

Extras 571

Chapter 571 The Plan For Submission

Rey no longer had any [Binding], [Mind Control], or [Domination] Skill at his disposal, so it would be very difficult to get a Summon under his Control.

Using Summoning Magic and controlling the Summons was still within his power—especially Elementals—but Beasts were completely different.

Beasts came from another world, and unlike Monsters who had flesh as their bodies and Mana Cores as hearts, or Elementals who were primarily composed of natural elemental attributes and had some kind of core that functioned as a stabilizer, the Beasts were fully composed of Mana—flesh, core, and all.

They might seem like physical bodies, but ultimately they were simply Mana given form.

Casting Magic to control them wouldn't work at all.

"I guess this is where the difference between Skills and Magic come into play once again..." Rey chuckled as he heard Ater's explanation.

"Precisely!"

With Skills that specifically allow control, as long as the action fell under the purview of the Tier, there really was no limit.

But, with Rey losing the perks of having Control Skills, he could only use Magic to achieve that end. And, as established already, controlling Beasts through Magic was quite impossible.

"If I'm to guess, the laws of this world just differ from the one they're coming from. As such, the kind of Control Magic that can be made using the Magic of this world would prove ineffective on them." Rey rubbed his chin as he analyzed the situation.

Ater shrugged and gave a casual smile.

"Those details are unnecessary, Master. The good news is that we have a nice alternative." Ater once again caused Rey's attention to fall on the shards of the Dyubbuk.

They were slowly closing in on one another, though Ater still had the core in his hands.

"How exactly do we go about it? It's an item for cursing and establishing binding vows, right?" Rey asked this partly because he was curious about how he would control his new familiar, but also because he wanted to see if the Dyubbuk's function would enable him to somehow bring Alicia back.

Ater hadn't mentioned the possibility yet, but Rey didn't want to give up hope just yet.

"It's simple. We force the creature to enter a binding vow with you, so it will be enforced by this item. Once it is done, a curse will be inflicted on the two of you. Fortunately for you, Master, you are immune to curses, so you aren't bound to your agreement..."

"But the Beast will be bound to theirs... Ater you're a genius!" Rey's eyes widened as he nearly jumped to his feet with a brilliant smile.

"Master, you are too kind. This is just basic logic."

Ater shook his head, almost as if he didn't want the compliment, but the way he squirmed after hearing Rey's praise made it clear that he enjoyed it.

He probably even wanted more.

"Okay, okay."

"May I continue, then?"

"Yes. Go on, Ater." Rey said, now excitedly waiting for Ater to unpack everything he had planned for the process.

The brief summary of it was thus:

Rey and Ater would have to move to a relatively remote location, where the Beast Summon would be brought out. The former and the beast would enter the binding vow right there and then. Prior to that, though, Rey would have set up a special Barrier as a Magic Circle where the Beast was to appear, so it wouldn't be able to escape or attack him or anyone.

Once the binding vow was complete, Rey would reveal his immunity to the Familiar and establish dominance over it. The Familiar would be tempted to also break the agreement, but would learn the hard way that it isn't possible.

Plus, with Rey and Ater being stronger than the Beast summoned, they could also bully it and subject it into further servitude if it decided to be stubborn.

"Isn't that a bit extreme...?" Rey found himself laughing with slight discomfort as he went over the plan with Ater.

"Any fool who doesn't see Master's great ought to be beaten over and over again until the truth sinks into their mind." Once Rey heard this, he couldn't argue any further.

'I still have no idea why Ater sees me in such high regard, but it's best I leave things like this. I mean, there's a lot I don't know about him... but it seems there's a lot he doesn't know about himself either.' When Rey reasoned about things that way, he had a certain train of thought.

'Could the same apply to me?'

Perhaps, hidden within him, was a part of himself that he didn't know about.

"So, are you ready for the Binding Vow with your Beast, Master?" Ater's voice interrupted Rey's thought, so he suspended it for the moment.

Instead, he gave Ater a probing smile and chuckled lightly.

"I thought you didn't want me getting another Familiar. Are you finally admitting that I need another servant apart from you?"

"..." For a moment, Ater said nothing.

He looked a bit serious as he stared at Rey. A complicated mix of surprise and slight hesitation, mixed with other things, roamed all over his demeanor.

Then—

"While I am of the stance that my competence will far exceed any Familiar you would summon, I also have to admit that I most likely won't always be by your side."

"Ater..."

"There are a lot of things in the works at the moment. In order to properly secure your protection, meat shields that can hold the fort until my arrival are necessary."

"... You..."

"That is why I consider this Familiar necessary. It will be a waste not to use something as rare and interesting as the Beast in question." Ater's smile was charming, and it oozed concern for his Master.

But that wasn't all that Rey saw.

'To think I was already thinking he would get along with the new Familiar. He only considers it as a meat shield.'

In Ater's eyes, he would always be the only legitimate Familiar for Rey. Whether or not the boy agreed with that or not was worth deliberation.

"Besides, I personally desire to test out this Dyubbuk and see its effects with my very eyes. I still need to hold off on removing the curse on the Alliance until certain conditions are met, which means this is the only viable option at the moment."

"I see..." Rey leaked out an amused smile as he rose to his feet.

As expected of Ater, there always had to be some sort of caveat—certain hidden intentions—behind his every move.

This quality of his still scared Rey, even though he was the Master.

"So, do you have any place in mind?" Ater asked, referring to where they would perform the entire operation. Despite the question being so sudden, Rey already had a place in mind.

"The Grand Calamity Class Dungeon." Within a moment, space around him and Ater warped, transporting them to the dreary hall that was the Dungeon's ground floor.

The overwhelmingly large expanse greeted them, and they both looked around; as if staring back.

"This place would be really good as a fortress..." Ater murmured, to which Rey's eyes beamed in response.

'Seems I wasn't the only one who thought about it!'

With the two being settled, and the preparations underway, a certain thought suddenly struck Rey.

'I no longer have my Inventory Skill, so... how exactly am I going to get the Familiar?'

Chapter 572 A Slight Hiccup

A Skill was essentially something one earned, or it came as a privilege from the world.

In both cases, they represented a special ability that a person possessed. Usually, Skills were meant to evolve, not disappear from a person. Since Skills were an intrinsic part of a person—especially those earned—they were a permanent addition to the individual.

Skills, in a sense, could not be created nor destroyed.

... But Rey was an exception.

By using [Merger], he essentially bent the rules a little. He broke down Skills and used them to mold new ones, or more advanced versions of one.

This, in a way, was still following the rules... but teetering on the edge.

However, the complete breaker was [Sacrifice], which caused the permanent loss of Skills, changing them to Stat Points.

In this case, the nature of the Skill was changed into another kind of power—Stats.

It was possible that Skill essence could be lost in the process, but ultimately, Skills would be converted to something else—never fully destroyed in a sense.

Still, according to the rules of the world... Rey could no longer use any of the Skills he had fed to sacrifice. He also couldn't use the Skills that were combined using [Divine Merger] to make his current Skill-set.

"Tch. This sucks..."

Once again, Rey found himself listening to Ater's lectures as they discussed the current problem.

All of this started when Rey asked Ater about what happened to his Inventory, going further to explain the whole [Divine Merger] and [Sacrifice] bit.

The short version of Ater's answer was:

"Your inventory and everything inside it is gone forever."

In essence... all of Rey's money, resources, and everything that he had kept within that space were completely lost to him.

It was beyond devastating to hear.

"The more time passes, the more I realize just what I've lost by giving up all those Skills of mine..."

He had taken so many things for granted, as they were just a part of his life, but now he was beginning to understand their significance.

'I can't even fly unless I use Magic or change the physical properties of my body somehow.'

Flying used to be so natural to him, so looking at the slight difference in this one Skill, and applying it to a lot of others, showed just how frustrating all of this was for Rey.

"Your power... it prevents you from copying the same Skill from a target twice, am I correct?" Ater asked, staring at Rey's anguished face.

"Yeah. How did you know?"

"I could tell. If you could indeed copy Skills from anyone an infinite amount of times, your problems wouldn't be that difficult to remedy."

"True. Haaa..." Rey heaved a sigh as he sat on the dark Dungeon floor. One of the first things he tried after getting Merger was to see if he could combine two [Divine Beast Summon] or multiple [Divine Sword Summon] to develop an incredibly OP Skill.

If he could combine a lot of SS Tier Skills, he figured it was possible to create an SSS-Tier Skill.

Not only that, but he could easily sacrifice multiple Skills to create powerful variants of Skills—especially since he could always copy them from his classmates and those around him over and over again.

But...

"It's the same way I can't copy my own Skills from myself. I can't copy the same Skill from someone I already copied from."

In essence, if two people had the [Fire] Skill, he could copy the Skill only once per person. Hence, he would have two [Fire] Skills. However, he couldn't ever repeat the process on either of them. If a third person with the same Skill came about, he could copy from them and get three [Fire] Skills.

That was what Rey understood about his power; hence, its limitations.

"I reckon [Sacrifice] is a lot graver than that, though. Based on the terms, I won't ever be able to use the Skill I sacrifice. That probably means I might never be able to copy it."

There was no way Rey could know for sure, since he would need to find a new target who had at least one of the exact Skills he sacrificed and see if he could use [Doppel] on the Skill.

'If I can no longer use those Skills, then I really fumbled with the Immortality and Resistance Skills. Damn it... what was I thinking?'

Before Rey could allow his frustration to get the better of him, he calmed himself.

Once he let his thoughts simmer a little, he gave a big sigh and rose to his feet. As he dusted his butt, despite there being no real need to, he prepared Spatial Magic.

"Let's leave then. There's no use sticking around here..." Rey would be lying if he said he wasn't disappointed. He managed to lose all three of his Beast Summons, with no prospect of ever getting them back.

The Skill to use them was also incredibly rare—an Exclusive Skill that belonged to Alicia. It was practically impossible for anyone in this world to have anything like it.

'Seems I'm stuck with only Ater. It's not a bad deal, but... I wanted more.'

"Why are we leaving, Master? What about the binding vow? Don't you want to tame your new Familiar?"

"Hm?" Rey raised an eyebrow and stared at Ater's confused face. It was a surprise to see that the usually sharp and competent guy didn't take the hint this time around.

"We can't do that anymore."

"Oh? Why?"

"I mean... I kept the purple egg in my Inventory, remember? All the items inside are gone, so... it's pretty much lost to me forever." Rey felt a little annoyed that he had to explain all of this to Ater.

It felt like he was opening fresh wounds.

'Just take the hint already!' He wanted to scream internally, but he was stopped by his emotion control, and also by Ater's amused reaction to his words.

"Oh, that..." Ater stretched out his hand, and a purple egg appeared right on top of his hand, with darkness coating the surface.

Rey's eyes nearly popped in shock. He couldn't believe his eyes.

"How do you have that?!" He yelled out, nearly losing his composure. His emotions even reached the threshold, so the System had to forcibly suppress them.

It seemed he still had a lot to learn in that department.

"I never said you would have to bring forth the Beast from your inventory, Master. This thing has been with me for a while now; since the time it was supposed to hatch."

Rey's emotions were checked, so he was a lot calmer now. Still, he couldn't shake off his confusion.

"I don't... understand."

Ater smiled, shrugging as he spoke calmly. "The Beast is meant to hatch next to its summoner. That is the rule. The egg was transported from wherever it was to your location—same as those Phoenixes who did the same in your battle against Dagon."

"O-ohhh!" Rey's eyes widened as he listened to Ater's tale.

"I managed to contain it before it fully hatched. If you look closely at the egg, you'll see cracks here and there."

Ater had been using the darkness to seal the egg and preserve it until Rey woke up. And now that the moment of truth had arrived, it was finally time to leave the rest to the hands of his Master.

"So, I ask you once again, Master... why are we leaving?"

Chapter 573 New Beast Familiar

The world might be unfair, but the System isn't.

The way it operated followed set rules, and it adhered strictly to them. Breaking those rules, or causing deviations, were met with certain consequences.

Curses only existed due to the fairness of the world's principles.

As such, any Beast that an individual summoned had to be returned to said individual. It didn't matter their location or position.

They would still appear before the one who called them.

The stage was set.

Rey stood before a Magic Circle, his eyes keenly focused on the egg that sat at its center. The object shone with purple light, but the black mist that danced around it seemed to suppress the power that lay dormant inside.

It almost felt like whatever was inside wanted to explode, but the cage that restricted it forced the creature to remain within.

"What kind of Beast should I expect?" Rey asked as he glanced at Ater, who was finally merging all the pieces of the Dyubbuk.

The Familiar grinned as he stared back at his Master.

"Didn't you want it to be a surprise?"

The moment Rey heard this, he itched his head. He had obviously let curiosity get the better of him, nearly ruining the moment.

"Yeah... you're right." Slight hues of pink appeared on his face, but they vanished almost instantly.

'I want this to be an amazing surprise! Like unpacking a surprise present for the first time!'

It was a kind of thrill that one rarely had, so he desired to savor the moment. Thankfully, his loyal Familiar understood that.

'Thank you, Ater!'

"Just a slight hint, though, Master..." Ater's words echoed as a buzzing sound began to fill the air.

"That Beast is very special. Its properties and compatibility with Master is incredible. I admit... if I was never summoned by you, it would make a perfect subordinate."

As those words sank into Rey's head, his heart began to race.

'Ater is giving it such high praise...' He suppressed all wariness and allowed slight doses of excitement seep through.

His eyes were wide open as he awaited the promised moment.

"I will now release my hold on the egg." Once Ater said this, the dancing blackness around the egg vanished, and the object began to tremble violently.

The Magic Circle around it shone with brilliant white light, activating on its own once it sensed the presence of the powerful entity within its confines.

An invisible barrier surrounded the area of significance, and all attention fell on the egg.

~CRACK!~

Fissures began appearing all over the egg, causing it to tremble even more.

Rey held his breath as his glistening eye reflected the bright radiance of the Magic Circle, and the glowing 'thing' that was beginning to emerge from within.

Then—

~POP!~

Like something finally erupting due to an overbearing pressure from within, the egg finally exploded, causing the entire area to be drowned in light.

Rey didn't need to close his eye, and neither did Ater. As such, they were able to witness the Beast's emergence in all its glory.

'T-that is—?!' His widened eye took in everything, and his jaws loosened that very instant.

The glistening, oily body of the creature floated in the air. Its fluid form, reflecting the light, but also displaying its amazing purple form, began to disperse from its spherical form into a more chaotic appearance.

Rey had seen something like this before—back on Earth, in games and a few shows.

"... A slime?"

Yes! The creature's thick, malleable form gave it away almost immediately. It was none other than an ooze which began to spray itself all over the area.

It splashed all over the barrier, but was met with resistance.

Clearly, it wanted to be free, but the surrounding field did not let it pass. The moment this happened, all of its slime-like appendages converged into the same ball from earlier, and it landed on the bare ground.

'I got... a slime, huh?' Rey took a step forward as he watched the thing with slightly narrowed eyes.

Ater told him the creature was strong, so Rey decided to believe in those words despite every ounce of his common sense telling him that wasn't the case.

'Still... a slime was the last thing I expected to come out of an egg.'

One look at Ater's pleased face showed that this was by no means an accident, so Rey had to assume that the slimes from fantasy worlds were exceptions.

The slimy creature remained dormant, but the moment Rey got closer, the thing charged in his direction and splattered itself on the wall of the barrier.

If it was anyone, they would have jumped back in fright—or at least shock—from the actions of the Beast, but Rey was different.

He had a small smile on his face as he proceeded to do the most reasonable thing.

'[Perfect Divine Appraisal].'

[STATUS WINDOW]

- Name: None
- Race: Symbiote Slime (Beast)
- Class: Absolute Summon (S-Tier)
- Level: 1 (0.00% EXP)
- Life Force: +++
- Mana Level: 0
- Combat Ability: 0
- Stat Points: 0
- Skills (Exclusive): [Symbiosis] [Perfect Mimicry] [Consume]
- Skills (Non-Exclusive): Nil

- Alignment: Neutral

[Additional Information]

The perfect canvas for those whom it binds with. As an ally, it can prove to be indispensable. As an enemy... it is virtually unstoppable.

[End Of Information]

"Huh...?" Rey was amazed by what he was looking at.

Based on Stats alone, the slimy thing didn't seem all that special. In fact, it seemed pretty weak. However, the Life Force had a strange information that he had never seen before, and the Skills also seemed pretty decent.

'The Additional Information also hypes it up. I better take a good look at its Skills.'

Now that Rey's Appraisal was upgraded, he could see the details of a Status Window, not just the base display. In essence, he could determine the Privilege of a Class he saw, as well as the details of the Skills observed.

As long as the target was susceptible to his [Perfect Divine Appraisal], Rey could decipher pretty much everything the System had on them.

"Let's start with [Symbiosis. It sounds pretty—"

"Master, you shouldn't delay any longer. We should begin the binding vow now."

"Hm? What's with the rush?" As he asked this question, Rey glanced at Ater, but the moment he did so... something unexpected happened.

~SHWUUUUUP!~

All at once, the entirety of the barrier was swallowed up by the Slime.

Almost as if its sticky body sucked all the energy around it, the Magic Circle's glow was all taken in by the purple creature, and the invisible barrier that surrounded it was also sent into its jelly-like form.

The result?

~WHOOOSH!~

The slime was free!

As soon as it gained its freedom, the purple creature thrust itself away from Rey, sending itself flying at incredible speed—

far from the two who watched it.

"Shocking..." As soon as Rey muttered this, the Zones changed, and the slime found itself right where it started from.

Ater also began to walk closer to the creature, who tried to escape once again, but still found itself stuck in its initial position.

"I saw it... this thing consumed the Mana didn't it? As soon as it did, its Mana Level jumped to 3,000."

Rey's eyes glistened as he watched the relentless slime with newfound wonder.

"Indeed. It can do a lot more if we're not careful, so we should begin as soon as possible." Ater presented the Dyubbuuk—a cube that was all-black, save for the purple core that glistened at its center.

Rey nodded and took the device from Ater's grasp. He already knew not to underestimate Beasts and to trust Ater.

"I'll take your word for it."

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Chapter 574 Exclusive Relationship

"Huu..."

With a stable heartbeat, yet steady excitement, Rey held the Dyubbuk forward and stared at the Symbiote Slime.

"Let's make a binding vow, friend." He managed to leak out a trustworthy smile as he watched the sludge do its best to escape, to no avail.

The slime ignored him, as it continued trying to run, so Rey chose to repeat himself.

Nothing changed.

'Damn. How exactly am I supposed to communicate with this thing?' Rey thought to himself.

Then, a certain thought came to him.

Within the vast surrounding that they found themselves in—with the aged walls and dreary atmosphere—he chuckled, stretching his hand out to the slime.

~WHUSH!~

In an instant, the Zone of the Slime instantly shifted, and it became much closer to Rey. Once this happened, Rey reached out his hand and neared the ooze.

'Ater isn't saying anything, but since he isn't disapproving then this can't be a bad idea...' Something Rey noticed about his Familiar was that he preferred letting the former figure out certain things himself.

He only intervened when Rey was grossly wrong, or if he wanted to reveal something unknown—something Rey couldn't have found out himself.

'Right now, he's letting me figure out how to communicate with the Slime. Well, here goes...'

The moment Rey touched the tip of the jelly-like creature, some sort of spark rushed through his body, sending every aspect of himself into some kind of overdrive.

It was like being pricked by a needle in a finger, yet feeling the sensation throughout the body. This didn't feel like pain, though.

It was something different...

'It feels like power.'

~Hello. What do you want from me?~

The sudden voice that echoed in Rey's head would have caused anyone to jump in surprise—perhaps even scream—but the lad maintained his cool.

He calmly gazed at the slime, which was still touching the tip of his fingers, and it seemed like time had completely stopped for the two of them. Their physical bodies were suspended, leaving the mind as their only means of contact.

'Let's make a contract. You and me... we'll make a binding vow.'

~Binding vow? Is there any real need for that?~

'What?'

~I'm a Symbiotic Slime. As long as I can find a suitable host, I'll simply latch on to them and the both of us can enjoy the benefits. There is no need for a binding contract.~

'Well... I mean...'

~Join with me. Bond with me. You and I can become one. It's not a bad deal...~

Rey felt a smile tugging on his face, but he suppressed it. After all, Ater had predicted the occurrence of this very scenario.

Symbiote Slimes weren't inherently evil or good. They were generally neutral about most things, and all they desired was a suitable host.

But, therein lay the problem.

'You're fickle. If a host you consider to be more compatible appears, you are going to ditch me, aren't you?'

~Heyy... don't put it like that...~

Rey knew this wasn't inherently a bad thing. After all, it was the same with human beings in almost every facet of their lives.

It only took a certain period of time for people to move on from one thing to the other. A man's favorite wear could change if he found something better. Weapons were forsaken for a much more powerful item.

Heck, even Rey's Skills were sometimes tossed aside for something better.

~It seems you understand how it is. Let's just keep our relationship... casual. There's no need to sweat the small details. You won't regret this, don't worry...~

Somehow, the voice that echoed in Rey's head sounded seductive. All he needed to do was subconsciously accept the Symbiote Slime's offer, and he would let the thing in.

They would bond, but only on a shallow level.

'So, it'll be like friends with benefits... or a situationship?' Rey narrowed his gaze as he considered the Slime's offer.

~I don't know what those terms mean, but... yeah. I guess that sounds right.~

It seemed its kind, while sticking to a single host, was polyamorous in nature. They didn't mind leaving one partner for another if they considered the latter to be a more attractive choice.

'Now I see why Ater went to fetch the Dyubbuk.' Rey's thoughts echoed within him. 'There's no way I could trust this one to stick with me forever without it.'

~So... what do you say? Deal?~

As the Slime transmitted this, more portions of itself began to wrap around Rey, turning darker in color as if to blend with the attire the boy currently had on.

Rey couldn't help but wonder what would happen if he was a much weaker person. Would the Slime need permission from any host regardless, or could it bind itself with less resistant vessels?

Also, since the Slime was able to break its contract at any time, did that mean the Host could also do the same?

'That's probably the case, but... if a Host did that despite the Slime's intentions to remain, wouldn't that make the Slime upset? If that happens, then...' Rey remembered the warning of the System concerning making the creature an enemy.

'So, it's in the best interests of a Host to maintain the relationship, while the Slime can just jump to another Host once its tired of its current vessel.'

The power imbalance reminded him of marriage—at least, the ones he happened to hear talked about back on Earth.

His family was no different when it came to this as well.

~What are you waiting for? Let us become one...~

Rey shook off the seductive voice in his head and gave the Slime a cold stare. "Sorry... but I want an exclusive relationship with you."

~W-what are you talking about now? Come on, don't be like that!~

Rey could feel the Slime getting more and more flustered. It even pulled back, but didn't completely get away.

That told him something.

'I know you want me. I want you too. But, I don't like having competition. You will be mine, and mine alone.'

~And if I refuse?~

Rey knew this was him just bluffing, but his instincts told him he wasn't wrong. He just had to go with his gut on this.

'Then the deal is off.'

~Are you sure about that? You won't meet anyone else like me, though.~

'I think you have it mistaken. You're the one who won't see any other host like me.' Rey smiled, slightly pulling his hand away.

The Slime, however, held it back.

~W-wait... let's talk about this first.~

'What is left to talk about? You clearly can't see value even when he's standing right in front of you.' To win over the Slime, he chose to employ a manipulative strategy that made it seem like he was the best option.

~W-who do you think you are? I'll have many people pining over me, just you wait and see!~

Rey wasn't intending on letting the slime meet anyone, so this bluff was wasted on him. Still, he decided to play along.

'Search as high and low as you want. I doubt you'll find someone who has an SSS-Tier Skill and an S-Tier Class... who still has the potential to grow.'

Upon hearing this, the slime's body trembled exponentially. It reached out to Rey's finger, wrapping itself around it while drawing closer of its own accord.

~F-fine... you win.~

Rey's smile grew broader as he stared at the shivering creature who was now at his mercy.

~Let's make a binding vow...~

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Chapter 575 Sudden Switch

The rest of the process was pretty simple.

Rey and the Symbiote Slime entered a binding vow, each delivering their own conditions for the relationship to be established.

On Rey's end, he gave three conditions:

"One, never betray me."

"Two, always obey my commands."

"Three, do not obey any other person's commands unless I give you permission to."

They seemed incredibly extreme, but when considering the actions or inactions of a Familiar, they all tallied.

Even Ater followed these three to the latter, yet he was still able to express himself and take the initiative in a lot of instances. As such, Rey didn't feel negatively about his conditions.

Instead, he focused on the ones that came from the Slime.

As though keeping things fair, it also had three conditions:

"Do not accept any other Familiar."

"Do not break our bond for whatever reason."

"Do not starve me."

They all seemed reasonable enough, and Rey could see himself following all of them without any need for infringement.

'What are the chances that I'll get the Beast Summon Skill again? I don't think I'll ever get another one...'

Still, even if he did meet a creature and desired to make them his Familiar, he didn't have a Taming Skill or Class, he would have to go through this whole 'Binding Vow' thing again.

'Well, I could always try to use Magic to make a creature from this world my Familiar, so that could work...'

The temptation could come, but Rey didn't feel the need to break any of the conditions that were set for him by his Symbiote Slime.

'Ater told me to break one of the rules and reveal that I am immune to the curse, which will in turn cause the Slime to try the same, but it will find itself punished.'

This was meant to display the power hierarchy between them. By following Ater's methods, Rey could be viewed as cruel, but he would also be feared by the Slime.

'I don't think I want to take that approach...'

So far, he had managed to establish a base relationship with the Symbiote Slime. It wasn't like he couldn't resort to force or a show of strength if necessary, but he didn't think that he needed it at the moment.

'It's in the Slime's best interest to cooperate, and I have nothing to lose if I do the same.' Staring at Ater for a brief moment, he noticed him nodding with a smile.

'Seems he understands my intentions.'

Rey's current thoughts were at a deeper level of consciousness, so the Slime couldn't read them. Plus, with Rey's access to his mind and body, he could always restrict some of his thoughts from being breached by the Slime, which meant he didn't have to worry about the creature constantly prying into his thoughts.

'There's no real need to be so cautious about it, but... well, I can't be too careful.'

Even with Ater, despite having Bonded with him from the start, he found it very difficult to trust him for the longest time.

It wasn't until recently that this changed.

'I guess it just takes me time to warm up to new people.' He smiled at the blob that now began to climb his body.

They were done with the Binding Vow, and the consequence for breaking one of the conditions was severe pain and weakness—one that could only be turned off if the culprit changed his ways, or if the other side forgave them. Breaking two conditions meant instant paralysis, weakness, and constant pain of an even higher degree than the first.

Breaking three conditions meant death.

Rey would never be affected by them, so he didn't really care about how severe they were. The Slime also seemed pretty carefree about the conditions, so they both didn't have a problem with things.

Thus—

~GLOP!~

—The ooze fused with Rey's body, becoming one with him in every sense of the word. It almost felt like diffusion, watching the slime permeate throughout Rey's body until they spread to every nook and cranny.

The power that Rey felt from his fingertips now became evenly distributed to his body, and it felt like he was living and breathing it.

"Haaa..."

The feeling was ethereal—almost as if he had expanded his consciousness. He felt a bubbling power inside him, feeling almost without limits.

Then, he heard a voice inside him.

~Your body is amazing! I love you so much, Master!~

'E-eh? What's with this sudden attitude change?' Rey wondered as he felt the excitement of the Slime inside his body.

Before he could properly process things, a System Panel popped up in front of him.

[System Notice]

[Congratulations! You have acquired a Familiar, and a secure 'Bond' has been established between the two of you.]

~Please Name Your Familiar~

'I see. So even without the Bonding Skill, we can still create a bond recognized by the System if we use Items like the Dyubbuk.' Rey found himself smiling.

As for the name to give the Familiar, he already had a name for it.

"Emil. That's your name."

~Kyaaaah! That's such a lovely name, Master! Ahh... this body is so nice. Tastes so good, smells so immaculate. I don't think any other body can satisfy me now. You're the best, Master! I love you! I love you so much!~

Rey felt very weirded out, hearing all of this in his head.

Beasts were without gender, and considering this one was a Slime, that went double for it. Yet, the voice and personality made Rey consider the thing incredibly similar to a girl.

... A very disturbed and weird girl.

"Congratulations, Master. You were able to subjugate it." Ater's voice echoed in the air as he approached Rey.

~Who the hell is this? You have another Familiar? But you promised—!~

'I promised I wouldn't acquire another Familiar. I didn't say anything about the one I had before our arrangement.' Rey found himself holding his head, almost as if he had a headache.

~You cheat! Liar! Pervert! How many more do you have, huh? How many more do you have ensnared in your trap? Did you deceive them the way you deceived me?~

Rey sighed heavily.

~You said you wanted something special with me. I gave my first time to you, you know? I thought you were the only one for me! Yet... yet...!~

"So do you want us to dissolve our agreement now? If that's what you desire, then..."

~C-come on, don't overreact. I'm only being like this because I love you so much, Master. I don't want you to... well, you know.~

"I only have Ater as my Familiar, so there's no need for you to worry." Somehow Rey felt like he had gotten into something impossible to maintain.

Regret lingered in his heart as he wondered why he was stuck with a clingy symbiote and not someone as understanding as Ater.

'Well, now that I think about it... Ater gets jealous too.' He laughed to himself.

~Master... can I ask you for a small favor?~

Rey could already feel a wave of exhaustion coming upon him. Whatever this favor would be, he already knew it would be incredibly problematic.

'Yes, what is it?' He grumbled as he replied through his thoughts.

~Can I call you Rey?~

The instant he heard this, Rey rolled his eyes and sighed. He looked at Ater, and saw the Familiar shake his head.

'Yeah, I thought so...'

It seemed Emil wanted their relationship to get a lot deeper than Rey wanted. Sure, he started this whole thing, but there were limits for him.

~So do I take that as a—?~

"No!"

Chapter 576 Perks Of The Symbiote

"Status Window."

As Rey muttered these words, a system panel popped open in front of him, displaying exactly what he desired to see.

[STATUS WINDOW]

- Name: Rey Skylar.
- Race: Human (Otherworlder)
- Class: Singularity (S-Tier)
- Level: 201 (10.03% EXP)
- Life Force: 13,000 (+13,000)
- Mana Level: 29,000 (+29,000)

- Combat Ability: 21,550 (21,550)
- Stat Points: 0
- Skills (Exclusive): [Doppel]
- Skills (Non-Exclusive): [Merger]. [Dead Calm]. [Sacrifice]. [Symbiosis]. [Perfect Mimicry]. [Consume]
- Alignment: Neutral

[Additional Information]

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

Status Condition: Possess a Symbiote

[End Of Information]

"W-whoa!" Rey couldn't help but openly display surprise as he looked at his new and improved Status Window.

'Emil literally doubled all my Stats.'

He didn't expect that to be a feature at all, especially since she was just laying dormant in his body. And, yes, Rey decided to refer to her as a female for convenience.

'It's a little funny... having her inside me, when it should be the other way around... Rey what the hell are you thinking?' He shook his head, slightly disgusted with his filthy mind.

Thankfully, Emil didn't hear all of that.

Rey had decided to isolate his thoughts, and he also zoned out of whatever she was saying to him, so he could focus on an objective analysis of his current state.

'Speaking of my current State, this is interesting...' He looked at his Non Exclusive Skills and noticed three additions to them.

'It looks like I get all of these Skills without even using Doppel, as long as I am bonded with Emil.'

That meant, for someone who didn't have the ability to copy Skills, or who had reached the limits of Skills they could ever have, with a Symbiote like Emil, they could get new Skills without any effort at all.

It was a crazy feature, but it made Rey curious about something else.

"Skill List."

[ALL SKILLS]

[Original Skills]

Doppel (SSS-Tier)

Merger (S-Tier)

Dead Calm (A-Tier)

Sacrifice (S-Tier)

[Doppel Skills]

[SS-Tier]

Divine Weapon Creation (Active)

Perfect Divine Magic (Active)

Divine Power Ascension (Active)

Perfect Divine Ray (Active)

Divine Magic Supremacy (Passive)

Perfect Domain Of The Divine (Active)

Perfect Divine Defense (Active)

Perfect Divine Regeneration (Passive)

Perfect Divine Appraisal (Active)

Perfect Divine Martial Supremacy (Passive)

Perfect Divine Growth (Passive)

Perfect Divine Form (Passive)

Perfect Divine Adaptability (Passive)

[Total: 13]

[Active Skills: 7]

[Passive Skills: 6]

~New Skills~

[Consume]

[END OF INFORMATION]

'Just as I thought!' Rey felt a grin forming on his face as his widened eye took in the detail that he noticed at the very bottom of the list.

'I can still get the Skills through Doppel, even if they are currently Non Exclusive Skills of mine at the moment.'

It all made sense, considering how it was possible for Rey to dissolve his contract with Emil—hence losing her perks—but with [Doppel], he still had access to the powers she offered.

'In the case where she perishes as well, I also don't have too much of a loss...' His thoughts trailed.

With that now settled in his mind, he decided to have Emil use her two other Skills so he could copy them. That way, he would have them stocked in [Doppel].

'Speaking of her Skills... I really should check out their details.' Rey didn't do this sooner due to the urgency of the situation back then, but since things were now settled, he figured now was the perfect time to get into things.

'First...'

He eyed the [Symbiosis] Skill and decided to check that out first.

[Skill Details]

[Symbiosis]

Tier: S

Ability: Allows the user to take on the properties of whatever they bond to, perfectly replicating their base status and powers.

[Limitation: Skills beyond S-Tier can not be processed, and Classes are exceptions]

[End Of Information]

'The hell?!' Rey's eye nearly widened the moment he read through the Skill's details.

'So that explains why my Stats doubled. Emil literally has the same Stats as I do. And just as I have her Skills... she also has my Skills.'

Only [Doppel] was the exception, considering how it was in the SSS-Tier. That meant she didn't have access to the Skill's functions, and all the abilities he had copied with it.

'Whew! That's a relief...' He sighed.

If he was someone without [Doppel], and he bonded with Emil, the Slime would pretty much be as strong as he was.

'Well, there's still Class to put into consideration, so maybe that will somehow close the gap.' Rey thought to himself.

Somehow, though, he felt an S-Tier Beast's Class wouldn't be something to scoff at either.

'Besides... something still bugs me about that Life Force description.' Rey turned to Ater, who was waiting patiently for him to finish his analysis.

If he didn't know something, he could just ask the Familiar who was most likely knowledgeable in that aspect.

He didn't want to ask Emil, though...

"What does +++ mean when it comes to Life Force? I don't get it."

"Oh that!" Ater chuckled, shrugging slightly. "Well, it basically means infinite. But not exactly."

'E-eh? Infinite Life Force?'

"It's not particularly infinite. It just means the individual doesn't take damage, or their life force doesn't particularly go down."

Functionally speaking, it was the same as having infinite Life Force, which was why Ater phrased it that way.

In essence... Emil was essentially immortal!

'H-hold on... if she takes no damage, doesn't that mean she won't die if she breaks our arrangement? That explains why she agreed so readily!'

Rey felt a slight spark of anxiety within him, but he snuffed it out and chose to approach the issue in a more collected fashion.

"Could a curse do the trick? Like... kill such a being?"

"Yeah... probably."

"Probably??!" Rey's eye widened as he stared at Ater in disbelief.

~Master! You're so mean! Why have you been ignoring me all this time? Do you really hate me that much? You hate me, don't you? You don't even trust me... how cruel.~

Rey was beginning to slightly feel bad for Emil, so he decided to respond to her after leaving her out of his mind for so long.

"Hey... how strong are you exactly?"

~Yayyy! You finally spoke to me! I'm so happy right no—!~

"Just answer the question..." Rey sighed, holding his forehead as he was reminded of the reason he zoned her out in the first place.

~W-well... I am indestructible, I feel no pain, neither am I shackled by any physical limitations like weakness or exhaustion.~

The more Emil spoke, the more he realized that none of the conditions he set would work on her at all—well, maybe they would somehow take effect due to their status as Curses, but it seemed even Ater wasn't sure about it.

~... I can also take on any shape or form you want. For example

—!~

~GLOP!~

Suddenly shrouding Rey's body was a slimy black property that took the form of a dark hooded cloak, covering his hands in black gloves, and his feet with black boots. The robe fluttered like a cape behind him, and the fabric felt all-natural and compatible with him.

It almost felt like he was covered in himself—naked, but not really.

Emil was made of the perfect fabric ever.

~What do you think, Master? Pretty cool, right?~

Rey was dumbfounded by how amazing it felt to wear the Slime. He could go on and on about how he was freaked out by her personality, but her utility made all of those complaints seem abysmal.

The best part about all of this was the fact that—just like Ater being able to float in the air, or humans being able to walk—this was just Emil's natural body function, not a Skill of some sort.

She was just built this way.

"Yeah... it's pretty cool." He managed to mutter as he looked at his entire body.

'She's amazing!'

Yes, there was the risk that none of the restrictions he placed on her would work, but since she was so attached to him, it was more probable that she wouldn't even betray him at all.

'Plus, Ater wouldn't have suggested breaking the rules myself and letting her do the same, if he wasn't certain the Curse would activate, or if he didn't have another contingency in mind in case that happened.'

Perhaps he wanted to see if the Curse would be effective, but judging from his casual reaction to all of this, Rey didn't think he had to worry too much.

At the very least, he could still maintain a healthy level of caution, but it would be detrimental if he marinated on doubt and suspicion for too long.

'Besides, there are other ways to deal with her if she misbehaves...'

"Well, let's look at your other Skills, shall we?" Rey checked out the two remaining abilities that Emil had and was equally amazed by their usefulness.

He only had one thought after seeing them all.

'I made the right choice!'

Chapter 577 Night In The Palace

[Skill Details]

[Perfect Mimicry]

Tier: S

Ability: Allows the user to perfectly transform into whatever they desire, with no flaws whatsoever. This applies to both partial and total transformation, and it also pertains to organic and inorganic forms.

[Limitation: You must have had physical contact with the target before this Skill can be functional, and the more complex or difficult the target is, the longer the physical contact must be.]

[End Of Information]

[Skill Details]

[Consume]

Tier: S

Ability: Allows the user to eat through any Magic or Skills, transforming them into Mana for stockpiling. The Mana obtained through this is non-renewable, and once it is used, it will not be refilled.

[Limitation: Certain Skills and Magic take longer to be consumed, so it could take an extensive period of time to completely eat through them.]

[End Of Information]

"Looks like we're done here."

Rey placed his hand in his pockets and his faithful Emil instantly responded to his thoughts and transformed into the kind of attire he desired at the moment.

A long-sleeved gray shirt, along with what looked like joggers. He had nice black shoes—almost like sneakers—giving him an overall casual appearance.

His eyepatch remained intact, however, same as his somewhat stoic face, so he still had a certain air of stillness about him.

~So cool, Master!~

Emil's voice rang constantly in his head, and it took him an incredible amount of willpower not to directly respond to her.

'I could tell her to stop saying these things, but that would offer a heavy restriction on her. Right now, I can't be too imposing until I find that she's completely on my side.'

Besides, he could simply zone her out when he didn't want to listen to her speak.

'Well, now I wonder which is worse between the two...' He turned to Ater, who was calmly waiting on him.

'If only she had Ater's personality...'

Now, Rey knew he had struck gold with Emil. Once again, as he mentally checked through all her perks, he knew she would be very instrumental to his growth.

He just had a few complaints.

'I guess we'll get used to each other.' Rey would have to get used to hearing a constant voice in his head, and she would have to get used to being ignored sometimes.

That seemed like a fair deal to the boy.

"Let's return."

Once he said this, a tear in space opened up, creating distortions around the gaping hole that led to their destination.

They stepped in, and as soon as they vanished from the Dungeon's grounds, the rift closed in on itself in a swift implosion.

~VWUSH!~

[Later That Night]

Night had settled quietly over the palace, and the moon shone brightly in the sky.

The palace lights glowed softly with a golden hue, casting a gentle light over the gardens and pathways. Due to the visit of many Nobles in the Palace's walls, there were a lot of security officers positioned in key locations around and within the area.

A lot of them also went on patrol to constantly create a stifling air of security.

In one of the guest rooms in the eastern wing of the palace, certain people gathered for a quiet meeting.

The guest room's lounge area was large and comfortable, with polished marble floors stretching across the space. In the center, a deep red rug lay on the floor, with a low mahogany coffee table on top. The table held delicate teacups and a crystal decanter filled with a dark, rich drink.

The walls were decorated in deep blues and golds; murals that could only be appreciated by the rich. Ornate wall lights gave off a soft, flickering light that played across the room, creating a warm, cozy atmosphere.

Five comfortable chairs were occupied by the respective people who were meeting, and the most surprising thing about them was their appearance.

They looked young... like teenagers!

"It seems the old farts have decided to take a break on the initial plan. Seeing Rey's interactions with the Royal Council must have thrown them off."

The one who spoke was Lyvia, the Mage of the group. She had a smaller build than the rest, but her brazen tone and fierce expression was enough to show how much she meant business.

In contrast to her, Byron—the Warrior—had a much larger build, with muscles seemingly bursting out of his skin-hugging outfit.

"I call bullshit on that. They must have been acting or something."

"I agree with Byron." This time, the Assassin of the group spoke.

His name was Devin, and he had a tall but slim stature, almost making him resemble a snake. His slit eyes made it appear as though he constantly had his eyes closed, and while a sly grin would definitely suit his long face, he had a slight frown on.

"We all know how the Royal Council is. It's strange that our classmates would get chummy with them in the brief period we've been away—especially with no Adonis around to tell them what to do."

The moment Devin mentioned Adonis' name, the group growled and frowned deeply. After all, the Hero was the one that stole the life of their former leader.

"In any case..." Cayden sighed, his appearance practically making him the only normal sized one in the group. He was prone to wearing masks when dealing with work, but since he was among fellow friends, there was no need for that.

In fact, there was no need to hide anything from anyone in this space.

They were all friends, after all.

"Haa... I hear you guys." A sweet feminine voice came from the fifth chair—the one everyone looked to with the most deference.

Yes, they were all friends... but there was such a concept as 'first among equals.'

Felicia Smith represented that very well.

Her beautiful black hair, purple eyes, and incredible beauty made it so that many who gazed on her wouldn't be able to resist.

Sure, she was flat as a washboard, but many had complimented her wonderful legs and tall height. Her long black hair swayed gently as she looked at her fellows with a stern expression.

"I'll talk to the old fogeys and get the full gist."

The rest nodded, leaving everything to her. It was no secret among them that the Nobles were planning on using them as political and military tools for their selfish plans, but what the fools didn't realize was that these young Otherworlders were just as conniving.

They also had plans, and the Nobles would help in that respect.

"I have noticed some weakness on their end for now. Even if I have to use my Skill on them, they'll follow the planned approach." Felicia smiled.

"Are you sure you want to take action now? Isn't it too soon?" Cayden asked, raising an eyebrow. "I know you were busy scoping the place out, so you weren't at the summit, so maybe you don't fully understand the gravity of the matter."

The girl sighed, shaking her head slowly.

"I get it, Cayden. It's not just Rey, right? Clark, Belle, and Justin also did the same. Trisha isn't present at the moment, but it's safe to put her in the same category."

"T-then—!"

"It doesn't matter, does it? Once they all fall for my Skill, it'll all be over." She smiled, her lips stretching to the corners of her face.

"They'll all be mine."

Chapter 578 The City Awaits

"Uhh..."

The next day arrived pretty quickly, and Rey woke up with a slight grunt, his eyes slowly opening up to the world around him.

The cause for his grunt wasn't the sudden exposure to light, or any stiffness in his body. No, he had long surpassed any of those inconveniences. The cause for his expression and reaction of discomfort was due to one reason alone.

~Master, good morning! Did you sleep well? Hehe... that was our first night together! Did you enjoy yourself? I know I did!~

"A good morning to you too..." Rey mumbled in a monotone voice as he rose from his soft and comfy bed.

Stretching his body, only out of habit, he also yawned.

His naked body stood immaculately, properly outlining his flawless form and well-toned muscles. Everything about him seemed to be maxed out—from the biceps, to the triceps, to the distribution of muscles all over his body. He had all the proper aesthetics to go with his slim body.

~P-perfection!~

"Why am I naked, Emil?" Rey mumbled.

He distinctly remembered going to bed in nightwear, so this current look surprised him.

~W-well, I just thought... being our first night together and all... and also for comfort, and, well...~

Rey rolled his eyes as he listened to her meaningless ramble. In all honesty, he didn't feel as conscious of his body as he used to. Pretty much all his classmates had seen his naked form, and the same applied to his Familiar.

All were yet to comment on his yogurt dispenser, so he took comfort in the fact that it didn't stand out—especially for the wrong reason.

~What are your plans for today, Master?~

"Just a few..." Rey mumbled. "There's going to be a Gala tonight, commemorating the near-completion of the Capital, so I'll have to attend."

Before that, he and the other Otherworlders would have to take a walk around the city, greeting the locals and reassuring them of their safety—also going as far as thanking them for their perseverance.

'The party will be bothersome, but it would be nice to take a good walk with everyone.' He smiled to himself.

Yes, he had seen the rebuilt Capital from the sky, so he was able to tell just how much progress it had made. The city was about eighty percent complete, and now completely habitable without any encumbrance.

Just a month would be enough to finish things off.

"I'm sure we should be able to finish before going to the Front Lines." He mumbled, already completely zoned out of what Emil was telling him.

He did hear something about a "Date", but there was already so much else on his mind that he didn't think to digest it.

"Ater is busy again, so I can't rely on him for this. I really should start properly searching for Esme. Maybe I should start in the Adventurers City..."

Rey already had business there, with Trisha being the only one among the readily available Otherworlders he was yet to speak to, so he figured that was a fine way to kill two birds with one stone.

'Alright then! I'll head there today.' First off, though... he had to freshen up.

~Hehehehe! We're going to have a bath together!~

At this point, Rey couldn't help but feel a slew of emotions. On one hand, he felt creeped out by Emil's borderline unhinged disposition regarding their relationship. On the other hand, however, he felt relieved that he wasn't the biggest pervert he knew.

... Not anymore.

As always, the Adventurers City was a lively and colorful hub, bustling with energy and the vibrant mesh of many cultures. The city thrived as a melting pot, with narrow cobblestone streets winding their way between old, multi-story buildings painted in dull and harsh colors.

Merchants lined the sidewalks, shouting out their wares—everything from exotic foods and handcrafted accessories to Enchanted Items and rare, curious weapons.

The air was filled with the scent of roasting meats, fresh bread, and a hint of incense wafting from the stalls of wandering traders or stationary kiosks. Walking through all of this was a young lady no older than 17—an adult by H'Trae's standards, but a young one regardless.

She had short dark hair, with her brown eyes glancing left and right as she took in the city she was yet to get fully used to. Her outfit was skimpy, by normal standards, but it was what made her most comfortable.

With a body hogging black tank top, having a dark brown jacket over it, as well as incredibly tight shorts and tall boots, she kept a steady pace and advanced to her destination—The Adventurers Guild.

The tall Guild Building stood at the heart of the city, and the dark-skinned lady noticed the intricate carvings that adorned its façade before stepping in. She even passed by a stone monument of two Adventurers raising their hands in the air; the new symbol of the City.

"Jet and Lux..." A feminine voice that betrayed the muscles on her gleaming skin echoed from her lips as she kept moving.

Large wooden doors, reinforced with ornate ironwork, swung open as she stepped inside.

The interior of the guild was vast and impressive, with high ceilings supported by heavy wooden beams. Hanging lanterns bathed the room in warm, golden light, illuminating the wooden paneling.

The main hall to the left bustled with Adventurers discussing quests, gathering Party members, and sharing stories of their journeys. However, what she was after was to her right.

—The Receptionist.

The lady made her way to the front desk, where a receptionist greeted her with a friendly smile. "Lady Trisha, you're already back from your Quest?" There was surprise hinted in her voice, but based on who she was talking to, this was to be expected.

After all, Trisha was a recognized Otherworlder and Savior of humanity.

In fact, right when she was walking through the city, and even when she entered the Guild Building, all eyes were on her. This wasn't due to her good looks and enchanting body, but also due to her status in the Alliance.

All showed her some measure of deference. "Yeah. The settlement will send word of the completion soon, but I have a letter signed by the chief about its completion." Trishs brought forth a parchment from the little pouch that hung around her waist.

"You can also send agents for inspection, so—"

"Lady Trisha, we trust you. There's no reason for you to lie about a Monster Subjugation you are overqualified for." The receptionist said with an awkward laugh.

"Hm. Okay..." Trisha, one of the few Heroic Rank Adventurers in the City, replied with a slight nod.

Her stern presence remained.

"Should I begin to process your reward?"

"No need. Once an emissary comes from the village, give the money to them. They'll need capital to rebuild their settlement, and I'm sure the support from the Capital won't suffice." "O-okay! I will do that right away!"

Trisha was bathed in gazes of admiration by the Receptionists and many Adventurers around her. Naturally, there were those who didn't seem too pleased by her action—considering how constant it had become—but they kept their dissatisfaction to themselves.

Trisha was a champion who refused to collect a dime for her labor. Instead, she would selflessly use it to help others.

"I guess my work here is done. Do you have any other task for me, preferably something involving stronger Monsters."

"W-well... about that... while you were away, someone came and made a private request for you."

Trisha raised her brow once she heard this. "Who?"

"He called himself Yer, and he said his situation is rather urgent." Once the receptionist said this, Trisha narrowed her gaze and deepened her scowl.

"What do you want now, Rey?"

Chapter 579 Silent Exchange

Trisha walked to the meet spot with the same serious expression on her face.

It was, as she expected, at the very Inn that she and her classmates lodged in when they first came to the Adventurers City. Staring at the luxurious building, and then returning her gaze to the piece of paper in her hand, she confirmed the address despite having no need to.

Upon walking into the building, all eyes fell on her, but she ignored all of them and went to the flight of stairs that stood opposite her.

In no time at all, she was at the very top.

Her lips were tightly knit together. Her thoughts were silent. With every step she took, the only sound she heard were the crunching ones her boots made.

Until, finally... Trisha arrived at the entrance.

"I'm coming in." She said with a normal voice before twisting the knob open and entering inside the large room.

Silence greeted her as she stepped in, looking at the ten beds that were lined up in a straight row. Suddenly, the place seemed much larger than it actually was.

Maybe it was because, unlike before, she wasn't here with her friends. Three out of the ten in this room were now dead, and the remaining were somehow fractured.

One was in an eternal sleep. One went on an unknown journey. Trisha was in a different city, with the rest being in the Capital.

She stood there for a moment, taking all of it in.

Then—

~SWOOSH!~

Instantly summoning her blade and twisting her body so she could slash whatever presence she felt behind her, Trisha moved with grace.

The sharp sword nearly scraped the cheek of the stationary boy before she stopped, still having a cautious look on her face as she looked at him.

"What do you want... " With narrowed eyes, her words seemed dipped in bitterness. "... Rey?" The boy who she now faced was taller than she was, with dark hair that swayed ever so gently. He had an eyepatch covering his left eye, and even with his sweatshirt and joggers giving him a casual appearance, he still had a certain presence around him.

It was a presence Trisha couldn't ignore.

"It's been a while. You don't look surprised at all..." Rey said with a small grin. "Guess my name gave it off, huh?"

"Yeah. It's an even dumber pseudonym than Ralyks." After she said this, she noticed Rey's expression remained the same. There was something awfully mechanical about how he remained stoic. He never blinked, and his face looked so calm.

Sure, she was also putting up a calm front, but it seemed his facade was a lot more effective than hers.

'Or maybe this is just how he is, and he was just fooling us with those expressions in the past.' She told herself, shaking her head slightly.

"Is this a clone of yours?"

"Hm? No. What makes you think that?" As Rey said this, Trisha walked past him and went straight to the door.

"Wait. I wanted us to have a talk... if that's fine with you." Rey's words lacked desperation or pure emotion. Trisha could tell the difference between the tone he used to have from now.

Right now he seemed more composed. He never stuttered, and even his display of hesitation seemed more like an attempt to articulate himself accurately, rather than evidence of nervousness.

Where did this new version of Rey stem from? Confidence? Or was it something else? Trisha wasn't sure, so she paused and looked at him.

For what would be almost a minute she just looked at him, building up the tense atmosphere in the air. During this period, Trisha looked into his eye.

'Why is he using an eyepatch? Did he suffer permanent damage? How come he has gotten so tall? Why does he seem so composed and calm? His presence too... it's different.'

Even with all his differences she could still tell of his identity, and while she had several unanswered questions, she couldn't ask them.

Instead, as she opened her lips and a sigh proceeded from them, she turned away and kept walking away from him.

"Trisha—"

"Come with me." Her voice shot out as she left the room, leaving the door open.

Rey's expression changed, albeit slightly, into that of relief. However, Trisha was not present to see it, neither did she listen to the soft whisper he gave under his breath.

"Thanks..."

'She's mad at me, isn't she?'

That was Rey's thought as he trailed behind the beauty that walked ahead. He felt guilt, mixed with a bunch of other emotions, but he had to shove all of them down for his safety and sanity.

Rather than dwell on that, he watched Trisha move with a certain rhythm that was hard not to notice.

As Rey stared at her back, he found his eyes going lower and lower, until...

~Master, what are you looking at?~

'Ah!'

His gaze instantly shifted right back up, especially since Trisha turned her head slightly to look at him. He tried his best to straighten up and even smile, but once their eyes met, she somehow seemed to enter a worse mood.

She scowled and began to walk even faster.

Of course, closing the distance between him and her was no problem for Rey, so he did just that.

"So... where are we going exactly?" He asked.

"...."

"You didn't even look surprised to see me. I thought you'd be more stunned that I finally woke up. Everyone else was stunned by—"

"Justin told me about it when I called him the other day." The moment Rey heard this, he narrowed his gaze and sighed.

"That Justin... I guess he just can't help spilling stuff."

"Also, Grandmaster Conrad informed me that there was a chance you'd come get me for the walk around the Capital and the Gala this night and then drop me off later." Trisha added, her gaze still focused in front of her.

"Eh? Really? He never told me that, though." "He said your servant told him. Ring any bells...?" She glanced slightly at him, which made Rey's thoughts go to a single person.

'Ater? Was he the one who... ah, I see now. Well, I suppose it's a good idea to have five Otherworlders instead of four in the Capital.'

"Yeah, I think I get it now."

"It seems you weren't informed of this before. Doesn't feel very good to have things kept from you, does it?"

Rey felt the burn instantly, and he decided to act on it.

"Trisha, about that—"

"We're here." She interrupted him, finally stopping in front of a building—one that stood right behind the main Adventurers Guild structure.

This annex was the Training Center, and also where Adventurer Exams were taken. Trisha stared at the entrance for a fair bit before proceeding inside, leaving Rey puzzled.

'What are we doing here?' He wished he could read her mind, but he had no idea what was going on in her head.

~Master, who is this woman? Why is she bringing you here?~

Rey ignored Emil and followed Trisha's lead. He watched as she picked a sword from the armory, and then proceeded further down the passageway.

He followed silently.

Finally, after walking for a few seconds in silence, Rey and Trisha finally arrived at a wide expanse—a place that he recognized too well.

'This is where Adonis took his Heroic Rank Exam!' Once again, he had to wonder why they were here. "Catch."

As Rey heard this, he saw Trisha fling a blade towards him, and he caught it with his quick reflexes.

"What is... why are you giving me a sword?"

"Your body is fast, but your mind is slow, huh?" Trisha said, creating some distance between the both of them as she pointed her own weapon at him.

"Take your stance, Rey." She bent slightly and adjusted her posture until it became a well-balanced battle stance.

'Hold on... is this what I think it is?'

Rey's suspicions were correct, and Trisha's determined gaze showed that she wasn't messing around here.

"Let's have a match."

Chapter 580 Dance Of Blades [Pt 1]

"Are you serious?"

The atmosphere was tense as silence echoed in the vast, dull expanse. The faulty lights on the ceiling flickered, radiating flashes of brilliance on the two who stood beneath it.

Trisha still tightly held her blade as she stared seriously at Rey.

The question he asked lingered in the air, and she bent a little lower, parting her lips to answer the question.

"What do you think?" As her response—another question—wafted through the air, Rey suddenly broke into a slight grin.

Trisha felt taken aback by this. She didn't know why he was displaying such emotions in front of her. Somehow, it infuriated her.

"You know I'm going to win, right?" He said. "There's no point in doing this."

"You said you wanted to talk. Well, this is what I want to do. So... do you only want to achieve what you want, or will you take your stance and fight?"

Her eyes harshly stared at him, and in response to this, he shook his head and sighed. His smile instantly vanished and he slowly began to move.

"I'm sorry. You're right... I apologize for the delay." Slowly, Rey began to take his own battle stance as well.

There was no hesitation in his movement, neither was there an ounce of weakness in his form. By the time he was done setting himself up, he gently placed his sword forward and didn't lose the stoic demeanor on his face.

"Whenever you're ready..."

Everything was set. Within the vast room that occupied them, the brewing moment had finally reached a crescendo.

It was time to explode.

~WHOOSH!~

Trisha attacked first with a sharp lunge aimed at Rey's torso. Her speed caused the very air around her to vibrate, and she moved as though she was a blur given form.

Still...

Rey deftly sidestepped the strike, his own blade rising to meet Trisha's in a clash of steel.

'Tch! He's fast.'

Gritting her teeth, she narrowed her gaze and strengthened every ounce of muscle in her body.

The two circled each other warily, their footwork precise and their blades poised. Then—

~SWISH!~

Trisha moved in with a series of quick, calculated thrusts, her sword a blur as she aimed for Rey's arms and legs. Rey countered each attack with smooth parries, his wrist moving fluidly to guide Trisha's blade away from his body.

"Guh—!"

Trisha pressed her advantage, launching a feint to Rey's left before slashing diagonally at his right shoulder.

Rey anticipated the move, pivoting on his heel and dodging the attack with grace.

As Trisha's momentum carried her forward, Rey took the opportunity to counter with a riposte, striking for Trisha's midsection.

'No, you don't!'

Trisha narrowly avoided the strike, her reflexes sharp as she twisted out of harm's way. She retaliated with a sweeping horizontal slash aimed at Rey's neck, but Rey ducked beneath the blade and lunged forward, his sword flashing with a quick thrust toward Trisha's stomach.

~WHOOOSH!~

Trisha parried the attack just in time, her blade catching Rey's and pushing it aside.

~CLANG!~

The two locked swords momentarily, each struggling for dominance as they tested each other's strength.

"You're strong, Trisha..." Rey mumbled, but she wasn't having any of it.

His compliments were worthless to her.

'We aren't using any special abilities, which is why it seems I have some measure of a chance. I'm sure he's turned off his Passive Skills too...'

In essence, this was a battle of pure Stats and skill.

'I might not be as strong as you, Rey... but I've been practicing Martial Arts my whole life. All my experiences... all my knowledge... I'll pour them into this match!'

Trisha broke the deadlock with a forceful shove, and they both had to disengage, each assessing the other from a small distance.

She tried to regain control of the fight with a series of aggressive attacks. She lunged, swung, and slashed, forcing Rey to move quickly to evade her strikes.

'Why...?'

Despite moving as fast as her body would allow, concentrating her full strength in every strike...

'... Why can't I hit you?!'

Trisha already knew the answer to that.

Rey's footwork was impeccable, his movements light and agile as he danced around Trisha's assaults like a ballerina in a play.

He was so smooth in his motion, as if he was one with the sword—no, one with everything that was happening around him.

It was... beautiful.

Sensing an opening, Rey went on the offensive. He unleashed a flurry of precise strikes, his blade darting and weaving through the air.

"Gah!" Trisha, caught by surprise, tried to hold down the fort, but it was too late.

For the first time since the fight began, her defenses were pushed to the limit as she blocked and parried each attack, her breath coming in quick gasps as she struggled to keep up with Rey's speed.

~WHISH!~

Rey followed up with a high slash, aiming for Trisha's head. Trisha ducked just in time, feeling the rush of air as Rey's blade swept over her. He transitioned seamlessly into a low sweeping strike, forcing her to jump back to avoid being hit.

"Haa... haa...!"

Trisha retaliated with a counterattack, aiming a thrust at his chest. He deflected the strike with ease, his sword moving in a blur as he countered with a series of powerful slashes. Trisha managed to block and dodge each attack, but Rey's relentless onslaught pushed her back.

'He's... getting faster!'

With a final burst of speed, Rey executed a complex combination of strikes—first high, then low, then from the side.

"G-guh!" She tried to maintain her stance, but she couldn't keep up.

Trisha's defenses began to falter under the pressure, and Rey saw his chance.

~SWUSH!~

He feinted a high strike, drawing Trisha's guard up, then quickly pivoted and struck low, his blade sweeping toward Trisha's legs.

Trisha stumbled, her balance lost, and Rey took advantage of the opening.

"I win." He muttered as he sent his blade flying at her.

~ZZZTTZZZ!~

Suddenly, with a burst of lightning, Trisha's entire body moved much faster than before, allowing her to evade the strike at just the right moment.

Less like a blur and more like a flash of light, she vanished from her position and appeared at a more distant position.

Sweat stained her face as she breathed heavily, staring hard at Rey, who remained stoic despite how intense the fight had been.

He never even broke a sweat.

"You used your Skills. Isn't that sort of cheating?" Rey said with a slight smile playing on his face as he watched her wary expression.

"...."

Trisha took the break to catch her breath, heaving visible breaths, before finally standing upright and preparing her body once again.

"I never said Skills weren't allowed." Once more, she took her battle stance.

"Oh? Is that so?" Rey narrowed his eye as he stared at her with a somewhat curious gaze.

"Yeah. Got a problem with that?"

"No..." He began to take his own stance as he pointed his blade at her and resumed his stoic demeanor.

A dangerous air surrounded him—enough to make the fearless Trisha shake down to her bones. But she snapped out of it and focused her attention on the incoming exchange.

'I can't win.' Her thoughts echoed as she strengthened her body even more with more Skills.

'But... even if it's just one strike...'

The time was near, and she was finally done with her preparations, her entire self ready to resume the dance once again. Her desire was simple too.

'... I want to prove you right—that I am strong!'