

[Adam C. POV]

[July 7, x777.]

Today, I had successfully completed a mission in the deserts of Rathal, a small place in the corner of the country, bordering the Alvarez Empire.

The mission had been, despite the high pay, rather easy, an S Ranked mission in which I had to recover a book a large group of thieves had stolen from a noble family in the capital.

For this mission, I had decided to take Erza, Cana, and Lilia with me.

I had known beforehand that the mission was going to be easy, so this seemed like the best opportunity to take Cana with me in order for her to get some experience in the field.

I smiled.

Despite this being her first official mission taking an active role, she had performed admirably well. Lilia, who I had

brought in on this mission for the sole reason of looking after the girls should anything go wrong, wasn't forced to intervene at all.

I was proud of their progress.

Especially Cana's.

I knew who Erza was, or would be, and beyond that I had trained her, pushing her further.

But Cana had grown this much alone, relatively speaking. She had Gildarts, but everyone knew he wasn't too keen on training her for real, so the level of strength I had seen today was the result of her hard work alone.

"Adam-sama, after we return the book, could we stay in the capital? I wish to buy some supplies before leaving," Lilia asked, breaking me out of my thoughts.

I nodded in agreement, "Of course, Lilia. We can take a few days to rest before we have to return to the guild."

Cana grinned beside me, obviously excited at the prospect of spending some time in the capital.

"Maybe I could buy some cake there," Erza added, her mouth watering at the thought, earning a chuckle from me.

"I hate sand," Cana muttered under her breath.

I could relate to that.

The scorching sun beat down on us as we trekked across the endless expanse of sand, our boots sinking slightly with each step. The hot air shimmered and danced around us, distorting the horizon as if it was a mirage.

Cana and Erza, despite their petite frames, were doing their best to keep up with my pace, their faces flushed from the heat.

Lilia on the other hand, seemed in her element, unfazed by the heat.

The date weighed heavily on my mind – July 7th, the day when everything would change, the start of an era. I tried to push the impending sense of unease to the back of my mind, focusing instead on the steady rhythm of our footsteps on the sand, after all, this was meant to happen.

Erza, with her natural exuberance and a smile that could brighten even the darkest day, tugged on my arm, her brown eyes sparkling with excitement. "Talking about sand, do you think we can have a spar when we get home?"

Her enthusiasm was contagious, and I couldn't help but smile back, ruffling her crimson hair playfully. "Sure."

Not sure what sand had to do with sparring, but I guess that's her way of asking for something.

Cana, wasting no time, tugged on my other arm, a fierce determination in her eyes as a pout formed on her face. "I want a spar as well, big brother!"

I scratched the back of my head, chuckling. "Sure, we can have one as well."

I wasn't sure when or why Cana had started to feel jealous of Erza, but she was determined to have whatever Erza had, in terms of spending time with me.

Perhaps it was her age, seeing they were both about to reach their adolescence, I don't know.

I wasn't particularly good at understanding kids, or teenagers.

As I thought about this, I was suddenly struck by an inexplicable sensation.

The atmosphere seemed to shift, the air around us growing heavy and electric, both hot and cold, both alive and dead. It started as a faint hum, barely perceptible at first, but it rapidly grew in intensity, until it felt as though the world itself was tearing apart.

The Ethernano in the air felt... strange. As if there was too much of it, and too little of it at the same time.

Cana, Erza, and Lilia, inexperienced as they were, couldn't sense the change, but I could. The magic that bound our world together was fracturing, splitting apart like a pane of glass struck by a hammer.

The ground beneath my feet seemed to tremble, the sky darkening overhead as storm clouds gathered with unnatural speed, forming and breaking apart, creating a twisted image in the sky, as the hair on the back of my neck stood on end.

I could see in the faces of my group, I was the only one feeling this.

Perhaps it was for the best.

As the seconds ticked by, the feeling only grew stronger and stronger, making it easier to understand what was happening, to the magic and everything that; that entailed.

The magic... was breaking in two, or rather, was breaking a door open.

A door that was never meant to be opened.

I could feel this... door, tearing open, breaking apart at the distance, thousands of miles away from where we were.

"It happened," I muttered under my breath, staring in shock in the general direction I was feeling things were happening.

I knew this would happen.

I had been expecting this for a long time.

But despite being prepared, despite being in the know, it was still shocking.

Erza and Cana looked at me with wide eyes, a mix of confusion and fear etched on their faces.

It seemed my expression had startled them.

"What happened?" Erza asked, pushing through her confusion, and fear, her eyes scanning the area for any sign of danger, her hand ready on her sword.

"Nothing," I replied, giving her a warm smile that I hoped would mask the unease I felt inside. "Just felt like being ominous."

"Oh, I see," Erza nodded, her body relaxing. "That's a strange training exercise, but an effective one! Wise as always, keeping us on our toes at all times!"

Training... what?

Sometimes I don't really understand what goes around her little scarlet head, more than not it feels like there's a different world up there.

Cana wasn't convinced, her forehead furrowing as she looked at me skeptically. "Are you lying, big brother?"

I chuckled. "Of course not sweet pea."

Cana was more insightful than I had given her credit for. She had a keen intuition when it came to me that sometimes bordered on clairvoyance.

"Adam-sama never lies!" Lilia declared with burning passion and unwavering trust, placing a hand on Cana's shoulder as if to reassure her. "He only avoids sharing the truth, and keeps all the information to himself! But he doesn't lie! He never lies!"

I...

Hm...

Not entirely wrong there.

She has a point.

Leaving Lilia with the girls, I turned my attention back to the sky, the storm clouds growing thicker and darker by the second. The feeling of unease continued to grow, spreading like poison through the air.

Something was coming.

Something big.

After all these years, The Dragons and their children were finally coming.

The Gates of Eclipse were being opened, giving birth to a new era.

Would that era be the same as the one I knew? Only time would tell.

"Let's move, it would be best if we are out of the desert before night falls," I said, breaking the tension in the air. "We have a long journey ahead of us."

The girls nodded in agreement, and we quickly resumed our path, making our way towards the edge of the desert, where the desert port was, in there I would pay a desert rider to take us out of the desert and towards the nearest town.

I had much to do.

And one of those things was finally meeting the pink-haired brat. The story of this world I knew seemed to revolve around.

[Layla Heartfilia POV]

The cold stone floor beneath me provided little comfort as I clenched the eleven celestial keys tightly. My breaths came in short gasps, each one feeling more labored than the last.

The dimly lit grounds were eerily silent, save for my own ragged breaths and the distant echoes of my ancestors, telling me I had to do this.

Gritting my teeth, I focused my will and channeled my life force into the Eclipse Gate. The sensation was indescribable – as if a thousand tiny needles were burrowing into my very soul, draining me of everything I had. I could feel the cold embrace of darkness slowly creeping into the corners of my vision.

The pain was unbearable.

But I couldn't falter. Not now.

Not when I was so close to finally completing my task, the task left behind by my ancestors, not when the fate of my daughter rested upon my shoulders.

Summoning the last reserves of my strength, I let out a guttural scream, pouring my entire being, everything I had to offer, my life, my soul, and my body into the task at hand.

The gate groaned and creaked, its ancient mechanisms protesting against my desperate efforts.

With one final scream of pain and determination, the gate opened wide. The empty grounds where the gate was were filled with a brilliant, blinding light, forcing me to shield my eyes.

Exhausted, I collapsed onto the ground, my vision a chaotic blur of colors and shapes.

As the light receded, I saw a figure emerge from the gate.

A woman, her eyes filled with both sadness and a flicker of admiration. She walked towards me, her voice tinged with pity, I couldn't see her very well, but felt familiar.

"You opened the gate without the twelve keys," The mysterious woman said, her words echoing in my ears. "I'm

sorry, I truly am, just know that your sacrifice won't be in vain, you did this world a great favor."

I wanted to respond, to ask her who she was and what her intentions were.

But my body betrayed me, my strength gone, and my vision fading rapidly to black. The edges of consciousness were slipping away, leaving me with nothing but the happiness in knowing that my actions today had saved my beloved Lucy from this terrible burden that had haunted our family for generations.

Our mission... no, my mission was finally over.