

## **Few Wives 271**

Chapter 271: Recollections...

"...I forgive you. Just don't do that again" Jade spoke after a moment of silence.

She and Emily retracted their auras soon after. Chris's side which was ready to fight also relaxed.

"Thank you for understanding, as a way of making amends. I will not mention Muku from now on. I will only speak about him when he's back. I won't even ask you to clarify some of the answers you gave me. All that matters is that you're safe. Speaking of which, let's look for a place to sit and catch up. I'm sure you have some questions as do I" Chris stayed true to his words as he changed topics.

The Ty group then searched for a place to sit, which didn't take long. They sat under a big tree on its huge protruding roots.

"So, do you want to go first or should I?" Jade asked after they sat under the tree.

This was after Chris introduced his crew and Emily introduced Emily. Chris and Emily had met a few times so, they were fairly familiar with each other. They partook in some small talk before moving on...

"You can go first if you want" Chris replied.

"Okay, brother. I won't ask anything specific. Just tell me anything you feel is worthy of note" Jade replied.

"Oh, okay. How Jade-like, it seems you're still the same even after the change in hair colour. Anyway, I already told you about how I changed to this right? Well, let me tell you everything else then. It all started one day when I was at work..." Chris went on to tell Jade everything that had happened to him from the first day of the apocalypse.

Everyone, including his teammates, listened intently. They weren't with him from day one. So, they were quite interested in knowing what he went through. Scarlett was especially interested.

Anyway, Chris began from the day he heard the voice in his head. Then how he along with many others ran to the safe zone and luckily made it. Not much happened in the first days as he was too scared to leave the barrier.

Then one day a group of people from a special organisation showed up. They offered a chance to join them to anyone willing. And they would help those people reach R1. The people would then be divided by their class level.

Chris who had been starving for days immediately took the offer. He simply just wanted food at that point. And they were offering it.

After that, the individuals really helped all those who signed up reach R1. And as fate would have it. Chris ended up being the only individual with a Pseudo-Legendary class. Which was made even more wondrous by his transformation from a short ordinary-looking man to a man some would call a hunk...

Then below him were three individuals who had Epic-level classes. Which was the class below Pseudo-Legendary. The four were immediately made into a team. And surprisingly enough Pete and Gnoth, who were Chris's old friends were among the trio. The last one being Scarlett.

Sometime later, the four saved James from the wilderness who begged them to take him in. Of course, they refused after he said his class was only Rare, which was two levels below theirs with Peak being in-between.

However, Chris was willing to give him a chance. He made James face Gnoth for a chance to get in. If he could knock Gnoth down, then he would enter the team. After a long battle which was mostly James running away from Gnoth. James got lucky by tricking Gnoth with his Rubberman abilities and managed to knock him down.

After that Chris let him into the team. He felt that James's abilities would be useful and he was right. For that reason, he was able to tolerate the troublesome James who kept on bothering Scarlett.

And speaking of classes. Unlike Muku's team, Chris' actually knew all the classes from top to bottom.

The classes went like this... Random-> Elementary-> Intermediate -> Advanced-> Super-> Rare-> Peak-> Epic-> Pseudo-Legendary-> Legendary.

And from Chris's words. The legendary class was just a myth at that point. It had only appeared once before in a mysterious lady they knew little about. So, Pseudo-Legendary was basically the highest level class around. And people with it were almost non-existent.

It seemed they didn't know about the "Unique class" though it was pretty much just a subgenre of Pseudo-Legendary, so it didn't matter.

When Jade and Emily heard about how the Legendary class was pretty much a myth. Their expectations remained the same. However, their minds were in a mess. They realised that Muku might be more special than they thought.

Sure, they knew he was special from his OP abilities, but now it had finally been confirmed...

They didn't say anything to Chris though. Even if he was Jade's brother. It wasn't information they were willing to share. Only Muku was eligible to tell him...

Anyway, Chris continued telling Jade about what happened to him. From how his team rose through the ranks and became the branch's aces, to the current mission in which they lost Pete...

"And that's my story. Yours?" Chris concluded by asking Jade about her experiences.

"Wow. What an eventful life you've heard. Let me tell you mine then. After that we can ask questions from a more informed position" Jade replied then went on to tell Chris the most general parts of her team's journey.

She had to be really careful with her words because, for the first time, she realised how many secrets her team had. From Muku's bloodline, Audrey's mutation, Emily's death-defying abilities, the two fairies and more. While she trusted Chris, she didn't trust his team. Not to mention that she couldn't decide to reveal their secrets without asking the others first.

Chris could tell that she was only telling him the general stuff. But he didn't pry. After all, he also held out in some parts. While they were family, they both had responsibilities to their teams which they couldn't ignore just because they were talking to family.

"Wow. To think you guys killed your way out of a beast-infested school. No wonder you're so strong. I'm even ashamed to be your big brother..you were killing beasts when I cowered in a corner..." Chris complimented Jade with a genuinely impressed and proud look on his face.

Unlike those cliché terrible brothers in novels. He didn't mind that his little sister was better than him. I'm fact, he was happy about it. That way he would be reassured about her safety in the apocalypse even if he were to suddenly die one day.

After all, death in the app apocalypse came suddenly and unexpectedly. Pete was a prime example of that.

"I saw you in action earlier on. While you started later than I. You still managed to become such a great Evolver and that's also amazing. Anyway, now that we have caught up. There's some important stuff I want to ask you, brother. You and Brother Tony worked in the same city, right? Have you not heard from him ever since the apocalypse began?" Jade complimented Chris then asked a question which had been weighing heavily on her mind since she met Chris.

And that was whether her other brother was also still alive. Honestly, she, like the other girls had pretty much given up on finding their relatives. With all that had happened, it was easily possible that all their relatives were dead. That's how brutal the apocalypse was.

Even if Layla and Emily, and then Chloe for the briefest time managed to find their relatives. The odds of finding anymore living relatives were still pretty bleak. And the bleakness would get worse with every moment which passes by. Again, such was the brutality of the apocalypse. And they had all learned to live with it.

Then out of nowhere, her supposedly deaf brother showed up. And he was literally the strongest person she met outside of their team.

And that made Jade greedy, it made her hopeful. She started thinking that if one was alive then the other one had to be alive too, right? And maybe her mother was too...

"Unfortunately, I haven't come across Tony ever since the apocalypse began. However, I'm confident he's alive. If I can make it out alive, I know he can as well. As much as I hate to say it. My younger brother is way more capable than I am" Chris gave Jade an expected but disappointing reply. She really thought that things were going to completely go her way for once. Unfortunately, the world was never that nice.

"Oh... Yeah. I guess you're right. Brother Tony has always been better than you. You're a noob compared to him. Since you're a captain. Maybe he's the leader of his own organisation or something" Jade spoke in a matter-of-fact tone.

Her words made everyone but Chris smile awkwardly. They couldn't help admire her ability to push Chris's buttons though. It had to be a gift

"You disrespectful brat. I'll teach you some respect today!" Chris spoke while lunging at Jade angrily. The brat made him lose all face with just a few words...

Chapter 272: Tagging along?

Somewhere in the apocalypse...

A handsome young man could be seen sitting cross-legged in a Japanese-style room. He was shirtless with four claw marks across his muscular chest. His long black hair fluttered around like there was wind in the enclosed room.

A thin layer of energy could be seen circling around him. The energy would alternate between white and black as it serenely circled around him.

The scene looked quite otherworldly...

Knock! Knock! Knock!

"Boss. We've received some news. Can I come in?" A voice sounded behind the door after three knocks.

"Come in. You better have found my brother this time..." The man spoke in a calm authoritative voice without opening his eyes.

The speaker then opened the door and entered the room. He then proceeded to tell the man everything he knew.

"Interesting. Get the men ready. We're moving out in an hour. I have a good feeling about this one..." The young man spoke as he slowly opened his eyes.

They were two perfectly normal back eyes. Yet looking at them made one feel like they were looking into the abyss...

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A while later...

Chris and Jade had stopped horsing around and sat back down. Chris had given up on punishing Jade since she was just too quick for him to catch.

He tried locking her up in a cage. But she was gone from the spot before it could fully materialise. So, he could only give up. They were only horsing around to lift each other's dampened spirits. Sure, they said that their brother was okay. But they both still felt very worried.

Then there was the issue of their mother. Neither said anything about it. They knew that if the other knew anything, they would have long mentioned it. They chose to leave it unsaid since it would only make them feel worse. They could only hope that she was fine. If she wasn't, then they hoped her end was painless... Even if it was highly unlikely...

"So, what's your plan now?" Chris asked Jade. He was indirectly asking her to come along with him.

"Don't bother. I have my own team. If anyone is joining anyone, it is you joining me" Jade immediately shut him down. While she loved her brother a lot, she was in too deep in her own team to leave. They

were practically family at that point. It was hard not to think of them as such after everything they went through together.

"Hmm. Is that so? While that sucks. It's expected of my always independent sister. Never doing what I want you to... Oh, and, I can't join you either. I have my own team as you can see. And we have a stable enough life somewhere. Not to mention what just happened with one of our own..." Chris also rejected Jade's offer. Then he sadly mentioned Pete's demise.

"About that... What are you planning to do? Your boss killed your friend then pretty much said that it was all in a whim. If I were you, I'd be plotting revenge. Ow!" Jade gave her insight into the matter.

Emily pinched her for her incentive words. Everyone present was well aware of what happened. And they also knew of the terror which Monarchs brought. What can Chris and his group possibly do?

In fact, Jade's words just reminded them of their weaknesses. All their expressions turned gloomy. Gnoth even tightened his fist until blood came out. This highlighted his frustration.

"Sigh. I also want revenge. But that's not something we can do. And we all knew the risk which came with the job. So, while it pains us all. The only revenge which we could possibly carry out was taking care of that slime. Which you kindly took care of for us. For that reason we're grateful. As for attacking the real trouble source. That's not even an option. Maybe in the future. But for now, we can only suck it up and soldier on. If a chance presents itself at some point. We will take it without hesitation. But for now, we'll just quietly continue surviving in the organisation... Speaking of which, why are you speaking like you know a few things about our organisation?" Chris didn't take offence at Jade's words.

As her brother. He had long gotten used to how thoughtless she could be. The girl just had no filter.

He patiently explained to her why real revenge was off the table. And as he spoke, his teammates, including Gnoth nodded in agreement. None of them were dumb enough to let their emotions get them killed. Pete wouldn't want or support that.

Chris then went on to ask Jade why she seemed overly informed despite not being from his organisation. And he hadn't said enough about it for her to speak like that.

"Umm... Well, we had a few run-ins with your organisation. Tactoa, right? I won't get into detail. But I will say that one of my groupmates lost a father to your organisation. He was killed by another Monarch but still, it's the same organisation, right? Then there were some randos a while back who attacked me and I ended up sending them on their way... Point is, there's no reconciliation between us and your organisation. I'm only saying this since you're my brother and also have your issues with Tactoa. So, I know you won't sell us out" Jade explained.

"Oh, so that's how it is... No wonder you didn't even entertain the idea of joining me. As for keeping quiet because I'm your brother... Let's say it's only possible because my team now has hard feelings toward the organisation as well. If not, then who knows what would happen" Chris spoke in an understanding tone, then finished with a joke which made Jade's expression turn dark.

"Hey! Are you saying you would have thrown me under the bus in normal circumstances? How could you?! I'm your only sister! I'll never trust you again you traitorous brother!" Jade exclaimed angrily. Her eyes were wide with surprise. She didn't expect such words from Chris.

"Calm down. I didn't mean it like that. I meant that even if I wanted to keep it under wraps. My teammates might not have thought the same. Even if I requested them to. Who knows if they would keep quiet? Especially James ("Hey!" James shouted)... Anyway, would you excuse us for a minute? We need to discuss something for a bit" Chris clarified and took a little jab at James who was fidgeting in the back.

"Sure" Jade responded while she and Emily watched Chris and his team go to the side for a bit. She was curious to know what he wanted to speak to them about. But she didn't eavesdrop.

Though it wasn't like she could do it even if she wanted to. Chris had cast a soundproof barrier around his group before they began speaking.

Of course, she could use her hearing ability. But it would be too obvious with her cat ears sticking out of her head.

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Inside Chris' barrier...

"So, our mission is practical over. What do you all propose we do next?" Chris asked his teammates.

"I'll go with whatever you choose" Scarlett was the first one to reply. Her answer was quite expected too.

"I'll go with whatever Scarlett chooses" James was very with another expected reply.

"What do you want to do?" Gnoth asked Chris seriously while looking him in the eyes. He, as Chris's old friend knew that Chris wanted to do something which strayed from the path they would normally take.

"... I want to follow my sister for a bit and see how she lives her life. It is only then that I can be completely assured of her safety. While I know Emily and I know she is a good friend. I want to see whether the others are also good people. I won't force anyone to come with me..." Chris replied seriously.

"Oh, so that's what you want to do. Well, I can also be considered little Jade's brother, so, I'll come along with you... And since the others already said they are coming along. I guess the whole team is going on a vacation" Gnoth replied and even forced a smile on his face at the end.

While he said it was to help Chris look after Jade. It was obvious that he just wanted to distract himself from a certain fresh event. Losing Pete was like losing a blood brother to him.

"Great! I knew I could count on you all. Let me notify the leader then. I'm sure she'll agree to give us a break after what happened..." Chris spoke then proceeded to send a message through the device he received from the base.

The technology was still weak so they communicated through Morse code. It took a bit, but Chris finished reporting everything soon enough. Of course, he didn't mention Jade and Emily.

He did mention the Monarch killing Pete though. And like they expected, it earned his group a two-month-long break. Their leader knew how to take care of her subordinates well...

As for the matter with NL Base. He reported what he thought when he first arrived. Which was, "a battle occurred, guns exploded, everything and everyone got wiped out". Which was believable enough and the leader believed it...

"So... About Pete..." Chris spoke while looking at Gnoth after finishing his report.

"Say no more. Like you said. There's nothing we can do. We can only bide our time for now and hope that a chance for revenge presents itself in the future. While it's sad to lose a brother. It's part of life, he'll live on our memories. Let's go tell your sister the good news, I'm sure she'll be thrilled to have you around for a while..." Gnoth interrupted Chris and expressed his understanding of the wait-and-see strategy Chris had decided on.

"I'm glad you're on board, brother" Chris replied as he smiled a little bit.

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A few moments later...

"No" Jade refused Chris's request to follow her with a deadpan expression on her face.

Chapter 273: Tagging along (pt2)

"What?! What do you mean no? I'm your brother! And how could you say it so resolutely?! So cold!" Chris's confidence immediately crumbled.

He was expecting Jade to happily jump into his arms while expressing her happiness in having him around. Yet it seemed like she didn't even want him around.

"I said no. I can already see you preventing me from doing anything because of your overprotectiveness. There's no way I'd be able to improve my strength with you around. I say we should separate here. You go your way, I go mine. We now know that the other is alive. And that's enough for me" Jade replied.

"Well, too bad. I'm coming with you whether you like it or not. And I promise I won't get in your way. I know very well that you can properly take care of yourself. You won't even know I'm there, I promise.

Please, let us do this civilly. I beg you. You don't want us to embarrass our family anymore, do you?" Chris resorted to threatening and begging at the same time.

If he only threatened her, Jade would resist with all her might. If he only begged, she would walk all over him. So, he went with a little bit of both.

"Tsk. Let me talk to my partner first...("They can come" Emily agreed immediately)... Well, it seems she's okay with it. But you better keep your promise. I'll ditch you the moment you step out of bounds" Jade helplessly agreed after Emily said it was okay.

As for what Emily was so quick to agree. It was because she understood where Chris was coming from. She was also an older sibling, after all. In fact, she felt that he was a lot more agreeable than herself. If it was her, she would have dragged Elsa away with her whether she wanted to go or not. There was no way she would leave her younger sister alone in the apocalypse. Even if she was strong and had a strong team among other good things.

Anyway, the group didn't linger in the area anymore. They began making their way toward the mansion with Jade in the lead.

They weren't in any particular rush so she didn't use her flight ability while dragging everyone along with her. That would require quite an amount of mental energy as well. Mental energy she wasn't willing to expend. Not to mention that she was still tired from her battle with the slime...

She also wanted to take the chance to show Chris that she was good enough to take care of herself. Maybe that way he will go away sooner.

"Wait..." Jade suddenly paused while scrunching her nose. She turned back to look at a specific person in their group.

"What?" James asked nervously while being stared at by Jade's seemingly disgusted eyes.

If he didn't know how strong she was. He would have definitely shouted at her for giving him such a disrespectful gaze.

"Can you do something about your pants. I really can't take the smell anymore. If you're going to stick around, you can at least get rid of that urine scent on you, right?" Jade spoke her mind without holding back.

Scarlett giggled in amusement. She was liking this little sister-in-law of her's more and more. Not only did she make Chris seem more human, but she also embarrassed the hateful James. And anyone who can embarrass James is a good person to her.

"Umm... I... Ah," James stuttered not knowing what to say. He thought that he was hiding it well. He was also walking a bit behind the rest. Yet the hateful brat still called him out. Couldn't she say it in a less embarrassing way? She could at least pull him to the side and speak, right? How was he supposed to face Scarlett now?

His face was red from embarrassment. He wished he could just dig a hole there and hide in the ground...

"If you don't mind. I can help you with that..." Emily suddenly chimed in. She was wondering if she should burn Jade's mouth off. The girl really had no filter when talking to strangers. It was something Emily had forgotten about after everyone got close.

Jade had toned the tendency down by a lot. And she wouldn't be bothered to speak when they meet new people in most situations.

"Yes, please!" Chris exclaimed immediately. Tears of relief and gratitude were leaking out of his eyes. He didn't know how she was going to help, but anything was okay as long as she helped him. Emily looked like an angel to him in the moment. Especially with her golden hair and eyes.

"Okay", Emily replied with a smile on her face, then...

Whoosh!

"Ahhhh!" James screamed like a pig in a slaughterhouse.

It was understandable though. After all, Emily had just set him on fire with a smile on his face.

He was regretting accepting her help. Who knew that her help was burning him to ash? Sure, he wouldn't stink anymore after that but.. He wouldn't be alive either! What kind of help was that?!

He had been tricked. She wasn't an angel. She was a demon in an angelic skin! And why weren't Chris and the others doing anything?! Were they in on the deal as well?! He had been betrayed!

With such thoughts going through his mind. James continued crying with his eyes shut tight... He continued doing that until he realised something... He didn't feel any pain at all. In fact, he felt quite good. Like he was being gently kissed by the sun...

That's when he opened his eyes. He was met with the sight of everyone giving him weird gazes. He looked down at his own body and realised that he was still perfectly fine. Not even a single hair on his body was burnt by the fire.

The best part was that the wet spot on his pants was gone and he no longer reeked of urine.

It was almost like the whole incident of a R3 Evolver pissing himself never happened. One had to know, R3s no longer needed to go to the bathroom. Their bodies could destroy all the waste inside them completely. Yet James still managed to wet himself... Quite surprising and greatly embarrassing.

"Umm. I'm sorry about that. I guess I should have warned you first. I guess I assumed you'd understand after not sensing any killing intent from me that I didn't mean to harm you. You know, like your teammates did.." Emily apologised.

Though her apology could also be seen as an insult to James's capabilities. After all, only he thought that she was attacking him. Which was understandable considering that he saw Emily tossing a flame his way. But still, his showing was terrible.

He even confessed his love for Scarlett and cursed Chris and Gnoth for being better than him. Which was why everyone was giving him such weird looks.

Fortunately, he didn't say anything unforgivable. So, while it was now set in stone that he would never get Scarlett from her look of disgust after he confessed. Everything else could be discussed.

Anyway, James accepted the apology with an ugly smile on his face and the group continued their journey.

They would meet some beasts from time to time which they took turns to deal with.

James also got his turn to take care of a beast. And quite frankly, his ability disgusted Emily and Jade. His body stretched like a bubblegum and completely wrapped around the beast like a snake and suffocating it to death. His head looked at them with arrogance while resting on top of his elongated neck.

And quite frankly the sight made both girls gag a little. They immediately understood why Scarlett was so disgusted with him. His ability wasn't fluttering at all.

They also learned what the domain of a physical-type Evolver looks like. James's domain was a clear dome which suppressed the enemy's power, improved the speed at which he stretched as well as made his skin a lot more resilient...

So, it can be said that a physical-type barrier gives the owner a strong buff. Jade's barrier also had that effect, but it wasn't too apparent since unlike James, she had an element in the form of her Beast Aura. So her domain's effect was mostly apparent in her beast Aura despite her body being improved as well.

So, it can be said that Jade was a hybrid. She falls in the battle-mage category instead of warrior and such physical classes.

She was basically the envy of both Mage-types and Physical-types. And Muku had joined her in that category after his soul link with Raya. Hell, he was even above her after his trial ground experience.

Anyway, there weren't any major issues in their journey. They fought when they could and avoided when they couldn't fight...

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Later on...

"Why are we running?! Didn't you say you took care of a PR3 beast on your own once before? There are only two of them in that small group. Why aren't we fighting them instead? You can take one, Emily and I will take the other. Your teammates can take the remaining three. Were you lying?!" Jade shouted at Chris as they ran away from a small group of beasts.

There were only two PR3s and three LR3s. It looked like the two PR3s were the parents of the three weaker ones...

"No, it wasn't a lie. I just forgot to mention that it was a heavily wounded PR3 and I caught it by surprise. Now shut up and run!" Chris replied while the group was getting propelled forward by Scarlett's wind while standing on a barrier platform Chris made...

Chapter 274: Tagging along (final)

"What?! You liar! How are you the leader of a group?!" Jade screamed as they whizzed away...

"Please don't say that. You make us seem dumb for letting him lead us. The truth is that he's usually very reliable. It's only now that he's like that. I think seeing his sister threw him off his game" Scarlett quickly defended Chris... Though she was probably just defending herself indirectly.

"Is that so? I guess we can be reassured that his behaviour is only temporary when the beasts eat us. But it's okay, I'm sure he'll make a comeback once we're poop and save us" Jade replied sarcastically.

She was frustrated by the situation. Only if she had recovered a little more. She would have been able to use her "beast suppression" and perhaps scared the beasts away.

Unfortunately, her current mental energy wasn't enough for such a thing. Despite how easily she displays it in normal circumstances, it actually takes a significant amount of mental energy along with her Beast Aura.

So, while her Beast Aura had recovered significantly, her mental energy was still low due to its much slower speed of recovery...

If push came to shove, she could grab Emily and maybe Chris and run away. But she knew that those two probably wouldn't let her do such a thing. Especially Chris who was the leader of the group she wanted to ditch...

"Umm, everyone..." James suddenly spoke from behind the others.

"What Pee-guy, do you have a solution?" Jade asked while giving James a side eye. And yeah, that's her nickname for him ever since the incident...

"Umm, do you also think that the shadow below is getting too dark?" James ignored the nickname. There was nothing he could do about it, after all.

He reported what he wanted to. Everyone immediately looked below the moment he did. All their eyes widened for a second then... They were swallowed by shadow.

They didn't notice it until the last moment because they were running in-between trees on a sunny day. So, there were already dark shadows everywhere. And no normal person would pay attention to shadows in such a situation.

James only noticed what was happening by mistake... And the idiot said it so calmly that the others couldn't react in time.

Anyway, the beasts behind them were freaked out by the incident. They were quickly scared off in fear that they would be next.

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A few minutes later...

"Ahhhhhh!!!!" The group was spat out and James's screams were exposed to the outside world.

Slap!

"Shut up! You know, if you were in my team, I would have long gotten rid of you" Jade slapped James and cursed him.

Her gaze and everyone else's moved away from James immediately after and focused on one extra individual who shouldn't have been there.

Chris's group looked at the newcomer with wary eyes with their guards up. While they realised that it was probably that person who had saved them, they still didn't know them. So, their wariness was reasonable.

"Couldn't you warn us first before scaring us like that?! I thought we were getting dragged to hell for a second there!" Jade complained to the newcomer while trying to slap them on the shoulder. But the newcomer easily dodged making Jade stumble a bit after missing. Which prompted a (Hey!) from her.

"I didn't feel like it" The newcomer who was obviously Layla replied with a few words then went quiet.

"Tsk. Fine. What are you doing here? And why didn't you just join hands with us to fight those beasts off? I'm sure with all of us together we can take care of them" Jade accepted the response and moved on. She knew that she wasn't going to get more out of Layla on the subject anyway.

"I was worried that you'd ditch Emily somewhere because of your unstable state. Or worse, you'd lose it again and I'd have to beat you up again. If Emily does it, she would have to significantly hurt you to stop you. As for fighting those beasts... You're stupid if you think you can fight a PR3 with just us. Unlike the beasts we fought before. They have perfected domains and without your "beast suppression" to throw them off, we wouldn't stand a chance" Layla replied mechanically...

"Tsk. I'm not sure how to react. It sounds like you're dissing me by thinking I'd suddenly lose it as well as showing your concern for me by considering what Emily would have to do to subdue me. Well, whatever, everything worked out and that's all that matters. And you're probably right in the PR3 matter too" Jade replied with an annoyed expression on her face.

She didn't want to admit that Layla helped them. But it was clear she did. Which she was forced to acknowledge. So, she could only admit it with a belly full of frustration.

"Thank you for helping us, Layla. And thank you for worrying about my safety. I hope it didn't feel too stuffy in my shadow... Oh, it seems Jade forgot to introduce you all. I'll do..." Emily thanked Layla and indirectly expressed that she knew Layla was in her shadow all this time... Maybe that's why she was so calm throughout the whole ordeal.

While she didn't know what method Layla would use to help them. She was confident that whatever Layla did would work out. Layla was a slightly older, cold but very reliable big sister. While they were all born in the same year. Layla was the oldest being born in January (on the 15th)

"No problem. It was okay. There's no need to introduce us. I already know them... Hello. I'm Layla. Emily's friend and Jade's associate(Hey!)" Layla accepted Emily's gratitude and introduced herself to Chris's group.

"What do you mean by associate?! Do we run a business together or something? Aren't we friends? Why are you and Emily friends but you and I are associates?! Are you listening to me? Stop ignoring me damn it!" Jade complained loudly.

Unfortunately, neither Layla nor anyone else gave her the time of day. They spoke amongst themselves for a bit. Soon they were back on Chris's platform getting propelled forward by Scarlett's wind. This time it was for transport instead of a getaway method.

Jade soon shut her mouth and sat on the platform with a pout on her face. She was mad that everyone treated her like air ever since Layla showed up. But there was nothing she could do but silently protest...

The journey continued without trouble after that. It was almost like Layla was their lucky charm...

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The next afternoon...

The cart had made significant progress, so it was slightly difficult for them to catch up with it. This was because they couldn't travel at night. For that reason, they only caught up with them on the next afternoon...

"Whoa... Is that a castle on ice?" James spoke while looking at the mansion from a distance away...

This time the others from his group didn't cast him disdainful gazes. They were just as amazed and mesmerised by the sight as he was.

It wasn't every day one saw such a sight. Especially for their group which all originated from humble middle-class families.

Even in normal times, the beautiful mansion would mesmerise them. Let alone in the apocalypse after Freya made it even better and with a light green barrier around it which made it seem rather mystical.

Soon enough they were all inside the mansion seated on the comfortable sofas.

It was only after Emily confirmed that she had destroyed all traces of filth from James's body that Jade agreed to let him sit on their sofa. But other than that everything was okay. Though she did give him disgusted gazes from time to time...

He on the other hand barely noticed. After all, he was suddenly surrounded by beautiful women. It was a new experience for him who only saw Scarlett most of the time since they usually stayed in the wild.

And they weren't just beautiful girls. They were peak beautiful girls who made Scarlett look quite average.

In fact, Scarlett became average when Jade and Emily showed up. But Jade was rude to him, and Emily "burned" him, so she didn't like either of them that much. Layla who came later on was quite cold too.

But now, his eyes were overloaded by the beauty that they literally got teary-eyed for a moment.

The reason for that was obviously the goddess, Audrey. That's right, goddess, that's the only word fitting her transcended beauty. While the younger girls were on their way to that level of beauty. She had already reached it.

What made her even more beautiful was how she didn't seem to realise how beautiful she really was from how she carried herself.

Whether it be, Chris, Gnoth, James or even Scarlett who was now questioning her sexuality. They were all mesmerised by Audrey's beauty.

They almost fainted when she smiled. In their heads, they even wondered if they died at some point and went to heaven...

"Don't even think about it. She's taken. And you don't want to mess with her man. He'll eat you all alive for breakfast" Suddenly a cold voice sounded behind Chris's group.

They looked back and realised that the speaker was the previously silent Jade who had a dead serious look on her face.

It was clear that she wasn't joking...

Chapter 275: Living together...

"..."

Suddenly everyone felt awkward. No one had expected Jade to call Chris's group out like that. Especially since Chris was her brother. You'd think she'd pretend not to notice their ogling of Audrey like everyone else was doing. But no, she just had to be Jade.

On the other hand, Jade didn't feel bad at all. She felt that her decision was the right one. It prevented unnecessary drama in the future.

She didn't want to live through a bad movie scene where her brother gets beaten up by his brother-in-law because of a woman. Yes, that's right, she already considered herself Muku's wife... Which wasn't anything out of the ordinary since most of the girls in their group also thought that.

Anyway, Jade's decision appeared to be the right one since it snapped Chris out of his mesmerised state. Though James and Gnoth were still trapped.

She didn't care about them though. If they wanted to be erased out of existence it was up to them.

"Ahem! Don't be rude Jade. Aren't you going to introduce us?" Audrey lightly rebuked Jade then asked her to introduce everyone.

It was clear from how she spoke to them that she was very familiar with them. Otherwise, she wouldn't have been bothered to say anything. So, Audrey felt it was best to have her introduce everyone. It was also a way to reduce the awkwardness in the air.

As for how Chris and the others had been ogling her, she didn't mind, she was used to strangers looking at her like that. She would rather not interact with new people for that reason but could handle it when necessary...

Anyway, Jade who couldn't say no to Audrey did as told. She introduced everyone. She even made it clear that she didn't want Chris around and hoped Audrey would make them sleep outside.

Of course, her request was rejected by the kind Audrey. There was no way she would do that to Jade's brother and his team. Even if it wasn't for that relationship. She would treat them kindly just based on their strength. One had to know it took quite a lot of struggle to reach R3. That alone deserved respect as long as the person wasn't of bad character.

"Well, Mr Chris and gang. We're glad to host you. Unfortunately, the Master of the mansion isn't present at this time. However, we will treat you to the best of our capabilities. So there's no need to worry" Audrey spoke after the introductions. There was a weird glint in her eyes as she spoke.

Layla's mouth twitched a little bit after hearing what Audrey said. She was actually holding back a smile. A few nights before they watched an anime where words along those lines were used by the housekeeper.

Audrey's eyes glowed at that time, which confused Layla. It was only now that she realised that Audrey had wanted to try saying it herself. To think her mother could be so childish... Well, she knew that her mother could be childish, but to think she would do it in such a situation...

"Um, ah. Yeah. We're glad to be here" Chris replied awkwardly not knowing what exactly he should say to that.

....

After that, Chris's group was given guest rooms on the second floor of the three-story mansion. The girls all stayed on the topmost floor. The two couldn't be mixed for obvious reasons...

The two groups then got familiar with each other over the next two months. They settled on a spot a week after their meeting and began hunting in the area...

Jade who was supposed to leave immediately after was unfortunately tied down. She could only grumpily stay at the mansion. This was because unlike what he promised. Chris was pretty much always following her.

As long as she left the mansion, he would follow immediately after. No matter where she went, Chris was there.

Fortunately, his members mostly minded their own business. Scarlett would sometimes approach Jade as she tried to recruit her on her quest to acquire Chris.

Her attempts failed at first though. It was only after she realised that Jade really loved meat that she began getting somewhere. After a few weeks, Jade even agreed to help Scarlett out.

Though that was mostly because Jade just wanted to get Chris off her back. That didn't matter to Scarlett though. As long as she got the man she loved to be her's, then everything else didn't matter...

Then there was Chris who followed Audrey a couple of times before he was beaten up by Layla to within an inch of his life. The worst part was how his teammates just looked on as he got beaten up. Well, he had been warned not to do it, after all.

And it was better to be beaten up by Layla than to have to deal with Muku later on. That guy had quite the dark...

Anyway, after that. James gave up and everyone began getting along. Scarlett even successfully made Chris her's after a month of Jade-assisted romantic events.

It was then that she realised that Chris had held her in his heart from the start. He was just awkward and didn't know how to approach her. That realisation made her day.

She moved into his room that very night and they had quite a wild one. Freya who had been pursued by James for a bit made it so that James could hear what was going on in the next room as revenge.

And, so, as Chris and Scarlett enjoyed a night of passion. James cried himself to sleep.

But it might have been for the best as he was a changed person the next morning. He was more serious.

So, while he's mouth twitched when he saw the limping but glowing Scarlett. He didn't make a scene like you'd expect from him.

From that day he would spend most of his time hunting and getting stronger. Which was a complete switch from before when he would spend most of his time getting rejected.

Anyway, the two groups lived their lives like that for the next two months. While there were some notable events. There wasn't anything significant which occurred. They steadily gained strength in the apocalypse.

Having a mobile base was great since they would move away from an area after hunting in it for a bit. This made sure they always had sufficient beasts to kill. And they wouldn't have to run far if they get overwhelmed by the beasts...

.....

Beast World: Close to two months later...

Muku had successfully made it out of the Middle Zone under the "protection" of the R6s.

However, they didn't stay any second longer after he was out of their territory. They immediately ran as far away from him as they could. He was no longer their problem.

In their heads, at that point, if someone dared mess with the "expert" at that point. He wouldn't find trouble with them. They were thinking that he might even reward them after he was done with his work when he returned.

As for why he didn't just appear where he wanted to go. They didn't think about it. To them. Experts like him weren't beings they could understand. After all, after reaching R7, they pretty much lived in different worlds.

In fact, the "expert", Muku, was the first "R7 or higher" they had come across. They only knew tales of R7s and beyond. Any beast in the forest which reached R7 would mysteriously disappear from the area and never be seen again. And they couldn't peer through the dense mana which floated all over the place in the Central Zone.

Such mysteriousness was part of the reason they treated Muku so carefully. Not to mention the idea of Muku being a random weakling having been erased completely from their minds by the portal...

Anyway, after making it out of the Middle Zone, Muku also sped up and went as far away from the place as he could.

He didn't want them to see their "expert" avoiding R4s and such...

After a month he was at the very edge of the Beast Forest. Speaking of which, the forest was surrounded by water. And in that water lived beasts just as deadly if not more deadly than the ones on land.

Muku got curious one day and tried to enter the ocean. However, a huge shark with huge crab-like legs jumped out the moment his foot touched water.

And it wasn't a random beast either. It was actually a MR3! Its speed and surprise factor were so high that Muku almost lost his head to it.

Fortunately, he managed to dodge in time. He immediately flew away from the area. After all, he was still just a newbie LR3 at the time. That battle would have been too dangerous. And who knew if the crab-shark had backup?

From that day he avoided the water like it was a plague. He only dared to get close to water sources away from the ocean like rivers and lakes.

Of course, those were also quite dangerous but they were manageable. He chose to spend most of his time in the forest picking off the weaker beasts to get stronger.

He was actually starting to appreciate the creepy armour which completely hid his presence.

Though there were times he would get caught. Like his current situation. He was standing a distance away from a pitch black beast with red eyes. It was looking at him like he was already a dead man.

After all, it was a PR3. And Muku didn't seem too strong to it. It didn't care that it couldn't sense his power level. Unlike the stronger beasts, it didn't think too much about it.

And it was actually correct. Muku was currently just a MR3. However, whether it would win or not. Only time will tell.

Muku who could sense its strength didn't back off. He wanted to test his current strength against a worthy opponent. And MR3s were too weak...

"Hehe. Coming back into the scene with a battle. Bring it on cat!" Muku taunted the beast with words it didn't get.

But it didn't care what he said. It charged forward with a watery mouth ready to taste the weird creature in front of it...

Chapter 276: Undisputed winner...

"Roar!!!!" The beast roared as it got closer to Muku. A black dome arose and consumed them as soon as it roared.

It has cast its barrier. And being weaker than it in terms of rank, Muku couldn't counter it. He could only accept his fate and try to fight from within.

The domain actually reminded him of Layla's Shadow Domain. And the beast reminded him of a beast his group had encountered long back... That beast was a Shadow Panther. The beast terrorised the residents of a whole base for a while before Layla killed it.

And now Muku seemed to be facing an even deadlier version of it. It was bigger, faster, stronger, smarter and had a domain. All the odds were against him. The possibility of death was actually high.

But that didn't scare him. He had had quite a few close calls in the short time he had lived on the outskirts of the Beast World. So, his current situation wasn't unusual. His blood was already pumping strongly, his body full of adrenaline.

Even though he lost his sight the moment the Shadow Panther deployed its barrier... He couldn't even sense it. However, he didn't fear. A smile appeared on his helmet-covered face. He simply closed his eyes and... A new world appeared in front of him.

The panther which seemed to have completely vanished was once again visible to him. Not through his eyes, but through something else... That's right, he had tapped into the abilities which had allowed him to fight Scar the Cynocephalus King.

It was then that the panther which thought it had him locked down made its move. It punched at him from the back with eyes glowing with confidence from another easy kill.

In its eyes, Muku who just stood in place doing nothing was completely defenceless. He was practically a sitting duck. It wasn't like he could do anything when its domain locked away his elements anyway.

That's when...

Whoosh! Bang!

"Roar!"

Boom!

Just when it was about to bite into his neck with its large mouth which came with being a seven-metre-tall beast... Muku moved.

He sidestepped and before it could react, he punched it in the gut. Considering the size difference, his attack should have been easily shrugged off. But things didn't go as one would expect. His punch actually sent it flying away with a loud pained roar.

Muku didn't give it time to rest. He immediately followed after it with a boom as he ran forward.

He wasn't using mana. His mana had been completely locked away. Even he couldn't do anything inside the perfected barrier in terms of using his mana. However, he didn't only have mana to fall back on.

Not after the trials, gifts and rewards Mrs C gave him. The current him was physically no different from the weaker PR3 beasts. So, even if he couldn't use mana or his bloodline power. He wasn't defenceless. Something the panther learned the hard way.

The lesson was even more painful for it which was weaker than normal PR3s physically. So, in actual fact, Muku was stronger than it physically.

Bang!

A punch landed on its face before it could adjust to the unexpected development. Its brain was rocked and it felt dizzy. The punch hurt so much that it couldn't even cry in pain.

Fortunately for it, despite being on the weaker side of PR4s, its skin and bones were just as sturdy as any standard PR4. If not its head might have been blown away by the punch. At the very least, its jaw would have been dislocated or broken.

But the pain did make it wish it could turn back time and avoid this disaster. It should have left this weird metal-skinned creature alone.

Boom!

Bang!

Just because it regretted starting a fight with him didn't mean it had no way of fighting him. It had just been caught off guard.

The moment it got a split second of reprieve, it made its move. And with a boom, Muku who was midair, jumping after it smashed hard into the ground.

He had been hit by a sudden gravitational force which didn't give him time to adjust before it smashed him to the ground. The Shadow Panther had reminded him that they were still in its domain and not his.

To think that its domain was different from Layla's despite them having the same element. Sure, the base abilities like depriving their target of their senses were the same. But it seemed not to have Layla's "Omnipresence" instead it had "Gravity control". As for how much it could control the gravity. Muku didn't know yet.

But just what it did was enough to make his expression grave. The beast had taken away his mana. And now it was messing with his physical capabilities. It was really not giving him a way out.

To think what he thought was going to be a normal everyday fight, even factoring in the life-threatening danger was even worse than he expected.

What was he supposed to do when it took away his two best cards? Was he left with no other option but to use his bloodline ability?... But that might be more problematic. Mrs C said that if he used it, he

would be practically telling all the Monarchs where he was and they would instantly appear and kill him off on the spot... So, yeah, using his bloodline ability was out of the question...

It was better to take his chances with the R3. He might lose an arm and a leg if he's unlucky, but there was still a chance of survival. Which wasn't there when faced with Monarchs in their true forms...

Fortunately, he had one more option. It would guarantee his safety, but it would wound his pride. But it was the only option left. But before that, he had to try and do everything he could. He refused to give up until the very moment.

With such resolute thoughts in his mind. Muku struggled to get up under the strong gravity which was pushing him down...

The panther actually looked on from the shadows and let him do his thing. Its eyes flashed with disdain. It wanted to show him that he was nothing in front of it. He had only beaten it up before due to luck and catching it off guard.

Muku soon adjusted to the gravity under its watchful gaze. It was actually surprised that he could do it. But that didn't scare it off. Everything was still under control...

Bang! Boom!

Just as Muku took his first step. It disappeared from where it stood. The next thing Muku saw was a large paw hitting his side and tossing him into the distance.

He coughed up blood mid-air and coughed up even more upon landing. However, he didn't let the pain control him. It was the chance he needed. He was freed from the beast's gravity control.

He ignored the pain and rushed toward it at his highest speed. He focused all his strength on his punch. There was a little something else mixed into it too. If the attack landed. It would definitely cause real damage to the panther...

Whoosh!

Soon he was upon it...

Whoosh!

And shot past it from above...

Bang!

Boom!

The panther followed behind him and smashed him to the ground from above. Muku coughed up even more blood.

This time he didn't get up. He couldn't get up for the time being even if he wanted to. The panther had won. It had completely beaten him up.

To think he'd lose his first battle against a PR3 despite making MR3s look like babies. It was only then that he realised the difference between those with a mastered domain and those without. He was certain that the panther hadn't even used all its strength.

As for the move it defeated him with...

"Cough. Cough! This vasters can actually increase or decrease the gravitational pressure, huh? What an ability, I'm kinda jealous... Though I guess I could do that with my Telekinesis. Unfortunately, that's not strong enough to do anything significant to this even if I can use it a little. Sigh, losing sucks" Muku spoke to himself while lying broken on the ground.

His body would recover after enough rest since he was a high-level Evolver and his bloodline also played a part. But the current him was done.

He could only look on as the panther which had mockingly given him his vision back by cancelling its domain approach.

Its approach was slow and arrogant. The walk of a real winner who couldn't be disputed.

It soon stood less than a metre away from Muku and looked down on him with disdain in its eyes.

Muku looked back with a neutral expression under the helmet. Then he softly spoke...

"Do it..."

"Roooooar!"

A roar accompanied by a large dragonic mouth appeared. Soon the panther's neck was clamped down on by the large mouth...

The development was way too sudden. The panther which had won suddenly found itself getting choked to death with an unknown creature's teeth sunk deep into its neck.

It struggled intensely wondering what went wrong then...

Ka!

A sound of a neck getting broken was heard and the undisputed winner slumped to the ground...

Chapter 277: Broken pride...

A while later...

Muku was still lying on the ground unmoving. The Shadow Panther's corpse lay next to him with a broken neck. It had been killed by Raya before it could react...

Raya who had turned into her tiny form sat on top of it with a smug look on her cute draconic face. Muku had tried his best to ignore her since she killed the panther. However, he couldn't take her burning gaze anymore. So, he had to say something...

"Sigh. Thank you for helping me" Muku spoke the words which made him scrunch his face as if he tasted something bitter...

The reason for that was pretty simple actually. He and Raya had made a bet a while back. The bet was that whoever needed the other party's help first, would do anything that party requested in return. Of course, the request had to be something reasonable.

But even then, Muku was quite prideful. For that reason, he had remained abstinent until the end. The panther wasn't his first near-death experience actually. But it was definitely the closest, this was because he found ways to win the past battles despite the odds. But he couldn't do anything with the panther.

Acknowledging his defeat was hard but there was nothing he could do... He could only console himself by thinking that Raya had only won because she rarely hunts.

Speaking of which, unlike humans who only have to kill a certain number to reach the peak. Beasts actually needed to consume meat then process the energy in that meat and slowly increase their strength.

The energy they got from their prey was the same as the KP humans got. However, they did it manually while humans did it automatically. Therefore, their ranking-up process was slower than humans as it took some time to extract the energy.

It wasn't all bad though. This was because beasts gain more from a single kill than humans do. This allowed talented beasts like Raya to keep up with humans despite the disadvantage.

Though she still needed to rest for a few days while that energy was absorbed by her body...

Anyway, Muku felt that it was because of that long rest period while he constantly hunted which allowed her to win. After all, it was a lot easier for him who's constantly seeking fights to get into trouble compared to her who's resting most of the time. That totally made sense...

It made so much sense to him he casually forgot that he was the one who bit more than he could chew by going after a PR3 when he was just a MR3 noob...

"Hehe. You're welcome" Raya replied in her cute little voice. She had been waiting for him to say it for close to two five minutes. And it sounded as good as she thought it would sound. She was quite pleased with herself.

"Tsk. So, tell me. What is it that you want? It better not be something extreme or I'm not doing it" Muku spoke grumpily.

"Oh come on now. Why are you such a sore loser? Is it because the panther fight was the first ever fight you lost after seeking it yourself? That's gotta be embarrassing, right? I know I'd be embarrassed. Anyway, enough about your embarrassing feat. Let's talk about my reward. You better not back out of it like you promised... Wait, I don't think I have anything I want from you right now. You lost so quickly I didn't even have enough time to come up with anything. Let's talk about it when I think of something, okay? Just remember it loser" Raya replied.

Her every statement cut deep into Muku's pride. If she wasn't Soul Linked to him he might have committed murder on the spot.

"Whoa! To think you're so embarrassed you are plotting to kill me for just stating the truth!. Who knew you were such a person?! I think I made a mistake when I made a Soul link with you. If only I could go back" Raya who sensed Muku's killing intent which appeared for a second before disappearing mocked him ruthlessly.

She wasn't nearly as scared as she sounded. Hell, she wasn't scared at all. Not only was Muku practically handicapped at the moment, even if he had his peak strength she was confident she could take care of him easily enough.

She was after all a dragon prodigy even Mrs C looked highly upon. So, she really didn't put Muku in her eyes even if she thought he was a pretty amazing human. Like they say, "there's always someone better", and she was Muku's "someone better"

With such thoughts, she ran her mouth in front of Muku until she was content.

"Can you just leave me alone?" Muku tiredly spoke after Raya kept on insulting him for a few minutes.

"Sure, I'll leave your defenceless self alone in the beast world. I'm sure you'll be fine. Bye then." Raya spoke then began floating away.

"... Please stop. I'm sorry. I didn't mean that" Muku called out in a somewhat pained and suppressed voice.

He didn't want to do it. But the current him really needed Raya more than ever.

Some beasts might have heard the battle sounds from before and were coming to check. As for why it took so long for any to arrive. Firstly, the Beast World was quite large. So it was pretty easy for the closest beast to be a few kilometres away.

And secondly, the Beast World was quite dangerous. For that reason, many curious cats or nosy beasts to be exact also got killed when they checked out random sounds.

For that reason, most who weren't confident in their strength dared not check out battle sites... At least not within a short period. But there were always mavericks who didn't follow any sort of pattern or reason. They'd do whatever they wanted when they wanted.

Fortunately for Muku, none of those were around. But that didn't mean he was safe. And that's why Raya's presence was necessary...

"Fine. I'll stay. You're really hopeless without me" Raya turned back as she replied in a cheeky voice.

She wasn't planning on leaving anyway. After all, if Muku died her strength would be compromised by half. Her soul would also be gravely hurt. Such a state wasn't something she wanted to experience, especially in the Beast World.

Not to mention Muku's adoptive mother. She was certain that the lady would kill her if she let Muku die. Even though they had only interacted with the lady for a little time. She was certain that the lady really loved this son of hers. As for why that was, she didn't know nor did she have the guts to ask why.

But of course, she wouldn't do everything for free despite those reasons. She turned into her big draconic form and started feasting on the panther corpse under Muku's pissed gaze.

He had never tasted PR3 beast meat after all. Unfortunately, not only had it been Raya who killed it so it was technically hers anyway, he needed to keep her happy for the time being. Not to mention that he didn't have the flame element. Or any ability which could cook meat for that reason. So, he was doomed to not taste the meat anyway.

The only meat he could eat was that from Unranked beasts which he could cook with regular fire. It tasted rather bland after all the high-level meat he had eaten in the past. But it was the only option.

He was actually just happy to be able to eat through the helmet at all. Apparently, the creepy mouth part of it could be opened with just a thought. As for why that was, he didn't know, nor did he care. What mattered was that it could be done and he could eat...

.....

A while later...

Raya had completely devoured the larger than her corpse leaving behind just the beast core. As for how she could do it, Muku didn't know. It always amazed him every time she did it.

"Hey. You once said that this armour protects me from gravity, right? Isn't that how I could easily shrug off the gravity from the Middle Zone? If so, why is it that the panther was able to hit me with gravity attacks and pretty much dog walk me with it?" Muku asked after a period of silence. He had finally adjusted to the situation and accepted his loss.

"There's your answer right there. One was gravity and the other was a gravity attack. One was a natural phenomenon while the other was a simulation through mana and mental energy. The obvious answer is that the armour only works on natural gravity. Though we can't say that we've actually confirmed that it's the armour which gives you that ability. But even then, the answer to your question is the same. Whatever gives you the gravity nullification ability only works on natural gravity..." Raya replied intellectually. She was also bored so she didn't mind talking to him.

She didn't even mock him as she had also gotten over that.

"Oh. That makes sense... It seems rather obvious too. Did I somehow get dumber somewhere along the Chapters" Muku acknowledged her answer then whispered the latter part to himself.

"It seems we can't stay here anymore. Hang tight" Raya suddenly spoke after sensing something approaching them. And the presents seemed to be even stronger than the PR3 panther. Which could only mean it was a Pseudo R4 or beyond...

She didn't wait for Muku to say anything before opening her large mouth and biting down on his mouth then running away while holding him up by his arm.

"Ahh! Stop! Stop! I can move myself!" Muku suddenly screamed in pain.

Raya let go of him so that she could ask him how he was planning on getting away in his broken state. But he didn't fall to the ground like she expected. He began floating in the air. That's when she remembered his Telekinesis.

If she were a human, a blush would have appeared on her face from embarrassment.

Muku didn't say anything to her and proceeded to fly away in the direction she had chosen. It wasn't the time for quarrels. Raya followed after him silently and the two successfully made their escape.

This was because Raya returned to Muku's mindscape after a certain distance. This threw the beast which was following them off their trail.

Muku's presence was completely covered by his creepy armour, after all...

Chapter 278: Rank 4!

One year later: From the day Muku was dragged to the Beast World.

"Are you ready?" Raya asked Muku in a serious tone.

She was currently in her battle dragon form. And she looked a little different. Her body had grown quite a bit. She now reached ten metres in height which was a big improvement from her four metres from before... So, saying she was a little different might be a gross understatement. That change in size was anything but little.

And it wasn't the only thing which changed. Her aura was also different... well, it was the same aura. However, it was worlds apart in intensity from the day she killed the shadow panther.

If her aura at that time was a bright furnace. Then the current her was a bright mini-sun. She was well on her way to being a bright sun.

This change was understandable though. After all, the Raya standing beside Muku wasn't a mere R3. She wasn't a Pseudo R4. That's right, she was a legit R4!

It wasn't surprising for her to reach R4 after hunting for more than seven months after the panther incident when she was already a MR3.

And she wasn't the only one who had improved. Beside her stood Muku... Unfortunately, he was still unable to escape the armour. It basically became his skin at that point. And it had gotten even worse in appearance.

It had actually grown a grey cloth which was mixed in with the metal. In fact, it wasn't cloth at all. It was actually metal which had been made to look like cloth somehow. It was almost like the armour was trying to look as scary as it possibly could.

And that wasn't the only change. The subtle mental state stabbings he got from before had gotten even worse. Now it took some real effort to keep his mind stable. There were times when he would let his guard down in battle and the armour would influence him into a mad rampage...

Anyway, that was a story for another day. What mattered currently was that, just like Raya, Muku was also a legit R4.

The two were currently standing in front of the "restricted zone" as the Beast World knew it. Of course, the two knew that it was just a trial ground.

That's right, it was time to go and see Mrs C again! It had been a year since the last time...

"Of course I am. Are you?" Muku replied resolutely.

"Of course I am. Let's go then" Raya replied and Muku jumped from the ground onto her head the moment she spoke.

"Tsk. I really hate it when you do that" Raya complained.

"Oh shut up. I let you ride me on the time" Muku retorted.

"Sigh. Fine. Whatever" Raya replied then...

Boom!

She took off into the sky. Just like one would expect from Eastern dragons. She could fly in the sky as if she were swimming in water.

It always amazed Muku how she could do that without wings with such a large body.

Speaking of which, her real form as a R4 was actually much larger than what she was displaying. Ten metres was the shrunken version. She could actually grow up to seventy metres. Which made her one of the biggest R4s. As for why she didn't stay in that form... It was obviously hard to walk around in. Hunting would also be hard when the prey could spot you from over a hundred kilometres away...

Fortunately, she had a bloodline ability which allowed her to shrink. Which most R4s did have. Those had to wait for R5.

"Woooh! What's the rush?!" Muku screamed while standing on top of Raya.

"Shut up. Let me enjoy this. Do you know how hard it was to reach R4?!" Raya replied and continued rushing forward.

Soon she passed the area which could stop even Monarchs and continued forward. What made her happy was how she could finally withstand the gravity within the training ground...

Sure, she was still on the outskirts and would probably have to retreat into Muku's mindscape when they reached the central area. But still, she was happy with the progress. She knew that someday she'd be strong enough to moonwalk through the intense gravity. Which was actually her goal. As funny as it was. She just liked the dance when she saw it in Muku's memories...

"Fair point..." Muku who also knew how hard it was to transcend the barrier between R3 and R4 replied.

The requirements for advancing from R3 were first reaching PR3 of course. That was quite easy with enough beasts to kill. Then came stepping into Pseudo R4. That's where things got interesting. One needed to first learn how to compress their domain to something akin to a body suit. They also needed to transform their mana into advanced mana...

We'll start with turning your domain into a "body suit". It's what the Pseudo R4s Iris massacred used. It pretty much multiplied the user's already multiplied abilities by double. Let's say a standard domain multiplied a user's abilities by ten or more depending on talent. Then a compressed domain multiplied those abilities by two. If it were twenty, then it would become forty. Which was a scary thought.

Of course, some domain abilities would be taken out of the picture. But the trade-off was very worth it. Mages would gain the ability to fight in close combat. And their magic would be made even more destructive. If they could destroy a big city in one attack under a domain's multiplier. Then they would be able to destroy one which was two times that with the same effort under a compressed domain.

So, in other words. A compressed domain made everyone a perfect combat machine. Even though without elements gain the ability to shoot neutral beams of energy under compressed domains.

However, it wasn't easy to compress one's domain to that point. It was different from the compression Muku did before under the big boar he faced before's domain. That time he wasn't the one actually suppressing it. The boar was doing that.

When one did it themselves, they needed at least ten times the mental energy needed to create and maintain a normal domain. One had to know that some people could reach R3 but because of their weak mental states, they couldn't even create domain embryos. Those people (those with random classes) wouldn't be able to make it past R3 no matter what. Of course, there were always exceptions, but those were far and few. Almost none existent. Not to mention not many such people reach R3 anyway...

Anyway, the point is, even the stronger and more capable people like Muku would need to put in a lot of work to compress their domains and sustain them.

It took Muku three months of hard work to even start the process. He only recently completed it all the way...

After that, or along with that rather, one had to turn their mana into advanced mana inside their mana core. Which would also need to be upgraded to contain the new energy.

However, its change would come naturally after the energy is successfully changed.

As for how the energy is changed. It was quite simple. One had to compress the mana inside them into a liquid state. That's right, more compressing!

Unfortunately, this one wasn't only long, hard and tiring, it was also painful. This was because the gaseous mana which fills a person's mana core only amounts to one drop of advanced mana. And to meet the requirements for the mana core's change. One had to fill it up with liquid mana (advanced mana).

Which would require thousands upon thousands of drops to fill the core up. This meant one had to fully recover their mana, create a drop, then recover and do it over and over for an unknown number of times. The higher the talent, the more drops one needs to create.

Then came the painful part. Since the mana core wasn't made to house Advanced-mana. Having the substance in it hurt like hell. It was a rather fragile organ, after all.

So, not only did the individual have to constantly deal with the troublesome process. They will also have to deal with pain which will keep on increasing with the more drops they create. It won't hurt them, but it will be very painful. And their mana capacity they can use in battle will be constantly decreasing.

Interestingly enough, the drops will need the same amount of mana no matter the space that's left. So the individual would keep on piling up the little mana they can store until a complete drop is made no matter the space that's left...

So, they'd be dealing with a long boring process, constant pain and they'd slowly lose their ability to fight with mana with the more drops they create since R3s can't use them.

Which means the person would probably have to go into hiding until they rank up. The selection process was just that brutal...

Anyway, after the core is filled up with drops. It would explode. That's right, the core along with the drops...or pool at that point, would explode together. Which was another painful experience. What would happen after that is the core's recovery powered by the advanced mana. This will turn it into a vessel for advanced mana.

The mana wouldn't only repair the core. It would travel all throughout the body reshaping it to fit. After that, normal mana won't be able to enter the body. Only advanced mana(AM) from the surroundings would be able to enter.

Speaking of which, there's just as much AM in the air as normal mana. Just that those weaker than R4 can't sense or use it...

Anyway, after those two processes are done. Then the individual would finally break into R4. And the AM in the core would return to a gus state after the advancement...

With everything they went through, one can understand why Raya and Muku were so happy, right?...

Chapter 279: Reunion with mom!

Sometime later...

A familiar wooden building's silhouette appeared in the duo's sight. Though by that point Raya had long retreated into Muku's mindscape as the gravity had gotten too much for her to handle.

Muku was just a few metres away from it when he saw it. This was due to the dense mana which made it hard to see anything in front of one's self.

He soon got to the familiar entrance and gained entrance through it the same way he did before. It was a lot quicker this time because he was familiar with it. Though there was a question in his mind...

"Umm, is this the same restricted zone we were in last time or do they just look the same? Or maybe no matter which zone you enter you end up in the same place? I mean, if we were here before, why did we end up in the middle zone when we got out? Shouldn't we have come out on the outskirts then?" Muku asked no one in particular as he advanced forward.

Soon he entered the familiar-looking portal. He didn't stagger like before since he was now slightly experienced in passing through portals...

The moment he appeared on the other side...

Whoosh!

"Oof!" Muku made a sound as the air in his body was knocked out by an unidentified being... The being was so fast that he couldn't react and was easily knocked to the ground.

Although he didn't see who or what had knocked him to the ground. He had a pretty solid guess on who it was. And as if to confirm his guess...

"Son! You're back! I missed you so much!" Mrs C spoke as she tried to bury herself into his chest.

He didn't know when she did it. But she had long taken off his armour and was hugging him directly. He just let her do what she wanted with a little smile on her face.

While their relationship started weirdly, he didn't hate the idea of having a mother. Seeing her show such affection for him warmed his heart. It was something he didn't have growing up in an orphanage.

A few couples had tried adopting him after hearing about his reputation as a child prodigy. But he rejected them all. He could see the bad intentions in their eyes from a mile away. Fortunately, he had the right to choose, unlike most kids...

That was also part of why he was okay with Mrs C calling him son. Unlike those before, her eyes were filled with nothing but motherly affection when she looked at him. It was kinda weird how she was so full of love in such a little time.

He figured that she must have lost a child in the past and merely redirected that love to him. That had to be it, right? Well, it didn't matter, he didn't mind...

Mrs C continued hugging him for a while before letting go. She had actually heard his thoughts about her "tragic past" when she read his mind. Which was like an instinctual thing at that point, but she didn't say anything. All she cared about was that he also liked being her son...

"Hello... Mom. It's been a while" Muku finally spoke after the two got up off the ground.

He hesitated on what to call her for a bit but gave in. It would be too wishy-washy to call her anything else after everything which had happened...

"I'm glad you're back son. Let's go and talk while we eat something. I'm sure you're very hungry. And I'd like to hear about all the interesting things you did after we separated" Mrs C replied while nodding then led Muku through the second portal.

They appeared in Room Zero after that. Muku wondered why there were multiple portals but didn't ask. If it was something he should know, Mrs C probably would have told him. It wasn't like not knowing made him lose out on anything anyway...

They soon took their seats. The food was already prepared and laid out on the table.

"Please dig in" Mrs C spoke and Muku who really loved her food which tasted out-of-this-world immediately dug in. It was by far the best food he had ever tasted. And it tasted even better after the trash meals he had to eat all for so many months...

Even though the food looked like his world's food, that was all there was to it. The taste and materials used to make it were world's above what he knew...

Mrs C just looked on as he ate like an animal. He had completely lost all his manners. However, she wasn't angered, a little smile even appeared on her face.

Raya who couldn't take it anymore came out of Muku's mindscape in her tiny form. She was eyeing the food with drool flowing out of her mouth. However, she dared not touch anything without Mrs C's go-ahead.

"Hello, little one. It's been a while. There's no need to look at me. Go ahead and eat. The food here is abundant, so don't hold back" Mrs C spoke to Raya with a smile.

Raya immediately dug in after hearing her words. She could barely hold herself back so she instantly lost control after being given the okay...

Mrs C just looked on with a smile. She didn't need to eat. And she was so happy she didn't feel like eating. Just looking at Muku was all she needed to feel satisfied.

....

A while later....

Mrs C had remained quiet throughout the period Muku and Raya ate. She didn't want to disrupt them. Not to mention that she knew that they wouldn't eat for too long...

After all, the food they were eating was full of so much energy that there was no way they would be able to eat even a quarter of it. Even Raya who was proud of her stomach and appetite could only eat a little more than Muku before she felt completely stuffed.

"Thank you for the meal. It was delicious" Muku and Raya spoke at the same time.

Mrs C smiled even more and nodded in acknowledgement of their thanks. She then waved her hand and the remaining food disappeared from the table.

In fact, not only did the food disappear, but a lot of things changed along with that. The chairs changed to sofas and the dining table turned into a little lounge table. There was even a story rug on the floor.

Within a second things changed from a dining room setting to a lounge. Muku and Raya who had somewhat forgotten how amazing Mrs C was were greatly awed.

Everything she did seemed like magic to them. Sure, they both had destructive powers and Muku could even replicate some common objects with his metal. But what Mrs C did went that extra mile in mysticism. The way she did things made it seem like there was nothing she couldn't do, it seemed like she didn't have the restrictions of elements or being bound by natural laws like they were.

At that point, they wouldn't be too surprised if she could create a living being...

"Well, thank you for thinking so highly of me. But, unfortunately, I can't create life. Only chaos can do that. But hey, the world is always changing, so maybe one day you my son will be able to do it. Haha.

Anyway, enough of the jokes, it's time to move on to the fun part. Tell me all the interesting things you went through this past year" Mrs C spoke and immediately shut down Muku and Raya's crazy thoughts.

However, what the duo noticed was that she only denied being able to create life. However, she didn't deny being able to create anything else... Does that mean she can do anything else as long as it wasn't creating life?!

As the two thought of such a startling thing, Mrs C smiled brightly as if silently acknowledging their thoughts. However, she didn't say anything and just kept them guessing.

"Wait, were you serious about knowing that? Wouldn't it be better if we immediately get into the trial?" Muku asked.

He chose to give up on the chaotic thoughts about what his mother could do. Just knowing that she was incomprehensible was enough.

"Of course I was serious. What mother wouldn't be interested in her son's adventures? And we can't do the trial now anyway. Have you forgotten that you can do them after a year? Well, it hasn't been a year since the last time you finished your trial. One more month is needed for that, so for the next month, you're stuck with me! So, you might as well humour me, right?" Mrs C replied in a matter-of-fact tone.

She then dropped a bomb Muku wasn't expecting. To think he has actually come so early when he thought he was a few days late!

"Sigh, fine... I'm here anyway. Might as well do what you want. But remember that it's not my fault if what I went through ends up being boring" Muku gave in to the situation.

He was certain that she wouldn't let him go after he had already arrived anyway. And he didn't mind spending some time with her.

And so, the son began recounting his past experiences to his starry-eyed mother. Her eyes were practically glowing as she listened on.

Muku sighed even more. It seemed there was no escape. She was clearly enjoying hearing him speak...

Chapter 280: Recounting past events...

Muku who had resigned to his fate told Mrs C every significant thing which happened to him.

From how he travelled through the Middle Zone to the outskirts. Then how he made his way up the food chain of the outskirts.

He didn't immediately let go of himself since there were R4s and R5s everywhere, even on the outskirts. So, with the help of Raya who was familiar with the outskirts. They looked for an area which was unlikely to have beasts beyond LR3.

After all, even on the outskirts, there were places with mana so thin that most beasts avoided them. Then there were areas like the desert in between the forest and the ocean on one side.

That place was also off limits. This was because it was full of large sandworms. The beasts ranged from Unranked to R6.

They had great senses and would know the moment any creature with a death wish steps onto their sand.

Muku and Raya weren't aware of that at first since Raya resided in another part of the forest before. The outskirts were so large it was impossible for weaklings like Raya to even travel one percent of them. So, it was understandable that she didn't know about the desert and sandworms.

And so, the foolish duo stepped onto the sand. But since they knew that anything and everything is dangerous in the beast world they were cautious in their actions.

This was also after Muku had the shark incident. So, he was cautious in new environments. As for why he even tried it despite being the cautious type... Well, Raya called him a wimp and he couldn't stand for it.

Anyway, soon after they stepped on the sand. Five sandworms appeared. And they were all PR3. It was both a blessing and a curse. This was because they managed to run away from beasts at least. However,

their endeavour was pointless as they got nothing out of it since they couldn't kill the stronger monsters.

However, it was actually a lucky encounter. This was because a R5 sand worm appeared soon after they left the territory. It was so large that Muku seemed like an ant in front of it. The creature was probably more than one hundred and fifty metres long with a girth around a fifth of that. So yeah, it was a monster.

However, that's not what surprised him. What surprised him was how it hadn't taken a humanoid form like all the R5s he had encountered so far... Of course, the encounters were from a safe distance away under his snug armour which hid his presence.

Mrs C paused his storytelling and explained to him why that was. The reason for that was that not all R5s took a humanoid form when they reached that stage.

The reason for this was that not all beasts had gained intelligence by that point. Some were still as driven by their instincts as ever. The sandworms fell into that category. And only a few which manage to reach R7 gain intelligence. But that wasn't easy to do without sufficient intelligence even if their instincts were better than most as allowed them to survive in such a harsh environment.

Anyway, Muku and Raya instantly gave up on stepping onto the sand any further after that. They focused on hunting in the forest. They would increase their hunting grounds little by little until they reached PR3. After that point, they completely retreated from the world.

After all, unlike all the rank-ups from before, advancing on the Pseudo-R4 path didn't make them stronger. Especially when they start the mana conversion stage. They would get weaker and weaker the more they converted.

So yeah, hunting in that condition was practically seeking death. Anyway, it took a while. The whole process actually took five months to finish. Meaning, it was easier to get to PR3 than it was to get from Pseudo R4 to LR4.

The process wasn't just painful it was also scary since one pretty strips themselves of their strength to do so. And the constant drain of their mana meant that they were almost always in a weakened state.

Anyway, they both successfully advanced two months before they made their way to the restricted zone which they had spotted at some point in their travels... They suspected that Mrs C placed them close to one on purpose...

After the advancement, they spent two months getting used to their new strength. This was obviously through battle.

They first went to bully some weak R3s. That's something they only did once after realising how sad it was for the R3s. Just enveloping a PR3 with their aura was enough to kill it. It would literally explode into a bloody mess without even being attacked.

It made them feel glad that no R4s had taken interest in them when they were weaker otherwise death would have been certain.

After that, they went to find trouble with LR4s. This was both to test their strength as well as see how R4s fought. Not to mention that fighting R3s was just too sad. No wonder R4s mostly ignored R3s and weaker beasts. They were just too weak!. Or maybe Advantage Mana was just too OP?...

The first R4 they came across was a huge fifty-meter-tall Komodo dragon-like creature with horns, long fangs, and spikes on its back. Its whole body was crimson red and the air around it was distorted from the heat coming off its body. It was easy to guess what element the creature had.

Looking at it made Muku think of one name which fitted it. That name was Earth Dragon. No creature fit that name more than the creature he was looking at.

He didn't let himself be awed by its majestic appearance though. He took advantage of the fact that it couldn't sense him and attacked.

He held out his hand and then...

**BOOOM!**

A large pillar appeared below the Earth Dragon and stabbed it in the gut. Just because he wanted to know how R4s fought didn't mean he would be merciful to his opponent.

Speaking of which, the attack he created was actually impossible for R3s. Not creating a pillar. No, that was nothing. The twist was how he didn't shoot it from where he was, create it close to him or create a line of spikes which originated from where he was and went on until they hit the Earth Dragon.

That's right, unlike R3s, R4s can create attacks a long distance away from them. In fact, Muku was actually thirty kilometres away from Earth Dragon. His advanced sense made the distance bit seem that long as he could see everything clearly.

Anyway, R3s can only create attacks in the distance if they are inside their domains. And their domains can only cover fifteen kilometres at most. Not to mention that the domain is pretty much still an extension of themselves, so there were no real long-range-made attacks in that scenario.

It was a real game-changer since it gives the enemy little chance to react. Only those who were really sensitive to mana might be able to sense the attacks. However, the rest would easily fall prey to the attacks...

"Tsk, I should have known that there would be a counter for it. But to think that this is the real use of a concentrated domain" Muku spoke to himself while looking at the completely unharmed Earth dragon which was now glaring at him from a distance as it fell to the ground calmly.

While it couldn't sense him based on mana. It managed to sense his intense gaze after he attacked it. Which led to it locating him instantly.

It was pissed that the ant interrupted its peaceful nap after a successful hunt.

As for what Muku was talking about. It was the red aura that covered the Earth Dragon. He had thought that it was the beast's natural aura before when it was barely visible. But it seemed it was actually the creature's semi-activated concentrated domain or domain armour (DA)...

It seems R4s could partially release their DA as a protection measure against sneak attacks like Muku just tossed its way.

Muku was happy to find out. He hasn't thought of it since his DA was too costly when he was R3. So he thought it would still be the same even after ranking up. But it seemed things had changed...

He was also worried about being abused after he realised he could attack from a distance without a trail. After all, if he could do it, or R4s should be able to do it too, right?

But now, he had gotten a suitable solution to his worry. In fact, Raya had been spending more time in his mindscape for that reason. Unlike Muku, her aura was as clear as day to all the beasts in the forest. And now as an R4. Other R4s would be interested in her. Which meant that her life was in real danger now...

Muku didn't make fun of her for it since he would have done the same if he were in her situation. After all, even he, who was pretty much invisible, was worried he might get ambushed.

Anyway, the large beast soon reached the ground. The impact pretty much created a sandstorm as dust rose and went in every direction after it landed on the ground.

BOOOOM!

The beast released a little of its aura and all the dust was blown away.

Muku's face twisted a little bit after sensing its aura. It seemed he had been mistaken before. The beast in front of him wasn't a LR4 at all. It was actually a PR4!

It seemed to have some kind of aura suppression ability or something.

Well, whatever it was. He was screwed! He was just a newbie R4 and he went to pick a fight with a veteran!

Was there worse luck than that?!

With that realisation, he did what any sensible person would do in the matter. He made a run for it!

He first deployed his Telekinesis domain and made himself invisible. Of course that wasn't enough. The PR4 might not be able to sense him. But it could vaguely sense his domain since it had been locked on him from the start.

Fortunately, Muku was super cautious. So, he didn't immediately think he was safe. He found a spot to hide and then dispelled the domain.

That way he was completely invisible!

"ROOOOOOOOOOAR!" The Earth dragon roared angrily after losing sight of him.

Its roar came with a fire breath which cleared at least a hundred kilometres in front of it...

The devastation was horrifying!