

Extras 691

Chapter 691 Conversation Between Extras [Pt 1]

Adrien's eyes were nearly bulging.

He did his best to hide his surprise, but it was impossible to fully keep it all tucked away. Having such a bombardment of information had taken its toll on him, so adding one more surprise to his list was the last straw. He could only gawk as the very person he suspected walked into the tent in a casual stride.

"... Long time no see." He said, causing Adrien to tense up a little.

Before Adrien could think of much to say, his lips slowly parted and words flowed out like a smooth river.

"Yeah. It's been a while, Rey..."

Indeed, it had been quite some time since they saw each other. Yes, he and Rey interacted just a while back, but that was through a puppet he made through [Pinocchio]. In actuality, they hadn't seen each other since the desertion of the Otherworlders.

In a sense, Rey was correct. But, the fact that he was standing in front of him right now, despite the commotion and conditions surrounding the current situation, Adrien had a feeling Rey meant it in a more sarcastic sense.

If that was the case, then he instantly felt foolish about even responding.

'It's difficult to believe, but you're the only one I know who fulfills all of the conditions necessary to push me this far. I suspected it was you for a while, but it seems my reliance on Justin's information proved to be my weak link.'

Adrien had long made Justin his loyal minion, so the boy could not lie to him, even if he tried. All the information prior to this point was also incredibly accurate, so there was never any suspicion that he would be lying. It made no sense whatsoever.

'And yet... here we are.' He ensured not to glare at Rey, showing a calm facade instead as his mind went into swift overdrive.

He had to manage the situation, and quickly.

"Relax, Adrien..." Rey's voice echoed within the room as he took another step forward, oozing nothing short of an air of confidence.

The Rey before him was nothing like the one he remembered.

It wasn't just the eyepatch covering his eyes, or the new attire he donned, or even the much more attractive body he somewhat developed after waking from his coma—if that was ever real, to begin with.

All of those things added to the change, but Adrien suspected there was something else about Rey that oozed out, making him constantly uneasy.

... Something beyond his own abilities.

"I just want to talk." He took a seat and settled right in front of Adrien, the wave of unease only getting stronger the closer he got.

Despite all of this, Adrien remained composed. He shifted on his chair, interlocking his fingers and giving the best smile he could muster.

"Sure, Rey. Let's talk."

'I never thought I would have you by the ropes like this...'

As Rey sat opposite Adrien, he could sense the boy's nervousness, or hesitation—perhaps both. Perhaps this was some sort of predatory instinct, or a manifestation of his elevated senses, but he could tell everything about his mood due to the changes in his facial reactions, subtle movements, as well as a bunch of other details.

After seeing all of this, he couldn't help but feel some measure of catharsis.

'So he's not always a composed jackass. That's good to see...' He grinned internally, even when realizing how petty was being.

Rey already knew the probable reason why Adrien was so shaken. He had most likely deduced that Rey was the mastermind upon his entry, and the shock was something that he was yet to fully get over from.

'He must have millions of questions in his mind. He must have a lot going on in his head right now...'

Rey knew all of that because the same would apply to him if he was in Adrien's position.

'I wonder how much he has figured out already... about everything.'

From the moment Adrien began to lead his army towards the Elves, Rey had begun playing his game. 'Once I confirmed that Adrien left the Dragon Camp, I sent Emil there to disguise herself as a Dragon and infiltrate the camp—which she did. Then, I had her use an Illusion Skill that she gets whenever she turns into Ater to fool the Generals, who in turn turned the entire Camp against Adrien.'

Of course, Rey maintained constant contact with Emil through it all, and he would have had her return to the Elven Camp, where he was based, if things got too dangerous.

If she couldn't return, or if their communication disconnected for whatever reason, he was determined to go to the Camp himself to save her—though, based on what he already observed, he doubted that would ever be the case.

'I could have used Adrien's absence to destroy the Dragon Army once and for all, but based on what Ater said... I had to understand Adrien's motives, so it was a much smarter move to make them turn on him so I could see how his reaction would be.'

Depending on the outcome, Rey reckoned he would be able to estimate the importance of his goals.

'If he chose to destroy the Dragons after they turned against him, I was going to step in and confront him—killing them all myself in the process.'

There was no way he would leave free EXP alone.

'And, well... the outcome of everything was a little surprising—though still within expectation.'

Whatever benefit Adrien was going to get from the Dragons had to be worth a lot, considering all that went down with the Dragons and how Adrien reacted to it.

'I also did this to push Adrien to reveal his hidden cards and abilities. I knew he wouldn't show all of them, but I had to know his level of combat expertise since I haven't seen him fight before...'

Rey was disappointed on that front, since Adrien hardly put up a struggle, but after witnessing how Adrien responded to the whole thing—including the power he displayed to resolve everything, Rey was convinced.

'This guy is an absolute monster.'

Chapter 692 Conversation Between Extras [Pt 2]

'I already knew this for a while, but, this guy... he's an absolute monster.'

[STATUS WINDOW] - Name: Adrien Chase

- Race: Human (Otherworlder)

- Class: Necromancer (A-Tier)

- Level: 90 (78.54% EXP) - Life Force: 30 (+3,000) {+4,000}

- Mana Level: 100 (+5,000) {4,000}

- Combat Ability: 50 (+4,500) {4,000}

- Stat Points: 445 - Skills (Exclusive): [Skill Creation]

- Skills (Non-Exclusive): [Inventory]. [Necromancy]. [Greater Darkness]. [Grand Defense]. [Grand Spatial Magic]. [Grand Item Summon]. [Grand Healing]. [Greater Armament]. [Full Resistance]. [Full Boost]. [Equip Limit Break]. [Deep Insight]. [Absolute Magic Utility]. [Mind Touch]. [Absolute Combat Application]. [Anticipation]. [Absolute Magic Interference]. [Divine Persona]. [Command Code]. [Greater Luck]. [Pinocchio]. [Link]. [Miasma]

{See More: [Status Interference]. [Where Evil Lurks]. [Banishment]. [Full Comprehension]. [Absolute Mental Fortitude]. [Idle Gamble]. [Wish Fulfillment]. [See Through]. [Veil]. [Collapse]. [Last One Standing]. [Absolute Mana Recovery]. [Absolute Life Force Recovery]. [It Is Written].}

- Alignment: Chaotic Neutral

[Additional Information]

A true mastermind. One who lurks in the shadows and causes others to do his bidding while laughing underneath his mask.

His goals remain a mystery too...

[End Of Information]

Rey wasn't surprised by Adrien's Status Window, since he had already seen it not too long ago. Still, no matter how many times he saw it, he couldn't help but be impressed and slightly intimidated by the sheer volume and utility of the Skills at his disposal.

'He has even more Skills than I do at the moment.' Rey thought to himself.

Yes, his own Skills gotten through [Doppel] had an advantage of 'quality', therefore making Adrien's Skills inferior. Despite that, Rey couldn't help but remain very careful with Adrien—at least, until he finally went through the details of each Skill.

They were all very useful, incredibly dangerous, and downright impeccable choices. However, none of them were of any real threat to Rey.

Adrien's Level was lower than his, and while he had more Skills, Rey's were far more potent. Finally, when it came to Levels and Stats, Rey had a big lead. In essence, while caution was still a good thing to take notice of, there was truly no need to feel intimidated.

The moment Rey recognized this, he became a lot more comfortable.

'Hiding in the shadows was fun while it lasted, but he would have figured out my identity sooner or later. Revealing myself now was the most optimal answer.'

Not only would he take Ater's advice by talking to Adrien, but he could also have the advantage of agency, making a lasting impression of dominance on the boy.

'So far... so good.'

"I see. The fact that you're here means you know about Justin, as well as the situation surrounding our relationship."

"Hm?" Rey cocked his head slightly.

"Don't feign ignorance. How else would you have been able to trick me for so long. You reckoned I wouldn't suspect you for all of this if you made Justin tell me that you were still in the Capital. And, the only reason I would believe his words is because I have such a strong assurance that he would never betray me... even if he wanted to."

Rey neither denied nor accepted these allegations, he just kept up his blank facade.

"If you know about Justin, it's very likely that you had someone pretend to be him, using them to communicate with me, while Justin was probably communicating with you or them. There are other potential answers, but this seems most plausible."

'This guy...' Rey smiled internally. '... He's too sharp.'

There was only one mistake in his assessment, and that was attributing all of this to be Rey's grand design. In actuality, Ater was the one who planned for this outcome, and the more it unfolded, the more Rey could see why he took certain steps.

'Still, I'm not about to correct his mistakes.' He let Adrien keep talking, exposing even more threads that Rey had supposedly set up.

"If I'm to guess, the current state of the Capital has something to do with you, huh?"

"What current state?"

"Hm? Did I overthink things, then? I suppose not being able to contact Justin coinciding with you revealing yourself could be part of a big reveal. If that's the case, then congratulations... you successfully startled me."

Rey didn't want to take credit for most of these—some of which he wasn't even aware of the details—but he simply smiled and shrugged.

"Consider it a kind of revenge for the past."

"Haha! I deserve that, I guess. You're not a man to forget grudges, are you? Even after I made us even during the Dark Gathering... you still have a vendetta against me."

"...." Rey said nothing and kept staring at Adrien.

"I mean, even going as far as recreating the whole accusation thing with the Dragons... just due to the ploy I made back when we were all in the Royal Estate. I explained myself and called a truce, but you still refuse to budge."

"You haven't given me sufficient reason to."

"Rey... haa... look, I'm not your enemy. There's no reason for us to even be fighting. I've made it clear that I do not want to cross you in any way, so it's a little frustrating when you step on my goodwill and do stuff like this."

"Your goodwill?"

"Okay, okay... maybe I phrased it a little wrong." Adrien sighed, slowly closing his eyes and inhaling deeply so he could calm himself.

"What I mean is... I haven't really interfered in your business until now, right? I've intentionally stayed away from you, and I have my own thing going. As for my actions in the past, I already gave you information and resources proportional to whatever I put you through. So... we are even, Rey."

Perhaps Adrien was correct. After all, up until now, there really wasn't any objective reason for them to be on opposite sides. But... "Things are different now." Rey said, straightening his posture on his seat.

"What do you mean by tha—?"

"You're on the side of the Dragons, Adrien. You've joined them in their Conquest and you're slaughtering Elves..." Shifting closer now, Rey made sure his piercing gaze reached Adrien.

After a moment of silence, he spoke.

"I want to know why."

Chapter 693 Conversation Between Extras [Pt 3]

Adrien was silent for a minute or so.

During that period, he had a very important decision to make—whether or not to tell Rey about whatever he had going on with the Dragons.

Whichever option he chose had its own share of consequences, and it was up to him to decide what path to take regarding his reply. One thing was certain, though.

Silence wasn't an option.

"To go home."

Upon hearing Adrien's words, Rey's intense gaze flickered for a moment. His eyes softened considerably, though it resumed its hardened position in no time at all.

"Home...?"

"Yes." Adrien sighed, rubbing his face with his palm. "Hidden within the Dragon Empire is a way for us to return to Earth. A way for me to go home."

Rey couldn't believe his ears. He wanted to say Adrien was lying, but something within him told him that this was an unfiltered truth. As such, even though he parted his lips to speak, words refused to come out. He just stared.

"I need to gain their trust so that I can organically make it into the Dragon Empire. I have even been promised an introduction to a Lord. Once that happens, I'll be one step closer to the place—The Chamber Of Ancients."

"Chamber Of Ancients...?" Rey had never heard those words before, but somehow, they sounded familiar.

'Hold on... I think I once heard Adonis mutter something like that when I caught him training by himself one time.'

He didn't think much of it then, and even now he wasn't even sure that was what he heard. Still, the name sounded oddly important.

'All of this could be a ruse, though. I don't think he's lying, and considering I can tell for the most part if that's the case, it'll be more illogical not to believe him.'

Besides, given what Ater told him, Rey didn't want to be too skeptical or antagonistic towards Adrien. He already promised his Familiar that he would listen to what Adrien had to say with a clear head.

'Let's try not to be too biased...' He told himself calmly as he continued taking in the information he received.

"From what I know about it, the place is a dome-like structure that rests at a very problematic place in the Dragon Empire. I don't see myself surviving an attempt there if I don't have legitimate grounds to be as close to the place as possible. It has—"

"What problematic place?"

"The Empire's Capital. That's where it is situated."

"Ah... go on." Rey found himself slightly flustered once he heard that, not that it showed on him in the slightest.

'Chances are that the strongest forces that the Dragons have will be situated there. If I count the Dragon Emperor, it would be unwise to just challenge him by going to his turf.'

That brief encounter with The Oracle had shown him just how far he needed to go if he wanted to take on the Emperor with absolute confidence for victory.

At the moment, he didn't have that.

"The Chamber Of Ancients has the same kind of Magic, or should I say a similar kind of Magic as the one that brought us here. Space-Time Magic, and it's an Ancient One... same as the one that Lucielle and the other Mages utilized."

No one really knew about Ancient Magic, or how they came to exist, but every now and then they popped up. The Interdimensional Summoning that brought Rey and his friends to H'Trae was

classified as such, as it was a Rune inscribed within Ancient Scrolls that were later transcribed by the Grand Mage to be useful for Summoning Otherworlders.

It took Lucielle several years to decipher the Magic and Instructions given in the scrolls, and within other old texts, which was how they were able to successfully summon everyone. It was also why they knew they couldn't perform another Summoning until decades had passed.

All of this was written down and solved by the Grand Mage Lucielle.

"The Chamber Of Ancients hasn't been used in very long—not for hundreds of years, by my closest estimates. We should be able to engineer it in a way for us Otherworlders to find a way home."

Adrien explained, a brilliant smile written on his face.

Rey remained silent for a few moments, trying his best to digest the influx of emotions he had to manage. Some thoughts flashed in his head, but he suppressed them almost instantly.

His primary focus was this conversation, so he set aside everything else and decided to concentrate on it.

"A way home..." He mumbled. "Is that why you killed so many Elves?"

The moment Rey said this, Adrien groaned and rolled his eyes, almost as if he couldn't believe he was being lectured about the ongoing genocide.

"This is my problem with you, Rey. You're smart and strong, yet you always hesitate to make sacrifices for the greater good. To see the bigger picture!"

"What bigger picture?! I don't claim to be a saint, but the Elves are people, Adrien. You're killing thousands upon thousands of people so you can go home!"

"Same way you'd kill thousands and thousands of Monsters to get stronger, Rey."

"They're not the same!"

"How so?" Adrien shifted forward as he furrowed his brow. "I can understand your hesitance to kill humans, Rey. I get it... but Elves? What makes them so different from the Monsters you have slaughtered mercilessly?"

"W-what are you saying...?" Rey appeared appalled by Adrien's way of thinking. Didn't it go without saying why the Elves were different from Monsters?

"Is it because they appear humanoid? There are Monsters who have a lot of human features, yet you'd kill them with no hesitation. The Elves are even hostile towards other Races, same as Monsters."

"That doesn't make them the sa—"

"How much do you even know about Monsters? You realize some of them have intelligence on par with humans, right? Certain Goblins, despite being primitive, have displayed the intelligence of children. Some Lizardmen even build huts and simple tools, similar to how we used to during the stone ages on Earth. The list goes on, Rey. Given enough time, with Evolution and further learning, they could become a very intelligent species. Yet... you'd kill those Monsters without hesitation, wouldn't you?"

"I... would. They're ultimately a threat to—"

"And the Elves aren't a threat? Right now, their deity tells them to kill the Dragons and they obey. What if we're next? What then?"

"I'd kill them then."

"Then apply that logic to Monsters. Certain Monsters, intelligent creatures, live out the rest of their lives without bothering anyone. Yes, they are aggressive towards people, but they won't go out of their way to bother us if we just leave them alone..."

Rey got flashes of his time in the Royal Dungeon—the moments he spent mindlessly killing so many of the Monsters there that he lost count of the number.

He didn't think much of it then, and even now. But... Adrien's words kept digging deep into his mind and began seeping right inside his thoughts.

"Why didn't you spare them? Why didn't you leave them alone since they weren't threats?"

Rey already knew the answer to that—and it was in parallel to the answer Adrien would also give for his own massacre of the Elves.

"To achieve my goals... I would do anything." Adrien said, his eyes flashing with incredible determination.

Rey felt his heart tighten as their eyes connected, reflecting something similar.

"You would also do the same."

Chapter 694 Conversation Between Extras [Pt 4]

"...." Rey was speechless.

What could he say in his defense? What words could he utter that wouldn't be shut down by Adrien? How could he defend his worldview?

He knew within himself that it was intrinsically wrong to kill the Elves, and that what Adrien was doing clearly bordered on the morally evil end. Yet... why couldn't he argue against his logic?

'If I refuse to accept his moral positions, I'll be a hypocrite.'

Rey would simply be asserting that Adrien was wrong because he didn't agree with his methods and actions.

That was arbitrary at best.

"Be honest with me, Rey..." Adrien interrupted his thoughts before he could go even further with his introspection.

"Why are you helping the Elves? Why are you so against me? You must have already known I was involved long before this meeting, so why didn't you just turn a blind eye?"

Rey felt something coiling around his heart. Was it guilt? No, not quite.

It was the feeling one had when they had been caught, or when someone saw right through them, despite their best attempts to hide the truth.

"You are benefiting something from them, aren't you? In essence, this isn't a moral clash, but a conflict of interests." Adrien sat back in his chair and smiled at Rey, whose mood was now completely ruined by the former.

When this meeting first started, it was clear who held the advantage. However, in only a few moments, the pendulum had shifted, and now Adrien seemed to be the one with all the cards. Rey didn't like that.

Still, he didn't want to become antagonistic towards Adrien just because he didn't like what was being said. If he did that, then he would just be a hard-headed person who was obstinate about his own beliefs without need for reform.

Because of that, Rey kept listening... "The Elves are cruel, Rey. They're a racist, savage, and hateful bunch. You've interacted with them too, haven't you? You have to understand what I'm saying." Adrien sighed. "They're not the kind of people you should feel empathy for."

Memories of how they treated Esme, and how they addressed him and the rest of the humans came to Rey's mind. He remembered Ciela, and the horrid punishment inflicted on her. Then... the image of The Oracle flashed in his mind.

He knew within himself that a lot of them acted horribly. But...

"... I don't think they deserve to die. It's funny how you have to make them out to be monsters just so you're okay with killing them."

"I never said they deserve to die. They don't deserve to die as much as Monsters, or even humans don't deserve to. But... for the sake of my goals, I am willing to kill them, the same way they will be willing to kill me if it calls for it."

"The only reason they'd want to kill you is because you slaughtered thousands of them, Adrien."

The moment Rey said this, Adrien chuckled to himself.

The former couldn't understand this. They were having a somewhat serious conversation until now, and it seemed Adrien just found something hilarious in what was just said.

"Something funny about what I said?"

Adrien slightly shook his head and laughed a little more before quieting down. "My bad, my bad. It's just... I remembered something just now."

Rey gave him a blank smile as he said this, his demeanor showing interest.

"What is it?"

"You mentioned that the only reason the Elves would want to kill me is because I struck first, right?"

"Yes, that's correct." Rey replied.

He already knew Adrien could use the whole 'monsters' narrative against him again, but Rey was prepared this time. He simply awaited the next words that would come out of his lips.

"The Elves don't normally kill. You know that, right?"

Rey raised a brow and nodded slowly. "Yeah."

In all honesty, this feature of the Elves proved incredibly fatal to Adrien's cause. After all, even when Monsters injured, or even devoured Elves, they would never harm them in any instance. Rey found this naivete to be particularly unsettling, but it also went to show how innocent they were in certain respects.

... Almost like children.

Yet, Adrien compared them to Monsters and justified his slaughter of them.

"Why do you reckon that they kill the Dragons? Unlike with other entities, they actively kill the Dragons. Why?"

Rey didn't respond for a few moments. He didn't do this because he didn't know the answer, but because Adrien should have already known the reason if he knew so much about Elves already. The whole thing felt like a leading question to Rey.

Still... he chose to respond.

"... Because their Oracle says that they should."

"Indeed! But why?!"

"Because The Dragons are a threat to the world?"

"Yeah... there's that reason, but the Elves have made it clear that they would never harm anyone or anything, even if it means their demise. There has to be something special about the Dragons that make them a unique target."

"...." At this point, Rey could only look at Adrien with raised eyebrows as he sat in silence.

"I conducted an experiment with the Elves not too long ago."

"Adrien..."

"Just five of them. I've already killed so many of them, so this is just icing on the cake, isn't it?"

Rey found himself glaring at Adrien as he uttered those words, but the latter didn't seem to care. He seemed convinced that Rey would change his disposition once he heard what he had to say.

"I was curious to see if this no-kill policy had any real consequence, so I made one kill another Elf to see what would happen. Want to know what happened?"

"What?" Rey responded grudgingly, to which Adrien broadly smiled. "The Elf's skin grew dark, and her hair became blackened. She became a Dark Elf." The moment Rey heard this, his thoughts went to Ciela, Esme's mother, who also had features akin to what Adrien just described.

"I couldn't draw my conclusion on that alone. After all, perhaps this was simply the cause of an Elf killing a fellow Elf. So... I had another Elf kill a Monster. Guess what happened?"

"...." This time, Rey said nothing.

"The same thing happened! She became a Dark Elf too."

This was even more of an assurance to Rey that none of the Elves he experimented with ended up killing anything or breaking their code. If they did, they would also transform into Dark Elves.

"It seems the Elves don't actually know of this cause and effect, though. Well... except the Esteemed Elders, maybe?"

If the others knew, they would have been able to see through Rey's bullshit game from the start.

"As for the last two Elves, I had one kill a Dark Elf, while I made the other kill a Dragon. What do you think happened this time?"

Rey could already guess the answer, but he let Adrien answer it.

"The one who killed the Dark Elf became a Dark Elf herself, but the one who killed the Dragon didn't change at all."

That meant, just as Adrien postulated, there had to be something unique about killing Dragons.

Chapter 695 Conversation Between Extras [Pt 5]

"The Elves aren't allowed to kill because of actual consequences, Rey."

Rey was silent as he listened to Adrien. There were a lot of things he had to say about the matter, but he bottled in his thoughts and kept an open mind—just as he promised Ater.

"No matter how threatening an entity is... they won't kill them. It is forbidden by Nature, and if they break those laws... they become blighted by the very course of Nature." He said, a twisted smile forming on his face.

"Pretty funny, right?"

"What exactly is your point? It's pretty clear that they only kill Dragons because of their command from The Oracle, and disobedience to that entity causes them to turn into Dark Elves."

There was nothing else to it, was there?

"Your experiment was unnecessary. You killed those Elves for nothing." Rey frowned.

"Don't be too quick to make your judgment, Rey. Do you really think I didn't consider that possibility as well?" At this point, Rey's eye widened and he took a deep breath. Apologizing to himself for getting so worked up despite the promise he made to himself, Rey closed his eye for an extended period before reopening it.

"Go on..."

"With only one pure Elf left in my experiment, I decided to make a risky gamble... just to test my hypothesis. I made them kill me."

"Kill you...?"

"Yeah. I mean... I didn't stay dead, of course, but that's because of a Revival Skill. I actually died for about a minute, and guess what happened within that time?"

"...."

"Come on... just guess."

"She turned into a Dark Elf?" Rey answered nearly half-heartedly.

"NOOO! She didn't turn into a Dark Elf! Exactly that! Do you see what I'm talking about now?"

"What?" At this point, Rey found himself at a precipice of confusion. Adrien was no Dragon, and he certainly didn't have some kind of special bounty on his head by The Oracle—at least, not that Rey knew of.

If that was the case, then the Elf should have transformed for sure.

"Maybe it's because you revived after..."

"Maybe. But she should have been a Dark Elf for a minute before reverting back, at the very least. But I checked the record... and no. She remains the same. I also revived one of the Monsters that was killed using a similar Skill, and guess what... the one who killed it didn't change back to a normal Elf." Adrien was now grinning very widely as he looked at Rey. "What do you think about that?"

"That you are very meticulous with your experiments..."

"Thank you, thank you... but I meant about the phenomenon. Why didn't the Elf turn into a Dark Elf after killing me? What similarities do I share with a Dragon?"

"...." Rey had no words to offer Adrien.

The latter appeared exasperated, almost to the point of sheer frustration. It seemed he expected Rey to have already figured it out, but he wasn't getting the answer he wanted.

"It all connects to the Chamber Of Ancients, Rey... and it connects to the order of the Oracle to kill the Dragons, as well as the reason why I consider the Elves no different than Monsters to me." Adrien said with a slight smile, once again drawing closer to Rey.

"What are you insinuating, Adrien?"

At this point, the boy couldn't hold himself anymore. He had to let out his discovery, so he parted his lips and dropped a bombshell that Rey wasn't expecting.

"The Dragons are Otherworlders too. They have to be!"

For a moment, there was silence in the tent. Both parties stared at each other—Adrien with a bright grin, while Rey with a much sterner look.

"What?!"

"Of course, I don't mean the new generation of Dragons... but most definitely the first ones. Just like us, the Dragons must have come from another world. They propagated here, so the offsprings they have aren't particularly recognized as Otherworlders... but technically... they aren't natives of H'Trae."

Rey's eyes widened as he took in all of this information, surprised by how much it all made sense as everything began to connect.

"Of course, my theory has one slight problem... and that's the fact that if The Oracle has registered me as a world threat like the Dragons, then killing me would be the same as killing them, hence making that the similarity we share, and not us being fellow Otherworlders... but I doubt that is the case."

"Why do you doubt it?"

"Well, there's the fact that The Chamber Of Ancients is very similar to the Ancient Magic that brought us here, which makes it weirdly suspicious that the Dragons have it on their land. There's also the fact that I don't think The Oracle is very involved with the Elves, punishing anyone who breaks their rules. It has to be a natural reaction that can't be decided arbitrarily. Some sort of mandate by Nature that The Oracle just interprets. Sort of like your doctor telling you of an allergic reaction you'll have when you eat a certain meal."

In the case of the doctor, they weren't the one inflicting the allergy, but simply interpreting a phenomenon. In that same vein, Adrien theorized that the Elves had some sort of reaction influenced by Nature if they killed any Native of H'trae.

"The only way to really clarify this is if we let the Elves kill a random Otherworlder, who has no prior interaction with the Elves. If the Elf doesn't change, then my theory will be undoubtedly true. But.... Otherworlders are in quite the short supply, and I can't use any more Revival Skills, so it's not a worthwhile investment."

"You..."

"In any case, Rey, do you understand things better now? The Dragons are most likely Otherworlders like us... and the mandate to kill them for being perverse entities to this world could also extend to me, you, Alicia... and the rest of our classmates." All with a composed smile, Adrien laid all of this down.

And Rey had to listen to it all.

Chapter 696 Conversation Between Extras [Pt 6]

"No..."

Adrien's smile slowly began to diminish as Rey muttered the word of disagreement. Tense silent followed this dissent, and the two parties stared at each other for what felt like hours.

"What do you mean no?"

"I mean there could be another explanation that you're not considering. One that makes your theory fall apart."

"Really?" Adrien raised an eyebrow, and then gestured to Rey to enlighten him.

"I believe I've covered all possible grounds. There are a lot of complicated thought processes involved with my theory, and how I arrived there, but I don't want to waste your time or bore you with the details..."

Narrowing his eyes, he focused on Rey and smiled. "So, why don't you tell me—?"

"The Chamber Of Ancients... haven't you considered the possibility that its origin doesn't have anything to do with the Dragons?"

"Hm?"

"I mean... based on what we know, the Dragons appeared nearly eleven years ago, and they took the Northern Continent as their territory. They killed a lot of members of the other races, taking the largest land for themselves to build their Draconic Empire." Rey began, his finger on his chin as he spoke with all seriousness.

"Using your logic, isn't it possible that the Chamber Of Ancients belongs to one of the Races that were exterminated by the advent of the Dragons? I mean, it—"

"Pfft!"

Adrien suddenly burst into a loud exhibition of laughter. His sounds of amusement filled the hall, spreading to every corner as he rocked on his chair.

One or two beads of tears even fell from his eyes as he laughed heartily.

"What's so funny?" Left in a state of utter confusion, Rey had no choice but to ask the question. Somehow, it seemed like he had just said something stupid. Adrien opened his lips to respond to Rey, but only more laughter came out of his lips.

This lasted for a few more seconds before Adrien finally began to settle down.

"Haha... sorry... sorry... ahhh, it's just so... ahh..." Wiping off the beads of tears that leaked out of his eyes, he sniffed and chuckled a little more.

"This is one of the reasons I like you, Rey. You somehow manage to entertain me every time, and this time, you've been particularly hilarious."

"I don't think I was being funny about anything." Rey responded with a completely serious demeanor, slowly getting agitated by Adrien's amusement.

It was clear that the two were in completely different worlds.

"Well, maybe you didn't do it intentionally, but... wow. I expected you to have figured it out by now, but I guess it's my fault for making too many assumptions."

"What do you mean by tha—?"

"You mentioned the Chamber Of Ancients belonging to some other Race, right? Well, you're wrong. It's not possible, since the Dragons have inhabited their land for over a thousand years, at the very least."

Upon hearing this, Rey raised an eyebrow and parted his lips in complete opposition.

"What? No."

"The history of this world... it's quite contradictory, isn't it? When we arrived at H'Trae, we were told that it had only been a decade since the Dragons invaded. It was after things got so intense that the human kingdoms banded together and formed the United Human Alliance... and so the story goes."

'Exactly so!' Rey's face seemed to show, but something about how Adrien addressed the whole thing so flippantly made him fear that perhaps things weren't as simple as that.

And no, they weren't. "The Dragon Empire has existed for centuries at the very least, Rey. No... over a thousand years, I suspect. And yes... they have occupied the Northern Continent during that time."

'H-huh...?' Rey maintained his poker face this time, but his thoughts were swarmed with as many questions as there were refutations to Adrien's words.

He was no fool that would just take the Royal Council's words at face value, after all. All those times he spent at the library, learning more about the world and everything about it... he used it to learn about the world and its history.

The Royal Council wasn't lying.

'The war indeed started over a decade ago, and it coincides with the information that exists within and outside the Royal Library.'

All over the United Human Alliance, that was also the consensus. Even the smaller human nations that Esme visited confirmed this to be the case in their stories.

Everyone already knew this as a fact... yet Adrien was spouting nonsense.

"Perhaps the purge of the other races happened over a thousand years ago... or maybe it didn't even happen, to begin with. I do not have enough information to be sure, but what's obvious is that the Dragons have thrived in H'Trae for a very, very long time."

"What makes you so sure?"

"Well... let's just say that I have a way to gain access to the memories of people, and I have also studied some of their literature and text. I have dated some of the items they possess, and I have listened to some of their conversations. I even had a few Dragons I captured tell me what they knew about their Empire. Everything coincides with a completely different history from what both the humans and Elves believe."

'For real...?' Rey's eyes slightly widened upon hearing this.

He didn't think Adrien was lying, and honestly... there was no reason for him to.

"The history of the Dragons, their invasion, and their true identities... it's all so inconsistent. What we know is different from what the Dragons know, and it hints at a much larger issue that I have found to be too pervasive to ignore."

Rey was still recoiling from Adrien's revelation when he took note of the eeriness that dwelled within the latter's words. With a sense of dread, he asked the only question that came to mind at that very instant.

"What larger issue?"

"That this is all some sort of grand game... and we are all just pawns in it."

Chapter 697 Conversation Between Extras [Pt 7]

"This world... doesn't it remind you of all those cliché stories we used to read as children?"

As Adrien's voice permeated the air, sending a chilly sensation through the ears of the only audience he had—Rey—he had an air of solemnness. An eerie silence accompanied his voice as he continued, his blue eyes dulling with every uttered word.

"The Dragons are the villains, set on world domination... and the other races are being overrun by evil. Heroes are summoned to face this threat, and by slaying the Emperor, they root out the evil completely..."

Rey remained quiet as he heard Adrien speak.

He had never read or heard of any of those stories that Adrien referred to as 'cliche', and perhaps that was because he wasn't particularly afforded much of such books when he was a kid. He eventually outgrew his interest in them.

Even now, Rey found himself having more of an affinity with textbooks or documentations, rather than novels.

"It's almost like we are in such a cliche setting... and someone has developed this entire narrative to pit us against the ultimate evil."

Rey kept up his silence.

"You've seen it too, right? Some things that clearly seem biased. For example, the Elves... they're special and loved by this world. I can't use Necromancy on them—well, except Dark Elves, but still... it's almost like they were built by some sort of higher entity."

"Like... God?" At this point, he had to say something.

"You could call them that. I'd rather call them a Story Teller. In this narrative... this game of blood and death, we have been chosen as the heroes—the main characters that should bring balance and peace to the world."

"Okay...?"

"Doesn't it make sense that the villains could also be brought into this world the very same way? H'Trae is like a blank canvas... some sort of battlefield where good and evil clashes." He said with a deeper frown.

Rey could sense multiple emotions emanating from Adrien. This was the first time he would be seeing the boy express himself so deeply and seriously.

The sight was... odd.

"I don't know what benefit comes out of this, and I have no idea what good could possibly come out of this chaos. Personally... I'm not interested."

"Not interested? Is that why you want to go home?"

"YES! I wish to leave H'Trae and break free from this cruel game that is being played." Adrien raised his voice as he jumped from his seat. "That's all I want!"

"...."

"We are the heroes now... the Otherworlders who will save this world from destruction. But what happens if another summoning takes place and we end up as the villains? That would be an epic plot twist, wouldn't it? Something such a cliche and twisted storyteller would employ to enrich their plot."

"...."

"It sickens me... bothers me to no end. No matter what actions I take, and what agency I have... it makes no difference if I'm a puppet on a string. So, that's why I realized the only real choice I can make." "... And what's that?"

Adrien smiled broadly at Rey, his eyes gleaming with sheer malice and determination.

"I'll cut those strings off and see myself out of the game. By expelling myself out of this narrative, I remove myself from the board."

After absorbing all of Adrien's words, allowing everything to sink in, Rey's thoughts slowly began to surface from the inner depths where they were brewing.

'He's not wrong...'

After his encounter with The Oracle, there was no way Rey could sit there and deny Adrien's suspicions, or outright dismiss them. This indeed appeared to be a game, and they were all merely boards meant to move against the other side.

'But this guy... he's dangerously smart and perceptive.' Rey narrowed his eyes as he faced Adrien.

'I also had a few suspicions here and there due to what I saw, but to think he figured it out...'

More and more, Rey grew impressed by Adrien.

But, that wasn't all.

Alongside the increasing respect he was developing for the one opposite him, there was also the gnawing fear—the unease that ate at him.

Adrien Chase was a very dangerous person to have as an enemy.

'Is this why Ater wanted me to converse with him like this? To understand him more, but also to recognize his value as an ally... as well as his threat as an enemy?'

If that was the case, then he was finally able to see the much bigger picture, along with making a few unsettling discoveries that were still very difficult to accept. Right now, Rey didn't even know what to do or say to the boy before him.

'The Oracle... the Dragon Emperor... whatever this game they're playing is... it seems all of us are stuck in it together.'

When he was oblivious to all of this, Rey thought of H'Trae as a paradise for himself.

He had power, wealth, purpose... and allies.

But now, the world was beginning to look like a cage to him. He didn't want to see things this way, but he was now left with no choice.

And the worst part...?

'Even after learning all of this... I don't want to leave.' Rey found himself thinking, his fists tightening as he stared very deeply at Adrien. 'I love this world—despite every messy thing about it. I want to live here, grow here, explore here... I want to do so much here.'

But, Rey had to face reality.

'Maybe I should—'

"Alicia made it clear on a few occasions that she wanted to find a way home too, right? You see, we're not on opposing sides as you make us out to be." Adrien interrupted Rey's thoughts with his calm, soothing voice.

He was back on his seat, completely relaxed on the chair behind his desk.

As his piercing gaze reached Rey, he smiled softly. Then, slowly stretched out a hand towards him, Adrien parted his lips and made an offer.

"Support me, Rey. Let's work together to find a way home."

*

Chapter 698 Trust

'Should I do it...?'

In the past, Rey would have easily dismissed Adrien and viewed him with several layers of skepticism and suspicion. But... things were different now.

Now that he had listened to Adrien, trying his hardest not to allow bias get in the way of logic, he found himself truly resonating with the boy. As he processed everything, Rey asked himself one very hard question.

'If I was Adrien... if I was in his shoes... how else would I proceed with things if I knew what I knew?'

He already had an inkling of what the answer would be.

It was staring right at him.

"I can't join your side, Adrien. I can't work together with you... or take part in any of your plans." Rey finally responded after a few seconds of silence.

In response to this, Adrien hardly showed any emotion. His smile still remained, and while there was a bit of a flicker in his eyes—just a tiny flash—nothing else seemed to have really changed.

"May I ask why?"

As the question came, Rey already expected it.

It seemed like a sincere one that required an honest answer, but he still found it difficult to make a decision on the matter.

'Should I tell him the truth? Should I just leave?'

So many thoughts were jumbled into his mind, and it took what seemed like forever to get all of them sorted out so he could make a proper decision right there and then.

'I still don't know which side to trust. I don't think I'll ever be able to know for sure, but...'

Unlike The Oracle, and unlike the Natives of H'Trae, Adrien was a classmate of his that came from Earth. They were more similar than anyone else that Rey had encountered in all his life, and his goals coincided with a promise he made to Alicia.

'I promised I'd find a way for her to return home. I suppose it's high time I make good on that...'

After taking a deep breath, Rey finally spoke.

"It's because I have met The Oracle... and we have already made a deal."

[Moments Later]

"I see... I see."

Adrien, who had been dead silent for a while, finally let out his first words after a while. He mumbled a few unintelligible words to himself after, but maintained a calm and absolutely stoic demeanor despite everything.

"That's quite the difficult situation."

"Right?"

"Hm... mhm..."

Silence existed amidst them for a few seconds longer before Adrien made a deep sigh and finally looked Rey in the eye.

"I mean... it's possible for me to make a Skill to cure Alicia, but I don't see any way I can save your friend, Esme. Since we can't go around that, I suppose we're somewhat stuck."

Rey sighed and nodded. "It's why I said I can't help you."

There was no way he could assist Adrien when they both had conflicting missions. While the latter's goal was to destroy the Elves and get the Dragons to trust him enough to get him to their Empire, Rey's task was to destroy the Dragons and purge them completely from the Eastern Continent.

In essence, they held contrasting positions.

"It's funny, isn't it? Back during the Dark Undertaking, we both had the same goals, yet we were on conflicting sides. Now that we are finally seeing eye to eye, we still find ourselves on opposite ends." Adrien smiled, chuckling lightly.

"I don't see eye to eye with you on everything. I still don't think you killing Elves is right. I just... don't."

"That's fair. I don't need to convince you on this matter. I simply understand that you'd do the same in my position... and I think you know that as well."

"Just stop it with your insinuations!"

"Haha! Alright, Rey... jeez." Adrien remained partly lighthearted despite the intense mood, and it did well to lessen the intensity of the situation.

Still, the matter was yet to be resolved.

If nothing was done about the status quo, Rey and Adrien were bound to revert to become enemies.

"I think there's a way we can work together, Rey."

"Hm?"

"Yeah... yeah, that's right! We can achieve both our goals, therefore ensuring there is an incentive for the both of us to proceed with this alliance."

Rey nearly raised his brow in confusion, but controlled himself from doing so at the last minute.

'What the hell is he saying? He has to protect the Dragons and destroy Elves, while I have to destroy the Dragons and protect the Elves. They are completely opposite.'

There really wasn't a way for both sides to have what they wanted.

"It's all coming together in my head." Adrien grinned with a rather optimistic expression on his face.

"Why don't you tell?"

"Ah, yes... before that, I'll have to ask you something. I've been curious about it for some time now, and it could also help out with the plan."

Once again, Rey found his eyebrow going up, this time out of curiosity.

"How were you able to fool the Dragon Generals? I mean... I took all the necessary precautions with the recordings. You couldn't have tampered with them, or their senses, so... how did you manage to do it?" Rey chuckled as he heard this.

Perhaps he would have been more skeptical to reveal his plans if he hadn't just told Adrien about his conversation with The Oracle, and about the plight they both shared. However, since he decided to trust Adrien with that much... he found it inconsequential to reveal this other card that he had.

"Emil... you can come out now."

~GLOP!~

The moment Rey said this, a black patch rose from the attire that he had on, and the Symbiote Slime popped out with what could only be described as excitement.

Emil instantly formed a slime-like mouth from her black properties, speaking up with a rather loud and feminine voice.

"Hello! My name is Emil... Symbiote Slime and Familiar to my Master, Rey Skylar!"

*

Chapter 699 A Move On The Board

"Ahh... how fascinating!"

Adrien nearly raised his voice just a few seconds after meeting Emil and hearing the role she played in fooling him. His blue eyes warbled as he stared intensely at the Slime, and his lips were stretched to both ends as he made a broad, toothy grin.

"You're really amazing... one in a kind."

"Indeed, indeed! You get it, don't you?" Emil, who would usually be cold to any outsider who wasn't her Master, became extremely loose and even jovial with Adrien.

Perhaps this was due to the fact that he recognized her greatness and constantly sang her praises. Either way, Adrien didn't stop there.

He kept up his words of admiration, and Emil returned the energy to him. This continued at great lengths until—

"Okay, that's enough." Rey sighed, his voice louder than theirs.

His tone dripped with annoyance despite there being nothing to be really angry. He slightly glared at Adrien, then extended the same to Emil, leaking out another sigh as he shook his head very slowly.

"I think we are getting a bit sidetracked here, don't you think?"

"Eh? Really? But we are getting to know each other, right? Isn't it beneficial to get to know your allies?" Emil responded with slightly defiant words hidden behind her playful tone.

Rey frowned at her, but before he could say anything, Adrien spoke up.

"I agree with Emil. We should get to know each other a little better." "I don't think so." Despite the near consensus in the room, Rey put his foot down on the matter and refused quite vehemently.

"B-but Master—!"

"Return inside me, and don't talk to Adrien."

"Uuuu..." Almost begrudgingly, Emil did as Rey commanded, her black form slithering deep into him until she became invisible to any who looked at him.

A few moments after this were occupied by silence.

Then...

"That wasn't fair, Rey." Adrien said this, but Rey remained silent about his words—as if he didn't know what the boy was talking about.

"Emil is probably lonely without company, yet you would—"

"I don't think that's any of your business, Adrien. Can we proceed with the planning now that your curiosity has been sated?" Once again, his response was cold.

To any who saw Rey at this point, they would have thought he overreacted, or perhaps he was acting too grumpy or combative towards his allies. However, Rey had very good reasons for his actions.

'I've been trying to avoid Adrien meeting Emil for the longest time out of fear for what he might do to her, but now... it's even more frightening that he has taken a deep interest in her.'

Emil was indeed very special, and Rey recognized that better than anyone.

'Maybe it's just my imagination, but I sensed some kind of affinity between the two of them. At first, I thought it was jealousy, but...'

What if it was more? Would that really be surprising?

'Adrien is weaker than I am, but he has a lot more Skills that Emil will naturally have through her [Symbiosis] if they were to bond. He also has a Divine Tier Skill, which is what attracted her to me, in the first instance.'

Last but not least, Emil's Skills would pretty much make Adrien incredibly powerful in his own regard. All of this was to say that Rey didn't appreciate their conversations because of a potential possibility that he dreaded.

He wasn't even sure that any of the punishments he laid down to Emil for disobeying his rules would affect her, considering the kind of constitution she had. 'It's safer this way...' Rey thought to himself. He considered addressing his Symbiote Slime in a more gentle manner once she next addressed him in his thoughts.

Perhaps that would make up for his impulsive reaction to her and Adrien's conversation.

But... Emil never spoke again.

'I guess she's still sulking.' Rey laughed to himself.

She sometimes got like that, but her talkative nature would always surface after some time. He simply smiled and decided to give everything time.

"Okay. Let's get into the nitty gritty of the plan, shall we?" Adrien said with a defeated sigh.

To this, Rey nodded and sat in a more upright manner.

"Finally! Let's get to it."

[Moments Later]

"I guess we will meet again on the battlefield... well, sort of."

Adrien chuckled as he watched Rey rise to his feet. He shrugged, instantly recognizing the meaning behind his words and also his action.

"Guess you're leaving now."

"Yup! You have a visitor arriving here, don't you? I'll leave you to it."

"Yeah..."

Sparks of energy rose from Rey once he concluded his words, and the space around him began to distort. Before he finally vanished from the tent, he gave Adrien a lasting smile and nodded at him with purpose.

"You've given me a lot to think about, Adrien."

The latter chuckled and smiled calmly. "Likewise."

~VWUSH!~

Rey vanished faster than the blink of an eye, leaving Adrien seated behind his desk, mulling over every word that Rey uttered and their entire conversation. This continued even as someone approached and stood outside his tent.

It was the pink-haired Dragon Commander—Che'ri—or rather, her puppet.

She still had all the personality and mannerisms of the original, as well as most of her capabilities. Since she was originally weaker than Adrien, he was able to make a near perfect copy of her with [Pinnocchio].

Even her memories belonged to the old Che'ri, so she acted accordingly.

'I guess it has something to tell me. Or rather, the Generals have sent it to tell me something. Perhaps they're finally ready to make a move?' Adrien smiled to himself as he rose to his feet, his eyes locked at the entrance of his tent.

He could see the still silhouette of the puppet, and despite his thoughts partially dwelling on its arrival, a bulk of his mind still remained on his conversation with Rey.

'He isn't telling me everything. But, I guess that makes sense since I'm also not telling him everything...' His mind went to Emil, and he found his smile growing bigger.

'I want that Familiar. It's so fascinating. I can only imagine how useful it would be in the grand scheme of things...' His glowing blue eyes warbled even more while he dwelled on this thought.

Adrien's legs moved as his mind raced, and in no time at all, he had exited his tent. It was becoming late evening as he did so, so the orange glow in the sky, and the slight darkness that washed upon the land granted the camp a somewhat different vibe.

It felt chilly... somewhat eerie.

"A meeting has been called for by The General, and you have been invited to participate." Che'ri said with her stern tone.

It felt robotic, but that wasn't due to her identity as a puppet. She had always been like this, so Adrien nodded in satisfaction at the attention to detail that [Pinocchio] employed.

"Understood. Shall we depart for the meeting together?"

"Indeed."

The two of them walked side by side to the Grand Tent, and through it all, Adrien ran several simulations in his mind. Ultimately, after guessing and postulating over and over again, he arrived at the most likely conclusion of the meeting.

'The Generals will be joining the battle this time for sure.'

[Meanwhile...]

The moon had peaked over the land, and a young man stood in a particular corner, resting on the wall of one of the many massive buildings that existed in the Royal Estate. He made sure he was secluded, and he even utilized his Skills to make sure no one had followed him, and none were watching him. There was nothing suspicious about him being out at such a relatively late period, though.

He was an esteemed Otherworlder—one of the heroes of the United Human Alliance.

There were no real curfews or limitations applicable to heroes such as himself, as he had long proven his loyalty to humanity. Plus, he was too strong for most people to even do anything to him.

Yet, this particular Otherworlder, despite such prestige and power, seemed to be panicking. He kept up his suspicious behavior, staring at an orb in his hand as he cursed and fidgeted.

Even though he knew no one could see him, he kept glancing around him with clear unease.

"Fuck... why aren't you responding? Come on..."

His dark brown hair fluttered with the cool night breeze, and just as he was about to finally give up in anger and walk away, he was stopped by a voice.

A voice from beside him.

"Why do you appear so worked up, Justin?" The instant the boy heard that voice, he froze. It sounded so familiar that it nearly caused all the blood within him to run cold and stop flowing.

"Relax..." The voice oozed as the presence grew closer to him, even touching him on the shoulder.

"... Enjoy the weather."

Justin slowly turned his head to face the figure who was giving him nothing short of a friendly smile.

"A-Adrien... what are you doing here?"

Chapter 700 The Deciever

"A-Adrien...?!"

The calm smile that the teenage boy in front of Justin had caused chills to permeate through his bones. The sole touch on his shoulder nearly caused his body to grow numb.

Still, Justin maintained his sanity and consciousness.

"What did I say about calling out my name so flippantly?"

"A-ah... my apologies." Justin found himself taking a few steps back to create some distance between him and Adrien before bowing his head in apology.

Before he could even leak out another word, a silhouette appeared right behind Justin, where he now stood. It belonged to none other than the same young man that he had tried to avoid proximity with.

"It's fine..."

Justin froze in place, and Adrien smiled as he touched him from behind this time.

"Why are you looking so tense? You haven't done anything wrong... have you?" He coiled closer to Justin, their faces mere inches apart from each other.

At this point, the lad's heart was racing rapidly.

Was this due to fear? How about natural subservience? It was both.

Justin had no choice but to tremble before Adrien, despite the both of them being supposedly peers. Perhaps this was just the inevitable reaction his body had to make when in the presence of the one who made it this way.

Either way, he had no choice but to keep his head lowered.

"N-nothing wrong. I've done what you asked me to. I was also about to call you, per our scheduled meeting period, but—"

"I wasn't available... right?"

Justin nodded as he heard those words of confirmation from Adrien.

"Forgive me for that. I just wanted a more physical interaction for once. Surely, you don't mind..."

At this point, Adrien stood in front of Justin, finally keeping a small distance between them both.

"I don't mind."

"Raise your head, Justin. There's no reason to act so tense, is there? We're on the same side, so it's fine..."

Justin knew those sentiments existed in words alone. Adrien had always been fond of exercising courtesy in the way he addressed people, but based on his expression and actions, it was clear he didn't particularly feel that way.

He never saw Justin as a peer or equal.

'I'm just a tool for him... and that's okay.' He told himself, obediently raising his head per the instruction he received.

'As long as he fulfills his end of the deal, I can even lick his boots.'

"Justin... why did you choose to work with me again?" Adrien interrupted his thoughts with a rather unexpected question.

It took Justin off-guard for a moment, considering how he was just thinking along those lines. He felt a little annoyed that he was being probed about such a personal matter, but he didn't really have a choice in this, did he?

"What are you talking about? You were the one who approached me with the deal..."

"Then why did you choose to accept it?"

Justin clenched his fists for a few seconds before loosening it and giving out a sigh. He truly had no choice in this matter/

"I want survive in this world and return home, and you had the means to make me stronger and immortal by turning me into an Undead. That way... I could make it back home in one piece and see my family again."

Of course, Justin was just glossing over everything... but that was all he had to say.

'He doesn't need an extensive sob story about my girl back home, or the sickness that... ah, no... nevermind that.' He shook off his thoughts and focused on the moment.

There was nothing he wouldn't do to see them again, which was why he was betraying his comrades despite all they had been through together.

'Eric and Billy died... and no one even knows where Adonis is. He could even be dead by now. I... I can't afford to risk my life if it means I might not get to see them again...'

Yes, he loved his friends, and he loved the people of this world...

'But my loyalty lies with my family back on Earth. They're my first priority, and they need me back home.'

No silly jokes or fun games could distract him from that fact.

"How touching..." A voice—different from the one he had been hearing all of this time—echoed in the air. This one also felt familiar, but for another reason entirely.

As Justin lifted his eyes and focused on the entity before him, he realized it wasn't Adrien.

It never was.

The crimson hair of the ebony man danced with the wind as his red eyes warbled with fascination. He had a cruel smile plastered on his face, and he was garbed in an all-black suit, with polished shoes, and an overall pristine image.

As the image burned into Justin's mind, he found his lips unconsciously moving to let out the name that pounded in his head.

"A-Ater... y-you're..."

"Indeed, Justin. Nice deductive skills you have there." The response was sarcastic, but Justin had no opportunity to feel slighted by those words.

He was dancing on the edge of confusion and fear.

'What's happening here? Did he transform into Adrien to fool me? D-does that mean he knows about my deal with him? I-if that's the case, then everyone... everyone will know!' Beads of sweat fell from Justin's face as he stared widely at Ater.

"Tsk, tsk... you never listen, do you?" Ater clicked his tongue as he slowly approached Justin.

Normally, the boy would have taken a few steps back—even if out of reflex—but this time he found himself unable to move in the slightest.

He just watched as the being of darkness approached with the force of malevolence.

"I told you to relax." Ater placed both hands on Justin's shoulder this time, staring down at him with his devilish smile.

"... Enjoy the weather."

Justin found himself gulping, feeling himself get crushed under the overwhelming presence that Ater exuded.

There was no escape for him—none at all.