

# Chapter 2

## -Raster Grizzly-

The next day, I headed towards the northern gate as promised. I can't say I was all too eager to team up with them, but once I'd decided to do it my body seemingly went through the motions on its own. Yesterday, I went around gathering information on Kukuru Lake and Raster Grizzlies. This too, I simply did out of habit, if nothing else.

“.....”

Gloomily, I examine my surroundings only to discover that no one's here. They did say to meet at the north gate in the morning... but perhaps I might have come a little *too* early. I didn't have a watch so I couldn't be sure, but my guess was that it was around four in the morning Yeah... I probably came too early. Well, I couldn't really sleep last night anyway. Perhaps because it had been too cold, or maybe because I was a bit on edge after hearing I'd be partying with some people I don't really know that well.

“*They're late...*”

We never set a specific meeting time, but it's common knowledge among adventurers that if you're going to be heading out on a long expedition, you meet up early. It's certainly better to be early than late. Better than leaving me here alone to wait all day. In fact, there was another adventurer group here at the north gate finishing up their departure preparations. It seemed they were waiting for just one late person--as opposed to me--who was the only one on time.

“*Ugh...*”

Maybe I'm the one who has it all wrong and we were actually supposed to meet up at noon. Maybe they planned out our departure time so we arrive at our destination at the right hour. In which case, it might have been better to tell them where I was staying yesterday. That way, when they actually decided on our meeting time they could have just contacted me.

“*Ah!*”

As I was brooding over all that I suddenly spotted a silhouette coming up the road. Several people came walking towards me out of the morning mist.

*“Oho, you're pretty early, Boy. Considering your attitude yesterday I was almost certain you'd be late today.”*

*“I just woke up early, that's all.”*

*“I see, I see.”*

Suzanne was grinning but I could hear her unspoken words, *“Are you sure you weren't just lonely? Are you sure you're not just being tsundere?”*

Well, it's too much of a pain to deny those accusations.

*“Alright then.”*

I took my hand out of my pocket and proffered it to Suzanne, who was standing in front.

*“As we'll be in the same party for a while, please allow me to introduce myself. I am Rudeus Greyrat; Magician. As mentioned previously, my specialty is rearguard support, and I'm an A-rank Adventurer as well. I look forward to working with you.”*

Suzanne looked surprised. Granted, I had been rather curt with her back when she was trying to talk to me in the caravan, so of course she'd be surprised if I suddenly start acting so friendly. I hadn't really thought that deeply about it though. I just thought it would only be common courtesy to introduce myself properly.

*“I'm Suzanne, Vice Leader of Counter Arrow. I'm a Warrior, and I serve as our Vanguard.”*

*“Vice Leader? Are you not the leader?”*

*“Effectively I am, since I do all of the work. Our actual leader is someone else.”*

Suzanne jerked her head and a man stepped out front. He looked like a pretty gloomy guy. From a glance at what he was wearing, he was a Mage too. After all, he was clad in a reddish brown robe and carried a long staff in his hands.

*“Hello, I'm Timothy. I'm a Mage. I'm part of the Rearguard, and my specialty is offensive magic. Technically, I'm the leader of this party, but...”*

*“Nice to meet you.”*

So, basically, Suzanne's the one who's actually in charge. Often times you see cases where it's the Vice Commander who holds the real power in an organization. Sometimes it's even considered preferable to the leader holding all the power. Better someone capable take charge than an incompetent, lazy one. Whether or not Timothy is actually incompetent is something I wouldn't know though. After all, a fractured organization can't run well, so it's quite possible that Suzanne still defers to Timothy's orders when it comes to big decisions. Something along the lines of: She handles the day to day operations of the party while he decides the overall direction the party is to take. In other words, one does the grunt work, the takes care of the party as a whole. Suzanne and Timothy's relationship seems a lot like two cornerstones holding up a building. Completely different from how Eris and me were... *[Sniffle.]*

*"Huh!? W-What's wrong!?"*

*"Sorry, I was just remembering something from the past."*

*"Ah--- Were you reminded of your former party leader? He must have been a splendid person."*

*"Not exactly..."*

He wasn't splendid at all. Up until the very end, he'd been a failure. The real splendid one had been the man who became our party's namesake...

*"Well, anyway, I'll do my best not to get in your guys' way."*

*"Is that so? I look forward to working with you."*

The self introductions continue.

*"I'm our Cleric, Mimiru. I'm intermediate ranked in recovery magic, and beginner rank in detoxification magic."*

He was of a medium build and wore a long whitish robe.

*"My name's Patris. I'm a Magic Warrior. Well--- I call myself a Magic Warrior, but really I can only use beginner rank wind magic, so I'm mostly just a Warrior."*

Patris was well built and had a sword belted to his waist. In his hand he carried a beginner's magic rod. He also served as our Vanguard. Including the leader, all three of them were in their mid-to-late twenties. I have no idea how long they've been adventuring for, but seeing how they're a B-rank, they're probably pretty experienced. And lastly, we have...

*"I'm our Middle Guard, Sara, the Archer."*

With a scowl, Sara introduced herself while glaring at me. Compared to the other four in the party she was quite young. Somewhere in her mid teens; right around the age where she'd be considered an adult in this world. Maybe it was because of her scowl or because of how her face was, perhaps it was due to her Asuran looks, but she resembled Eris quite a bit.

*"What?"*

*"It's nothing."*

She glared at me again, so I averted my eyes.

*"Just so you know, I still haven't approved of you. I only agreed to let you tag along because Suzanne was so insistent. If you so much as get in our way, or do something to get one of our party killed, I'll never forgive you. Got that?"*

*"Got it."*

I give her a listless reply. If I'm going to be in a party with her I suppose I should have tried more to get along with her... but I'll only be with them for a short while anyway. If she's going to be that hostile, I don't really want to try and be friendly.

*"Step off, Sara."*

*"But Suzanne---"*

*"There might come a time where you have to leave our party and adventure with others too."*

*"What? Are you saying we're going to disband!?"*

*"That possibility is always there, and if someone died we'd have to find someone new to replace them too. Back in Asura, you were able to get away with just not teaming up with people you didn't like, but that's not going to be possible from here on out. So you better start learning how to work with others."*

*"....."*

Ah, I get it now. She didn't take me on just out of pity. She also wanted to teach Sara a lesson. No wonder she was always acting so friendly. The reason why she chose someone as young as me was also because she was looking ahead to what might happen five, or even ten, years from now. At that point, Sara would have grown quite a bit, and she too may someday have to team up with someone much younger than her. That possibility would only grow the older she gets too. If she could handle teaming up with someone whose attitude is as bad as mine, she could handle a normal youngster no problem. Basically, she was just using me... Well, whatever. If that's what you want, I'll play along. Either way, it's not like it'll get in the way of my goal.

*"Got it? Anyway, now that we're done with our introductions, shall we head out?"*

At Suzanne's words, we began our expedition to go hunt the Raster Grizzly.



Three days later.

After three days of traveling north out of Rozenburg we set up camp. According to the intelligence I gathered earlier Kukuru Lake, the supposed location of the Raster Grizzly herd, was only a few hours from here. Apparently, Raster Grizzlies have terrible night vision, so their movements become very dull as the darkness sets in. Our plan is to wait until night and then launch a surprise attack on them. Until then, we're going to have a meeting to reflect on how we handled the monsters we encountered on our way here. Counter Arrow's not a bad party by any means. Two Vanguard, one Middle Guard, and two Rearguards. They've got a good balance of roles. Once you include me as well our strategy basically becomes as such: The moment we spot an enemy I cast Quagmire on them to restrict their movements while Timothy uses fire magic to pick off as many as he can from long range. Once the enemy finally makes their way to us, Suzanne and Patris enter the fray, while Sara supports the two. If any of the Vanguard take damage Mimiru steps in with recovery magic. On the road, we encountered and defeated many monsters, which gave me a chance to see just how well they coordinate together. I must say, they're quite skilled. Suzanne, Patris, Timothy, and Mimiru are all veteran adventurers. Obviously nowhere near the level of Ruijerd, but they understand how to work together as a party far better than Eris did. Although, seeing as how my only job is to make quagmires, I end up with a lot of free time, so I try suggesting something.

*"Once the Vanguard starts fighting, wouldn't it be better if I help support as well?"*

*"You still haven't fully grasped the movements of both Suzanne and Patris! What if you hit one of them by mistake!?! You just stay back and make swamps!"*

*"Then should I help pick them off after I restrict their movements?"*

*"It's common sense that Mages conserve their magical power in case the battle drags on for too long! All you need to do is slow them down! That's more than enough!"*

*"Then... Once the battle turns into a melee brawl, should I head to the Vanguard to help as well?"*

*"Do you want to get shot down by me?"*

I tried suggesting everything I could think of, but Sara denied me at every turn. Frankly speaking, it's rather bothersome. If I joined in on the attack I could probably finish them all off before it even became a close range battle. As it is now we end up entering close combat every time and our vanguard ends up taking damage, albeit only a little. It's really inefficient but, well, if I just think of it as Suzanne's way of trying to let Sara build up more experience, then I guess it makes sense. I did that back when we were on the Demon Continent too. As they say: when in Rome, do as the Romans do. I'll just deal with it and use the opportunity to build some experience towards working within a team. In an emergency I can always make my own decisions anyway, so I guess there's no harm in conserving my strength and fighting as a unit with them. Teamwork can only be built out of continual practice. I don't really have confidence in my own decision making though--or even my teamwork ability really...

*"You're the newcomer here so just do as you're told--and don't get in our way!"*

"OK."

It doesn't look like Sara wants to work on our teamwork. I don't remember doing anything to make her hate me, but she still seems to hate me. Must've been that bad impression I made on her the first time we met. It's not like we have to force ourselves to get along, but her acting so cold towards me just brings back painful memories. Back when I was seven and Eris didn't listen to anything I said...

*"That's enough Sara. Why do you have to be so critical?"*

*"It's not like... I mean--- He's not even using honorifics or being respectful..."*

*"That's normal considering we're all adventurers. Besides, you don't use them either, you know."*

*"Yes, but---"*

*"Then keep your complaints to yourself. We're about to start the subjugation request soon, so stop your petty bickering."*

*"S-Sorry."*

Sara shrank back from Suzanne's harsh words, but seeing as she's still glaring at me, it looks like she doesn't plan to apologize. With the group meeting over she promptly went to her bedroll and fell asleep. Truly this is the power of youth. I guess I'll go to the bathroom real quick and take a nap as well. I walk a bit away from the camp to relieve myself. While I'm finishing up my business I suddenly notice someone standing next to me. It's Timothy. As he opened up the front of his pants, I was greeted with a sight of a splendid member that doesn't suit his boring looking face at all, and began relieving himself as well.

*"Sorry," he suddenly apologized.*

*"For what?"*

*"Sara. She's not a bad girl, but she's been a bit... difficult recently."*

*"It's only natural. To be so skilled at such an age, she really is a genius."*

I'm certain those four B-rank adventurers are all veterans, but Sara's on a completely different level. Her skill is way above the rest of the party. In battle, she's able to accurately get pinpoint shots at a monster's vitals, even from pretty far away. On top of that, she's got good judgement and is pretty quick witted. She doesn't have any faults. In terms of just strength, she's probably A-class.

There aren't many Archers in this world. While it's true bows can mount long distance attacks, they pale in both firepower and range when compared to magic. Unlike mana, which regenerates as long as you sleep, there's a limit to how many arrows you can bring. The more you carry, the more you have weighing you down. It's not like an RPG where you can just walk around with 10,000 arrows in your inventory. If you want to be a long distance fighter, you learn magic.

Every now and again though, you find geniuses with such skill that they can more than compensate for that gap in base power, with pure skill. If you have the technique to perfectly hit the enemy's vitals in any situation, and ability to keep up a rapid-fire long-range barrage that outclasses most magic, then even a bow becomes a deadly weapon. As far as the occupation of adventurer is concerned anyway. Of course, it's a completely different story if we're talking about trying to become the world's strongest or something. But still, A-rank strength at her age. Just like Eris. A genius.

*"You say all that, but you're a genius too you know. I can tell just from seeing you fight. You're the first person I've seen who can use chantless magic since my magic school teacher."*

*"Just something like that isn't enough to bring back the people that are important to me though..."*

*"Yeah, that's true. Sorry..."*

It's true being able to use chantless magic is pretty convenient, but it's nothing to feel superior about. What use is it when it's not even enough to keep one woman by your side...

Well, I guess it makes for good publicity. It'll probably attract some strange people as well, but Zenith surely knows I can use chantless magic.

*"At any rate, I'm sorry Rudeus."*

*"Don't worry about it."*

This is rather interesting. Aside from Sara, it seems like everyone else has noticed my ability is higher than what I'm letting on. This is the kind of perceptiveness you'd expect from veterans. They know how to perfectly make use of their abilities without any waste. In all honesty, these guys' abilities are at best upper C-rank, but because they know how to use their abilities to the fullest, they've been able to make it as far as B-rank. They know how to perfectly analyze their combat potential, and on top of that, how to use that potential to its utmost extent. That's how they're able to perform so well. On the flip side, that means they're also not laid back at all. Even when Sara was badmouthing me the whole time, they responded with remonstrations and nothing else. Partially because they want to let Sara grow as a person, but also because they don't play around at all. Since they take everything seriously, they know that if they misread what I'm capable of and fell into trouble because of it, I wouldn't be able to follow up to help. Of course they've spent this whole time trying to figure out just how capable I am, but at the same time, they've also been trying to figure out just how far they can make it in this harsh land. Even if I tell them what I'm capable of, they won't be able to trust just words. Which leads me to wonder why they decided to take me along. Perhaps... out of sympathy. After all, it's impossible for everyone to act ideally basing everything only off of logic and calculations.

*"You only did what was natural."*

At any rate, all this means is I just need to focus on fulfilling my role as the support. No need to think about unnecessary things.

*"Thank you for being so understanding. We'll be heading out once night falls, so make sure you get some rest."*

*"Will do."*

I nod my head in agreement, head back to camp, and fall asleep.





The Raster Grizzly. A B-class monster. It seems to be rather common in the northwestern part of the Central Continent. It's covered completely in white fur, with a single streak of black running down its back. The only real differences between it and a normal bear are that they live and hunt in packs, and they spend the time leading up to winter stockpiling food. During that time they're rather aggressive and often attack humans. In comparison, they're surprisingly docile in summer. They also seek out watering holes during that time to breed, which is usually the best time for adventurers to eliminate them.

There's a set elimination method for these guys. Aim to get them at summer, during their mating period.

*"Alright."*

We climb up atop a small hill, and confirm the location of the Raster Grizzly herd. We're hiding in a thicket on a hill, upwind of the herd. There's no way they'll be able to find us. They mate all day from noon till dusk, and then they sleep all night. They don't even bother making caves or shelter, they just drop dead tired where they are. That's when we're going to light them all up with magic, whittling them down until they start heading our way. By the time that happens though, most of them will already have been eliminated, so the Vanguard and Middle Guard will be able to dispatch the remaining grizzlies.

That's our plan, basically.

*"How's it look Sara?"*

*"I see around 20 or so."*

Laying on top of the hill to scout out the enemy was Sara, as she has the best eyes of all of us. Seems like there's about 20-something Raster Grizzlies. I can't really tell from this distance myself. All I can make out is a bunch of white lumps that look like the Raster Grizzlies about 300 meters out. Ruijerd would've managed to tell you the exact number if he was scouting from this far away... Well, no point in talking about what someone who's not here could do.

*"Think we can do it?"*

*"Definitely! Right?"*

Sara turned around with a look of confidence on her face. I'm not sure how fast Raster Grizzlies can move, but considering our position, we should have the advantage. I can slow them down with my Quagmire, and since they just went to sleep, with Timothy's, Patris' and Mimiru's magic, we should be able to make short work of them.

*“Alright, let's go.”*

At Timothy's words, everyone tensed up. Even if we can easily handle 20 or so grizzlies, it's still possible the worst could happen. Like everyone else, I prepare myself and grip my staff.

*“The land thy seek is protected not from divine flame. Rampage o' flames, burn away the blessings of the land. Giant Fireball!”*

*“Quagmire!”*

As soon as Timothy finished chanting his intermediate level fire spell, I cast my Quagmire. Right around the maximum range Sara can effectively hit with her arrows. If I slow them down here, Sara will be able to help out too.

*“The land thy seek is protected not from divine flame. Rampage o' flames, burn away the blessings of the land. Giant Fireball!”*

Timothy began to continuously shoot giant fireballs. Despite their enormous size, they sped towards the Raster Grizzlies at high speed and impacted. A fireball slammed into one of the grizzlies and scorched it to death in an instant. A few of them made it out, but Timothy's fireballs still had amazing power, speed, and precision. He's pretty skilled with them.

*“Take this!”*

The Raster Grizzlies suddenly started making a huge racket and finally began to head our way. It's pretty hard to hit a moving target, and a few of his fireballs started missing, but even so he kept burning them down, one by one.

This is easy.

They're halfway to the point where I set up the quagmire. Considering once they reach that point, Sara's arrows will start whittling them down even more, we might not even have to engage in close combat this time. ‘Is this seriously an A-rank quest?’ -- Is what I'm thinking right now

*“Haah!”*

Right before the Raster Grizzlies reached my quagmire, Timothy's fireball hit another one, lighting up the surroundings. In that instant, I saw it.

Off to the side of the swamp; something about the same size as a Raster Grizzly, but all black, was heading right towards us.

*“No way! A black Raster Grizzly!?”*

At Sara's shout, I understood what that was.

It was mud.

The Raster Grizzly had used mud to conceal itself in the dark. It was using camouflage. Obviously, it hadn't done that with the mud from my quagmire. There had been another herd of Raster Grizzlies near the lake, a bit further off from where the flock we'd spotted had been. They'd naturally just gathered in a swampier location of the lakeside. Since they'd been sleeping nearby, when we attacked the flock we'd spotted, they woke up panicking, and started heading towards us as well.

*“There's too many of them!”*

*“Retreat! Retreat!”*

Timothy called out orders, in a panic. The new herd was huge. 50, no--- Maybe 80 large. That giant herd of Raster Grizzlies illuminated still by the fading light of Timothy's fireball, was rushing right at us. There's simply no way we can beat that. Timothy seems to have realized that as well, but....

It's too late. Honestly, they should have noticed that other herd before they'd even started fighting, and decided to give up from the start. The party's failure had been not scouting the area out during the day.

*“The terrain here isn't to our advantage. Fall back to that place we found a earlier!”*

Suzanne's voice resounded through the darkness. Her judgement was correct. In case we ran into more Raster Grizzlies than we could handle, she had scouted out a place where we could limit the amount of enemies that could reach us at once.

Retreat back there and reform ranks, the correct decision.

Like I said though, it was all too late. That plan was made with the assumption that we'd be further away from the enemy, and I'd be able to place my quagmire in their path. There's no way we can run away from those Raster Grizzlies running towards us at full speed from our flank. It's checkmate.

*“Dammit! They're gaining on us!”*

*"Tch. Fine, I'll be the bait. Everyone else, run!"*

*"Suzanne!"*

Suzanne stopped in her tracks and turned around. Pale-faced, Sara turned back to look at her.

*"No! I'll stay! It was my fault! I didn't notice them when I should have!"*

*"Don't you dare stop!"*

*"You idiots! You think you can stop them with just the two of you!? Fine, if you're staying, then we all are!"*

*"Alright, let's show those bastards what we've got!"*

At Sara's shout, Mimiru and Patris took their stances. The giant horde of Raster Grizzlies are closing in on us. The rumbling of their approach feels almost like an earthquake. Even in the darkness, the overwhelming pressure of their presence can be felt. Sara's legs are trembling.

Not just Sara, even Suzanne, Mimiru, Patris, Timothy, everyone was trembling and pale-faced. But not a single one of them looked like they would turn and run.

Seeing such a spectacle caused the beating of my heart to quicken. Because the Raster Grizzlies were coming? No, I couldn't care less about that. It was because of Sara, Suzanne, Timothy, Mimiru, and Patris. For some reason, seeing them caused my heart to pound. My spirits lifted for the first time, my breathing started to get rough. Why? I couldn't tell you. I might not know why, but seeing them stand up hopelessly against that number of Raster Grizzlies, I started to feel again.

*"Ah---"*

I had unconsciously put my hand in my pocket, and started gripping what's kept inside.

*"Rudeus! What's wrong!?"*

Patris shouted my name and everyone turned around. I got a good look at everyone's faces, Sara included. None of their eyes had lost their fighting spirit. They hadn't given up yet. They were all trying desperately to stay alive. Even in this hopeless situation, they were still fighting on. Clinging to life with all their might.

Seeing them all, I finally understood. The feeling of the object in my pocket, their faces, and the past I keep remembering.

I finally understood. I understood why. Why they stopped to fight. I'd known all along, and now I've remembered.

*“Don't worry. Leave everything to me.”*

My calm voice surprised even myself. I suppressed the turmoil in my heart, and raised my staff towards the oncoming horde of Raster Grizzlies...

***“Exodus Flame!”***

An immensely huge flame burst from my staff, easily burning through the herd of Raster Grizzlies.





One hour later.

The area around the lake has all been turned into a burnt plain. A huge quantity of Raster Grizzly corpses are strewn across the landscape. Most of the corpses had carbonized, but a few were still intact enough that their fur could be harvested to sell.

“.....”

We're currently harvesting the Raster Grizzly skins that are still salvageable. After I cast Exodus Flame, almost all of the Raster Grizzlies had been killed, and those that remained scattered and ran. A few of them still charged at us, but Suzanne and the rest were able to bring them down while I shot down the ones that ran with my Stone Cannon. After the battlefield quieted down everyone was completely stunned. I simply said, *"Well, let's salvage what we can,"* and now here we are. We're grabbing all of their tails as proof that we killed them, and skinning their fur to sell. I'm sure you already know, but monsters like this have harvestable materials worth selling. Taking back as much of this as possible is something every adventurer does. We split into groups of two and started skinning them. My partner's Timothy. The Mage combo. Timothy's completely silent. His expression says he doesn't know what to say to me. Not just Timothy, everyone's like that. I don't mind, honestly. I'm not really planning on saying anymore than necessary either.

“.....”

Once we finish our work, we pile together all the tails and skins we collected, and begin burning the remaining bear corpses. By the time we finish all that, the sky begins to lighten. The air's filled with the scent of roasting meat. Smelling that smell made it really feel like we're finally done with the monster subjugation. At some point, Suzanne had come up right next to me.

*"You saved us."*

Shrugging her shoulders, she continued.

*"If you hadn't been there, we'd be dead right now. I knew you were more capable than you looked, but I didn't realize you were **this** good."*

*"No... If I hadn't been there you guys wouldn't have taken that request to begin with, right? A veteran B-rank party like yourselves would have taken on a C-rank request first to get a feel for the requests around here."*

*"Well, yeah..."*

Suzanne scratched her cheek, at a loss. I didn't mean anything mean by it though. Rather, I'm actually grateful to her. Thanks to what I realized during that fight, my spirits picked up a little.

*"Regardless, it's good that we brought you along. Thank you so much."*

*"If you say so. Anyway, let's go back."*

*"Alright."*

Suzanne looked at my face, smiled lightly, and went back to where all the pelts were. Now we're going to take as much as we can carry back with us on our triumphant return. The elimination may have been completed, but the request wasn't over yet. We're still out on an adventure until we get back and turn our proof into our reward. Guess I should go help carry stuff too. As I go to pick up a bundle of furs, a girl suddenly appears in front of me. A girl about the same height as me.

*"Thanks for saving us..."*

Sara muttered, then trotted back to Suzanne's side.



As we returned to the Adventurer's Guild laden with bear furs we were met with a lot of strange gazes. The kind of stares you'd give strangers. There's a lot of adventurers out there who set up base in a single city. That's why when people like us from somewhere else suddenly come in with a huge achievement, they start to get resentful. If it's a particularly bad place, it's possible you'd get mixed up in some unpleasantness too. Where they'd start asking for a 'protection fee' or the like.

*"....."*

I send our leader Timothy a questioning gaze. To my surprise, I find he's smiling as he looks around. Gazing about at the resentful glares of other adventurers who are surely thinking, *"If only I'd been the one to clear that request, I would have made a killing."*



He faces them all and proclaims: *"This is a celebration to commemorate our start in this town! Everyone here, food and drink's on me! Let's all party at the bar!"*

Everyone's faces suddenly went blank at first, but at the mention of free food, they all started cheering.

*"We've got some pretty generous newcomers this time around!"*

*"Haha! You guys are the best!"*

*"Yahoo! Free beer!"*

Seeing what had just unfolded, I was completely dumbfounded. He so easily just gave away seven days worth of earnings.

*"This is how Timothy does things. As long as he spends a bit to treat everyone, no one'll hate us. Considering we'll have to spend quite some time working with these guys, even the weird ones, it's a small price to pay to buy their goodwill."*

Suzanne explained to the dumbfounded me, while looking proudly at Timothy. I see now...

If success and money comes your way, it's only natural that you'll draw the jealousy of others. But if you share that wealth with everyone else, then even those that would have been jealous are willing to forgive you. Since adventurers need the reward money from requests to maintain their daily expenses, it's not something you can afford to do often, but if you ever rake in a big haul, it pays to share it with everyone to draw aggro off you.

*"Listen up you oafs! We'll be in the guild's care from today onwards, the party Counter Arrow and the adventurer, Rudeus Greyrat!"*

At Suzanne's shout, cheers rang out.

*"Counter arrow! Counter Arrow!"*

*"Rudeus! Rudeus!"*

The chanting lasted for only a short moment, but its effects were tremendous. I really should learn from these guys. I want to avoid pointless trouble with people like the time with Sara as much as possible. While thinking about it, I also started moving towards the bar, swept up in the festive atmosphere.



A few hours later, I return to my room. After we'd all gone to the bar, I'd ended up drinking a bit too. I'm not really used to drinking alcohol, and on top of that, the stuff they serve here is a really strong brew similar to whiskey. I got sick of it pretty quickly and started using detoxification magic. I don't think I'll ever drink that stuff again. My head's still hurting a little bit so I cast some healing magic, and light a fire in the fireplace.

*"Haaah..."*

The logs in the fireplace crackle softly as they release a small flame. It'll be a while before the room starts to heat up, but watching the fire is really relaxing.

*"....."*

While staring at the fireplace, I reach into my pocket, and take out what I always keep there. A white cloth. It's not a handkerchief. The one thing Lilia managed to send to me when everything else was lost in the Metastasis Incident... Yes, my divine artifact. It's something I've kept in my pocket all this time. I grasp it in both hands and press it towards my forehead. In that fight with the Raster Grizzlies, when I saw Counter Arrow standing up so bravely against death, I was reminded of Roxy.

Roxy must have tried desperately to stay alive. Of course, I'd never seen her in a life or death situation, but I knew she'd once been an adventurer. She too must have found herself in desperate situations, fought desperately to protect her comrades, been saved by them in turn. Just like the members of Counter Arrow. Then she became my home tutor. She taught me all the things she learned as an adventurer. She let me experience what it meant to really live. And all that, she must have learned from here.

*"I don't care if I die? What the hell, me."*

I press the white cloth to my chest.

*"What do you mean you have nothing left!?"*

Tears start streaming down my face. To prevent the sacred cloth from being soiled I press it against my forehead once more, and curl up, sobbing.

*“Uuuu...”*

My voice comes out in choked sobs. My hiccups won't stop, and my whole body is shaking. I'm still here. I still have things left.

I may have lost something truly important, but that doesn't mean I have nothing left. How could I have forgotten what it is I promised myself when I came to this world. How could I have forgotten about Roxy, or the time she took me out into the world. These are things she taught me. Things I learned. How can I betray her now? And not just Roxy... I touch the pendant on my chest. Lilia probably made it, this pendant carved of wood. She's devoted herself to me. She's waiting for the day we'll all be reunited. Even Paul is doing his best back in Milis. We may be all over the world, but that doesn't mean I'm alone.

*“Sensei, please guide me.”*

There's no way in hell I'm dying here. Yeah, maybe things've been tough, but I've been through worse. Sulking forever is pointless. It's time to start trying again. It's time to start doing what I need to.

*“Alright.”*

I take out one last thing from my bags, another piece of cloth--the one feminine thing that Eris had been carrying around, the one memoir I have left of her--and silently throw it into the flames.



Sara's Point-of-View.

Honestly, I'd underestimated him. When I'd first heard the name Greyrat, I thought of the noble family that governs over my homeland. Notus Greyrat, ruler of the Milbotts domain. I'd only ever seen him once, when he'd brought his soldiers to our village to hunt some monsters. My memories of that time are pretty vague, but I clearly remember his sly, crafty face. Rudeus reminds me a lot of him. The name Greyrat isn't all that uncommon in Asura, but most of the people holding that surname are all lower or middle class nobles. You won't find any commoners with the last name Greyrat. Well, most commoners don't even have a last name to begin with. Myself included.

For someone like me, a daughter of a pair of hunters, the only name I get is Sara. My mom and dad don't have any last names either. What I'm trying to say here is that that boy, Rudeus Greyrat, is the son of some noble. He may wear a cheap robe and not take good care of his appearance or hair, but it's that high quality staff of his that sets him apart from the usual adventurer. He probably doesn't understand a single thing about how this world works. But still--what is a noble's son doing so far away from Asura, all the way out here in the North? Well, it so happens that I was able to figure that out just by looking at his expressions. He uses those polite words and soft speech to keep others at a distance, hiding his true intentions. He probably had some bad experience at that high class school for nobles, fought with his parents, and ran away. A noble kid running away from home isn't that rare an occurrence either. I can't understand it at all, but it seems like some people don't enjoy the privileged life of being a noble. Those kids that don't like it tend to run away from home and become adventurers. Nobles receive a gifted education from a young age.

Obviously reading, writing, and arithmetic, but depending on the house, some of them also learn swordplay. I've heard some noble houses consider magic unnecessary and don't teach it to their kids, but depending on which school you go to, beginner level magic proficiency is required. For some reason a lot of kids like to leave the luxurious life of being able to learn swordplay and magic, and even a decent amount about how the world works at school, just to be adventurers. Especially kids around Rudeus' age. I've had to escort quite a few of those kinds of kids myself. None of them tried to leave Asura like Rudeus did but... they all ran back home scared after just one or two adventures. Seems like out of all of them, there are a few who actually have some talent and manage to become adventurers, but I've never seen one. I'd thought Rudeus was just like those other noble kids--and I hate those kinds of people. Born into a blessed environment, not having to work for anything, able to receive an education, and free to live an easy life without putting in any hard work. Just thinking about how weaklings like them tried to become adventurers makes me so mad. Well, I'm willing to forgive them for trying to become adventurers, but what I can't forgive is that they don't have the determination to live and risk their lives as adventurers. The moment they encounter a demon and get hurt, or find their comrades in a pinch, they instantly run away.

Why is that? Because they have somewhere to run back to. If it's too hard, if it's too scary, they can just go back home. They try to become adventurers all the while preparing their escape route before they've even started. They don't give a single thought to the people who don't have anywhere to run to, those that live their whole lives out as adventurers. They don't care at all about the people who get dragged along with their whims, and get injured and lose the ability to continue adventuring, or die because of them.

I thought Rudeus was one of them. I was surprised when at first he said he was looking for his mother, but after a bit I thought he must just have been lying. He probably thought he'd try his luck in the Northern Frontier instead of Asura, like everyone else. Either way, when things got tough I thought he'd just run. That's why I thought I'd try to keep him from doing anything, so he'd at least not get in our way.

But I know now--I'd underestimated him.

Rudeus didn't run, rather he practically wiped out that entire Raster Grizzly herd single-handedly. He was hiding the fact that he was an advance class, or possibly even a saint class Magician. That just pisses me off even more! It's true that he did save us so I did thank him, but I have no intention of treating him like a savior or anything.

*"Hey, Sara, how long are you going to keep sulking for?"*

*"I'm not sulking!"*

Even after returning to our inn, I'm still pissed. I don't want to accept that noble boy's skills. I mean... I hate nobles.

*"Why are you so obsessed with him anyway, Suzanne?"*

*"Why...? I can't just leave him alone now can I? A small boy like that, traveling all by himself. If I found out later he died somewhere out there I'd feel bad. Well, it looks like I didn't really need to worry about that though, seeing how strong he is..."*

*"Yeah, so why don't we just leave him alone then? I bet that whole spiel about looking for his mother and crap was all lies anyway. He probably just ran away from home like all the other nobles. If he gets himself killed it's his own damn fault."*

*"Sara, I know you don't like him, but even you know he wasn't lying. Why do you keep insisting that he was?"*

Yeah, even I know that. If he really had been lying, Rudeus wouldn't have done what he had. He wouldn't have cried there in the Adventurer's Guild. I know he's not lying. What he said--that he got caught up in the Fittoa Metastasis Incident, had to learn magic and spend years on the road to get back home, only to find out his home had vanished and his parents gone missing--I know all of that's true. The fact that he's suffered such a cruel fate is something I knew I understood just from adventuring with him once.

*"....."*

But somewhere in my heart, I refuse to accept Rudeus Greyrat. I refuse to accept what he's been through. Or maybe I just don't want to accept that we all had our asses saved by a noble brat.

*“Hmph, he just wasn’t in any real danger this time, that’s why. I bet when we’re in a real pinch he’ll just turn and run.”*

Trying to reject Suzanne's words, I curled up into bed and turned my back to her. For some reason, I just felt so frustrated.