

Endless 301

Chapter 301: It's Common Sense, You Know?

"Your name is Chuck, right?" Caelum asked the handsome blonde teenager. "Are you really the strongest mage among the First Years?"

Alex's roommate had no idea why the elf was asking him if he were the strongest mage among the First Years. In any case, he liked being in the limelight, so he decided to go with the flow for the time being.

Chuck flipped his hair. "Indeed. Not only am I the strongest, but I'm also the most handsome mage among the First Years. No one else is more handsome than I am!"

Serenya, as well as the other elves, couldn't help but look at the shameless teenage boy. They started wondering if all humans were as shameless as this one.

A day had passed since the students from Faelarun Academy had arrived in Frieden Academy, so they were now itching to show everyone their outstanding strength.

They had been carefully handpicked among the First Years to ensure their academy would not be dishonored when their students fought against the humans.

"Is it just me, or do you guys also see those glittering lights on his body?" one of the elves asked his fellow students.

"I also see it," an eleven lady replied. "This might be a cheap trick employed by humans to raise their aesthetic sense in public."

The elven lady wasn't wrong. It was indeed one of the spells Chuck had learned from Lord Gilgamesh during the Trial in the Heracle Mountain.

This glittering light everyone was seeing had no purpose but to add aesthetics. In fact, Chuck and Lord Gilgamesh deliberately made the spell to make themselves look cool in public!

Truth be told, Caelum was also itching to learn how that spell worked. Undeniably, it made the human boy look incredibly suave right now.

But the elves had underestimated how shameless Chuck really was.

The teenage boy even conjured a gust of wind to make the robe of his uniform flutter in the breeze, making sure to strike a nonchalant but cool pose that increased his coolness factor by 200%.

Serenya blinked once then twice. Even she was starting to feel like the handsome human was indeed an eye candy.

“Enough. Come with me to the Training Grounds,” Caelum said. “I request a duel with you.”

“A duel?” Chuck crossed his arms on his chest and gave his challenger a smile filled with confidence. “I don’t mind having a duel with you, but there is a process for such things.”

The teenage boy had become more shameless and quickwitted after finishing his trial, so he wasn’t fazed in the slightest from the challenge of the elven prodigy.

“Process?” Caelum frowned. “What process?”

“Well, since I am the strongest in the academy, shouldn’t you challenge those who are below me first?” Chuck answered. “If you are going to fight the King, you must first challenge the guards, right? Only by defeating them will you gain the right to fight me!”

Chuck could tell that Caelum wasn’t an easy opponent to beat, so he decided to just toss the problem to other people for the time being!

“I don’t know about the elven culture, but this is how things go in the human world. It’s common sense, you know?” Chuck added. “First you have to defeat the champion of the First Years, Renard Vale. He is not a magician, but he is ridiculously strong.

“Of course, if you don’t want to fight him, you can send others to fight him in your stead. But only after defeating Renard will you gain the right to challenge the other Pillar of the academy, Nessia Varr.

“After defeating Nessia, you will finally challenge Alex Stratos. If you defeat these three, I will grant you the opportunity to fight me. Until then, you still haven’t proven your worth to fight the strongest mage among the First Years of Frieden Academy.”

The young man had spoken in such a serious and confident tone that all the elves were fooled by his words.

Alex had told the elves that Chuck was the strongest First Year in order to cause trouble for his roommate.

Little did he know that Chuck had used his own plot to get back at Renard for being grumpy all the time.

Renard liked to fight, and he usually challenged the other First Years in sparring matches, not caring if they were Mages, Warriors, or Magic Knights.

Ever since they returned from the Heracle Mountain, Renard had changed, like the rest of them.

He had also grown more active in sparring matches, as if he wanted to grow stronger in a short period of time.

Alex had also sensed that Mr. I-have-trust-issues seem to be racing against time in order to break through to the next Rank.

But this was all good. After all, the stronger the Heroes and Heroines became, the more Alex would be able to enjoy his academy life.

“I just need to challenge this Renard guy, right?” Caelum asked in confirmation. “I already know who Ms. Nessia is, so I’ll challenge her after I beat Renard. As for Alex Stratos...”

The elf smiled evilly. He had long planned to fight against Alex because the young man was now getting on his nerves.

Chuck also smiled evilly since he also wanted Alex to show the Elf his rightful place.

He didn't know why, but for some reason, he believed that he could all toss his problems to Alex, and the latter would solve it without fail.

That kind of trust was something Chuck couldn't give to other people.

But if it was Alex, he was willing to put his faith on him, so he wouldn't have to fight the elves!

"Very well. Where is Renard?" Caelum asked.

"Give me a moment please," Chuck replied before raising his head to face the sky.

The teenage boy took a deep breath before shouting out loud.

"Dim Diiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiim!"

The elves and the students who were passing by all looked at Chuck as if he was some kind of weirdo.

However, the young man smiled with confidence as he looked in a certain direction.

From the southwest of the academy, a flying creature appeared.

It was none other than an Eagle Parrot, which was one of Dim Dim's friends in Fran's farm.

The Eagle Parrot's name was Captain, and it let a loud screech before descending from the sky.

When it was only dozens of meters in the ground, something jumped off its back and landed perfectly on Chuck's head with a dabbing pose.

"Dim Dim is here!" Dim Dim declared, still in its dabbing pose.

The elves, excluding Caelum and Serenya, were so impressed by Dim Dim's perfect landing that they all clapped their hands, making the little bun raise its chest proudly.

"Ahem!" Dim Dim smiled happily because it had been practicing that heroic landing for a few days.

Chuck didn't hesitate to explain the situation to the little bun and asked Dim Dim if it saw Renard in the academy.

"Dim!" Dim Dim nodded, and pointed towards the direction of the Magic Knight training grounds.

"Alright, we go that way," Chuck nodded. "Dim Dim saw Renard in the magic Knight Training Grounds. You see, that guy likes to duel with other people, so this is a perfect opportunity for you guys to see him in action."

"Good." Caelum smiled fearlessly. "I'm already itching for a fight."

Dim Dim smirked, also itching to see how Renard would brutally beat the crap of the person who called its friend ugly.

The little bun was a kind soul, but it would not allow anyone to look down on its friends, especially Daisy, whom it considered as its patrol partner in the academy.

Chapter 302: The Dance Of Steel And Storm [Part 1]

Renard took a deep breath before clenching his fists in preparation for battle.

Right now, he was challenging a student named Alistair Crowhaven.

Alistair Crowhaven stood tall with the unmistakable bearing of someone forged in discipline.

His army-cut hairstyle emphasized the sharp lines of his face, giving him a hardened, soldierly look that made him stand out among the other academy students.

Broad-shouldered and built like a fighter who thrived in the thick of battle, he carried himself with the confidence of a man who had already seen more drills, training, and fights than most of his peers could imagine.

As a Rank 3 Tempest Brawler, each of his fist strikes was infused with the power of roaring winds, giving him both speed and explosive power.

Coming from a proud lineage of soldiers, he carried his family's legacy like a badge, and every opponent who faced him could feel the weight of that heritage pressing down on them.

Renard was only a Rank 2 Berserker Juggernaut, but he'd always bravely challenged opponents technically stronger than him.

Excluding Alex, the teenage boy was confident that no one of the same Rank as him was his match.

Because of this, he actively challenged Rank 3 fighters and above in order to hone his combat abilities to the fullest.

"I've been paying attention to you, Renard," Alistair said. "Although your rank is lower than mine, I know that you can't be underestimated. I will fight you using my full power, so prepare yourself."

"Thank you," Renard replied.

"Aren't you going to say that you will also fight to your fullest?" Alistair narrowed his gaze.

“Except for my killing blow, I will use everything in my arsenal to fight you, Alistair,” Renard declared. “Let’s have a good fight.”

“Good.” Alistair grinned and bumped his two fists together.

A powerful gust of wind blew outward as faint traces of wind magic covered his hands and feet.

It was at this moment that Chuck, Dim Dim, and the Elves arrived at the training grounds.

“Looks like we came at a good time,” Chuck said. “That guy over there is Renard.”

“I see.” Caelum narrowed his gaze as he locked on the young man, who had taken a fighting pose.

But after a few seconds of observation, a frown appeared on his face.

“His presence is only that of a Rank 2 Warrior,” Caelum stated. “I’m a Rank 4 Arcane Archer. There will be no thrill to fight against a weaker opponent.”

“A Rank 4 huh?” Chuck smirked. “What is stronger, you or a Rank 4 Boss Monster?”

“That depends on what kind of Boss Monster it is,” Caelum replied. “I am confident that I can continuously snipe at my opponent from a safe distance, wearing it down until I go for the kill.”

“I see.” Chuck nodded. “Well, then. I guess you’ll just have to see for yourself and decide whether you won’t find any thrill in fighting against Renard.”

Chuck had watched the recorded video of the Second Trial of the Academy where Renard and Alex’s group fought against the Rank 4 Boss Monsters in the trial.

Mr. I-have-trust issues had crippled the boss with a single punch, which was the reason why many of the Combat Professors thought highly of Renard.

When Chuck had asked Alex if he would win if he sparred against Renard, his roommate only told him that their battle would lead to mutual destruction.

Back then, Chuck didn't know what Alex was talking about.

However, he understood this during the battle against Willow during the Battle Royale.

Alex had tanked the full-powered attack of the Elder of the Demon Worshipers and reflected the damage back to her.

But he had risked his life to win that battle.

Perhaps, this was also the reason why Renard didn't wish to fight against Alex. He must've also known that there would be no winner between the two of them.

As everyone's gaze landed on the two combatants in the training ground, Alistair finally made his move.

With a single step, a booming sound reverberated in the surroundings as the concentrated wind pressure he had placed under his foot propelled him forward.

Renard planted his feet firmly in the ground as he pulled back his arm to unleash a punch to meet Alistair's devastating attack.

Caelum and the Elves narrowed their eyes as they waited for the clash between the two martial experts, who were not holding anything back.

A loud thunderclap reached everyone's ears, followed by a strong gust that expanded outward, making the hairs of the ladies flutter.

Booming sounds echoed repeatedly as Renard and Alistair exchanged blows at close range.

Since Alistair was faster, Renard adapted to a boxing defensive stance, using his arms to block the blows he couldn't dodge, while unleashing counterattacks of his own.

Alistair also dodged and blocked Renard's punches, which were all very heavy.

Each time their fists collided, the ground beneath them cracked, sending spiderweb fractures racing across the training field.

Dust rose with every exchange, mixing with the sharp scent of earth from Alistair's tempest-fueled blows.

Renard's muscles bulged as he absorbed the storm of strikes, his defensive stance solid as steel.

Every blocked punch echoed like a drumbeat, and each counter he threw forced Alistair to weave with precision or risk being seriously injured.

"You're sturdy," Alistair admitted between strikes, his grin widening. His wind-coated fists blurred, each blow accompanied by a sharp hiss of compressed air. "But sturdiness alone won't be enough against me!"

Renard exhaled slowly, his eyes burning with focus. "Then I'll just have to prove you wrong."

Suddenly, Alistair changed his fighting style, his body spinning like a whirlwind.

He launched a spinning kick wreathed in compressed wind, the strike sharp enough to slice through stone.

Renard crossed his arms to block, empowering it with Aura, mitigating the impact that sent him skidding back several meters as dust and debris exploded outward.

The audience tensed, watching as Renard lowered his arms.

His forearms were red and trembling slightly from the force, but his expression was unfazed.

“Not bad,” Renard muttered. His veins pulsed with crimson light as his Berserker Juggernaut physique began to stir, the aura of raw aggression flaring around him like a bonfire. “Now it’s my turn.”

With a deep roar, Renard charged, his movements heavier but unstoppable, like a raging bull.

His fist cut through the air with the weight of a hammer, forcing Alistair to raise both arms in defense. The impact rattled his bones, and the wind barrier around him cracked like glass under strain.

The ground quaked beneath their clash, shockwaves rolling outward, making Caelum’s expression turn solemn.

Chuck smirked at the sight. “See? Still think this won’t thrill you?”

Caelum narrowed his eyes, leaning forward slightly.

For the first time, a trace of curiosity flickered in his usually cold gaze.

“He’s only Rank 2. And yet, he can put forth that much power,” Caelum commented. “That punch has crossed the threshold of Rank 3 when it comes to raw power.”

Chuck smirked, knowing Renard was still holding back. If he really used that crippling blow he had used against the Rank 4 Boss Monster back then, Alistair’s arm would have been broken.

The clash continued. Renard pressed forward with raw might, while Alistair responded with speed and precision, their blows striking like thunder and gale, steel and storm.

It was no longer just a spar. It was a battle where each fighter tested the limits of each other, putting their skills to the test.

Chapter 303: The Dance Of Steel And Storm [Part 2]

Renard advanced like an unstoppable avalanche, each punch carrying the weight of a sledgehammer.

In contrast, Alistair moved with the wind, dodging, weaving, and countering with strikes that cracked like lightning.

The audience even forgot to blink, afraid they might miss something if they did.

Dust exploded, the air howled, and the training field became a storm-torn battlefield under their feet.

“Too slow!” Alistair barked, ducking beneath Renard’s heavy swing before driving an uppercut infused with compressed wind straight into his opponent’s jaw.

Renard’s head snapped back, the blow rattling his brain.

He took two three steps back, and just as he was about to take his third step, he made sure to plant his foot firmly on the ground before launching a fast jab that grazed the side of Alistair’s cheek, drawing blood.

That punch had been thrown subconsciously, and it earned Renard a few precious seconds to breathe.

His vision was still blurry, and yet, he understood that if he didn’t do anything, his opponent would be able to land another blow in his body, which might also be his last.

Out of desperation, Renard uttered a guttural growl that could be mistaken to come from a wounded wild beast about to fight to the death.

Despite knowing that Renard was still suffering from the after-effects of his punch, Alistair didn’t let down his guard as he pressed his momentum.

The soldier-like student advanced, his steps sharp, precise, like a blade carving through the storm.

He twisted his body, aiming a wind-laden hook meant to crush Renard's ribs.

But this time, Renard didn't evade. He stepped into the strike.

The blow thundered against his side, pain erupting like fire through his body, yet his massive arms wrapped around Alistair like an iron vice.

Before Alistair could pull away, Renard slammed his forehead forward.

The brutal headbutt was loud and crisp.

Alistair groaned in pain, as blood sprayed into the air.

Gasps erupted from the crowd.

Caelum felt a chill run down his spine as if the one who received the headbutt wasn't Alistair but him.

Although it was a barbaric move in his eyes, it didn't change the fact that there were no rules when it came to a battle of life and death.

The elf understood this completely, so instead of looking down on Renard, he was starting to feel that this teenager, who was weaker than him by two ranks, indeed had the qualifications to challenge him in a duel.

Ignoring the stabbing agony in his ribs, Renard heaved Alistair upward and hurled him against the ground.

The earth cracked, dust exploding in all directions, as Alistair's body bounced once before falling down once more.

Renard didn't hesitate to sit on his opponent's chest and raised his right fist to pummel his opponent until he could no longer move his arms.

But just as he was about to punch his opponent to oblivion, someone grabbed his hand, stopping him in place.

"I think that's enough, Renard."

Alex had arrived at the training ground, looking for the students of Faelarun who were under his responsibility.

When he arrived, Renard and Alistair were still exchanging blows with each other. Just like everyone, he watched the battle seriously, as if trying to learn from the two combatants fighting with all they had.

Just like everyone else, he felt an imaginary pain when Alistair struck Renard's jaw, as well as Renard headbutting Alistair.

However, when Renard managed to slam his opponent's body to the ground, Alex knew that the fight was over.

So when he saw Renard straddle his opponent with the intention of smacking the other to oblivion, Alex used his skill, Shield Charge, and canceled it before he slammed against Renard's body.

He then reached out to grab Renard's wrist, preventing him from giving Alistair serious injuries.

"You already won," Alex said firmly. "Alistair is already unconscious."

Renard's mind and ears were still ringing. However, Alex's words reached him.

He then looked down on Alistair and confirmed that the other had indeed fainted.

The teenage boy shuddered. As much as he enjoyed battles, the last thing he wanted to do was to beat up an unconscious person, especially someone whom he had asked for a duel.

Sensing that Renard finally understood the situation, Alex released his hand and pulled his body away from Alistair.

“Here, drink this,” Alex said as he handed a healing potion to Renard before taking out another to pour over Alistair’s body.

Drinking a potion orally and directly applying it to injuries had different effects.

Usually, Adventurers would drink half of their healing potion and pour the rest to their injuries for the best result.

But Alex couldn’t possibly force an unconscious person to drink a healing potion. It would do more harm than help.

An unconscious body had no proper swallowing reflex, and pouring liquid down their throat could cause it to enter the lungs instead of the stomach.

That wasn’t just borderline dangerous.

It was potentially fatal.

Because of this, Alex only poured the potion directly onto Alistair’s wounds, letting the liquid seep into his skin where the magic would activate on its own.

Soft golden light spread across the injured fighter’s body, knitting the worst of the damage closed.

Fortunately, there were a few students from Alistair’s class who knew healing magic. So the moment their shock faded, they hurriedly used their powers to heal him.

A few minutes later Alistair's breathing steadied, though he remained unconscious.

Renard, meanwhile, chugged half of his potion before letting the rest splash over his bruised ribs and battered jaw.

A soothing warmth spread through his body, dulling the sharp edges of pain.

The crowd exhaled in relief.

Some students had thought Renard would lose after that devastating uppercut.

Others believed Alistair would crumble after the headbutt.

None had expected such a brutal clash to end like this.

Renard was victorious, but not without scars of his own.

Chuck folded his arms with a knowing grin. "See, Caelum? Still think it's boring?"

The elf didn't answer right away. His sharp eyes lingered on Renard, still recalling the duel that had just ended.

Finally, he spoke, his voice calm but edged with intrigue. "Well, he's not a bad sparring partner. Make sure to tell him that I, Caelum Veyra, wish to challenge him after he has fully recovered from his injuries."

"Okie dokie." Chuck nodded.

However, deep inside, he hoped that Renard would beat Caelum in their duel. Really! He didn't want to face the Arcane Archer, who was a Rank higher than him!

Of course, the elf had no idea that the smiling human boy beside him was wishing for his downfall.

He had already expected that Frieden Academy would have their own geniuses, and he wished to challenge all of them to widen his own world.

Just like most of the Elves from Faelarun Academy, the exchange between academies was the first time they stepped outside of their Kingdom.

They hadn't seen the human world until now, and seeing these "short-lived" humans made them realize a few things.

For one, they were not pushovers.

Caelum gave Renard one last glance before making a gesture for his fellow students to leave the training grounds with him.

But just before leaving the training grounds completely, he glanced at Alex, who was already following behind them.

'After I defeat Renard, I'll be fighting this guy next,' Caelum thought. 'I wonder, will our battle be just as exciting as the battle I watched earlier?'

Dim Dim, who was perched on top of Alex's head, was busy telling its partner that Caelum wished to challenge him as well.

Alex said that he didn't want to fight Caelum, so Dim Dim thought of an idea that might work.

After telling the young man about its proposal, Alex thought that it was an interesting idea, so he decided to implement Dim Dim's plan.

"Kukuku!" the little bun chuckled evilly from on top of Alex's head.

While it was true that Caelum was two ranks higher than Alex, that didn't mean that his loss was guaranteed.

In fact, Dim Dim believed that no matter what Caelum or the other elves do, there was one field where they couldn't beat Alex.

"Caelum, I heard from Dim Dim that you wish to challenge me," Alex said. "Is that true?"

"It is true," Caelum replied. "I plan to fight you after I defeat Renard. But since he needs time to recover, you can wash your neck until then."

"Why do we have to wait until Renard recovers?" Alex arched an eyebrow. "If you want to defeat me, I'll give you an opportunity to do so."

"Oh?" Caelum arched an eyebrow. "Very well, I accept this challenge. Should we fight here in the training grounds?"

"No." Alex shook his head. "Let's fight on a different battlefield. In fact, you and the rest of the elves can work together to beat me. I don't mind."

The elves who heard Alex's boast, couldn't help but glare in his direction.

"It seems that you are itching for a fight huh?" Serenya, who was also itching for an action, asked in a teasing tone. "Are you sure that you can take us all?"

"Enough talk." Alex smirked. "Just follow me."

The young man then walked towards the Seventh Training Ground with a wide smile on his face.

Chapter 304: This Is What It Sounds Like [Part 1]

Within the special Fairy Lounge of the Seventh Training Room...

The fairies were currently having a tea party, talking about the recent events that happened in the academy.

"It's been very peaceful lately," Doh said after she finished drinking her tea. "Most of the students have average musical talents, so none of them stood out too much."

[E/N: Tsk, tsk. You planted your own flag.]

"Indeed." Reh nodded. "I hope something exciting happens! We have exchange students now, so I hope they come here and visit us!"

"Be careful what you wish for," Mii commented. "The Gods might just grant your wish."

Sue smiled faintly. Unlike her friends, she preferred quiet and peaceful days.

Suddenly, their comrade, Lah, burst into their Fairy Lounge, gasping for breath.

"H-He's here!" Lah declared. "He's here!"

The Fairies blinked in confusion as they looked at the blue-haired fairy, who had an excited look on her face.

"Calm down, Lah," Tee said. "Explain yourself properly. Who is here?"

"Alex!" Lah shouted. "Alex is here!"

When the other fairies heard her words, the hands holding tea cups all started to tremble.

They shook so badly, tea splashed on the carpeted floor. Though none of the fairies seemed to mind it very much.

The fairies who go by the name, Dew, Lyra, Cello, Zithra, Harpa, Clarina, Fluta, and Picca all had grim expressions on their faces. Anyone who didn't know better would think the world was about to end.

Just like the other fairies, they had experienced Armageddon after hearing Alex's singing, and frankly, they still hadn't recovered from their trauma.

As if waiting for that moment, another fairy entered the room, and was shocked to find the other fairies doing an epileptic dance on the spot.

"What's happening here?!" Melodina asked in confusion.

"Oh, their PTSD is just acting up after hearing that Alex is headed in the Seventh Training Room," Doh said with an amused smile on her face.

"Finally, something exciting is going to happen." Reh sighed happily. "This is going to be fun!"

Mii nodded in agreement. "Come! Let's go meet Alex!"

"The Elves are with him, so this is going to be good!" Lah giggled.

Fah and Sue giggled. They were the first Fairies who got traumatized by Alex's singing, and thanks to their early bird advantage, they had learned to appreciate his songs and were even looking forward to his appearance.

They then left the training room with Melodina, leaving the rest of the fairies convulsing on the floor.

"A-Are you sure we should leave them like that?" Melodina asked with concern.

“Oh, relax. They’ll bounce up after a few hours and suffer from memory loss,” Doh replied. “It’s going to be fine.”

A few minutes later...

Alex and the rest of the Elves arrived at the Seventh Training Room.

“You guys and girls said that you wish to beat me, so I’ll give you all an opportunity to do so,” Alex said to Caelum, Serenya, and the rest of the elves.

Alex had long wanted to make these arrogant kids know how awesome he was. Since Dim Dim reminded him that fighting them in a different kind of duel would be more effective, he decided to take them to the Seventh Training Room.

“Well, then. Do you see that First Year ranking over there?” Alex asked as he pointed at the Leaderboards of the Karaoke King and Battle Choir. “If any of you beat my score, then you win.”

“Oh... so this is where your confidence is coming from?” Caelum sneered. “I have heard about the Leaderboard Rankings of Frieden Academy. Frankly, we’re interested in participating and putting our names in your rankings.”

“Good.” Alex smiled. “Alright then. Go and knock yourselves out.”

Suddenly, the Fairies appeared and circled Alex and Dim Dim.

“Alex! Are you here to sing again?” Doh asked, her eyes sparkling like the stars in the sky.

“I’m not the one who will sing,” Alex replied. “It will be them. They want to beat me, so I decided to let them beat my ranking in the Leaderboards.”

All the Fairies blinked once, then twice, before shifting their gazes at Caelum and the Elves.

Melodina, who was responsible for the Battle Choir, couldn't help but look at them in pity.

Beat Alex's rank in the Leaderboards?

Good luck!

You would need all the luck in the world to beat that score!

"Very well. I'll challenge the Singing King first," Caelum said with confidence as he entered one of the training rooms.

Everyone followed him, and Alex explained what Caelum should do to participate in the challenge.

"I'll tell you this, but I'm also hailed as a prodigy when it comes to singing," Caelum said with arrogance.

"Famous last words," Melodina commented.

Caelum ignored her as the world around them changed.

Alex and the rest of the elves found themselves seated on the audience seats, while Doh, Reh, Mii, Fah, and Sue, sat on the judges table.

Since they were the judges for the Singing King and Queen, they were duty bound to grade the arrogant elf, who called himself a singing prodigy.

After hearing the Fairies' instructions, Caelum reached out to hold the orb that was floating in front of him.

A moment later, the stage lit up with shimmering golden lights, and the handsome elf now stood under a magical spotlight.

An enchanted microphone floated gently toward him, glowing faintly, as if testing whether its wielder was worthy.

The elf reached out confidently and grasped it.

“Prepare yourselves,” Caelum announced to both fairies and elves alike, “for I shall show you the true voice of the Elves.”

Melodina wasn’t a judge of the Singing King and Queen, but she could already see the ending.

With a sigh, she pinched the bridge of her nose.

She had seen this pattern before.

It all starts with confidence, arrogance, and then the crushing reality of Alex’s record.

“Don’t say I didn’t warn you,” Melodina muttered.

Alex smirked from his seat. Oh, this is going to be good.

As the melody began, Caelum raised his voice.

His tone was clear, elegant, and indeed worthy of an elven prodigy. The first verse flowed like a silver river, precise and filled with natural charm.

The elves in the audience nodded approvingly, saying things like “As expected of Caelum.”

Even Serenya folded her arms, confident that her companion would easily take the top spot.

But the fairies... the fairies did not look impressed.

Doh was fixing her mascara, while Sue was busy filing her nails.

Reh, Mii, and Fah, just looked at Caelum, wondering if a meteor would fall on the stage and set him on fire.

After hearing Alex's singing, their criteria for judging had also changed.

It was no longer about whether someone sang well or not.

They were not judging tone or elegance.

They were judging impact!

As the chorus came, Caelum poured more power into his voice.

He thought the room would be enraptured.

Instead, the fairies began tilting their heads, blinking rapidly, as if listening to a bird chirping the same note again and again.

Reh stifled a yawn.

Doh doodled on her score sheet.

Mii plucked a tiny harp string under the table in boredom.

By the second chorus, Sue had actually fallen asleep.

The other elves gawked. How could these fairies be so indifferent to a voice that could charm even woodland spirits?

Finally, the song ended with a dramatic flourish. Caelum lowered the mic with an arrogant smirk, convinced he had secured first place.

“Now,” Caelum declared, “show me the results.”

The fairies, without a word, raised their scoreboards.

65 Points out of 100.

Caelum froze. “W-What?!”

The elves gasped. Even Serenya’s jaw dropped.

Alex leaned back in his chair, hands behind his head, grinning like the devil himself.

As the one and only Singing King, how could this arrogant elf possibly beat his record?

With a look of disbelief on his face, Caelum challenged the fairies why he was given such a low score.

A moment later, the Fairies roasted him and told him that his singing was only good enough to make people fall asleep, which in itself was an achievement that earned him 65 Points.

The Elves were also in uproar, unable to accept this result.

They were a race that also specialized in the Musical Arts and were recognized as one of the best singers in the world.

Although Caelum wasn't the best singer among them, he still sang incredibly well, which should have earned him a higher point in the rankings.

Chapter 305: This Is What It Sounds Like [Part 2]

The Seventh Training Room trembled from the noise, not from Caelum's heavenly voice but from the way the elves forcefully smashed their hands on the benches in protest.

"This is outrageous!" Serenya snapped. "Caelum's voice is like flowing water under moonlight! How dare you insult his performance with such a low score?!"

"Yes!" another elf shouted. "Even our bards would give him full marks!"

The fairies didn't even flinch.

Doh crossed her arms and spoke in a matter-of-fact tone. "Flowing water under moonlight? More like a lullaby to put toddlers to bed. I nearly dozed off halfway through."

Reh twirled her hair with a finger, smirking. "Sixty-five points is already generous. If you ask me, sixty-four would be more fitting—and only because he managed not to trip over his own voice."

"Don't worry," Mii said cheerfully. "Your friend has potential! Potential to work in a nursery, maybe. Babies would love him."

The elves' faces turned crimson with outrage.

Caelum clenched his fists, trembling with fury. "You mock the voice of the Elves?! You dare!"

"Stop." Sue, who had woken up from her nap, lifted her hand lazily. Her sleepy eyes met Caelum's glare. "Listen carefully, Elf-boy. You sing beautifully. Truly. But beauty isn't enough here."

"W-What do you mean?" Serenya demanded.

Sue pointed her tiny finger toward Alex. "That young man over there broke our souls. He dragged us into a world of auditory destruction that made us see the edge of heaven and hell at the same time. Compared to him, your voice is like... like a peanut butter and pickle sandwich without the pickles."

Doh nodded sagely. "Exactly. When Alex sings, he's just not singing. He's scarring everyone who hears his voice. His music will stay with you whether you want it to or not. You'll dream of them, you'll cry because of them, and you'll wake up screaming in the middle of the night thanks to them."

"That's impact," Mii added with a grin. "And that's why none of you will ever dethrone him."

The elves turned toward Alex in disbelief.

The young man simply leaned back in his chair, smugness radiating off him like a halo. Dim Dim wobbled on the armrest beside him, clapping its tiny bun hands in celebration.

"Feel free to challenge my score anytime," Alex said smugly. "I don't mind if you use the entire month of your stay in the academy to achieve that."

"You!" Caelum started, his pride on the verge of collapse.

But Serenya suddenly stood. "Fine. If Caelum cannot claim the Singing King's throne, then I shall."

The elves gasped.

Serenya was not only beautiful, but she was also one of the prodigies of their group.

Gentlemen in the academy wished to become her partner, while the ladies wished to be like her.

In short, she was an idol among the First Years in Faelarun Academy. For her to personally step up to beat Alex's score in the Leaderboards showed how serious she truly was.

Alex's grin widened. "Oh, this is going to be good."

The fairies perked up as well, though not with excitement. Rather, it was the kind of look hunters gave when they knew fresh prey had stepped into their trap.

"Very well," Sue said, yawning as she motioned toward the glowing orb. "Let's see what you've got."

Serenya walked toward the stage, her posture regal and steps confident.

"I shall prove," Serenya said, gripping the floating orb with elegance, "that Elves are not inferior to humans."

Dim Dim gave Serenya a pitiful gaze. The beautiful elf had no idea what she was talking about.

The little bun was certain that Serenya was a great singer, but being able to sing well was not enough to make the Fairies give her a high score.

But it didn't have any intention to say anything, so it bought a bag of potato chip from the Arcana Shop and started to eat, waiting for Serenya's attempt to put Alex's song to shame.

The lights dimmed once more, and Serenya stood center stage, illuminated by the soft glow of the enchanted spotlight.

The microphone hovered before her lips, awaiting her voice.

When she sang, her enchanting voice captivated the elves, who looked at her with admiration.

The room itself seemed to hush, mesmerized by the elven prodigy's melody.

Her song painted vivid imagery.

The moonlit forests, rivers sparkling with starlight, and the gentle warmth of twilight breezes. It was elegant, refined, and undeniably beautiful.

The elves in the audience held their breath in awe.

“This is it!” a lady whispered.

“As expected of Serenya!” another cheered softly.

‘She will surely dethrone that human!’ Caelum clenched his fists in anticipation.

But while the elves were enchanted, the fairies... were silent.

Not the kind of silence that comes with reverence. Quite the contrary, it was the silence of someone trying very hard not to burst into laughter.

Doh chewed a potato chip that Dim Dim had offered her.

Reh was doodling a caricature of Serenya on her notepad.

Mii leaned on the table, resting her cheek on her palm, her eyes glazed over.

Fah and Sue were whispering to each other, trying to decide if Serenya’s singing reminded them of a past they had already forgotten.

Dim Dim, meanwhile, continued to eat one potato chip after the other, its cheek bulging a bit like a chipmunk.

Unlike the fairies, whose criteria had changed, the little bun still believed that there was beauty in the world.

While it didn't believe that the elf could beat Alex's score in the Leaderboards, it preferred to listen to any song. Even tone deaf singers and offkey singers were welcome.

Simply put, any song that wasn't sung by Alex was a good song for the Dim Sum God.

Serenya poured her soul into the chorus, unleashing waves of magic-infused harmony that made even Caelum rise to his feet, proud of his companion.

The elves clapped when the final note hung in the air, her voice fading like silver dust.

Serenya lowered the microphone with elegance, smiling sweetly, already convinced that she had conquered Alex's throne and brought honor to the Elven Race.

Chapter 306: This Is What It Sounds Like [Part 3]

"Well?" Serenya asked, confidence shining in her eyes. "How many points?"

After a quick simultaneous exchange of glance, they raised their scoreboards with perfect synchronization,.

90 Points out of 100.

The elves froze.

While the score wasn't bad, they believed it should've been higher.

But just before she was about to challenge their score, Doh spoke up first.

"The reason why you got a score of 90 is because we didn't judge you based on the standards of the Singing King," Doh said in a serious tone. "We judged you based on the criteria of the Singing Queen."

“That’s right.” Reh nodded. “If we were to judge you with the Singing King’s grading system, your score will only be 70 at most.”

Serenya frowned. “So I only got 90 points because you are judging me based on the Singing Queen’s criteria?”

“Right.” Doh nodded.

“But what do you mean by—if my song is graded based on the Singing King’s criteria, I would only get 70 points?” Serenya asked in disbelief.

“Exactly.” Reh smiled faintly. “Let’s not talk about your singing talent for now. Even the Singing Queen wouldn’t win against Alex if the two of them fought in the Battle Choir.”

The frown on Serenya’s face grew deeper.

Faelarun Academy also had a Battle Choir, so she was well-versed on the subject.

While she was among the Top 3 in the rankings of Faelarun Academy, there was a gap between her and the Top 1 in the Battle Choir leaderboards.

The First Place record in the Faelarun Academy came from Aeris, who had transferred to Frieden Academy during her Second Year.

Years had passed, yet no one had beaten the score she had set. Even with Serenya’s talent, she was unable to dethrone the princess of the Elven Race.

That kind of result was acceptable. After all, Princess Aeris was an elf just like her.

But she couldn’t accept the fact that she still fell short of dethroning the Singing Queen of Frieden Academy.

"I understand now." Serenya eyed the Fairies with an arrogant smile. "All of you are biased judges. You don't want us Elves to dethrone the current top contenders because that will be a shame for Frieden Academy is it not?"

"Wow, just wow." Doh shook her head helplessly. "To think that someone will dare to call us biased."

"Indeed." Sue commented as she finished filing her nails. "But since you are in doubt, I have a proposal for you."

"I'm listening." Serenya crossed her arms over her chest.

"How about... all of you Elves fight Alex in Battle Choir?" Sue asked with a devilish smile on her face.

"Genius!" Fah exclaimed. "You're a genius, Sue!"

"I know, right?" Sue's smile widened.

"Very well, I will fight him!" Serenya said with confidence.

"Sorry, I think you misheard me," Sue replied. "I said 'ALL' of you will fight him at the same time in Battle Choir."

"What?" Serenya blinked. "All of us? As in ALL of us at the same time?"

"Right." Sue nodded. "That way, none of you will be able to come up with any excuses when you lose to Alex. Or... are you saying that you and the rest of the students of Faelarun Academy are scared?"

"Oh, no. Should Alex give you guys a handicap?" Reh giggled. "Alex, how about you sing while blindfolded?"

"No problem!" Alex replied with confidence.

Caelum and the Elves almost coughed out blood then and there. How was singing with a blindfold a handicap?

In fact, singing while blindfolded didn't even matter because most singers close their eyes when they feel too emotional while singing!

"I'd just like to ask for confirmation," Caelum stood up. "If we beat Alex in Battle Choir, will our names be on the top of the Battle Choir Leaderboards?"

"Of course," Melodina, who was the judge of the Battle Choir replied. "I swear upon my name and honor that I will not go back on my word."

"Good!" Caelum sneered at Alex. "Don't make excuses if you lose later."

"Excuses are for the weak," Alex answered with confidence. "I will make you understand why I am the Singing King of the academy!"

The Fairies all clapped their hands in excitement.

Sensing the grave danger, Dim Dim escaped the training room like its buns were on fire.

The Fairies failed to apprehend the little guy in time, making them click their tongues in regret.

Seeing Alex's partner flee so fast made Caelum and Serenya smile.

"It seems that your partner doesn't want to see you lose," Caelum stated.

The fairies giggled, their tiny wings fluttering. They knew exactly why Dim Dim left, but they had no plans to explain it to the Elves..

“Smart bun,” Sue said with a lazy smirk. “If I could leave before the massacre, I would too.”

Serenya snorted, folding her arms. “Big words, but this time, you’ll face not one but all of us. You can’t possibly hope to defeat the pride of Faelarun Academy in Battle Choir.”

“Battle Choir,” Alex repeated, his grin spreading into something far too wide for a lawful human. “Good. It’s about time I showed you why I am called the Singing King!”

“After this, you will not be called a Singing King but a Singing Joke!” Caelum snapped back.

“Big words.” Alex smiled faintly. “Make sure you can back it up.”

The elves stiffened.

The fairies cheered.

“Battle Choir!” Sue announced, her sleepy eyes suddenly sharp with excitement. “One Human versus a dozen Elves. Venue: Seventh Training Room. Time: right now.”

Magical runes lit up along the floor, forming a massive circle. The walls shimmered as the enchantments activated, ensuring that the following unmeasurable destruction wouldn’t leak outside.

“Good luck,” Reh said in a singsong voice, winking at the elves. “Try not to get scarred for life.”

Serenya and Caelum stepped into the glowing circle, followed by the other elves, their faces firm with determination.

Alex walked in last, stretching his shoulders like a fighter preparing for the ring.

He casually rolled his neck and cracked his knuckles, as if he was preparing for nothing more but a warm-up practice.

“Alex,” Serenya declared, raising her voice so all could hear. “Today, your so-called throne will crumble.”

Alex chuckled. “You don’t get it, do you? There’s no throne. There’s only me.”

The runes flared to life, locking the combatants inside.

“Battle Choir, begin!” Melodina’s voice rang out like a bell.

The two Parties appeared in a majestic coliseum, with Alex on one side, and the Elves on the other.

The illusionary sky above shimmered with golden clouds, the cheers of phantom audiences filling the air.

The enchantment made the atmosphere heavy, as if every note sung here could split the heavens and tear apart the ground.

Caelum raised his chin, summoning his lyre with a flash of emerald light.

Serenya’s hands glowed as she drew out a silver flute made from starlight.

The other elves manifested harps, violins, and even crystal chimes. Together, they formed a complete orchestra, their magic weaving around each other to create a beautiful melody.

“This will be your end, Human,” Caelum declared.

The elves struck the first chord.

A wall of harmonious sound rose, layered with ancient Elven incantations.

Their voices merged, creating a radiant shield of melody that shook the coliseum's pillars. Images of forests and glowing stars manifested above them, the embodiment of Elven pride.

The phantom crowd roared in approval.

Alex stood, holding his microphone in hand, as a wonderful memory played on his side of the battlefield.

"The song I didn't write..." Alex said with a smile. "This is what it sounds like."

The moment he opened his mouth—

"—!"

A wave of sound exploded outward.

It wasn't singing.

It was the opening verse of the end of the world.

His voice hit like a cannon—no, a meteor—shaking the coliseum as though an extremely vengeful beast had been unleashed.

The illusions the elves had conjured shattered instantly. Like glass, the glowing forests shattered. Like dying embers, the stars fizzled. Like sand, everything crumbled down.

The harmony they had built collapsed under the sheer force of Alex's opening verse.

Caelum staggered backward, his lyre strings vibrating violently before half of them snapped as if reaching their limit.

Serenya covered her ears, her flute trembling in her grasp. The other elves cried out as cracks ran along their instruments.

“What... what is this?!” Caelum shouted.

“”This is! Battle Choir!”” All the Fairies shouted in unison and exchanged high fives with each other.

The fairies in the stands exploded into laughter, clapping their tiny hands.

“Yes! Yes! Break them, Alex!” Mii cheered.

“Destroy their harmony!” Reh yelled gleefully.

“Kill!” Doh roared.

“Deaaaaaaaaath!” Fah raised both of her hands as if she were the Empress of a Kingdom who was cheering her favorite gladiator to go for the kill.

Sue smirked. “This is just the prelude. They haven’t even heard the chorus yet.”

Inside the arena, the elves scrambled to recover, pouring mana into their instruments to rebuild their shattered harmony.

Serenya’s eyes blazed as she raised her flute again. “Don’t falter! We are Elves! Show him the beauty of our song!”

The orchestra roared back to life, defiant, their melody weaving tighter and stronger.

But all their efforts crumbled the moment Alex sang the chorus of his song.

And then...

There was no then.

Chapter 307: Before Heaven And Earth, Before Gods, and Men [Part 1]

The Solara and Faelarun delegates had been in the Frieden Academy for four days.

At first, the Elves had been arrogant, almost annoyingly so.

The students of the academy tolerated them, considering that they were VIP Guests. However, they weren't pushovers and made sure to vent during their clashes in the training grounds.

Of course, the students of Faelarun Academy weren't the only ones actively joining duels. The students from Solara Academy also joined the fray, making the training grounds one of the most visited places in the academy.

Chuck blinked once, then twice, as he looked at Caelum, who seemed to be avoiding him since yesterday.

Instead of challenging Chuck, the other Elves challenged the other students of the academy, as if using them to vent their frustrations.

Serenya, known for her composure, also fought violently, even resorting to using powerful attacks.

This prompted the Professors to activate the arena's safety feature, which instantly teleported the students about to suffer serious injuries to a safe location.

Ironically, the Elves usually won these duels.

But even though they won, none of them seemed to be happy about it.

“What’s wrong, Caelum?” Chuck asked. “It’s as if you have an itch you can’t scratch no matter what you do.”

Caelum ignored the young man as he stepped out of the arena.

“Oi, what’s wrong?” Chuck blocked the elf’s path after being ignored. “Did I do something wrong? Why are you guys ignoring me?”

“Sorry, Chuck, but forget about the duel I requested of you,” Caelum replied. “I will still fight Renard since I believe I have much to learn from him. However, I will no longer challenge you in a duel.”

Chuck didn’t know whether he should be happy or sad after hearing the arrogant elf’s words.

But he noticed something that he didn’t know before.

Nearly all of the Elves, except for those who didn’t participate in the Battle Choir and stuck to Prince Kaelen as his bodyguards, had all become very respectful toward Alex.

Chuck even saw some of them shudder whenever his roommate appeared to greet them.

There was even someone who started crying when she saw Alex, which made the academy’s troublemaker wonder if his best friend had done something to the elves.

Caelum and Serenya even politely asked Alex to just focus on guiding Prince Kaelen, asking for Astrea to be their guide instead.

Thinking that the Elves might still be embarrassed due to what happened in the Seventh Training Room, Alex agreed and swapped places with Astrea as the guide for Faelarun Academy’s second group.

Just as Chuck was thinking of asking Caelum if his roommate had done anything to them, he heard a loud shout in the distance.

“You! Release her at once!”

Everyone in the training ground shifted their attention to the entrance of the training ground, curious about what the commotion was all about.

The delegation of the Solara Academy, which was already a very common sight in the training grounds, had arrived to enjoy their share of the duels.

But when their gaze landed on the young man, whom they recognized as the Fourth Prince of the Solara Kingdom, Prince Garen, they knew that something wasn't right.

“How long do you plan to hug her?!” Prince Garen shouted in anger. “Let go of her at once!”

Alex blinked once, then twice, before looking at Vaan, whose arms were wrapped around him, his head resting on his chest.

Ironically, the silver-haired young man wasn't even holding onto Vaan.

In fact, his hands were even raised in the air as if in surrender, yet the prince was still fuming and insisted that he let go of the pretty boy who was smiling mischievously.

Of course, no one saw the latter's mischief. His face was covered by Alex's chest, so to everyone, he was still the pure, beautiful lady.

“Your Highness, I think there's a misunderstanding,” Alex replied. “I'm not hugging him—errr, her. Look, I'm not even touching anything!”

“Do you think I'm blind?!” Prince Garen asked, his glare locked on Alex's handsome face. “Just a glance, and I can tell that you're a playboy! Unhand her, or face my sword!”

Everyone wanted to say, “Yeah, you're blind,” but decided to just watch since they found this incident quite entertaining to watch.

“Um... Alex, something hard is touching my stomach,” Vaan said with a blush creeping on his face.

Alex wanted to cough a mouthful of blood then and there after hearing the pretty boy speak nonsense.

“Vaan, be good,” Alex lightly patted the pretty boy’s head. “Don’t cause trouble for me, okay?”

Vaan stuck out his tongue and reluctantly stepped away from Alex.

However, while his back still faced the Prince, the delicate looking young man pressed his hands together and mouthed, “This Prince has been trying to flirt with me for days. Please, save me, Alex.”

No sound came out of Vaan’s lips, deliberately done as he didn’t want to cause a scene.

“I guess this is what you call love is blind,” Alex muttered.

Dim Dim, who was perched on top of Alex’s head, nodded in agreement. “Dim.”

Before Alex and Vaan could even do anything, Prince Garen stepped forward and wrapped his left arm on Vaan’s waist, pulling him away from the silver-haired young man.

“Listen, I don’t want you going anywhere, Ms. Vaan,” Prince Garen stated. “If you do, I will challenge you to a duel!”

Ever since he saw Vaan, the Prince fell in love at first sight.

At first, he tried to be courteous and respectful.

But every time he saw Vaan smile and talk to Alex, he felt the flames of jealousy burn within his chest.

Vaan had always been close to Alex.

Whenever they accidentally met, the pretty boy would give Alex a hug, while the latter would pat his head.

The students of the academy were already used to this scene, but Prince Garen didn't want Vaan to smile at any other young men aside from him.

Also, the skinship Vaan shared with Alex drove the Prince nuts.

The Radiant Lily of the Solara Delegation, Lady Celestria, frowned. It went without saying that her cousin's obsessiveness was becoming a problem.

However, since he was the fourth prince of Solara, she couldn't berate him in public since it would make Prince Garen lose face.

'I need to talk to him in private later,' Lady Celestria thought. 'This can't continue.'

Suddenly, Caelum thought of an idea, and a faint smile appeared on his face.

"Prince Garen, we are the guests of Frieden Academy, so this kind of behavior will not reflect kindly on us," Caelum stated. "However, I see in your eyes that you have a grudge against Alex, which I think will become troublesome if you bottle it up."

"How about you just challenge him here in the arena and settle it like true men? Isn't it a knight's duty to protect the weak and innocent? I see Ms. Vaan seemed to be frightened out of her wits."

"I am?" Vaan blinked.

"Yes you are, Ms. Vaan." Caelum insisted.

Vaan tilted her head to the side, looking very cute, which made Caelum feel his heart skip a beat.

'W-What the hell?!' Caelum, who suddenly felt like Vaan looked extremely cute for a human, suddenly became anxious.

Ever since the Battle Choir ended, a scar had formed on his heart and refused to heal. As a result, his emotions had been all over the place since yesterday.

The anxiety and blow to his confidence had left him and the other elves itching for an outlet, making them more active in challenging Frieden Academy's students.

"You're right." Prince Garen nodded. "Alex Stratos, I challenge you to a duel. If you win, you will break up with Ms. Vaan and never bother her again! In return, I will promise to make her happy for the rest of her life as my wife!"

The girls from Frieden Academy who heard this went "Kyaaah! Kyaaah!" as if a duel to get Vaan's affection made their hearts flutter.

The guys who secretly had a crush on Vaan cheered and urged Alex to kill the Prince of Solara!

"Go Alex! Kill him!"

"Cut off his PP!"

"Don't let him steal our muse! Death to the heretic!"

"Death!"

""Death!""

“What the fuc...” Alex muttered because things had escalated to the point where the entire training ground was in uproar.

The young man glanced at Vaan, and the latter acted like a damsel in distress, wiping his crocodile tears with his handkerchief.

It made her look very vulnerable, and the simps who had a crush on her, especially Prince Garen, wished they could protect her smile no matter what.

“I accept this duel,” Alex knew that he couldn’t get out of this mess, so he decided to accept the challenge. ‘I’ll just concede before the match starts.’

Once the Prince had calmed down, he would talk to him in private and tell him that Vaan was actually a boy, not a girl.

Seeing that Alex had accepted his challenge, Prince Garen smiled with confidence as if he had already won the duel.

As if waiting for that moment, Prince Kaelen also appeared in the arena with his entourage.

Naturally, Lapis was there.

She looked at Alex as if wanting to help him, but he merely shook his head and told her that things are going to be fine.

Prince Kaelen, who had long felt that his sister was unusually close to Alex, also decided to watch this battle unfold.

He had already marked Alex as someone that shouldn’t be allowed to breathe in the same space as his sisters, whom he loved very much.

Chapter 308: Before Heaven And Earth, Before Gods, and Men [Part 2]

News of Prince Garen’s and Alex’s duel quickly spread in the academy like wildfire.

Both students agreed to hold the duel after classes ended the next day, which made them the hot topic of the First Years, as well as the upper years who were also paying attention to the exchange students.

“Vaan, you do realize this is all because of you, right?” Alex asked in a calm tone.

“Mmm.” Vaan hummed in agreement.

“Why aren’t you repenting?” Alex sighed as he looked at the pretty boy seated beside him, even resting his head on Alex’s shoulder. “Wait, are you actually enjoying this?”

“It’s a lie to say no,” Vaan replied. “You’ve always been my Knight, Alex. I aspire to become someone like you.”

The two were currently seated on a bench in the garden of the academy.

Some of the students, especially the girls, would look in their direction from time to time before giggling and whispering in each other’s ears.

Alex and Vaan paid them no heed since they were already used to this. Until now, everyone still remembered how Alex saved Vaan from the Demon Worshipers and set the “young lady” free from their control.

“Seriously, don’t go making boys fall in love with you so easily,” Alex sighed a second time, though he still didn’t push Vaan away.

Knowing the pretty boy’s circumstances, he admittedly let the other do whatever he wanted.

Vaan giggled, but didn’t say anything else to Alex’s advice.

Among their group, only Nessia truly knew that Vaan was a boy.

The rest? They were still in doubt if she was really a he.

This was especially true for Lavinia and Latifa.

There was even a time when Latifa asked Lotte to spy on Vaan while he was taking a bath to confirm if he was a boy or a girl.

However, Lotte vehemently refused, unwilling to intrude upon Vaan's privacy even at Latifa's order.

Even Dim Dim was now doubting if Vaan was really a guy, which was very unusual for the Dim Sum God, who knew everything about Arcana.

"Alex," Vaan suddenly said, his voice soft and playful. "Do you think I look good enough to be worth fighting for?"

Alex slowly turned to look at him. "Vaan... don't phrase it like that. Do you have any idea how much trouble you've caused already?"

Vaan lowered his head. "You're right. I'm afraid I will cause more trouble for you in the future. I don't even know how I can repay you for everything you've done for me. If you tell me to pay with my..."

Alex placed a finger on Vaan's lips before glancing at the eavesdroppers in the distance.

The girls were already exclaiming "Kyaaaah!" as if Alex and Vaan were reenacting the script of one of the romance novels girls their age liked to read.

"You're enjoying this a lot, don't you?" Alex inquired in a helpless tone.

Vaan nodded. "A lot."

“When you reclaim your title as Viscount, make sure to give me a piece of land in your territory. That’s the least you can do to repay me for my troubles.”

Alex had no place to call home in Arcana, and to be honest, he was also thinking of getting a place where he could settle down once he was done with the academy.

Upon hearing his words, Vaan’s face brightened up, but he immediately changed his expression to a serious one.

“I will agree to your condition if you win the duel,” Vaan replied. “I know that you’re planning to lose on purpose when you accepted that duel. Make sure to fight properly, and the deed of land is yours.”

“I guess I have to take this match seriously now.” Alex scratched his head.

Vaan then reluctantly stood up and unsheathed the ceremonial short sword he always carried around him for protection.

He then rested the flat edge of his sword on Alex’s left shoulder, who was still seated on the bench.

“By the blade you wield and the heart you bear, rise as shield of the helpless,” Vaan said softly, as if conferring knighthood to Alex.

“Let your strength be tempered with mercy, your courage with wisdom.

In battle, be relentless. In peace, be just.”

Vaan raised his sword and placed it on Alex’s right shoulder.

“Never betray your word, for a knight’s honor is the breath of his soul,” Vaan stated. “Swear now to the crown and people, and let your name echo in the halls of loyalty.”

Vaan raised his sword and sheathed it once more.

“That was the oath that my Great Grandfather lived up to when he was knighted by the previous King,” Vaan said softly. “Do you know, Alex? Viscounts can’t confer knighthood because it is the privilege of Marquesses, Dukes, and Kings.

“If you were to become the knight of my territory, I can’t even imagine how happy I would be. But after spending time by your side, I understand that you’re someone who wishes for freedom more than anyone.”

The delicate young man paused for a bit before crouching down to look at Alex straight in the eye.

“Tell me, if the King of Avalon were to confer you Knighthood, would you accept it?” Vaan asked in curiosity.

“No,” Alex replied.

“See?” Vaan smiled faintly. “You are not a Knight bound by a kingdom. You are a knight bound by your heart.

“The Oathkeeper takes his oath seriously. So, when you made that Oath to save me, I felt glad to be born in this world. Thanks to you, I learned that someone out there is willing to risk their life for me.”

“Back then, I thought that what awaited me was a lifetime of suffering. But at the cost of your battered body, you delivered me freedom. This life of mine belongs to you, Alex.”

To Alex’s surprise, Vaan knelt down on one knee like a knight, swearing his fealty to his King.

“I, Alex Vaan Damne, swear upon ‘The World’ that watches over all things, that I will use this life of mine to carry out the Oathkeeper’s will.

“His enemies will be my enemies. His burdens will be my burdens. His path, I shall walk beside him until the end.

“I pledge my spear to strike where he commands, my body to guard where he stands, and my breath to endure when all others falter. Let my blood be the price if ever his life is imperiled, and let my name be forgotten if I fail him in his darkest hour.

“Before heaven and earth, before gods and men, I bind myself to his cause. Not by force nor by gain, but by the truth of my heart and the honor of my soul.

“From this day forth, I am his sworn knight, his steadfast companion, and his eternal defender—until the stars fade and The World itself ceases to turn.”

Suddenly, the world came to a standstill.

Alex’s eyes widened in shock as he felt a divine presence make itself known.

“N-No way...” Alex muttered.

A two-meter-tall card hovered above Vaan’s body, who was still kneeling and frozen in time like everyone else.

On the surface of the card, the number “VII” appeared, representing one of the Deities of the world.

“It has been a while since the voice of a mortal reached my ears.” A voice spread in the surroundings, but Alex was certain that no one other than him was able to hear it.

“I will be paying more attention to you Vaan, and see if you are worthy to become my Apostle. As for you... child who had been marked by the Lovers, continue to look after my candidate, for Vaan had sworn to live her life for you.”

“Her?” Alex asked almost hoarsely.

"I mean, Him." The Deity immediately corrected itself. "It's been a while since I woke up, so I momentarily got confused. Vaan is an interesting child, someone who should have already disappeared from this world, and yet, he is here and continues to exist.

"He has broken away from the whims of fate, and you have played a role in his unbinding. But do you know? Changing the Fate of others is a double-edged sword. Do not think for a moment that you won't be paying a price for changing the destinies of others.

"The Wheel continues to turn, and Fate will have its due. Pray... child of men, that the payment she will ask of you is something you are willing to let go.

"I give you this warning because of Vaan. Do not change destiny as if it's a casual thing. Only when you have the resolve to risk it all should you attempt to continue this path you decided to tread."

The deity inside the two-meter-tall card smirked before it slowly dispersed in radiant light.

Golden particles descended upon Vaan's body as if being blessed by one of the Deities in the world, whom Alex had only seen thrice in both lifetimes.

Time once again flowed normally, and Vaan finally raised his head to look at Alex's face.

He had made his pledge, and the world had acknowledged his sincerity.

Chapter 309: Like, And Love, Were Two Different Feelings [Part 1]

"I'm sorry, Alex," Vaan said softly. "My feet and legs suddenly feel like jelly."

"It's fine," Alex replied as he lifted Vaan into a princess carry.

The young man decided to take the pretty boy to the infirmary, worried about his friend's body.

Getting blessed by a Deity was a good thing, but right now, Vaan was only an Apostle Candidate.

Even so, Alex was certain that Vaan's body would get some sort of power-up, making him stronger than ever.

It was a phase that all Apostle Candidates had to go through. With this, by the time they were finally chosen as Apostles, their bodies would be strong enough to contain the divine powers that were going to be bestowed upon them.

Alex wasn't an Apostle despite inheriting the Legacy of the Oathkeeper.

He was merely recognized by The Lovers, who had given him their blessing, similar to what had happened to Vaan.

Technically, Alex had also become an Apostle Candidate. However, he was certain that the Lovers had no intention of making them their Apostle.

In any case, he shared a connection with the two Deities, so he believed there would be no hostility between him and the Apostle of The Lovers and The Chariot if he were to meet them.

At least, that was what Alex wanted to believe.

"Being carried like this is embarrassing," Vaan muttered, his face as red as a tomato. And yet, there was a faint smile on his face.

"You're so light, Vaan," Alex said. "You're just as heavy as my Guildmaster when I carried her. How much do you weigh?"

"It's rude to ask someone their weight, Alex." Vaan pouted. "Who is this Guildmaster you are talking about? Are you part of a guild? Who is she? How did you meet? Do I know her?"

"Oh, look—we're in the infirmary!" Alex immediately tried to change the subject and used his foot to knock on the door.

Vaan understood that Alex didn't want to talk about it, so he didn't pry any longer.

A few seconds later, the door opened, and one of the nurse twins who had silver-white hair with pastel streaks of blue, Lin, looked at Alex with a mischievous smile on her face.

"The Infirmary is empty right now, so you two can use it as much as you want," Lin said before Alex could even say anything.

"I'll even hang the 'Sorry, We're Closed' sign, so don't worry. No one will disturb you. The drawer in my table is unlocked, so if you need contraceptive potions, just take one without hesitation, okay?"

The corner of Alex's lips twitched, while Vaan giggled after seeing the young man's reaction.

"Please don't tease me, Ms. Lin," Alex said. "You have a patient, so please take care of him."

Lin's smile widened a bit as she opened the door wider to let Alex inside.

The moment the young man entered, the nurse summoned the 'Sorry, We're Closed' sign and hung it outside the door.

Alex, who had no idea that the Nurse had done exactly what she said earlier, gently lay Vaan on the bed.

"Please do a full-body check-up for Vaan," Alex said. "There might be something wrong with his body since he suddenly lost the ability to walk."

Of course, Alex didn't say anything about the incident with the Deity. Even if he were to say it, he was certain that Lin would just make fun of him and tell him not to joke around with something like this.

"Vaan, is today your safe day?" Lin asked in a teasing tone.

“Every day is a safe day for me,” Vaan answered with a smirk.

The two exchanged a knowing smile with each other before Lin lightly tapped Alex’s shoulder.

“Go outside, and make sure that no one bothers us,” Lin ordered. “Don’t worry. I already know about Vaan’s secret. He is safe with me.”

Alex nodded and did as he was told.

It would be troublesome if a student suddenly entered the infirmary while Lin was giving Vaan a full-body check-up.

A few minutes later, Lavinia arrived at the Infirmary and saw Alex standing in front of the door.

“What are you doing, Alex?” Lavinia asked. “Are you hurt?”

“No.” Alex shook his head. “Ms. Lin is giving Vaan a checkup, and asked me to stand outside. How about you? Are you hurt?”

“Tis but a scratch,” Lavinia replied. “But since I ran out of potions, I decided to go here and get medicine so it heals right away.”

Lavinia showed her shoulder, where the bruise was located.

“I have a potion here,” Alex didn’t hesitate to take out a healing potion and handed it over to Lavinia. “Please drink it.”

The young lady’s gaze softened as she accepted Alex’s goodwill.

“Thank you,” Lavinia said.

A part of her didn't want to drink the potion because it was something given to her by Alex. But since he looked worried, she reluctantly took a sip and applied a few drops to the bruises that were on some parts of her body.

After she finished applying the potion to her injuries, Alex asked who she had fought against.

"I sparred with Prince Garen earlier," Lavinia admitted.

"Huh?" Alex blinked. "Why did you fight with the Prince of Solara? And who won?"

"It was a draw," Lavinia replied. "Neither of us was going all out, and it turned into a battle of attrition. In the end, Prince Garen proposed that our match be a draw. He was unwilling to go all-out in our fight since he still has a battle with you tomorrow."

Alex pieced the pieces of the puzzle and realized why Lavinia had challenged Prince Garen.

"Thank you," Alex said.

"Thank me for what?" Lavinia asked.

"You sparred with Prince Garen to study his fighting style and possibly injure him so that we won't have to fight tomorrow, right?"

"..."

Lavinia didn't answer, but her silence was enough to confirm Alex's suspicion.

If not for the fact that she was his Master's precious sister, Alex might have already hugged her due to how touched he was with her actions.

An awkward silence descended between the two for nearly a minute before Lavinia finally spoke up.

“You said that Vaan is having a check-up inside,” Lavinia said. “Is he hurt badly?”

“I don’t think so,” Alex answered. “But he temporarily lost the strength to walk right now.”

“Huh?!” Lavinia immediately looked concerned. “What happened? Did the students from Solara Academy harass her?”

Alex couldn’t count the number of times when he tried to correct Lavinia’s way of referring to Vaan as him instead of her.

However, since this was a delicate subject, he decided it would be safer if his club members also refer to Vaan as ‘her’ in public. Less slip-ups meant less chance for people to discover his secret.

“No,” Alex replied and tried to make Lavinia calm down because her gaze looked like someone who would kill the person who hurt her friend. “Vaan is just too active lately, so the exhaustion might have finally caught up to him.”

Lavinia pondered for a bit before leaning on the door as she stood beside Alex.

Although they were classmates, Alex was spending a lot of time as the guide of the delegation, so she couldn’t see him much as of late.

Since it was only the two of them, she decided to catch up a bit, and ask if he was having fun being a tour guide for the elves.

Chapter 310: Like, And Love, Were Two Different Feelings [Part 2]

“Seriously, the Elves are a pain,” Alex grumbled, which made Lavinia smirk. “The only good Elf is Lapidus.”

“How about her sister, Aeris?” Lavinia arched an eyebrow.

“What’s so good about her?” Alex inquired.

“She’s good at everything,” Lavinia answered without hesitation. “She’s beautiful, talented, strong, and she’s loved by the students.”

“That might be true, but I think you’re more beautiful, and more talented than her.”

Lavinia wasn’t expecting to be praised by Alex, so the young man’s words caught her by surprise.

“... Do you really mean that?” Lavinia looked at Alex, doing her best to not smile sweetly from his compliment.

“I do.” Alex nodded. “If not for the fact that your older brother is my Master, I might have already asked you out to become my girlfriend.”

Lavinia blinked once, then twice, as a deep feeling of wishing to eliminate her brother, Cairo, rose from her chest.

However, when she realized what she was thinking, she immediately panicked and lost her footing, her body tilting to the sides.

Alex, who was right beside her, caught her in his arms and pulled her close to him.

“Are you alright?” Alex asked, looking at her with concern.

His face was a bit closer than she expected, so her face reddened when she saw a tinge of worry in his beautiful blue eyes, reminding her of the time when he had come to save her in the Etherion Domain.

“I think I lost the strength on my legs,” Lavinia lied because she wanted to remain in Alex’s embrace for a little while longer.

“... I see.” Alex gently supported her body, holding onto her waist so he wouldn’t accidentally touch anything else. “Then lean on me until you can stand up again.”

“Un.” Lavinia replied as she leaned closer to him.

She hadn’t allowed herself to be touched by any man or be held this closely.

But she didn’t mind if the one holding her was Alex since he was special to her.

Alex wasn’t stupid.

He wasn’t a dense person either.

He understood that Lavinia might have developed feelings for him.

But just like what he felt about Efa, he wanted to better understand if her feelings were only a fleeting affection from the time they shared in the Etherion Domain.

Alex wasn’t an expert in relationships, but he had set boundaries for himself.

Like and Love were two different feelings.

Although ‘like’ could evolve into ‘love’, he was still unsure if returning the feelings of Efa and Lavinia was the right thing to do.

His original plan was to raise the affection points of his Four Queens.

But for some reason, Alex felt that he shouldn’t approach relationships as if he were playing a game.

Also, he was worried that if he ever succeeded in making one of his Queens fall in love with him, would he live happily ever after with her? Or would he feel regret because he was secretly hoping to have a harem with his other Queens in a world of endless possibilities?

'I'm a very sinful man,' Alex sighed internally. 'Is there some kind of guideline on how to fall in love properly?'

While deep in thought, he felt Lavinia hug him a little tighter as she rested her head on his shoulders.

Alex swallowed subconsciously because, as much as he tried to ignore it, Lavinia was a truly beautiful lady.

She was also a strong-willed lady, and to be perfectly honest, Alex felt that he didn't deserve someone like her.

Perhaps he was too lost in his thoughts, he didn't notice that the door of the infirmary had finally opened.

Lin saw Alex and Lavinia hugging each other, and a look of surprise appeared on her face.

But this surprise didn't last long.

Not knowing what to do, the nurse did the only thing that she could do and that was to cough lightly to catch the attention of the two teenagers, who were both sharing an intimate moment with each other.

"The check-up is finished," Lin said the moment Alex and Lavinia glanced in her direction.

She had expected the two to act a little flustered and immediately separate from each other.

But instead of distancing themselves, they stayed that way, with Lavinia hugging Alex a little tighter as if not wanting to let go.

Alex might have felt what she wanted, so he stayed still and didn't take his hands off her waist.

"What's the result, Ms. Lin?" Alex asked the nurse, who looked a little disappointed because she didn't see the reaction that she wanted to see.

"Well, she is perfectly healthy," Lin answered with a pout. "She just needs some rest. I'm sure that after an hour or two, she will regain her mobility once more."

"That's good to hear," Alex replied. "Thank you, Ms. Lin."

The nurse once again eyed the two teenagers and coughed lightly.

"Here, Alex," Lin placed a small potion bottle inside Alex's pocket. "It's a contraception potion. No need to thank me."

Alex didn't know whether to laugh or cry from the nurse clearly attempting to set the mood for something naughty again.

In the end, Lavinia reluctantly pulled back and went inside the infirmary to check on Vaan's condition.

The members of Endless Horizon had become a tight-knit group, especially when the crest clubs were bullying them.

Even Renard, who usually did things his own way, would look angry whenever he heard that his fellow club members were being harassed by others.

This feeling of camaraderie made their friendships special, which made them believe that if ever they were to face any difficulties, their entire club would be there to back them up.

"Sorry for intruding on your special moment," Lin said in a volume that only Alex could hear. "But there's something I need to tell you about Vaan."

“What is it?” Alex asked.

The Nurse then glanced around her surroundings, making sure that no students were near them.

But as if afraid that someone would overhear, she decided to whisper to Alex to ensure that no one would hear.

After hearing the nurse’s words, Alex’s eyes widened in disbelief.

“Are you serious?” Alex asked doubtfully. “If you’re just pulling a prank on me...”

Lin shook her head. “I’m being serious. So, make sure that you keep it a secret as well.”

“Of course, I will,” Alex replied without hesitation.

“Good.” Lin nodded. “Come back here after two hours. Vaan should have recovered by then.”

“Can I see him?”

“Of course.”

Alex entered the infirmary and looked at the young man who had pledged to become his spear.

Vaan was given a sleeping potion, so he was sleeping peacefully on the bed.

His breathing was steady, and his face looked much better now.

Lavinia glanced at Alex and gave him a brief nod, as if telling him that Vaan was fine.

Alex nodded back and glanced at the sleeping boy with a complicated look on his face.