

Extras 721

Chapter 721 The Deal's Ripening

~FSHUUUU...~

As the brilliant light permeating the room dimmed, the two entities in the room came into full view once again. The darkness around was banished completely, and the utterly black surroundings were turned white.

From the ground, to the ceiling, to the walls... they were blank in color.

That was hardly the only change, though.

Rey's eyes widened as he looked at the fair lady in front of him, his eyes reflecting her pristine wonder as he nearly choked on his saliva.

Her white hair flowed immaculately behind her, as her elven ears were perked up perfectly. Her skin seemed so soft and without blemish that he felt drawn to it almost by instinct. She was still naked, and her perfectly proportioned figure made all his suppressed desires slowly surface.

Then, there was the sweet smell.

It was so overpowering that Rey felt he would have been overcome with lust if not for his incredible tolerance, or rather immunity, to such things.

'She resembles Esme... no, The Oracle...' He just looked at her, shell-shocked, feeling an indescribable feeling buried deep within him.

Ciela was definitely prettier than Esme, though not by too large a margin. Neither of them even held a candle to The Oracle, but Rey was still stunned by how it was possible for someone to be so attractive.

While he was having these thoughts, he witnessed Ciela open her eyes, revealing the blue gem-like irises she possessed. He was still drowning in the sight when she parted her moist, lustrous lips, and spoke up.

"H-Hey! What the hell?! A human?! What is a human doing here?! Where am I? Who the hell are you?!"

'A-ah... she's awake!' Rey quickly realized how distracted he had become.

"Why are your hands on my hair, filthy man? Take them off this instant! Do you know who I am?! The Oracle will not forgive this sacrilege! Nature's curses be upon you!" She kept yelling at Rey, though unable to move due to her being stuck to the walls.

'Damn. Looks like she's not much different from the rest of the Elves...' Rey had taken her back a total of 17 years and a day, which was before she ever went to the Human Continent and had Esme. Hence, her attitude was reminiscent of the kind that Elves would have in their society.

'I thought she would be different, since she went to the Western Continent, but I guess she did so selfishly out of adventure and not because she wasn't racist...'

"Hey! I'm talking to you, human! Answer my question now, or else...! Are you the one who brought me here? Why does this look like... no that can't be! Why would I be there, in the first place? Hey, you... urgh!"

Before Ciela could continue even more of her loud ramblings, Rey cast a Sleep spell on her, causing the Elf to fall unconscious instantly.

'Argh... it's good to know she's so unpleasant. I don't have to deal with her or explain anything.' He itched his head while groaning.

Despite thinking this to himself, Rey knew it was only an excuse to have.

'In the end, all of this is because I don't want Esme to be an Oracle Candidate, and I want to pass the burden to someone else. This way, it's easier since I don't get to hear her vehemently refuse the role.' He thought to himself.

Even though he didn't hear it from her lips, Rey already knew she most likely didn't want the position.

If she really did, she wouldn't have gone to the Western Continent.

'But... that really is none of my business.' He knew fully well that his thoughts only validated what Adrien said about him, and as much as it pained him to admit it, the boy was right about him all along.

'To achieve my goal... to save Esme... I guess I am capable of subjecting someone else to this.'

In essence, he was relegating someone to a fate that he considered too tragic for another—even though the latter wanted the role while the former rejected it.

Rey knew the hypocrisy of his actions, and yet... yet... YET...

"I'm so happy... and relieved..." A smile awkwardly formed on his face as he looked at the fresh face of the one he would be exchanging for Esme's freedom.

Now that he had an Oracle Candidate ready, there was nothing holding him back from seeing Esme and bringing her back.

'I'm coming back for you, Esme... just you wait!'

All of the Elders waited outside The Shrine as Rey stepped in while carrying Ciela in his arms, her covered body cradled like a baby.

Rey's steps were measured and precise, filled with caution and also excitement, as he traversed the Shrine's halls until he got to the front of the statue. He cast his gaze on the lifeless thing and inhaled deeply before proceeding.

"I have your Candidate, and I have fulfilled our bargain. Now... fulfill yours!" For a moment, nothing happened.

Rey waited patiently this time, though. There was no way The Oracle was sleeping, and he doubted she couldn't hear him, so he simply waited to be transported to her Domain.

However, even after waiting a while... nothing happened.

'Hold on...!' A sudden dark thought began to permeate Rey's mind. 'What if... she was after Esme all along?!

That would mean that The Oracle had only sent him on a wild goose chase in order to get him off her back, while also saving the Elves in the process.

'No... that can't be! If that's the case, then—!' Rey began to panic, though the instant he did this, all of his emotions were suppressed.

Then came rage! Sheer, unbridled rage began to lurk in his heart as he glared very deeply at the statue.

This also fizzled out, much to his frustration.

And then, just as he was about to give out as a result of this frustration, the statue before him began to move, and its eyes glowed a bright color. The entire room was suddenly filled with a warm sensation and an amazing scent.

Before Rey even realized it, he was no longer in the shrine.

"We meet again, Rey..." A rather familiar voice echoed all around him, causing him to open his eyes and direct his senses towards the maiden before him and not the elaborately beautiful structures around him.

"Welcome back to my Domain."

Chapter 722 Walking With The Oracle [Pt 1]

'She's perfect!'

Now that he was in her presence once again, Rey became reminded of how he felt the first time he laid eyes on the epitome of beauty.

The Oracle's every frame was perfection itself—from her perfectly beautiful face, to her shimmering blue eyes, and the dress she wore which was adorned with gold and all other forms of jewels.

Her hair was whiter than all else, and the fact that her body was bathed with the brilliant golden rays of the sanctuary around her only increased her appeal. Her very posture was full of elegance, and the way she stoically gazed upon Rey made her appear all the more majestic.

"So, you've returned..." She broke the silence, her eyes trailing to the Elf that Rey tightly had close to his chest.

It was only when she said this that Rey ceased his light gawking and cleared his throat in a slightly unnatural fashion. He felt like an idiot for staring that long, but there was just something about The Oracle that made it almost impossible not to be engrossed in her.

"Yes, so... I brought your Vessel." He raised Ciela high, showing the Elf in all her glory to the epitome of perfection before him.

"I can see that. Now, hand her over..." As The Oracle stretched out her hand to receive Ciela's unconscious body, Rey pulled it away and made a slight glare at The Oracle.

"Esme first. I've done so much already for this deal, so it's only right that I get her first, right?" He knew The Oracle was much stronger than he was, but he also remembered their last battle quite vividly.

'As long as I maintain control over the space around me, it won't be easy for her to grab Ciela from me. And, at this point, there's no need for her to refuse the deal since I'm in her domain with the prize.'

Just as Rey expected, The Oracle gave in.

"Fair enough." She said, moving away from Rey as her lips parted a second time. "Follow me."

Without wasting any time, Rey thrust his body forward and trailed behind the flowing hair that danced behind The Oracle.

They traversed the golden palace until they reached a door, which The Oracle opened. Its content was pure white, and she stepped inside, allowing Rey to follow suit before the doors closed behind them both.

'H-huh...?'

Upon entry, Rey was greeted with an entirely surprising sight.

The white point led them to what appeared to be a dense forest, filled with so many plants, shrubberies, and endless trees that seemed to stretch on forever. The door they came through had long vanished, and only the forest seemed to exist.

As Rey was silently wrapping his thoughts around what happened, The Oracle ceased walking and turned to face him.

"Don't waste time." As she said this, her eyes glowed blue and she slightly creased her brows in a glare.

"I was just observing my surroundings. That isn't a waste of time." He responded rather swiftly, refusing to be bullied by her.

Inasmuch as she was stronger than him, he couldn't dismiss the fact that he had certainly worked hard to qualify for this meeting. It wasn't like he was asking for some kind of favor this time.

This was something he earned! Besides... "It's ironic that, for someone so particular about time, you delayed me for so long before responding to my appearance in the Shrine."

He had spent at least thirty minutes there, and yet... she only responded when he was growing justifiably paranoid. Something told him The Oracle did this intentionally, but her constantly passive and detached attitude told him she wasn't the petty type.

So what was it? Why did she take so long?

"Synchronizing this realm with H'Trae takes time. It's why I took a while before bringing you here and sending you back the last time." The Oracle said with a calm, impersonal tone.

Once again, she didn't seem to care, but that wasn't what struck Rey.

'So she was taking it easy on me last time? Or rather... she didn't take too much action until she could send me back to the normal world, huh?' It somehow felt like bullshit, but since Rey had no other answer to his question, and he saw no reason why The Oracle would lie to him about such an

inconsequential detail, he accepted it. Once they walked a little more, the atmosphere suddenly changed. The dense forest vanished, replaced by the dry and hot climate of the desert.

Grains of sand sucked to Rey as he moved, forcing him to kick them with every step he took. He was tempted to fly, but after seeing The Oracle walking, he decided to just continue.

'It's not like I'm growing tired or anything...'

The sand was just really uncomfortable, but since the fair maiden could endure it... so could he.

Not long after, the desert became an icy realm—surrounded by tall snow-capped mountains, with lands littered with snow.

The change was so swift that Rey didn't even notice it until it happened.

'Is this some sort of amalgamation of different spaces? Or do spaces of various kinds overlap here?' It was difficult to tell, even with his senses and spatial control.

Perhaps that was because The Oracle had more dominant authority over the space than him.

Rey planned to remain silent and simply observe, but after doing this for a while, his curiosity got the better of him, so he blurted out the pressing question on his mind.

"How long till we get to Esme?"

"...."

She didn't answer him, and kept walking instead. 'Tch!' Not liking the fact that he was ignored, Rey stopped moving, and not long after, The Oracle stopped as well. She didn't turn to look at him this time, but she did so anyway.

Suddenly, the atmosphere became a thunderstorm—with heavy rain descending from the darkened heavens, and swirling winds dancing all over the area. The immense darkness was illuminated by The Oracle's presence, and despite the heavy rain that fell, she did nothing to stop herself from getting drenched.

Instead, she uttered words that stopped Rey from uttering anything in protest. "You already know the truth about the Dragons, don't you? About their identity as Otherworlders... and their role in this world."

Rey's facade was that of stoicism—at least, that was what he hoped. He also ensured to keep it that way as he gave his response.

"What of it?"

"You must have an idea of how this world operates, then. It is a story... with a start, a middle, and an end... all of it determined."

Rey didn't know why The Oracle was telling him this, especially when his question was about Esme, but he wasn't going to waste such an opportunity—especially when she was being so talkative.

"Determined by who? You, right?"

"No."

Her flat answer caught Rey off guard, but he only followed up the response with another question.

"So who is the—?"

"I do not know. I only know a little more than you do about all of this... and the purpose of this world." She responded before he could even finish his words.

Then, as she turned to look at him, the dropping rain that cascaded down her face made it appear as though she was crying heavy tears.

"Just as you had no say in becoming a piece... I had no say in being a player."

Chapter 723 Walking With The Oracle [Pt 2]

There is no such thing as a real 'Choice.'

For everything one does has been somewhat predetermined by biological inclinations and societal orientation. People are predisposed to acting in certain ways due to their upbringing, as well as innate traits inherited through the gene.

These factors make the 'Free Will' they possess as mere illusions.

One does not 'choose' to eat. They are either hungry, satisfying a craving, or following a directive stemming from certain external conditions that is further amplified by an internal response.

... This is the position of certain philosophies.

"I am not the one who started all of this." The Oracle began as she looked at Rey with an emotionless face.

Yet, her eyes... something about it felt tragic.

"I am neither the owner of the game, nor the one who designed the board. I am nothing more than a player forced to sit on one end of the board and play with the pieces that I am bestowed upon."

"Bestowed upon by who?"

"I do not know, but... you have met one of them, have you not? The messenger of the ones above." As The Oracle said this, Rey remembered the accident that brought himself and all his classmates before the pearly gates.

Back then, they were greeted by a rather magnificent entity.

"Seraph?"

"So that is their name..." The Oracle smiled softly. "It appears you knew something I didn't."

Rey returned her smile and responded. "Not anymore."

"Huhu... indeed."

At that point, the rain ceased and it became a rather sunny atmosphere. The sudden warmth cleared the remnant cold, though the drenched figure of The Oracle remained unchanged as Rey stared at her.

She wasn't walking, which meant she had more to tell him.

"I know this is asking for a lot, but do not resent me and the Elves. Continue to look after them, even after the conclusion of our deal."

Rey smirked as soon as he heard that. "And what's in it for me?"

She shrugged almost instantly.

"Nothing. Consider it something of a last favor... a dying wish of sorts."

"You're going to die?"

"Not necessarily. Just as with my predecessors, my consciousness and knowledge will be merged with the new Vessel and become the new Oracle. However, I am not certain if I will remain 'me' once this is over. I doubt I was this way before I became The Oracle, and I also doubt I will continue to remain this way in the new Vessel."

Rey understood what she was saying, and it honestly felt scary.

'I guess she was also making tough choices for the sake of the world. Rather than selfishly choosing to preserve her own life, she wants to benefit the larger whole.' The prime reason she couldn't make more egregious moves was because the enemy would do the same—which was why agency was left to the pieces on the board. In a sense, she was a victim of this entire scenario, and while Rey found it very hard to fully absolve her of all the negative emotions he had towards her... he could empathize with her.

'Logically speaking... she has done nothing wrong.'

All the grievances he had were merely emotional; subject to his arbitrary definition of right and wrong... something he felt rather hesitant to rely so strongly on now..

"The truth is... I love this world." Rey confessed, following the same spirit that prompted The Oracle to speak up in the first place.

"Oh, really?"

"While I know that isn't the case, it almost feels like this entire world was made just for me. I got an amazing Skill, was able to experience a lot of amazing things... and even though I've been in a lot of messed up situations... I'm still alive somehow."

Yes, perhaps all of this was mostly luck. Maybe he just happened to be the one to win the lottery, hence becoming special as a result.

It could have been anyone, so having such power fall on him was still perfectly normal.

That was what he told himself.

"I know it's conceited for me to think this way, but I somehow feel responsible for this world—or rather, the people within it."

Rey didn't know the exact moment when his goal evolved from just getting stronger to a much larger ambition, but he knew that within himself now.

"I want this war to end. I want to protect humanity, to defeat the Dragons... and to create a peaceful world for all to live in."

Perhaps this was all just a selfish way of saying he wanted a "Happily Ever After" for himself, but this was much larger than him at this point.

It was probably naive and childish of him, but... he truly wanted to help.

"And, even though I had the chance to be complicit in the destruction of the Elves, and I also despise them for a lot of the things they have done... I still want to protect them."

In his eyes, they were like misguided children who had committed several atrocities. He could perhaps put some blame on them, but it would be unfair to shove all of the responsibility to them—just as it would be unfair to do the same to The Oracle.

'In the end, whoever is behind this is to blame.'

So, Rey made a vow to himself—at least, regarding the matter with the Elves.

"I will show them the right path."

He had all the power and recognition to do so, so rather than just utilizing the Elves for his benefit, he would also give back to them.

"Thank you, Rey." She smiled at him. "Though, I do not think your intentions translate to what would be best for the Elves."

"What do you mean?" He furrowed his brows at this point.

"The current 'problematic' views of the Elves, as well their no-killing policy is necessary for their preservation by Nature."

"Preservation? What do you—?"

"Listen carefully, Rey. In the future, only the Elves will survive the great conflict to come, and they will thrive in the new age." As the Oracle said this, Rey looked at her with horror.

Her expression showed no malice or pleasure—just an emotionless facade.

"I told you already, didn't I? In the end... you will fail."

Chapter 724 Walking With The Oracle [Pt 3]

"This world... H'Trae... is meant to be inherited by the Elves."

Rey already knew that the world had a certain bias towards the Elves. Despite their non-violent culture, they were still incredibly powerful. They also had such hubris that was backed up by the world's preference towards them.

He was constantly told to help them, and it was only when he was on their side that his Alignment became a 'Good' Variant.

'Does that mean Good and Evil are decided by one's tendency to aid the Elves and not Harm them? Are things really that simple here?' He didn't know anymore.

From what The Oracle just told him, everything else was pointless.

"Everyone else will perish?" He asked, just for confirmation, and he watched as The Oracle affirmed his words.

"Everyone else will perish."

Rey was supposed to believe her. After all, she had been correct about the 'path' that opened up which allowed him to save Ciela. She was also correct about plenty of other things, and she even seemed sincere and impersonal about the whole thing.

He knew she certainly wasn't lying.

But, even then...

"I can't believe it. I don't think the future is as set in stone as you believe it to be." Rey mumbled to himself.

"Are you saying I saw wrong?"

"No." He stared hard at her as he gave the only response he could. "It's simply that I intend to change that future you saw."

Rey believed in his own free will, as well as the power of decisions. If a person knew the future and did his best to change it, one of two things could happen.

He could inevitably arrive at that future... or he could completely change it.

For example, if a person knew he would die in a car accident, then he could simply stay at home all day and call sick at work. By doing so, he would have changed that future... though it was possible that a car crashed into his home and killed him, despite his attempts to prevent the accident in its entirety.

Either way, Rey didn't think the man's death in the latter case amounted to the same future as with the first scenario if he just entered his car and died in the car accident.

The future had changed somehow, and his death happened in a different fashion.

"If I know enough, and I take the proper actions... I'm sure I will be able to change the future enough to save as many people as possible."

A lot of people were probably still going to die, but if he could preserve the majority—saving as many as he possibly could—that would be more than enough as an accomplishment for him.

No, not just him. It would be the best outcome for H'Trae.

"And do you think those who designed this game will let you alter that future that has been preset?"
"...."

"One of the benefits of playing a game is that one doesn't know the final outcome. They do not know if they will win or lose. But this... this one is different. It's less like a game and more like a story. The ones above already have an end in mind, and your defiance will alter it."

"...."

"Do you truly believe they will stay still and let you interfere?"

After being silent for so long, Rey smiled as he confidently placed his hand on his chest and responded with as much boldness as he could muster.

"I don't care for them. Cowards who arbitrarily set up the worst possible outcome for a story and leave us to live out their mess... I can't be bothered with them."

Was he scared of those high up? The ones who had even more authority than The Oracle? Yes... yes, they frightened him.

But weren't they functionally nonexistent in this world?

They contributed nothing to H'Trae, and all they did was set up the world—dooming most of its residents to destruction.

"If they haven't interfered thus far, I don't expect them to do anything of note. And even if they do... I'll think of something once I get to that point."

If he and everyone else in this world were fated to die, the very least he could do was try his best to help as many people survive. And if the ones above had a problem with it and finally descended from their high place, then things couldn't possibly be worse than total annihilation.

That was his current position.

Perhaps this was all blind stubbornness—the kind expected from an immature teenager who had very limited experience of the world.

But Rey truly clung to his words, refusing to let them go no matter what.

The Oracle saw that as she listened to him speak, and it made her chuckle—no, even laugh—very loudly.

"You could be correct... after all, you are The Singularity that even I do not understand." Her laughter still echoed as she uttered those words and smiled very longingly at him.

"I hope to witness this future that you will create from the depths of my successor's consciousness."

"You could also help, you know? Tell me everything about the future—no, maybe just the important bits—so that I can do my best!"

The Oracle shook her head slowly and sadly as she heard this.

"Rather unfortunately, I can not. My memory has reached its utmost limit, and other than what happens at the very end, I have no knowledge of whatever happens after now."

"What? Damn it!"

"I would have also liked to bless you with my Skill [Clairvoyance], but your limited memory and weak body will not be able to properly utilize it in any meaningful way."

"Isn't it SSS-Tier?"

"That does not matter in the face of your [Doppel]."

"You can see the future with [Clairvoyance], can't you? In that case, even if it is seconds, or minutes, or hours into the future... I am sure it will help me out in some way. Please... give me the Skill!"

The Oracle smiled and nodded at Rey upon hearing his resolute request.

"Very well, Rey. Consider this my contribution for the future you wish to create."

Chapter 725 World Of White

?The walk of silence continued between the two.

After their interaction subsided, neither Rey or The Oracle spoke another word to each other. Instead, the latter kept her eyes forward, and the latter followed her every movement. The landscape around them kept changing too.

Rey didn't ask any further questions, not allowing his impatience to get the better of him this time. He knew better than to say anything problematic.

This continued until, once again, The Oracle stopped.

"We're here..."

Rey set his gaze beyond The Oracle, staring into the space that she had her eyes on. That was when he saw it--a door in the middle of nowhere.

It was currently a desert landscape, so dry sand kept swirling around the door, its grains beating upon it as they danced in the air.

"She is beyond that door." The Oracle pointed, gesturing that Rey proceeded into the place.

Normally, Rey would have been very conflicted and skeptical of the whole thing. He would be rather suspicious of The Oracle, wanting her to venture in first--something like that. He would have considered a chance that the door was a trap too.

All of that was stifled now.

It wasn't that he trusted The Oracle completely, but that he simply saw no reason to be on guard before her. There was no need for her to resort to such an elaborate trap, even if she had malicious intent.

And Rey didn't think she had any malicious intent.

'So Esme is behind that door, huh...?' Stepping forward while breathing heavily, Rey kept his gaze fixated on the lone door.

There didn't seem to be anything behind it, but that didn't stop him from reaching for the doorknob and twisting it the moment he got close enough.

~FSHUUU~

A hissing sound proceeded from within the door as soon as he merely opened it.

"Go on" The Oracle's voice prompted him, and he could feel her gaze on his back. Not wanting to cause any further delay, he took a deep breath and stepped into the world of the unknown that he would be thrust into.

Then...

"T-this is--?" Rey's eyes widened as he was greeted with yet another vast world.

This was a land of winter, with a lot of mountains in the distance, and dried trees decorating the surrounding from various sides. In this world of white, there was silence--a form of purity. The decorum was deafening, and it felt sacred to the utmost.

No living entity seemed to be present.

... Except one.

"What are you doing here, Rey?"

Rey's heart nearly skipped a beat as soon as he heard the voice. He hadn't been too distracted not to notice that she was standing right behind him. He just didn't know what to say when he faced her, so he remained like that until she spoke.

Even though his back was turned against her, he could see her pretty normally thanks to his all-round vision.

She was gorgeous--as usual.

No... even better.

Something about these white lands seem to accentuate her beauty, giving her the vibe of an untouched flower--delicate and precious.

"I..." Rey didn't know where to start from, or what to say.

A million thoughts ran in his head, and he could only pick one. The choice became so difficult that he decided not to think at all and simply follow his instincts.

"... I missed you."

Turning to face her, he allowed the fiercely cold wind to blow against his dark hair, revealing his eyepatched eye on one side, and the crimson one on the other. He also saw her wearing a pure gown, almost like a wedding dress, staring at him stoically.

Despite his best attempts to hide his emotions, they bled out too raw. In contrast to him, though, Esme didn't seem to have any struggles at all.

She was completely calm.

"I'm guessing The Oracle informed me of your arrival..."

"She didn't."

Rey was stunned. If The Oracle didn't tell Esme that he was coming, how could she maintain such a calm facade even when they were face-to-face with each other?

'Could it be—?!'

"I know what you're thinking, Rey, but The Oracle didn't do anything to me. She has hardly interacted with me since I got here."

"O-ohh..."

Rey used his [Perfect Divine Appraisal] just to confirm, and Esme wasn't lying. She was perfectly normal—at least according to the System.

"I see..."

"Yeah..."

After this, they both stared awkwardly at each other, the distance between them about ten meters or so. Either of them could close it in a second, but they both remained transfixed in their positions.

Until...

"Can we talk? I'm sorry for not hearing you out last time." Rey finally spoke up, breaking into a sigh.

"It's fine."

"No, it's not!" He quickly interrupted her. "I should have considered you greatly, focusing on what you wanted and why. If I did that... I would have been able to properly convince you not to do this."

"You wouldn't have been able to convince me, Rey. This is something I want to do." She shook her head stubbornly.

Rey could feel a burning emotion within him as soon as he saw this.

"So... you were so comfortable just leaving? I still don't understand. As much as I apologize for not giving a conversation between us a chance, you also share in the blame for that. You... you..."

"So do you despise me—?"

"NO!" Rey took a step forward, but quickly stopped upon realizing how forceful he was probably being.

His main purpose for all of this was not just to get Esme to come back with him, but for the both of them to have a conversation and understand each other.

That wouldn't happen if he chose to be brutish.

"Rey... can I tell you something?" Esme's face seemed downcast at this point, depicting the very first emotion he had observed from her since their reunion.

The atmosphere suddenly grew tense, but Rey readily responded anyway.

"Yes! Yes, of course—"

In a flash, she appeared right in front of Rey, her eyes fixated on his as she parted her lips and uttered the words.

"I love you."

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Chapter 726 Confessions

Rey stared dumbfoundedly at Esme the moment he heard those words.

"Y-you--"

Before he could say anything more, she held him on both cheeks and pushed herself upward while pulling him towards her.

He was still recoiling from the confession when he felt her lips touch his. Before he realized what was happening, he was in a passionate kiss with Esme, the both of them reciprocating the action.

Rey couldn't believe this was him.

No... it was more like he didn't want to believe that this was him.

He had so much pent-up passion that was released during the kiss, and the deeper he went into it, the more comfortable he became.

His stiff hands began to move, and they reached for Esme's body, going for an embrace.

But--

"No, Rey..." Before he could fully capture her in his arms, Esme pulled away, leaving him stuck in place.

"I know you're in love with Alicia. I don't want to get in the way of that..."

That seemed strange, coming from someone who had just kissed him, but Rey said nothing about that. He just had a bewildered expression on his face as he stared at her.

"Rather than make you choose, or complicate matters... I have chosen this path. This way, I will carry the burden of my emotions myself, while also walking down a path of greater purpose."

Rey instinctively knew that if he didn't say anything, it would all be over.

He already understood that.

And so, parting his moist lips for the first time since the kiss, he finally blurted out the words that his mind could form as fast as possible.

"I don't want to lose you."

Esme gave him a slight smile, shrugging at those words.

"Rey... it's not that simple."

"I know it isn't. I know, but... can you just allow me to be selfish? Please..." He didn't know what else to tell her.

He didn't know what to say about his love for Alicia, or her love for him, or the way he felt right now just looking at her. He didn't want to lie to her, but he also didn't want to be honest with her as well... about his feelings that ran rabid within him.

He simply suppressed them and told her what he could.

But... none of it was enough.

Esme shook her head once she was done hearing his pleas and smiled.

"My decision has already been made, Rey. I will become the next Oracle." She gave her resolute response with a determined expression.

He could see it in her eyes--she was completely serious.

"... I'm sorry."

Sadness followed her eyes as she looked away from him, allowing the cold wind to blow around them and quell the silence with its cold howl. This was only temporary, though, as Rey also gave his reply.

"I'm sorry as well..."

If he had known things would turn out this way, he would have taken a different path. After all, he wanted Esme to be happy, and if this was what made her experience fulfillment, then he wouldn't have come in the way of that.

'No, who am I kidding? I would have still done so...'

Becoming The Oracle meant merging one's consciousness with so many others. Esme would no longer be herself once the process was complete, which made her functionally dead.

How could he ever allow that under any circumstances?!

'I wish there was some sort of compromise I could make, or some way to make you change your mind. Unfortunately, there isn't.'

And... it was already too late for any of that.

~VWUUUUUSH!~

That very instant, someone interrupted the rather tense silence that enveloped the two. She floated in the sky, forcing the two to gaze upon her in all her glory.

The instant they saw The Oracle, they recognized her.

"I have come here to inform you that the deal has been canceled." She said in a fairly cold and detached manner..

"H-huh?"

To call Esme shocked would be an understatement. She was stupefied by The Oracle's decision, and so kept alternating glances between Rey and The Oracle. It appeared as though she wanted to say a million things at once, but was stuck on delivery.

"You are a sweet and kind girl, Esme. You also carry a lot of strength and virtue within you... all of which will be lost once you become The Oracle."

"What?"

"I do not wish for you to carry such a burden."

"I want to!::

"No, Esme... trust me when I say that you don't want to." The Oracle's voice was reminiscent of sadness as she spoke.

If she, as The Oracle, was so certain about the overwhelming loss that would be bestowed upon her successor, surely it would be able to convince Esme of the wrongness of her choice.

But no.

The girl stubbornly clung to the idea, once again trying to enforce the deal they made.

However, no matter how hard Esme pushed, The Oracle shook her head. There was no way she was budging from her position—partly because she already had a replacement, but also because of what she saw within Esme.

It was something she didn't want to taint.

"Esme... despite your identity as a Half Elf, I recognize you as one of us... one of me. I won't be turning you into a Full Elf, but you are not lesser than they are."

At this point, The Oracle descended to Esme and embraced her.

Their foreheads touched each other in a light tap, causing a beam to explode from the contact made. Coupled with the light was a surge of energy.

~VWUUUUUM!~

As the violent winds whipped across the area, and Rey stood there witnessing all that was happening, the silence among the three seemed to last an eternity.

"Farwell, Esme..." The Oracle's sweet voice echoed softly into the air, melodiously ringing in the atmosphere around them.

Esme's eyelids fell short, and she lost all the strength in her body at that moment.

"I hope you find happiness."

*

Chapter 727 The Oracle's Last Words

"Was this... the best choice?"

Rey now had Esme in his arms, and The Oracle was now holding the unconscious Ciela. After she fell unconscious, Rey had used his Spatial abilities to bring her to him, and afterwards gave The Oracle the Vessel she required.

With their deal sealed, there was practically nothing left of their exchange. It was time for Rey to return home, and for The Oracle to start her business.

But...

"I feel like I just did a horrible act, depriving her of her wish."

Rey's guilt was eating him up, and he turned to The Oracle to hear her opinion on it.

"Indeed. Ciela should be more compatible with me anyway, so having her as the Vessel is a lot more beneficial to—"

"Not that, idiot! I mean... ahem... sorry about that."

"It's fine. It takes one to know one."

"W-whoa! Where did that come from?" Rey was more than surprised to see the usually emotionless and detached Oracle throw a jab at him in such a way.

It even made him smile a little.

"A-ah..." The moment he smiled, he realized that this had to have been The Oracle's plan all along.

This was her way of cheering him up.

"Thanks... Oracle?"

"You're welcome, Rey." The two of them exited the space where Esme was in through another door that suddenly appeared before them, and once they did so, they returned to The Oracle's golden

palace. 'Does that mean she could have brought us to Esme directly? Then why didn't she?' Rey wanted to ask, but quickly decided against it. The reason she chose such an elaborate method was probably to have a discussion with him, and based on how productive it was, he didn't regret a second of it. The only problem on his mind was Esme... and one other issue.

"What about Alicia? Is she—?"

"She has been healed already." The Oracle's response was swift, almost as if she could read his thoughts. Upon hearing this, he smiled and nodded.

'I can heal her curse with [Tempora], but that would mean reverting her Stats and Skills that have evolved due to summoning Dagon. That won't be good in the long run, so this arrangement is far better.'

Other than relief, however, Rey didn't feel much about the news.

Perhaps he thought it was already a given, or because he already had some way to save her, so he didn't feel as excited as he thought he would be. Either way, that ate away at him too.

"I should be leaving now." Rey muttered, almost in a defeated tone. "Thank you for everything."

"It's nothing."

As The Oracle said this, Rey began to feel the spatial pressure around him loosen. The difference between how he was willingly leaving the Domain this time, and how he was forced to the last time played in his mind, causing him to smile wryly.

So much had changed in such little time that he didn't know how to properly acclimate.

"One last thing, Rey."

The moment he heard his name, Rey looked up to see The Oracle's concerned expression.

"Be very wary of that Familiar that you keep close. The one you trust so deeply and place in charge of your affairs."

The moment he heard this, a brow went up and he blurted out. "Ater?"

"That thing... even I am unaware of what kind of entity they are. They are filled with sheer malevolence and unknown elements. Definitely... definitely malicious." Rey already knew most of these things about Ater, but there was a certain ominousness that rang from The Oracle's warnings that seemed very legitimate. He didn't like the eerie feeling he got about Ater afterwards.

'I mean, even the System told me to stay away from him, but... '

How possible was that at this point?

'Even though he claims to be bound to me, I guess there's no real way to verify his claim. It's also possible that he could find a workaround, given all that he knows. It's possible that he's up to no good too...'

Rey still felt like he could stop him if push came to shove, though, since most of Ater's attacks wouldn't have an effect on him.

'I suppose I'll be more vigilant for now...'

"Thank you. I will take your counsel seriously." He bowed, smiling broadly at The Oracle, who exchanged his gesture.

"Mhm..."

"Bye."

"Yeah... bye."

It struck Rey that this would probably be the last time he was going to lay his eyes on the entity before him. Something about their farewell sounded too lackluster and unsatisfying.

He wanted it to be more memorable—at least, for her.

"Your name?"

"Pardon?"

"Do you remember your name?"

"A-ah... I believe I was once named Emilia."

"Well, Emilia... sorry for hitting you during our last meeting, and for being rude and annoying."

"Haha... it's fine." She chuckled, covering her lips as she smiled at him.

"You... I won't let you down! I promise!"

"Alright then, Rey." The Oracle—no, Emilia—waved at him and blessed him the sweetest smile he had ever seen in his life.

"Take care... always."

"Su—!"

~VWUUUUSH!~

Before Rey could get the last word in, the spatial rupture around him erupted and he and the girl he carried were sent back to the Shrine, leaving the standing Oracle all alone in the vast space.

She stood there for a few seconds, staring into empty space.

Then—

"I have to admit... I am a little envious of you, Esme..." She muttered, slowly turning away to look at the floating figure of her new Vessel.

"You have someone who would go to any lengths to save you."

The closer she got to the floating Elf, the nearer she got to her demise. However, Emilia was not sad at all.

To her, she had already perished the moment she became The Oracle.

"If I had even one person who stood up for me back then... would I too have been able to escape the shackles of fate?"

It was too late to ponder about that now.

Her time was up, and it was time for a new Vessel to carry on the eternal role of being a slave to the ones above.

To play a game with a concluded end.

Chapter 728 Betrayal

~VWUUUUSH!~

In a spark of energy, and swirling of distorted space, Rey found himself in the Shrine.

He stood right in front of the statue, his eyes fixated on how its glowing eyes slowly began to dim, until it became as lifeless as it usually was. Esme was cradled on his arms the whole time, and his expression was absolutely lull.

This stoic expression was a full front, though.

Deep in his heart, he was struggling with a myriad of emotions that he had to keep suppressed.

He understood what was going to happen to Emilia, he had to ponder about Esme, had to think about Alicia, and also about the higher powers that The Oracle spoke of. Then, there was the impending destruction of the world that seemed inevitable according to the one who witnessed the future.

All of this information came with their fair share of emotions—a lot of them.

He couldn't process them.

If he tried, they would overflow and overwhelm his mind. Knowing this, Rey reckoned it was best to abandon those feelings for the moment until he was able to properly rest—both physically and mentally.

'I haven't slept for a few days now. I've been thinking about a lot, exerting myself a lot, and overall just... haa... I need a break.' His thoughts flowed, though he felt they were too disjointed for his tastes—yet another sign that he needed a break.

But all of that would have to wait.

Right now, Rey had to deal with something else, and it was tied to the fact that he wasn't alone in the Shrine.

"I thought we would be meeting later." He muttered, turning away from the Statue while averting his eyes to the one who stood behind him.

"Didn't you have somewhere you had to be... Adrien?"

Adrien was standing very close to the entrance of the Shrine, and it was clear that he had been waiting for Rey for quite some time.

As soon as he heard this question, the smile on his face broadened and he shrugged the whole thing off almost instantly. Instead of replying immediately, he chuckled and walked closer to Rey.

"I just wanted to see you one final time before leaving. After this, I'll be heading to my next destination."

"Is that so? Okay then..."

"That's her, right? Esme... what a nice name for a nice lady."

Rey tightened his hold on Esme as he frowned at Adrien, who waved his hands in surrender, laughing as he spoke.

"Sorry, sorry... I mean no harm. I'm not interested in her anyway."

"Who said anything about interest?"

"Hm? What did you mean, then?" Adrien raised a playful brow, but it was quickly followed by a heavy sigh from Rey.

"Just stay away from my allies, okay? If there's nothing else, we should part ways here."

"Hmm... I see." Adrien smirked. "Understood."

"If that's all, then—"

"I went to the Elf Dungeon and found it raided already. It seems someone beat me to it, so I wanted to confirm if that was you."

"Yes, that was me." Rey answered honestly, slightly growing annoyed by Adrien's questions.

"I knew it! The only one who could possibly do it in this whole Continent—apart from me, of course—is you. Well, there's Emil too..."

"Again with Emil? Just stop it already." Rey didn't want to get too worked up, since that would just be adding one more emotions to the mix of highly volatile ones already in stock.

And so, instead of adding gasoline to the flames, Rey suppressed to the point where the subject matter became one of slight interest to him.

"You really don't know the value of what you have, Rey. Emil is—"

"Mine. She's my Familiar, and I'll handle her however I please. If you have nothing more of relevance to add, I'll be having my leave now."

It was getting more and more taxing, controlling his emotions. He was tempted to use [Perfect Calm], but his actions would be too unpredictable in that state.

"I'll just teleport, and... h-huh...?"

All of a sudden, Rey felt all the Mana drain within his body, leaving his tank at the very bottom of zero. Before he could even realize what was happening, Emil's voice echoed within his mind in the loudest voice possible.

~I'M DONE WITH YOU, REY!~

"What?!" Without his Mana, most of his Skills were deactivated—as even passive Skills required some Mana to work on, and Buffs needed to multiply pre-existing numbers.

With everything at zero, he felt the weight of his exhaustion weigh on him even more—though he still managed everything.

The sudden protest that Emil gave added one more emotion to the mix—confusion.

~You are a terrible Master, and you don't appreciate me at all... unlike Adrien! He is a far better candidate than you, and he understands my true worth!~

The powerful blast of sheer Mana should have easily destroyed the entire Shrine and everything around it for at least a few blocks—if not more—yet nothing of the sort happened.

Instead, the incredible explosion was contained within a barrier that covered the explosion in its entirety.

As a result, only the interior of the barrier was affected by the powerful explosion.

"Haa..." A sharp exhalation rose from within the barrier as a naked figure stepped out, his flesh forming as he emerged from the smoke.

Bones, muscles, and every other aspect of his body completely regenerated from the blast that would have reduced anyone and anything in its vicinity into ashes.

Rather, due to immortality, the figure did not meet his end.

Instead, in about a minute, he had completely recovered from the damage caused by the eruption of his own Mana.

"... They're gone, huh?"

Rey looked around him, even going as far as spreading his senses to everything around him, but he didn't find a trace of both Adrien and Emil. It was clear that they fled the instant she shot him with the Mana Blast.

'If I didn't hesitate, I would have... no, there's no use thinking about any of that now.'

If what The Oracle said about his Familiar was true, then this was good riddance. Emil was going to be very problematic to deal with as a foe, but now that he knew exactly what she was, he wouldn't hesitate to use whatever means possible to eliminate her.

'Since Adrien sees no problem taking my Familiar, he surely won't have a problem with me destroying her.'

The real problem was information.

'Emil knows about [Doppel], as well as Ater, and a bunch of other secrets of mine. Now that she's working with Adrien, I've pretty much lost all my leverage.' Rey's frustration at his own hesitation only grew the more he considered the consequences of letting Emil go. He would have at least sealed her off somewhere, rather than let her get into Adrien's clutches.

'But... where exactly would I seal her?'

Emil already had the ability to eat through Skills, and she could transform into certain individuals—including himself—and also use their Skills.

She was his ultimate enemy, in a sense.

'I didn't realize her dissatisfaction with me had reached such a height, and I also didn't think Adrien would show up so soon. It's all so...' The more he tried to reason his way through it, the more annoyed he became.

In a flash, Rey summoned clothes for himself through Spatial Magic, making sure he maintained his black aesthetic.

'I guess my eyepatch was the only thing not destroyed. It's pretty durable...' Rey felt its texture above his eye. It was a shame he would have to stop using it soon since he had almost fully acclimated to his full vision. "Status Window."

[STATUS WINDOW] - Name: Rey Skylar.

- Race: Human (Otherworlder)

- Class: Singularity (S-Tier)

- Level: 270 (0.58% EXP) - Life Force: 13,000 - Mana Level: 7,000/39,000 - Combat Ability: 21,550 - Stat Points: 20,650

- Skills (Exclusive): [Doppel]

- Skills (Non-Exclusive): [Merger]. [Perfect Calm].[Sacrifice]. [Domain Of Man]

- Alignment: Neutral Good

[Additional Information]

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

[End Of Information]

'Looks like I lost all the Skills that she got from me, which means she's no longer bound to me. It's a good thing I still have them in my [Doppel], though... so it's not really a loss.' Rey thought to himself as he looked at his Status Window.

He then shifted his gaze to the Stat Points left in his arsenal. 'Reduced by 10,000, eh? I guess that's how much I took to supplement my Mana.'

Thanks to his swift cognitive process, once the explosion occurred, he had to act and think fast, so he took some Stat Points and added them to his Mana. Afterwards, he used two Skills at consecutive times.

One was his [Perfect Divine Magic], which was used to send Esme away from their location so she wouldn't be affected by the blast, and the second was a barrier to protect the Shrine from the blast.

Perhaps this was just his sentiment, or a sense of responsibility, but he didn't want the place destroyed due to his irresponsibility.

'Now that I think about it, I should have used [Domain Of Man], but... Emil also had [Domain Of Man], so things would have gotten dicey if she ate through my Domain and trapped me in hers.'

Besides, he couldn't completely forget about Adrien, so he had to play smart.

'No matter... I know what Adrien is planning. I doubt he lied to me about it, considering he went through all that trouble.' Rey sighed to himself.

Besides, he also had 'that' Skill to help him out if push came to shove.

No matter how he looked at it, they were going to meet each other sooner or later, and Rey already knew what he would do once that time arrived.

'I'm going to beat him up badly... and eliminate Emil as swiftly as possible.'

This time, he wouldn't hesitate or try to rationalize the situation. The only problem was how to counter Emil, but that was something he would have more than enough time to think about and consider.

'For now, I'll have to attend to Esme and rest too...'

A lot was weighing him down—particularly thoughts that were layered in his mind, but he pressed on.

With a single Spell, he created a spatial rift and vanished to his destination.

Chapter 730 Scream Of Pain

'I'm sorry...'

With hunched shoulders, he watched as Esme's body lay on the bed he placed her in. Her delicate body displayed a kind of fragileness that nearly made him pity her.

Despite his own unfortunate circumstances, he couldn't help feeling even worse for Esme.

'No... do I really feel bad for her, or myself?'

At this point, Rey could feel the emotions within him rise up at a terrible pace. He had suppressed them for so long that their compounded effects were beginning to disturb his mind.

Unable to resist any longer, he fell to his knees and released everything at once.

"HAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!!!!" Screaming at the top of his lungs, he had tears descending down his eyes as his whole body trembled.

He felt bad—very bad.

All of those feelings—rage, fear, shame, sorrow, and much more—oozed out of his voice, which would have normally filled the room, but thanks to his Sound Magic, Rey controlled the flow of the noise he was making and restricted it greatly.

In essence, not even Emil who slept beside him could hear his wails and screams.

'I... I... what am I doing?'

Despite being the one that was betrayed by Emil, he couldn't help but blame himself for how everything ended up this way.

'If only... if only I was a better Master...'

He had taken Emil for granted all this time, and he carelessly trusted Adrien. Now that he thought of all these things, he hated himself and all his course of actions.

"I'M SO STUPID!!!" He cried out in utter and pure anger.

Perhaps this was nothing but self-pity. However, Rey didn't care about that at all.

All of the current emotions that nearly suffocated him were very real—too real. He hated himself for feeling so much disgust towards himself, and towards how he handled so many situations with such incompetence.

'I'm just an average idiot who got blessed with this power. In the end... I haven't changed a single bit!'

Whether as Yer, or Ralyks... or whatever other identity that had been framed around him... he was nothing but ordinary. He was nothing else but a fool.

"Hicc... hiccc..." Sobs that were buried underneath layers of suppression sprang out, alongside a myriad of other emotions here and there.

'I... I...'

All of a sudden, every single emotion that was consuming him within that single window vanished in their entirety. In essence... the System intervened.

"A-ahh..." Rey no longer felt the urge to cry, and he even wiped off the tears that streamed down his eyes. His mind became much clearer, and his body felt strangely rejuvenated.

All the overwhelming emotions that he felt like would kill him if he didn't release them suddenly seemed like a thing of the distant past. Despite crying and screaming mere seconds ago, it seemed like it happened much further into the past.

That was how disconnected he was from the atmosphere he had just created.

'I've gotten it out of my system, so it's best not to remain too fixated on feelings and focus on the most important matters at the moment.'

Slowly rising to his feet, he took in a deep breath and began to calculate a bunch of things in his head related to the pertinent issues that he had to address. Before he could even make it very far, though—

"R-Rey...?"

—A voice stopped him dead in his tracks.

His cold heart suddenly felt warm, and he could feel the jitters spread through his brain and throughout the rest of his body.

He couldn't resist turning after hearing his name, and he found Esme in the bed looking at him with a slightly curious—but mostly emotionless—facade.

"What's going on here?" She asked, turning around to see a rather familiar surroundings.

This was definitely Rey's residential room in the Elf Community, which meant she was no longer in the paradise that was the Oracle's Domain.

The moment she realized this, her expressionless face became that of a frown. "I know what's on your mind. But, if you'd allow me to explain what—" As Rey spoke, Esme's frown only became more grim, eventually raising her hand to stop him from saying any more.

"Hold on... let me get this straight, Rey..."

"Yeah?"

"You took me away from my destiny as the Oracle's Heir and brought me back here.... Right?"

"Yes..."

"Why would you? Even after I told you..."

'Because I—' Rey wanted to utter certain words, but he let his rational mind take over and stop him from making more poor choices.

In the end, the best thing he could do—which would also be the least selfish—would be to tell her all about what happened when she was with The Oracle, and how he arrived at a solution.

"I'll tell you everything..."

He would have to tell her about Ciela, about Feralia, Adrien, as well as so many people who played their part in the intricate scheme. In the end, he could find no better way.

"It might make her angrier, and it's unpredictable what she'll say or do, but..." Rey's thoughts trailed as he watched the stoic Elf stare at him waiting.

'... I owe her that much.'

Yes, some might argue that he saved her from assimilating with The Oracle and losing all her personality, but since she was willing to do all of that to achieve her goals... Rey was the one who butted in unnecessarily.

This was the only way he could offer recompense.

[Moments Later]

"I see. So that's how it happened." Esme's voice was cool, and her expression remained unchanging after listening to all of the news.

She was even accepting the news rather maturely—all things considered.

"Thank you, Rey."

"Eh? For what?" He was slightly flustered by Esme's good-natured words. He was sure that she'd flip, but she seemed completely relaxed about the whole thing.

"You came back for me... you cared for me... you went through such lengths..." She made a slight smile as she looked at him. "Thank you."

At this point, Rey felt warmth slowly permeate his heart.

Perhaps he wasn't such a bad person, after all. "Esme, I—"

"That being said, Rey... I can never forgive you for what you did." Esme interrupted him with even more words that rose from the depths of her heart.

Her smile had turned into something a lot darker.

"You ruined my chances of helping my people my way. I know why you did it, and I also considered it... but in the end, I chose that path anyway. I even told you to just... y-yet you..." It seemed like Esme would cry, but she actually didn't.

Instead, she looked Rey straight in the eyes with a deep glare and moist eyes.

"You chose my mother instead... a mother I never got to meet." Rey knew just how curious Esme was about her mom. But now, just to ruin her plans, Rey went to sacrifice the one person that Esme wanted to talk to the most.

"She's gone forever now, Rey... thanks to you."

In response to this, Rey remained silent for the longest time. After a few seconds of silence following Esme's last words, though, Rey had to say something.

"I know."