

Chapter 1

-The Depressed Magician-

Rozenburg. The second largest city within the Basherant Dukedom. At about two months travel time from the northern border of Asura, it marked the entrance to the Northern Frontier. The significance of that position made it one of the most important cities in Basherant. Over half of Basherant's revenue was generated by the exportation of magic tools from Rozenburg to Asura.

"So we're finally here."

I survey my surroundings as I step off the carriage. Merchants and adventurers can be seen milling about under the cloudy sky. The caravan I came in had been carrying a large quantity of valuable goods. Apparently, exotic goods all the way from Asura fetch a high price here.

"It's cold..."

Many are wearing an assortment of thick clothing, likely due to the autumn chill. Supposedly it snows heavily and gets quite cold here during the winter, so I should get some winter wear soon. Now is probably as good a time as any to get some. But before that, I need to find a place to stay. It's not like I have much luggage, but every adventurer knows that it's better to start working after you've established some kind of home base. With all that in mind, I set off.

Surprisingly, there aren't many outdoor stalls around here. Perhaps the caravan entered the town from a different entrance than the one adventurers usually use. Actually... Wait. It's almost night out. Considering how cold it gets here, most shopkeepers probably close up before it gets too late. Before I knew it, I arrived at the Inn District. While confirming the prices written on the signboards, I pick one that looks suitable and enter. According to the sign out front, it was an inn that mostly caters to B-rank adventurers named, *"The Round Shield"*. What crappy naming sense. On top of that, there was a picture of a buckler on the sign. This place could easily be mistaken for an armor shop. Personally, I would've been fine with a C, or even a D-ranked inn. According to Suzanne though, the cheaper inns do not have proper heating so you're more likely to freeze to death there than anything else. That's why if you're going to stay at an inn, it has to be at least B-class or better.

To be honest, I didn't really pay attention to that warrior's lecture, but I did learn a few things of value. Information is important after all.

"Hm?"

As I enter the inn a man, who appeared to be the innkeeper, was in the middle of cleaning. The moment he saw me, he scowled. His expression clearly full of animosity. What a rude fellow.

"I'd like to rent a room for... 'bout a month."

"Yeah, yeah. Sign here. Put your thumbprint here. Once you're done with that the furthest room in on the third floor is yours."

His tone was as rude as his expression, but at least he prepared the room and paperwork right away. I quickly finished signing the form and paid him for the room. Seems like Asuran currency still works here. At some point I may end up having to exchange my money, but for now it seems to be fine. According to that warrior woman, Asuran coins are highly valued even as far out as Rozenburg. The innkeeper's eyes went wide the moment he saw the Asuran Silver Coins I'd put on the counter for payment. Even if he doesn't like someone, so long as they're willing to pay, he's satisfied, huh?

I still had almost all of the money I'd managed to make on my way to Asura from the Demon Continent. All this money was meant to be split between the three of us, but I ended up holding on to most of it. Plus, I also had some money I got from Alphonse back for helping out at the Fittoa Refugee Camp.

Lodging fees for a month weren't exactly what you'd call cheap, but I had more than enough left over. Still, I'd need to earn some more eventually otherwise I'll run out. While continuing to worry about my finances, I head to the third floor and enter my room.

"Hmm."

Inside the room was a bed, a closet, a table, and a chair. The only thing special was the fact that it was made out of brick--which you don't see often--and had a huge fireplace. Next to the fireplace was some kindling and a flint. I guess you're just supposed to light it yourself if you get cold. I'm not quite sure how to operate the fireplace, but I can ask the innkeeper later.

"Haaah..."

With a huge sigh, I throw down my luggage and plop down onto the bed. As I lean back I catch a glimpse of the pure white sky outside. I guess the constant cloudy weather is just an inherent trait of snowy countries. The skies were always a pure blue back in Asura. Without even a hint of clouds, an endless expanse of blue. I've been traveling under that kind of sky for as long as I can remember. Yeah... Blue really is a pretty color. The complete opposite of me.

"Ah...!"

Let's not think about that.

Let's not think about colors.

What's under the sky is more important. I get up off my bed and peer out the window. To my surprise there's quite a bit of green. I'm not sure if it's due to being on the third floor, or because this is a slightly more expensive inn, but I have a completely unobstructed view of the town outside. Countless trees dot the landscape of Basherant. Supposedly they were planted so that they could be harvested for firewood if the need arose. But because of how neatly they're all planted it looks as if the whole country is overflowing with greenery.

Speaking of which, that forest we passed through after leaving Asura was pretty nice too. That place was filled with huge, leafy trees that rustled when the wind blew. Forests are nice. Nature is nice.

Looking at nature lets you forget about all of your worldly worries. Just traveling through a forest is enough to cleanse your heart.

"Eris..."

The moment I muttered that word, I became depressed once more. No matter how much you purify a broken heart, it still won't heal. Eris' departure really came as a huge shock to me.

I thought I'd really connected with Eris. I thought we both loved each other. I thought I'd be able to continue to support Eris--who'd lost her parents--and live together with her in Asura. I had been willing to take on that responsibility. Call me self-serving if you want, but she'd been the first person I'd slept with. The first girl I'd truly loved. I'd been prepared to love her to the very end. Even if the Greyrat house was a noble house, no matter what would come after, I'd been prepared to protect her forever. Whether it was by fighting or by running away...

But that's not how she saw it. I wasn't anyone special to her.

[Sniff.]

I sniffle a little. Alright, let's stop with the depressing talk. It's been months since Eris left. How long do I have to dwell on it before I'm satisfied? Eris left by herself. She no longer needs me. We've gone our separate ways, and we both have our own goals. Our respective paths leading onwards. Isn't that good enough?

In the end, all it means is that's all I amounted to. I wasn't able to become someone special to another. Rather than bemoan my misfortune, I should be glad I got to do it once at all. More importantly, there's a reason why I came here. My goal takes priority. Of course, that goal is finding my mother, Zenith Greyrat. This isn't some sentimental journey to heal my heartbreak. Not in the least.

I didn't leave Asura to avoid a certain girl's face from constantly popping into my head. I left because I have to find the last missing member of my family. After all, I promised my father that I would.

That being said... I don't really have a plan in mind. I have no idea how to even start searching for her, let alone find her.

"Haaah..."

All that ever comes out of my mouth these days are sighs. I still can't forget what happened that day. Just why did she leave after she so happily spent that night with me...?

"No, no. I need to stop thinking about this."

Let's forget about that for now and start thinking of how to find my mother. My brain doesn't really want to work properly, but I need to make it do so. Alright, let's start by narrowing down the possibilities. Quite a bit of time has passed since the metastasis incident so it's unlikely Zenith is anywhere a lot of people pass through. This town is pretty big so it's still possible that she's here. But if Zenith really is here, someone else should have found her by now. Scouring more densely populated areas might yield some results. There's no reason for her to go somewhere devoid of people after all. Even if she has managed to land herself in a place where search parties couldn't find her, to investigate such places I'd still need to get information. Information from somewhere where there's a lot of people. So, basically, I need to start my search from a populated location, but I also need to expand my search net once I get more information. Specifically, I need to find those places where search parties haven't been able to investigate yet.

I don't think it's possible for me to search everywhere like this by myself. What to do...

"Ideally, it'd be best if she was able to find me."

I roll around on my bed as I ponder this. It doesn't seem like that bad a plan after saying it out loud. Finding one person among everyone in this huge world is practically impossible. For example, finding one left-handed person among 10,000 people just isn't feasible. If there was some kind of way to get a report from those 10,000 people then it'd be a different story. If you were able to ask "Would those people who are left-handed please raise their hand?" you could pick them out easily. So... If I'm able to make myself famous enough, it's quite possible Zenith would hear of me and come find me of her own accord. Considering she still hasn't been found after this long, it's also quite possible she's run into some kind of trouble--much like Lilia. Even so, as long as I make my name well known, someone's bound to try and make contact.

That's gotta be it. I'll get famous and have Zenith find me.

"But how exactly am I going to make myself famous...?"

I need to make my name as well known as possible. But... How!? I could try and do the same thing I did with Rujierd and Dead End, doing good deeds in his name to increase his popularity and make people realize he's actually a good person. I didn't really get to see how effective it all was in the end, but I do know it at least had some effect back in the Demon Continent.

I guess if I did something similar where I try and promote my name as an adventurer I'll eventually manage to become famous. Unlike Rujierd, I'm not afflicted by a curse that makes me hated. If I just go on as usual, I'll naturally become famous. A magician by the name of Rudeus searching for his mother Zenith who had vanished in the Fittoa Region metastasis incident. Using every tactic at my disposal, I'll make sure the world knows that such a boy is working around here. Even if Zenith herself can't, whoever it is that knows about Zenith will at least eventually come to contact me. It could get a little troublesome if they want a ransom or something, but I wouldn't mind paying out.

"I really don't want to do this though..."

Running around by myself under this cold sky, promoting my name. There's no guarantee that Zenith will find me even if I do manage to make a name for myself. If anything, the chances of her finding me are pretty slim. If the Fittoa Region search party--which is a pretty huge organization in and of itself now--wasn't able to find her, the chances of her not finding out about me are even higher. I'm certain there's also a lot of people smarter than me in that search group. Far better than me at collecting and disseminating information. Those people had the means, the will, and the ability to do so much and even they couldn't find her. Is there even any point in me trying then? I'm not very good this kind of thing. There isn't much of a point is there? There's no way I can find her. Everything I'm doing is just useless isn't it?

"....."

The very thought of it makes me want to sigh, but I can't think of any other ideas, nor can I to keep dawdling either. All I can do is try out every idea I come up with, one-by-one. It's quite possible that while I'm doing this I might chance upon another idea and then a new set of options will appear before me.

"For now let's just sleep."

I decide to stop thinking there for the night and close my eyes. I thought I'd gotten used to traveling, but the fatigue from that long carriage ride finally caught up to my body and I fall asleep instantly.



I wake up the next day and head towards the Adventurer's Guild. For whatever reason, the Adventurer's Guild here isn't anywhere near the entrance to the city or the Inn District. I don't know why that's the case, but I also don't really care.

"Ugh."

As I open the ornate double doors and enter the guild, numerous gazes fall upon me. It feels as if their glares are piercing right through my very being. I guess I'm still not used to being stared at. I had started to get used to it a little bit traveling through the Central Continent, but there were also other people with me back then. Rujierd and Eris were both--- Let's not think about that.

"Hey look, it's a kid."

“A newbie, huh?”

“I bet he just came to play around.”

The adventurers inside laugh scornfully at me. They're not harassing me outright, but it's still not pleasant to hear. Before, I was able to just ignore such insults, but for some reason they really hurt right now. 'Course, it's not really surprising that I stand out so much, considering a 12-13 year old boy just waltzed into the guild. I'd better learn to get used to it quickly though. Once I'm famous I'll have to face a lot more of these painful gazes.

At any rate, there's some things I need to handle before taking requests. With heavy steps I walk up to the reception counter. The lady there wasn't exceptionally pretty, but she was still wearing clothes that revealed her big bust. I swear, there has to be some kind of rule that only busty women can be receptionists in the Adventurer's Guild. I show her my Adventurer's Card.

“Excuse me, I'd like to... disband my party.”

My party... The words *“Dead End”* were still carved into the very bottom part of my card.

Dead End. The party I'd made together with Rujierd and Eris. No one from that party remains anymore. It's just an empty name now, so it's only proper that I disband it. Yeah, it's all gone now... All gone.

[Sniff...]

Tears start running down my face, and I unconsciously sniffle. I tried my best not to cry, but I ended up crying anyway. Rujierd and Eris aren't by my side anymore. When that harsh truth is thrust before me I can't help but cry.

“Understood. Please wait a moment.”

Seeing my teary expression, the receptionist began the disbandment process with a sympathetic face. I just come in here, ask to disband a party, and suddenly burst into tears. She's probably disgusted with me.

“Here you go.”

“Thank you...”

I wipe my tears away with my sleeve and take my card back. The words *Dead End* have vanished from it now. Whenever Rujierd and Eris update their Adventurer Cards they'll see that it's been disbanded. I wonder what they'll think of it. Rujierd will be disappointed I'm sure. But Eris--- No. No... I can't think about that. It's all in the past now.

“.....”

When I turn back around I notice everyone's staring at me. Is seeing a crying kid really that rare? Come on, they're all over the place.

"Hey, you think he's crying because---"

"You think they all got wiped out?"

"Poor kid, he was the only one to survive..."

Oh. They're pitying me.

They think that my party was annihilated and I'm the only one who made it out alive. Not a single one of them is thinking I'm crying because I got dumped by a girl. Man, I'm pathetic. Honestly, I'd at least have a reason to cry if they'd all been killed. Not that I'd ever want them to die of course.

"....."

I silently walk over to the request board. There are a lot of requests pinned up. Not as many as I saw back on the Demon Continent, but way more than I ever saw in Asura. Looks like adventurers are in high demand around here. Most of the requests are C or B-rank though. Almost all the requests were low ranked back in Asura. That's why most adventurers out there eventually have to move out if they continue to raise their rank, usually either south to the Dragon Kingdom, or north to the Three Magic Countries.

"Alright, which one should I do..."

I'm A-rank right now. According to the guild's laws I can only take requests within one rank of my own. From the looks of it, there are no S-rank requests right now so I'm limited to only A or B-ranked stuff. Fortunately, there's quite a lot of A and B-ranked requests here. I didn't expect to see this many in the Central Continent. Just means that the Northern Frontier is that harsh, I suppose.

[A: Eliminate the den of Raster Grizzlies that have taken up residence near Kukur Lake.]

[B: Work as a guard for the large scale logging project in Hadra Forest.]

[B: Work as a guard for the merchant caravan heading to Neris.]

Hmm...

Well I guess any one of them will work. I peel off the very first request I saw, the A-rank one. Raster Grizzly elimination. Judging from the name I'd guess they're some kind of bear, but I don't know. Whatever. It's too much of a pain to gather information on these demons. I take the request back to the receptionist.

"Excuse me, I'd like to take this request."

I hand over the request paper and my Adventurer Card.

"Huh?"

The receptionist has a bit of a confused look on her face. She's probably wondering why a guy who just disbanded his party wants to take on a party quest.

"Umm, even if you are an A-rank, to try and take this on by yourself... I mean, this request was designed to be handled by a party."

"Yeah. I know."

"I'm afraid that I can't let you take it on."

Well, it is a request to eliminate an entire den of demons. Normally you wouldn't go it alone, but that's just perfect for me. If I want to get famous I'll need to do some pretty reckless things. Of course, there's danger associated with this path but... Whatever. There's nothing fun about living anyway. Despite my best efforts, I lost everything in the end. Everyone left me. All I had left were painful memories. I'm certain that's all that awaits me in the future as well. If that's all there is to life, then what does it matter if I die?

"Ah---!"

The moment that thought crossed my mind my chest started to ache. Unconsciously, my hand had started reaching for my pocket. I tightly grip what's in that pocket, and grind my teeth. Somehow, gripping it made me calm down.

"What's going on? Some kind of dispute?"

Hearing those words behind me, I come back to my senses.

"It's not really a dispute."

When I turn back around I see some familiar faces. It was the brown dreadlocked warrior woman. The one who'd kept talking to me back in the caravan. Next to her, the girl who'd kept snapping at me. I'm pretty sure the warrior was called Suzanne, and the other girl Sara. Behind them were a few guys who I can only imagine were the rest of her party. I honestly don't remember their names at all. They're the B-rank adventurer party, Counter Arrow.

"I think I get it now. Your party got annihilated and now you're trying to find your missing mom but have no money. That's why you're trying to take on such a crazy request all by yourself, right? What an impressive young man you are."

Please don't put words in my mouth. I never said my party got annihilated, nor did I say anything about having no money. Obviously, I'm not rolling in money, but it's not like I'm dirt poor.

"But... I don't like your expression. That isn't the face of someone determined to go on alone, even with their party gone. That's the face of someone who no longer cares even if he dies."

"....."



She gently touches my cheek. I bet 'bullseye' is written all over my face right now.

“So how about it, boy? Wanna try that request together with us?”

“With you guys?”

“Yeah, we just got here ourselves. There's a lot we're still unfamiliar with too. Originally we were just gonna get by on our own, but since we're both new here, how about we work together?”

“No thanks. I'm planning on going it alone and becoming famous to make searching for my mother easier...”

“There's no way you'd become famous working alone. You need people to spread tales about you to gain fame. To do that, you need to join a party and live longer than you're planning to. You guys all think so too, right?”

The rest of her party all nod in agreement, but Sara's still pouting unhappily. Her displeasure is completely understandable. If you're new to this place it makes more sense to try and recruit someone familiar with the area. I didn't really help them much with their guard work when we were traveling either. It's obvious from my garb that I'm a magician, but they have no way of knowing how strong I am, what kind of magic I use, or how I fight. In other words, she's just pitying me. She's inviting me out of pity.

“.....”

That being said, she does have a point. It's true that if I just try and solo everything, rumors about me won't spread. Adventurers generally don't care very much about other adventurers. There's no one who goes around gathering information about something they don't care about. Depending on how things pan out, it's quite possible that at best, there would only be rumors about a magician boy working solo in the area. *“There's a magician who can use chantless magic”, “He's from the Fittoa Region”, “He's looking for his mother who disappeared in the metastasis incident”*. If details like that don't spread, there's no point in me becoming famous. For that to happen people to need to really know about me. In which case, it would be best for me to join a party. The bigger the party, the better.

While it's true that most adventurers pick a certain town as their base--and then generally never leave--there are others who are just trying to make enough money to get to their destination, much like we once were. If I was able to convey my goals to guys like that then...

“You look pretty young, but if you're really an A-rank then you must be pretty skilled, right? So what can you do?”

“In--- In my old party I was the rear guard. I'm best at providing support to the vanguard with my magic.”
“Perfect. We've been needing another rear guard for our formation.”

I guess I'll just go with her for now.

“Alright... I'll join then.”

“Great! In that case, finish making your preparations by tonight and meet us by the North Gate tomorrow morning. I'll explain how our party works in more detail along the way.”

“Sure.”

It's not ideal, but it'll do. Through that whole exchange, that Sara girl's sullen expression never once wavered.