

Endless Leveling Done Right!

Chapter 6: End of Tutorial

Looking at the map, Alex saw the two blinking red dots in the location of the Goblin Camp.

He unlocked the Map Feature after reaching Level 1, allowing him to view the places he had been previously.

Most of the map was grayed out, but the location of the two monsters remained visible. He also spotted a single green dot on the map, which represented none other than Dim Dim, who had stayed behind to observe the Goblin Camp from the top of a tree.

Seeing that Alex was fine, Dim Dim waved in his direction, eliciting a warm smile from the young man.

Alex continued to play safe and cautiously approached the camp, intending to observe his last two targets.

Surprisingly, the Goblin Warrior's health points had decreased by more than half, likely thanks to the head injury Alex had luckily dealt.

Blood kept flowing from its wound even when the creature desperately tried to put pressure on it with its left hand.

The goblin, whom Alex had hit with a stone earlier, guarded the Goblin Warrior.

After confirming that the bigger threat was about to die from blood loss, Alex focused his attention on the goblin guarding it.

Gripping a stone he pulled out of his storage ring, the young man drew back his arm and hurled it with all of his might.

The stone hit the goblin square in the head, earning a pained cry and surprised snarl.

Before it could even turn to face its attacker, another stone struck its chest, making it stumble backward.

Alex didn't waste the opening and threw another stone, landing another solid hit on the goblin's head.

He was about to throw another stone when the dying Goblin Warrior roared and charged in his direction.

Alex swiftly retracted his arms and didn't hesitate to run away, understanding that it was more advantageous to him if he let the Goblin Warrior run after him. Not only would its injury worsen, but its energy would also be depleted.

'I'll just have to endure for a few minutes, and you're dead meat,' Alex thought as he glanced behind his back to look at the second goblin, who was shouting while running in his direction.

The second goblin wanted nothing more than to beat the crap out of the human who kept throwing stones at it.

Unfortunately, Alex was too fast for it to catch up.

Another game of cat and mouse ensued, with Alex throwing stones at the goblins whenever they took a break from running.

In gamer terms, what he was doing was called kiting.

Kiting was a very popular strategy in role playing games (RPG's) and real-time strategy games (RTS).

This strategy involved keeping a safe distance from your enemies while constantly using ranged attacks to deal damage to them.

Many players, especially those who specialize in close combat, hated fighting against those whom they called "Cheap Shots."

In games where Player versus Player (PVP) and Player Killing (PK) were the norm, dying without hitting your enemies once and dying without knowing how you died was the worst feeling ever.

The first to die was the goblin, who died after getting hit on the head three consecutive times.

Alex took advantage of its exhausted state and delivered the finishing blow when it could no longer defend itself.

The Goblin Warrior now knelt on the ground, panting for breath. It glared hatefully at the young man, who had used despicable tactics to defeat them.

Alex didn't bother to say anything and simply threw one stone after the other until the Goblin Warrior died.

The moment the last monster collapsed, he heard a notification sound inside his head.

[Level Up!]

Then, and only then, did Alex breathe a sigh of relief.

"It's finally over," he sighed before opening his Status Page.

Every level up in ELO had three Stat points as a reward, which players could distribute as they wished. Alex quickly added two to Strength and one to Agility.

He had already decided he would be a Glass Cannon, so he prioritized his Agility Stat, which would increase his speed, allowing him to better dodge and run away from his enemies.

His Strength Stat now had 5 points, so his Constitution Stat gained an additional point as well.

Alex Stratos

Age: 17

Mana: (N/A)

Job Class: (N/A)

Strength - 5

Intelligence - 1

Dexterity - 1

Agility - 14

Constitution - 8

Stamina - 8

Magic - (N/A)

Luck - 3

Available Stat Points: 0

AP - 0

Skills: (N/A)

[Difficulty Level: Hell Mode]

'Too bad, I don't have any Magic Affinity,' Alex mused. 'But I can unlock it once I get into Frieden Academy.'

Those who were born with Magic Affinity could use Magic.

However, since Alex's Mana Parameter had (N/A) written in it, this meant that he couldn't use Magic.

For now, at least.

"Dim Dim!" Dim Dim congratulated Alex, which broke the young man out of his thoughts.

"Thank you, Dim Dim," Alex said as he picked up the Dim Sum God from the ground. "You helped me a lot."

"Ahem~" Dim Dim raised its head cutely, which made the young man chuckle.

Seeing how proud the little guy was, Alex placed Dim Dim on top of his head before looking at the bodies of the goblins on the ground.

'I need to cut off their right ears and loot their camp,' Alex decided. 'I don't have money right now. Selling them to the Adventurer's Guild should give me enough funds.'

The young man then glanced at the sun, which was about to set in the west.

He wanted to finish everything before night fell, so he could book an inn in the Town of Thalaria.

Half an hour later, he arrived at the Goblin Camp and noticed a small chest in front of the Teleportation Gate.

Alex couldn't remember if Hell Mode gave this kind of freebie.

Only hardcore players dared to choose Hell Mode, and he wasn't one of them. He never got curious enough to create a character at this level of difficulty either because it was simply too cruel.

When a character died in Hell Mode, it was permanent.

That meant total reset—no respawns and all items gone. The only option was to start the game from scratch again, which was a pain in the *ss.

Fortunately, Hell Mode was only available in Story Mode.

Story Mode was the part of ELO that focused on the lore of the game. It heavily focused on the Story Quests of various characters that played important roles in the game as a whole.

This was different from the MMORPG Mode, where millions of players played in a vast open world alongside others.

Story Mode in ELO focused on the game's lore, centering around the Story Quests of key characters.

Unlike the MMORPG Mode, where millions of players explored a vast open world together, Story Mode was a single-player experience.

Players could choose from nearly 400 Heroes, Heroines, and Unique NPCs, many of whom also appeared in the MMORPG Mode as interactive characters.

This added flavor to their characters and enriched the overall game experience.

'I wonder what's inside this chest,' Alex mused as he opened it to check its contents.

What he found inside made his eyes widen in shock.

A purple skill book with the insignia [EX] lay inside the chest, making Alex wonder if he was just seeing things.

Only when he grasped the Skill Book in his hand and pulled it from the chest did he realize his eyes hadn't deceived him.

Chapter 7: The Game Changer

'This changes everything.' Alex looked at the Skill Book in his hands, still unable to believe his luck.

Just like items, Skills were divided into different grades.

Common, Uncommon, Rare, Super Rare, Unique, Legendary, and Divine.

The purple book in Alex's hand was a Super Rare Skill Book, an item that would let him choose any skill available in the game.

However, there was a limitation. He could only select one skill, and it could only be Rare Grade Skill, or below.

Although the Skill Book's grade wasn't the highest, it bore the [EX] Insignia on it.

What did that mean?

Unlike skills acquired from ordinary skill books, any skill chosen by the Player could grow into something far stronger.

Just that alone made it more valuable than any ordinary Super Rare Skill Book in the game.

Whether the skill chosen was a Common, Uncommon, or Rare Skill, it could eventually ascend to Legendary Rank as long as the Player kept on using the skill over and over again.

Just like Alex had said earlier, the Skill Book was a game-changer.

It would allow him to start his ideal build early in the game, giving him access to better skills in the future.

"But I still need to unlock my Magic Stat to use the skill I wish to have," Alex muttered. "That means I need to wait until I get into Frieden Academy."

After carefully storing the Skill Book in his storage ring for future use, he took the small pouch inside the chest.

The pouch contained twenty silver coins, roughly equivalent to two gold coins.

'Perfect,' Alex thought. 'With this, I don't have to worry about staying at an inn for a while.'

Alex stuffed the pouch inside his storage ring and looked around the camp to check if he had missed anything else.

So far, aside from the sword of the Goblin Warrior, the camp had nothing else of value left to loot.

Seeing no reason to stay anymore, Alex approached the teleportation gate and pressed his hand against it.

The runes under his feet glowed, and Alex felt lighter as they lit up one after another.

When the magic circle's power reached its limit, his body faded into particles of light that shot toward the biggest Floating Island, where the Town of Thaloria was located.

A moment later, Alex felt himself standing on solid ground in the middle of a large plaza. As he regained his senses, he heard bustling noises surrounding him.

By the looks of it, he was in the teleportation hub of the city. Various stalls lined the edges of the plaza, and behind them were merchants hawking their wares to the tourists who had come to visit their town.

Alex originally wanted to check the merchants' products but changed his mind when a loud growl sounded from his stomach, reminding him to eat.

"Dim Dim."

"You're right, Dim Dim. I need food and sleep. Let's find an inn first."

"Dim Dim~"

As a player, he had visited the Town of Thaloria many times. But this was his reality now, and he was experiencing everything from a different lens. Sure enough, it felt different to see the town in real life.

After asking one of the patrolling guards for directions, Alex finally found the inn he wished to stay in.

Cat Tail's Inn.

As the name implied, it was run by Catkins, making it famous among the players.

Aside from that, a Unique Character could be found in this place. Alex also hoped to meet this character, which was one of the reasons why he chose this inn.

The chances were slim, but as long as he stayed at the inn, meeting that character was not impossible.

Just as he was about to enter the inn, a notification sounded inside his head, and a blue window screen appeared before him.

[Main Story Quest]

[Enroll at Frieden Academy]

— Frieden Academy is where the most talented teenagers on the continent gather to become exceptional Warriors and Magicians. The majority of the students here are members of the nobility and other powerful families.

< Mission >

— Become a Scholarship Student by passing the Trial of the Academy.

Duration: 3 months.

Rewards: ???

Failure: Death by Snusnu.

The corner of Alex's lips twitched after seeing the fate that would befall him if he failed to pass his mission.

'That sounds a bit hardcore,' he thought as he entered the Inn to secure some food and lodging.

"Welcome to Cat Tail's, nyah~"

Seeing a beautiful Catkin for the first time, Alex couldn't help but gulp his saliva. While he wasn't ignorant about them, seeing them in the flesh, and not behind a computer screen, was a surreal experience.

Because of this, Alex had a strong urge to give the inn a five-star review, simply because the waitresses were all beautiful Catkins.

Unfortunately, there was no such thing as five-star reviews in Arcana, so he simply gave the innkeeper a thumbs-up in his heart.

Now he understood why the cultured men on Earth liked Beastkins, especially Catkins, Foxkins, Wolfkins, and Cat Woman.

"I'd like to order some food," Alex said. "And book lodging for a few days."

"You came to the right place, Mister," the waitress replied with a smile.

She gestured toward an empty table tucked into a cozy corner of the tavern and guided him there before taking his order.

The young man was not in the mood to eat meat right now, so he chose to get mushroom soup and sandwiches for him and Dim Dim.

It didn't take long for their order to arrive. As soon as the food was served, they started eating, conversing between bites.

"Dim Dim, are you staying with me?" Alex asked the Dim Sum God, who happily ate its sandwich.

Dim Dim nodded. "Dim."

"Then let me know you better," Alex said. "Do you have any favorite foods?"

Dim Dim thought for a while before answering Alex's question.

"Dim~"

"You like pudding the most?"

"Dim!"

"I'll make you some in the future," Alex said, eliciting a happy smile from the cute little God.

Truth be told, he felt more at ease after knowing Dim Dim would accompany him in his journey.

He didn't want to admit it because it sounded cheesy, but he felt a bit lonely about never seeing his friends from Earth ever again.

'I guess the Guild will need to find a new tanker for their weekly raids,' Alex realized as he thought of his guild, which was one of the top guilds in the game. 'I hope the Guild Master doesn't go crazy after realizing I went MIA.'

(A/N: Missing in action.)

With a faint smile on his face, the young man looked at Dim Dim, who was happily munching on a new sandwich.

To be honest, he felt a little guilty about leaving his responsibilities behind. But even if he could go back to the moment he was given the choice, he wouldn't hesitate to make the same decision to go to the world of Arcana.

Because the world of endless possibilities was like a siren's song for people like Alex, who wished to have a second chance at life.

He might've been off to a rough start, but he still felt optimistic about passing the Trial of Frieden Academy.

However, Alex overlooked one extremely important detail.

The academy trial's difficulty had also been ramped up to Hell Difficulty.

A fact he would only realize three months from now.

Chapter 8: Alex's Short-Term Goal

After claiming the key to his room, Alex climbed upstairs, intending to finally rest for the night.

If the intense first battle of his life in the world of Arcana taught him anything, it was that he must not treat this world as a game, for one mistake could end in his death.

He had countless things to worry about, especially events he'd face in the future. But for now, he just wished to shower and rest for the night.

He headed straight to the bathroom, washing away the dirt and exhaustion from his body.

Several minutes later, he dried himself off and approached the mirror, his lower body covered only by a towel.

The moment Alex caught his reflection in the mirror, his breath hitched. The face staring back at him wasn't familiar.

Short silver hair, blue eyes, and a face that would make being single extremely hard back on Earth appeared on the mirror's surface.

"This... is me?" Alex muttered as he lightly tapped his cheek to make sure he wasn't just seeing things.

When he first arrived in Arcana, survival was his main goal. He put his all into fighting and defeating the Goblins, leaving no time to take a proper look at his appearance.

Now that he had a moment to breathe, Alex finally took a good look at himself. After countless double-takes, he confirmed that his eyes were actually okay. The face he had now was truly the replica of his character portrait in ELO.

Alex Stratos.

That was the name he had given to his character in-game, whose face he had customized himself.

At that time, the young man spent a long time fiddling with the game's advanced customization feature to create this face.

'I'm lucky I didn't mess around with my character's setting too much, unlike those famous VTubers who made their characters look like zombies and aliens for laughs.'
Alex shuddered. 'Imagine being stuck with those ridiculous faces forever.'

The thought of avoiding a fate where he looked like a zombie or some kind of fool made the young man sigh in relief.

"Dim Dim?" The Dim Sum God couldn't help but wonder about the thoughts running through the young man's head as the latter struck different poses in front of the mirror.

Assuming Alex was doing some kind of play, Dim Dim imitated him a bit and also made different poses while on top of the young man's head.

Seeing the Dim Sum God having fun, a chuckle escaped Alex's lips.

They spent a few more minutes acting like silly kids before finally deciding to rest for the night.

"Goodnight, Dim Dim," Alex said.

"Dim Dim~" the Dim Sum God also bade Alex goodnight before closing its eyes to rest for the night.

The young man thought it would take a while before he fell asleep, but surprisingly he descended into the land of dreams only a minute after his head hit the pillow.

Several hours later, the young man felt something poking his nose, prompting him to open his eyes. He woke up just in time to see Dim Dim reaching for his nose... again. A strange sense of déjà vu washed over him as they locked eyes and started another silent staring contest lasting half a minute.

In the end, Dim Dim pulled back and greeted the young man a good morning.

"Dim Dim~"

"Dim Dim, don't bother acting innocent. I know you were about to poke my nose again."

The Dim Sum God giggled and jumped in place, as if asking Alex to get out of bed so they could start their day.

Although reluctant, Alex rose up from the bed and did some light stretching.

To his surprise, he felt neither stiff nor tired. Instead, his body was brimming with strength and a sense of relaxation.

'That was some good sleep,' Alex thought before glancing at the clock hanging on the wall.

It was six in the morning. After a quick calculation, he learned he had slept for ten hours straight.

Suddenly, a very important thought struck Alex, leading him to ask the Dim Sum God for a favor.

"Dim Dim, do you have anything I can write on?" Alex inquired. "I need to write the things inside my mind before I forget them."

Dim Dim nodded. "Dim."

The Dim Sum God summoned a worn leather journal, perfectly suited to ELO's setting, and handed it to Alex, along with a magic pen that would never run out of ink no matter how much he wrote.

"Thank you, Dim Dim," Alex said as he accepted the leather journal and the magic pen with gratitude.

He then sat at the table and started to write the things he needed to do to complete his Main Quest in Arcana.

[Main Story Quest]

[Enroll at Frieden Academy]

— Frieden Academy is where the most talented teenagers on the continent gather to become exceptional Warriors and Magicians. The majority of the students here are members of the nobility and other powerful families.

— Become a Scholarship Student by passing the Trial of the Academy.

Duration: 3 months.

Rewards: ???

Failure: Death by Snusnu.

Alex had three months until the Trial of Frieden Academy commenced. As long as he passed, he would be granted a scholarship.

When playing ELO's Story Mode, the players would be asked to choose one of the 350 Unique Characters in the game.

Three of those characters were Heroes, and another three were Heroines.

The rest were supporting characters who played important roles in the game.

After finishing the route of the three Main Heroes in the past, Alex had chosen the Unique Character, Charles Lambert, as his fourth.

He had chosen that particular NPC mainly due to its surge in popularity.

And it wasn't because the character was amazing.

Not at all. But why? Players simply wanted to challenge Charles Lambert's Story Quest since it was yet to be cleared.

Not even by Professional Gamers. In fact, they deemed it impossible to clear his Story Quest.

Even Alex played the character for nearly a year before finally clearing the tutorial quest.

It was after he had painstakingly cleared it that he had received the God of Games' invitation to go to the world of Arcana.

This had led to him being kidnapped by Lily and Cupid before being blasted to outer space from a giant cannon.

'If this world is similar to the game, then Charles Lambert must also be real,' Alex thought with a serious expression on his face. 'Then, if nothing changes, Charles will meet a bad end and die in the Dungeon of Beginnings.'

A part of Alex knew he could just ignore Charles and enroll in the academy without too much of an issue.

However, if he did just that, he would forever question himself whether he had done the right thing.

If Alex had never known of Charles' existence, he wouldn't have felt guilty about standing by while someone met their end.

But knowing that the NPC he had played for nearly a year would likely experience a tragic death, he couldn't just sit still and do nothing.

When playing Charles Lambert's character, the player only had two months before the enrollment in the Frieden Academy began.

"Fine," Alex said through gritted teeth. "I'll help you reunite with your sisters and find a cure for Eris' disease. This will also put all the effort of the Eris Brotherhood to rest."

The Eris Brotherhood was the community that actively played Charles' character in the game.

They jointly compiled all the information about Charles' tutorial quest on a wiki page, including the location of the hidden quests and items in Briarwood Village.

Their goal was to reunite the brother and sisters who had been separated from each other due to the whims of fate.

'But I can't help him with how weak I am right now,' Alex thought. 'I need to train properly, so I can help him clear the Dungeon of Beginnings.'

Finally setting a short-term goal for himself, Alex decided to list down the training course he planned to complete within two months before he headed to Briarwood Village to meet up with Charles Lambert.

He hoped that, for a second time, he could prevent a tragedy, one he had experienced again and again for nearly a year of his life.

Chapter 9: The Birth Of Endless Leveling Online

Could one man alone truly change the course of history?

"Dim!" Tears streamed down the Dim Sum God's face as it nudged the head of the young man lying on the ground.

Dying screams surrounded them as the entire city devolved into madness and pure chaos.

"Sorry, Dim Dim," the young man said. "This is as far as I can go."

"Dim! Dim! Dim!" Dim Dim tried to pull the young man's finger as if trying to drag him somewhere safe.

However, the young man didn't budge, lying still as blood pooled beneath his body and stained the ground crimson.

"Dim Dim, listen to me," the young man murmured, forcing himself to keep his voice calm and steady, even as his life slowly drained from his body.

"Find a person who will reach the end of this journey with you, Dim Dim. Someone with an unyielding heart. Someone who will not give up until the very end. And someone who will protect your world in my stead."

Blood trickled from the corner of the young man's lips as he mustered the strength to gently pat the head of the weeping God who had never left his side.

Seeing his little friend so heartbroken, the young man felt his own tears fall. Even as his vision blurred, he forced himself to speak and leave one last piece of advice.

"This time, please give your chosen one endless possibilities. Perhaps, he will be able to do the things that I wasn't able to do..."

The young man's voice trailed off as the light in his eyes slowly faded.

The Dim Sum God nudged the young man's head with its cheek many times, but he never spoke again.

Soon, the cries of the innocent, pure-hearted God spread in the surroundings as the world around it burned in a hellish inferno.

Then and there, the God of Games, Eriol, slowly opened his eyes, waking up from the dream of the future that had yet come to pass.

"What's wrong, Eriol?" the Goddess Lily asked as she fed the Dim Sum God, Dim Dim, a small candy. "Did something happen?"

"Dim Dim~" Dim Dim chewed the candy happily with no idea of the future Eriol had seen—one that would break its little innocent heart to pieces.

"Here. Have some more candy, Dim Dim." The little angel, Cupid, fed another candy to the Dim Sum God, whom he treated as one of his dear friends.

"Dim Dim~" Dim Dim thanked Cupid and ate the candy in a carefree manner.

Eriol looked at the three Gods and knew that he needed to do something to prevent the future that he saw from happening.

"Say, Dim Dim, shall we make a game together?" Eriol asked, scooping the little God into the palm of his hands.

"Dim?" Dim Dim looked at the God of Games with a confused look on its face.

"A game?" Lily echoed. "What kind of game?"

"Are you talking about those games played by the humans on Earth?" Cupid suggested. "I love their first person shooter games! My enemies always blame me for cheating because I kill them all with a head shot. Those weaklings~"

Eriol nodded. "Yes. We're going to make a game. A game of endless possibilities. I already have a name for it."

"Oh, and that is?" Lily asked.

"Endless Leveling Online," Eriol replied. "Sounds fun, right? I'll make sure to make you three the game's mascots."

"Really?!" Lily asked, visibly elated at the thought of gaining more followers simply by becoming a mascot of the game Eriol planned to make.

"Even me?" Cupid asked.

"Dim Dim?" Dim Dim pointed to himself.

"Yes, yes, and yes." Eriol chuckled. "The three of you will be in the game. So... want to help me?"

"You bet!"

"I'm in!"

"Dim Dim!"

Eriol nodded as he started forming a rough plan in his mind.

Even if it was difficult...

Even if it seemed impossible...

He would prevent that kind of ending and ensure that his dear friend, Dim Dim, wouldn't have to suffer a heartbreak.

He would prevent the world of Arcana, which the Dim Sum God had created with all of his heart and divinity, from being destroyed.

Eight years later...

From the Celestial Realm, the God of Games, Eriol, looked at the world beneath him and observed the young man who had answered his call.

The sight of Dim Dim peacefully sleeping atop the chest of the snoring young man made Eriol smile faintly.

"Can one man truly change the course of history?" Eriol muttered.

He remembered all the advice the young man in his dream had told Dim Dim.

To look for someone with an unyielding heart...

And to give that someone endless possibilities...

That way, they could better help the Dim Sum God prevent the calamity meant to befall its world.

To perfectly select that someone, Eriol decided to find a person in Arcana meant for an end so tragic, it seemed impossible to reverse.

The God of Games searched high and low, using his abilities to find someone who met those requirements.

Soon, he discovered Charles Lambert.

With his ability, he simulated Charles Lambert's life countless times, all of which resulted in a bad end.

No matter what kind of variables were added, Charles Lambert's fate seemed to be set in stone.

Dying at a young age and unable to reunite with his sisters, he perished inside the Dungeon of Beginnings, never to be seen again.

Eriol added all the simulations he had created to the newest patch of Endless Leveling Online, waiting for someone who might be able to change the course of history.

The moment someone completed this task, he would give them an invitation and summon them to the world of Arcana.

He had great faith in humanity. After all, he had personally witnessed, on more than one occasion, humanity managing to reverse a hopeless situation from happening.

One of them was a Shepherd who had saved the world of Hestia.

The other was a Heaven's Necromancer who had saved the world of Elysium.

Both had faced hardships that would've made ordinary mortals give up and accept their fate.

But they had held their ground and accomplished things deemed impossible.

After sending Alex to Arcana, Eriol tried running another simulation to see what the future held.

But all he saw was darkness.

Eriol sighed. Just as he was about to end the simulation, he noticed something small flickering within that darkness.

It was shaped like a shield, faintly twinkling like a lone star in the darkness, about to disappear at any moment.

The God of Games observed this small shield, and a small flame of hope was ignited inside his heart.

Although it was faint, a possibility existed.

And that was all that Eriol needed to believe that perhaps a single man might indeed have the power to change the course of history.

Chapter 10: You Can't Fool Me

Poke

"Nghh..."

Poke *Poke*

"Ngh.. Mnh...."

Poke *Poke* *Poke*

"... Dim Dim, can you not poke my nose whenever you want to wake me up in the mornings?" Alex said helplessly.

The Dim Sum God giggled, but made no promises to stop poking the young man's nose.

Alex helplessly sighed, already resigned to his future of waking up to a little custard bun's tapping spree. This was the little one's daily entertainment now, and there wasn't anything he could do about it.

He got out of bed and gave his face a swift rinse. The cold water woke him up enough for him to begin his day.

Three days had passed since he got here. Back then, everything around him could only be found through the screen. Though he was still adjusting to his new reality, he was surprised to have an easier time than he had thought.

He casually went through the plans he had for his future in his head.

His main mission was to pass the Trial of Frieden Academy and become one of its scholarship students.

Unfortunately, he had no idea what the trial would involve. Even though the academy wasn't unfamiliar to him, this specific test had never shown up in any of the playthroughs he had experienced.

Out of curiosity, he had played the three Main Heroes as well as the three Main Heroines of the game before.

Two were nobility, two were royalty, and the last two were scholars personally invited by the principal. None of them had to take a trial. As such, he had no idea what was waiting for him in the trial of the academy.

'But, I have to go somewhere before the trial,' Alex thought.

He mentally noted his plan to visit Briarwood Village.

He needed to meet someone—Charles Lambert.

Yes. The unique character whom Alex had played for nearly a year and whose mere tutorial quest had been globally deemed an impossible mission.

Of course, that had been debunked the day Alex had cleared it, though it had taken him nearly a year of trial and error.

Still, there was a nagging thought at the back of his head saying that if he didn't go and help Charles, the latter would definitely die in the Dungeon of Beginnings, just like the countless times he had in the game.

At the same time, Alex wasn't stupid. He understood that if he wanted to offer help, he must first get stronger—strong enough to overcome the challenge with Charles.

"Time to train."

The young man then picked up the basket that Herbalists usually brought with them whenever they went to the forests to look for herbs.

But unlike them, Alex didn't plan to collect herbs.

He planned to collect rocks.

His plan was simple. Fill the basket halfway with rocks before carrying it on his back, then jog to raise his Strength and Agility. Rinse and repeat daily for better results.

After exiting the South Gate, Alex headed to the river located at the southeast of the Town of Thaloria.

Even now, he still struggled to understand how a river could appear on a floating island.

'Alex, common sense doesn't apply to fantasy worlds,' he reminded himself. 'It's just like anime logic. Some of them can't be explained by science and physics.'

A few minutes later, he finally arrived at their destination.

"Dim Dim, help me pick up rocks by the riverbed," Alex said. "Choose stones that are clean and not muddy, okay?"

"Dim!" Dim Dim nodded.

It then happily went to the river to pick up a stone before tossing it into the basket as if it were playing basketball.

To the young man's surprise, the stone fell perfectly inside the basket, making the Dim Sum God jump in happiness.

Seeing that Dim Dim was having fun, Alex decided to join in.

Soon, the two "little kids" started shooting rocks towards the basket, trying to beat each other with the number of shots that managed to score.

"Dim Dim!" Dim Dim raised its body proudly because it was the one who won their shooting contest.

"Right, you won fair and square," Alex praised. "Though we got a bit too carried away."

The basket, which he had originally planned to fill only halfway, was now filled to the brim with rocks.

Dim Dim only giggled. It did enjoy their little game of basketball.

Since the basket was too heavy for Alex to carry, he was forced to dump some of the rocks at the side of the river until the weight became manageable.

"Okay, let's start our training!" Alex called out to Dim Dim, who effortlessly jumped to the top of his head and landed as light as a feather.

"Let's go!" Dim Dim pointed forward, catching Alex by surprise.

"Um?" Alex picked up the little guy from his head and held its gaze. "You can say other words aside from Dim?"

"Dim Dim?" Dim Dim blinked innocently.

"You can't fool me, Dim Dim."

"Dim?"

"Nevermind."

Seeing that the Dim Sum God didn't plan to cooperate, Alex once again placed it on top of his head and started to run.

Ten minutes later, the young man started to pant for breath. Sure enough, running while carrying a basket half filled with stones wasn't an easy task.

Sigh. If he were still playing the game, all he needed to do was pick a training course, click okay, and the training would end in the span of a few seconds.

Unfortunately, there was no shortcut in reality, so he needed to put some effort into raising his stats aside from leveling up.

"Maybe, I'm rushing things a bit," Alex muttered before reducing the number of stones until only a third of the basket was filled. 'I think this much is manageable.'

And just as he expected, the weight was indeed better, allowing him to keep his pace while running.

Alex sprinted around the Town of Thaloria, drawing amused glances from the guards on the city walls.

It was the first time they'd seen someone run through the town carrying rocks on their back as part of their training.

But since Alex wasn't causing any trouble, they simply observed as he took a couple laps around the town.

A few hours later, when the young man felt that his lungs and heart were about to give out, he finally heard a notification sound, which sounded like music in his ears.

< Strength +1 >

< Agility +1 >

The young man did a fist pump internally because this proved that his theory was right. This hybrid-style training routine could indeed increase two stats instead of one. Not only would this save time and effort, but it would also boost his stats faster than he had in the game.

Although he was exhausted, he still felt happy because his hard work had paid off. He only had three months before the trial started, so he planned to raise his stats as high as he could before then.

"Let's go back, Dim Dim," Alex said. "I'm so hungry I could eat a horse."

"Dim!" Dim Dim nodded and told Alex that it was feeling hungry too.

The two then returned to the town in high spirits.

Neither of them knew that a rumor was beginning to spread among the citizens of Thaloria about a crazy young man, with a basket of rocks strapped to his back and a cute bun on his head, running in circles around the town's gates.

Because of this, Alex would find himself being teased by the waitresses in the Cat Tail's Inn for the next few days during his stay.