

Endless Leveling Done Right!

Chapter 46: An Opportunity Rather Than A Disaster

Poke

"Nghh..."

"Poke* *Poke*

"Dim Dim... Can you please stop poking my nose?"

As Alex slowly opened his eyes, he was half expecting to see the Dim Sum God's usual smile.

However, the Dim Sum God had a rare solemn expression on its face, which made Alex believe that something was wrong.

Glancing at his surroundings, he noticed that he wasn't at the camp where he had slept for the night.

"Did we get separated after the first floor changed its surroundings?" Alex asked.

"Dim!" Dim Dim nodded.

Despite the situation, the young man didn't panic and simply stood up and looked around his new environment.

He seemed to be inside some sort of cave, and the exit was only a few meters away from him.

"Let's go, Dim Dim," Alex said as he picked up the Dim Sum God and placed it on top of his head.

He then walked toward the exit so he could regroup with the others.

However, what he saw outside the cave wasn't the familiar forest area, which was the main feature of the first and second floors.

"This is..." Alex was suddenly hit with a bad premonition, so he hastily opened his map to check his current location.

< Third Floor of the Etherion Domain - Scorched Barrens >

These barrens had once been a green plain until a fire god's rage had scorched the land.

The ruins had belonged to the Sulari Flamecallers, a vanished tribe which had tried to harness the fire deity's power but had been consumed by it.

Monsters: Ash Hounds (Peak Rank 1), Flame Scarabs (Peak Rank 1), Cinder Wing Vulture (Peak Rank 1), Flame Salamanders (Rank 2).

'Sh*t,' Alex cursed internally after he confirmed that his hunch was correct.

Now he understood why Dim Dim looked worried earlier. It wasn't because they had gotten separated from their group.

No.

It was worried because they had gotten separated from the Catkins by two freaking floors!

"Dim Dim, this is bad," Alex said with a grim expression on his face.

"Dim." Dim Dim nodded.

The young man believed he still stood a chance against the Rank 1 Monsters. After all, he had battled a fair share of them by now.

But the flame salamanders were bad news.

These lizards were as big as komodo dragons and could unleash Fire Bullets from twenty meters away.

But that wasn't all. These salamanders were also very agile and could run fast for a long period of time, making them an absolute menace.

'I think this is what it means to be stuck between a rock and a hard place.' Alex sighed.

In front of him was a domain where a few fire salamanders lived.

But if he tried to return to the second floor, he would be facing the mutant jumping spider that had made the Rank 3 dire bear look harmless in comparison.

Most importantly, the path leading to the first floor had been sealed shut and wouldn't open until two days later.

In other words, it wasn't impossible for Alex to regroup with the Catkins. However, he would have to wait for a day and a half and, most importantly, miraculously get past the Boss Monster.

While the young man was wondering what his next move should be, he heard a voice inside his head.

"Disciple, what are you doing on the third floor?"

Everyone in the secret room had been paying close attention to the teenagers stuck inside the domain.

But Ramza had been drained from the effort of protecting kids a few hours ago, so he had retired for the night to recover his strength.

In his place, Cairo stood watch and monitored Alex and the other Catkins.

When he realized that his disciple was now on the third floor, he didn't hesitate to use the artifact left by his grandfather to make contact with the young man.

"Master, I don't know how I got here," Alex replied. "I assumed I would remain on the first floor even after it changed at midnight. I only realised I was wrong after I woke up and found myself here."

"I don't know if you were really born under an unlucky star, but this is the first time such an incident has happened," Cairo commented.

Alex smiled bitterly as his master's words hit him where it hurt.

It wasn't that he had bad luck.

His life simply had its difficulty setting literally set to Hell Mode!

"Listen, I will tell you more about the Scorched Barrens," Cairo continued. "First off, the fire salamanders usually wander around the center of the domain. If you avoid that area, the chances of encountering one are very low.

"Of course, if you have bad luck, then expect to encounter one wherever you go."

"Master, didn't I tell you not to raise any flags?" Alex facepalmed. He didn't know if his master intended to calm him down, but whatever the intention, the latter's words only made him more anxious.

"Don't be a pessimist," Cairo consoled. "In fact, I will tell you some good news. The third floor's exit is fixed, so all you need to do is head east, and you will find it.

"Also, we have two guardian golems that safeguard that place. They are meant to stop any Catkins from trying to challenge the third floor. So, if ever you face any of those salamanders, you can run towards the golems, and they will protect you from them."

The moment he heard the words "guardian golems," Alex finally let out a breath he didn't know he had been holding.

He was familiar with these golems because they were Rank 3 Monsters that were often seen in dungeons that had owners.

"Master, can you order those golems to go to the second floor and fight that jumping spider?" Alex asked.

"I can't," Cairo replied. "My grandfather has to enter the domain himself to give them new orders. The last thing he told them was to not harm the trial participants and to make sure no Catkins wandered to the third floor.

"The bracelets given to you and the others let the golems know that you are trial takers. As such, they will not hurt you.

"But since you're not a Catkin, they are also not obligated to forcibly send you back to the second floor. Also, those golems are just slightly stronger than a dire bear. With that giant spider's speed, even two of them won't be able to land a hit."

"Even if they can't land a hit, they can at least act as tanks, right?" Alex asked. "That will give us an opportunity to land a blow on the Boss Monster's body."

"True. But like I said, only the owner of the domain, my grandfather, can order the golems," Cairo stated. "They won't move from their spot unless their master commands them to."

Suddenly, a flash of inspiration appeared inside Alex's mind.

"Master, you said that the golems and the path that leads to the second floor are in the east, right?" Alex inquired.

"That's right," Cairo confirmed.

A plan was starting to form inside Alex's mind, making his current situation seem more like an opportunity rather than a disaster.

With a destination in mind, the young man headed east.

However, he hadn't wandered off for long before he encountered one of the monsters that commonly appeared inside the Scorched Barrens.

< Ash Hound >

Monster Rank: Rank 1 Monster (Peak)

Monster Grade: Common

Health: 130 / 130

Attack: 20 - 30

Note: They say each ash hound carries the soul of a fallen soldier, its bark a war cry lost in flame. The battlefield has never ended for them; it just burns forever.

The red hound didn't hesitate to lunge in the direction of Alex, who had already summoned his sword and shield.

He knew that his journey would not be an easy one.

But as long as he didn't meet any flame salamanders on the way, he was confident that he could turn any adversary he met along the way into experience points that would only strengthen him.

Chapter 47: Playing With Fire [Part 1]

The sound of an explosion spread through the surroundings as a flame scarab burst into flames.

"I hate monsters with suicidal abilities." Alex wiped the sweat on his forehead. That was really close. The flame scarab's detonation had nearly hit him at point-blank range.

Two of them had teamed up to fight him at once. Although he had killed one of them fast enough, he had been too hard-pressed to deal with the other on time, and the scarabs had nearly succeeded in their kamikaze attack.

Flame scarabs were around one meter long, could fly, and liked to detonate their bodies whenever they were close to death.

That was why they must be killed as fast as possible.

"Dim!" Dim Dim shouted, warning Alex as the explosion had caught the attention of the other nearby scarabs, who were now flying in their direction.

"Sh*t!" Alex cursed aloud before running away as fast as he could.

Fighting two at once had already been hard enough, yet three times as many were headed in his direction.

Fortunately, they couldn't fly for a very long time. Sure enough, they gave up after a two-minute pursuit.

But that didn't mean Alex was safe. Before the young man could even catch his breath, he heard a growl from his right. When he turned, he found an ash hound charging at him with bloodshot eyes.

This time, Alex didn't run away. Instead, he welcomed the approaching monster with his shield and sword.

After fighting a handful of ash hounds along the way, he had already gotten used to their pretty straightforward attack patterns.

Charge, lunge, and bite.

It hadn't taken Alex much time to develop a simple strategy, which was very effective against these bastards with strong barks but weak bites.

"Shield Bash!" he shouted as he bashed his shield on the ash hound's head, creating a dull sound upon collision.

Of course, he didn't really have the Shield Bash Skill, a very common skill for Tankers in ELO.

However, that didn't stop him from using his shield to bash the dog's head, stopping its advance, before following up with three sword strikes to finish it off.

[Level Up!]

The young man panted for breath for nearly a minute before picking up the monster core that had dropped after the ash hound's death.

He then opened his status page and dumped one stat point to Strength, then added the rest to Agility.

Alex Stratos

Age: 17

Mana: (N/A)

Job Class: (N/A)

Strength - 25

Intelligence - 17

Dexterity - 10

Agility - 42

Constitution - 39

Stamina - 39

Magic - 0

Luck - 4

Available Stat Points: 0

AP: 240

Active Skills: (N/A)

Passive Skills: Improved Stone Throw, Head Shot.

[Difficulty Level: Hell Mode]

"Looking good." Alex smiled faintly. His plan to farm experience points had only just begun.

After another two hours of travel, the young man finally arrived at his destination.

'Those must be the guardian golems Master mentioned earlier,' Alex realized.

The two golems were red in color and seemed to be made of rocks. As Alex's gaze landed on them, their information appeared in a blue window screen.

< Guardian Golem >

Monster Rank: Rank 3 Monster

Monster Grade: Uncommon

Health: 800 / 800

Attack: 70 - 90

Note: They were built to protect, not to question. Long after kings have turned to dust and empires have crumbled, they still guard doors no one remembers.

Although he was feeling anxious, Alex decided to test whether the golems would really not hurt him.

The core of his strategy would revolve around them, so if they treated him as an ally, then his plan might just work.

"Um, hi guys?" Alex said as he stood in front of the two golems, who remained in place.

They turned their heads in his direction for a moment before turning their eyes back to the Scorched Barrens, watching closely for any signs of the enemy.

Feeling a little bolder, Alex moved closer and reached out to touch a golem's foot to see if it would react to him.

Seeing that the golem didn't even bother to push him away, Alex decided to sit on its foot.

When that didn't even get a reaction from it, he asked Dim Dim to see if the golem would react to it.

Treating this as some sort of challenge, Dim Dim crawled all the way up the golem's body to its head.

"Dim Dim!" Dim Dim shouted, as if declaring that he had completed the challenge.

"Good." Alex nodded. "Now, come back. We will proceed as planned."

"Dim." Dim Dim nodded and crawled back down.

Now that he had confirmed that the golems didn't treat him as a hostile threat, Alex decided to continue with his plan.

"Dim Dim, can you tell me where the fire salamanders are?"

"Dim!"

The Dim Sum God then pointed in a direction where the nearest Rank 2 Monster was located.

Alex then picked up the little guy and headed in that direction.

Twenty minutes later, the young man finally saw the monster he was looking for.

< Flame Salamander >

Monster Rank: Rank 2 Monster

Monster Grade: Common

Health: 320/320

Attack: 40 - 60

Note: Some say it's just a lizard with a bad attitude and an even worse temper. Others swear it's a fire spirit sent to ruin your day. Either way, don't get too close unless you want to play with fire.

'Lucky! It's alone,' Alex thought as he eyed the monster behind a boulder. 'I just hope I can dodge its Fire Bullets.'

The three-meter-long fire salamander had jet-black skin adorned with bright yellow markings.

Its body is smooth and slightly glossy, often appearing slick with moisture due to its preference for hot environments.

The vibrant yellow patterns vary greatly between individuals, ranging from speckles and blotches to bold stripes

This made each fire salamander uniquely marked, like a living ember etched in ink.

Gritting his teeth, Alex took out a stone from his storage ring and threw it at the monster that seemed to be taking a nap.

The stone bounced off the monster's head, dealing one damage.

However, that was enough to provoke the flame salamander, who immediately made its anger known by hissing loudly.

The moment its gaze locked on Alex, it didn't hesitate to unleash Fire Bullets in the young man's direction.

Knowing that the moment of truth had arrived, the young man hurriedly hid himself behind the boulder.

The sound of the explosion spread as the fire salamander bombarded the boulder in anger, chipping parts of it with every shot.

When it realized that the boulder wouldn't be destroyed anytime soon, it angrily crawled toward the boulder so it could tear the young man apart with its claws.

But when it looked behind the boulder, the young man was no longer there.

Hissing furiously, it scanned its surroundings and finally saw Alex running eastward.

"Come here, ugly!" Alex shouted. "Or are you too weak to follow m—ooof!"

The young man wasn't able to finish whatever it was going to say because the fire salamander began bombarding him with Fire Bullets that were as fast as baseballs thrown by a professional pitcher.

Fortunately, they weren't insanely fast, so Alex could still react to it.

He dodged what he could, but the fire salamander did something tricky and unleashed two Fire Bullets in quick succession, aiming for the place where it assumed Alex would dodge.

And just as it expected, Alex did move in that direction.

Left with no other alternative, he raised Svalinn to block the Fire Bullet and braced for impact.

A dull thud reached Alex's ears, but that was it.

He wasn't blown away, didn't feel his arm growing numb, nor did he suffer any injuries from tanking the blow.

Perhaps the fire salamander was also surprised by this outcome because it completely stopped its attacks.

The two stared at each other in disbelief before the young man coughed lightly.

"Can you do that again?" Alex asked.

As if agreeing to the request, the fire salamander once again unleashed a Fire Bullet in the young man's direction.

This time, Alex didn't run away and braced himself for impact.

But just like what had happened earlier, the Fire Bullet simply turned into sparks the moment it collided with Svalinn.

After confirming that he really hadn't received any damage from the attack, Alex and Dim Dim both smiled evilly at the same time.

"Kukuku!" he chuckled like a second-rate villain before storing his sword back into his storage ring.

He then took out one of his brittle vials and charged at the fire salamander, whose main source of damage—its magical fire attack—was completely negated by the round, black shield in the young man's hand.

Chapter 48: Playing With Fire [Part 2]

Alex didn't know how.

He didn't know why.

All he knew was that as long as he held Svalinn, the Fire Bullet of the fire salamander couldn't do anything to him.

Out of desperation, the monster unleashed a Fire Bullet at point-blank range, aiming at the young man's feet.

The timing was so perfect that Alex wasn't able to lower his shield to cover his feet on time.

However, when the Fire Bullet hit him, it dispersed as if it had hit something that could nullify fire damage.

When Alex finally understood what was happening, the fear and anxiety he felt earlier over fighting against the fire salamander vanished without a trace.

His original plan had been to lure the Rank 2 Monster to the guardian golems so they could fight it in his stead.

But with Svalinn, he no longer needed to do that.

"Slash!" Alex roared as he swung his sword at the monster's body, drawing blood.

There was a famous saying in ELO.

"A bleeding beast is just a corpse waiting for the final blow."

It was also a way of saying that if a monster could bleed, it could be killed.

And once Alex remembered this famous saying, he once again brandished his sword, drawing more blood.

The fire salamander might be strong and could fight in close combat, but it was just as dangerous as an ash hound.

Meaning, Alex had no problem in killing it.

After its trump card became useless, it was no different from a Rank 1 Monster with more health in the young man's eyes.

A few minutes later, the fire salamander's body collapsed before turning into particles of light.

It left behind a monster core, which was two times bigger than the cores that came from Rank 1 Monsters.

Alex looked at the monster core on the ground, but he didn't rush to pick it up.

He was still trying to comprehend how he had easily killed a Rank 2 Monster without even getting injured once.

"Status page open," Alex said firmly.

When his status window appeared, he immediately looked at Svalinn's information.

He wanted to find out if the shield was really responsible for nullifying the effects of the Fire Bullets.

< Svalinn [EX] >

Item Grade: Common [Sealed]

Stats: +20 Defense

Active Skills: [Sealed]

Passive Skills: Auto Repair, Fire Immunity.

Effects: if it is wielded by someone whom the shield has recognized as its owner, it will match the strength of its wielder.

— Will unlock skills and abilities depending on the Stats of its wielder.

[Fire Immunity]

— Temporarily unsealed. Will be sealed again after two days.

— The wielder of Svalinn will be immune to any kind of flame.

Note: A shield not meant for mortals, yet borne by those who defy fate. Svalinn does not shine, nor does it shatter. It endures, as it was meant to.

It is the wall before the inferno, the last defense of the living world. So long as Svalinn stands, the sky shall not burn. To wield it is to bear the burden of the heavens.

'Fire Immunity?!' Alex gasped in shock after seeing the latest information that appeared on Svalinn's page.

Now that he had confirmed that the shield was really the reason why he hadn't been affected by the effects of the Fire Bullet, he finally realized just how amazing the shield in his hand was.

'I wonder just how powerful this shield will be when all its abilities are fully unlocked,' Alex mused. 'With this, there might be a chance to defeat that Boss Monster.'

He didn't really understand why he had suddenly woken up on the third floor of the Etherion Domain.

But now, he was very happy that he had gotten separated from the others.

If he wanted to help everyone, there was only one thing that he needed to do, and that was to become stronger!

"Dim Dim, please tell me where the next fire salamander is."

"Dim!"

The Dim Sum God jumped off Alex's head and effortlessly landed on the ground.

"Dim!" Dim Dim pointed in a direction, and Alex nodded in understanding.

"Let's go."

"Dim Dim!"

Cairo and the other Elders, who were now paying close attention to Alex, were very surprised at the sudden turn of events.

They had seen the young man wielding the family heirloom of the Hartwell Clan, and Cairo confirmed he had gifted it to his disciple.

In their eyes, the shield was just an ornamental decoration that had no practical use in battle.

Those who had wielded the shield in the past hadn't found anything exceptional about it.

But seeing Alex unaffected by the fire salamander's Fire Bullet, some were starting to believe that they must have used the shield wrongly.

Unfortunately, Cairo was also in line to become the future Patriarch of the Hartwell Clan.

Since he had already given Alex the shield as a token of their master-disciple relationship, the Elders couldn't possibly ask it back from the young man.

Ramza, who had arrived a few minutes later and had also seen what happened, didn't make any comment.

He simply played with his beard, deep in thought.

They continued to watch as the young man fought one fire salamander after another, defeating them just like he had defeated the first one.

[Level Up!]

Alex finally heard the notification sound after killing his sixth fire salamander.

He was starting to get the hang of killing them. He was also getting faster, especially since he no longer had to worry about their trump card.

The Rank 2 brown bear Alex had seen in the Floating Forest had strength and robust vitality.

The Rank 2 red-eyed zebra jumping spider had speed and cunning.

And finally, the Rank 2 fire salamander had firepower.

If Alex were to classify their threat level, he would believe that the jumping spider was the strongest of the three monsters.

Right now, it was still a threat to him. But after farming a few more stat points, it would no longer be dangerous for him to fight it.

"Dim Dim, where's the next one?" Alex asked.

Dim Dim didn't answer right away. Instead, it crawled back on top of Alex's body and stopped on his shoulder.

"Dim Dim!"

"There are no more fire salamanders here?"

"Dim!"

The Dim Sum God then told Alex that if he wanted more, they should head to the fourth floor of the Etherion Domain.

After giving it some thought, Alex decided to try something.

"Master, can you hear me?!" Alex shouted.

"Yes, I can hear you," Cairo replied.

"Master, are the monsters on the fourth floor the same monsters that can be seen on this floor?"

"Yes," Cairo answered. "But there's a Mini Boss fire salamander on the fourth floor. It's twice as big as other fire salamanders, and its body is crimson. However, there is something I think you should know.

"There is another temple on the fourth floor. If you wish to change jobs, you might want to go and look for one. It's located at the north of the domain as well."

"Thank you, Master!" Alex answered.

Since there might be some kind of time limit or restriction for outsiders communicating with those who were inside the domain, the young man no longer asked his master any more questions.

Instead, he asked Dim Dim if it knew where to find the path that led to the fourth floor.

"Dim!"

The Dim Sum God didn't bat an eye and pointed.

Alex didn't hesitate to follow Dim Dim's lead.

In fact, he was very curious about the monster drop of the Mini Boss.

'I hope I get a good drop after I kill it,' Alex thought.

The young man understood that he was in a race against time.

Svalinn's Fire Immunity buff would end after two days.

He planned to raise his stats as high as possible before reuniting with the others, so that they could fight the mutated Boss Monster together.

Chapter 49: The Monster Ruling The Fourth Floor Of The Etherion Domain

"Wow. Is this what Superman feels when people try to shoot him with guns?" Alex muttered as he casually approached the two fire salamanders, who didn't hesitate to bombard him with Fire Bullets.

Unfortunately for them, their attacks dispersed whenever they were about to hit the young man's body. Although Alex had experienced this a few times already, he still felt invincible.

Emboldened by his Fire Immunity, the young man determinedly pointed his sword at the monsters.

"This is Sparta!" Alex shouted before charging at the two monsters, who were in disbelief at the sight of someone tanking their attacks with ease.

The two monsters switched to close combat as soon as the young man was close enough. Having anticipated this, the latter threw a brittle vial toward the head of one of the salamanders.

As the bottle broke upon impact, the black pepper and chili powder immediately took effect. The salamander spun its body around in a death roll, as if hoping that doing so would remove whatever stinging his eyes.

With one of the monsters distracted, Alex engaged the other salamander in close quarters.

Hateful hisses and screeches escaped the monster's lips as Alex's sharp sword repeatedly slashed his opponent's body.

He had fought quite a number of salamanders by this point, so he had grown familiar with their attack patterns to the point that battling them took him less than two minutes.

After taking down the first monster, he quickly finished off the second, which was still handicapped from its momentary blindness and thus unable to defend itself properly.

As usual, both monsters left monster cores upon their deaths. Alex picked them up and headed to his next battle.

The difference between the third and fourth floor was that monsters often attacked in groups of two or three in the latter.

On his way to his next destination, Alex found himself face to face with three ash hounds.

Instead of backing down, he accepted the challenge. Anyway, he wasn't fighting alone.

Dim Dim held a brittle vial in its hands.

Their plan was simple—Dim Dim would throw the vial at the monster that would attack Alex when he was busy dealing with two of the monsters in front of them.

Unlike the two fire salamanders, Alex had a harder time defeating the ash hounds as they were obviously used to fighting as a team.

They also moved fast, encircling the young man and looking for a good opportunity to strike.

Alex charged at one of them, and the two hounds didn't hesitate to lunge at him from behind.

However, he had already expected such a move from them, so he turned around and used his shield to bash one of the ash hounds on the head while he used his sword to hack the other.

The first hound took this as an opportunity to launch a sneak attack.

But Dim Dim was ready for it.

"Ei!"

The Dim Sum God flung the brittle vial at the monster's head, hitting it perfectly.

A whimper emerged from the hound as Alex spun around, imitating the sword skill that Claire had used when fighting against the dire wolves.

"Whirlwind Slash!"

Of course, Alex didn't have the Whirlwind Slash skill.

He however had the Slash Skill.

So, the moment he said it, the skill activated, empowering his sword strike to make it hit harder than usual.

Knowing ELO revolved around the concept of repetition, Alex had practiced the whirlwind slash stance during his free time.

He might not have a particular skill now, but as long as he mimicked the same motions over and over again until they came to him naturally, he believed it was only a matter of time before he acquired the skill.

By then, even without the skill, he could unleash a Whirlwind Slash, which he had forcibly gotten through constant practice.

The slash hit the side of the hound's body, dealing considerable damage to it.

But Alex knew that the monster was on its last legs, so he didn't hesitate to take a step forward and thrust his sword into its body one more time.

The moment the sword pierced through the hound's body, its life finally ended.

When Alex saw that it was starting to turn into particles of light, he shifted his target to the two remaining monsters.

Dealing with two ash hounds was easier than dealing with three.

In time, he managed to kill the monsters without too much effort.

"That was some intense workout," Alex muttered as he wiped the sweat on his forehead with the back of his hand.

"Phew!" Dim Dim imitated the young man and also wiped its forehead as if it had been the one battling the monsters earlier.

Just as Alex was feeling more confident about his fighting strategy, he saw three flame scarabs flying in his direction.

Instead of fighting them, Alex chose to run.

Their kamikaze attacks were a combination of fire and wind elements, sending powerful shockwaves upon detonation.

They were perhaps the only monsters on the third and fourth floors that Alex didn't want to touch.

Getting injured at this point was not part of his plan, so he only fought monsters he was confident in defeating, like the fire salamanders and ash hounds.

Half an hour later, Alex came across a fire salamander that was bigger than the others.

'This must be the Mini Boss Master talked about,' Alex thought as he observed the monster from afar.

Its body was crimson in color and it had bright yellow markings all over its body.

It was at least six meters long and was guarded by two other fire salamanders.

< Crimson Fire Salamander >

Monster Rank: Rank 2 Mini Boss Monster

Monster Grade: Rare

Health: 850 / 850

Attack: 90 - 140

Note: You don't fight a crimson salamander. You survive it. They were once docile beasts, but it all ended when the Fire Nation attacked.

'This one is very tricky to fight,' Alex thought.

Judging by its size, it would be hard to fight against it in a one-on-one battle.

Not to mention, it wasn't alone.

It had two normal fire salamanders as its bodyguards.

Alex might not fear their flames, but he certainly feared the crimson salamander's tail and claws.

The fire salamanders had lashed him with their tails during battle, and since the Mini Boss was technically of the same species, he assumed it would do the same.

After making a decision, the young man decided to withdraw... at least for now.

'I'll save you for last,' Alex thought as he headed in the direction of the temple, where he planned to change his Job Class for the first time.

He believed that the added skills and abilities he would gain after changing jobs would give him an edge against the monster that ruled over the fourth floor of the Etherion Domain.

Chapter 50: The Temple Of The Lovers [Part 1]

"I admit—that one is a bit tough, even for me." Alex panted for breath as the last ash hound finally died.

At first, there had only been two of them, so Alex had been confident enough to initiate the fight. However, after one of them howled, three more appeared.

Obviously, he would be at a disadvantage, so he hastily killed one of them. That way, he only had to fight four at once.

Still, he was outnumbered. As a solution, Alex ran toward a boulder and pressed his back against it. This meant that he no longer had to worry about an attack from behind, allowing him to focus on his front and sides.

He temporarily focused on defense, waiting for Dim Dim to hit two of them in the head with the brittle vials. After two of the four hounds were incapacitated, Alex finally shifted to the offensive stance and charged at the nearest enemy.

This was one of the hardest battles he had fought so far. Ash hounds were very agile, and when they came as a group, they were even harder to deal with.

"Dim Dim!"

Hearing Dim Dim's warning, Alex raised his head, only to see two fire salamanders emerge from his four o'clock.

He had no idea if the two just happened to spawn very close to them, but that didn't matter right now.

All he knew was that the two didn't hesitate to bombard him with their Fire Bullets, which made him grin.

"Sorry, friends," Alex said as he ran toward the two fire salamanders. "Fire doesn't work on me right now. Thank you for the experience points!"

For Alex, ash hounds were scarier than fire salamanders.

At least all he had to worry about the latter was their tail attacks. Even then, he had already picked up their mannerisms so he could tell whenever they were about to unleash this kind of attack against him.

With that knowledge, the young man slowly whittled the health of the two Rank 2 Monsters until they succumbed to his sword strikes.

[Level Up!]

Alex knelt on the ground and used his sword as support.

The back-to-back battles had exhausted him, and his stamina had also decreased drastically after using the skill, Slash, to end the fight faster.

After regaining his composure, the young man opened his status page to check whether he should add his stats to Strength or Agility.

'I think I'll need more speed when I fight against the Boss Monster,' Alex thought. 'But maybe I should add some points to Strength to increase my damage.'

Just as he was thinking about which parameter he should increase, the image of the red-striped zebra jumping spider appeared inside his head.

'That's right. I should be adding stats for a build that can fight against that thing.' Alex sighed.

After careful consideration, he added his three stat points to Agility.

He couldn't possibly outspeed the Rank 2 Mutant Boss Monster, but being a little bit faster would at least improve his reaction time.

Alex Stratos

Age: 17

Mana: (N/A)

Job Class: (N/A)

Strength - 25

Intelligence - 17

Dexterity - 10

Agility - 48

Constitution - 40

Stamina - 40

Magic - 0

Luck - 4

Available Stat Points: 0

AP: 240

Active Skills: (N/A)

Passive Skills: Improved Stone Throw, Head Shot.

[Difficulty Level: Hell Mode]

'Just eleven more stat points, and I'll be a Ranker,' Alex noted. 'I've finally come this far.'

Only those who had 151 combined stats and above were considered Rankers in the world of Arcana.

It meant that they were no longer ordinary humans but those who pursued the path of strength.

'Come to think of it. There's a rumor saying that if you change job when you have become a Ranker, more job classes will be available to you at the temple,' Alex mused. 'It's just a rumor, though.'

"Dim Dim~"

"Sorry, I was spacing out. I'm going to pick the cores now."

The young man collected the cores and stored them inside his ring.

Truth be told, he was quite happy with his harvest. More cores meant more money, and he sure as hell needed money for his daily needs and travel expenses for his trip to Briarwood Village.

"Where is the direction of the temple again, Dim Dim?"

"Dim Dim~"

"Thank you."

With the Dim Sum God as his navigator, Alex could finally see the outline of the temple in the distance.

But just as he was about to continue his travel, a patrolling golem appeared and looked in his direction.

Sensing the bracelet on the young man's hand, the golem didn't attack Alex and resumed its patrol.

Although the temple was still a kilometer away, there were many golems patrolling its surroundings, making sure that no monsters would respawn near it.

'Maybe if the temple on the second floor had golems, that Mutant Spider would have been defeated long ago,' Alex thought. 'If only I can bring these guys to the second floor, I won't have to worry about that Boss Monster anymore.'

While thinking about these thoughts, Alex made his way to the temple.

Honestly, he still couldn't think of how they could triumph over the jumping spider even if he, Lavinia, and all the Catkins fought together.

They were simply outmatched in both speed and power.

All the spider needed to do was kill them one by one, and the morale of the group would drop drastically.

By then, everyone would just be waiting for their deaths, becoming the Boss Monster's meal.

When the young man finally reached the gates of the temple, a refreshing breeze washed over him, healing his injuries and increasing the regeneration of his stamina.

Temples in the game usually boosted health, mana, and stamina regeneration once the player got near them.

Some players would often go to the temple to receive these buffs before going on an adventure.

Alex had often done the same in the past, but after joining a guild, he no longer had to worry about buffs since his guild members already had that covered.

The two guardian golems standing beside the gate of the temple opened it for Alex.

"Thanks," Alex said before walking inside.

The first thing he saw was the Statue of the Lovers, holding each other's hands with smiles on their faces.

Usually, each temple was dedicated to one of the Deities who represented the Major Arcana of the Tarot Cards.

The Lovers symbolizes romantic love, deep emotional connections, union, and attraction. It's about soul-level bonds, not just surface-level infatuation.

'If I remember correctly, the Hidden Prestige Classes under The Lovers are Twin Flame Duelists and the Twin Lotus Monk,' Alex thought.

'The Twin Lotus Monk is in the top 9 of the Global Rankings, while the Twin Flame Duelists occupy the top 1 Rank in the Tag Team battles. That bald monk sure is scary, especially when he uses Aura.'

Alex once had the opportunity to fight the Twin Lotus Monk, but their battle ended in a draw.

It was one of the hardest battles against a fellow player that the young man had ever fought in, and he still remembered how insanely strong that monk had been.

After reminiscing about the past, Alex's gaze landed on the floating orb in front of the Lovers' statue.

It was the appraisal orb that allowed a player to change their Job Classes.

In ELO, players could change their Job Class as many times as they wanted.

The only downside was that their stats would be reset, meaning the player would have to start from scratch.

The only exception was if they chose a Job Class of the same branch.

For example, Rune Guard and Iron Wall Sentinel were both under the Shielder Job Class. So if a player shifted from a Rune Guard to an Iron Wall Sentinel, all the skills the player possessed would be carried over to their new Job Class.

In the Lore of Arcana, having multiple professions was highly encouraged because the creator of the world seemed to be good friends with the God of all Trades.

The young man put these thoughts aside for the time being as he placed his hand on the appraisal orb to see what kind of Job Classes were available to him.

