that question for a while now. He even prepared a response which would be something like:

"It's not something I can divulge at the moment. But, yeah... I'm very strong."

Rey didn't particularly mind telling his classmates what he could do, but there was one major reason why he avoided doing so.

It was a reason he had decided to suspend for the present moment.

"Well... personally, I am curious, but I don't want to push you to say it or make you uncomfortable." Justin said with a slight chuckle.

"Yeah, same here."

"I guess it's the same here. Besides, Sir Ater already told us not to make you uncomfortable and pester you when you finally woke up."

Once Rey heard the response from his classmates—no, his friends—he nodded and smiled even more.

"Thanks guys..."

It seemed his prepared response was not needed, after all.

"... I mean it."

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[Moments Later]

Rey was in his room, laid upon his bed, while Ater floated beside him.

He was deep in thought, and since this was clear, there was perfect decorum in the wide expanse that surrounded him.

Ater said nothing, simply watching as his Master brooded on the thought that echoed in his mind.

"Hey, Ater... how long have you known?" Rey finally spoke up, his voice a mere whisper as it floated in the air.

"Since I first laid my eyes on him." "...." Rey fell silent for a moment. He was initially shocked by the discovery, but thankfully none of this showed thanks to his mastery over his outward display.

Despite the suddenness of it all, he acted like nothing had just happened.

'It certainly explains a lot of things, but... I still don't get it.' Rey rose to his feet and stared blankly into the air.

'Justin is working for Adrien.'

[STATUS WINDOW] - Name: Justin Baker

- Race: Undead (Otherworlder)

- Class: Ghost Assassin (A-Tier)

- Level: 120 (64.90% EXP) - Life Force: 300 (+150) {1,000}

- Mana Level: 200 (+100) {500}

- Combat Ability: 100 (+50) {500}

- Stat Points: 0 - Skills (Exclusive): [Mimic]. [Marionette]. [Stealth]. [Sleep]. [Voice Mimic]. [High Perception]. - Skills (Non-Exclusive): [Dash]. [SideStep]. [Ghost Mode]. [Greater Regeneration]. [Greater Mana Recovery]. [Mind Transfer]

- Alignment: Chaotic Neutral

[Additional Information]

A former human who became an Undead and servant of a Necromancer. His will to live is strong, and while he is on the side of good... evil is not out of the question to achieve his goals.

[End Of Information]

"I don't know why I didn't see it until now..." Rey mumbled, recollecting the Status Window that stood in front of Justin's face when he Appraised all three of his 'friends.'

He was just curious—interested in seeing how far they had advanced over the course of training for over two months.

The other two had pretty standard ones, but... Justin had two Status Windows.

One was the type that Rey had always seen—the one where he was still a human, with less Levels, Stats, and overall information.

But the second one was completely different.

It was the true Justin.

"How long do you think he has been working for Adrien?" Rey asked, even though he already had his suspicions.

The moment Ater responded, though, he could no longer deny it.

"If I were to guess... I'd say it was from the very beginning."

## **Chapter 565 Council Summit [Pt 1]**

[The Next Day]

The hallway of the Royal Council looked exquisite as always.

Its polished floors, extravagant designs, and pristine scenery never dulled for the two months that Rey spent in his coma.

There seemed to be quite a few changes to the design of the place, and that was because the battle with Dagon had destroyed a portion of the main building. Still, rather than being a cause for degradation, the redesign worked in favor of the overall aesthetics of the palace.

As Rey and his friends strolled into the inner sanctum, he recognized that there were a lot more security officers than usual, and once he asked, his questions were answered very swiftly.

"Some influential figures are going to be present in today's meeting, so this is a culmination of their guards and ours." The one who did the honors of replying to him was Lucielle, and she did it ever so eagerly.

He smiled and thanked her, hoping she wouldn't use the opportunity to try what she did the previous day.

Thankfully, she did not.

"You're welcome. Once we get inside, I'll take my place beside the Councilors. Brutus is already waiting inside, since I offered to get you all myself."

Right now, Lucielle was leading the charge of Rey, Belle, Clark, and Justin. Ater said he was busy with other businesses, so he excused himself.

As such, the Grand Mage was the only adult in the group—at least, by Earth's standards.

"How kind of you..." Rey mumbled, his guard raised once again.

"Is she trying to get closer to me again? She must really want us to have that conversation, huh?"

"It's no problem. If it wasn't me, it would have been Brutus. I just don't like staying in that stifling place with those old nobles and so-called important men of the Alliance."

Her gaze trailed from him to the rest of the Otherworlders, and she kept on speaking. "They were once nobles of the Kingdoms before the war, and since they still hold sizable influence and wealth--plus, they make contributions to the cause--they are recognized by the Alliance."

In essence, appropriate respect was accorded to them despite them not being directly in control of the Alliance.

"If they're so important, why can't they be selected as members of the Royal Council. Last I checked, there were three vacant seats." Rey asked, once again diverting her gaze to him.

"Oh that..." She smiled and shrugged. "Most of them aren't interested in the position, since they would rather live in the South, where it's safe. They're fine with the recognition they get from the contributions they make."

"And what of the ones who are interested in the position?"

"They're incompetent buffoons." Lucielle chuckled. "I'm sure one of you could make better leaders than them."

Some nobles had no experience ruling anything. They were born into wealth, and so they simply flaunted their heritage and desired more power. Unknown to them, being a member of the Royal Council often meant sacrificing all the benefits gained for the sake of the Alliance.

It was why the now deceased members engaged in Criminal Activities in order to attain wealth. There was hardly any legitimate means to get rich, since the Alliance itself still required a lot to sustain itself.

"Those fools don't understand that. Well, it doesn't really matter. They won't be getting their hands on the seats anyway."

Lucielle's brash attitude as she referred to the aristocrats made Rey a little amazed. He looked at the other three and found similar expressions on their faces.

"Don't you think you're being a bit... I don't know... disrespectful towards the important men of the Alliance?" He asked with a slight smile on his face.

"What are they going to do against the Grand Mage? They need me more than I need them. Plus... they couldn't touch a hair on my body unless I permitted it."

Her response, coupled with the confident way she spoke, made Rey's smile grow broader on his face.

"You can relate, can't you? I saw and heard of how you related to everyone as Ralyks." Her gaze narrowed on Rey, with the crimson glow in it gleaming with suppressed excitement.

"When you're absurdly strong. Stronger than anyone else... there's a lot you can get away with."

Lucielle stopped walking, and so did Rey. The rest also followed suit, but they all looked at the two who kept staring at each other with complicated expressions on their faces.

"Wouldn't you agree, Rey Skylar?"

He narrowed his eye as he heard her call him by his full name. He disliked it when people did that, but somehow... her words did not irk him.

He smiled when he realized why, shrugging as he answered her question.

"I agree."

Lucielle wasn't wrong. Being unfathomably strong had a lot of perks. They both recognized that aspect of themselves well.

But...

"Why don't you simply get more then? More power, money, or whatever you desire? If you're strong enough, why are you satisfied being the Grand Mage of the Alliance, working for weaker people, when you could be so much better?"

Lucielle was very young compared to practically everyone else in positions of power. It was probably because someone of her caliber couldn't work under those less competent than she was.

'Yet she works under the Royal Council and fights humanity's wars as her duty...'

Rey also did the same, even when he was Ralyks, but he did things on his own terms. However, for Lucielle, she followed the orders of the Council and was pretty much subject to the power that be.

"Duty is something I like to associate with power. If I'm this strong, I should at least help people out, right?" She shrugged in response.

"But who is there to enforce that duty on you? If you choose not to perform it, who can really fault you or stop you?"

"Me."

"Hmm?"

"If I'm strong enough to decide to abandon that duty, I'm also strong enough to accept it. In the end, I decide what I want to do."

Rey's smile broadened as he heard this. He could see her lips also curling upward.

"Besides... my duties have nothing to do with my desires. There are things I want, but they aren't more money or more authority. I already have enough of that, honestly..."

Upon hearing this, Rey felt his interest piqued.

"So what do you want? And why haven't you gotten it?"

"Well, let's just say the things I want aren't in my reach at the moment. As for why I haven't gotten what I want at the moment..." A broader smile formed on her face as she stared keenly at Rey.

"... The guy that has it is much stronger than I am."

Lucielle gave him a wink and then continued her march forward. Before Rey could properly assimilate her full intent, she raised her hand and signaled everyone to keep up the pace.

"We don't want to keep those oldies waiting, do we?" She chuckled, laughing out loud as her hair swayed from side to side.

'This woman...' Rey found himself chuckling internally, shaking his head as he advanced.

'... She really knows how to drive home the point.'

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## Chapter 566 Council Summit [Pt 2]

"Now presenting the esteemed Otherworlders to this honorable Council."

The double door was opened wide, revealing the five who stood behind its sturdy and gleaming frame.

Lucielle still stood at the forefront of the students, but with a single flash of Magic, she was instantly transported to her position beside the seats of the Councilors--with Brutus being on the other extreme end.

There were five seats on the elevated platform, but only two were filled by Grandmaster Conrad and Councilor Vida. They looked ever so regal, clad in outfits that oozed authority and wealth, and with bright expressions on their fresh faces.

The designs around the elevated platform also resounded with privilege and power, with red curtains that popped out, and golden structures that gleamed under the bright lights offered by the chandeliers.

All in all, nothing much had changed when it came to an audience with the Royal Council.

Well, other than a few things of note.

'For one... this crowd.' Rey thought to himself as he looked around him.

On slightly elevated platforms--though not as high as the Councilor's--were a crowd of people. They occupied both left and right of the open space, with their sophisticated attires varying from one another--reflecting their high status.

They all looked healthy and wealthy, and they stared at the emerging Otherworlders with fascination. Some had bellies that overflowed, while others seemed to be dressed too extravagantly.

They even had Enchanted Items on--most likely for safety--and it wasn't hard to see why.

'All of them look like they haven't seen a bit of hardship since the day they were born.'

Rey didn't particularly have a negative impression on all of them, but his opinion of their kind wasn't positive either.

'A lot of Scylla's customers were nobles, after all. Sure, they've been culled already, but something about these people with power doesn't sit right with me.'

Rather than properly help out with their full resources and personnel, these people preferred to remain in the South--where it was mostly safe. They also gained authority for contributing to the cause of the Alliance, as if that was something 'special.'

'They're forgetting that without those contributions, the Alliance is under a greater likelihood of falling. Once that happens, all their assets will be meaningless and even their lives will be forfeit.'

Once anyone recognized that, they would cease being entitled.

'It's possible they recognize this, but they're simply capitalizing on the desperation of the Alliance. After all, I don't think it hurts very much to have them live out their lives in the South.'

No... that wasn't right.



Rey knew how detrimental the existence of these nobles were, and how they contributed to the currently lopsided economy of the Alliance.

'A noble is entitled a right to land in any region he desires. It's no surprise they all choose the South, where things are safer.'

Since they had the resources as well as the irrevocable right to land, these nobles ended up obtaining large parcels of land for their estate, which meant less property for the public.

Due to their presence there, certain percentages of resources had to be allocated to them. Plus, higher rates of taxes and levies were inevitably issued to the regions they occupied--areas where regular folk also occupied.

With land, as well as other resources growing ever so scarce, life in the South was practically unbearable for the common man.

'The good news is that some nobles end up splurging all their resources, and if they do not meet the quota of their contributions to the Alliance, they are stripped of their title. Still...' Rey cast one more glance at the people who stared at him with particular interest.

'... It sort of leaves a bad taste in my mouth.'

Rey was all for freedom and liberty. It was alright for people to pursue personal interests if that was what they sought. However, if a person assumed a position of authority—like a king, noble, or soldier—they had to follow the duties those positions held.

'That's why I chose to identify as a mercenary as Ralyks. Lucielle seems to understand this perfectly, which is why she is performing her role as Grand Mage to her utmost despite having the power to refuse.'

A noble's primary duty was to the people in their territory. Of course, with the advent of the Alliance, power was centralized in the Council, with nobles having near zero authority in the decisions and action of the Nation.

However, it was practically impossible for the Royal Council to govern everything and everyone in their vast territories, so nobles were inevitably to be chosen for important roles in the grand scheme of things.

'The fact that the Underworld was able to expand so much in barely a decade shows what a wonderful job they were doing.'

Just as with the Royal Council, some nobles were complicit in the affairs of the Black Market, Slave Union, and Mercenary Gang. The severe offenders were punished with death, while those who were just conspirators or participants were stripped of their title and were either imprisoned or let off—depending on the severity of their involvement.

'I suspect some of those involved were able to escape scrutiny, since they were able to remove any link that connected them to the Underworld.' Rey let out a silent sigh and shrugged.

'Ater took over that investigation, so I'll just leave everything to him.'

"Yo bro... they're all staring at you." Rey felt a slight elbow jab on him and he slightly glanced at the one who did it. "You're like a celebrity now, you know?"

The playful smile Justin gave almost made it seem like a mistake Rey made the previous night, but he knew full well not to judge people based on external depictions.

"I guess so. Haha...." He chuckled, slightly nudging him back.

'I'll stick to the plan and make sure none of my suspicions or discoveries show from my interactions with him.'

With that, Rey cast his gaze forward and took a couple more steps forward until he and the others stopped at the appropriate position before the Council.

There was no need to bow, so they simply stood still.

'Ater will handle the rest.'

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### **Chapter 567 Council Summit [Pt 3]**

"Greetings, esteemed Otherworlders!"

Conrad stood to his feet and moved towards the edge of the barricaded platform, all so he could get as close to the four who stood before him.

He had a bright smile on his face, and as his blonde hair swayed, his neatly trimmed beard seemed to twitch slightly. His eyes reflected joy—no, relief—at the presence of the Otherworlders, especially the one who was the center of attention.

"We welcome you to our summit." He continued, ensuring his tone was both audacious and respectful.

Going as far as bowing his head before them, he concluded his opening greeting. "Thank you for coming."

Vida was also standing in front of her seat, and she followed his cue and bowed the moment he did so. Once the other nobles saw this, they knew they had to follow suit.

'Arrogant fools. They have no idea who they're dealing with...' Conrad sighed, nearly shaking his head as he spotted many among the nobles who displayed reluctance when lowering their heads.

'Still, incompetent ones like them have their uses.'

Sadly, the Alliance still had much use for the contributions of nobles, hence the reason why the entire system hadn't yet been abolished. It was a way to incentivize rich and powerful people to contribute to the Alliance's cause.

That way, even merchants could become nobles if they paid the appropriate price.

'We expended a lot of resources on the rebuilding and compensation efforts, so their influence is needed now more than ever.' Conrad took in a deep breath, letting his thoughts sink in.

Thanks to their growing importance, they even had the gall to refuse coming to the Capital despite the Council inviting them. They gave several excuses, but Conrad knew the primary reason was due to their safety.

'The Capital has been attacked by Dragons twice now. They didn't want to take the risk, so they were going to remain in the South.'

Normally, Conrad would have threatened to strip them of their Noble Status for refusing a direct invitation, acting treasonously against the Alliance, but the current circumstances couldn't allow such a brash action.

'For one, their fears aren't particularly unfounded. The safety of the Capital is indeed questionable. Plus, with their resources being relevant to us now more than ever, it's not really a decision I'm willing to make so hastily.'

The invitation was merely to commemorate the nearly complete reconstruction of the Capital, after all. It was a monumental occasion, after all, considering how quickly they were able to move.

'But, I suppose it's not important enough for them to risk their lives over.'

Despite their refusal to come, here they were—at least ninety percent of them were present, and the remaining ten percent had sent messages prior to this summit that they were simply delayed, but were on their way.

From the way things looked, the Capital Recovery Gala would have full attendance of all the influential figures in the Alliance—nobles included.

'I am still unsure why they had a sudden change of heart, but this is good.' Conrad thought to himself, slowly raising his head.

This was the first time the Otherworlders would be meeting the nobles, and the same also applied vice versa. There were a lot of things that could happen as a result of this interaction, but it all depended on the reaction of the Otherworlders.

'Now then... I can only pray for the best of results.' Conrad thought to himself, waiting for a response from the parties he just addressed.

"What's with the formality, Conrad." Rey suddenly said with an audacious voice. "I thought we were already past that."

'H-huh? Rey, you...!'

Conrad's eyes widened the moment he heard the response from the most important figure among the Otherworlders at the moment.

'I would have gone to see him yesterday, but Vida and I were too swamped dealing with all of these nobles and time passed before we both realized it.'

He hadn't had proper sleep for so long now, and the only reason he looked so fresh was due to Magic. He had to look his best in such a gathering, and it was the same for Vida.

It was the least they could do, after all they were very useless when it came to actually protecting the Capital—or the entire Alliance.

'The Council is no better than the nobles who hide away in the South. While Calamity befell the Capital, we were tucked away into the secret bunker underground.'

Since their only use was the administrative affairs and decisions regarding the United Human Alliance, they had to perform their duties to the maximum.

If that meant groveling before their saviors, he would gladly do that.

There was no room in his heart to be angry at Rey for hiding his power, considering how much help he had rendered to the Alliance on a much larger scale.

'And that servant of his as well... attitude aside, he's beyond phenomenal in his execution.'

It was only due to Ater that they were able to make so much progress in barely three months. His power and insight were otherworldly, to say the least.

The rest of the Otherworlders helped too. Instead of giving up on saving the humans and simply saving their own skin, they all decided to double down and work harder for the sake of helping the Alliance.

'I still have no idea what got into the Hero, or where he went, but I believe he is also doing what he can for us.'

Despite them losing members of their group, their resolve was much stronger than ever.

'Honestly... they are more than deserving of all respect and honor.'

These were Conrad's thoughts, so it caught him by surprise when Rey suddenly acted so familiar with him despite having no reason to.

That said, Conrad was not oblivious to his intentions. As such, he decided to play along.

"W-well, I need to thank you for your services, do I not?" He responded, trying his hardest to sound as casual as possible.

"You know that isn't needed between the two of us. It seems you're doing well, though. You too, Vida. You both look great despite the amount of stress you must be under."

Conrad and Vida chuckled, staring at each other while exchanging meaningful glances.

They both understood what Rey was trying to do.

"Thanks, Rey. You also look pretty neat.."

"Of course! I've been asleep for so long, it's only to be expected." Rey replied with a casual smile.

"You seem to have grown taller too. I almost didn't recognize you."

"Haha! I've been getting that a lot." It was Rey's turn to chuckle, now taking an extra step forward.

"Still, I must say... it's good to be back."

'Thank you for this, Rey!' Conrad's eyes beamed with gratitude as he looked at the boy's charismatic approach to their introduction.

'The nobles might have their own hidden intentions and agendas, but now that they've seen the very man who single-

handedly killed such a disaster being so casual with us, their regard for the Otherworlders will also extend to us.'

Conrad had his sources who told him of a group of nobles who had already gotten their hands on people who claimed to be Otherworlders. That wasn't impossible to consider, since there still had to be a bunch of them roaming the land.

'Their goals for gathering them must be to have some leverage against us as the Royal Council.'

Most likely, they would also try to bring Rey and the rest of the Otherworlders present to their side. But now, thanks to Rey's performance, the chances of that were very unlikely.

'He really is the amazing person I remember.'

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## **Chapter 568 Council Summit [Pt 4]**

[Moments Earlier]

'Well, I never thought this would happen so soon, but I suppose life has many surprises.'

That was Rey's initial thought when he observed certain individuals in the Royal Council Hall. He had been observing the additional security, even seeing General Lucy present in the hall. 'The last time I saw her was right before the Dark Gathering...' As always, her face was stern and her expression unchanging.

Rey thought it was a little funny because they both had eyepatches.

'I could get some tips from her...'

It was while he was having these thoughts that he sensed a different kind of resonance from a few members of the security personnel within the room.

Since the nobles brought their own security officers to keep them safe, it wasn't a surprise to see the massive hall chock full of guards—private and public.

Among these were four individuals in particular who were impossible to ignore. Not only were they positioned very close to each other, also adorned with luxurious Enchanted Items, but they also had their faces covered in some way.

One was a warrior, so he had a helmet atop his head. One was a Mage, and so a hood obscured their facade. The third seemed to be some kind of assassin, and he simply had a partial mask—one made of bandage-like clothes—cover the lower portion of his face.

As for the fourth, he seemed like the leader, and he was dressed in quite the spectacular fashion—a dark trench coat, with layers of gold decorating it in many areas. He also had a full mask that covered his face.

What intrigued Rey about these four wasn't particularly their outfits, but the 'vibe' he got from them. After he awakened, his senses improved drastically. Even without focusing on Light or Dark Mode, he could still perceive many things that he previously wouldn't.

And so, in order to justify his interest in the four, he used his Perfect Divine Appraisal.

... That was when he saw the key words 'Otherworlder'.

'Ahh... I see...' Once he noticed that, he began to piece a few things together. By analyzing their Additional Information, as well as their Classes, while also using his own brain to fill in a few holes, he was able to tie up the links pretty quickly.

'Looks like my old classmates are working for the Alliance's nobles now.' Rey smiled internally.

He still couldn't guess how many of them were operating this way, or the precise reasons why they individually chose to be subject to the snobby nobles, but he could pretty much guess the latter.

'I suspect they traveled to the South and garnered the favor of the nobles due to their relative strength compared to the people of this world.'

Since they also had secrets of the Alliance, and they know about the rest of the Otherworlders, they would also have an edge. That made them indispensable assets to the nobles who employed them.

'At least they're not slaves. That's good...' Rey found himself slightly shrugging.

'It's possible that the nobles got information about the rest of my classmates and will want to bring more of us to their side.' He had dealt with enough humans—both scummy and righteous—to know how their minds worked. Still... he couldn't help but laugh internally.

'I'm sure they're feeling slightly mortified right about now. The guy they wrote off as the weakest of the group is now recognized as the strongest... haha, I have to see the looks on their faces.'

By using Dark Mode, he could see past any obstacle, though only the outlines of everything would be seen. In essence, a realm of black and white where he could perceive all.

Upon closing his eyes and looking at them one more time, he was pleased to find shocked expressions on their respective faces. He also recognized them quite well despite their obvious attempts to use Illusions on him.

None of those worked on him, so he was able to see them as they were.

'Byron, Lyvia, Devin, and Cayden.' He recognized them well. After all, they were often associated with Adam as part of his clique before the latter passed away.

'There should be one more. I wonder where Felicia is...' Perhaps she didn't make it, or she was somewhere else. Either way, it was quite pleasant to see his old classmates now stunned by his rise to power.

It felt a bit immature, but Rey reveled in it.

'The System doesn't block happiness, so I suppose it's safe to revel in my satisfaction.' He finally opened his eyes after closing them for so long.

Well, in his perspective it had been too long, but in actuality, barely any time had passed. He could think very quickly and act in the same regard.

As a result, all of these actions were done by him in a split second.

'Well, I am curious about their adventures and the plans they have—if they have any—but for now, I better give them a show.' He grinned, almost devilishly, looking at Conrad, who was finally raising his head after greeting him and his friends.

'Looks like I'll have to replace Adonis as the leader here, considering the fact that I'm the strongest.'

Rey already learned quite a bit from Adonis after watching him address the Royal Council and his fellow students for quite some time, so he didn't think he would have a problem replicating that magic.

Plus, by regulating his emotions and being perfectly in sync with his thoughts, he wouldn't have to stutter or miss a beat when passing his message across.

He simply stepped up, his face radiating the very confidence he wanted to emulate, and his lips parted to bring forth the kind of words he desired.

"What's with the formality, Conrad. I thought we were already past that."

Saying something like this, Rey noticed the surprise on the faces of his old classmates grew, and that just caused him to grow even more satisfied.

Still... that was only one reason why he decided to take such a radical approach.

'Conrad looks surprised too, but I'm sure he'll get it quickly... what I'm trying to do.'

Rey didn't know or particularly like any of the nobles, but he trusted Conrad and Vida to an extent. He knew them, both ss Ralyks and Rey, and they were honest people who desired to help the Alliance.

At least for the most part.

'No one is perfect, but they're as ideal as they come. It looks like, with the presence of my old classmates, and the tension currently permeating the political landscape, there could be some sort of power struggle brewing.' Rey thought internally. 'To prevent any unnecessary conflict, it's better we, as Otherworlders here, take a clear stance in support of the Royal Council.'

That way, whatever ambitions the nobles had for the Capital—and the Alliance in general—would be completely paused.

At least, until he figured out what exactly was going on.

'I would like to avoid taking any lives, if possible.' Rey sighed internally, now waiting for Conrad's response to his words.

'Let's hope they take the hint and back off.'

### **Chapter 569 Council Summit [Pt 5]**

The meeting didn't take very long.

After their greetings, and a few casual conversations between Rey and the Council Members, the rest of the Otherworlders also joined in on the conversation.

They followed Rey's lead and acted very familiar with the higher-ups.

This did two things for both sides.

One was establishing the position of the Otherworlders, associating them with the highest position of power in the United Human Alliance. In essence, they weren't just lackeys, but actual partners with the Royal Council.

The second, and perhaps more crucial thing, was making it so the Royal Council had a deep bond with the Otherworlders; hence warding off any scavengers who desired to poach any of them to the other side.

Plus, since it was possible that the nobles were beginning to act very cocky and more entitled due to having Otherworlders on their side, by presenting Otherworlders on the side of the Royal Council, it would serve to caution them.

When comparing quality, it was clear who had the superior allies.

Hence, it was even possible for the opposite to happen—at least, in the mind of the nobles. Their Otherworlder employees could end up switching to the other side as a result of the temptation.

That alone made the move brilliant.

If the Nobles were smart enough, they would quickly recognize this and back off as soon as possible; that was the rationale of both Rey and Conrad.

On that note, the meeting ended with the presentation of the Otherworlders to the Nobles, and vice versa. It was clear that its purpose was more of an exhibition, and also a formal recognition of the heroes of humanity.

Once it was over, the Otherworlders were dismissed, and this time Brutus was the one who escorted them back to their residence.

Lucielle stayed back with Conrad and Vida to deliver a supplementary address to the nobles present. Whatever else was discussed there was anyone's guess.

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"Thank you, Rey. No, all of you." Brutus bowed his head the moment they entered the Otherworlders' residence.

He remained at the entrance, and while everyone was excitedly proceeding in, either relaxing on the parlor's couch, or opting for the comfort of their rooms, those words of gratitude made them all look in the Head Warrior's direction.

"You all have my gratitude." He re-emphasized his position before raising his head before the young ones.

"Stop overreacting, Brutus." Justin laughed. "We didn't even do anything. Just showed up and went with whatever Rey had going on."

Brutus didn't know whether Justin was truly oblivious of the significance of what Rey did, or he was just playing dumb on purpose, but hearing what he said only made the warrior smile even further.

"Right now, there are a lot of internal problems within the Alliance. It is none of your concern, of course, but your presence in that meeting has helped support the cause of the Royal Council." Once Brutus spoke these things, the students got a bit of perspective on what was going on behind the scenes. Still, one student in particular wasn't satisfied.

"Why can't the Royal Council just get rid of those guys? They have the most power in the Alliance—both politically and in terms of force." The only blond girl among them asked. "If they're getting in the way, why not eliminate them thoroughly?"

Once everyone heard this, their eyes widened in surprise as they looked at her with shocked faces. Belle was the cutest thing in the room, yet the vile words that proceeded from her lips completely betrayed her appearance.

It seemed she recognized this very quickly, as she swiftly began to rephrase her words so they would be more palatable.

"W-what I meant was... like strip them of power and stuff. Like, if they are a threat to the kingdom... cut them off... from power, I mean. Ultimately, allocation should belong to the Alliance, right? They can just destroy... I mean, sever the nobles from the wealth that makes them so influential, to begin with... right? Right?"



Her panicked face leaked a bead of sweat or two, and the constant gaze of everyone around her made her nearly shriek under pressure.

Thankfully, it seemed her cute side won and everyone managed to buy her bumbling excuse for proper context.

"Yeah... I was wondering about that too." Clark added. "Those nobles seem to be doing more harm than good. If it's resources the Alliance needs, they can just tax them harder or forcibly take the resources they need for the betterment of everyone. We are in a time of war, after all."

The rich weren't particularly bothered in this world, especially if they paid their dues, but nobles had some responsibility to render. If they proved to be overbearing, stripping them of their title was ideal.

Plus, since the Council had ultimate political power, the loyalty of the Nation's strongest, and five Otherworlders who were readily on their side, they could find a way to obtain the resources they required without needing to buckle to the pressure of the nobles.

So why? Why were Conrad and Vida tolerating these people?

"Firstly, things aren't as simple as your words make them seem. Actions like those cascade down and cause consequences that would be difficult to contain, even by the Royal Council." Brutus began, but then he offered a deeper sigh.

"Unfortunately, even if we were willing to take the risk, there's also the second restriction..."

Everyone waited silently, watching as keenly as possible, to listen to the troubling reason that caused the Head Warrior to display signs of distress.

"Before the establishment of the United Human Alliance, there was a binding vow made among the Councilors and the aristocrats of the time, which preserved their lives and resources if they were to ever agree to the agreement."

The only reason for the termination of this agreement would be if they were found doing something borderline illegal—that is, against the outlined laws of the land—as documented in the Royal Wryths.

So far, the nobles had done no such thing; at least, not to the knowledge of the Council. "They are an obnoxious bunch, yes, but the binding vow prevents us from taking any radical action against them, or any new noble faction that forms afterward."

What served as a show of trust among Nations willing to band together for the common benefit of mankind had now grown to become a burden.

"What happens when the Royal Council breaks this binding vow?" Rey finally spoke up, causing attention to shift to him for a moment.

He had been standing right in front of his room's door, but now he drew closer to the rest. His arms were folded as he finally halted his approach.

Staring at Brutus with a serious demeanor, he waited for a response.

"A curse will be activated."

"I see. So the Grandmaster and Councilor's life could be in danger if they break the vow?" "I doubt it's that simple." Rey interrupted Clark as he turned back to Brutus. "Those two wouldn't risk the entire Alliance just to preserve their lives."

Once Brutus heard this, his expression darkened.

"There's something else, isn't there?" Rey's gaze, coupled with his serious demeanor made it clear just how badly he wanted to know what was going on.

"Tell us."

## **Chapter 570 Binding Vow**

[Later That Day]

"Huu..."

Releasing visible breaths from his pursed lips as he sighed, Rey dropped the book he just finished reading on his desk as he rose from the chair where he sat.

'It's been months since I last read, but it takes me a few minutes to finish a whole book now. And that's even when I'm being slow.' He proceeded to his bed and collapsed on it, covering his face with his hand.

'How am I supposed to read with Alicia if I'm just faster than her by such a degree?'

Rey knew his worries were misplaced. Rather than agonizing about these thoughts, he ought to think about ways to lift her curse first.

'Curse, huh? Who would have thought it would become such a troublesome thing...' Closing his eyes, he remembered what Brutus told him and his classmates earlier that day.

—The brutal consequence for breaking the Binding Vow.

'A curse befalling all of the Alliance...?Is something of that scale even possible by humans?'

There were millions of humans living in the Western Continent. It was difficult to estimate their numbers, due to many factors, but based on the last recorded census, and the events that Rey just caught up on after reading a few books just now, he placed the number at five to six million.

'The Capital itself houses over a hundred thousand people. Some regions have a higher population, and recently the South has been saturated with higher numbers than before.'

From what Brutus said, this curse would be inflicted randomly on the people of the Alliance. Rey didn't know the details of what that meant, and it seemed Brutus was also unsure of it.

'Could it be that less than the total number of people in the Alliance will be affected, but those chosen will be random, or maybe everyone will be affected.'

He wasn't even sure if he and his classmates—as Otherworlders—would be targeted by this Curse or not.

'I know I'm safe from it, but what of the others?' It seemed like a careless deal to be made over some unity between nations, especially since it had to do with wagering the lives of unsuspecting people.

'Those were desperate times, so I can see how it might have seemed like a good deal back then.' After all, the Royal Council had to unanimously act, using the resources of the Alliance at their disposal, before the Binding Vow could be broken.

This wasn't an easy thing to do, so as long as one person in the group wasn't stupid, everyone was safe. Besides, even fools valued their lives, so they weren't going to take any action that put their lives at risk.

All in all, the entirety of humanity under the Alliance was being held hostage by the Binding Vow, and most didn't know it existed at all.

'I guess this is what happens when you give someone the power to rule over you.'

The major issue on Rey's mind when all of these questions were asked was this:

"How in the world were you able to make such a deal?!"

Apparently, it was due to a device—similar to the Oculus—which was able to record and enforce binding vows with a curse.

'I guess it sort of tallies with what Ater told me. Even humans can bring about powerful curses in this world if the consequence is that significant.'

The world was the one who delivered the curse, so it would be pretty much irreversible by Rey with his Healing Magic.

'I really need to get a Skill that deals with this stuff.'

But, he didn't even know where to begin when it came to that search. At this point, Rey felt very blind and confused on what path to take.

'I thought the Enchanted Item that Brutus mentioned could help me, but apparently—in order to preserve the vow—it was divided into various parts and split among the biggest factions at the time.'

The one that was in the Royal Council's possession existed within the Treasury, but there was no real way to determine where the others were—not without breaking the vow itself.

'Technically, the curse won't be activated if an agent of the Royal Council acts in the same way prohibited by the vow, or maybe even a third party.'

The best option presented before him was to look for all the pieces by himself and see if they could stop the curse of the vow, while also hoping it led to some clues—or preferably some kind of Skill—that would save Alicia.

'All of this is operating on some heavy presupposition and assumptions, but... it's my only clue at the moment.'

According to what Brutus told him, there were seven pieces in total—one in the custody of the Royal Council—while the others were split among the most powerful Nobles in the Alliance.

'Finding them should take a while, but...'

~VWUUSH~

A dark silhouette formed close to Rey's door, causing the boy to sit upright in order to see who was making their entry into his room.

He instantly knew as soon as he sensed the presence.

"Ater... where have you been?" Rey asked, a slight smile tugging at his lips the moment he watched the man in black suit emerge from the dissipating darkness.

Ater's red hair danced as he smiled at Rey, swiftly making a slight bow upon entry.

"Just running an errand or two. I thought a little about a current problem, so I had to go fetch a few things."

"A few... things?" Rey raised an eyebrow.

Right before his eyes, six shards—pieces of a construct of some sort—appeared right in front of Ater.

'No way! Is that—?!'

They floated before the Familiar, resonating with each other while being shrouded by some form of darkness. Ater raised his hand, and a final piece appeared atop it—like a core of some sort, which gleamed with dark purple.

"This is the Dybbuk. Apparently, there was a time when... ah, from that look on your face it seems you already know what it is." Ater stopped midway through explanation and made a grander smile.

"As expected of my Master."

"H-how did you get all of those? They're supposed to be with various factions!"

"Ah, so you already know that much. Indeed, and they were kept in quite obscure and precocious locations. It took me all day to gather all of them, after which I went to the Treasury to obtain the final piece."

'All day? This is barely evening, though...'

"I hope you aren't upset I acted in such a manner, especially breaking into the Treasury, Master. I was just following your order regarding the wellbeing of these people, which you left in my care."

Rey could feel all sorts of emotions rush through his body, but he did his best to suppress them.

"No, not at all." He laughed a little. "You did well."

"Really? That's perfect, then. I thought we could kill two birds with one stone with this item."

"Two birds? Is he thinking about the same thing I was considering with Alicia? If Ater also has the same idea, it must be legit!" Rey could feel excitement bubble up within him.

"Firstly, we'll get rid of that annoying binding bow of the Royal Council. Then..."

Just as Rey expected, Ater had thought ahead this entire time. But, what about the second? Rey already knew what it would be.

It was—

"... We'll finally be able to bind your Absolute Beast and make it a loyal slave."

