

Endless 141

Chapter 141: I Don't Like The Sound Of That

Once the battle ended, Phoebe's team returned to congratulate Alex and his group on their victory over the Boss Monster.

However, someone put a stop to their praises and confronted them straight on.

"We don't need you here," Renard growled in anger. "Instead of fighting with us, you just ran. Since all of you are useless, what's the point of keeping you all here? Scram before I kick you out by force!"

"W-What's wrong with you?!" one of the trial takers replied, embarrassed but also defiant. "What's wrong with running away? Those are Boss Monsters. We can't fight them head-on!"

The other trial takers also voiced several excuses, but Renard wouldn't accept any of them.

Just as conflict was about to erupt between the two sides, Alex stepped in and gave Renard a pointed look, indicating that he would handle it.

"Calm down, Renard," Alex said before shifting his gaze to the teenagers who insisted on staying inside the temple. "My friend here is right. We don't need any of you here, so leave while we're still being nice."

"That's unfair!" one of the trial takers shouted. "Why just us? Phoebe is our leader, but you're not asking her to leave. Are you discriminating against us?"

Phoebe stood with her arms crossed over her chest. Frankly, she was already fed up with her teammates' embarrassing behavior.

"Unlike you guys, Phoebe helped us fight the Boss Monsters," Charles commented. "Had you guys also helped then, we would not be chasing you out now. We allowed you to stay here earlier since we didn't want a needless confrontation. We already gave you a chance, but you wasted it."

Charles was a kind person, but he also understood that kind people were often taken advantage of by others.

“Are you going to leave on your own, or shall we use force to make you leave?” Lavinia asked, her sword whip slithering around her like a snake. “Or perhaps you’d prefer to be disqualified from the trial and permanently removed from the island. It’s your choice.”

Nessia wordlessly raised her staff, and a few fire bullets materialized, floating in front of her.

Even Dim Dim was holding a brittle vial, glaring at the brats who were still trying to exploit Alex’s kindness.

Alex and his team members might be injured and tired from their recent battle, but they were still a force to be reckoned with.

The other trial takers knew so, thus they decided to leave. But as they left the safety of the temple, some occasionally turned back to cast hateful glances.

Once their backs completely faded in the distance, Nessia approached Alex and showed him the core of the Rank 4 Hellmaw Basilisk.

“What should we do with this?” Nessia asked.

Right now, she regarded Alex as the leader of their team, so she asked for his opinion on how to use their spoils of war.

“There are still a few hours before the trial ends,” Alex replied. “A Rank 4 Boss Monster Core is certainly precious, but not more than our safety. Use it to create a defensive formation to replace the last one that broke.”

Nessia nodded and strengthened the defensive formation around the temple, using the monster core as its power source.

As Nessia created a new formation, the group they had just kicked out of the temple looked for a new place to hide.

They all felt indignant about how they had been treated and wanted nothing more than to take revenge upon Alex and his team.

“How can they defeat Rank 4 Boss Monsters that easily?!” one of the trial takers asked his teammate. “How is that even possible?”

“They must be cheating,” another trial taker suggested. “We should report them to the staff when this trial ends.”

“I agree. Otherwise, how could they have taken out that Harpy and Basilisk so easily? They’re Boss Monsters, not just ordinary ones!”

“Yes! Let’s report them!”

“I second that!”

Phoebe’s former teammates had a bellyful of complaints toward Alex and his team.

In truth, they were just bitter because they had been kicked out of that safe haven, where they had ideally intended to remain until the end of the trial.

Hearing their words from the surveillance, the Magic Professor of Frieden Academy only scoffed at these teenagers. They had no idea what they were talking about.

In reality, if Nessia had been properly trained with magic formations, she could have even one-hit KO the Boss Monsters.

Formation Masters were highly sought after by the army for good reason—even a single one could turn the tide of battle.

As long as they had enough time to prepare their magic formation, they could create an impenetrable fortress or a devastating killing array.

Nessia's magic formation wasn't perfect, but she had still shown exceptional talent in the field. Also, her magic formation had another flaw. It wasted too many resources!

The monster core of the Two-Horned Blaze Wolf had the potential to create more, but she had only derived three giant Flame Spears, each one as powerful as a full-powered attack from Vulkarath, the Ember Howl Sovereign. And since she had already used two of them, she only had one left.

The same could be said for the monster core of the Wind Razor Harpy Matron. Nessia had already unleashed two giant Wind Blades, leaving her with only one more shot.

Had she been taught properly, she could have increased the number of attacks to five for every monster core.

Despite her skills' imperfections, Professor Isolde still wished for Nessia to pass, so she could personally train the latter to create proper magic formations.

"Looks like I'm going to win our bet, Rowan," Ramza said with a smile.

"Mayhaps," Rowan replied looking amused by his friend's confidence.

"You old fox, don't tell me you still have some tricks up your sleeves?" Ramza scoffed. "You're already an adult, and you plan to bully kids? Play fair, old man."

"Play fair?" Rowan smirked. "This is a trial of my academy. Everything had already been arranged before I sent the trial takers on the island. Just wait for a few more hours. You're going to see something very interesting."

Ramza clicked his tongue. "I don't like the sound of that. It seems that you have no intention of letting anyone pass this trial."

Rowan didn't reply. Instead, he just smirked, wanting to see just how far Alex's team could survive.

There were currently fewer than thirty-five trial takers left on the island.

Rowan had given the Stonehide Tyrant a new order, asking it to stop hunting any of the remaining teenagers on the island.

The Headmaster of the Academy had created a "fail-safe" countermeasure to ensure that, no matter where the teenagers go or hide, the last surprise of the second trial would find them without fail.

Even Professor Isolde looked forward to seeing how Alex's team would handle the last hurdle that would befall them in the last two hours of the trial.

While the last survivors were preparing for the end of their challenge, faint buzzing sounds no one could hear reverberated within the mists that had now covered the outer areas of the island.

Countless red eyes started to glow. If someone were to look at the island from the sky, they would see a sea of red dots blinking menacingly at them.

One by one, the red dots inched toward the center of the island. No one would be able to escape their viciousness, just as the Headmaster of Frieden Academy had planned.

Chapter 142: Wings Of The End [Part 1]

A few hours had passed since the two Boss Monsters were defeated. Dim Dim was peacefully lying on Lavinia's lap, its eyes closed for a nap, when it suddenly opened its eyes.

It looked around, as if sensing something.

As Alex stuffed himself with some roasted pork buns, he inadvertently noticed the Dim Sum God's restlessness.

"Is there something wrong, Dim Dim?" Alex asked.

“Dim Dim.”

“Huh?!” Alex almost dropped the roasted pork bun in his hand after hearing the little one’s warning.
“We’re surrounded by monsters?”

Dim Dim nodded. “Dim!”

Alex hurriedly opened his map. When the sight before him confirmed his companion’s words, his eyes widened in shock.

The entire map was covered in red blinking dots, and they were slowly converging into the center of the island.

Another reason why he freaked out was that the blinking dots only had “???” on them, which made it impossible to know what kind of monsters they were.

“Everyone, get ready!” Alex shouted. “There’s a monster swarm heading to the center of the island. They’ll be here in a few minutes!”

Only two hours remained before the second trial’s end. This was the last surprise Rowan had prepared for the remaining survivors on the island.

Alex’s gaze landed on the purple blinking dot the size of a pigeon’s egg.

What did this symbol represent?

It marked the appearance of a new Boss Monster, possibly the one commanding the entirety of the monster swarm.

Of course, there was also the orange blinking dot, which represented the Stonehide Tyrant.

According to the map, the orange dot was stationed about a mile away from the temple where Alex's team hid. But it had also started moving, heading in the temple's direction, just like the unidentified monster swarm.

Alex's expression turned grim.

'So this is the countermeasure the Headmaster prepared to eliminate the rest of the survivors until only twenty remain,' Alex realized. 'The temple is located right at the center of the island.'

'There's a possibility the rest of the survivors will be eliminated before this monster swarm reaches us.'

Of course, Alex was trying to be optimistic. However, the more he looked at the map, the more serious his expression became.

The two Boss Monsters were heading straight toward the temple, and the monster swarm followed.

"Help!" a teenage boy shouted as he pounded the barrier protecting the temple. "Please! Help me! Have mercy! I just want to pass the second trial!"

More teenagers discovered the well-hidden temple and were now asking Alex's team for mercy.

The monster swarm was thorough.

It didn't matter if you hid inside a cave, underwater, or even under the ground.

You would be targeted and eliminated without fail, and there was no place on the island where you could hide from them.

"What do we do, Alex?" Lavinia asked. "Should we help them?"

Alex didn't reply right away. Instead, he scanned the faces of his teammates.

By now, they could hear the loud buzzing in the surroundings, and it was getting stronger with each passing minute.

There were at least fifteen to seventeen teenagers who wished to enter the temple.

Judging by the location of the monsters on the map, Alex believed that they might actually be the last survivors on the island.

"Let's vote on this," Alex proposed. "I won't be voting and will just follow what the majority wants. Shall we let those trial takers in, or should we keep them out of the temple?"

"I vote to keep them out," Renard replied without hesitation. "We are not obligated to help them."

"I agree with Renard," Lavinia stated. "We can survive till now because all of us have been working together to make it happen."

"While I do sympathize with them, do not forget that all of us are competitors," Nessia pointed out. "I'm just lucky to have ended up with the right team for this trial. Otherwise, I might have been eliminated long ago by the same people who are now asking us for their help."

Bob lightly patted Alex's shoulder and smirked. "I'm not really a good person. I have eliminated many trial takers on this island with Grint's and Jorven's help."

"Frankly, if I had come across you guys, and you're all alone, the three of us would have eliminated you as well. Like Nessia said, we are all competitors who wish to become scholarship students."

"It's not like we don't want to help others. It's just that, in this situation, we need to help ourselves more than others."

Grint nodded. "In business, merchants are prepared to suffer a loss from time to time. It's a calculated risk to build connections, increase our customer base, and area of operations.

"But even with good intentions, merchants often face dangers like banditry and other problems outside of our control. They're complete strangers to us, Alex. We can't know what they might do if we let them in. Maybe they would stab us in the back just to pass this trial."

"I'm not a very smart person," Jorven admitted. "But I know that as long as we survive, we will be able to reach our goal, which is to become scholarship students.

"Right now, I believe we are close to reaching that goal as long as we don't make bad decisions. I also believe letting them in will be a bad decision."

Charles nodded to Alex because everyone had already said what he had in mind.

Alex smiled faintly as the buzzing sound grew louder, almost drowning out his teammates' words.

"Understood," Alex replied. "Everyone, please do your best to survive. This is the last push."

""""Okay!""""

The sound of trees breaking reached their ears, and a moment later, the Stonehide Tyrant once again made its appearance.

Sensing that Alex's team didn't plan to let them inside the temple, the trial takers screamed and fled to wherever they thought was the safest place.

The Stonehide Tyrant ignored them because its attention had locked onto the teenagers with whom it had a vendetta.

"They're here," Lavinia said as her senses picked up the presence of the countless monsters in the surroundings.

At first, they only saw numerous black dots over the horizon.

But now, those dots were becoming bigger—and bigger—until Alex and the others were finally able to see their enemies.

Bees with sizes ranging from a meter to two flew in a dense formation.

From the nearby forests, countless red ants appeared and surrounded the temple.

The teenagers, who had tried to escape earlier, were all knocked out and bundled together.

Seeing this action, Alex suddenly had a bad premonition.

Ramza, who was watching this from the side, glared at the Headmaster of the Academy.

Seeing his friend's glare, Rowan only chuckled. His laughter confirmed Ramza's deduction.

"You sly fox." Ramza shook his head and sighed. "It looks like you have no intention of letting me win the bet."

"No, Ramza," Rowan replied. "I'll let you win our bet. I just want to see how these kids perform in this seemingly hopeless situation."

"Oh? Then in that case, please continue." Ramza laughed as he played with his beard. "But know this, my friend. These kids might just be able to give you a pleasant surprise."

"I'm actually looking forward to that. If they do well, I might be inclined to even give them a reward after this."

“Don’t forget your words, okay?”

The two old men shifted their attention back to Alex’s group, who all looked grim after seeing the enemies that they had to face.

However, when Ramza’s and Rowan’s gaze landed on Alex and Dim Dim, they couldn’t believe what they were seeing.

Alex and Dim Dim both had devilish smiles on their faces, as if the appearance of the monsters didn’t scare them at all.

In fact, both of them looked extremely happy at this outcome. Looking at the pair’s face, Ramza and Rowan wonder if the two have suddenly lost their senses due to the hopelessness of the situation.

“Would you look at that, Dim Dim!” Alex’s grin grew wider. “Experience points. Experience points everywhere!”

“Kukukuku!” Dim Dim chuckled evilly.

If they had been facing a different kind of monster swarm, Alex would have definitely fallen into depression.

But a swarm of insects?

How could he possibly be depressed when he was basically given free experience points on a silver platter?

It was like a bonus round in a game where you could get unlimited coins and experience points for free!

The young man and the Dim Sum God couldn’t stop chuckling.

Like Ramza and Rowan, their companions also couldn't help but wonder if their temporary leader had finally lost his mind!

Chapter 143: Wings Of The End [Part 2]

Despair.

That was what gripped the hearts of the last survivors in the second trial of Frieden Academy.

Nessia had been very confident earlier because of her magic formations, but now, even she couldn't help but shudder at the sight around her.

Countless insect-type monsters had surrounded the temple.

What was worse was that the Stonehide Tyrant was sneering at them while keeping watch on the trial takers whom the insects had captured.

"Oi! You ape!" Bob shouted in anger. "Why aren't you eliminating those trial takers?! You just need to whack a few of them, and this trial will be over! Why are you not doing anything?!"

The Stonehide Tyrant chuckled and, for the first time since the trial started, it spoke.

"I don't want to," the Stonehide Tyrant replied in a mocking tone. "My master has ordered us to start eliminating you guys first."

"What?!" Bob was caught off guard. He had simply spoken out of whim, wanting the Stonehide Tyrant to eliminate the other trial takers so the rest of them could pass. He didn't expect that the Boss Monster could talk, let alone reply.

But the monster's answer made Alex's team turn a shade paler.

"So you're saying the Headmaster wants to eliminate us?" Lavinia asked, doing her best to keep her voice as calm as possible.

The Stonehide Tyrant nodded. "Exactly. We're just following orders."

Faced with the truth, Renard gritted his teeth in fury while he raised his clenched fists, ready to fight.

"This is why I don't trust people," Renard muttered. "It's all a conspiracy! They're targeting us on purpose!"

Phoebe, who had just become part of Alex's team, bit her lip. However, when her gaze landed on Alex and Dim Dim, she noticed that the two didn't seem to be in despair.

In fact, they looked very happy!

"Would you look at that, Dim Dim?" Alex grinned. "Experience points. Experience points everywhere!"

"Kukukuku!" Dim Dim chuckled evilly.

The two continued to cackle like third-rate villains. The other teenagers were almost certain they had gone crazy.

Even the Stonehide Tyrant paused, confused why one of its targets, which it wanted to punch to oblivion, looked like they were actually having fun.

From the sky, a three-meter-tall Queen Bee descended and hovered a hundred meters away from the barrier that Nessia had created.

< Virezzia, the Hexwing Empress >

"Each flap of her wings sings a curse. Each sting, a death sentence written in gold and venom."

Monster Rank: Rank 4 Boss Monster

Monster Grade: Rare

Attribute: Dark / Insect

Species: Hex-Crowned Queen Bee

Type: Hive Boss Monster

Health: 11,750 / 11,750

Attack: 690 – 1,120

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The Queen Bee screeched, ordering its swarm to attack the barrier.

Countless giant killer bees heeded her command and flew toward the barrier, their stinger ready to strike.

“It’s over!” Bob shouted in despair. “We’re doomed!”

But just before the bees clashed with the barrier, all of them froze mid-air. Some of them even backed away hastily.

“Kukukuku!” Dim Dim chuckled evilly as it held the wooden sandal that Alex had given it a few seconds ago.

“Enchant Flame,” Alex chanted, imbuing the sandal with the fire element.

Before anyone could even understand what was happening, the Dim Sum God threw the wooden sandal, creating a sonic boom in its wake.

One moment it was in Dim Dim’s hand, the next second it was only a meter away from the Hex-Crowned Queen Bee, who didn’t even have the time to evade this deadly attack.

The wooden sandal pierced through its body like a hot knife cutting through butter.

Everyone watched in shock as the Boss Monster uttered a blood-curdling screech before transforming into particles of light.

< Level Up! >

< Level Up! >

< Level Up! >

Alex’s smile widened after getting the consecutive notifications inside his head.

Earlier, when the Basilisk had died, it had given him a lot of experience points. Unfortunately, they weren’t enough for him to level up.

This time, however, he got a surplus of experience points due to a special trait of ELO, and that was none other than “Overkill Points”.

If the killing blow exceeded a certain threshold, the experience points gained would also be bigger.

Since Grandma Agnes' Sandal was extremely effective against Insect Type Monsters with high crit and came with a chance to insta-kill the Boss Monster, the experience points Alex gained shot through the roof.

The Headmaster of the Frieden Academy was playing with his beard as he watched the battle unfold. He was very curious about how the survivors would fare after receiving the special surprise that he had prepared for them.

But the one surprised was him! The sight made him accidentally pull on his beard too hard, making him flinch in pain a little.

Ramza, who had been doing the same thing, also pulled on his beard too hard, but the shock he felt overwhelmed any pain he felt.

"W-What the..." the Magic Professor, Miss Isolde, couldn't help but open her mouth wide due to the unexpected outcome. "D-Did that little white thing just one-hit K.O. a Boss Monster?!"

Alex had thought long and hard about how to use Grandma Agnes' Wooden Sandal without letting others discover its power.

Because of this, he had decided to pass over the legendary sandal to Dim Dim and make everyone believe that the little guy was really a very powerful creature that had been hiding its true abilities before now!

And his plan worked.

Even Lavinia and Charles, who had known Alex and Dim Dim for quite some time, rubbed their eyes instinctively to make sure that they weren't seeing things.

"Kukukuku!" Dim Dim chuckled as the wooden sandal returned to its hands.

The Dim Sum God then raised the sandal in preparation to throw it a second time. However, as if snapping from their daze, the bees and the ants quickly retreated as if they were facing their mortal enemy.

“Dim Dim, kill!” Alex ordered.

“Dim!” Dim Dim jumped off Alex’s head and charged outside of the barrier like a War God that was about to beat the crap out of anyone that stood in its way.

“Ei!”

“Ei!”

“Ei!”

“Ei!”

Dim Dim was very quick and agile, so it didn’t take long before it jumped into the swarm of ants and started to whack all of them silly, turning them into particles of light.

“Mwahahaha!” Alex laughed as he cheered the Dim Sum God on. “Good! Keep the experience points coming! You’re doing well! Don’t just target the ants! Target those bees as well. Let me help you!”

Alex shouted as he cast a magical shield to serve as a platform for the Dim Sum God to jump on.

“Shield [EX]!”

Just like a ping pong ball that was high on sugar, Dim Dim leaped on top of the shield and bounced off countless bees, smacking them silly from the sky.

A trail of light followed in its wake as more monsters died under its merciless rampage.

“Dim Dim!” Dim Dim shouted it war cry, but no one dared to stop it.

The majority of the bees were paralyzed with fear, with some of them falling from the sky because they had even forgotten to flap their wings.

“This isn’t a dream or a hallucination, right?” Nessia tugged on Charles’ shirt, making sure she wasn’t the only one who was seeing this scene.

“It’s not,” Charles answered as he watched the happy-go-lucky Dim Sum God smacking their enemies to oblivion. “I didn’t know Dim Dim was this strong.”

“Goodness.” Bob couldn’t turn his gaze away from the little guy either. He had thought Dim Dim was Alex’s little pet. “Good thing I didn’t fight Alex when we first met.”

Grint and Jorven nodded in agreement, not wanting to get slapped by the flaming wooden sandal that Dim Dim was using to annihilate every pest in its way.

Chapter 144: Dim Dim, The Little War God

< Level Up! >

“Good job, Dim Dim!” Alex cheered. “Now use your ultimate move!”

“Dim Dim?” Dim Dim landed on top of a bee and tilted its head.

It was asking Alex what its ultimate move was. The young man blinked in realization.

“F-Forget what I said!” Alex shouted. “Just slap them silly!”

Dim Dim nodded before slapping the bee it was riding as if the latter were a horse.

“Ei!”

At this point in time, the giant bees finally had enough. They all fled as fast as they could.

Even the ants had scurried away back to the forest, leaving only the Stonehide Tyrant behind.

Dim Dim landed gently on top of Alex’s head, raising the wooden sandal like a sword as it announced its victory to the world.

“Dim Dim!”

“Well done, Dim Dim!” Alex praised. “You were amazing!”

“Ahem~”

“You are so cool!”

“Ahem~”

“You’re the best!”

“Kukukuku!”

Ramza, who had been watching everything from start to end, laughed out loud. This was truly an unexpected outcome.

He was already cursing Rowan inside his heart for doing Alex and his granddaughter dirty.

But this result pleased him. The more amazing Alex was, the prouder the Clawford Tribe would be, for the outstanding young man was their Oathkeeper.

“Did you get that, Roselia?” Ramza asked, not even bothering to hide his delight.

“Yes, Master,” the handmaiden replied. “I made sure to record it properly.”

“Good!” Ramza chuckled. “I’ll show this to the tribe. Some of them are pestering me about Alex’s trial.”

Now that the major threat had disappeared, Dim Dim shifted its attention to the Stonehide Tyrant and smiled evilly.

Without a word, the Boss Monster fled in fear, even ramming the trees in front of it in an attempt to escape.

It had seen the little bun’s outstanding battle earlier, and the last thing it wanted was to become Dim Dim’s next victim.

Seeing that its bluff worked, Dim Dim giggled and ran toward the beast cores and sigil that had fallen on the ground.

It hummed happily as it picked them up before keeping them inside its dimensional storage for future use.

There were still less than two hours until the trial ended, so there was still a possibility that the monsters would return.

Truth be told, Alex was very tempted to run after the insects in order to farm experience points.

However, he didn’t want his overconfidence to get the better of him.

The wooden sandal only worked against insect-type monsters.

If the Stonehide Tyrant realized this fact, Alex might find himself in a situation that would result in his downfall.

'Although it's regrettable, I cannot be too greedy,' Alex thought before glancing at his comrades, who were all looking at him in awe and disbelief.

The teenagers stared at each other for nearly half a minute before Alex coughed lightly, breaking everyone out of their daze.

"Are you guys okay?" Alex asked with a mischievous smile on his face. "You guys look as if you've seen a ghost."

"I didn't know Dim Dim was that strong," Charles admitted. "I just thought it was a small, soft, squishy bun."

"He has his moments." Alex nodded. "Unfortunately, he can't always enter that mode. But whenever it happens, Dim Dim becomes unstoppable."

This was also Alex's way of telling everyone that although Dim Dim was easygoing and kind, that didn't mean they should underestimate it.

In fact, even without the wooden sandal, the Dim Sum God was a menace with its brittle vials.

Any ordinary person would find themselves screaming in pain if they crossed Dim Dim's bottom line.

Fortunately, his message was effective. Everyone adjusted their understanding of their little friend.

"Dim Dim~" Dim Dim hummed happily as it crawled up Alex's body and perched on top of his head.

It announced that it had already collected all the monster drops in the surroundings, making it very happy.

“Nice work, partner.”

“Dim~”

The two high-fived each other, prompting Nessia and Lavinia to join the fun.

The two ladies also high-fived Dim Dim, making the latter giggle.

Suddenly, the sound of bells ringing echoed in the surroundings.

“Congratulations, you have all passed the second trial!”

Rowan’s voice spread in the surroundings.

“Although there is still some time left, I have decided to end the trial now because you have far exceeded my expectations. All of you did well, and I am very happy to welcome you as the new scholarship students of the academy!”

Alex and the other trial takers all turned into particles of light before shooting to the sky.

A moment later, they all found themselves at the plaza of the academy.

Lavinia sensed the presence of her kin and was genuinely surprised when she saw her grandfather and brother waiting for her return.

“Grandpa!” Lavinia ran toward Ramza and gave him a hug. “I passed the trial!”

“I saw it, Lavinia,” Ramza replied as he lightly patted his granddaughter’s head. “You did well. I am very proud of you.”

“You were amazing back there, Young Lady.” Roselia praised. “Well done.”

Cairo also nodded before shifting his gaze to Alex, whose face was currently being hugged by a very excited Efa.

The Scout had been so impressed by Alex’s performance that as soon as he appeared, she grabbed him, kissed his cheek, and crushed him in her embrace.

Elaine had to restrain her overly eager partner away, asking her to release the young man, who was already blushing from the Scout’s overly familiar skinship.

Efa realized that she had overreacted and suddenly became embarrassed.

In order to hide this fact, she grabbed Dim Dim and peppered its cheek with kisses. The little guy giggled.

“You were so cool back there, Dim Dim!” Efa said. “I never thought that you were a little war god deep inside your fluffy exterior.”

“Ahem~” Dim Dim looked very proud. Its cuteness made Efa kiss it a few more times.

“You also did well, Alex,” Elaine said as she patted the young man’s shoulder. “Your ability to lead and command others have improved over time.”

“Thank you, Elaine,” Alex replied.

“Then, do you know what time it is?” Efa asked.

“Time to sleep?” Alex answered.

“No.” Efa shook her head. “It’s time to celebrate! Let’s go to a tavern. You can also bring your friends with you.”

“That sounds like a good idea,” said Ramza after overhearing Efa’s proposal. “Let’s all celebrate. My treat. Bring your friends with you as well.”

Ramza glanced at the teenagers who had caught his eye.

‘It is best if they continue to have a good relationship with Alex and Lavinia,’ Ramza thought. ‘I can’t wait to see how they have all improved a year from now.’

The old Catkin glanced at Rowan, and the latter gave him a brief nod in reply before walking away.

Both were pleasantly surprised to see promising talent among this year’s trial takers, whom they believed would make the current school year far more exciting than the last.

“Would you guys like to go and celebrate with us?” Alex asked Charles, Renard, Nessia, and Phoebe.

“No, thank you,” Renard replied before walking away.

He was someone who didn’t like to mingle with people in the first place, so Alex didn’t insist that he come with them.

Charles, Nessia, and Phoebe agreed because this was a good opportunity to enjoy their hard-won victory.

As everyone left the gates of the academy, Alex finally took some time to read the notification window that appeared in front of him.

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[Main Story Quest Complete!]

[Enroll at Frieden Academy]

— Frieden Academy is the Academy 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: Rewards are still being calculated.

— You will be notified of your rewards when morning comes.

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The young man finally breathed a sigh of relief because his main quest was completed at long last.

However, he knew that this was only the beginning, for there were still many things that he would experience inside the walls of Frieden Academy.

Deep inside, Alex was feeling very excited because he would soon meet the characters that could only be met inside the academy.

The characters that he had loved.

The characters that had made him cry.

And the characters that had taught him things that he didn't expect from a game, which had now become his reality.

Chapter 145: The Heart Moves Where The Heart Wills [Part 1]

The group headed to the best tavern in the city, which the Headmaster of the Academy had booked for his staff, his guests, and the trial takers who had passed the trials.

Even Renard, who initially declined Alex's invitation, had no choice but to go since Rowan had personally invited him.

Efa and Elaine thought of leaving first since they felt like outsiders, but Ramza insisted that they stay and join everyone for the celebration.

After all, they had played a role in helping Alex, Charles, Lavinia, and Cairo survive the Dungeon of Beginnings.

In the end, the two Adventurers yielded because Alex and Dim Dim wished for them to come celebrate as well.

"Can I have my four sigils back now?" Rowan asked Dim Dim, who was currently eating some pudding. "Since they weren't used in the tournament, I would like to take them back."

Dim Dim blinked once, then twice, before tilting its head to the side.

Clearly, it was pretending to have no idea about what Rowan was talking about.

Ramza chuckled from the side, amused by the scene.

"It's like you're trying to steal candy from a child," Ramza commented in a teasing tone. "Since you want something back, shouldn't you offer something in exchange?"

"But... they're mine to begin with," Rowan grumbled.

“Not anymore.” Ramza smirked.

As Alex observed the two old men bantering, he couldn’t help but sigh due to Rowan’s personality.

The Headmaster of the Academy was one of the thirteen Paragons of the world.

The Dimensional Gatekeeper, Rowan.

He held the ability to control and manipulate space, making him a truly powerful being.

However, his down-to-earth nature sometimes made people forget just how strong he really was.

Alex watched as Rowan adjusted his glasses before shifting his attention back to Dim Dim, who had resumed eating its pudding.

“I’ll exchange 100 gold coins for each sigil,” Rowan said. “Do we have a deal?”

Dim Dim shook its head innocently.

“No,” Dim Dim replied, still focused on its pudding.

“200 Gold Coins.”

“No.”

“300.”

“No.”

“Okay, 500 gold coins each,” Rowan said firmly.

Dim Dim ignored the old man and continued to eat. Clearly, it knew that the sigils were more precious than mere 500 gold coins each.

The Dim Sum God knew everything there was to know about Arcana. To others, the sigils might be nothing more than special tools that trial takers could use to escape the island and pass the second trial.

But in truth, they held the power of space.

Their main use was to instantly teleport anyone to the plaza of Frieden Academy.

What did this mean?

It meant that no matter where one was in the world, as long as one of the sigils was activated, its holder would instantly be sent to the plaza of the academy without fail.

That was the power Rowan had imbued the sigils using his space magic.

In short, the sigils could be life-saving tools Alex could use to escape dire situations.

Dim Dim understood this very well, so it didn’t plan on returning them no matter what!

Seeing that the little squishy bun was ignoring him, Rowan reached out to give its cheek a light poke.

But before the old man could touch its cheek, Dim Dim used its little spoon to block his finger.

It didn’t mind if Alex or any of its friends poked it. But being poked by an old coot?

No, thank you!

“Dim!” Dim Dim said angrily as it pointed its spoon at Rowan like a sword.

This made Ramza laugh louder. After all, there were very few people in the world who would defy a Paragon.

“Dim Dim, those sigils are very precious, you know?” Rowan tried to pacify the little bun, who was glaring at him. “Returning them to me is the right and proper thing to do. Okay, let’s settle this with 1,000 gold coins per sigil. Do we have a deal?”

At this point, even Alex was tempted. He was about to tell Dim Dim to accept the exchange, but the Dim Sum God was firm.

“No!” Dim Dim replied, which made Rowan sigh.

He wanted to get the little bun to see reason and return the sigils to him, but he couldn’t bring himself to bully such a cute creature!

Especially if that creature was giving off a subtle but unmistakable aura of divinity.

As one of the Paragons of the world, Rowan could see more than others could.

While he was unable to see the threads of fate, he was certain that Dim Dim was a creature the world of Arcana loved.

“Fine, you can keep them,” Rowan replied. “Just make sure to use them properly.”

“Dim!” Dim Dim nodded and resumed eating its pudding.

The party continued until late at night.

Since the Headmaster had already rented the inn, his guests and the successful candidates were free to use the rooms as their lodging.

As for him and his staff, they had their own rooms in the academy.

Still, Rowan offered to accommodate Ramza and his entourage in the guest rooms of the academy.

Ramza didn't reject his old friend's offer and bade Alex and his friends goodbye.

Lavinia hesitated a bit, but she still followed her grandfather and brother to the academy.

Efa and Elaine were also given their own rooms, so they didn't need to look for another inn to stay for the night.

"Dim Dim, can we sleep together?" Elaine asked.

"Dim!" Dim Dim nodded.

Elaine was one of Alex's first friends, so Dim Dim didn't mind staying with her.

The young man didn't mind either and only thought that Elaine wished to squish the Dim Sum God's cheeks or treat it as a plush.

A sigh escaped Alex's lips as he closed the door of his room.

He was quite tired from his recent adventure and wanted nothing more than to rest. However, he first decided to take a bath to wash away the dirt and grime on his body.

His broken left arm made it difficult for him to remove his clothes. Luckily, his clothing was loose and practical, so he didn't have to struggle for long. The young man then made his way to the shower room.

Cold water fell on his head, making him shudder. However, it also brought relief, soothing the aches and soreness in his body.

As he was about to take the soap to wash himself, another hand reached out to grab it.

Alex's eyes widened in shock when he realized that he wasn't alone. But his main concern was that he hadn't sensed anyone until now.

"Don't worry, it's me."

A familiar voice spoke behind Alex.

The young man was surprised because he made sure to lock the door of his room before he went to the bathroom.

But, Efa once told him that lockpicking was one of her specialties.

This trait was also boosted by her new Job Class, Shadow Scout, allowing her to infiltrate locations stealthily as long as it was dark.

"I know it's difficult for you to wash yourself, so I have come to help you."

A pair of hands started to lather the soap on his back, scrubbing every nook and cranny.

These hands were rough, proof that their owner had spent a lot of time wielding weapons instead of taking care of them like any noble lady did.

They weren't soft like those of a pampered girl, for they belonged to the hands of someone who risked her life as an Adventurer.

Alex didn't know what to do, so he simply allowed Efa to wash his back without saying a word.

The young man wasn't like those isekai protagonists who were dense to a stupid degree and couldn't tell what others felt about them.

Efa would act playfully around him and didn't mind touching his hand, hugging him, or giving him a kiss on the cheek.

At first, he had thought that this was just her way of showing her appreciation after he had saved her from the goblins.

But as time went by, he understood that the lady, who was three years older than him, didn't see him as a child.

She was treating him as a man, and this action of hers confirmed it.

Chapter 146: The Heart Moves Where The Heart Wills [Part 2]

Alex was a healthy young man.

He had experienced what it was like to take the stairs of adulthood in his past life, so he understood what Efa wanted from him.

It was very hard for him to ignore the young lady's determination, especially when he knew very well that he didn't dislike her either.

Efa might be older than him by three years, but she was cute and petite.

If Alex and Efa stood side by side, a stranger would assume they were about the same age.

As the water washed away the soap on his back, Efa lightly patted his shoulder and whispered in his ear.

"Turn around."

There wasn't a tinge of her usual mischief in her voice. The playful tone she always used with Alex was gone, replaced by determination.

This time, she wasn't teasing him. It was as if she wanted him to understand how she truly felt through her actions.

Alex wanted to meet that determination of hers, so he turned around to look at her face-to-face.

Her beautiful blue eyes met his own, and for the first time, Alex felt like he was seeing her for what she really was.

Her hair used to only be shoulder-length, but she had grown it out and tied it in a ponytail.

While she might not be the most beautiful girl in the world, Alex's heart couldn't help but skip a beat as he gazed upon her face.

Efa smiled sweetly because she realized that Alex finally understood how she felt about him.

This was no longer a game, and there was no point in hiding anything.

She didn't mind if this would become her last memory of him, but she decided to face it head-on.

Regardless of what happened next... regardless of the consequences, she was prepared for it.

Even if Alex were to push her away, she would accept it.

She didn't want to have any regrets.

Efa knew that once Alex entered Frieden Academy, there would be fewer opportunities for the two of them to meet because he would need to focus on his studies.

So, while there was still time, she bared her heart to him, even though that same heart was now pounding wildly inside her chest due to anxiety, embarrassment, and dread.

“If you don’t like it, you can push me away,” Efa said as she hugged Alex and rested her head on his shoulder. “I just want to know how you feel about me. I promise that this will be the last time that I will do something like this. The only thing I want is your honesty.”

Alex stood still, feeling her warmth despite the cold water that was falling on top of their heads.

But he understood that this was something he couldn’t run away from.

Efa had gathered her courage for this moment, so he knew that running away wasn’t an option.

If he tried to downplay this moment or treat it as some kind of a joke, he would regret it for the rest of his life.

Alex raised his right hand and lightly stroked the back of Efa’s head. She trembled ever so slightly at his touch.

She couldn’t help but tear up a bit because her emotions weren’t really stable at the moment.

As the water continued to fall upon their bodies, the two remained holding each other until Efa finally pulled back.

The young lady had already regained her composure and started to lather Alex’s body with soap.

“Let’s finish this, shall we?” Efa said softly, doing her best not to let Alex see her eyes.

She was relieved that they were inside the shower room because the young man might have teased her had he noticed the tears that were falling from her eyes.

Alex smiled faintly and allowed Efa to clean him up properly.

The young lady carefully scrubbed away all the dirt and sweat from his body, then rinsed him off with clean water.

Once she was sure Alex was squeaky clean, she gently dried him with a towel before nudging him out of the shower room so she could also wash up.

Alex continued to dry his hair with a hand towel as he looked through the window of his room.

The two moons in the sky illuminated the world, and the sea of stars spread as far as the eye could see.

Alex had made an important decision, and his heart was at peace with it.

Perhaps he was too deep in thought that he didn't notice that someone had already walked up behind him.

Only when someone hugged him from behind did he snap out of his daze.

Turning around, he looked at the young lady who was making his heart beat faster inside his chest.

Efa pulled him and led him to the bed, wishing to sleep beside him.

As they lay under the covers in a tender embrace, the two talked about themselves.

Their childhood.

Their dreams when growing up.

And the realization that some dreams might not be possible to accomplish.

Of course, Alex couldn't possibly tell Efa that he came from another world, or that for many years, he had only known Arcana as the setting of a game.

The young man struggled to explain some things because the technology of Earth was very different from the technology of Arcana.

But, he told her what he could tell and simply winged the rest!

Efa didn't mind it since she already knew that Alex was a very mysterious person. She simply listened as the young man told his tale about a world that seemed to be familiar and unfamiliar at the same time.

"So these planes are completely made up of metal," Efa said. "Just like airships, right?"

"Yes," Alex answered. "But they're not fueled by magic cores or magic crystals. They're powered by jet fuel. Frankly, I don't really know what jet fuel is, but that's what they are called."

"I see." Efa smiled, enjoying her conversation with Alex, while lightly patting his chest.

On that night, the two knew a little better about each other.

The food they liked to eat.

The places they wanted to go.

The monsters they hated the most, and a few more things. Their conversation lasted past midnight.

Both of them listened to each other's worries and frustrations.

Sometimes, both of them would chuckle as they talked about something funny, or sigh because there was nothing they could do about the worries in their hearts.

Efa and Alex then gazed at each other before sharing a sweet and lingering kiss that warmed both of their bodies.

While they didn't cross that final line and simply held each other in an embrace, a promise was born between them.

Soon, Alex fell asleep, his heart at peace.

Efa looked at his face for a few more minutes before planting a kiss on his forehead. She then held him tight and closed her eyes.

Just like Alex, she felt that a heavy burden had been lifted from her shoulders and was looking forward to the next time they met each other.

By then, the young man would have spent a year in the academy.

Efa was certain that the next time they met, they would finish what they had started.

Alex didn't lie to her, and even told her about the ladies that he saw in his "dreams," whom he would meet inside the academy.

He told her about their background, which made Efa giggle because the young man beside her seemed to be shooting for the moon.

But she liked that part about him.

Alex seemed to be moving towards a goal that she couldn't see at the moment.

However, she believed that whatever that goal would be, it was something that was truly important for the person she had chosen.

Whether he would be able to succeed in wooing their hearts would depend on his ability.

Since Alex had shared his secrets with her, she understood that he didn't want her to have any regrets in life.

Both of them had given each other a year to fully sort out their feelings, so the next time they met, things would never be the same again.

High above the celestial realm, Cupid was giving Alex a thumbs-up.

As a Messenger of Love, he was well aware that love had many faces.

A happily ever after might not be possible for everyone.

But not taking that leap of faith had made many people regret their decision in the later parts of their lives.

"The heart moves where the heart wills," Cupid muttered before flying away to meet up with Lily so he could give her a report on how awesome Dim Dim had been during the second trial of Frieden Academy.

Chapter 147: Main Quest Rewards

When Alex opened his eyes the next morning, Efa was no longer by his side.

All he saw was a letter, which he assumed she had left behind on the table.

“I’m not really good at saying goodbyes, and it’s not like we’ll never see each other again. I’ll come and find you during the school break, so make sure to study hard and get even stronger the next time we meet!

The young man read the letter a second time before carefully storing it inside his storage ring.

They had given each other a year to sort out their feelings, so he was certain they would meet again during the school break.

‘Starting today, we will be staying at the academy dorms,’ Alex thought as he opened the window of his room. ‘I didn’t expect I’d be going back to school. Though Frieden Academy will definitely be different from the academies on Earth.’

There were already many dangers lurking within the walls of the learning institution, yet he also had to watch out for challenges from his fellow students too.

Most of the students were nobles or members of the royal family.

Needless to say, some of them look down on commoners, especially the scholarship students.

Upon remembering the events that would soon befall Renard and Nessia, the young man couldn’t help but smirk.

‘I’m sure they will be able to manage it,’ Alex thought before the images of Charles and Eris popped up inside his head.

Charles had enrolled to Frieden Academy for one reason and one reason only—to find the cure for his sister’s sickness.

Fortunately or unfortunately, the pill that would cure the Child Bane’s disease could only be exchanged from the academy’s treasury.

Not only that, but it also required a hundred thousand academy merit points, something that Charles wouldn't be able to collect easily.

'Eris should be five years old right now,' Alex thought. 'At most, she only has three to five more years to live. Within that time frame, Charles must get the pill that will cure her.'

Alex then opened his Arcana Shop and checked the consumable area.

Just as he expected, the cure for Eris was there.

— — —

< Aurelia's Tear >

"A single tear to mend what fate has broken."

Item Grade: Mythic

Type: Consumable / Cure

Cost: 40,000 Arcana Points

Effect: Instantly cures the affliction known as Child's Bane (Scarlet Grief). Restores 80% of maximum health and permanently strengthens the immune system against soulbound diseases. Usable only once in a lifetime.

— — —

Alex closed his eyes before heaving a deep sigh.

As much as he wanted to help Eris, he also needed Arcana Points to get stronger for the time being.

Besides, it was Charles' main quest, and all the decisions he would make in the academy would revolve in this matter.

'I'll just come with him for some quests to help him gather merit points,' Alex decided as he glanced at the notification window that had popped up beside him.

It was none other than the rewards he had gotten from completing his main quest.

— — —

[Main Story Quest Completed!]

[Enroll at Frieden Academy]

— Frieden Academy is the Academy 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.

< Rewards >

— Windrazor Harpy Matron Monster Core

— Hellmaw Basilisk Core

— Hexwing Empress Core

— 4 Middle Grade Magic Crystals

— 10,000 Arcana Points

— 5,000 gold coins

[In light of your outstanding performance against all odds in the Dungeon of Beginnings and the second trial of Frieden Academy, you will receive a bonus reward!]

< Bonus Reward >

— Oathbound Armor Set

— —

Alex was quite happy with the rewards he had gotten from his main quest. But after seeing the bonus reward, he couldn't help but immediately check the information of his new armor set.

— — —

< Oathbound Armor Set >

“For those who swear with blood and shield, whose strength lies not in power—but in promise.”

Set Grade: Super Rare

— —

< Oathbound Helm >

“May your eyes stay clear—even as the world turns grey.”

Type: Helmet

Stats: Constitution +5, Intelligence +5, Damage Reduction +5%

Effect: Reflects incoming physical damage by 5%

< Heartwarden Plate >

“Let blades strike, so others need not bleed.”

Type: Chestplate

Stats: Constitution +10, Strength +10, Damage Reduction +20%

Effect: Reflects incoming physical damage by 5%

< Gauntlets of Silent Resolve >

“The hand that lifts others bears the heaviest weight.”

Type: Gauntlets

Stats: Strength +5, Dexterity +10, Damage Reduction +5%

Effect: Reflects incoming physical damage by 5%

< Blade of the Bound Vow >

“A blade that sings only when the heart stays true.”

Type: One-Handed Sword

Stats: Attack +140, Strength +10, Constitution +10

Effect: Deals 30% bonus damage to enemies targeting allies.

Passive: While fighting to protect a party member below 50% HP, gain +10% Attack Speed.

< Mantle of the Last Oath >

“Even should you fall—the promise lingers on the wind.”

Type: Cloak

Stats: Constitution +10, Agility +5, Damage Reduction +5%

Effect: Reflects incoming physical damage by 5%

< Set Bonus Effects >

[2 pieces]

Oathkeeper’s Step – Movement speed +10% when moving toward an endangered ally (below 50% HP).

[3 pieces]

Sacrificial Stand – While blocking or intercepting attacks for an ally, gain 15% reduced damage.

[4 pieces]

Sworn Justice – Critical hits against enemies who attack your allies deal 25% more damage.

[5 pieces]

Final Vow – Heart Unbroken

— If Alex receives fatal damage, he will instead survive with 1 HP and become invulnerable for 10 seconds. This passive skill has a cooldown of 48 hours.

— Reflects incoming physical damage by 10%

— — —

“Holy sh*t...” Alex muttered after seeing the stats of his armor set.

The young man’s eyes were still wide with shock even after he had reread the information to make sure he wasn’t dreaming.

Not only did his armor set reduce all incoming damage—whether it be physical or magical—by 35%, it also had a physical damage reflection of 30%!

The Set Bonus also allowed Alex to gain more abilities. In other words, this set was the perfect match for his job class.

‘I will treat this as my trump card and only wear it when needed,’ Alex thought.

The stats and bonuses of the armor set were undoubtedly incredible, but it was the skill, Final Vow, that made Alex grin from ear to ear.

Ten seconds of invulnerability was a big deal as it would certainly be enough to save his life under any circumstances.

Also, the 10,000 Arcana Points made him giddy with excitement as it would allow him to buy a few things from the arcana shop.

Before this, he hadn't touched his Arcana Points—not that he didn't want to, but he simply hadn't accumulated enough points to afford anything.

Now that he was rich in points, he was itching to shop. But in the end, he managed to calm down and stop himself from acting impulsively. The points could be used for more important things in the future.

Instead, Alex took out the four middle-grade magic crystals and consumed them.

This act gave him 42 magic points, increasing his Magic Stat to 201.

He then took out the rare skill book he still hadn't used and activated it.

Thanks to his recent experiences, Alex could finally confirm which skill he needed the most.

The only reason he had put off learning this skill in the first place was because he had been restricted by his limited mana pool, which made it impossible for him to cast more powerful skills to assist him in battle.

Although 201 Mana Points was still quite little compared to natural-born mages, it was still decent enough to allow Alex do something that would push him closer to the power of a Shield Savant.

Alex had been able to become the top 69 Ranker in the Global Rankings not only because of his Job Class was a tanker.

No.

It was because the Shield Savant was a Job Class that was similar to G*lgamesh in Fate St*y Knight.

Instead of summoning countless weapons to hurl at his enemies, Alex could summon countless shields and make them attack without mercy.

Imagine hundreds of magical shields imbued with different elements, attacking autonomously like satellites, while Alex calmly enjoyed a cup of tea.

That was how disgustingly strong the Shield Savant was, and it was just one of its many offensive abilities.

Alex was now planning to imitate that battle prowess with his meager mana.

So without any hesitation, he chose the skill that would bring him closer to his ideal build.

And that skill was none other than...

— — —

< Multicast [EX] >

“One thought, countless echoes. One motion, infinite force.”

A pinnacle-tier casting technique that allows the user to simultaneously manifest multiple instances of any skill. Whether it's projectiles, barriers, or movements.

Multicast [EX] manifests a single intent into a storm of action.

This is a passive skill that can be toggled on or off at will, granting its wielder full control over when to unleash overwhelming force or conserve power. It does not merely replicate skills, it amplifies will, shaping mana into a harmonious barrage.

Only those with absolute control over mana threads can wield this skill without losing themselves to chaos.

— — —

“Finally, I can now use this skill,” Alex muttered.

With this skill, he could summon a few magical shields and enchant them with flame or holy magic before hurtling them at his enemies.

‘I just need to buy the Multitask Skill Book from the Arcana Shop and this build will be complete,’ Alex thought. ‘Unfortunately, I don’t have enough points right now.’

Alex only had 16,440 Arcana Points right now, and the Multitask skill book cost 20,000 Arcana Points.

Since he had chosen this path, he needed to save up more points to finalize his build.

Once he obtained the multitask skill, he would be able to autonomously control his magical shields and allow them to attack his enemies as if they had a will of their own.

And just like his Oathbound Armor Set, he would keep it as his trump card until the right time came.

Just as he was feeling good about himself, he noticed that there was a white, little bun staring at him from the window ledge of his room.

The young man was so occupied with his thoughts that he failed to notice that Dim Dim had come to wake him up.

“Good morning, Dim Dim,” Alex said. “Did you sleep well with Elaine?”

“Dim Dim~” Dim Dim smiled and greeted Alex a good morning as well.

“We’re heading to the academy later. Are you ready for another adventure?”

Dim Dim nodded. “Dim!”

“That’s good to hear,” Alex lightly patted his little partner’s head, making Dim Dim’s smile widen.

After admiring the view of the Capital City of Harmonia from his window for a few more minutes, Alex and Dim Dim left the room to meet up with the others.

He wanted to bid a proper goodbye to Elaine, Ramza, and his Master, Cairo, who would continue his journey in the Kingdom of Avalon.

The young man was very thankful for everything that they had done for him, and truth be told, he was going to miss his master, who always supported him with everything he had.

Chapter 148: A New Chapter Was About To Start

Alex bid his goodbye to Elaine, Ramza, and Roselia, then followed his master to a remote location.

The Catkin had asked to talk with him in private, and the latter merely assumed that his Master was just shy to bid him goodbye in public.

“Alex, we won’t be seeing each other until your school break,” Cairo said. “But before I leave, I plan to teach you two Demon Slaying skills.”

As Alex’s master, Cairo could directly impart a skill to his disciple even if they had different professions.

Learning skills supposedly exclusive to another profession was one of the many advantages of having a powerful master in Arcana.

Cairo was a Demon Slayer, so that meant Alex could learn Demon Slaying skills from his master, despite being an Oathkeeper.

Until now, the Catkin hadn't passed down any of his core skills to Alex since he had wanted the latter to first build his foundation in swordsmanship. That way, the young man would be more aware of how to use those skills properly in battle when he learnt them.

As if waiting for that moment, a notification sounded inside Alex's head, and a blue window screen appeared in front of him.

— —

< Subclass Unlocked! >

< New Subclass: Demon Slayer >

— —

Alex Stratos

Age: 17

Alignment: Chaotic Good

Mana: 201/201

Job Class: Oathkeeper

Subclass: Demon Slayer

Strength – 70 [+6]

Intelligence – 30 [+3]

Dexterity – 20 [+3]

Agility – 110 [+3]

Constitution – 76 [+4]

Stamina – 76 [+4]

Magic – 201 [+3]

Luck – 24 [+3]

Available Stat Points: 0

AP: 16,440

Active Skills: Oathkeeper's Duty, Shield [EX], Shield Bash, Unyielding Pact, Echo of the Sworn, Balance Breaker, Shield Charge, Rear-End Thrust, Enchant Fire, Enchant Holy

Passive Skills: Improved Stone Throw, Head Shot, Rebuke of Steel, Shield of Thorns

— —

“Since you’re now a Rank 2 Oathkeeper, I will bestow upon you these two Demon Slaying Skills,” Cairo said as he pulled out his sword from its scabbard and channeled his strength into it.

“Demon Slaying Arts, First Form...” Cairo’s blade turned purple, giving off a very deadly appearance.

“Culling Blade!”

With a strike meant to vanquish demons, Cairo slashed forward as if cutting the very fabric of the world.

Alex felt as if time itself slowed down, allowing him to observe and learn how the skill manifested from start to finish.

It didn’t take long before his understanding of the skill, Culling Blade, reached the level of enlightenment.

He had fallen into a trance-like state while analyzing the move, only coming back to his senses after he heard the sound of a notification inside his head.

< Congratulations! You have learned the skill, Culling Blade! >

— —

< Culling Blade >

“The hunt begins with fire... and ends with silence.”

Element: Demonic-Flame

Stamina Cost: 10

Description:

Upon activation, the blade is coated with ghostly purple flames that sear through the flesh and essence of demonic beings. These flames cling to the sword like vengeful spirits, howling in silence as they tear through infernal resistance.

Effect:

- This skill deals 100% bonus damage against any creature
- This skill deals a 300% bonus damage against demonic creatures.
- Ignore 50% defense of demonic creatures.
- Has a 30% chance to inflict [Culling Burn] upon successful hit.

[Culling Burn]

- Deals 15 Damage per second for 5 seconds.

— —

“This skill is very effective against Demons, so don’t hesitate to use it when you face one of them,” Cairo explained. “Now, this is the second skill I will teach you. It has a wide area of effect, and you can use it when enemies surround you.”

The Catkin took another fighting stance. This time, his sword was coated in a golden light.

“Demon Slaying Art, Second Form...” Cairo stabbed his sword on the ground and shouted.

“Grand Cross!”

Just like what had happened earlier, the world once again moved very slowly, allowing Alex to observe the skill closely.

Information passed through his head, helping him understand everything about the skill.

The young man watched as the ground under Cairo’s feet created a golden magic circle that expanded ten meters in all directions, with the Catkin at its center.

A moment later, golden light erupted from the magic circle, which would’ve dealt significant damage to any non-ally creature within its strike range.

Once again, Alex fell into a trance and only snapped out of it when a notification popped in his head, informing him that he had learned a new skill.

< Congratulations! You have learned the skill, Grand Cross! >

— —

< Grand Cross >

“Let the light pass judgment upon the wicked.”

Element: Radiant-Holy

Stamina Cost: 30

Description:

Coats the weapon in holy light that will channel the divine wrath through its edge. Plunging the sword into the ground will create a golden magic circle that is ten meters in radius.

Ancient runes that pulse with radiant light surge forth, searing all non-allied creatures inside with purifying force.

Effect:

- All non-ally creatures within the circle take 250% Holy damage.
- Demonic and Undead enemies take 500% Holy Damage.
- Can be used to exorcise earthbound spirits, as well as evil spirits of the dead.
- Inflicts [Radiant Seal] on Demonic and Undead Creatures for 10 seconds.

[Radiant Seal]

- Reduces movement and attack speed by 50%
- Removes all positive buffs from the target.

— —

The golden circle faded as Cairo finished his demonstration. He sheathed his sword and glanced at Alex, who seemed to be staring into space.

“Did you learn the skills properly?” Cairo asked, waking Alex from his daze.

“Yes, Master!” Alex replied, bowing his head in gratitude. “Thank you very much for imparting these skills to me!”

Cairo nodded. “Good. Study well in the academy. When we meet again, I will teach you another skill.”

The Catkin then patted his disciple’s shoulder. “Elaine and Efa said they plan to travel with me to see the world. They had mostly stayed in the Floating Islands of Thaloria and only visited the nearby towns and villages.

“But with me, they will truly get to travel around the kingdom of Avalon. If time permits, we might also go to the neighboring kingdom and see what they have to offer.”

Alex smiled faintly. “Master, that sounds like a grand adventure. I’m relieved you will have Elaine and Efa with you. Honestly, you are not good when it comes to earning and spending money.”

Cairo coughed lightly, unable to refute his disciple’s words. He didn’t really travel while carrying a lot of money.

If he were hungry, he would simply hunt beasts to feed himself.

As for shelter, he would sell body parts from the monsters he had killed along his way. Usually, it was enough, and he never really had a problem making ends meet during his journey.

With the sensible Elaine and Efa accompanying Cairo, Alex believed that his master and the ladies could visit many places and help many people in need.

“Grandfather said the academy is filled with many geniuses and outstanding individuals,” Cairo remarked. “As my disciple, you shouldn’t feel inferior to them. If they come to you looking for trouble, you have my permission to beat the crap out of them.”

Alex nodded. “Yes, Master.”

“Do not forget—you are the Oathkeeper of the Clawford Tribe,” Cairo said in a serious tone. “Do not hesitate to ask for our help because we will always support you in any way we can.”

“Also, look after my sister, okay? She’s proud and can be arrogant at times. It’s only after she met you that her attitude has softened a bit. At the least, she no longer acts like a spoiled young lady from a wealthy family.”

Cairo then increased his grip on the young man’s shoulder as he added a few more reminders to his disciple.

“If any boys maliciously injure or harm my sister in any way, go ahead and kill them, okay?” Cairo said coldly. “Chop them up, then feed them to the fishes to erase all evidence. You can ask my grandpa to do the cleanup. He will do it with a smile on his face.”

Alex shuddered. He could tell that his master was not joking at all. He wanted to laugh it off, but Cairo’s gaze was too overwhelming, so he could only nod his head in acknowledgment.

“Don’t worry, Master!” Alex patted his chest with confidence. “Leave it to me. I’ll make sure that no one messes with Lavinia.”

“Good.” Cairo nodded. “I knew I could count on you.”

After having a heart-to-heart talk, Cairo escorted Alex to the gates of the academy, where they found Lavinia, Elaine, Charles, and his sister, Eris.

There was also another young lady, whom Alex was familiar with, and she was none other than Vivian, the older sister of Charles and Eris.

Dim Dim was playing tag with the five-year-old girl. Eris giggled sweetly as she ran away from the white little bun chasing her.

“You must be Alex,” Vivian said in a grateful tone. “My name is Vivian Lambert, and I am Charles’ and Eris’ older sister.”

“Well met, Vivian,” Alex replied. “You’re a second year in the academy, right?”

“Yes,” Vivian answered. “My aunt paid for my tuition.”

Her aunt was the Headmistress of the orphanage where Eris was currently staying.

She was also a very successful businesswoman and had been using her spare money to raise orphans.

The orphanage was her home, and just like Charles and Vivian, she was also doing her best to find a cure for Eris’ disease.

The three of them wished nothing more than to free the young child from the shackles of the disease that always claimed its victims before their tenth birthday. She deserved to live her life to the fullest, too.

“Eris, Dim Dim and Alex need to enter the academy now,” Charles said as he patted his little sister’s head.

Eris looked very reluctant to part with her new friend, but she still nodded her head, albeit a little sadly.

Seeing her expression, Alex crouched down so that they could see eye to eye and smiled at her.

“Don’t worry, Dim Dim will visit and play with you on the weekends,” Alex said. “Isn’t that right, Dim Dim?”

“Dim!”

The Dim Sum God then told Alex that it would escort Eris back to the orphanage and return to the academy with Charles and Vivian afterward.

Only then did Eris smile happily as she picked up her little friend and hugged it lovingly.

After saying goodbye to each other, Alex watched as Cairo, Elaine, Roselia, Charles, Vivian, and Eris walked away.

“Why is Efa not with them?” Lavinia asked. “Did something happen?”

“Efa said she’s not good with goodbyes,” Alex answered.

“I see.” Lavinia nodded.

She didn’t mention that Efa had spoken to her in private earlier. But whatever they had talked about was only known to the two of them.

“Is there something on my face?” Alex asked because the young lady beside him was staring very intently at him.

“Nothing,” Lavinia said as she looked away. “Let’s go, Alex. It’s time to go to the dorms.”

The young man could only shrug before following Lavinia.

A new Chapter of their lives was about to start. As Alex stepped onto school grounds, his memory of the many events waiting to unravel within Frieden Academy filled him with both excitement and worry.

Chapter 149: Alex’s Roommate [Part 1]

Scholarship students were housed in a separate building from those who paid tuition.

The name of Alex’s dormitory was Ironheart.

It was a fitting name for it symbolized resilience, grit, and strength, perfect for scholarship students who had earned their place through hardship and hard work rather than status.

The poetic symbolism evoked a sense of unity, and to outsiders, it was a home where warriors and mages were tempered, not pampered.

At least, that had been the intention when the Ironheart Dormitory was first established.

But now, those who resided within its walls were called many derogatory names, such as iron rats, rust born, and, most commonly, scrapkin. To some nobles, the residents of the Ironheart Dormitory were like a new race of beastkin whose defining trait was, well, being scrap.

Of course, not all nobles were bad.

The majority were actually good and treated scholarship students as friends and equals.

Only the elitists of the academy who prided themselves on their nobility looked down on the masses and treated them as mere playthings.

This mindset was not restricted to students.

A few Professors with noble lineage also looked down on the scholarship students, believing that those specific students were only able to enter their glorious academy through sheer luck.

Naturally, these Professors never said such things out loud, fearing they would get kicked out by the Headmaster of the Academy.

The extent of their discrimination was turning a blind eye whenever they saw some of the nobles abusing scholarship students, even secretly reveling in the victim's suffering. Of course, some would even go out of their way to cover for the bully.

“The first, second, third, and fourth years have their own dorm leaders,” Nessia said as she adjusted her glasses. “This year, I have been personally nominated by the Headmaster to become the Dorm Leader of the First Years.”

As the dorm leader of the incoming students, she explained the rules to Alex and Lavinia, who had arrived a bit later.

“Wow, you don’t have to look so smug about it, Nessia,” Alex commented because the young lady couldn’t stop her self-satisfied smile from appearing.

“Don’t worry, you can count on me if you have problems.” Nessia lightly patted her modest chest as if she could handle everything that the world could throw at her.

“So don’t hesitate to look for me, okay? Since we were on the same team in the second trial, I’ll help you to the best of my ability.”

Alex grinned. “Okay, I need your help now. Can you tell us where our rooms are?”

“Of course.” Nessia fixed her glasses a second time. “The left wing is for the guys, and the right wing is for the girls. Guys are not allowed to enter the right wing unless they have explicit permission from one of the Dorm Heads.

“Any guy caught sneaking into the girls’ side will be fined 100 gold coins, and on top of that, they might also receive extra punishment from the staff of the academy.”

Alex thought that the rule was reasonable since the rooms of boys and girls should be separated from each other in the first place.

“But this rule doesn’t apply to the right wing,” Nessia added. “Girls can visit the boys’ dormitory, but we have a curfew. No girls are allowed to stay in the boys’ dormitory past eight in the evening.

“Last but not least, each room will accommodate two students. I have used my authority to put you and Renard together, so no need to thank me.”

Alex almost coughed out blood and perished on the spot.

“Um, can you swap him with Charles?” Alex asked. “You know Renard and I don’t really get along—”

Seeing Nessia break into a mischievous smile, the young man immediately understood that she had done it on purpose!

“Oi! This is abuse of authority!” Alex complained. “Girl, please give me a different roommate. Anyone will do as long as it’s not Renard!”

“You’re fine with anyone?” Nessia’s smile widened.

“On second thought, just make Charles my roommate,” Alex said seriously. “Just think of it as a favor from the experiences we shared in the second trial.”

Nessia giggled. “I was just teasing you. I knew you and Renard don’t get along, so I made him Charles’ roommate.”

Alex sighed in relief when the possibility of spending one entire year living with Renard disappeared.

He and Renard were like oil and water, except oil wanted to kill water for interrupting it mid-dump.

“Your room is room number 13. It’s on the first floor,” Nessia said. “As for who your roommate is, I only know of his name, which is Chuck No Rizz.”

“... Come again?” Alex blinked.

“Chuck No Rizz.”

“... Oh my god.”

Chuck was one of the NPCs of ELO. He was known as the greatest troublemaker in the academy.

Due to his good looks, most people wouldn't think that he'd be such a big troublemaker at first glance.

But as long as they spent some time with him, they would know that this handsome guy was someone who liked to see the world burn.

Chuck was a Fire Mage. If the opportunity ever presented itself, he would not bat an eye and burn the entire academy to the ground.

Do you need a forest fire?

Toss Chuck inside the forest and you get one for free.

Need an Arsonist? Say no more! He is the right man for the job!

Do you need your exam papers to mysteriously vanish in a small “accident” involving fireworks and a summoned salamander? Why, Chuck's already lighting the fuse!

In the game, he once set off the cafeteria sprinklers because someone said cold food was better than hot.

As for his greatest achievement?

Accidentally inventing the spell “Flashbang Inferno”.

An explosion so bright and loud, it gave five professors temporary amnesia and set the student council president's uniform ablaze.

And no, Chuck didn't have rizz.

He had fireballs.

He didn't flirt. He ignited opportunities and exploded expectations, leaving some of the ladies unable to resist him!

There was even a famous scene that happened during Alchemy Class in the game.

"This potion is highly volatile," the Alchemy Professor stated. "All of you should handle it with care."

Chuck snapped his fingers, and a small spark appeared beside the case filled with potions.

What happened moments later was messy and chaotic, but it could also be described in three words.

Explosion. Smoke. Screaming.

A few months in the future, the academy would try to expel him five times.

But everytime, the paperwork mysteriously caught fire.

Coincidence?

Everyone thought not!

The only saving grace was that no one had died from his pranks... At least not yet.

“Sorry, but every other room is already taken,” Nessia said firmly after seeing Alex’s complicated expression. “No more room swapping is allowed.”

Alex blinked once, then twice, as he gazed at the young lady in front of him.

Compared to Chuck, Renard actually looked cute in comparison!

‘Fortunately, I have Svalinn.’ Alex wiped the imaginary sweat on his forehead. ‘If worse comes to worst, I’ll just use Shield Bash on him to knock him unconscious.’

With a heavy heart, Alex headed to his room.

He didn’t know why Chuck acted the way he did. Perhaps he just wanted attention.

Regardless of Chuck’s reasons, Alex was bound to spend a year with him. He could only hope that his roommate wouldn’t “accidentally” set his clothes on fire.

Chapter 150: Alex’s Roommate [Part 2]

‘Room 13.’ Alex gazed at the room number of the door in front of him. ‘This must be it.’

He took a deep breath before trying to open the door normally. But just as he expected, it was locked.

Using the key Nessia had handed over to him, Alex tried again. This time, the door finally opened without problems.

The room wasn’t that big, but it was big enough to fit two beds, a table, two chairs, and two study desks. At a corner, he also saw a door which he knew led to the bathroom.

Alex was satisfied with what he saw. Overall, the room wasn’t that bad. It had everything a student would need, though there was not a single additional luxury.

There were also two cabinets inside the room. Alex decided to only put uniforms into his cabinet since he preferred to keep his clothes inside his storage ring.

Speaking of uniforms, Alex had yet to pick them up from the Academy Office.

Scholarship students were awarded three sets of uniforms after being accepted into the academy. If they wanted more, they could only buy with their own money.

'I should probably go there right now,' Alex mused.

However, just as he was thinking about leaving the room, the door behind him opened. A handsome teen with short red hair and blue eyes entered the room.

"Hi!" the stranger said, smiling widely. "You must be my roommate! What's your name?"

"Alex," Alex replied. "Alex Stratos."

"Alex is a good name." The teenage boy's smile turned into a smirk. "My name is Chuck No Rizz. Just call me Chuck, okay? Although I am from a prestigious Ducal Family, I decided to enroll here using my own ability.

"You should be happy to have someone as awesome, amazing, handsome, dashing, suave, charismatic, and handsome as me as your roommate. Yes, I mentioned handsome twice because that part is important. Although you are also handsome, I'm more handsome than you."

"Hahaha..." Alex forced himself to laugh out of politeness.

He was really starting to regret protesting about having Renard as a roommate.

Although the two of them didn't get along well, Renard was at least quiet since he didn't like talking to other people!

Chuck, on the other hand, seemed to be very happy to have a new victim—errr, friend, who couldn't escape while he talked.

"So, my best friend, how about we go to the Academy Office together to get our uniforms?" Chuck asked as he slung his arm on Alex's shoulder, all smiles.

Had Alex not already known that the person calling him "my best friend" was the notorious troublemaker of Frieden Academy, he might've had a more positive impression of Chuck.

Sadly, he knew that the guy was a powder keg waiting to explode, so he didn't want to get too chummy with him.

"Um, actually, I plan to meet with my friends first," Alex replied. "Let's hang out next tim—"

"Friends?! You already have friends?!" Chuck interrupted Alex before he could finish whatever he was going to say. "Then they are now my friends as well. Since they are also my friends, it's time to meet them. Let's go, Alex. Time to meet our friends!"

The corners of Alex's lips twitched because his plan to slip out of Chuck's grasp failed.

In the end, Alex decided to just meet up with the others after getting his uniforms from the office.

As the two young men left the Ironheart Dormitory, Chuck told his new best friend about his amazing adventures, which Alex was forced to listen to.

The students, especially the ladies, couldn't help but look at the two handsome teens who looked like they were great friends.

Chuck still had his arm slung around Alex's shoulder as he continued to talk about himself.

To make the situation less unbearable, the young man asked the chatterbox how he was able to pass the second trial.

Alex didn't remember seeing anyone who looked like Chuck during the last hours of the second trial.

He didn't see him among the teenagers who had been captured by the insects while the Stonehide Tyrant watched.

"Well, I don't want to brag, but during the last hours of the second trial, I stumbled upon a sinkhole that suddenly appeared under my feet while running away from the Hellmaw Basilisk," Chuck explained.

"I then found myself in a deep underground cavern. Though I don't remember too much about it since I fainted not long after.

"When I regained my consciousness, I found out that I was one of the people who passed the trial. I'm very lucky, right?"

"You are indeed very lucky." Alex's lips once again twitched because Chuck had gotten an easy pass.

"I know, right?" Chuck laughed. "So, how about you? How did you pass the second trial? You must have found a good hiding place like me, right?"

"... Right." Alex nodded.

He didn't want to explain a lot of things, knowing Chuck would start asking him questions nonstop if he did. He didn't want to be trapped in a conversation that would never end.

"We're finally here," Alex said, barely able to hide his relief after seeing the door of the Academy Office.

"Are you already familiar with the layout of the academy?" Chuck inquired. "You didn't even ask anyone for directions, and we arrived here without problems."

"I have something called Men's Intuition," Alex replied. "That helped me find this place."

“... Bro, I’m also a man, you know?” Chuck pouted slightly. The ladies who saw his cute expression placed their hands over their chests and blushed. If only they knew what was lurking under that lovely face!

There was a short queue of students. The two hurried to line up as well so their next agenda would not be delayed.

Three minutes later, it was now their turn. As usual, the chatterbox took the initiative to talk to the staff about their uniforms.

“Please place your hand on the crystal ball,” the staff said. “It will automatically measure your body size. After that, you will have uniforms that fit you perfectly.”

“My lady, how about you tell me your name so I can invite you for a meal after your shift is over?” Chuck said in the most charismatic way possible.

The staff blinked once, then twice, before looking at Alex, who simply averted his gaze as if telling her he didn’t know who the shameless teen beside him was.

“Your hand, please,” the staff repeated. “Please put it in the crystal ball.”

Chuck chuckled, but he no longer teased that staff, knowing the line behind him was growing longer.

After he followed her instructions, the crystal ball glowed faintly, showing a number.

The staff then took out three sets of uniforms from the cabinet with the designated number that appeared on the crystal ball.

These were the uniforms that perfectly suited Chuck’s body size and build, making them very comfortable to wear.

Alex did the same. Soon, both of them returned to the Ironheart Dormitory, having achieved their mission.

“Now, let’s meet with your friends,” Chuck insisted. “Make sure to give me a good introduction, okay? Also, do you have any girl friends? I’m currently single and ready to mingle.”

Alex pondered a bit.

“Since you want to meet my friends,” Alex said slowly as a good idea started to take shape in his mind, “I have no choice but to introduce them to you.”

He laughed internally, wondering how Chuck would react after meeting Renard.

The teenage boy preferred quiet, and liked to be alone unlike Chuck, who was noisy and a social butterfly.

But both of them were easily set off by the smallest of provocations, which would be a fun thing to see.