

Endless 191

Chapter 191: Be Careful What You Wish For [Part 2]

"A-Alex, a monster that looks like a monster is coming for us," Latifa stuttered.

As soon as those words left her lips, the young man immediately stopped conversing with the spirits.

"Close your eyes and don't look at it," Alex warned. "It's mostly harmless until it copies the appearance of the first person who looks at their reflection in its mirror."

"Can't we just kill it before it copies someone's appearance?" Latifa inquired.

"No." Alex shook his head and motioned for the fox lady to come closer to him. "The Mirror Doppelganger is invincible until it copies someone's appearance. Until then, no attacks can hurt it. In other words, it can't harm us, but we also cannot harm it."

Feeling anxious, Latifa hurriedly sat beside Alex and closed her eyes.

The young man did the same. The last thing he wanted was for the monster to copy his appearance and his abilities.

The Oathkeeper might not seem like a hard hitter, but getting bashed by a shield would definitely hurt!

However, the young man was most worried that the Mirror Doppelganger would copy Latifa's abilities.

Although she might only be an astral projection of her real self, with her real body somewhere in the academy, that didn't mean that the monster couldn't copy her powers.

Latifa's abilities were mostly support abilities that were perfect for scouting and debuffing enemies. In addition to Slow, Bind, and Paralyze, she could also make them see an illusion that would render them immobile for a few seconds.

But what Alex was most afraid of was the Mirror Doppelganger copying Latifa's ultimate skill.

Fox Spirit Awakening.

Once this ultimate skill was activated, Latifa would transform into a War Goddess who could directly injure her opponent's soul.

While injuries to the body might heal in time, soul injuries were more dangerous and difficult to cure.

In that form, she could even potentially annihilate a person's soul, leaving only their empty shell of a body behind.

The body would still be alive and could function normally. But without a soul, it would simply become a vessel that other spirits could use to once again walk the world.

As such, she was targeted by the antagonists of the Fourth Arc of the story. If the player wasn't careful, a bad ending awaited them.

Alex continued to comb through his memory of the game. Usually, when Guilds challenged the Chrono Maze, they would always bring a low-level player with them.

Specifically a player that was only Level 1.

Upon entering, they would start farming materials in the Chrono Maze. Once the Mirror Doppelganger appeared, the Level 1 Player would face it, forcing the monster to transform into a Level 1 Player.

This would make killing it extremely easy. It's obvious why this strategy was extremely popular.

Since Lucius was sleeping, and Latifa was too powerful to risk being copied by the Mirror Doppelganger, Alex wondered how they would be able to deal with this particular monster.

Suddenly, he remembered that there was one more creature with them. In fact, it was actually perched on top of his head right now.

It was none other than Dim Dim.

'...' Alex's mind blanked out for a brief moment when he thought about whether the monster could actually copy a God.

Sure, Dim Dim might look harmless—and squishy—but that didn't change the fact that it was still a God.

He had no idea what Dim Dim's skill set was. Despite spending so much time with the little bun, Alex had only seen two of its offensive abilities.

The first one was to poke a sleeping person to oblivion until they went crazy.

The second one was to throw things at monsters with uncanny accuracy.

Other than those two, he had only seen Dim Dim summon bamboo steamers filled with food.

If the Mirror Doppelganger copied the Dim Sum God, would Alex be really able to kill it?

Suddenly, the sound of something ticking reached Alex's and Latifa's ears, painfully reminding both of them that the Mirror Doppelganger was only a few meters away from them.

Just as Alex was about to continue pondering what to do, a pair of hands grabbed hold of his arm.

A moment later, he felt something soft press against his body. He almost opened his eyes in shock.

Fortunately, his willpower got the better of him, so he was able to keep his eyes shut tightly.

He didn't have to be a genius to know what just happened.

He could feel the slight shivering in Latifa's body because she was holding onto his arm for dear life.

Although they were in a dangerous situation, the young man couldn't help but give the Mirror Doppelganger a thumbs-up in his heart. It was dangerous and scary, but thank to it, this kind of situation happened so naturally.

As the ticking sound grew louder, Latifa's hug became tighter.

Fortunately, Alex was not exactly weak, so he remained calm as he tried to come up with a way out of this mess.

While the young man was deep in his thoughts, a round ornamental mirror that was at least two meters tall hovered very close to them.

Latifa's body stiffened. Even though her eyes were tightly shut, she could still sense how close the monster was. She bit her lip to avoid crying out in fear.

While the two teenagers were at a loss for what to do, there was one creature that didn't seem to be worried about the Mirror Doppelganger at all.

Seeing that the two teenagers had lowered their heads and were refusing to look at it, the monster finally turned its attention to the fearless creature whose smile was reflected on its surface.

Suddenly, the Mirror Doppelganger's body shook as it tried to copy the Dim Sum God, who was looking at it boldly.

What followed next was an ominous and loud crack that almost made Alex and Latifa jump in fright.

Even so, they still kept their eyes closed, thinking that it must be a trick to get them to open their eyes and look at their reflections.

Half a minute later, the Mirror Doppelganger dissipated into particles of light, leaving behind a high-grade magic crystal on the floor.

Dim Dim looked half-disappointed after the monster failed to copy it. It had hoped that the Mirror Doppelganger could copy it so it would gain a playmate to wander inside the Chrono Maze with.

With a heavy heart, the little bun lightly patted Alex's head, telling him that it was now safe to look.

Since the young man trusted his partner, he slowly opened his eyes. He squinted while scanning the room for the monster who had been invading his personal space just a while ago.

If not for the fact that there was a high-grade magic crystal in front of him, Alex might have thought that the monster had lost interest and left them in peace.

"Dim Dim, did it try to copy you?" Alex asked.

"Dim."

'I see...' Alex thought. 'So, it can't copy a God.'

Now that the mystery had been solved, Alex decided to pick up the high-grade magic crystal, only to remember that someone was still clinging to him very tightly.

As much as he wanted to enjoy this, he knew that it would be disrespectful to keep Latifa in a state of fear and nervousness.

"It's alright now," Alex said. "The monster is already dead. You don't have to worry about anything anymore, Latifa."

"Dim Dim!"

Latifa had overheard the conversation between Alex and Dim Dim.

But she had believed that it might be another attempt by the monster to get her to lower her guard.

When Alex told her that it really was over, she only opened her eyes a little bit, ready to shut them again the moment she detected anything amiss.

Fortunately, the monster had truly disappeared. The young lady could breathe a little easier.

However, her body was so tense that she completely forgot to let go of Alex's arm. Even though the danger had already passed, she was still hugging his arm tightly.

Chapter 192: We Can Do This The Hard Way Or The Easy Way

Dim Dim picked up the high-grade magic crystal on the ground and tossed it inside its dimensional storage for safekeeping.

Latifa still clung tightly to Alex. By the looks of it, she would take a few more minutes to calm down.

Alex didn't mind that one bit. In fact, he was secretly pleased that the young lady trusted him enough that holding his arm made her feel safer. He calmly waited until she regained her composure.

Ten minutes later, the young lady suddenly pulled back and dropped his arm like a hot potato when she finally realized what she'd been doing.

"I'm sorry," Latifa said, her cheeks reddening in embarrassment. As Alex was not one of those dense isekai protagonists, he didn't point it out.

"For some reason," the fox lady continued, "I felt real danger from that monster. If it had succeeded in mimicking my abilities, there's a chance it might have been able to leave the Chrono Maze and harm our schoolmates."

'That would have been disastrous,' Alex thought as he listened to the young lady's concern.

He could already see countless students collapsed on the ground, looking into space with soulless eyes.

If that had really happened, Latifa would have been so burdened with guilt and remorse.

“Latifa, I think you should go back to the academy,” Alex said gently, so he wouldn’t hurt the young lady’s feelings. “You don’t have to worry about Lucius. I’ll make sure to take him out of this dungeon.”

“I’m sorry,” Latifa replied, aware of Alex’s concern about her safety. “I’m so useless.”

“No.” Alex shook his head. “You’re one of the kindest and gentlest people that I have met in my life. Also, there is something important that you should do for me in the outside world.”

Latifa steeled herself as she waited for Alex to tell her what he needed her to do.

“That copycat demon worshiper is still at large,” Alex stated. “Since Lucius is no longer in danger, you must follow the demon worshiper’s movements and ensure that they will not hurt our peers.

“Lastly, you should look for Professor Gareth and tell him everything. If he doesn’t believe you, tell him ‘Alex made a promise to keep the identity of the suspect a secret to you earlier.’ As long as you do that, the Professor will have no choice but to listen to you.”

Latifa nodded. “Understood. Be careful. If you’re not out of this dungeon when the Headmaster returns, I’ll make sure to inform him so that he can get you out of here.”

“Good.” Alex smiled. “Now, go. We mustn’t let the evildoers have their way inside our school. Also, ask the person you trust the most to help you. During times like this, it is better to have people you rely on helping you out.”

Latifa gave Alex one last worried look before turning into particles of light.

Truth be told, the young man felt a little regret because the young lady was no longer around to keep him company.

He tried to comfort himself. 'I still have Dim Dim and the spirits to talk to while I wait for Lucius to wake up from his slumber.'

Somewhere in Frieden Academy...

Professor Gareth watched his "son" calmly drink a cup of tea in his dormitory room.

"What's wrong, Father?" Lucius asked. "You look like you're out to kill someone."

"Why did you do it?" Professor Gareth demanded, cutting straight to the chase.

"What are you talking about, Father?" Lucius frowned. "What did I do?"

"Don't play games with me, you rascal," Professor Gareth growled. "I was talking about the survival game for my students. Why did you have to do that to Grumpy?"

The frown on Lucius' face deepened. For some reason, Professor Gareth seemed confident that he was the one who had forced the Red Ape to go berserk, almost killing a student in the process.

Still, he decided to play dumb, for that was the only thing he could do at the moment.

"Father, I don't understand what you mean," Lucius insisted. "What survival game? What did I do to Grumpy?"

His current appearance was something he had worked hard to achieve.

Not only was Lucius a member of the student council, but he was also the son of Professor Gareth, whom the organization had recognized as one of the pillars of Frieden Academy.

He had planned to use Lucius' authority and connections to expand his network among the students and cause enough chaos to make the students fear for their lives.

"I see, so you want to play that game, huh?" Professor Gareth narrowed his eyes before he unleashed his Aura, locking the young man before him in place.

The Professor then raised his right hand, which was already coated with Aura, before slapping his adopted son with enough force that it sent the latter's glasses flying off his face.

Blood dripped from Lucius' lips as he looked at the Professor in disbelief.

He hadn't expected that Professor Gareth would really slap him.

Although the middle-aged man had held back his power at the last second, the slap had almost broken the demon worshiper's transformation.

"We can do this the hard way, or we can do this the easy way," Professor Gareth declared. "So, are you going to cooperate or not?"

"F-Father, why are you doing this to me?" Lucius pleaded. "I really don't know anything!"

Another resounding slap echoed inside the room.

But this time, Lucius' body crashed against the wall. He barely had time to groan in pain before falling flat on the floor.

Luckily or unluckily for Lucius, the walls of the dormitories were magically enhanced with several layers of protection. If not, he might have ploughed through them, leaving human-shaped holes in his wake.

“Wrong answer,” Professor Gareth said coldly as he walked toward his son who had just coughed out a mouthful of blood.

Knowing that another hit would surely end his transformation, the demon worshiper became desperate.

“Father, please, let’s talk properly,” Lucius begged. “Make me understand what is happening. It really hurts. Even if you want to kill me, at least let me know what I’ve done wrong!”

The demon worshiper still had no clue how the Professor had been able to figure out that he had been the one responsible for the Red Ape’s rampage.

Not only had he employed magical artifacts of stealth, but he had also used other artifacts to erase his smell, footsteps, and any other traces he might have left behind.

Since his ability was to copy people, he had made a lot of arrangements to prevent anyone from following his trail.

Even now, he was hopeful that Professor Gareth was only fishing for answers.

Maybe it just so happened that he thought that his son was involved.

Unfortunately, the demon worshiper had no idea that even if he could remove his traces, he couldn’t remove his existence.

The Memory Dial had shown Professor Gareth all that he needed to know.

This was why he wanted to know the truth from his son before the Headmaster returned.

If Rowan were to handle this matter, the chances of Lucius getting expelled were extremely high.

To prevent that from happening, Professor Gareth wanted to find the real reason why Lucius had done such a thing so that he could find a solution for this predicament.

He didn't care if he needed to resort to violence to achieve his goal.

Pain loosened the tongue, and he was an expert in making people talk.

Also, Professor Gareth felt that there was something off in the way Lucius acted.

He couldn't quite put his finger on what tipped him off, but he trusted his gut instincts. Much as he didn't want to believe it, the person in front of him only looked like his son.

His presence and aura were very different from Lucius, whom he had raised with love and care. Blood ties or not, how could a parent not recognise their own child?

Chapter 193: I'm Not Your Father

'Damn it!'

The demon worshiper who copied Lucius Thornwell's appearance cursed internally.

His true name was Calem Voxmere, and he prided on his skill to perfectly copy the appearance and body structure of his targets.

Every time he was sent on a mission, he would research his targets in detail, learning even the fine details of their mannerisms, relationships, hobbies, likes and dislikes, and even their gait.

He sought perfection, so every time he used his abilities to gather confidential information, steal treasures, or commit any other criminal acts, he made sure that others would take the fall in his stead.

Of course, he also had the demon worshipers' intelligence network to help him out.

They had deemed Lucius Thornwell the ideal candidate to impersonate for the important task of infiltrating the academy as a student. This was because of two reasons.

The first one was because he was the adopted son of Professor Gareth, who held a high position in the academy.

The second reason was that Lucius himself was a member of the student council, acting as its secretary.

As he was in a position of power and well-connected, the organization believed Calem could accomplish the most by impersonating him.

However, Calem was starting to doubt whether the information that he and the organization had gathered was accurate.

According to the head of the information network, Gareth truly loved and cared for Lucius, even though he was adopted.

Their relationship was very good, so Calem couldn't understand why his supposed "father" was hurting him so much!

'Damn it!' Calem cursed internally. 'Is this how their relationship is always like behind closed doors?! Does this bastard always beat his son in private?!'

No matter how much he begged, no matter how much he asked for his "father" to stop hurting him, Professor Gareth's blows did not slow down. In fact, they only got harder.

It was not to the point that Calem would die from them, but the blows truly hurt!

His transformation almost came apart a few times during the beating, and he was only able to keep it up due to his sheer willpower!

As the minutes passed by, the gaze of the Overlord of the Mistral Weave Forest, who was also one of the Guardians of Frieden Academy, turned cold and ruthless.

The beating was only meant to make his “son” feel pain, but with the lack of progress, it intensified until it reached the breaking point. Or rather, it reached the young man’s breaking point.

“Argh!” Lucius slammed against the wall for the umpteenth time and collapsed on the floor, his clothes dyed in the color of his own blood.

With shaky hands, the teenage boy took out a high-grade potion from his storage ring and drank it. The pain all over his body subsided, but just a little.

“I see, I understand now,” Professor Gareth said icily as he raised his foot. “It seems that I was right.”

A resounding crack echoed inside the room, followed by Lucius’ scream.

Under the Professor’s boot was Lucius’ crushed right knee.

“What kind of father are you?!” Lucius shouted in pain and anger as tears streamed down his eyes.

“I’m not your father,” Professor Gareth replied flatly. “And you are not my son.”

He stomped again, and Calem shrieked, almost fainting from the shock and pain.

His left knee cap was now also mangled. It was no longer possible to stand or run away.

“I’ll ask you just once,” Professor Gareth said as he grabbed the teenage boy’s hair, raising him up like a doll. “Who are you?”

“F-Father, it’s really me, Lucius.”

"I see, so you chose death."

Without another word, the Professor punched Lucius' stomach, making the latter spit out a mouthful of blood.

Before the teenage boy could say anything, another punch landed on the same spot, then three more. His eyes rolled backwards.

But how could Professor Gareth allow him to faint?

A slap on the cheek, and the copycat regained consciousness, only to find himself staring straight into the Professor's cold and merciless eyes.

Calem couldn't help but shudder after seeing the deathly gaze. Then and there, he understood that if he didn't do anything to save himself, he would die a very painful and gruesome death.

The Professor's eyes were glowing red, as if he had activated a berserk state. For some reason, Calem felt that something was invading his mind.

"S-Stop!" Calem forced himself to speak. "I..."

However, before he could even say anything else, his body stiffened as if he had fallen into some kind of trance.

His transformation became undone. Instead of a teenage boy, the Professor was now staring at a man who appeared to be in his early thirties.

Professor Gareth had beaten "Lucius" over and over to goad him into using his healing magic on himself.

As a Light Mage, Lucius was very capable of that.

Even if his lips were sealed and his hands bound tightly by a rope, Lucius would still be able to use his healing magic with a thought since he specialized in chantless casting.

This made him one of the most powerful Light Mages of his generation.

And yet, Lucius had done none of that. The imposter merely used a high-grade potion to heal himself.

That had been enough to confirm the Professor's suspicions. He no longer held back and crushed the impostor's knees so that they couldn't escape from him.

The sight of the copycat's real face incensed Professor Gareth, and his anger threatened to consume him.

However he understood that there was a time for rampaging, and there was a time for questioning.

"Who are you?" Professor Gareth asked with barely restrained rage.

"Calem Voxmere," Calem replied.

"Where is my son?" Professor Gareth demanded, making sure to maintain eye contact with his captive.

"I sealed him away in the Chrono Maze," Calem answered.

After hearing his reply, the Professor almost ripped the demon worshiper's head off of his body.

However, he knew that Calem was an important captive and that the Headmaster would certainly wish to personally interrogate him himself.

Without another word, Professor Gareth summoned a golden cube. At first, the cube was small enough to fit on his palm, but it suddenly enlarged itself and grew taller than the dorm door.

Professor Gareth unceremoniously tossed Calem inside the cube before making it return to its original size. He then returned the mini prison to his storage ring.

Once the captive had been secured, he took a deep breath in order to calm himself.

The first thing that crossed his mind was to contact the Headmaster as soon as possible. Unfortunately, as much as he wanted to do so, he had no way to reach him.

Rowan Vademont was one of the handful of people who knew how to open the Chrono Maze.

Without his help, no one could enter and exit from it freely.

'Lucius...' Gareth clenched his fists so hard that they made cracking sounds.

Suddenly, it occurred to him that perhaps not all hope was lost yet.

'Wait, maybe Alex will be able to open it!' Professor Gareth thought.

Since the young man had the Memory Dial, he would be able to rewind time and find out the passwords that the demon worshiper had used.

Professor Gareth knew that the passwords of the Chrono Maze changed everyday.

However, he didn't know the detailed intricacies behind it.

He immediately headed to the Ironheart Dormitory to look for the young man who had already helped him twice in one day.

'Even if I have to give him all of my remaining academy points, I need his help to find Lucius no matter what,' Professor Gareth thought anxiously as he left the dormitory meant for the Elite and Noble students.

His heart sank when he arrived at his destination but Alex was nowhere to be found. Apparently, he had still not returned to his room after leaving to talk to Professor Gareth in his office.

Professor Gareth was at a loss until Latifa materialized beside him and informed him of the situation inside the Chrono Maze.

Chapter 194: Are We Lost, Or Are You Just Farming Magic Crystals?

"I'll sing you a song, it's a song of the sea."

""Row bully boys row!""

"And I'll sing you a song if you'll sing it with me~"

""Row bully boys row!""

Alex couldn't help but smirk when the myriad of voices in the Chrono Maze sang alongside the Dim Sum God, who was swaying its body from side to side while watching the two young men fight the monsters around them.

After eating some food and rest and downing a couple of healing potions, the secretary of the student council had fully recovered his strength and was now battling the monsters with Alex.

They were now making their way to the exit—at least, that was what Lucius thought.

But in truth, Alex was making a veeeeeeeeeeeeery long detour around the maze so he could hunt as many monsters as he could.

Since there were only Rank 2 Monsters in the maze, Alex and Lucius were able to beat them easily.

Whenever the spirits scouting ahead saw a Mirror Doppelganger, they would immediately notify Dim Dim. The Dim Sum God would then personally deal with it.

Each time the Mirror Doppelganger was defeated, a high-grade magic crystal would drop, even though the odds of that happening after a monster was killed were only five percent.

Alex didn't know if the monster suffered an overload after being unable to copy the powers of a God, but he didn't dwell too much on it.

The only thing that mattered to him was that they had already defeated four Mirror Doppelgangers, and every single one of them had dropped a high-grade magic crystal!

Alex was already counting the gold coins he could earn if he sold even one of those crystals in an auction house.

At the very least, he believed he could get tens of thousands of gold coins.

Also, it was not impossible to get hundreds of thousands of gold coins if the bidders were desperate enough!

High-Grade Magic Crystals were extremely rare, and there was always a demand for them in the market.

"Alex, we have been wandering for hours," Lucius pointed out after adjusting his glasses. "Are we near the exit? Or are we lost?"

"Don't worry, Sir Lucius," Alex replied cheerfully while patting his chest with confidence. "We're not lost. We are right on track."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes. I'm sure!"

“Why do I feel like you’re lying to me?”

“Hahaha! How can that be? I mean, what would I get from lying to you?”

Lucius looked pointedly at the low-grade magic crystal in Alex’s hand before shifting his gaze back to Alex’s face.

Alex merely whistled a merry tune as he quickly kept the crystal in his storage ring.

“Just... tell me the truth.” Lucius sighed. “Are we lost, or are you just farming magic crystals?”

“The latter,” Alex answered, prompting the secretary of the student council to heave a deep and long sigh. However, that was the extent of his complaints. He was not the sort to nitpick his savior’s... eccentricities.

“Fine.” Lucius nodded. “As long as you know the way, that’s fine. But when do you plan to leave this place?”

“Um, can we stay for one more day?” Alex inquired. “I already asked Latifa to talk to your father and tell him that we’re here inside the Chrono Maze.”

The corner of Lucius’ lips twitched ever so slightly when he realized that the young man “still” planned to farm magic crystals for one more day.

“... You do realize I’ve already been trapped here for eight days, right?” Lucius asked weakly.

“I do,” Alex replied brightly. He flashed the long-suffering secretary a smile. “But since you’ve already been here for eight days, what’s one more, right?”

Lucius gripped the handle of his staff more tightly. If Alex hadn’t saved him, he would’ve beaten the greedy young man with his stick to oblivion.

But it is what it is. Alex had saved him. In fact, Alex had purposely come to the Chrono Maze to save him even though they were only acquaintances. In light of that, Lucius held himself back and heaved a sigh for the umpteenth time.

“Now I understand why Theo hates you,” Lucius muttered under his breath.

“Um? Did you say something, Sir Lucius?” Alex inquired.

“No.”

“Okay.”

And with that, they spent another day in the maze while an hour passed in the outside world.

By the end of the day, Alex had managed to farm fifty low-grade magic crystals, thirty mid-grade magic crystals, and ten high-grade crystals. He was very pleased with his haul.

Meanwhile Lucius stared at the portal before them, finally feeling relieved for the first time in over a week.

He had repeatedly asked Alex about his method to reach the topmost floor of the Chrono Maze, but the young man only said that it was a “trade secret” he had no plans to share with other people.

The student council secretary had also asked Alex how he knew the passwords to the dungeon, only to get the same answer.

In the end, Lucius decided to just leave the young man be and enjoy the freedom that was only a few steps away.

Alex sighed regretfully because his farming had already come to an end.

Truth be told, he wanted to stay behind, but he knew he shouldn't try his luck any more. If he went overboard, the Headmaster might even confiscate his magic crystals.

Entering the Chrono Maze was forbidden.

However, Alex had only entered the dungeon because of an emergency. At least, that's how he intended to explain himself if the Headmaster interrogated him—though that excuse was only believable if he hadn't obviously made this a crystal farming trip.

'I hope I can come back to this place again,' Alex thought. 'I can now max out the quota for the magic crystals I can absorb in my body.'

Alex had very limited mana and was unable to unleash the full might of his nerfed version of his Savant Mode, which was an exclusive skill of the Shield Savant Job Class.

The moment the two students left the dungeon, they were surprised to find two people waiting for them.

Before Lucius could even say anything, Professor Gareth hugged him tightly.

"Father, you're hurting me," Lucius groaned.

Professor Gareth chuckled before pulling back to look at his son, who looked like he had eaten a piece of sh*t.

The teenage boy's body glowed faintly with light as he used recovery magic to relieve himself of the pain he felt after being violently hugged by his father.

"You're really Lucius," Professor Gareth said, finally feeling at ease.

"Of course, I'm really Lucius." Lucius blinked. "Who else would I be?"

The teenage boy then looked at his father with a solemn gaze and told him how he had been knocked unconscious by the Elven Princess, Aeris, and sealed away inside the Chrono Maze.

“It’s not Aeris who knocked you unconscious,” Professor Gareth replied after his son finished his explanation. “It was a person who can copy the faces of others. He also interfered with the class activity I had prepared for my students by forcing Grumpy to turn berserk.

“Students almost died because of that. After Alex helped me investigate, we found out that the one who was responsible for the incident was you.”

Professor Gareth then recounted what happened, making Lucius’ face turn pale.

When the Professor mentioned that the culprit was called Calem Voxmere, Alex knew his gut instinct had been right on the money.

“Professor, please don’t tell anyone about this incident aside from the Headmaster,” Alex said. “Calem might have some accomplices here in the academy. If you hand him to other people, there’s a high chance he might escape.

“Just keep him bound for now until Professor Rowan returns. As long as we don’t say anything, his comrades will be kept in the dark.”

Professor Gareth and Lucius agreed that they should avoid alerting their enemies prematurely.

“Thank you, Alex,” Professor Gareth said. “I don’t know what would have happened to my son without your and Latifa’s help.”

“You’re welcome, Professor,” Alex replied.

Professor Gareth then awarded Alex and Latifa five thousand academy points each for their assistance.

Latifa wanted to return the reward, but the professor only said that she should put it to good use. After all, his son's life was worth more than five thousand academy points.

Of course, Alex didn't reject the professor's generosity and thanked him.

'Today is really a good day,' Alex thought. 'Not only did I get magic crystals, I also got academy points. Maybe I should exchange my points for something good tomorrow.'

After the father and son pair thanked Alex one last time, they left, leaving the young man with the beautiful fox lady, who was looking at him with a complicated look on her face.

Chapter 195: The Warrior Princess

"Um, thank you for your help," Latifa said as she bowed slightly to the young man in front of her. "I would've been at a loss for what to do if you hadn't been there."

"You're welcome, and thank you as well," Alex replied. "It's also to your credit that I earned a lot of... things. If you need my help in the future, feel free to call me again. As long as I'm free, I'll gladly assist you."

Alex was actually looking for a way to befriend Latifa, who was mostly asleep in the academy.

Meeting her Astral Projection was only a random encounter, and the chances of that happening were very small.

But since the young lady had sought him out for help, he thought that it would be a shame if this were to become the end of their relationship.

So he decided to tell her that she could count on him if she ever found herself in trouble.

"Thanks, I'll do that." Latifa smiled. "See you around, Alex."

She then disappeared into particles of light, off to somewhere in the academy.

Alex sighed as he watched her go, feeling happy that he had somewhat become friends with the sleeping beauty.

The young man then returned to the Ironheart Dormitory and was informed by Chuck that Professor Gareth had looked for him earlier.

“Did you do something bad?” Chuck asked. “Professor Gareth is actually a very chill professor. If he’s looking for you, it might be because you are going to be punished.”

“I already met Professor Gareth,” Alex replied. “He just wanted to ask me a few questions. Nothing too complicated.”

“I see.” Chuck patted his chest in relief. “I really thought you were in trouble when he looked for you. By the way, Alex, since tomorrow is Saturday, do you have any plans?”

The students of Frieden Academy only had classes on weekdays.

Weekends were for rest. Most of them either leave the academy for short trips, visit their hometowns, do some personal training, or simply study a little more to get ahead of their peers.

Alex thought for a bit before shaking his head. “I don’t have any plans for tomorrow.”

“Perfect!” Chuck patted his best friend’s shoulder. “Then, how about you accompany me on a little fishing trip?”

“Fishing trip?” Alex blinked.

Truth be told, Alex had never had the chance of fishing back on Earth, so he had tried his hand at fishing in Arcana.

Although he wasn’t that good at it, he wasn’t that bad either, and it would be a good way to spend his day off..

“Okay, sounds good,” Alex replied. “Where will we go fishing?”

“Um, you see, I have a fiancée...” Chuck’s face reddened a bit. “However, she doesn’t like me. But a few hours ago, she suddenly invited me to go fishing at the Arowana River. It is the home of monsters that are Rank 3 to Rank 5.

“I’m a little intimidated, so I’d like you to accompany me. So, thank you for agreeing. You’re really my best friend!”

Alex almost choked on his saliva when he heard the words Arowana River.

That was a mid-grade hunting area for ELO Players because of the high-ranking monsters that lived in it.

Since many low-level players died in this river, it came to be known as the Newbie-Killing River.

Anyone below Rank 3 must be extra careful whenever they visited this place, given it’s very high death rate.

“Chuck, does your fiancée hate you?” asked Alex, who was doing his best to keep the smile on his face from twitching.

“Well, she says she really doesn’t like me,” Chuck admitted. “But since our engagement was arranged by our parents, she also had no choice in the matter.”

“I see. I now understand why she invited you to go fishing.” Alex patted the teenage boy’s shoulder while looking at him with pity.

“Dim Dim,” the Dim Sum God agreed.

For the two of them, it was incredibly obvious what was really going on.

Chuck's fiancée wanted to use him as bait for the monsters in the river. If he got attacked by strong monsters while out on a date, then it could be easily written off as an accident. In that case, it would also be Chuck's fault for being too weak to protect himself from such threats.

"Chuck, as your friend, I want to tell you that this is a bad idea," Alex said seriously. "I don't know who your fiancée is, but she must really hate you a lot."

Chuck's shoulders sagged a bit after hearing his best friend's words. He also felt that being invited to such a dangerous place was strange. But since he really liked his fiancée, he had decided to just go ahead and agree to her request.

As a safeguard, he had also decided to invite Alex to join him. But hearing Alex say that his fiancée hated him straight to his face made Chuck a little anxious.

"What's your fiancée's name?" Alex inquired.

"Xenia," Chuck answered, still feeling down. "Xenia Valeria."

"Huh?!" Alex looked at his friend in shock. "Are you talking about Xenia? That Xenia?"

Seeing his best friend's reaction, Chuck regained a bit of his confidence and raised his chin arrogantly.

"Yes, my fiancée is that Xenia," Chuck stated.

"Why are you engaged to the warrior princess?" Alex blinked. "Even if she's the fourth princess of the Kingdom of Avalon, she's still a princess."

Princess Xenia was one of the main supporting characters in ELO, especially when it came to politics and events that happened within her kingdom.

She was a true beauty, and many players liked her.

However, Alex was not one of them.

The main reason for this was because she was part of the anti-commoner faction. Unsurprisingly, she was one of the bullies who tormented Nessia and Renard in the main story line.

However, after Nessia gave her a good slapping—and Renard gave her a good stabbing—the princess realized the error of her ways and became one of the most powerful supporting characters in the game.

Princess Xenia was a Weapon Master, allowing her to gain mastery of any weapon she liked.

She also had a special skill called Critical [EX], giving all of her attacks a 50% chance of landing a critical hit.

However, it didn't end there.

Once her rank increased, that critical chance would increase by five percent.

She had gained the skill Critical [EX] when she became Rank 1, and the Princess was currently a Rank 3 Weapon Master.

This meant that every strike she unleashed had a 60% chance of dealing critical damage, making her a bloody damage dealer who was a permanent member of any strong party.

In short, she was the META, and having her as a party member made dungeon expeditions and fighting monsters so much easier!

Even though Alex didn't like her, he had to admit that forming a good relationship with her was better than antagonizing her.

"Chuck, I don't know if you're lucky or unlucky." Alex scratched his head. "Your fiancée is a certified lioness, but there is one thing that you should know about her."

“And that is?” Chuck inquired.

“She’s bi,” Alex answered with a straight face.

“Bi?” Chuck frowned. “What’s a bi?”

“Oh... she likes both guys and girls,” Alex explained. “As long as they are good-looking, then she likes them.”

“Wait, does that mean that me being her fiance is destiny?” Chuck flipped his hair. “I am the most dashing, handsome, and charismatic person that I have ever had the fortune of meeting in my life. It’s no wonder she chose me as her fiance.”

“... Right,” Alex said as he did his best to keep his face smooth and expressionless.

In the end, the young man decided to follow his roommate to the Arowana River, secretly hoping that he was overthinking the death flag blatantly waving on top of Chuck’s head.

Chapter 196: The Fishing Trip [Part 1]

After chasing Chuck out of the room, Alex immediately started absorbing the magic crystals he harvested from the maze, only stopping when he reached his limit.

102 Magic Points.

That was the total magic points that Alex gained.

— — —

Alex Stratos

Age: 17

Alignment: Chaotic Good

Mana: 306/306

Job Class: Oathkeeper

Subclass: Demon Slayer

Strength – 73 [+6]

Intelligence – 30 [+3]

Dexterity – 20 [+3]

Agility – 110 [+3]

Constitution – 76 [+4]

Stamina – 76 [+4]

Magic – 303 [+3]

Luck – 24 [+3]

Available Stat Points: 0

AP: 16,940

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, Culling Blade, Grand Cross

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

[Difficulty Level: Hell Mode]

His combined stat points was 309, excluding the item bonuses and the stat points for Magic and Luck.

He was now in the middle stages of being a Rank 2 Oathkeeper.

Once he broke through the threshold of 500 combined Stat Points, he would become a Rank 3 Oathkeeper and gain new abilities that came with leveling up.

'We're getting there,' Alex thought as he examined his character profile. 'Having 306 mana is good, but it's still nothing compared to real mages.'

The young man sighed internally, painfully aware that this was the limit of his mana pool. Unless... he gained equipment that boosted his magic stat or have enough luck to get a legendary-grade magic crystal.

Of course, getting that magic crystal would require Alex to fight against Rank 8 to Rank 9 Monsters, something impossible at this point in time.

There was also the divine-grade magic crystal, which hadn't appeared in the game ever.

If Alex was able to absorb a divine-grade magic crystal, he wouldn't have to worry about his mana pool ever again. After all, it would give a whopping 20,000 to 50,000 magic points!

Also absorbing the divine-grade magic crystal would also give him a passive buff of 200% mana regeneration.

Alex could spam countless shields and make them attack his enemy like a boss if he were lucky enough to get such an item.

Of course, Alex wasn't really expecting to get something like that.

However, he had set his sights on the legendary-grade magic crystals, which were more attainable.

'I just hope that Xenia will not really use this fishing trip to eliminate her fiancé,' Alex thought. 'After all, there are many strong monsters in that river, and it's very easy for her to engineer Chuck's death by misadventure if she wants to.'

Xenia might be a good character in the game, but she had one fatal flaw.

She was a very moody person.

Her mood swings were unpredictable.

One moment she could be giggling at a joke, and the very next, she could be cursing for you to die a dog's death under her foot.

That was one of the reasons why Alex didn't like her.

Compared to Fran, who was like a breath of fresh air that made Alex feel at peace, and Latifa, who liked to cuddle in her sleep, Princess Xenia's unpredictability was a concern.

There was even an arc in the story where she became a demon worshiper and ended up one of the scariest Last Boss in the game.

Alex's fully-geared team had been wiped out by her in that story arc, making him dislike her even more.

'I really hope that nothing will happen tomorrow.' Alex sighed in his heart.

The next day...

"I didn't expect you would bring a friend along, Chuck," commented Princess Xenia, seated in a carriage that would take them to where her personal airship was on standby.

"H-Hahaha!" Chuck laughed. "My roommate is not busy today, so I decided to invite him. You know what they say—the more the merrier!"

"I suppose..." Princess Xenia gave Alex a sideways glance before looking out of the carriage window. "Having two baits instead of one," she murmured, "will make the fishes merrier."

She spoke so softly that Alex and Chuck couldn't catch what she said, so they assumed that she was just clearing her throat.

Alex observed the princess, admiring her long red hair that resembled flowing strands of fire. When the sunlight illuminated her from behind, her hair looked like a halo.

Her pose as she looked outside of the carriage was a delicate balance of royal elegance and unshakable will.

The princess's eyes were a deep amber-gold and held a flicker of defiance, as if they remembered every injustice ever done to her.

Though her features were noble, there was nothing fragile about her. Her posture was great, and she was definitely heroine material.

But this beautiful rose was a very thorny flower.

So thorny that Alex didn't dare to touch her lest he got pricked.

Aside from the three of them, there was another person inside the carriage. It was none other than Princess Xenia's handmaiden, Mary.

Alex didn't know much about her aside from the fact that she was a trained Assassin who quietly served the fourth princess of the kingdom of Avalon by pretending to be a normal handmaiden.

Both of them were First Years, just like Chuck and Alex. However, unlike the two young men, they were in Class A.

Mary paid close attention to Alex and Dim Dim, whom she was seeing for the first time.

Chuck was her employer's fiancé, so this wasn't their first meeting. They had gone on other outings before.

However, Alex and Dim Dim were new faces to her, so she couldn't trust them completely.

If the two did anything towards the princess in any way, she wouldn't hesitate to go for the kill.

After traveling for twenty minutes, they finally arrived at the airport and boarded Princess Xenia's flying ship.

In addition to the sailors manning the ship, there were a dozen royal guards stationed.

At a glance, Alex could vaguely tell that those tasked with protecting the princess were at least Rank 4 or Rank 5 knights.

However, the person who caught his attention was the middle-aged man serving as the captain of these knights.

'If I remember correctly, his name is Alphonse,' Alex thought. 'The Steel Knight.'

The knight had gray hair and a gray beard that showed his age.

But his gaze was sharp like a sword. It was as if he could cut anything in existence.

He was a Rank 5 Steel Knight. He was loyal to Princess Xenia's mother, the third wife of the King of Avalon.

Behind closed doors, Princess Xenia referred to him as "Godfather," and he was also one of the people whom she trusted the most in the world.

"It's good to see you again, Sir Chuck," Alphonse greeted the teenage boy with a smile before shifting his attention to Alex. "And this is?"

"He is my roommate and best friend, Alex Stratos," Chuck replied. "And the little bun on top of his head is the Nature Spirit, Dim Dim."

"Ahem!" Dim Dim raised its body proudly, as if to make sure that Alphonse and the other Royal Knights didn't look down on it.

"An interesting creature." Alphonse smiled faintly. "So, are you now ready for your fishing trip?"

"Even if I'm not," Chuck replied as he scratched his cheek sheepishly, "do I really have a choice?" His honesty elicited hearty chuckles from Alphonse.

Seeing this exchange, Alex believed that he was just overthinking things.

The princess seemed to be in a good mood, and the knights looked like they were all righteous men.

In the end, Alex decided to relax because he had been on edge since meeting the princess earlier.

But there was still a nagging feeling at the back of his head telling him that he shouldn't lower his guard, or else, he wouldn't be able to react in time if danger came knocking on their door.

Chapter 197: The Fishing Trip [Part 2]

A trip that would've taken at least ten days by carriage was covered by the airship within a mere thirty minutes.

Flying over mountains and impassable terrain had made this journey very smooth, and yet, the moment Alex saw the Arowana River, he couldn't help but shudder.

'I don't think anything bad is going to happen since the Royal Knights are here,' Alex thought, trying to stop himself from overthinking. 'They won't turn a blind eye if the son of a Duke is in danger, right?'

Chuck's mother might not be from a noble lineage, but it didn't change the fact that he was still a son that the Duke recognized.

The Duke's other son, Caspian, might treat Chuck like he wasn't part of their family, but the latter was still important enough to the kingdom that he had been engaged to the fourth princess of Avalon.

Alex hadn't known much about Chuck's back story since he wasn't a playable character in the game.

The young man didn't want to admit it, but he had thought of his roommate as a nuisance, only meant to cause chaos and destruction.

But after spending time with him, Alex had learned more about Chuck and came to his own conclusion.

The main reason why Chuck was such a troublemaker was probably because he was lonely.

His family didn't want to give him any love or pay him any heed, so he decided to just play pranks on people, hoping to catch their attention.

Of course, this was only Alex's assumption. It might not be the real reason why Chuck had become the most notorious troublemaker in Frieden Academy.

Regardless, since he now considered the teenage boy his friend, he decided to look out for him in this outing, since it was possibly life-threatening despite being a date of sorts.

As the airship descended from the sky, Alex gave the princess a brief glance.

She was looking at the river with a determined expression.

As to what she was determined about, the young man had no idea.

However, there was one thing he noticed.

Near the banks of the river was a ship at least fifty meters long.

Alex had thought that they would just be fishing by the riverside, but seeing the boat made him wonder if the princess planned to board it.

Despite being called a river, the Arowana River was actually pretty wide.

In the game, it was said to be the widest and longest river in the Kingdom of Avalon.

Seven miles wide and four thousand miles long, it crossed over three kingdoms before finally reaching the sea.

Because of this, travel between the Kingdom of Avalon, the Solara Kingdom, and the Elven Kingdom of Faalarun was possible even without an airship.

"Are we going to be fishing on the ship, Your Highness?" Alex took pains to sound polite and deferent because he didn't want to be seen as rude by the princess's retainers.

“Yes,” Princess Xenia replied. “We will take that ship to go fishing.”

Alex wanted to ask more questions but decided to hold back for the time being.

‘It doesn’t matter,’ Alex thought. ‘I’ll see what she’s planning once we get on that ship.’

Fishing on the river by boat is more dangerous than fishing by the riverside.

Rank 3 and Rank 5 Monsters were very common in the river.

On rare instances, Rank 6 monsters do appear.

But aside from them, the Arowana River hosted a few more powerful beings—three Rank 7 Overlords and the strongest of them all, a Rank 8 Golden-Eyed Electric Eel, which was a nightmare to fight in its own backyard.

With the knights protecting the princess, fighting against a Rank 5 Monster was fine.

Fighting a Rank 6 was still manageable.

As for Rank 7 Monsters? Alex didn’t want to touch any of them with a hundred-meter pole.

“Alex, I have a question for you,” Chuck said with uncharacteristic seriousness.

“Go ahead,” Alex replied.

“Can you swim?”

“I can.”

“That’s good to hear because I can’t swim.”

Alex blinked once then twice as he stared at Chuck, who looked a little pale.

“I understand.” Alex patted his friend’s shoulder. “If you fall into the river, I’ll go save you.”

Chuck let out a long and deep sigh because this had indeed been one of his worries.

If not for the fact that his fiancée was the one asking him to come, he would have decisively rejected an invitation to fish at the Arowana River.

A few minutes later, they disembarked from the airship and were escorted towards the boat that also belonged to Princess Xenia.

‘She has put considerable effort into this fishing trip,’ Alex realized as he observed the layout of the boat, which was built for long-distance traveling.

“Have you prepared everything?” Princess Xenia asked one of her subordinates who had been waiting for their arrival.

“Yes, Your Highness,” a pretty lady in a knight’s uniform replied. “Everything has been prepared as per your wishes.”

“Good.” Princess Xenia smiled. “Now, please, tell the captain to depart.”

“As you command, your Highness.” The pretty lady bowed before leaving to execute the princess’s order.

After that short discussion, Princess Xenia approached Chuck and Alex, who were admiring the river while leaning against the taffrail.

“Since we are going fishing, how about a little competition between us?” Princess Xenia proposed.

“A fishing competition?” Chuck flipped his hair. “Are you sure about this, Princess? I have been called Master Baiter by my friends because I am able to catch any fish due to how amazing I am.”

The princess smirked as if she were already used to Chuck’s boastful attitude.

“Then that settles it.” Princess Xenia nodded. “We will have a competition. For two hours, we will catch as many fish as we can, and the ones who catch the biggest and rarest fish will win.”

“I’m fine with that.” Chuck patted his chest with confidence. “What is the prize for winning? Also, will Alex be included in this competition?”

The princess gave Alex a sidelong glance before smiling faintly.

“Why not?” Princess Xenia answered. “Two of you will form a team, while Mary and I will form another. As for the prizes, if your team wins, then you can ask me for anything. As long as I am able to do it, I will agree to your request.”

“And what if you win?” Chuck inquired. “What prize will you ask of me?”

“If I win, we cancel our betrothal,” Princess Xenia stated. “We’ll start the competition in half an hour.”

The princess then walked away, not even bothering to ask Chuck if he was fine with the conditions of the competition.

Clearly, she had already decided that her engagement with Chuck must, by hook or by crook, be severed.

Chuck watched her go with a complicated look on his face while Alex only sighed internally.

"I guess she really hates me, huh?" Chuck said softly as he looked at the river that spanned miles.

"Chuck, I know that I'm just a bystander, but I think she doesn't deserve someone like you," Alex said. "I'm not saying this because I think you are inferior to her or because you're annoying. But do you really want to spend your life with someone who doesn't love you?"

The young man then rubbed his friend's shoulder a little.

"There are many fish in the sea," Alex added. "I'm sure that you will find someone who will accept you for who you are."

Chuck shook his head. "Alex, I know you mean well. But I cannot break off my engagement with her. I do like her, but that's not the reason why I'm her fiancé. It's because of my mother.

"My father has promised that as long as I stay engaged to the princess, he will help find the cure for my mother. I am unable to do anything by myself. But as long as I remain the princess's future consort, my mother will be able to again regain her health and vitality."

Alex frowned after hearing his friend's confession.

But since it was a family matter, he decided that it would be rude if he kept on prying for details.

"So, what will you wish for if you win?" Alex asked in order to change the topic.

"I haven't thought of it." Chuck pursed his lips. "But I can't lose, Alex. Even if I don't get anything if I win, I can't lose no matter what."

"Understood. We won't lose even if they use tricks in this competition," Alex assured.

“I’m really glad I brought you with me!” Chuck regained his light-heartedness and chuckled. “Now I feel more confident about winning. Or not drowning.”

Alex smiled faintly before glancing at Sir Alphonse, who was looking in their direction.

He was certain that the middle-aged man, being a Rank 5 Knight, had overheard his talk with Chuck.

Whether Sir Alphonse planned to do anything about it, Alex couldn’t tell. For now, he simply observed them as if this was a task assigned to him by the princess, who was already confident of her victory over her clueless fiancé.

Chapter 198: The Master Baiters [Part 1]

The boat moved downstream for about twenty miles or so before the Captain ordered for the oars to stop, allowing the ship to stay where it was.

Princess Xenia then introduced the judge who would preside over their competition.

He was a well-known fishing guru, who could quickly determine the quality of each fish by size, species, and other factors.

“This is Mr. Dredd,” Princess Xenia introduced the middle-aged man, who seemed very amiable. “And he will be the judge for our competition. Do not worry about fairness, for Judge Dredd is known to be an objective expert.”

“I can at least attest to that. He is the judge for the annual fishing competition in the three kingdoms.”

Judge Dredd, who had tied his long hair into a low ponytail, grinned and gave Alex and Chuck a nod of greeting.

Unlike everyone else on the ship, Judge Dredd was not wearing a shirt or any other garment to cover his upper half. His toplessness revealed a muscled body that would put bodybuilders to shame.

However, his muscles were not the most striking thing about him.

The first thing that Alex noticed was the intimidating shark tattoo on the older man's chest.

Chuck, on the other hand, was itching to ask Judge Dredd how to become as ripped as him.

"So, are there any rules in this competition?" Alex asked because this was the most important thing in his mind.

"The rules are very lax," Judge Dredd replied. "You can use any bait and any ability at your disposal. However, I will only score the fish that you catch using the fishing poles that I have personally prepared.

"These fishing poles have not been tampered in any way. This is to ensure that the two of you will have a fair and healthy competition. At least, that is what I'd like to say... but nothing is really fair in this world."

Judge Dredd knew that Princess Xenia had prepared some special bait that could attract fishes so rare that even professional fishermen did not see them often.

These fishes were not monsters but real fish that many people sought to catch and eat.

He was already feeling sorry for the two teenage boys, who might be good looking, but didn't have much experience in fishing.

This was in stark contrast to Princess Xenia, who was a Weapon Master.

Anything she held in her hand could be considered as a weapon, even a fishing pole.

This meant that she would understand not just how to use it properly but also how to employ various tricks and techniques to use it even more effectively and creatively.

Of course, she had already practiced fishing for a few days in anticipation of this event. She had only invited her fiancé to join her on this fishing trip after getting the results that she wanted.

If she won fair and square, then that's fine.

If she didn't...Well, it just meant that the fishes would get to enjoy a human-sized bait, which they could chew until nothing was left.

After giving Alex and Chuck the fishing poles, Judge Dredd crossed his arms and waited for the kids to start fishing.

"You can use this as bait." Princess Xenia smiled brightly as she handed the two a bag of corn kernels. "Chuck, I already told you that we were going fishing, so you should have prepared your own bait. It's not my fault that you came unprepared."

"Xenia, I think you're misunderstanding something." Chuck flipped his hair with his right hand. "I didn't bring any bait because I planned to give you an advantage. Now, you won't have a reason to complain if you lose."

"Arrogant as ever." Princess Xenia sneered. "Good luck to you then, Mr. Master Baiter."

With that, the princess moved to the right side of the ship, where she planned to fish.

Alex and Chuck were on the left side, so that they wouldn't have to compete with Princess Xenia and Mary for the same fishing spots.

Chuck warily eyed the bag of corn kernels in his hands before looking at Alex worriedly.

The confidence he had shown the princess earlier was gone, replaced by a "Alex, can we really win?" expression.

"Don't worry, Mr. Master Baiter." Alex chuckled. "We will win."

Alex now understood where the princess' confidence was coming from.

He watched as the young lady skillfully attached a rainbow prawn to her fishing hook. Rainbow prawns were considered top-tier fishing baits if you wanted to catch those very rare and elusive fishes that were very picky with what they ate.

The rainbow prawn was a delicacy, and it was very eye-catching under the water.

No fish could resist it, and even monsters would want to take a bite of it if they happened to see it first.

But Alex didn't need to use such baits in order to win.

After all, he had a secret weapon!

"Dim Dim, let's show this bratty princess who the real winners of this competition are!" Alex declared.

"Kukuku!" Dim Dim smiled evilly before summoning a bamboo steamer, which contained dumplings that they intended to use as bait.

So what if Princess Xenia had rainbow prawns?

Was that a big deal?

Alex had Dim Dim!

And what fish could possibly ignore the food that came from a God?

Unlike regular dumplings, the Dim Sum God's dumplings didn't break apart easily unless it was eaten.

It didn't matter if the dumplings were tossed into the water.

They would retain their shape while their flavor would spread into the water, attracting all the fishes lucky or unlucky enough to be nearby!

“Kukuku!” Alex chuckled evilly as he attached a pan-fried pork dumpling to his fishing hook.

Dim Dim also continued to laugh evilly as it offered Chuck some dumplings to be used as fishing baits as well.

Mr. Dredd felt himself salivating after seeing the baits that the teenage boys were attaching to their hooks.

He hadn’t eaten anything as of yet because he was planning to cook the fishes that the princess would catch in this competition.

‘Just what kind of bait is that?’ Mr. Dredd wondered. ‘Why does it look so good?’

The middle-aged man then cleared his throat before raising his hand.

“This competition will last for two hours,” Mr. Dredd announced. “You can start fishing now!”

After he gave the signal, the teenagers threw their fishing lines over the water.

Princess Xenia gave Alex and Chuck a look of pity because there was no way that she would lose in this fishing competition.

However, just as soon as the fishing hooks landed into the water, a commotion happened on the left side of the ship, where Alex, and Chuck were fishing.

The water churned as countless fishes flocked to their side of the boat, fighting desperately to bite on the baits that the two boys had cast.

Alex, who felt a strong tug on his fishing line, didn't hesitate to start reeling.

A moment later, a silver fish that was nearly a meter long, landed on the deck and started to flop and trash about, as if it wanted to return to the water as soon as possible.

Seeing the fish, Mr. Dredd's eyes shook because it was none other than a Silverwind Trout!

It was a very rare fish. In fact, it was considered the third rarest fish in the Arowana River! He had been hoping that he would have the fortune of feasting on a Silverwind Trout after the competition ended.

Chuck, who had zero experience in fishing, felt something tug on his fishing line, so he also pulled it back with all the strength he could muster.

However, he was unable to pull the fish out of the water no matter how hard he tried.

"Alex, help!" Chuck pleaded because the fish that he was trying to capture was fighting back so strongly it might actually succeed in pulling him underwater.

Without much ado, Alex grabbed Chuck's fishing rod, pulling as hard as he could.

But, to his surprise, he was also unable to bring in whatever had bitten on Chuck's fishing hook!

"Mr. Dredd, please help us!" Alex asked. "This fish is huge. I don't think we can pull it with just the two of us."

Without hesitation, Mr. Dredd grabbed hold of the fishing hook with both hands.

His muscles, which had weathered many storms while he fished on rivers and seas, had never failed him in the past.

With the experience and the strength of an elite fisherman, Mr. Dredd pulled back and the fish that had fought so valiantly against being captured suddenly found itself out of water, through the air, and on the deck of the ship.

Time seemed to slow down as Alex and Chuck watched the massive golden fish fly towards them in a graceful arc before landing on the ship with a sloppy sound.

It was easily twice as long as the fish that Alex had hooked earlier!

“Golden Scaled Salmon!” Mr. Dredd’s eyes were almost bulging out of his sockets. The rarest fish in the Arowana River had appeared right before him.

He looked at the fish, then the two teen boys, then the fish, then the two teen boys again.

They had somehow managed to catch two of the three rarest fishes within a minute after casting their lures!

‘T-This kid called himself a Master Baiter a while ago,’ Mr. Dredd thought. ‘I thought that he was just kidding, but I guess he can back up his title!’

Meanwhile, Princess Xenia and her handmaiden, Mary, could only look in disbelief at the two massive fish that were flopping on the deck of their boat.

Just the two of them were enough to feed their entire retinue, and they were fishes so rare that even the princess had only seen them in picture books!

Chapter 199: The Master Baiters [Part 2]

Two hours after the competition started...

Mr. Dredd couldn’t help but grin from ear to ear as he and his helpers grilled dozens of fishes at the same time.

Alex and Charles had caught so many rare—and mouthwatering—fishes that the judge of the competition invited some of his friends and acquaintances to join him in preparing a feast.

Thanks to Chuck's recommendation, they had decided to hold the feast near one of the riverside villages.

But it didn't end there.

Chuck used this opportunity to tell everyone that this special feast was sponsored by the fourth princess of the Kingdom of Avalon, Xenia Valeria.

This gave the princess mixed feelings. Although the fishing competition was her idea, the ones who actually caught so many rare fishes and won were none other than Alex and Chuck.

Her plan to thwart her marriage to Chuck had clearly failed, but before she could wallow in disappointment, the troublemaker of the academy gave all the credit to her, raising her popularity with the people.

Chuck himself avoided the limelight, allowing the princess to bask in gratitude and admiration.

Alex had given his roommate a thumbs-up after his great show of generosity towards his fiancée, who didn't like him.

"Wow, this is so good!" Alex gasped in shock after taking a bite of the grilled fish that Mr. Dredd had personally handed to him. "This soup is also very delicious! Just how did you make this dish, Mr. Dredd?"

"Hahaha! As someone who likes to fish and cook the fish that I caught, I have learned how to prepare them in ways that will make their flavors richer," Mr. Dredd replied with pride. "Still, it doesn't change the fact that it tastes better because the quality of the fish that you caught is that good.

"By the way, the annual fishing competition will happen in six months. Why don't you two Master Baiters join the competition and represent the kingdom?"

Alex pondered for a bit before telling Mr. Dredd that he would think about it. That was enough to make the judge of the competition very happy because he would love to have another feast like this.

The villagers were also delighted to be able to eat such delicious food. They thanked the princess profusely for her generosity. In face of such gratitude, even the temperamental Princess Xenia forced out a stiff smile.

In the end, she decided to just go with the flow, telling everyone that her two “retainers” had done an exceptional job in catching the fishes for this special celebration.

Due to how delicious the grilled fishes were, Alex asked Mr. Dredd to prepare some portions that he could bring back to the academy to share with his friends.

Since they had caught so many fishes, there was no problem in getting some takeouts!

“I guess you lost this time, princess,” Alphonse commented with a smirk. “Did you change your mind in using those two teenagers as fish food?”

“Godfather, please stop joking,” Princess Xenia replied. “Others might think that you’re being serious.”

“Oh, my bad. Then this means that you will honor your bet, right?” Alphonse kept smiling as he glanced at Alex and Chuck, who were enjoying the dishes that Mr. Dredd and his friends had cooked together.

“Since I dared to make the bet, I dare to pay the price,” Princess Xenia answered. “But if his wish is to keep me as his fiancée then he is just being delusional.”

The Princess wanted to control her own fate, so an arranged marriage was something that contradicted her will.

As such, she wanted to force Chuck to end it because she couldn’t openly defy her father’s arrangement that easily.

Two hours later, the Princess informed the two young men that they would now be returning to the academy.

Mr. Dredd and his friends decided to remain in the village and chat about the upcoming competition that would happen in half a year.

The middle-aged judge made sure to remind Alex and Chuck that a spot would always be open for the two of them in the competition.

As the boat moved upstream, the small village slowly disappeared from sight.

Alex and Chuck were so full that they knew that they could no longer eat dinner when they returned to the academy.

Of course, they didn't forget to bring some food back for their friends. They planned to have a fish buffet at the clocktower.

While the two were looking at the river, Mary approached Chuck.

"Her Highness wishes to speak to you in private," Mary said. "Please follow me, Young Master."

Chuck gave Alex a glance, and the latter gave him a thumbs up in return.

"Wish for the thing you want the most," Alex stated. "It doesn't matter if it's realistic or not. As long as there is a possibility, you must reach your hand out to grasp it!"

Mary gave Alex a side-long glance before shifting her attention back to her Master's fiancée.

The teenage boy took a deep breath in order to calm his nerves before giving Mary a nod, indicating that he was now ready to meet the princess.

Alex watched his friend go with a faint smile on his face.

He had now confirmed that Chuck might indeed be a troublemaker, but he was a very smart troublemaker.

The teenage boy had credited the feast to Princess Xenia to boost her popularity. Alex believed that this would become Chuck's protective talisman for the rest of the trip.

Princess Xenia might be capricious, but she still cared about what others thought. She was also too proud to leave a favor or debt unreturned. As such, there was no way she would hurt someone who had just made her look good in the eyes of her people.

'I'm sure that it's going to be fine,' Alex thought. 'But just in case, it won't hurt to be prepared for anything.'

Alex had already opened his map, which showed the green blinking dots representing him and Chuck.

If his aquatically challenged roommate was suddenly tossed into the river, he would detect it right away and jump in to save him.

Chapter 200: Chuck's Request

Inside the princess's personal cabin...

"Since you've won the competition, let me hear what you want," Princess Xenia said as soon as Chuck closed the door of her cabin.

The only people inside the room were Princess Xenia and Chuck. Mary was outside, standing guard at the door to prevent anyone from disturbing their conversation.

"There is one thing that I wish to have the most in this world," Chuck said. "And that is also the main reason why I cannot break off the arranged marriage between us."

The princess frowned because she had assumed that the teenage boy would ask her to remain his fiancée.

But before she could even say anything, Chuck continued speaking.

“The most precious thing in this world to me is my mother,” Chuck declared. “And she is also the reason that binds me to this agreement with the royal family. My father, Duke Marius of Emberholt, is a very ambitious person.

“While I do not know what he is thinking, I do know that he holds my life and my mother’s life in his hands. I don’t know if you are aware, but my mother is suffering from a withering disease.

“My father has promised that as long as I am your future consort, he will use everything in his power to find a cure for my mother.

“Although she is just a commoner and my father’s third wife and has already lost her beauty to the withering disease, I believe he still cares about her. I believe he means what he says.”

Chuck sighed as he lowered his gaze.

The moment the princess had announced that if he won, she would fulfill any request of his as long as it was within her power to do so, he had already thought of asking her to help him find a cure for his mother.

“My mother is still in her early thirties, but she looks like someone in her late sixties,” Chuck stated. “And with every month that passes, her vitality drops drastically. What I wish for is the medicine that will cure her.

“As long as you are able to get it for me, I promise that I will personally break the arrangement between our families. I will do this even if I have to publicly go against my father’s wishes and ask His Majesty, the King, to end this engagement.”

Hearing his request, the disdain and contempt that the Princess felt for her fiancé suddenly vanished.

In truth, her circumstances were similar to Chuck's.

Her mother was also the third wife of the King of Avalon. She was also of commoner birth.

Princess Xenia's mother had been a theater actress, and the King had fallen in love with her when he saw her illuminating the stage with her presence.

The moment he had found out that she's pregnant with his child, he hadn't hesitated to take responsibility and bring her to the royal palace.

Fortunately, the King's first two wives—whom Xenia would come to regard as her two other mothers—were very kind women and had welcomed the actress to the inner palace.

They had also showered Xenia with care and kindness, and she had grown up feeling blessed despite her commoner background.

"If I find the cure for you, will you promise to call off the arranged marriage?" Princess Xenia asked.

"Yes," Chuck replied in a heartbeat. "As long as you can get the medicine, I'll go ahead and do it."

The withering disease was similar to the disease that was plaguing Charles' little sister, Eris.

It could be cured with the Life Weave Pill.

The ingredients needed to make this pill could be bought using the academy points. However, they would need to find a very skilled alchemist to craft it to increase the chances of success.

Of course, Princess Xenia didn't plan on taking that route because it would take a lot of time to accumulate enough points.

Besides, she could simply ask her mothers for help in acquiring the necessary ingredients.

However, she understood that even with their power and wealth, gathering these rare ingredients wouldn't be easy.

If it had been easy to acquire them, those who suffered from the withering disease would have been cured long ago.

"Very well, I will do my best to find the ingredients of the Life Weave Pill," Princess Xenia promised. "If I also happen to come across a pill being sold in markets or auction houses, I'll do my best to get it for you."

"Thank you, Your Highness." Chuck placed his hand over his chest and bowed respectfully.

"No need to thank me," Princess Xenia replied. "After all, this is part of our deal. Rest assured, I will do my utmost to help your mother, I promise you that."

After their talk ended, the princess told her fiance that she wanted some time to think alone, so he bade her goodbye and left the room.

Half a minute later, Mary entered and saw the princess looking at the river through the window of her cabin.

"Did he ask for something impossible or unreasonable, Your Highness?" Mary asked after seeing the solemn look on her Master's face.

"Not impossible, but hard," Princess Xenia replied while still looking at the river. "He didn't ask me to remain his fiancée. He just wanted me to help him find the cure for his mother."

The princess then told Mary about Chuck's situation as well as the main reason why he refused to break off their arranged marriage for now.

After hearing everything, Mary mulled over potential solutions before her eyes lit up.

“I will also reach out to my Clan and ask if they are able to procure the ingredients for the Life Weave Pill,” Mary said with determination. “But will he really follow through with your agreement after he gets what he wants?”

“I don’t know,” Princess Xenia admitted. “But, I’d like to believe that he is a man of his word.”

The fourth princess knew that she was a very lucky individual.

Her mothers, her father, and even her siblings loved and treasured and doted on her.

She had already investigated Chuck in the past and knew that his relationship with his family wasn’t really the best.

His brothers looked down on him and treated him like he was a bastard even in public. Xenia imagined that their behavior must be even worse in private.

She wondered what she would have done had she been in Chuck’s position, but all the possibilities she could visualise were dyed in blood.

Of course, the blood she saw wasn’t hers but the blood of the people who dared to make her life a living hell.

Princess Xenia was strong.

She had understood this the moment she had first held a weapon in her hand.

This was why she firmly believed that even if there was someone in the world who could make her feel pain, she would not take it lying down.

Princess Xenia would sharpen her wits and weapons to give them a very painful, and brutal, end.

She wasn't a damsel in distress.

She was a warrior princess who wished to control her own fate.

While she didn't know what hidden agreements her father and the Duke of Emberholt had made behind closed doors, she would not allow herself to be bound to a person who couldn't make her prideful—and courageous heart—skip a beat.