

[Adam C. POV]

Silence engulfed me in the abyss of the void within Sho's card.

Time was an enigma here, without any outside stimuli, or magic around beyond the one keeping me in a cage. It could have been seconds, minutes, or hours since I'd been willingly plunged into this vast emptiness.

Card magic was quite creepy, if you think about it.

Sure, I had allowed myself to be captured in order to infiltrate the Tower, seeing that path was easier than trying to find it.

That being said, the void within the card was quite chilling from an average point of view. An expanse of black, an infinite canvas of nothingness.

It didn't have a ground or a ceiling, no walls or corners. It was just... emptiness, a vacuum devoid of color, light, and sound.

Hm.

Now that I think about it, this feels like the perfect place to sleep.

I might have to talk with Cana to see if she can replicate this, but without using cards.

But enough about that, I had to concentrate.

I was playing the role of a Trojan horse, waiting to be delivered into the hands of the enemy, only to rise when they least expected it.

As such, I had to keep myself alert, ready for anything, and while that anything happens, well, I had to endure the solitude, the silence, and the overall boredom behind playing an idle role.

Taking a deep breath, I closed my eyes, taking in the cool tranquility of the nothingness, focusing on the rhythm of my heartbeat to pass the time.

[Jellal Fernandes. POV.]

The Tower of Heaven loomed high above, its ominously beautiful silhouette stark against the clear blue sky as I made sure that the last few preparations were ready.

Inside, in one of the many halls of the tower, the flickering path torchlights casted ghostly shadows that danced and contorted along the walls.

The air was thick with the scent of old stone, damp and earthy, with just a hint of blood.

Smiling, I reached to one of the walls with my hand, my fingers brushing over the cool, weathered surface, tracing the patterns of time etched into it in silence admiration.

The silence pressed in around me, punctuated only by the occasional drip-drip-drip of water in the distance.

The echo of footsteps broke the stillness.

"You're back earlier than I expected," I commented, turning around.

As I did, a figure emerged from the gloom, her silhouette outlined in the dim light of the hall. Ikaruga, her pink hair cascading over her shoulders, her eyes reflecting the flickering flames around us.

As she walked towards me, she held herself with an air of calm certainty that I had come to respect, as much as I could anyways.

"I take it you succeeded?" I asked, my voice low and controlled.

She didn't reply immediately, choosing to hold my gaze, her smile widening. Then, with a slow, deliberate motion, she reached into the folds of her robe and brought out a poker card from Sho's magic deck.

Ikaruga nodded, a small smile curling her lips. "Yes, I did."

I reached out, taking the poker card from her and holding it up to the light. "Excellent work," I said, nodding my head in approval.

"He was better than I expected, but not nearly strong enough as the rumors suggested," Ikaruga said, her voice laced with amusement.

I guess this settles whether or not he defeated Jose Porla himself. If he had, Ikaruga would've lost, she was strong, but not nearly strong enough to take on someone with the caliber to take down a Wizard Saint.

A smile slowly unfurled on my lips. "That will be all, for now."

Ikaruga gave me a small bow before turning on her heels and disappearing into the shadows once more.

As I watched her go, my gaze turned to the card in my hands. "I've been waiting to meet you, Adam."

[Adam C. POV.]

"I've been waiting to meet you, Adam."

The ephemeral void around me shattered like glass, reality fracturing into thousands of shards that spun away into nothingness.

The sensation was like being dropped from a great height, as the nothingness that once held me captive rapidly faded away, replaced by the sharp scent of ozone and the prickling sensation of magic in the air.

In the blink of an eye, I was back in the physical realm again, my senses filled with the raw tangibility of it all.

The first thing I registered was the oppressive feel of the chair beneath me. Cold, hard, unyielding. Calmly, I tried to shift, to stand, but found myself restrained.

My wrists were bound by glowing bands of energy that pulsed with a chilling hum, sending tendrils of numbing energy up my arms.

Not a bad approach.

These were no ordinary bindings; they were magical in nature, crafted with the sole purpose of siphoning off my power.

I could feel the steady drain, like a slow leak in my reservoir. I coiled my energy a bit, testing the limits of my newfound state.

I was bound, but not without escape.

It seemed Jellal, who I assumed had set this up, hadn't accounted for sudden bursts of power, meaning the way to break out of this was by releasing my Shikai.

Deciding to let things play out, I moved my gaze to inspect the chair, finding intricate runes etched into the metallic surface, arcane symbols that glowed with an ominous blue light.

Each pulse seemed in sync with the bindings, a malignant symphony designed to strip Wizards of their powers. A prison tailored specifically for magic users.

"So we finally meet, Adam," Jellal said with a smirk, stepping out from the shadows into my cell, stopping right in front of me, his blue hair, and eye tattoo giving away his identity quite fast. "I've heard much about you. Your reputation precedes you."

That felt like a backhanded compliment.

"Jellal, I take it?" I replied, keeping my tone neutral. "Not that I'm not flattered, but what's the occasion?"

"You could say I've been interested in meeting you for some time now," Jellal said, his voice smooth and confident. "That said, I must admit, I never expected you to fall for my little trap."

"You rebuilt the Tower," I replied, my eyes scanning the room. "I figured it was only a matter of time before someone tried to take things back from where Brain left them. Still, I never imagined it would be a fellow slave the one to do so."

It was almost poetic, a former slave, bringing back the place that took their freedom.

Jellal chuckled darkly, his eyes glinting with malice. "You destroyed Brain's work, denying this world the power of Zeref. Since that day, it has been my life's work to fix the consequences of your selfish actions, no matter the cost."

"And in order to do that, you destroyed the life of others, slaving those you once swore to help, how kind of you," I shot back. "If you were half the man Erza described you were, you would see how much of a puppet you truly are."

Jellal waved his hand dismissively. "It was necessary evil. Zeref will make this world right, only he can lead this wretched world into the right path."

It was almost sad to see how little of the original Jellal was left inside his head. The man standing in front of me, was nothing but a husk, a hollow puppet dancing under someone else's control.

"I take it you didn't capture me for nothing, didn't you?" I asked, cutting straight to the chase.

Jellal smiled, his eyes glinting with amusement. "Aren't you a clever one? But to answer your question, yes, your presence here has a purpose."

I raised an eyebrow in response, waiting for him to continue, even though I already had an idea of what he would say. Not that this was an accomplishment, I mean, it wasn't hard to decipher.

"You are here to make sure, Erza comes, and to atone for your sin," Jellal said, his voice low and dangerous.

"Can I ask you a question?" I replied, meeting his gaze.

"I might as well humor you," Jellal replied, his expression neutral. "After all, you don't have much time left, so ask away."

"What happened with Brain?" I asked, seeing that was one of the main reasons I had come here.

Jellal chuckled, his face twisting into a scowl. "I should've expected that question, you two have quite a history together after all."

That was the understatement of the century.

Taking a deep breath, Jellal's eyes darkened, and for a moment, he looked lost in thought. "To answer that question, I wouldn't know, the last time I saw him was over eight years ago, when he completed my training."

I guess I was hoping for too much by thinking I could get the Tower and Brain in one swoop.

Another day.

I had waited this long already, I could wait a little more.

"I guess I will kill him another day," I sighed in disappointment.

As those words left my mouth, I felt a sudden jolt of pain shot my entire being, as Jellal stood before me, his right hand outstretched, a dark aura pulsating around him.

"It seems you are misreading your situation," Jellal sneered, his eyes flashing with a hint of malice. "Your life ends today, there is no tomorrow for you, no hope, no goals, nothing but the cold embrace of nothingness."

"Am I?" At this, I let a slow, defiant grin spread across my face, as I reached for the steady trickle of my power, gathering it, before realizing it all at once, like a dammed river bursting its banks.

The bands around my wrists and ankles trembled, the glow behind the runes keeping them in place flickering wildly as if uncertain.

Jellal's eyes widened, the first crack in his composed facade, as without realizing it, he found himself taking a step back, obviously not expecting this development, at all.

The pulsating glow of the bands grew erratic, the bindings struggling to contain the sudden rush of my magic. Then, with a resonating crack, the seals shattered, releasing me from their grip.

The echo of their destruction filled the room, a sweet symphony to my ears.

As the echoes of shattering magic subsided, I stretched out my now-free hands, and legs, flexing my fingers.

The chair beneath me, the one that was supposed to be unyielding prison in Jellal's eyes, now felt like any other piece of furniture, one quite comfy at that.

"So, you were saying?" I smiled, feeling the magic within me, surging and eager to make up for the time it had been suppressed.

"You let Ikaruga capture you," Jellal snarled, his eyes still wide with shock.

"Well, it was easier than interrogating an assassin for the location of this place," I replied, cracking my neck, as I activated an dim aura of Kaido around my body, focusing said aura on my wounds.

The warmth of this aura spread through my body like a soothing balm, before slowly mending the damage I had taken during my fight with Ikaruga, as Jellal stared at me, like a deer under the headlights of a car.

"So you actually defeated, Jose Porla," Jellal laughed, recovering from his previous shock, as his body began to radiate with power, the air around him distorting from the sheer force of it.

I smiled.

He was stronger than Jose Porla.

Good, this time I might actually get the chance to enjoy the fight.

"Hopefully, you'll be more of a challenge than he was," I replied, my eyes locking onto Jellal's, my own power rising to match his.

The ground beneath us trembled, dust falling from the ceiling as the very fabric of the room strained to contain the combined might of our magic power being released, despite the fact we were far from releasing our full power.

"I'm glad Ikaruga failed," Jellal replied, his eyes gleaming with savage delight, as his lips pulled back in a cruel grin, his magic power surging like a tidal wave. "Because it means I get to destroy you with my very own hands!"

"Oh, Jellal, with all this animosity you're showing, one might start to think it's a twisted form of affection," I replied, unsheathing my Zanpakuto. "I'm flattered, but I don't swing that way."