

Prologue

"I love dancing in front of women, but I hate being danced around by them."

Two dimensions are most as expected.

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A forest spread before them. Three carriages cut through the lone road crossing through the forest, driving past at great speed.

"The Dragon's Beard."

That was the name of this forest that was situated between the northern border of Asura Kingdom and "The Red Dragon's Upper Jaw". The Red Dragon's Upper Jaw is the counterpart to the valley that runs through the southern border of Asura Kingdom — "The Red Dragon's Lower Jaw." While the Lower Jaw is at the edge of the southern border, between the northern border and the Upper Jaw lies a forest. The reason for that is due to the great number of demons that reside within it. Long ago, the kingdom built a massive wall encompassing the southern edge of the forest, and in doing so closed off the demons from attacking their border. This allowed them to greatly reduce the amount the country needed to spend on demon subjugation. Thanks to that, the forest is now rife with demons, wanted criminals fleeing the country, and the like. For that reason, there were few that would choose to travel through here. Though few, such travelers still did exist. Trading merchants and those on urgent business from Asura to the north came through from time to time. The man leading the three carriages rushing through was one such merchant.

He was an up and coming merchant who had rapidly risen to prominence within the past year and just recently entered the Merchant's Guild. A man by the name of Blune. Blune was carrying two carriage's worth of goods north from Asura Kingdom. Their value was such that if the worst were to happen, he would incur losses so huge that he may as well hang himself. The worst being... attacked by demons or bandits, thus losing his merchandise.

Back when he had just been a small time, but willful and proud, peddler he was able to count on his own sword skills to guard himself and his wares. However, now that he had risen in the world, the amount he stood to lose, and the danger involved, both increased. No longer could he count on his sword skills alone to protect his livelihood. But as the danger increased, so too did his budget. He could now afford to hire guards for his caravan. Riding in the last carriage were the adventurer guards he hired, along with three other travelers.

The adventurer guards were a B-rank party of five called “*Counter Arrow*” who were based in Asura. Of the three travelers, two were swordsmen on a journey to hone their skills, while the last was a gloomy looking magician boy clad in a grey robe. The three travelers were not guards, but Blune assumed that if his caravan were to be attacked they would be in danger too, and so would help fight to protect themselves at least, if nothing else.

By the way, the gloomy magician...? He was a boy named Rudeus Greyrat. Swaying slightly with the shaking of the carriage, he gazed at the sky with a blank expression on his face. Slumped against the back of the carriage, he stared on with empty, lifeless eyes and a mouth half open. His heart was empty. Truly, and completely, empty. There was nothing for him.

[Empty. That's all I feel. Why am I even alive right now? Is there any point in me being alive right now? I honestly don't know. All I know is that right now, I'm filled with nothing but emptiness. Zero. That's all I am. My heart is as empty as space itself.]

It felt as if his heart was shouting those words to the world, that was how depressed he seemed.

“Haaaah...”

He breathed a listless sigh. Because of him alone, the entire carriage was filled with a dark atmosphere.

“Hey, you. You've been sighing a whole lot. What's wrong?”

A woman sitting in the carriage called out to the boy. She was dark skinned with dreadlocks, and a member of the B-rank adventurer party, Counter Arrow. Outfitted in a breastplate and gauntlets, her equipment was rather light. Still, it was too much for a swordsman, meaning she was probably a warrior. In response to her words, the boy slowly raised his head... and smiled. The female warrior was taken aback. The boy himself may have thought that that smile was a pleasant one, but in truth, it was devoid of any human warmth. A smile that could be seen carved on a wax doll.

“Was I really sighing that much? Sorry about that. But don't worry, it's nothing.”

His voice was cheerful, but his eyes were still empty. His face still gloomy, at complete odds with his voice.

“Oh yeah, why are you traveling north?”

The female warrior did not give up. She had expected to be ignored, but at the very least, he responded.

“Huh? Why? What do you mean why?”

“From the looks of it you're a magician but... You're still a kid, right? Don't you think it's a bit too early for you to start adventuring right out of magic school?”

That boy with empty eyes looked to be very young. 12, maybe 13 at most. Still just a child really. After being pestered with all these questions that boy, with such a youthful face, twisted his lips to reveal a crooked smile.

“Umm, there’s no real need for me to answer that is there?”

Said the boy, trying to end the conversation. He did not want to talk to anyone. He was depressed, simply waiting for the carriage to finally reach its destination. Normally such rude, blunt words would offend a person. That being said, there was also an implicit understanding among travelers not to pry too deeply into each other’s affairs. Normally if someone cut the conversation abruptly like that, you would shrug your shoulders and give up. The dreadlocked woman was about to do just that.

“Suzanne’s just trying to be nice! What’s with that attitude!?”

But the girl sitting next to the dreadlocked woman would not stand for it. She asked Rudeus thusly, in an indignant voice. With blonde hair and a confident expression on her face, she was dressed lightly, much like a swordsman. Strapped on her back was not a sword, but a bow. She looked to be about 15 years old, a bit older than the boy. It was apparent that she was not aware of that implicit understanding between travelers. The boy turned his head to face the girl who had yelled at him so suddenly. He stared at her for a moment, then turned away with a tired look on his face.

“Now, now, Sara. It’s not like he’s trying to pick a fight with us. He’s just a bit blunt.”

“But Suzanne, haven’t you been worrying about him since yesterday? Going on and on about how he seemed to be depressed about something. Even though you tried to talk to him he just—”

Looks like the dreadlocked woman was called Suzanne, and the other Sara. Though the boy had turned his face away, he continued to steal glances in their direction every few moments. It seemed he was at least a little curious about those two. His smile had vanished, replaced with a dark expression; it was impossible to guess what he was thinking. After a few seconds he finally spoke, in that same falsely cheerful voice that would only make one worry.

“Well, I’m going north to search for my mother who went missing in the Fittoa region metastasis incident.”

“Oh...”

“The Fittoa Region...”

After hearing that the two both had an apologetic expression.

The Fittoa Region metastasis incident. It was a dreadful, shocking accident for the people living in Asura at the time. While they were not from that area, upon hearing of the Fittoa Region’s disappearance, they did their best to aid the restoration efforts as adventurers. They had chanced upon many refugees in their adventuring travels. Looking back at him, you could tell the boy’s face was just like those refugees. The despairing face of someone who had lost their friends, family, and home. She should not have asked. Suzanne did not say it, but her face clearly conveyed those words.

“Still— What gives you the right to act like that?”

Sara was still displeased. The boy did not seem to mind however. He went silent and turned away again. The atmosphere in the carriage got even gloomier. The other two traveling swordsmen stirred slightly, feeling awkward.

“How do you even plan to search for her? The Northern Frontier is huge.”

Suzanne continued her questioning. She knew she was being nosy, but she really could not stand the dark atmosphere they were traveling in. The boy made a face that said *“She’s still going?”* and turned around again, once more making that empty smile.

“Well... I guess I’ll just figure it out as I go along.”

“Do you have a destination in mind? Some kind of information about the whereabouts of your friends or family? It’s dangerous to travel alone, you know.”

“.....”

It was then that the boy finally realized something. She would not stop trying to talk to him. Honestly, he did not really want to keep talking. If he tried to cut off the conversation like before, he would just get yelled at by the other girl. He had not noticed it before.

“In that case, would you like me to teach you about the Northern Frontier? It’s better than knowing nothing at all about it, right?”

“Haaah... Well, alright. I guess.”

After a brief silence, he finally replied. But his face showed that he did not care about actually learning more. It was apparent from his expression that he thought that continuing to answer questions would be a pain, so he would rather just have her talk about whatever for some time.

“Alright. Clean out your ears and listen well.”

Suzanne decided that was good enough for now and began to talk.

The Northern Frontier.

As the name suggests, it refers to the area covering the northern section of the Central Continent. Most of the Northern Frontier was a desolate wasteland. Not as bad as the Demon Continent, but it was buried in snow for a third of the year, resulting in the crop yield being quite low. Most countries were poor and the people were always raiding each other in a fight over the scarce resources available. Not only were there many demons roaming around, but they were quite a bit stronger than those you would find in Asura. It is for that reason that many wandering swordsmen and experienced adventurers find their way here.

However, this does not bring the respective countries of these regions any real revenue. But even in this harsh land there are a few countries that have managed to prosper.

Commonly known as "*The Three Magic Countries*".

The one most advanced in magic education, the Kingdom of Ranoa.

The one most advanced in the development of magic items, the Kingdom of Neris.

The one most advanced in the research of magic, the Kingdom of Basherant.

Together they are joined in an alliance and cooperate to further the advancement of magic. It is through the power of magic that they have managed to prosper in the Northern Frontier. Suzanne's party had found it difficult to find work in Asura once they had advanced all the way to B-rank. They planned to move to one of the three magic countries and continue their adventuring there. This was also Rudeus Greyrat's destination, but he had yet to choose a particular country out of the three.