

Extras 661

Chapter 661 Dissent

"I refuse!"

Rey's answer was the same as the last time, and for good reason.

'I still don't trust this Oracle character. If Esme becomes like that... will she really still be Esme? There's a lot we don't even know, so making an informed decision right now is impossible...'

There was also the fact that he already knew of another way to get The Oracle to do what he wanted. All he had to do was find Adonis and convince him to ask her to save Alicia.

'The easy part is convincing him. I'll have to find him first.' Rey thought to himself, but still considered that to be a much more solid plan than literally selling Esme off.

The last reason—certainly not the least one—on his mind was that Esme would no longer be with him if she became The Oracle.

Yes, it was a little too selfish, which was why Rey didn't want to give it so much priority.

But... that was just how he felt.

'Will she be stuck in this place for the rest of her life? I... I don't want that for her!'

All of these things were happening too fast, and rather than jumping right on it—taking The Oracle at her word—it was best to have a proper conversation with Esme about it.

'At this point, we should just leave this place, and—'

"I wasn't asking you, Rey Skylar." The Oracle's voice woke Rey from his thoughts, and that was when he noticed her gaze was on Esme.

He also noticed that Esme was yet to give a coherent response. Based on how she looked, though, he could already guess what she would say.

"Esme, wai—!"

"I accept your offer." Her voice flowed very fluidly, and her blue eyes shone with determination as she looked ahead.

In a flash, Rey rushed towards her, holding her by both shoulders as he shoved his face close to hers in an attempt to reason with her.

"What are you doing? You can't make such a decision on the spot like that!"

"Why not?"

"Why not? What are you... what are you saying? Esme, we can't trust her! This whole deal sounds shady as hell! We should leave and come back later maybe."

As Rey bombarded Esme with those words, she closed her eyes and inhaled deeply. After a few seconds of this, she shrugged Rey's hold off of her and pulled back from him.

Stunned by this, Rey took a few steps back as well.

"Can't you see that this is for the best, Rey?" She began, turning her gaze towards him so they stared each other in the eyes. "You finally get the cure for Alicia's curse, and I... I get to be a true Elf and help my people as The Oracle. It's what we both desperately want."

"No... not like this!"

"Why not?! You have a chance to be with the girl you love, and you want to throw it all away?"

"I-it's not that simple, Esme!"

"Seems simple enough to me." She shrugged, taking more steps back as she noticed Rey trying to move towards her. "You should stop trying to sabotage your goal at this point."

"My goal isn't the only thing I'm worried about here! You can't—!"

"Can't what? Achieve my own goals? I already told you... this is what I really want! Do you really want to stand in the way of that?"

"...."

Rey was rendered speechless by what Esme told him that he had no words to say for a few seconds. The Oracle watched all of this in silence, seeing the palpable tension that existed between the two as they stared hard at each other.

Then, as the silence evolved and reached a crescendo, Rey whispered words that came deep from his gut and through his itchy throat.

"You promised... that you weren't going to leave me."

Clenching his fist, he stared hard at Esme. Trembling lips prevented him from saying those words coherently or as intensely as he wanted.

Still, he said them.

Yes, he knew what he was doing was selfish. Esme was her own person, and she had her own dreams to accomplish. But... but Rey couldn't afford to leave her.

More importantly, he couldn't afford her leaving him.

"Well... you left me first." Esme responded, her tone almost as detached as The Oracle's as she looked away from him.

Rey couldn't as much as croak as he heard those words.

He wanted to stretch out his hand to reach her, but his hands wouldn't budge. He wanted to speak, but his throat was too sore. Even when he opened his lips, only hollow air proceeded out of them.

Perhaps all of this was because Rey knew he was right.

'I have no excuse... no reason or justification that could outweigh her current choice.' His thoughts trailed.

He didn't want to be too selfish. How could he tell her to abandon her own dreams, especially if he also got something out of it.

Who did he think he was? How dare he do something like that?

And yet... yet why did he feel a strong feeling in his heart that he should just open his mouth and scream at the top of his lungs that he wasn't going to let her go?

Why did he feel this burning desire? This overwhelming feeling that supposedly granted him the right to refuse her?

Was that enough justification, though.

"I... I..."

Of course, it wasn't.

"The deal has already been established in my eyes. There is no room for any dissent or disagreement on your part, Rey Skylar." The Oracle's voice interrupted his hollow, pathetic excuse for a response.

"Since there is no further use for you, I will now be evicting you from my domain. Once you return to the Shrine, I shall provide you with the means to cure your dear friend."

"No..." Rey's whisper was so faint that not even The Oracle picked it up the first time.

"What was that?" She asked.

"I said no." Raising his head high, while staring hard at The Oracle, he controlled his quivering lips and let his words flow straight from his gut.

"I'm not leaving here without Esme!"

Chapter 662 Clash Within The Domain

"You..."

As Rey's defiant voice rang out in the hall, the Oracle's neutral face depicted a light frown. She furrowed her brows, causing creases to appear on her face while staring hard at the defiant human.

"... You weren't given a choice in the matter."

~ZZZTZ!~

All of a sudden, a glitchy effect manifested around Rey—almost as though space itself was collapsing on him.

However, within the fraction of a moment, he removed himself from that position and teleported a few meters from the spatial disturbance.

Swiftly turning his face from the glitch to The Oracle, he could already deduce what had just happened.

"Tch." Her clicking tongue added more to his suspicions.

"You just tried to evict me by force, didn't you?" Rey asked, a deep glare forming on his face as he began to address The Oracle with enmity.

"Yes. Your purpose here has been consummated, and you have become an eyesore."

Rey gritted his teeth as he watched The Oracle's condescending gaze upon him. A lot of emotions swirled within him, including a certain tinge of regret.

'I shouldn't have brought Esme here. I knew something was shady from the start, but if I could have known it was this bad, then...' He briefly glanced at Esme, who was busy sighing and shaking her head.

"Rey, just stop."

Despite hearing her saying those words to him, he just couldn't stop and listen.

'I know I'm being selfish, Esme. But... we need to talk about this at length first. This is all just happening too fast. We could be making the wrong call here...'

Rey wondered if he was the one being unreasonable? He just didn't want to quickly abandon their bond the moment they found something convenient.

Was that so bad?

Yet, the glares he received from both sides—Esme and The Oracle—somehow told him he was in the wrong.

"If you stubbornly choose to remain here, then..."

Rey's full attention returned to The Oracle as soon as he heard this, but once he turned to her location, she was nowhere to be found.

It was almost as though every trace of her had been removed.

"... You leave me no choice."

Once Rey heard that voice, his instincts screamed at him, and he obeyed them instantly.

~WHOOSH!~

Like a bolt of lightning, he dashed away from his position, only to find it exploding a tiny moment later.

~BOOOOOOOOOOM!~

No debris or shard flew in any direction, but the loud explosion caused the entire area to tremble violently. 'Damn... what an impact.' Rey couldn't afford to think, as he swiftly left his position once again, only for blasts to appear in those positions that he abandoned.

He kept doing this, trying to sense patterns in the explosions in an attempt to deduce how they worked. He also strained his eyes very hard to seek out The Oracle.

'With my Divine Form, I should be able to at least detect her with my senses. My Eyepatch is off too, so my perception is at its peak right now. Yet... why can't I see anything?'

He also couldn't understand where the explosions were coming from.

He just kept racing away to avoid the destruction that would certainly not be very pleasant to experience.

~BOOOOOOOOOOM!!!~

What Rey didn't understand at the moment was that there was no use searching for The Oracle and the cause of the explosions.

They were one and the same.

"Your attempts are futile." He heard a word whisper into his ear, and a hand held his shoulder very softly.

'H-huh...?'

~BOOOOOOOOOOOOOOM!!!~

At that moment, a loud explosion enveloped the area where Rey stood, causing him to fall to his knees in a mere instant.

"G-gahh...!" He felt pain, but it swiftly disappeared thanks to his Class Privileges.

His rational mind instantly entered overdrive as he struggled to make sense of everything and find an escape from the situation he found himself in.

'She wasn't hiding or anything. The reason I wasn't able to pick her up with my eyes was because she was simply moving too fast!'

Anytime she stopped moving, an explosion would occur, which Rey constantly avoided.

Until now, that is.

"Simply yield. There doesn't have to be any sort of conflict here, Rey Skylar." The Oracle sounded like she couldn't be bothered by Rey's resistance.

She was much stronger than he was, and her experience most likely dwarfed his. The only thing he had going for him was his tenacity and stubbornness.

But even those... how far could they really take him?

"I am not leaving here without Esme!" He growled, once again vanishing from his kneeling position before The Oracle could send him back to the Shrine.

"You're not going to get rid of me that easily."

Heaving, as if he was out of breath, Rey recognized he had to take the current match completely seriously if he was ever going to win—or even survive.

'She's much stronger than that Divine Beast. I'm lucky that she doesn't want to kill me, but that doesn't mean I should get complacent about this...'

Once Rey resolved this within himself, he decided to go all out.

The first thing he activated was [Divine Power Ascension], which ended up boosting his Stats to a heightened degree. He went on to include all the other Buff Skills he recently obtained from the Monsters he killed very recently.

As he expected, they only caused a small increase in his Stats, but their effects stacking up meant that he was good to go.

'Emil, I'll be needing your assistance here!'

~Understood, Master!~

While Emil didn't have the Skills he stockpiled in his [Doppel], she could replicate parts of other Monsters and replicate their abilities—making her a perfect partner in such a situation.

'I'd say we are both stalemated on the Magic front, so that's canceled. Using [Perfect Divine Ray] might cause her to get very lethal with me, since it's a kill move. I don't want her to get too serious...'

Rey could tell that the reason he was getting so much leeway was because she underestimated him. He had to keep it that way.

'We both have the ability to control our domains, so while I can't possess everything here, I'll use [Perfect Domain Of The Divine] to create a considerable space around me for the purpose of overall mobility and also to help me out in combat.'

Rey still wasn't done with his assessment.

'My defense and regeneration are both in the SS-Tier, and with pain being mitigated to the point of nigh-nullification, I should be able to actually withstand some of her attacks while dealing counters.'

Then, if he was to focus on benefits, he had [Perfect Divine Martial Supremacy], [Perfect Divine Form], and [Perfect Divine Adaptability] in his arsenal. Playing his cards well, he could find a way to somewhat keep up with The Oracle if he dragged things out for long enough.

Of course, all of this was on the premise that she wouldn't take him too seriously.

'[Unbreakable], along with my other related Skills, makes up for my lack of durability compared to her. But, with those pure Stats she just has the superior speed.'

Rey, no doubt, had the better set of Skills for combat. But... so what?

From what Dagon showed Rey, Skills were pretty meaningless if one was up against an enemy that was too strong to be bothered by them.

'I should focus on perhaps wearing her as thin as possible, then escaping this place with Esme. If I can learn more about that [Clairvoyance], and even gain some Skills from her through [Doppel], that would also be good. Still, the primary goal is to secure... Es.... me...?'

Rey's eyes bulged the moment he realized something very fatal.

'Where is Esme?!' He looked around like a crazed man, but found no sign of her in the slightest. His heart raced quickly, but soon calmed down. Beads of sweat formed on his face, but they disappeared in no time.

His eyes twitched as he felt restlessness try to overtake his ability to remain calm.

... All to no avail.

"Seems you finally noticed." The Oracle said.

She stood a distance from him, her regal outfit still shimmering beautifully as it accentuated her purity and grace.

"WHAT DID YOU DO?" Rey asked, gritting his teeth as he clenched his fist.

"Kept her somewhere isolated and safe... away from you."

"You..."

"Why do you stand in the way of her happiness and your goals? It makes no sense..."

"Let me talk to her."

"...."

Rey was on the verge of breaking down as he bowed his head, his clenched fist loosening as he sighed heavily. "Please..." The murmur slowly escaped his lips, and as he raised his eyes, he pleaded for mercy.

Rey didn't care if he had to kneel, prostrate, or beg a million times.

He just wanted to talk to Esme. But—

"No."

~WHUUUSH!~

That instant, several golden blades appeared all around Rey Skylar—all of them a product of [Divine Weapon Creation]—as he glared at The Oracle with desperate rage.

"I won't ask again!"

Chapter 663 Rey Vs The Oracle [Pt 1]

'Divine-Tier weapons should be able to work on her...'

That was Rey's line of logic when he glared at The Oracle, his heart racing as he thought of alternatives to apply to the situation.

If it came down to it, he could just brace the storm and throw himself into the fight. However, at this point, he decided to be a lot more disengaged from the fight.

... All to win.

~WHOOOSH!~

Several blades rushed towards The Oracle, their golden edges shimmering brightly as they sparked with ethereal energy.

One second, they were rushing towards her, and the next... they had all scattered off.

'A-ah...' Rey's eyes widened at the sight, his senses struggling to comprehend what had just happened in that split-second.

'D-did she just deflect all of them...?'

It took some time to fully process the information, but after Rey closely watched The Oracle and filled in the blanks in his head, he arrived at the most possible explanation.

'When they were arriving, she dodged and grabbed one of the blades and used that to deflect the others.' He could see her wielding what resembled his Divine Weapon, but it was now covered in white.

"You should give up now, Rey Skylar. There is no possibility of victory for you in this fight."

"We'll see about that..." Rey summoned a weapon to his hand as well, swinging it to swiftly grow accustomed to its feel.

He felt its power run through him, and its brilliant properties complemented his prowess. Summoning several other weapons around him, he charged forward alongside the several blades that currently charged towards The Oracle.

"Useless..." As she swung her hand, ready to do away with the several blades that charged towards her in multiple directions, Rey switched places with one of those blades and raised his own blade to parry her strike.

The result was unfortunate.

~BOOOOOOOOM!~

He was sent flying across the hall, his entire body unable to support the weight of her swing.

"Gahh...!"

It seemed The Oracle was right. There really was no way he could match up to her in terms of Skills and Stats.

"Huu..."

Rey quickly rose to his feet, vanishing right back to where he stood before.

'I'm getting desperate here, but I can't allow myself to do too much...' He reasoned within himself, his eyes still on The Oracle.

'Hey, Emil... separate from me for a moment.'

~Okay, Master!~

That very moment, the Symbiote Slime rose out of Rey's body and fell on the ground beside him. Her slimy, semi-liquid body bounced slightly as the lights around seemed to reflect on her oily sheen.

~GLUP!~

'Transform to me.'

~Alright, Master...~

In no time at all, Emil became Rey and she resembled him to the utmost of details. At this point, two Reys stood side by side with practically no distinctions.

Oh, but there was...

'I'm the only one who can use [Doppel], but everything else is the same. She has all my current Stats, even now that I'm being buffed.'

Yes, with Emil separated from him, he would lose about half of his Base Stats, but he currently found himself at a disadvantage at the moment.

'There's just more strength in numbers.'

He would have called Ater, but his communication device didn't seem to be functioning at all. Even if he could reach him, Rey didn't think there was a way Ater would be able to get to this pocket dimension.

'In the end, it's just me and Esme...' He inhaled deeply, readying himself for another round of the fight once again.

~What's the plan, Master?~

Upon hearing that, he shrugged and smiled like a madman. "I don't know yet!"

~WHOOOSH!~

In a trail of crackling energy and blinding light, the two of them raced towards The Oracle, who wielded the sole white blade as she watched the two close in on her.

Rey took the forefront, while Emil went for her right flank.

Despite being outnumbered, The Oracle didn't look bothered at all. Her composure only seemed to intensify as they neared her.

~WHUUUUUUUMMM!~

A sudden blizzard—an amalgamation of wind, ice, and several charges of lightning—suddenly manifested from the sleight of her hand.

Its purpose was clear: to obstruct Rey and Emil from reaching her very quickly and coherently.

Unfortunately for her, she was dealing with Rey—whose Domain, despite being limited only to his immediate surroundings, was more than enough to protect him from the storm.

As for Emil, she simply used [Consume] to take in the storm and increase her charge—increasing her speed with the additional Mana at an astronomical rate.

"Hm?"

Before The Oracle realized it, the two had completely closed in on her with full intent.

~SWISH!~

Rey swung his golden blade, but it was easily blocked by The Oracle. Emil dashed right behind her, though, her arms turning into a sharp blade as she thrust it towards The Oracle.

Another burst of Magic swole from her at that point, but Emil swallowed all of the Mana and pressed on, determined to pierce the target.

Realizing the futility of using Magic rather quickly, The Oracle used her superior strength to throw Rey aside and use the blade to counter Emil in a timely manner.

~CLANG!~

It worked, but the cost was her diversion from Rey.

Rey used his [Perfect Domain Of The Divine] to switch zones, easily returning to the position he had occupied while clashing with The Oracle. With her back now turned on him, he considered it to be the perfect time to strike.

But—

~WHUUUUM!~

In an instant, several spikes rose from the ground and pierced Rey with their golden, sturdy forms.

There was a blank look on his face through it all, though.

After all... he wasn't Rey.

All along, he was Emil, and the one who seemed to be Emil was Rey.

~SLOOOOP!~

In that decisive moment, Emil returned to Rey, further improving his Stats right as The Oracle still blocked his strike.

The increase in strength was abysmal when compared to the relatively endless power that she could draw from.

But, a sudden shift in the balance was more than enough to allow Rey to twist his body—almost as if folding paper—and close the gap between him and The Oracle once again.

He let go of his blade and simply charged bare-handed towards her.

Her eyes remained composed, and her blank face continued to stare at him as he charged toward her with everything he had. Then, right as he was about to touch her, he felt a certain pressure that prevented him from reaching her.

"Does this seem familiar?" Her voice suddenly echoed in the air, causing his eyes to bulge even more than before.

Before he could say anything, he saw a blur and the next thing he felt was a kick on his face that sent him flying backwards.

His body bounced on the clear floor, until enough distance was covered, before finally sliding for a few more seconds and stopping.

"Your Zone Layering Technique that you use with your Domain Control. Did you think I wouldn't be able to do it too? You can Appraise me, so you should know that I have that ability as well."

Rey gritted his teeth as he slowly rose to his feet.

"You thought you could obtain the advantage with your combat prowess, hoping that would somewhat make up for the difference in our Stats, but failed to consider the possibility that I could be familiar with your moves."

It wasn't that Rey didn't consider the possibility. Even now, as he breathed heavily, he was not overly surprised by her sudden display of expertise.

'I considered the possibility, but decided to operate on the assumption of their nonexistence.'

The reason for doing that was simple. If he entertained the possibility of her being a skilled combatant, then all of his efforts were going to be inevitably futile.

'There's no way to win!'

Rey still didn't know what her [Clairvoyance] Skill was all about, which presented a big problem for him.

'I can try using variations of abilities and techniques to see which will land or not, but I'm running out of time.' He narrowed his eyes as he watched The Oracle.

Rey had to constantly spend Mana trying to erect the [Perfect Domain Of The Divine] around himself so that The Oracle wouldn't banish him from her world. The moment his Mana hit rock bottom, that would be the end.

'Emil's [Consume] Skill has been exposed, so I doubt she'll use Magic to fight us again.'

Rey went through a few other simulations in his head, but he found himself coming short in many instances. Perhaps he wasn't used to fighting very intelligent enemies who also had the raw power to back them up.

'She's stronger and smarter than I am. There really shouldn't be a way to win...'

However, Rey had one trick up his sleeve—one that he didn't want to use for so long due to how dangerous it would make the fight.

Right now, though, he had no other choice in the matter.

'I have to use [Perfect Divine Ray].'

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Chapter 664 The Oracle's Thoughts [Intermission]

'How annoying...'

Those were the exact thoughts of The Oracle as she gazed upon Rey Skylar from a distance.

She didn't particularly feel any animosity towards him. In fact, she really didn't feel anything about him at all. He was someone she already knew about before he arrived here, and she also knew of his accomplishments in H'Trae.

All of them were impressive... but pointless.

'The end is set in stone. I have seen it. And soon, Esme will see it as well...'

The Oracle thought to herself, feeling even more annoyed at Rey's actions.

It was almost the same way a grown adult knew the answer to a problem, yet a child kept insisting on taking the wrong route.

How could a child ever know any better than an adult who has traveled that path many times?

'And... the fact that he is even fighting me...'

When he initiated his assault, she almost wanted to giggle due to the sheer stupidity of that course of action. But now... she felt differently about the whole thing.

'... So annoying.'

Rey Skylar was infinitely weaker than The Oracle. She already recognized that from the start, which was why she didn't particularly take the fight seriously.

Even now, there really wasn't a 'fight' to her.

Still... there was something very infuriating about his combat with her that incessantly got on her nerves.

'He's difficult to deal with.'

Rey was like a bug—perhaps a mosquito—who was incomparably weaker than a human. Yet, due to his weakness and smallness, he was just incredibly cumbersome to squash.

'He has a Skill on the same level as mine that prevents me from simply using my Domain as I see fit. He's very slow and weak, but he employs considerable strategy that makes his actions less predictable than I would have preferred.' The Oracle thought to herself.

There were also annoyances that vexed her.

'He is immune to Curses, so I can not inflict one on him. Voice Of The World can't affect someone The World has an interest in, such as himself, so it's useless against him as well...' The more she went down her train of thought, the more she reflected on her disadvantages.

'Link Connection only affects those I share a connection with... that is, the Elves. Other Races are exempt, and that goes double for Otherworlders.'

She couldn't get into his head or make 'suggestions' that would alter his decisions or actions. Her Skills were practically useless in this instance.

But, even if they weren't... she still didn't want to resort to them.

'He has [Doppel], which means he will instantly possess my Skills once they have been manifested before him. I can't carelessly expose him to even more power.'

It was why she only resorted to using [All Magic] and [Perfect Domain]; both Skills which had very limited consequence on Rey's growth since he already had similar Skills in the same Tier and the outcome wouldn't ripple through too many things.

Then, for her [Clairvoyance], she couldn't use it for two reasons.

'For one, it only works on H'Trae, and right now... that isn't where we are.' She frowned slightly, though it didn't show on her perfect face.

This Domain Of God was more like a watchtower that existed outside the world of H'Trae, used to observe the world for what it was.

With [Clairvoyance], The Oracle could see everything that happened in the world—past, present, and future. She could take everything in, therefore knowing everything and everyone within the world and their roles.

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

'But my capacity is nearing its limit, and I can't absorb much more information. It's why a new vessel is required. Ciela messed up, but I can still make do with her offspring.'

Despite how much guidance she had offered to Esme, and how pivotal the girl would be to the grand scheme of things, Rey Skylar was now getting in her way at the last minute.

'The very reason she is alive is so she can become The Oracle!' She wanted to shout, but realized the futility of that too.

Still, all of this was unrelated to the second reason she couldn't use [Clairvoyance] even if she wanted to.

'He will simply use [Doppel] to copy that too.'

And, as The Oracle, she could not allow Rey Skylar to possess any other Primeval Skill.

"In the first instance, that shouldn't be a Skill that any one person should have. It should only serve as a recorder of all the events within this world, and an avenue to replicate abilities displayed without needing to build new Skills from scratch in other areas.'

Just as one could simply carry a code to a System without needing to build codes from scratch again, such was the purpose [Doppel].

'All Tiers of Skills and phenomena are to be recorded with it. It's not even meant to be used for combat, but it seems the Skill has somewhat been tailored to suit a host.'

Yes, it would become limited in nature—hence making the Slots only a hundred—and other limitations that the host had would reflect on the Skill.

Even after all this, the truth of the matter was known to The Oracle.

'[Doppel] is the greatest of all Primeval Skills. After all, just as it records the phenomena in this world... it has within it recorded phenomena from other worlds as well.'

The Oracle couldn't even begin to imagine just how many 'Skills' were already stored in the main [Doppel]. An unreal amount, no doubt.

'Even though this boy shouldn't have the Skill at all, I should still be grateful he does not possess the full thing. Then again, do any of us, really...?' A small smirk formed on her face as she thought of a rather funny thing.

'How exactly does someone like this fit into a board? He is already bigger than the entire set... though it seems he does not realize it yet.'

The Oracle shrugged off her thoughts of the far future and far past and decided to dwell in the present—in her fight with Rey.

'Nothing still changes...'

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Chapter 665 The Singularity's Thoughts [Intermission]

Rey couldn't be careless.

'I only have one shot to use it. If I fail, then she's definitely going to switch up on me and use even more lethal force.'

In a sense, Rey was hoping The Oracle would go a bit harder on him—perhaps use even more of her power on him, so he could copy them.

But, no such luck.

'[Curse Of The World] probably won't work on me due to my Class, but what of the [Voice Of The World]?' Rey had no idea what it was.

He was also unaware of whether or not The Oracle was using [Clairvoyance] or not. Though, he figured it would be pretty much over if she decided to go with that.

'I am still not sure if [Doppel] can copy SSS-Tier Skills, so I was sort of hoping to find out here.'

Once again... no such luck.

All of these weren't his primary motives, though. The main assignment he had was to rescue Esme and then have a proper conversation with her.

Everything else was secondary.

'But that makes me a bit hesitant to use this Skill. If I damage The Oracle, what is the assurance that Esme will appear before me? What if she chooses to hurt Esme? No, I can't think that. She must have some deep reason to make Esme the next Oracle, which is why she treats her the way she does.'

Still, Rey couldn't be too careless.

'What if she gets petty and injures Esme when I rescue her?' That was Rey's major worry.

After all, The Oracle could think in terms of 'If I can't have her, no one can!' and that would be a very disastrous outcome. There was no room for optimism here, but Rey clung to what little hope he had and decided to shut off worry.

[Dead Calm] was in full effect, and he had practically toned down all of his emotions.

What mattered now was the mission.

'This palace is large. The chances are high that Esme could be somewhere here...' As he reasoned this way, he also ran into a bit of a problem.

The Oracle's Domain was too large.

'My senses can't find the end of it. It could be possible that she's interfering with my senses too, by using the whole Zone Layering thing to stretch out the Domain, making it larger than normal to my senses.'

That meant, as long as The Oracle was alive and conscious, he would never be able to find Esme.

'Which means... I either have to kill or immobilize her.'

At the moment, Rey had no ability that he could use to immobilize her—Stat or Skill wise, The Oracle had proven to be superior.

Killing her seemed like the only option, but was it really one?

'I have no idea what effect it would have on the world if she died. Is that even a risk I should consider, talkless of taking?'

Even with all of these thoughts, Rey recognized the hubris of his thoughts.

'Who's to say I could even kill her?'

[Perfect Divine Ray] remained his strongest offensive move, and as shown with Dagon... it simply eviscerated his foe and moved faster than they could possibly react.

But... not even Dagon had The Oracle's Stats.

'Plus, that Beast was mindless. She's definitely very intelligent. Lastly, she knows so much about me, so she must know about the Skills I possess.'

Would she really fall for his [Perfect Divine Ray]?

He found that doubtful.

Still, it remained his only weapon to use against her. Or was it...?

'I've got it!' After brainstorming very hard within The Oracle's Domain, spending less than a few seconds in the stalemate, though it felt several times longer, he arrived at a plan that could completely turn the fight around.

'Emil... I might need your help here.'

~Yes, Master! I'd do anything for youuuuu!~

Rey shivered a little as soon as he heard her squeal, but he was glad to hear her swift and optimistic response.

After all, what he was about to propose was very dangerous.

'I'm going to do something very deadly right now—and it could potentially kill me if you do not help me.'

~F-for real?! But you're immortal!~

'Yes. But... I am not sure about how far the effects of this Skill reaches, so I don't want to take any chances.'

Firstly, he was going to shroud his body with Zone Layering. Then, he would make sure all his defensive and resistance Skills were at full throttle.

'My Regeneration, Adaptation, and Immortality better help out here. But... I don't know if they will be enough.'

After having so many close brushes with death, Rey didn't want to take that chance.

'I'm not even sure we are in H'Trae, so my Class Privilege might not work. I think it'll work, though, considering she hasn't cursed me yet.' Rey thought to himself, preparing himself as he inhaled deeply.

~Are you really sure you want to do something that risks your life, even though you're immortal, just for that girl? I mean... I'm very jealous now...~

'What do you mean by that?'

~Do you love Esme, Master?~

At this point, Rey was unshackled by the bubbling emotions that would have clouded his judgment. He didn't have hesitation or wariness, especially when speaking to his Familiar.

He could only speak the truth so he could act most optimally.

'I don't want to address that yet, so why don't we focus on the task at hand?'

~...~

Rey had already braced himself, and all he waited for was Emil to come on board with the plan.

~What do you want me to do, Master?~

As soon as he heard her voice in his head, he smiled broadly.

'Shroud my entire body with yourself. Then, I'm going to set myself ablaze with [Perfect Divine Ray].'

This was an application of the Skill he had never tried before.

Yes, he would be working overtime by using Zone Layering, as well as all his other abilities, so he wouldn't be affected, but using Emil as a shield was also very important.

'You're indestructible, aren't you?' He asked, his eyes focused on the target.

All of this was to stop her.

'Let's find out together!'

*

Chapter 666 Rey Vs The Oracle [Pt 2]

~BOOOOOOOOOOOM!~

A resounding echo of destruction burst within The Oracle's Domain. It rose from a single point, causing the stale winds to gather around the area and rapidly swirl.

The atmosphere undulated in a violent, raging storm.

And... at the center of this storm was a man. This figure was shrouded in layers of multicolored light that had now taken on the form of pure white energy.

His whole body was bleeding out this power, almost as if he was baptized in it.

He had a dark cloak to cover himself, and his usually exposed skin seemed to be covered in some form of black bandages. Even his face seemed to be obscured by a skull mask of some kind—though completely black.

He seemed to be an emissary from hell—a harbinger of death.

A man dressed in black, but cloaked with white.

"Rey Skylar... what have you done?" The Oracle made a whisper as she watched him with keen eyes.

He did not respond to her with words. Instead—

"Haa..."

Thick steam leaked out of his lips as his visible breath stuck out thanks to his deep exhalation.

He still stood still, among the flashes of white lightning, and the intense energy that shrouded him. It almost felt like he was waiting for something.

"Rey Sky—"

~WHOOOOOSH!~

Before The Oracle could complete her words, Rey closed the distance between himself and her.

He did this by shooting himself forward—like a horizontal rocket—completely destroying the ground in the process.

Yes... the same ground that had withstood all forms of attacks and remained intact.

It broke apart just from the impact caused by Rey's flight.

~CLANG!~

Rey sent a fist flying at The Oracle, but she blocked it with the white blade she wielded.

It didn't last a single moment.

~CRAACK!~

Not only did the weapon shatter, but it dissolved from shards into nonexistent fractions of their pieces. In mere moments, they were nowhere to be seen.

All were consumed by the raging light

As soon as the blade's barrier was gone, the next target to be hit was The Oracle.

But, of course—

~WHOOOSH!~

—The instant Rey's fist was about to be planted on her face, she vanished away.

The Oracle wisely created a wider gap than before, her body now floating in the air as she stared keenly at Rey. Despite her expression being very calm, there was now a form of seriousness attributed to it.

"Hey..."?She heard a rather startling call from Rey.

His voice was dangerously low and tense, almost like he was out of breath, but also burning with suppressed rage.

"... Don't call me by my full name again. I don't like it, and it's beginning to get a little annoying."

The Oracle had expected more serious words from him, so she cocked her head in surprise. She didn't really comprehend his preference, or why he took it so seriously, but none of that was important to her at the moment.

The most pertinent issue was seeing how Rey just closed the gap in their Stats with the use of his Skill.

'[Perfect Divine Ray], huh? It makes sense that him shrouding himself in it will boost his speed and intensity to the highest rate allowed under the System. The Skill's potency is undisputed, and since it can cover distance within a moment, even Zone Layering is useless against it.'

But, using it like this couldn't be without consequence, and The Oracle could already see a few.

'For one, it may boost his speed and intensity—probably enough to damage me—but his actual thinking and reaction speed probably can't keep up.'

That meant Rey Skylar must have first thought of what action to take before actually resorting to it. In essence, when it came to actual combat—making spontaneous decisions on the fly—he was probably going to suffer for it.

'... Or that's what he wants me to think. I know his other Skills and how they interact with his body. His Divine Form and Adaptation will force his body to acclimate to this current change in power at

a rapid pace. Plus, his Divine Martial Supremacy has combat prowess ingrained in his body to the point where it can be classified as muscle memory at this point.' She reasoned as well, considering all the variables.

In essence, it would be a mistake to face Rey in a head-on fight either way.

'I am not particularly a fighter of any kind, so while I might understand all of his build and characteristics in order to respond appropriately, I do not possess the Skills for engaging in fights...'

Her role wasn't of that, and never before had she even had any need for more.

'I probably won't need anything more. This power of his can't be sustainable... or can it?'

[Perfect Divine Ray] crossed distance in a moment—much faster than one could continuously lay out Zones. That was a two edged sword that affected both herself and him.

'He must be using his Familiar as some kind of insulator to protect himself from the [Perfect Divine Rey]. That's smart, considering it is practically immune to damage.'

But... was [Perfect Divine Ray] going to be stopped by that?

'No... not really. The light that courses over his body will inevitably seep through the slime coating and begin to eat at his body. No armor, no matter how dense, can protect him from the intensity of the Ray.'

Sooner or later... Rey would begin to feel the brunt of his own attacks.

'He has regeneration, adaptation, and a bunch of other things to assist him. Plus, he can't die since The World has plans for him. Still...' She made a light smile as she stared at him, watching as he prepared for his next strike.

The Oracle could tell what was going on in his mind, and it amused her.

'... It's going to hurt you so much that you'll wish for death to come.'

~BOOOOOOOOOOM!~

Like a sharp blur, Rey pierced the air and reached The Oracle within a second's notice. She, once again, tried to escape his grasp.

Teleportation through her [Perfect Domain] was the preferred choice.

But—

'H-huh...?!'

All of a sudden, a certain kind of interference prevented that from happening.

The culprit could only be one person.

"Rey... Skyla—!"

*

Chapter 667 Rey Vs The Oracle [Pt 3]

'It hurts...'

Rey already suspected he wouldn't be able to escape the brunt of using [Perfect Divine Rey], but he didn't expect the impact to come this fast.

'The Zone Layering was completely useless, and even this...' He gritted his teeth as he controlled himself by seething.

The radiation being blocked by Emil was slowly leaking past her slime covering and upon his body. It caused every facet of his skin to constantly burn as it struggled to regenerate.

His body was going through so many processes at once.

First, he would receive damage.

Then, he would heal... and then adapt. His body would acclimate after that, and then a new—much more powerful wave—of pain and damage would strike.

The process would repeat—continuously and constantly—all within mere seconds.

'Every second I waste is more torture for myself. Even with [Dead Calm] and my Class Privileges active, the pain I feel is astounding.'

It felt like the utter destruction of his cells at this point.

'What if the Ray is also destroying the effects of the Skills? No... that can't be possible. If that was the case, my Regeneration and Adaptation wouldn't be working.'

What if they were only working because he was getting the damage in small doses? If not for Emil, would he really be able to heal fast enough?

'Now isn't the time to think about that!'

Rey called himself to FOCUS, concentrating wholly on the target who floated a distance from him. Her condescending gaze didn't move him, but he reckoned he would get a lot off satisfaction if he wiped the calm demeanor off her face.

'Let's go!'

~WHOOOOOSH!~

Launching himself into the air like a bullet—no, much, much faster than that—he closed the gap between himself and The Oracle in no time at all.

He noticed she once again attempted to flee using spatial manipulation, but he could not allow it.

'Zone Layering is useless now. There's no use to focus my Skills on that. Instead...' In a mere instant, he spread his [Perfect Domain Of The Divine] to the area around him.

Unfortunately for The Oracle, she was within his realm of influence.

~ZZZTZZ~

Her teleportation trick didn't work, and worst of all, the moment she realized this... she uttered the name he told her not to.

"Rey Skyla—!"

~BOOOOM!~

A solid blow instantly dug itself into her belly, causing her body to bend in a rather unseemly manner for one of her stature.

"Ack!" Her eyes seemed to nearly pop out of her sockets as she felt the weight of his blow and the intensity of his attack on her stomach.

Still, The Oracle acted fast.

~WHUUUM!~

A swift, powerful kick lashed at Rey's face, instantly twisting his neck by many degrees. His neck twisted and turned several times, sending blood spurting in every direction.

"G-guh..." The Oracle used this chance and tried to fly away from Rey that instant, but found that he was grabbing her leg very tightly.

"Tch! Y-you—!"

"Hehehehehehehehehehe!" As his neck quickly returned to its natural position, maniacal laughter echoed from Rey's flapping, bloodied lips.

Then—

"I got you!"

The Oracle's facade had to change at this point. Her wide eyes were bloodshot, depicting both shock and some form of fear towards the human who tightly held her leg.

"You're not running away!" As he said this, The Oracle felt a certain pull that forcefully drew her close despite her feeble attempts to struggle.

In no time at all, she was face-to-face with him.

"W-wait—!" Her words fell on deaf ears thanks to all the pain and agitation Rey felt at the moment.

He could only fight, and he did so with utmost precision.

~BAM!~

A loud echo, filled with both the sound of a devastating impact, as well as cracks of bones, rushed through the air as Rey landed a straight blow on The Oracle's cheek.

"Gahhh!"

Like a ragdoll, her body was sent pitifully flying in the air.

Rey rushed towards her, kicking the air so he gained enough momentum to cover the incredible distance in one breath.

He did just that.

~WHUUUSH!~

More energy around him undulated as he sent a straight thrust towards her, but she evaded it by twisting her body in the air and kicking him with her uninjured leg.

The blow caused Rey's brain to tremble, forcing him to lose consciousness for a moment.

Another kick of hers caused his entire leg to explode.

However, as soon as this happened, Rey's outstretched hands were already beaming with intense radiation.

It was the [Perfect Divine Ray].

~BOOO

OM!!!~

Now that he was right in front of her, and she had just exerted herself in a certain way—unable to react to the sheer speed and power of the ray, it was the perfect opportunity for impact.

And... it worked!

Rey's burst of destruction bathed The Oracle in its pure white blast.

Every part of her body was covered by his ray of destruction, and not even sound or any kind of resistance from The Oracle could escape from its embrace.

"Haa...!" Rey regrew his head at that moment, just as the energy that danced around his body began to dissipate.

His heavy breathing accompanied him as he slowly descended to the ground.

'Seems my Mana ran out at just the perfect moment...' A painful, distant smile crept up on his face as he looked at the dissolving white cloud of destruction above him.

His back was now against the cold, hard ground of The Oracle's Domain, and his eyes felt so heavy he began to close them.

A million thoughts ran through his mind, and even Emil's words kept echoing within his head.

~You did it, Master! You beat that woman! Hahaha!~

Yes. He indeed did.

But... then what? What was he going to do after that?

'A-ah! That's right! I have to save Esme!' He swiftly shot his eyes open, ready to move his body so he could begin scouring the Domain for Esme.

But as soon as he did so...

"You certainly had your fun, didn't you?"

... He saw a figure standing right beside him, her blue eyes coldly locked with his.

"G-guh!" He felt her leg press on his chest as she looked at him with an unchanged, calm and absolutely lull demeanor.

"It's time for you to leave... Rey."

*

Chapter 668 New Offer

'H-how did she do it...?'

Rey was stunned beyond words as he felt The Oracle's leg press on his chest as his body powerlessly remained glued to the floor.

Her skin was as smooth as ever, and her graceful demeanor was not diminished by even a fraction. She still had the electrifying presence that he remembered, and the look she gave him from her eyes represented nothing but calmness.

This didn't seem like a person who had just been smacked twice, and also burned to a crisp by an explosive blast.

The Oracle was looking absolutely fine.

"How did you do it?"

"That is none of your business." She responded very curtly, her gaze narrowing on him as she most likely already determined his fate.

Rey had run out of Mana, and his physical state wasn't particularly the best at the moment.

He wasn't capable of resisting, even if he wanted to.

'Damn... is this really how it'll end?!' Gritting his teeth, his mind ran through several things as he watched The Oracle mercilessly stare him down.

It was clear she did not care for him in the slightest.

'Even after going all-out, I still lost. I knew she was incomparably stronger, but...' For a moment, Rey actually thought he stood a chance.

He realized the advantages that the System bestowed upon him through Privileges.

{Class Privileges}

~ 50+ Subsequent Stat Points for every Level Up.

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

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

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

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

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

[End Of Information]

'The Equalizer effect really came in handy. There was no way I could have even reacted to someone with such high Stats without this Skill working overtime.'

Even more than the way Rey was incomparably stronger to someone with Stats in the triple digits, so was The Oracle to him. Yet... he managed to land hits on her.

'[Perfect Divine Ray] also helped. Emil too... and yet...'

He coughed out slightly, reasoning the way out of his current predicament. There was only one that he could see.

'Should I use the [\$\$\$] Effect?'

Rey didn't know the use or function of the Skill, but he was very desperate at this point. The System said he could only use it once, which probably meant it was a very powerful and destructive Skill.

'I could use a bit of that right now...!' Rey imagined to himself.

Still, something held him back from going along with the only seeming option that was available to him. It was uncertainty.

'What if it's a suicide move? What if Esme gets caught in it? I still don't know where she is...'

All of these thoughts culminated into hesitance, bringing about his impotence.

Still, he wouldn't stop glaring at her with burning determination.

"Your resistance is born out of ignorance. I already told you... it is useless." She said to Rey, her voice a calm whisper. "I can't fall. I can't die. You weren't the only one blessed with certain privileges by the World, Rey." Rey was forced to swallow her words as she said them.

'Her Class is higher than mine, so it only makes sense that her privilege is also that good. I can't see them for some reason, but...!' He could guess that she was also immortal and probably had some sort of damage nullification.

She was definitely leagues above him.

Even with the difference in their power shoved in his face, and The Oracle's calm manner of telling Rey to cease his futility, there was only one thing Rey could respond with.

"I... won't leave here without Esme."

As soon as he said this, he felt the leg of The Oracle press even harder on his chest as her eyes narrowed a little. It seemed she was a little annoyed by Rey and his reaction, but the detail was so subtle that one could easily miss it.

Then, she parted her lips and said the most unexpected thing.

"If you really want to have her that badly... then there is a way." Rey's eyes widened as he heard this, his wide gaze resting on The Oracle's calm face.

She slowly removed her leg away from his chest and slowly walked a few steps back—allowing Rey to sit up while still looking at her with a dazed face.

He didn't understand her change of heart, or this new way that she seemed to be proposing.

Still... he was very interested in it.

"What is the way?" Asking with so much energy that one would not have thought he was still recovering from unbelievable pain, his voice filled the hall.

The Oracle paused. She looked at him in silence for a few moments and then sighed to herself.

"If you can find a proper replacement for Esme, then I will choose that replacement and not her." For a moment, Rey was dazed by this.

"A replacement...?"

"Yes. An Elf that fulfills all the requirements I have informed you of. One with Esme's special bloodline... unsullied by the world or its corruption."

Hearing all of this further drove Rey into confusion.

'I thought Elves like that only appear once every cycle or something. How can I find someone like that now?'

If an Elf like that existed, Rey had a feeling The Oracle would have chosen her and not Esme, who was just a Half Elf. The whole thing felt like a wild goose chase.

'But, right now... what other choice do I have? At least, I should listen some more.'

If The Oracle wanted to banish him out of her Domain, she would have done so already. That meant she still had some sort of use for him, and there was some measure of legitimacy to her offer.

"Tell me more about this replacement. How do I go about it?"

Chapter 669 The Only Way

Within the silence of The Oracle's Domain, two entities faced each other in palpable tension.

Rey was seated on the floor, while The Oracle watched him from her graceful position as she stood with the most upright stature ever.

The silence that existed between them only lasted a second before Rey spoke up once again, after asking his first question.

"I don't know where to begin with this task. What exactly am I supposed to do?" Rey said this for two major reasons. 'First, I want to confirm whether or not this was her intention from the start. If Esme is just a hostage for me to fulfill this role and get her the actual heir. And the second reason... to learn more about what I'm supposed to do here.'

The way Rey saw it, he was stuck in an impossible situation. 'I have to tread carefully here...' He nodded to himself, grateful that The Oracle didn't even seem upset about the attacks that he rendered towards her.

Or attacks that he thought he rendered towards her.

'I'm supposed to be immune to Mind Control and Illusions, but it's possible her Class Privilege makes her an exception to the rule.'

So, it was possible that Rey never even struck her and everything was in his head. That made sense since she seemed too calm for someone he hit so violently.

'She landed a few heavy hits, but... she could still land more.' Yet Rey sensed no resentment from her in the slightest.

She was just cold and detached from him and the whole thing.

"You may begin by helping the Elves wipe out the Dragons. If you do that, a path is bound to open up for you."

"A path will open up? What do you mean by that?"

"You'll understand when it happens." She responded with a shrug, but her vagueness seemed unnecessary. 'Why does it feel like she's just trying to use me to destroy the Dragons for the Elves? Ah... I see what's happening here.' Rey's thoughts began to trail as he kept his eyes on her.

'She probably thinks that if she sends me back, I'll leave the side of the Elves or even turn against them. She must still value them, and she wants to preserve their lives, even if she can't do anything about the Dragons directly.'

If [Clairvoyance] allowed her to see everything in the world, or at least in the Elven Continent, then she must have known about how he helped the Elves in some instances, as well as how useful he could be in the ensuing conflict.

'She's using me to help her people, while also dangling a prize in front of me.'

The reward for his services was that he would get a chance to 'save' Esme from her impending fate. But... something about the deal seemed too one-sided.

'It's unfair towards me!'

"I know what you are thinking, Rey, but do not worry. This agreement benefits both of us."

"You say that, but I don't trust you." He sharply responded.

There was no need to hide away his feelings. Since she could practically read his thoughts at this point—or rather, it seemed like she could—he had nothing to keep to himself.

He would just give it to her straight.

"Your deal benefits you and your Elves more than it benefits me. I save your people from the Dragons, and then I get a replacement for you to get Esme back. That doesn't sound so even to me."

"Oh, but it is." The Oracle responded calmly.

"How so?" "Because you have no real choice in the matter. I require a replacement, else the world as you know it will end."

The moment Rey heard this, the bravado he put on collapsed almost instantly.

"W-what?" He had to spit out in surprise.

"There is a delicate balance that has to be kept, and my expiration is slowly approaching. Without someone to take on the mantle, the Dragon Emperor's side will be left unchecked." She responded calmly.

This whole war was an intricate game between The Oracle and the Dragon Emperor—one that involved checks and balances.

If her side weakened, he would be given the perfect chance to strike.

"You can either follow the path and find a replacement, or I choose Esme as my heir. One has to be done, or you will lose everything and everyone you love."

The Oracle's words sent shivers down Rey's spine.

She was completely serious with him, and he could feel his bones jittering for a moment before acclimating to the tense moment he was in.

'I still don't trust her, but... I don't want to imagine what will happen if she isn't here doing whatever she is doing to keep The Dragon Emperor at bay.'

If they were equal in power, that meant The Oracle was the only one who could stop the Emperor.

'I have to find a replacement that isn't Esme.'

"So, what do you say... Rey?" The Oracle asked with a soft, patient tone. She waited for his answer, an unassuming gaze watching him ever so blankly as he mulled over the matter.

"I... I would like to ask for an audience with Esme first of all."

"No."

"Why no—?!"

"You'll have an audience with her once you eliminate the Dragons and see the path. Do not worry, I won't touch her until then."

"Like I can just take you at your word."

"It is like I said... you have no choice in the matter." The Oracle responded, still acting calm and detached as if none of it mattered to her.

"I could decide to abandon the deal and turn against the Elves. I could take the side of the Dragons and exterminate every single Elf that exists here." Rey's cruel smile as he said this was meant to pass a message across, and indeed it did.

The Oracle's expression instantly changed the moment she heard this. For the very first time since he saw her, she gave him an enchantingly brilliant smile.

"Do as you wish."

Chapter 670 Unsavory Mix Of Emotions

~VWUUUSH!~

The lights of the hallowed shrine shone brighter as it welcomed Rey back into its inner embrace.

As the young man felt the cool ground of the sanctum, breathing in its air and staring at the statue—whose bright eyes were beginning to dim—he took in a deep breath.

"Huuu..." Then, he exhaled slowly.

He did all of this to calm himself, controlling the rabid emotions that threatened to burst through the threshold and consume him. That's right! Rey was feeling a myriad of emotions as he reappeared in the world as he knew it.

He felt frustration, rage, disappointment, confusion, sadness, and a bunch of other feelings—all coming at him at once, nearly overflowing within his stationary form.

Still, even with all of these, Rey maintained a straight facade.

'In the end, I had to accept the deal...' His thoughts trailed as he leaked out more heavy exhalations, doing his best to breathe deeply.

'I had no real choice, just as she said. Even when I tried bargaining, all of it fell through.'

Apparently, he had overestimated The Oracle's interest in the Elves. What was at the top of her priority was an heir, and Esme was a perfect candidate for that.

'She returned me here without letting me get too many words in. I guess she has no doubt that I'll follow through with the deal...'

Rey truly didn't like being used like this.

He hated being a mere piece in a game that he didn't even understand. Perhaps that was what caused his ever-growing frustration.

No... that wasn't all.

'How could Esme just leave me like that? We could have at least talked it out...' In a way, Rey felt mad at her for just choosing the option that would most definitely end with the both of them separating. However, he couldn't completely get angry at Esme.

He also felt incredible guilt within himself.

'If this is truly what she wants, then am I not standing in the way of her goals? Should I really be doing this?' He thought to himself, mulling over his choice once again.

'Do I... really have the right to do this?'

Contemplation wasn't helping in calming his emotions. In fact, since they only made the burden on him worse, he decided to postpone the act.

'I just have to help the Elves, and I'll find a way to get the replacement somehow. Esme will be free, and Alicia will be saved. I'll have my cake and eat it at the same time... there's no need to overthink anything.'

Rey felt like his head was hurting, even though it really wasn't.

He was just feeling tired.

'I should get out of here.' After one more deep breath, he activated his Spatial Magic and vanished from the Shrine.

~VWUUM!~

That exact moment, his scenery changed and he found himself inside his lodge—within the luxurious room that the Elves had presented for him.

Everything was immaculately arranged, but it all felt utterly bland and ugly—almost like the entire place was a dump.

'I guess this is only natural, considering how amazing The Oracle's Domain is...'

He felt like crumpling on his bed and forcing himself to sleep. At the very least, that would reduce the burdens that assailed his mind at the moment.

Maybe he could also dream of having Esme by his side...

'That'll have to wait for now, though.' As his gaze turned to the entrance of his abode, he narrowed his eyes.

He had a visitor, and it wasn't someone he could really ignore.

In a breath, he found himself right before his door, twisting the knob so he could see his guest and not keep her waiting.

"Kara..." He murmured, seeing her brilliant face as he opened the door.

Her green hair looked messy, and her glasses also seemed a little out of place. She also seemed to be out of breath, which meant it hadn't been long since she arrived at his place.

It made Rey a little relieved that she wasn't waiting for him for too long. After all...

"... I'm not really in the mood to see anyone."

His thoughts were in disarray, and the one thing he needed more than anything was rest. He even shut Emil out of his thoughts, so she couldn't hear him and he couldn't hear her.

At the moment, he didn't want any kind of interaction.

"I understand, Sir Rey, but I have just made an important discovery that I think will interest you."

Rey rolled his eyes and sighed. He really wished people could get the message the first time he spoke, but it seemed he just had to drill it in.

'Should I have just ignored her from the start...?'

"It's about Esme—"

"Esme? What about her?" His energy returned almost instantly, and the dead look in his eyes completely vanished.

His heart nearly jumped for a moment, but he controlled it at the last moment.

Even Kara was a little startled by the suddenness of his reply, as well as the switch he made from lethargy to enthusiasm. It took her about a second to compose herself before speaking again.

"N-not really about Esme, but it's in close relation to her. I found out about her mother!"

"Ciela?" Rey's eyes widened slightly.

He was a bit curious about how Kara got to piece together the information about Ciela, and how she was related to Esme, but that didn't stop the disappointment that was now creeping on his face.

'I'm sure she worked hard to gather the information, but I already learned about her from The Oracle. There's nothing new here...!' He just didn't know how to break it to the overenthusiastic Kara, who was now gushing very hard the moment Rey mentioned her name.

"Y-you already know? Amazing! As expected of you, sir!"

"Well... yeah. In any case, you really should leave now..." Rey mumbled, his sigh resuming as he felt a slow pull of depression tug at him.

"Hm? You don't want to see her or anything?"

"Huh?"

Confusion played on both Rey and Kara's faces as they stared at each other. Before Rey could open his lips to ask her what she meant by her words, Kara went on to ask another question that made everything clear in an instant.

"I mean... she's being confined by the Elves. Don't you want to see her at least?"