

D. Extraction 51

Chapter 51 The Garden

Kyle then heard the whispering voices behind him... He wasn't sure which of his attribute improved his sense of hearing but he was quite thankful for it.

"Brass Emblem... Another noble family, huh? I wonder which family is he from..."

"He doesn't have a fancy carriage. His luggage case is new but cheap. His coat is the same... I'm guessing he's a son from a countryside noble family."

"Nice try... But it's not... I'm 70% sure that he just robbed that emblem from someone. Did you not hear about the incident--"

"Idiot... The emblem is marked. You can't steal it. The guard will be able to tell."

"Whatever, he still looks like a newspaper seller in the streets of our city... Heh heh..."

Kyle could only sigh in his mind as he waited for the guard to finish inspecting the emblem.

"Uhhh... Ehem... Is there something wrong?" Kyle asked the guard after noticing that it was taking some time.

"Nothing... We just need to scan it. Wait for a moment." The guard replied as he handed the brass emblem to one of his colleagues.

After a few seconds, the scan was finally completed.

"Vale Chambers... You may enter." The cold and deep voice from the other bulky guard stopped everyone from gossiping.

In the meantime, Kyle was also curious about how the guard learned his name through that invisible scan.

The brass emblem doesn't have any other texts engraved on it aside from the "Vermont Academy" written at the bottom part of the insignia.

However, the guard only held it for a few seconds and he didn't use any mystical item but he still learned of his identity.

After getting the emblem back, Kyle briefly glanced at the people behind him.

Well, he just wanted to look at the guy who called him a newspaper seller.

Although it was true, that was over a year ago and many things have already happened. It didn't feel nice being called as such once again and it was also quite rude since it feels like he was being mocked.

After remembering his face, he decided to just continue entering the gate.

He would first have to get verified in the Registrar Office so he can get his uniform and ID. He would further be assigned to his dormitory after that.

There are several signposts pointing in the direction of various offices and buildings so it wasn't that difficult to find the Registrar Office.

Kyle passed through the Auxillary Supplies Room, First Information Room, and Lockers Room, before arriving at the Registrar.

In the meantime, he also noticed that the academy castle, or building, appears properly maintained and there is almost no moss or dirt that can be found on the walls and stone pillars.

"Next!"

Kyle heard a female voice behind the window of the office as the next student approached her.

It didn't take long until his turn since there are three windows assisting the students.

The process is smooth since Mr. Heinz has already completed all the requirements that must be submitted and he only needed to show up for the formalities.

In just a few moments, he received a small box containing his uniform including his identification card and the keys to his dormitory room.

"Do you have any questions?" The beautiful lady in the office asked with a smile after providing all of these things.

Perhaps, if this is a normal Academy, he would think that this kind and gentle-looking lady is a harmless person. However, after knowing Lesley or even Denise, he's sure that this lady is also a Spellcaster.

"Ahem... I would like to know if the dormitory room I'll be staying in is for four or eight people..." Kyle asked after organizing his thoughts.

"Since you're assigned to the Seven Pillars Garden... It'll be a four people room, Vale. As I've checked, you already have two roommates assigned to your room seven..." The office lady replied after checking the documents.

She then continued to explain that the Seven Pillars Garden has seven rooms that can accommodate a total of 28 people.

All the other dormitory rooms are for 8 people already.

"I see..." Kyle nodded as he also realized that it was all thanks to the brass emblem that he could stay at the Seven Pillars Garden.

It seems to be a nice place and only nobles, or people with a great background, can stay in the Seven Pillars Garden.

After thanking the kind office lady, Kyle followed the direction leading to the Seven Pillars Garden.

Normally, he would still have to visit the Health Room for a medical check-up and meet the Vice Headmaster in the Academy Admin Office for shadow extraction before he can get his uniform. However, all these steps were omitted thanks to the early arrangement made by Mr. Heinz.

"Ohh... This looks really nice..." Kyle muttered in admiration after seeing the Seven Pillars Garden at the separate building close to the left wing hall of the Academy.

The garden has a monument of a four-winged horse made of black stone at its center. Then, surrounding this garden were the seven rooms arranged in a crescent moon form.

As Kyle was thinking of going close to the monument to read its description written on a steel plate, he saw someone going out of room seven so it immediately attracted his attention.

'Hmm?'

It is a young man with short gray or maybe a little silver hair wearing the uniform of the Academy. With the way he carries himself, Kyle can guess that this person is indeed noble.

Then, four more students from different rooms appeared as they seem to have planned to go somewhere.

Kyle then heard their conversation although he didn't really plan to.

"Zeno! I heard that the first thing we'll do after the ceremony is to reveal our Spirit Strands... Is it true that there's going to be a reward for the highest scorer?" A chubby young man asked the silver-haired youth after they met.

"It's true... However, don't think too much of the reward since I'll be taking it for sure." Zeno replied without any hint of arrogance in his voice as if he was simply reminding his friends.

Chapter 52 New Place

"Haha! As expected, I guess you already exceeded ten strands..." The chubby youth beside Zeno added with obvious flattery.

Zeno seem to like these words but he didn't confirm the number of his Spirit Strands.

"We will see... It will be a huge surprise tomorrow." Zeno replied as his friends continued to flatter him.

It was unfortunate that he didn't hear his last name. However, he can guess that Zeno came from a powerful background while those who are sucking up to him were probably from a lesser noble family.

In any case, didn't bother talking to them for now as he waited for them to leave before entering the seventh room.

Click...

He realized that the door wasn't locked so there was no need to use the key... As soon as he opened it, he saw a person seated on the couch in the living space.

"Mhm?" Kyle was a bit surprised as he thought that the room is now empty. However, after thinking about it, the lady in the registrar office mentioned that he has two roommates already.

The student also noticed his arrival and gave him a warm smile.

"I'm Harith... Harith Stratwell. I thought that no one would be arriving here anymore. It's a good thing there will be three of us in the seventh room." Harith said as he put down the snacks he was eating.

Based on the smell, it seems to be roasted chestnuts that Kyle would normally see being sold by the street-corner sellers in the town.

"Stratwell? Is it the same with the Stratwell Hospital? Ah, I'm Ky—I mean, Vale Chambers."

Although there is no Stratwell Hospital in the nearby town, there is a Stratwell Hospital in Melthorn City where he came from.

"So it's Vale Chambers... You're right, the Stratwell Hospitals belongs to my Grandfather." Harith expected that he would be recognized so he didn't think too much of it.

He then paused for a moment as he tried to recall the Chambers Family.

Unfortunately, nothing was coming up in his memories. Nevertheless, he knows that his tutor wouldn't miss any important families in the kingdom. This means that Vale shouldn't be a very important personality. He's probably one of the countryside nobles who sacrificed all their savings to bring their beloved son to the Seven Pillars Garden of the Academy in hopes of befriending other nobles.

According to his tutor, this is a normal thing to happen since the Vermont Academy is the only place where the sons and daughters of the Faction's noble families would gather. Making connections here is very important, especially to those declining noble families or those with a shallow background in the world of mysticism.

"I'm sorry for not knowing your family. However, since you were able to get here, I'm sure that you have a great background as well. Ahem... I will be eating my snacks in my room so I won't be disturbing you."

Harith said as he stood up while taking his roasted chestnuts.

"Right, you can use either of these two rooms on the right... The one on your left is occupied by Zeno Roquemont... and this is my room." Harith added as he pointed at the room beside Zeno's.

'So it was Roquemont...'

Kyle was about to ask about the name of their other roommate but since Harith already mentioned it,

'The door at the center must be the shared washroom then...' Kyle mused.

He then selected the nearest room on the right side so he will be near the main door. He also entered his room swiftly as the smell of the roasted chestnut still wafted throughout the whole living space.

'I was expecting bunk beds when I heard that I will be staying inside in a four-person room. This is actually better than I expected.' Kyle commented in his mind as he saw his room.

It is certainly better than his windowless room in the workshop.

He then found a button on the wall near the door and pressed it... Then, the lamp, or perhaps bulb, on the ceiling lit up illuminating the whole room.

"Hmm? Is it using electricity? Or something different?" Kyle muttered as he curiously looked at the ball of light.

According to the books he read, the kingdom has already discovered electric lighting but it is still in its infancy... Using gas for lighting was still prevalent in the cities and larger towns.

In the workshop, most of the lighting came from oil lamps or even candles so it was quite surprising for Kyle to see this "bulb."

Of course, he decided not to ask Harith about this light since he would probably be looked down upon if he did that.

He decided not to think too much of it and blamed it on the mysteries of this world instead.

The inside of the room was quite simple. There is a white cabinet where he can keep his clothes, a study table, a chair, a bed, a small shelf where he can place dozens of books, a mirror, and a window... There is also ventilation on the ceiling and Kyle felt that this place is quite decent.

After a while, Kyle already emptied his luggage and organized his things. He then checked his uniform to see if it'll fit.

"Hmm... I look good." Kyle muttered to himself with a smile after wearing his black and maroon uniform.

It includes a full suit, coats, ties, and hats. There is a pair of each of them so he didn't have to wear the same clothes all the time.

In any case, all the male students have the same set of uniforms except for the ties which will help people identify your Academic Year.

For a first-year student like him, his ties have a patch of one eight-angled star. The second-year students have two eight-angled stars and so on.

After removing his hat, he decided to leave to walk around the campus and familiarize himself with the surroundings...

However, as soon as he came out of the Seventh Room, a woman who seemed to be a professor approached him.

"Are you student Vale Chambers? I was sent by Headmaster Jean to look for you."

Chapter 53 Headmaster

"Headmaster Jean?" Kyle repeated.

"Yes... He doesn't want to be called Headmaster Hoffman. Ahem, I don't know the reason why he's calling you but he seemed to be in a good mood so don't worry. Maybe he just wanted to ask about your enrollment." The female professor replied.

Kyle gently nodded as he tried to think what the Headmaster was planning to do this time.

"I see... Where can I find the Headmaster, Madam?"

"He's in the Headmaster's Office... You can find your way there. I'll be going elsewhere. By the way, I'm Professor Stella Harwin. I'm teaching Fundamentals of the Magic Zone. Make sure to attend it." Stella said with a smile as she seemed to be looking forward to the class.

"What did Headmaster say to her? Ugh..." Kyle felt a headache as he replied. "Thank you, Professor Harwin... I'll be looking forward to your class..."

With that said, the female professor finally left leaving Vale to his own device.

It didn't take long before he found the Headmaster's Office.

Along the way, he met a few female students. They are all wearing skirts that reach their ankles and high-collar dress uniform that covers their upper chest and neck.

They all look prim and properly feminine but according to his memories, the female students have another uniform. That particular one looks more comfortable since that dress uniform is sleeveless and low cut bodices... If he wasn't mistaken, it can be worn on specific days.

"Come in, Vale..."

As he was about to knock on the door, he heard the Headmaster's familiar voice.

Kyle took a deep breath before entering the spacious headmaster's office.

Headmaster Jean is seated behind his desk and he seemed to be playing a board game on his own. Kyle wasn't sure if it was a chess game but whatever it is, he certainly doesn't know how to play it so he didn't stare at it for too long.

"Did Heinz teach you how to play Rack and Ruin?" Headmaster Jean asked as Kyle closes the door.

"No, Headmaster Jean..." Kyle replied.

'Is that the name of the board game?' He added in his mind.

"Ah? How about Invasion or even Stroke of Luck? Those are games that nobles would normally play or even gamble."

Kyle shook his head after hearing this. He doesn't really care whether he would befriend a few nobles or not. He's not in the academy to befriend them in the first place. He's here to learn how to get stronger by understanding the Darkness Arcane Path.

His Extraction System doesn't give him knowledge and he can only obtain it here in the Academy. He won't waste the opportunity given to him.

"Well, I guess this is not important... I called you here since Heinz mentioned a few things to me... He told me that he didn't leave enough money for you. Is that true?" Headmaster Jean asked.

"..."

Kyle was momentarily speechless after hearing this. He didn't expect that they will be discussing how poor he was.

"Yes, Headmaster... He left me with ten thousand zen. I heard that it should be more than enough for my first three years here since most of the expenses will be covered by the Academy. Master Heinz also mentioned that I can start accepting a part-time job after my third year." Kyle replied.

"That's correct. The truth is... Heinz had an incredible contribution to the Academy before he left. I asked him for any rewards that he wanted... and he made two requests..."

As Headmaster Jean said this, Kyle felt that one of the requests was related to him. Otherwise, there is no point in bringing him here in the first.

He was right...

"He first requested to no longer be tied down by the Faction... I granted it. The second request is that I should give you an opportunity..." The Headmaster said as he showed an ominous smile.

Kyle recalled seeing this same smile when his shadow was taken from him.

"What opportunity, Headmaster Jean?" Kyle cautiously asked.

However, the Headmaster only maintained his smile and answered.

"I don't know... However, whatever opportunity it is, I can only give it to you once."

Kyle felt alarmed as he realized that this request is certainly an incredible thing. He's unsure what was about to happen to him in this academy... There are certainly plenty of opportunities here aside from the opportunities gained by attending classes.

If the headmaster assisted him in one of the most beneficial opportunities that can be gained in the Academy, it would certainly bring a huge change to him.

"If you have something in your mind you can tell me about it." The Headmaster asked.

"I can't think of anything yet, Headmaster. If I found any "opportunity", I will inform you immediately."

"Good... One last thing, Heinz mentioned that you have an interesting hobby that is quite similar to Professor Chalton of the Necromancy Department... If you don't mind, I can give you an opportunity to see my collection in my basement."

"..."

This time, Kyle was truly speechless and unable to react for a while. It took him a few seconds to process what he was trying to say...

'Master Heinz... You've really done it this time. You even mentioned that to the Headmaster...' Kyle could only sigh inwardly.

Nevertheless, he truly considered his offer for a moment... After all, the corpses in his collection might be extraordinary.

"I will think about it first, Headmaster. I need to consider it carefully since I can only receive one opportunity."

"Very well." Headmaster Jean expected this answer so he allowed him to take his time.

They ended their discussion here and Kyle simply returned to his dormitory room instead of walking around...

On the next day, all the first-year students including Kyle gathered at the auditorium to attend the entrance ceremony.

Chapter 54 Entrance Ceremony

The Entrance Ceremony started at eight in the morning at the Auditorium where all the first-year students gathered.

The Headmaster didn't even attend and it was only supervised by Deputy Headmaster Webclair.

During the entrance ceremony, Vale realized that it was only the Headmaster who doesn't like to be called by his last name for some reason. He wanted to be known as Jean and not Hoffman.

In any case, the Deputy Headmaster explained that the Entrance Ceremony should've been in the gymnasium. Unfortunately, an accident occurred and this has to be held in the Auditorium instead.

As for what accident occurred, Vale had no idea what it was.

The speech was quite precise detailing the Academy's mission to provide students access to quality education aside from the Dark Arts. Not only are they being prepared for the world of mysticism but also for the society.

After the speech, the Deputy Headmaster introduced the Representative of the First Year Students.

Apparently, she was recognized to be the most compatible in the Darkness Possession among all the students. During her "possession", she did not experience any pain or rejection in her body. It means that the higher-ups are expecting her to reach the apex of the Arcane Path...

Vale may have a "special physique" according to Mr. Heinz but it certainly can't compare to the physique of the Student Representative...

He then heard a few people whispering how she only had her eyes turn black for a couple of seconds before returning to normal.

'That was impressive then...' Vale thought as his gaze turned to the young blonde girl standing on the stage.

Perhaps due to the uniform, Vale could hardly see any difference from the female students aside from their hairstyle. The majority of the girls have blonde hair followed by those with red and brown. The minority, on the other hand, has black hair and could probably be counted on one hand.

Maya Featherstar completed her speech by ending it with a promise that she'll be a role model student for not only the first-year students but for the whole academy...

"I wonder if she was attacked recently because someone doesn't want her to be a student representative..." Vale muttered softly but unfortunately, the one next to him still heard him.

"Keke... You're quite behind with the news. Although the benefits of being the Student Representative are quite decent, it's not enticing enough for the other nobles to attack her. It was said that she was ambushed by the Masked Moguls..."

Vale shifted his gaze to the young man beside him. Although this young man should only be 13 or 14 years old like him, the aura coming from him was quite different. It was similar to the gangsters around the streets of Melthorn City.

This confused him for a bit as he entered his Phantasm State without being noticed.

As expected, this person had also entered the state and even dared to use some Dark Spell to shroud his body—

'Ahh... It's not a Dark Spell... Is it a Mystical Artifact?' Vale mused as he suddenly noticed that the amulet this person was wearing was causing the problem... He then canceled his Phantasm State as he answered the young man.

"I didn't know about that. It's also my first time hearing about the Masked Moguls."

At the very least, the Masked Moguls shouldn't be a special organization run by the 12 Factions or even the 5 Churches...

"We can talk about it later. I'm Chad Bulmung."

"Vale Chambers." Although Vale was curious about the amulet and the Masked Moguls, he didn't ask further as he simply introduced himself.

The two then nodded to each other and at the same time, the Deputy Headmaster finished his closing remarks as he allowed one of the male professors to get on the stage.

He didn't introduce himself and just spoke clearly to everyone.

"Ahem... I will be calling your names one by one as we will be assigning your class... For the First-Year Class 1 under Professor Saullon. Darryl Crane, Shannon Everett, Sheryl Price..."

The professor called all 120 students. Vale Chambers was sent to Class 2 and Chad Bulmung will be joining him as well. Unsurprisingly, the one assigned to their class was Stella Harwin.

Since there is a total of 120 new students, it was divided into four classes with 30 students each.

Vale was actually surprised at first that there are so many students today considering how deadly the Darkness Possession was.

However, he immediately recalled the various families that received the blessing of the... The Featherstar Family is just one of them.

According to the books he read, the founding members of the Dark Arts received some sort of "blessing" that allows them to see through the mysteries of the Arcane Path.

He's unaware of its specifics but knowing that they have an advantage is more than enough.

After the division of class was completed, the Professors led their students to their study classroom at the right wing building of the Academy.

Professor Stella Harwin appears quite amiable so almost all the students felt relaxed and comfortable as they chose their seats.

"I won't be assigning seats. You can take whichever seat is free. You can settle it by yourself." Professor Harwin said as she waited for everyone to find their seat...

Then she handed pamphlets to everyone.

"It is a complete detail of your scheduled subject and the professors assigned to them... As you can see, I will only be teaching two of the subjects there."

At this time, Vale also received a pamphlet with complete detail of their scheduled classes.

Chapter 55 Schedule

'Hmm? There are only morning classes?' Vale mused as he saw the scheduled subjects.

He is currently seated in the third row near the open window and beside him was Chad Bulmung.

The latter also has similar thoughts as he muttered softly...

"This is not even a whole day class... We have plenty of time during the afternoon."

On Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, there would be four classes.

Oardic and Soineti from 6 to 8 AM. Intermediate Arithmetic from 8 to 9 AM. Fundamentals of the Magic Zone from 9:30 to 11 AM, and Physical and Health Education from 11 AM to 1 PM.

On Tuesdays and Thursdays, there would be four classes as well.

Elementary Spirit Law from 6 to 8 AM. Basic Usage of Mystical Artifacts from 8 to 9 AM. Music and Arts from 9 to 10 AM and Darkness Path from 10:30 to 12:30 PM.

Finally, there is also a class on Saturdays and it's only in the afternoon.

It is Millton Kingdom's History from 1 PM to 2 PM and Essential Dark Spell from 2 PM to 4 PM.

'Why did they have to sneak in a schedule on Saturdays? Can't they just add it on Friday afternoon or any other weekday?' Vale frowned as he checked the daily schedule.

He didn't mind the number of classes but it doesn't seem properly distributed in his opinion.

'What are we going to do for the rest of the day then?'

As he reached his thoughts, Professor Harwin continued.

"There will be no classes for today. However, after you leave this room, you are obligated to visit the assembly hall and join any of the student clubs... Your seniors are waiting there right now. You have to enter any of the clubs within this week."

"Professor Harwin, can we join two or more clubs?" One of the female students asked.

"You can. However, you have to ensure that you'll be taking them seriously. Emily Gainet, are you planning to join two or more clubs?" Professor Harwin asked.

With this question, almost everyone glanced in Emily's direction.

This action seem to have put pressure on her as she stiffened for a moment before answering. "Not really, Professor. I just spoke to a few seniors a while ago and all of them are inviting me to join their club..."

Vale nodded after hearing this. Emily looks quite beautiful so it wasn't surprising that she was immediately recruited.

Professor Harwin wasn't surprised as well as she added... "You may only be first years but you already have a chance of earning contribution points. These points may not be useful in your first three years but when you accumulate plenty enough, you'll be benefiting a lot once you've stepped into your fourth year."

"May I ask what can we do with the contribution points?" A male student in front asked.

Professor Harwin didn't immediately answer as she creased her eyebrows while looking at the student.

"Alvin... Vendel, right?" She asked.

It seems that she was trying to recall everyone's name.

"You're correct, Professor."

"Mhmm... The contribution points would be very useful in your fourth year when you choose your branch of specialization. Of course, you don't have to think of it for now... That will still take quite some time. Many of you might even quit or be expelled in the first three years." Professor Harwin said with a knowing smile on her face.

"Ahh? We can be expelled?"

"I didn't hear about this... Isn't it enough to survive that Darkness Possession?"

"Professor, what are the grounds for expulsion?"

"Yes... We're curious. Can you please let us know?"

Almost everyone wasn't aware of this policy so they curiously asked the kind professor.

She didn't think too long since it is also one of the things she has to mention...

"I'm sure that you can easily guess the answer. You will be graded based on the results of your examinations, attendance, behavior, and a few more things as you finish your first year. There are written and practical examinations and all of this will greatly affect your final score. Failing most of them can lead to your expulsion... I'm telling you now that you may want to enjoy your academy life but ensure that you can pass all the requirements that the Academy is expecting of you."

She then paused for a moment before looking at a red-haired female student behind Vale.

"Lisa Grayback... Can you guess what other reasons can someone be expelled?"

After being asked, almost everyone glanced in her direction. Some were curious why she was specifically asked. As for the others, they simply wanted to admire her looks since she appears quite charming.

Lisa didn't expect to be asked as well. She unconsciously stood up after being called as her mind raced to find an answer.

"I think we can also be expelled if we disregard the Academy Rules. One of them is regarding violence... There's also about bullying, stealing, or even unsupervised ritual. We are not allowed to summon a mysterious existence through a ritual... unless a professor or someone with authority is watching."

Professor Stella Harwin nodded. She was satisfied with this answer as she allowed Lisa to take a seat.

"Well said... These Academy Rules are written on a stele at the entrance of the Academy's main hall. You may want to check it if you have some time."

Noticing that no one has other questions, the Professor continued.

"Lisa Grayback is the only student who passed the Public Recruitment in the southern region of the kingdom. She's expecting a lot from you who had a deeper background in the world of mysticism so I hope that you won't disappoint her."

Chapter 56 Student Clubs

'The only student who passed the public recruitment?' Vale repeated in his mind as he recalled his last year's attempt to enroll.

Lisa certainly achieved an impressive feat and everyone in the classroom knows this as well. If she has a common background, it means that she drank the Darkness Possession potion which has a very high chance of death.

For them, the act of force-feeding the potion may have been acceptable if they are still in a state of war against the other "righteous" factions but it is different now. During that time, according to their parents or elders, they would have to "collect" various children from many towns and cities to have them drink the deadly Darkness Possession. No one thinks too much about its danger since they are at war.

They would turn these people into their elite soldiers after nurturing them for years... if they ever survived.

However, now that they are in a peaceful era, these unnecessary deaths can be avoided if they have an expert on their side.

In short, no one really thinks that people would still think of enrolling in this academy unless they have some background in the Darkness Arcane Path.

The looks given at her were mixed. Some pity her, some were curious, some with disdain like she was dirty, and a few were uninterested.

'Professor, you're trying to get her into trouble, aren't you?' Vale was quite surprised but he didn't speak.

Lisa sat down as she felt everyone's burning gaze. It seems that they have plenty of questions in their minds and were just waiting for Professor Harwin to leave so they can start talking to her.

To be honest, she was also shocked after hearing the professor's words. She didn't think she was alone.

After all, there are a total of 30 students here. She was expecting that other public recruitment or enrollment sites were able to invite a few people...

However, it appears that she had greatly underestimated herself.

'Am I that special?' Lisa asked herself.

"You're amazing... Does it mean that you haven't learned how to create your Magic Zone?" Chad Bulmung asked in a soft voice.

"Magic Zone?" Lisa repeated.

At this question, Vale and the others know that she's a complete noob about this.

In any case, this is the reason why she's in the academy. She can easily learn about all the basics so even if they have an advantage today, it will only help them in the first two years in the academy.

"Let's talk about it later. Let's be friends..." Another female student beside Lisa said in excitement... She looks at Lisa like a rare species as she made up her mind in befriending her.

Professor Harwin then cleared her throat to get everyone's attention.

"Ahem... That's all for me. I would normally ask everyone to introduce yourselves to each other but you'll be doing it in another class. That's Elementary Spirit Law tomorrow and I'm assigned to that subject as well. We will be checking your Spirit Strands at the same time." She then paused for a moment as she looked at everyone's reaction. Seeing that no one is upset that they didn't get to introduce themselves today, she continued.

"You can now visit the Assembly Hall. You have a week to select a club so make sure you visit all possible clubs that you may like before joining them."

After saying this, she left the classroom leaving the students to their own devices.

A group naturally formed to those who are seated close to each other.

Some were excited about tomorrow's Spirit Strand test while others are discussing the club they wanted to join.

Needless to say, Vale easily grouped up with Chad, Lisa, and Aubrey, the girl seated next to Lisa.

A few classmates wanted to talk to Lisa but seeing that she already formed a group, they silently backed out.

"Guys, are you going to visit the Assembly Hall now?" Another student close to them asked.

His round face and plump body would make everyone remember his name.

"Yes... You're Blair Etton, right? Do you want to join us?" Chad asked as he showed his smile.

"Thank you! I want to join a specific club... However, I don't think I can do it alone."

Vale was curious as he followed up with a question.

"What club is it?"

After hearing the question, Blair's eyes lit up as he immediately introduced the club he was interested in.

"It's the Variant Research Club. It's a club aiming to strengthen the current versions of Variants and even discover the third type. I heard that they already made progress. As you know, most of the Variants are from male body parts. I want to help them to make a female version... Female Variants are the best. If money is their only problem---"

Clap! Clap! Clap!

Before he can finish his words, a few students started clapping as someone stood in front of everyone. He has short blond hair, a sharp nose, and brown eyes like many others...

Vale couldn't recall who he was but he didn't seem nervous standing in there. It appears that he was used to attracting attention.

After clearing his throat, their classmate started his agenda.

"You probably all know who I am. However, I will still introduce myself. I'm Neil Somerhalder. Yes... I'm from the Somerhalder County."

Vale had no idea who he was. However, some of his classmates were surprised at this young man's identity... Chad Bulwung even reacted with an explanation.

"I thought I only misheard the professor a while ago... So it's really the Somerhalder of the Rune Arts Faction... I wonder how were you able to attend here?"

"Interesting... 'A Somerhalder Learning The Dark Arts: Is he a Spy or an Exile?' I think that it's quite a good headline."

Jody Lumbarde, a female student with short red hair commented after hearing his introduction. It seems that she's planning to join the Academy's Publication Club or something similar.

Neil didn't mind her words. He was glad to be recognized by his fellow classmates so he nodded proudly and continued with his speech.

Chapter 57 Assembly Hall

"That's right... My family sent me here after learning that I have better talents in the Dark Arts. I'm also speaking in front of you today to invite you all to the Survivors Club... It's a Club currently led by two eight-year students. They need young elites like us to continue their groundbreaking research. If you join me, not only you'll learn advanced knowledge from our seniors but I can also share some knowledge regarding the Rune Arts... If you're not convinced, visit me in the Seven Pillars Garden..."

Neil may have charisma thanks to his good looks and obvious confidence, but his classmates weren't easily convinced. Furthermore, he didn't even give a proper introduction to that student club.

Although most of the students in Class 2 aren't nobles, they come from a family with a background in the Dark Arts.

In short, they already have vague ideas about the clubs they wanted to join.

Even if a son of an earl stood in front of them and invited them to join a club, they wouldn't necessarily follow their words.

Nevertheless, Neil was still able to convince five boys in his group. These five weren't from the Kingdom's nobility but their families were still quite influential.

According to Chad, those five were connected to the families under the Necromancy Branch of the Dark Arts Faction.

"Does it mean that the Survivors Club is related to Necromancy Branch?" Vale asked after recognizing that their decision to join seemed to be connected to the branch their families came from.

"You're right... I'm not too sure but the Survivors Club seemed to be researching a better way of extending life through the same theory used by some Necromancer... I'm not really sure."

This time, it was Blair Etton who answered.

As for Lisa, she's just listening on the side. She doesn't have any ideas about the branches of the Dark Arts Faction and the families involved in this.

"Let's not care about them then... Let's find a suitable club quickly... We don't have afternoon classes so it'll be boring if we just return to our dorm every day." Aubrey added as she urged everyone.

As Neil and his team left, some groups also started leaving so Vale naturally agreed to her suggestion.

The assembly hall was bigger than the auditorium so this is probably the best place to gather all students from all academic years.

As soon as Vale's group entered, they felt like they were in a fanfare. Plenty of seniors were trying to call for the freshmen to consider joining their club.

"We are the Reader's Hub... Consider joining us if you want to be together with people with the same hobby. Ahem... This club is supervised by Professor Elnora White, the most beautiful Practitioner of the Dark Arts!"

"Join the Oardic Translation Club if you have the skills... You can earn contribution points every month. However, you have to pass your 'Oardic and Soineti' subject first... We will wait for you next year... You can always change your Club in the first three years so consider joining us by then. For now, you can play around in other pathetic clubs like Reader's Hub, Writer's Cave, and Seeding Soil Starters."

"If you want to study the brain, join the Brain Teaser's Club. We receive fresh brains monthly for research purposes."

"We're the Self-Defense Club... In your third year, your Physical and Health Education will focus on sports and self-defense. Consider joining so you'll be accustomed to such activities."

It is completely different from Vale's expectations.

He thought that since this was the Academy of the Dark Arts, the place should be gloomy, creepy, and filled with weird people who probably wanted to summon an evil existence.

Well, he didn't have much experience with the Academy students. The one with Lesley and the third-year scumbags left a bad impression on him.

However, now that he looked and listened at them, they seem quite normal... Perhaps, the exception was the Brain Teaser's Club since they were hinting that it's a Human Brain and not some sort of animal! It was quite disturbing for him...

'I'll consider it if it's a whole corpse...'

"Cough... Cough..." Vale immediately erased that idea as he doesn't want to make another misunderstanding.

"Hmm? Did you already make a choice? Let me remind you, what the guy in the translation club said is only a half-truth... We can indeed change clubs any time within the first three years but it can only be done twice." Chad said after noticing Vale's reaction.

"I have no plans of joining any clubs yet... However, thank you for reminding me about that rule... Let's follow Blair first. He mentioned that he wanted to join the Variant Research Club, right? Should we check it first?" Vale replied as he shifted the topic to their plump classmate.

"Sure! I'm also quite curious about this... Lisa, have you seen the Variants already?" Aubrey asked...

At this question, everyone noticed how the latter suddenly paled. It seems that she had recalled her first encounter with the Variant.

"The Variant... is that scary undead, right?" She asked.

Vale smiled at this as he answered. "Yes... But they're not undead. They're not products of Necromancy but Dark Alchemy."

He explained it similarly to how Mr. Heinz explained it to him.

Lisa was doubtful at his words but since the others supported Vale's claim, she can only accept the truth...

'Those Variants are living? Isn't that too cruel? It's probably better to die than to turn into something like that...'

Lisa can only pity them inwardly as she looked at Blair, who wanted a female version of it, with a complicated gaze.

Chapter 58 Club's Mission

Blair noticed her gaze but he decided to ignore it. In any case, he believed that this is an accepted practice among the Dark Arts practitioners so there is nothing to feel guilty for.

"They should be at Stall No. 22. Let's go..." Blair said as they passed over a few stalls made by various clubs.

There were many normal clubs like those related to cooking, music, and even tea enthusiast's club. Vale even saw a Fortune Telling Club. As far as he remembers, there shouldn't be a branch of Dark Arts that is close to divination or fortune-telling...

Well, there is a ritual to learn how many years a person has left before he dies. However, that requires a high-level ritual that must be done with expensive sacrifices and no normal student can do that.

Soon, their small group arrived in front of Stall No. 22, the Variant Research Club.

There is a table and a couple of students who were playing chess on it... They didn't seem interested in recruiting freshmen so it surprised the group momentarily...

"Excuse me. I'm a freshman student. May I ask if you guys are recruiting?" Blair was extremely polite as he interrupted the two students who are playing.

The two didn't realize that there are people in front of their stall so they were a bit flustered and immediately cleaned up the table.

They were not expecting that someone would actually think of joining their club!

"Y-yes... Did you make a mistake? Read the poster we placed again. This is the Variant Research Club. We research Variants most of the time in an operating table. It's filled with blood and can be a bit disgusting for weak girls and boys. You have to consider this carefully."

"That's right... We're trying to make various improvements and it can't be done by just giving theoretical papers. We would do it in a literal sense..."

The two seniors were seriously warning them! They're completely unlike the students of other clubs.

Their trustworthiness immediately increased, especially to Blair who was still hesitant until now.

"Great! I knew it! That's how it's supposed to be... I thought that you guys are just thinking of formulating theoretical papers and submitting them to the Dark Alchemy Faction to be tested... I'm relieved." Blaire truly sighed in relief after hearing their explanation.

It appears that he wanted to confirm this before joining this club.

The two members of the club were happy upon hearing this as they looked at Lisa and Aubrey...

"Yes! We're really doing it. However, since you are only first years students, you can only assist or watch us do the practical thing. Of course, we can give you a live experience in your third year. Is that alright? I can help you sign your names now."

"That's right! Next week, there will be a dissection and it will be done by a few sixth-year seniors under the professor's watch... It's a special activity done in our club. If you join now, I will let you watch them in the gallery. Ahem, may I ask for your names?"

Realizing that they were mistaken to be interested in the club, Aubrey and Lisa immediately shook their heads and said.

"No. I'm not interested. We're just coming along with our classmate."

"Me too." Lisa meekly said as she even stepped back for a bit.

The two recruiters didn't hide their disappointment after hearing the two.

"Is that so... I hope that we can still be friends. May I ask what class are you in?"

"You can still consider joining us if you can't find other clubs that suit your interest..."

Blair decided to interrupt them at this point. He even raised his double chin as he spoke proudly.

"Ahem. I'm the only one who wanted to join the club. But I still have a few questions. I wanted to know the name of the adviser of the club. How many members are there? Can I gain Contribution points here? What kind of path are taking in strengthening your Variants?"

His questions go on and on so Chad immediately interrupted...

"Since our friend has found the club he was looking for... We will be leaving now. We also need to find our clubs."

Blair immediately thanked everyone for accompanying him.

Then, in the next hour or two, the others also found the clubs they wanted to join except for Vale.

Lisa Grayback wanted to join the Reader's Hub since she needed plenty of knowledge.

Unfortunately, after learning that the Reader's Hub focused on reading romance, adventure, and detective novels, she's considering joining the Library Committee instead.

Apparently, the Student Clubs were either made by a group of students after getting an adviser or made by the academy itself.

The difference in this is that the student-made clubs require a professor or an adviser to be established, while the academy-made is not.

Anyway, she's planning to observe the Library Committee for a couple of days before applying for it.

Aubrey Hall, on the other hand, was planning to join the Board Game Club!

Vale was actually curious why board games have their own Club in the Vermont Academy of Dark Arts.

Lisa also had the same thoughts as she knows one of the board games on the table. It is the Rack and Ruin that the Headmaster plays in his office.

"Isn't this game for the gamblers?" Lisa asked curiously.

Chad only smiled as he explained with a smile.

"Well, any game can be used by gamblers. Just think of it as some sort of entertainment. Who knows, it might be useful when we're doing missions outside the Academy someday."

The female member of the Board Game Club heard this and immediately agreed.

She clasped her hands and looked at Chad with a beaming smile.

"You're right! Many of the student clubs are aiming for that in the first place. The era has now changed, those of us who are treading the Arcane Path must learn how to blend into society... This board game will do just that!"

Chapter 59 Ranker

Vale nodded at the reasonable explanation from the female student. However, he didn't expect that Aubrey would have such a hobby...

He was initially expecting that she would join the Tea Appreciation Club since she was looking at their stall for quite a long time.

"Ahh... I'm going to look for a different club. Are you coming with us, Aubrey?" Chad asked with a flustered face.

After being approached by the excited female student from the Board Game Club, he seemed to be panicking for a bit and it didn't escape Vale's eyes.

"Yes... I'll check this place again on the last day to submit my application form. I'm not in a hurry."

After they left the stall, Chad lead the group to a crowded stall.

There were about a dozen students surrounding this stall so Vale couldn't help but be curious.

"What club is this?" Vale curiously asked as he can't see the poster in front.

"It's the Ranker's Club..." Chad answered as he looked at the group of students queuing up. He recognize that most of them were from Class 1...

"Ranker's Club? Interesting... Even that guy is planning to join. What does this club do?" Aubrey asked as she saw a familiar person.

Chad followed her gaze and realized who she was referring to...

"So even Wilfred Moontomb is planning to join this club. I guess I'll be looking for another club." Chad wryly smiled as he realized that too many students are planning to join.

As far as he knows, the club only accepts 3 students per year to join their club. Furthermore, there will be a series of tests that you needed to pass in order to be accepted.

Aside from Wilfred, Chad also noticed a few guys who are from noble families.

"Ahem... What does the Ranker's Club do?" Vale repeated Aubrey's question.

This time, however, someone answered before Chad could reply.

"It's a club aiming to be part of the Evanescent Vessels. Joining it won't guarantee your acceptance in the Order but it gives you a higher chance."

At this sudden answer, not only Vale's group surprised but also a few students around them.

This familiar voice was definitely from Maya Featherstar!

Vale immediately looked behind him and confirmed that he was right.

"Thank you for answering..." Vale replied with a gentle nod. Although he still has a few questions, he realized that the entourage of girls behind Maya was also looking at him with pressuring gaze.

On the other hand, Chad Bulmung was excited after seeing her closely.

"Are you also planning to join the Ranker's Club?"

Maya pursed her lips as she turned her gaze to the crowded stall before shaking her head...

"Not anymore..." With that said, Vale noticed that she looked at him once more before leaving to visit another club.

"Vale, do you know each other?" Aubrey softly asked as she also noticed the profound glance that Maya gave him.

"No... It's my first time talking to her." Vale answered.

'Wait, did she see me observing her that time at the town?' Vale thought but he immediately shook his head. He must be overthinking it. He was too far from the site of the incident and Maya's magic zone shouldn't reach him from that distance.

"Also, she's the student representative of the first year. She should be in the Student Council, right?" Vale added.

Although he wasn't sure what the benefits she'll get from the Student Council, he knows that it is better than what the Ranker's Club can offer.

"That's right... However, they're still allowed to join other Clubs since the student council shouldn't be that busy this time of the year." Chad added as he looked at Maya's back once more before shifting his gaze to the crowded stall.

"Well, she probably just wants to talk to you, Vale." Lisa added as she slowly felt comfortable with the group.

"Let's stop talking about her... What are your plans now? Haven't you found any club yet? What are your hobbies anyway? Perhaps we can help you find." Aubrey asked Vale.

"I just want a club that will not be too tiring... Even if it is, I want something that could hone my skills." Vale answered after some thought.

"Then the Ranker's Club is suited for you... The Credence and Ethics Committee is possible as well. Since you're from Chambers Family, you probably have two Dark Spells already. You can apply to those two." Chad suggested.

Aubrey nodded at this agreeing to his suggestion.

However, as they were walking around, another recruiter heard their conversation and immediately joined in.

"Heh... The Ethics Committee has a high requirement since they're tasked to maintain peace and order within the Academy. You can call them the academy police. Don't bother applying to it unless you're in the third year. I think you can consider joining our club instead. It's the Spirit Crafter Club."

It was from another student that was taller than Vale. He has a kind, gentle face and seemed a very approachable person. It was no wonder he was tasked to be the recruiter for their club.

"I'm Wade Saxon... I'm a sixth-year student and currently the Vice-President of the Club. Spirit Crafting may not be useful for you until you're in your third year but I assure you that you'll like it..."

Vale was intrigued by this including the others beside him. They didn't mind him suddenly joining their conversation as Vale asked a few questions.

"It's my first time hearing about Spirit Crafting, what does your club do? And what's the requirement to join this Club?"

Wade smiled after realizing Vale's interest but before he could answer, something happened at the stall of the Ranker's Club.

Several gasps and exclamations were heard...

Then, one of the fifth-year recruiters of Ranker's Club said in surprise.

"Great! Wilfred Moontomb, you deserve to be a member of our club... Having two high-grade Dark Spells before you even enter the Academy... I'm impressed."

Chapter 60 Undecided

Vale was curious about the Dark Spells that Wilfred learned... Thankfully, Wilfred's companions seemed to notice that the surrounding students had taken interest in their matter.

With a deliberate increase in their voices, they also started praising their incredible classmate.

"You're the best, Wilfred. I think even Maya won't have such great Dark Spells. It is actually the Spectral Hands! I heard that you'll need at least eight Spirit Strands before you can even attempt it!"

"Indeed... I believe that you should have been the Student Representative. Spectral Hands and Fear Stream. The combination of these two will surely put you on top of all the first-year students."

Wilfred was certainly glad after hearing his classmate's praise. He was indeed disappointed that he wasn't selected as the student representative. However, since his goal for coming here isn't as simple as being part of the Student Council, he didn't take it to heart and moved on quite quickly...

What he really wanted was to get closer to the Order of the Evanescent Vessels and learn even a bit of their secrets.

"Thank you... I will be working hard as a member of the Ranker's Club..." Wilfred said to his senior before glancing at the crowd who was curious about him.

As soon as his eyes landed on a few cute girls, his smile widened even more as he acted cool while fixing the collar of his uniform.

In the meantime, Vale's group was also quite impressed with the two skills Wilfred learned. Only Lisa was clueless about it.

"Spectral Hands and Fear Stream is indeed at the higher end of the First Tier Dark Spells. As expected of a seedling from the Founding Members of the Dark Arts Faction."

Chad Bulmung commented like an experienced old man as he touched his chin. His mind filled with thoughts.

"With those two Dark Spells, I think he has already planned all his future Dark Spells..." Vale commented as he also knows that those two Dark Spells will really work well together.

Unfortunately, it has a high requirement so not everyone can think of having these spells in the early stage.

However, if you're in the late stage already, you wouldn't really select this Dark Spell anymore.

Since the number of Spell Models that a spellcaster can create is limited, no one would pick several First Tier Dark Spells as their Spell Model composition... If they grow stronger, they would consider Second Tier Dark Spells and wouldn't pick high-end First Tier for sure.

"Tomorrow, there will be a Spirit Strand Test on everyone... I believe Lisa doesn't have a single spell model yet... If you reached five spirit strands, I will suggest a good Dark Spell for you. You can learn it easily and it's also strong." Aubrey said with a smile.

She doesn't seem to care about Wilfred's matter and was thinking of something else.

Lisa was still a bit unsure but she was not an idiot either. She can vaguely tell that the selection of Dark Spells is very important.

After considering for a moment, she probed Aubrey... "Can I ask if it's possible to do it after a few years when I've learned enough?"

Since selecting a Dark Spell is important, she wanted to select them on her own... After all, even though Aubrey seems very kind, they only know each other a few hours ago.

There was no way she could trust her future on her.

However, as soon as she asked this, she felt she was scolded.

"No!"

Aubrey, Chad, and even Wade Saxon of the Spirit Crafters Club answered in unison frightening her for a moment.

The three looked at each other for a moment before letting Aubrey explain the reason why.

"It will be very difficult to enter the Phantasm State if you're already 16 years old. That's a requirement to have a Dark Spell. If you're creating a Spell Model at that age, you will require an expert's assistance to do it for you. That's a difficult thing even for the experts so no one would do it unless you pay them a hefty sum."

At this explanation, Lisa's eyes lit up.

"No wonder 13, 14, and 15 years old have a chance of being accepted as a First Year Student of the Academy. That made sense!"

She was previously curious why all the Arcane Academies were accepting these ages in one group. It was for this reason all along!

'So there is a disadvantage if you start stepping into the Arcane Path at an older age.'

"Thank you for informing me. I will certainly take your suggestions for my first dark spells..." Lisa added. She felt a bit excited learning about the Dark Spells and couldn't help but look forward to tomorrow's Spirit Strand Test.

In the end, Vale and Chad were undecided about the club they wanted to join. They can only delay their selection and check the Assembly Hall again tomorrow after their class. This event is open for the whole week anyway.

At the very least, they visited all the open stalls in the Assembly Hall. Although according to Chad, other Clubs didn't come to the Assembly Hall for some reason so they didn't see all the clubs yet.

Perhaps, their requirement is too high or they already have plenty of members. There is also a chance that they were just lazy and had forgotten the recruitment today.

Click...

After Vale entered the seventh room in the dormitory, he realized that his roommates were still out. They might still be in the Assembly Hall or still eating at the cafeteria so he didn't think too much of it.

On his bed, Vale was still thinking of the club he'll be joining...

"The Battle Arena Committee is good since I'll see plenty of battle techniques... The Spirit Crafters Club is interesting since there will be plenty of mystical artifacts... As for the Club that seems to deal with human corpses, there is only the Survivor's Club, Spirit Body Research Club, and the Underworld Prier Club..."