

Endless 311

Chapter 311: Resistance Is Futile [Part 1]

Alex slowly drank a can of beer as he stole glances from the two beautiful ladies by his side.

Right now, he was at the Karaoke Bar with Noelle and Latifa, who were singing a duet together.

Latifa's voice couldn't match professional singers, but her vocal tone was good. With enough practice, Alex believed that she would become a good singer.

Noelle, on the other hand, was the real deal.

He always thought that his Guildmaster could easily become an idol or actress if she put her mind to it.

She was beautiful, had a good figure, a wonderful voice, and a lively personality, which was perfect for a celebrity.

And yet, instead of taking such a convenient path, she became the Guildmaster of the top 1 Guild in the Global Rankings of ELO, Endless Horizon.

"Okay, it's my turn next!" Alex placed the beer can on the table to take Noelle's microphone from her.

However, Latifa grabbed it back and passed it once again to Noelle.

"No!" Latifa said. "You're not singing anything, Alex. Not until you revert to your form from your past life. Right now, you're Alex Stratos, so you're not allowed to sing."

"W-What is this discrimination?" Alex asked. "And since when did I turn into my forme... oh... you're right."

Alex glanced at the mirror on the side of their room and saw a handsome young man with short, silver hair glancing back at him.

However, he still didn't understand why Latifa was preventing him from singing when they were in a Karaoke Bar.

Last but not least, this was his dream!

How could someone who was just hijacking his dream forbid him from singing?!

Noelle, who looked very amused by the banter between Latifa and Alex, giggled from the side.

"Alex, you should be more of a gentleman and let us girls sing for you," Noelle said with a smile. "Aren't you lucky? You have two beauties singing for you, and only you. I bet even our guild members will be paying millions to get this kind of service."

Alex blinked once, then twice, before finally backing down.

His Guildmaster was right. If their guildmates were to know that he was inside a room with not only Noelle but also another beautiful lady, both singing for him, they would definitely spend millions just to be in his shoes.

Heck, they might even stab Alex out of jealousy, toss his body out of the room, and enjoy Noelle's and Latifa's duet to their heart's content!

"Fine..." Alex decided to compromise and bit on a potato chip. "But, Latifa, what are you doing here? Do you really have the power to enter other people's dreams?"

Latifa ignored him and simply flipped the song book, looking for other songs to sing.

While she didn't know most of the songs, she had a very good memory.

She had intently listened to the songs Noelle had sung, so she had already memorized the lyrics and the melody. Singing her own rendition wasn't too hard at all.

Suddenly, someone else appeared inside the room and sat beside Alex.

The young man's eyes widened in shock, and his mouth opened in disbelief.

Seeing his reaction, a smile appeared on Lotte's face. She then picked up a potato chip and pressed it inside Alex's mouth, which was still wide open.

Alex bit on the potato chip, eating it properly before asking Lotte a question.

"What are you doing here?" Alex asked.

"Why shouldn't I be here?" Lotte asked back in an amused tone.

"I mean, this is my dream, right?" Alex insisted.

"And?" Lotte smiled sweetly.

"You're trespassing, so you need to pay the fee," Alex said in a serious tone.

"Oh, dear. What kind of payment would you like?" Lotte's smile widened.

Alex gulped. Among Latifa's Alters, Lotte gave something like 'the girl next door' vibe—very friendly, kind, and playful.

She was the Alter that Alex liked the most.

His second favorite was Latifa's third Alter, Lulu, who would only manifest after she grew another tail and became a Rank 4 Celestial Walker.

'Wait, Alex, this is just a dream,' Alex thought. 'This might be a good opportunity to test things out... right?'

"Somehow, I don't like that look that you're giving me, Alex," Lotte commented. "You look like a pervert."

Alex averted his gaze and coughed lightly. He didn't really have any impure thoughts aside from asking Lotte to kiss him on the cheek as payment for trespassing in his dream.

But he was too scared to ask for one.

The reason?

If Latifa and Lotte could really enter dreams, and he demanded Lotte to kiss him on the cheek, wouldn't that affect the way they treat him in real life?

Alex would not want something like that to happen!

"Lotte, please tell me the truth," Alex moved closer and whispered in her ear. "Do you and Latifa have the power to enter dreams freely? Are you both trying to manipulate my dreams?"

"I wonder," Lotte answered with a smile. "I'll leave the answer to your imagination, Alex."

Alex clicked his tongue. It seemed that he wouldn't be able to know whether Latifa was really entering his dream, or if he was dreaming of her alongside Noelle.

An hour later, Alex finally woke up from his dream.

But the moment he opened his eyes, he found himself in a very precarious situation.

'Who am I?!' Alex thought. 'Where am I?!'

The faint moonlight entered the transparent window of the clubroom, giving the room a dim glow.

Alex found himself sleeping on a very soft, comfortable bed, which he didn't remember entering.

Lastly, he found himself being hugged by a beautiful fox lady, who was using his body as a body pillow.

His brain froze for a brief moment as if it had suffered a meltdown.

He remembered sleeping on the couch to take a nap, planning to pick up Vaan from the infirmary after a few hours.

However, the sky had now grown dark, and the moon was hanging in the night sky. It was very obvious that he had slept longer than he expected.

But that wasn't the problem right now.

He was sleeping on Latifa's bed, hugged by the young lady. Lotte was also looking at him, arms crossed over his chest as if she found her husband cheating on her.

Chapter 312: Resistance Is Futile [Part 2]

Waking up in that kind of situation should have been a blessing to Alex.

Who wouldn't want to wake up with a beautiful lady sleeping by their side?

But instead of being happy, he felt like he was treading the line of life and death under Lotte's watchful gaze.

Just as he thought things couldn't possibly get any worse, a blue window screen appeared in front of him.

< Hidden Quest Completed! >

Quest Name: Become the Pillow of a Heroine!

Reward: 1,000 Arcana Points, 10 additional points to Luck, and 2 Free Level Ups!

[Level Up!]

[Level Up!]

Alex's body trembled as the notification sound of the two level-ups brought him back to his senses.

His Character Stats also appeared in front of him, allowing him to distribute his stat points.

However, when he saw the note at the bottom, Alex felt that he was entering dangerous territory.

Alex Stratos

Age: 17

Alignment: Chaotic Good

Mana: 327/327

Job Class: Oathkeeper

Subclass: Demon Slayer

Strength – 80[+6]

Intelligence – 34 [+3]

Dexterity – 20 [+3]

Agility – 110 [+3]

Constitution – 78 [+4]

Stamina – 78 [+4]

Magic – 324 [+3]

Luck – 34 [+3]

Available Stat Points: 0

AP: 17,740

Note: Something is Rising, and It's not the Shield Hero.

— — —

Something was indeed rising, so Alex desperately thought about what to do.

As if on cue, his imagination kicked in at that moment, and it showed him multiple choices on what to do in his current situation.

— — —

< Multiple Choice Detected! >

Situation: You are currently being used as a body pillow by a fluffy, beautiful fox lady. Something is rising, and you cannot hide it forever. Choose wisely!

Do not move. Do not breathe. Do not have impure thoughts (Too Late). You're just a pillow. YOU'RE JUST A PILLOW!

Gently disengage, and try not to wake her up. Ignore Lotte, who is looking down on you with arms crossed over her chest.

Try to Roll a Charisma check. Maybe, just maybe, you will be able to escape this situation alive.

Faint. (Sometimes, this is the only way to live another day!)

Give in. Resistance is futile. The fox fluff now controls your destiny! (YOLO IT!)

— — —

Alex was very tempted to choose options A, D, and E, but he understood that doing so might cause problems at a later time.

'I-I'm sure I slept on the couch,' Alex thought as he gently disengaged with Latifa, making sure to gently pry her hands off his body.

Seeing a frown appear on the young lady's face, as if in discomfort from losing her pillow, Alex immediately grabbed the pillow beside him and stuffed it beside her.

As if moving on instinct, Latifa hugged the pillow, and the frown on her face disappeared, making Alex sigh in relief.

He then carefully left the bed under Lotte's watchful eye.

For a heartbeat, Alex thought he saw her lips quirk up in a faint smile, amusement glinting in her golden eyes as they shone in the dark.

"Um, I'm sorry," Alex said to Lotte.

"Sorry for what?" Lotte asked with a smile.

"Um, I don't know how, but I suddenly intruded on Latifa's territory," Alex replied as he glanced at the sleeping girl.

The bed inside the club room was off-limits to anyone except for Latifa. So, Alex shouldn't have ended up sleeping beside her.

Even now, he didn't know how it happened!

Though... deep inside, he wished he could have stayed in it longer and watched the sleeping beauty's face up close, happily serving as her inanimate pillow.

"It's fine," Lotte said. "You might have sleepwalked while I wasn't around."

"Y-Yeah, thank you for understanding." Alex bowed before leaving the clubroom to head to the infirmary.

He didn't know if Vaan was still there. But if he was, he planned to take him back with him before the academy's curfew.

When Alex finally left the clock tower, the sleeping beauty finally opened her eyes.

Latifa's gaze then met with Lotte, with the latter looking at her with a smile.

"So, why did you do that, Latifa?" Lotte asked. "Alex is a good person. You shouldn't make him suffer from a heart attack after waking up."

"How rude," Latifa replied. "You mean waking up to see me can give someone a heart attack?"

"If the conditions are met, then yes."

"Lotte, you're being mean as of late."

"Heh."

Latifa also didn't know why she did that to Alex.

The young man was sleeping peacefully on the couch, but seeing that he might not be resting properly, Latifa asked Lotte to carry him to her bed, so he could rest properly.

Latifa wouldn't dare to let anyone, especially a man, sleep on her bed.

But for some reason, she wanted to be close to Alex, like how they were inside the Trial in the Heracle Mountain.

At first, she only planned to only hold him a bit.

But that hold turned into a hug that made Latifa feel safe and secure, she forgot to let go.

Alex's warmth, his soft sleeper breaths, and the gentleness of his expression as he slept influenced Latifa into sleepiness.

Before she could control herself, she had fallen asleep while hugging Alex and entered his dream world.

Lotte made sure to lock the clock tower, so none of their members would stumble upon this scene.

Fortunately, Alex went to the club when everyone else had already left, so there had been no problems.

Latifa sat up slowly, still hugging the pillow Alex had given her. Her golden eyes shimmered faintly under the moonlight as she looked toward the door where Alex had exited just moments ago.

"He's so warm... and he smelled nice," she whispered before quickly shaking her head as if to banish the thought.

Lotte, of course, heard it. She leaned against the wall, arms still folded, her lips curling into a sly grin. "My, my. So it wasn't just about 'resting properly.'"

Latifa's ears twitched, and her tail puffed up. "T-That's not what I meant! I just... I just thought he'd sleep better next to me."

Lotte tilted her head. "Mhm. And hugging him like a long-lost teddy bear was part of the sleep therapy, too?"

Latifa buried her face into the pillow, muffling her voice. "You wouldn't understand..."

Ever since that trial in the Heracle Mountain, Latifa never felt so connected to someone like she did with Alex.

She could still somewhat justify it in her head—not only had she and the young man shared each other’s memory, they had also become one in a literal sense after merging their consciousness.

Lotte’s golden eyes softened, her teasing smile fading into something more thoughtful. “No, Latifa. I think I do.”

Latifa peeked out from behind the pillow, surprised at the seriousness in her Alter’s tone.

“You like being near him. He makes you feel... safe. That’s not something you can explain with logic,” Lotte said softly. “That’s just how it is.”

Latifa remained quiet for a while, clutching the pillow tighter. Finally, she whispered, “If... if Alex knew, would he laugh at me?”

Lotte chuckled lightly. “No. If anything, he’d probably faint on the spot out of happiness. Although he looked smug and in control most of the time, he’s a very simple young man.

“But, Latifa, remember this. Alex is also close to other ladies. Sometimes, when it’s Lumi’s turn to watch over you, I secretly follow him around the academy.”

“... Stalker.” Latifa smirked.

“I don’t want to hear that from someone who tried to order me to peek at Vaan while he is taking a bath to confirm if he is a boy or a girl,” Lotte replied.

“Now, let’s return to the topic. I told you I follow Alex in my free time. Sometimes, I catch him looking at Fran, Lapis, and even Astrea with a gaze filled with tenderness and maybe a little bit of affection.

“Also, Lavinia is making her feelings known. I saw her today in the infirmary, and from what I can see, it seems Alex could tell she had feelings for him as well.”

Latifa hugged the pillow in her arms tighter as she listened to her Alter's report.

"I think it's very obvious that Alex is quite popular with the ladies," Lotte stated. "So, you mustn't take things half heartedly or you will get hurt in the end."

Lotte then sat down on the bed and hugged Latifa. The two didn't say anything else because there was no need to say more.

The one who got to decide was Latifa. Truly understanding how she felt was the most important step, one that would allow her to enter a world she had never known.

Chapter 313: A Hammer For All Seasons [Part 1]

Alex slowly rose from his bed as he looked at the window of his room.

The first rays of sunlight lit his surroundings with a pale glow, announcing the start of a brand new day.

On the small basket right beside Alex's bed, Dim Dim slept peacefully, showing no signs of waking soon.

It was still pretty early, so Alex didn't wake the little bun. He walked to the table with the jug of water and a small bowl, then proceeded to wash his face.

Today was the day of his duel against Prince Garen.

Even now, he couldn't help but sigh internally, not knowing what to feel about the Prince's rather intense infatuation toward Vaan.

Well, it was perfectly understandable since Vaan was a really cute girl—err, boy.

For men unaware of his true gender, falling for him was natural, given his lively, mischievous, and charismatic character.

For Alex, even if Vaan was really a girl, he would at most think of her as a mischievous little sister who liked to play pranks on others.

'I wonder how I should fight Prince Garen later,' Alex thought.

The Prince was a Rank 3 Solar Knight and was also just a step away from becoming Rank 4.

In other words, he was a Pseudo-Rank 4 Solar Knight, boasting great defense and offensive capabilities.

With the resources of the Kingdom of Solara at his disposal, this wasn't too surprising.

Prince Garen was capable of using Sun and Fire Magic, a nightmare combination for most people.

But Alex still had a chance to win even as a mere Rank 2 Oathkeeper.

The reason?

His shield, Svalinn.

While it had yet to completely recognize Alex as its Master, the Shield still allowed the young man to wield it and even use a fraction of its powers.

It had high resistance against Sun and Fire Magic, making it a perfect counter against Prince Garen's magical abilities.

After washing his face, the young man put on some casual clothes before leaving the room.

He only had one class to attend today, though it wouldn't be until the afternoon.

'It should be finished by now, right?' Alex thought as he headed toward the Academy Gates.

His destination was the City of Harmonia, a kilometer away from the academy gates.

Covering that distance wasn't a big deal to the students, and it also served as the perfect warm-up for Alex.

Since he wasn't in a hurry, he decided to jog instead of running until he reached the city gates.

From there, he went to the eastern side of the city, where the Artisan District was located.

It was along this area that he had a shop make his Mimic Lantern, which had proven its worth during their recent expedition.

After returning to the Heracle Mountain, Alex had commissioned one of the famous blacksmiths in the city to craft him a hammer.

At first, the Blacksmith was very annoyed to hear Alex's request for a special hammer that could be used in forging and in battle.

He even specified using Mithril and Adamantium as the materials to ensure it would be sturdy and serve as the perfect conduit for magical abilities.

The young man also asked that a special magic be imbued in it, allowing the hammer to change its size and extend its length if Alex were to use it in battle.

There were other additional functions that he insisted on being added to his weapon, which made it veeeeeeeeery expensive.

Alex flinched when the Blacksmith told him the cost of creating the hammer and his services.

It was a whopping four thousand gold coins, more than enough for Alex to buy dozens of weapons in an ordinary Weapon Shop.

A well-made ordinary sword usually cost fifty gold coins, and a superior grade was worth a hundred gold coins.

Even those with special runes and abilities were only worth around one hundred-fifty up to two hundred gold coins.

Simply put, the price tag the blacksmith had put on the War Hammer Alex wanted to customize was worth as much as a weapon bought in an auction house!

When Alex tried to bargain, the blacksmith didn't hesitate to literally kick him out of the shop, which made Dim Dim giggle nonstop, finding the scene comical.

In the end, Alex relented and gave in to the blacksmith. Only he knew, but the person he chose was a future Legendary Blacksmith of the Kingdom of Avalon.

At that moment, his works were not that popular yet. But Alex thought that forming a connection with him as early as now would earn him preferential treatment in the future.

After some time, Alex finally appeared in front of the Smithy that had the sign, "Hammer Me Harder," written in bold silver letters.

Its owner, Magnus Bangforge, was a dwarf of culture, but this was a secret only known to a few.

One of the reasons he agreed to craft Alex's War Hammer was the special book that Alex had given to Magnus on their first meeting.

What was the name of that book?

It was none other than the book that Alex had purchased from one of the bookstores in the city, and it was called "School DxD," which Magnus reluctantly accepted as a bribe to craft Alex's War Hammer.

As he entered the shop, the sound of a chime echoed inside its interior.

Alex didn't even need to call for Magnus. The sight that welcomed him was a dwarf snoring on a couch, the School DxD book lying pages down on his chest.

Knowing how grumpy Magnus was, Alex pondered what to do to wake up the sleeping dwarf.

However, he couldn't think of anything, so he decided to browse the weapons, armors, and other things on display for the time being.

"Hmm... this Buckler looks good." Alex grabbed the small shield, a third of the size of Everguard.

It was lightweight and looked like something that would really hurt if Alex were to throw it at someone.

Actually, Alex also planned to commission a set of bracers from Magnus, which would also act like a shield.

That way, Alex could still fight in situations where he could not use Everguard and Svalinn in battle.

He even had a design in mind, something he worked on when he was still very active in the game as a Shield Savant.

After placing the buckler back on display, Alex glanced at the short swords and daggers.

He also had thoughts of keeping a dagger or a short sword as a secondary weapon, which he believed would be useful on expeditions with his club members.

But just as he was about to take one of the daggers on display, a rustling sound reached his ears.

Magnus had finally woken up, chugging a bottle of wine as his first drink of the day.

“Aye, that hits the spot,” Magnus muttered as he propped himself up from the couch. “You’ve come at the right time, Alex. I just finished your hammer last night.”

Alex breathed a sigh of relief. He thought he would have to wait for a few more days before collecting the weapon he commissioned.

“Follow me,” Magnus ordered as he walked toward the forge room, so he could show the young man his recently finished masterpiece.

Chapter 314: A Hammer For All Seasons [Part 2]

“Wow,” Alex muttered as he looked at the one-handed Warhammer laid on top of the table.

It looked similar to the hammer blacksmiths used in their craft, which was rather short to be wielded as a weapon.

Made from both Mithril and Adamantine, one side of the war hammer was silver white like moonlight, while the other was as dark as starless iron.

Both sides merged seamlessly down to the center, making it look like a weapon born from the union of good and evil.

“Go on. Touch it and apply some of your magical power through the handle,” Magnus said with a smile.

Alex obeyed and grabbed the Warhammer with his right hand.

Immediately, runes glowed faintly within the surface of the hammer as if awakening from its slumber.

The handle of the Warhammer was only a foot long, and the hammerhead’s width and length were the same.

Finding his grip on the handle perfect, Alex was amazed. It was as if the weapon had become one with him.

With a mere thought, the handle extended up to two feet, with the hammerhead increasing its size to make it look more intimidating.

When Alex used his other hand to grip the handle, intending to use it as a two-handed weapon, the length of the handle extended up to three feet, and the hammerhead nearly doubled its size.

The runes continued to glow faintly as Holy Power emanated from the weapon in his hand.

This Warhammer was made specifically for the upcoming Dungeon Expedition, which would be hosted by the academy.

The monsters inside the dungeon were all Undead Monsters, making Alex's Warhammer the perfect weapon to clear it.

"The handle of that Warhammer can extend up to five feet," Magnus stated. "It will instantly extend its length based on your thoughts and needs. It's also imbued with Holy Magic, so it would be very effective against Undead and Demons.

"Of course, it also works well against humans and ordinary monsters. I put my back into making this weapon, and frankly, the end product surpassed my expectations!"

Alex nodded. The weapon also surpassed his expectations.

"Sir Magnus, what is the name of this weapon?" Alex asked. He couldn't see the stats of the Warhammer at the moment, as if a condition wasn't yet met.

"Sacrament," Magnus replied. "The name of that weapon is Sacrament."

As if waiting for that moment, a blue window screen appeared in front of Alex, showing the information about the Warhammer in his hands.

— — — —
< Sacrament >

“Every strike is a prayer, every blow a solemn vow.”

Item Grade: Unique

Type: Warhammer

Stats:

Attack Power (One Handed): 350 – 450

Attack Power (Two Handed): 450 -800

Magic Conduction: +150%

Active Skill: Crusader’s Smite

Passive Skill: Aura of Courage

Special Abilities:

Extending Shaft – The handle lengthens or shortens at will, granting versatile reach in combat. The Hammerhead also increases its size when wielded as a two-handed weapon.

Sanctified Core – Emits a faint holy radiance that weakens undead and demonic foes.

Oathbound Conduit – Increases the effectiveness of magic spells by 150% when cast through the weapon.

Note: Not a relic of gods, but a weapon sanctified by conviction. Its power grows not from the forge alone, but from the Will of its wielder.

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< Crusader's Smite >

"With a battle cry of conviction, you channel holy wrath into your strike."

Effect: The next attack deals +150% Attack Power as Holy Damage.

Bonus vs Undead/Demonic: Deals an additional +200% Holy Damage when fighting against Undead and Demons.

Secondary Effect: On hit against Undead and Demonic Creatures, creates a small shockwave of light (1-meter radius) that knocks back weaker enemies.

< Aura of Courage >

— You are immune to spells or other abilities that induce Fear, Madness, Terror, Weakness, and Confusion.

— This Aura extends up to ten meters from the wielder of Sacrament.

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"A Unique Weapon!" Alex gasped in shock because a Unique Weapon was only a grade lower than the Legendary Grade.

(A/N: Item Ranking Grades: Common, Uncommon, Rare, Super Rare, Unique, Legendary, Divine.)

“Now you see how great I am?” Magnus crossed his arms over his chest and laughed out loud.

Alex couldn't help but grin as he looked at the Warhammer in his hands.

A Unique Weapon. His very first one since coming to the world of Arcana.

“Thank you, Sir Magnus.” Alex bowed deeply, his voice filled with sincerity. “This is more than I could have hoped for.”

Magnus waved his hand as if brushing off Alex's words, but the proud smile plastered on his face betrayed his satisfaction.

“Don't thank me just yet, brat. That hammer will only show its true worth if you can master it. Sacrament isn't just a lump of metal you swing around. It is also a newly born sentient weapon. If your heart wavers, so will its power.”

Alex tightened his grip on the hammer's handle, feeling the faint hum of holy energy resonating through his hand. “Then I'll make sure my resolve never falters.”

“Hah! That's the spirit!” Magnus chuckled. “Put it to good use, and if it ever needs maintenance, you know where to find me.”

Alex gave a firm nod.

His eyes remained fixed on the hammer, almost as if he were afraid it might disappear the moment he looked away.

He could already imagine how it would feel smashing through skeletal shields or burning through zombie hordes with radiant light.

“Go on then,” Magnus said, motioning to the empty yard beyond the smithy. “Test it. Let Sacrament know who its wielder is.”

Without hesitation, Alex stepped outside.

The sunlight glinted faintly across the silver-and-black hammerhead, the golden runes pulsing in quiet rhythm. He raised it high, exhaled, and willed the holy power inside to respond.

The air around him vibrated, and the runes shone brighter.

A faint, solemn warmth spread outward in a ten-meter radius, washing over the smithy yard like a protective embrace.

“Aura of Courage...” Alex whispered in awe. Even without enemies nearby, the oppressive heaviness of doubt, of fear, seemed to vanish.

Then, gripping Sacrament with both hands, he shouted from the depths of his chest—

“Crusader’s Smite!”

Holy light exploded along the hammerhead as Alex unleashed the attack at the magical dummy target at the center of the yard.

A sound similar to a thunderclap reached his ears as the hammer obliterated the magical dummy, shattering it to pieces.

Magnus let out a long whistle. “Heh. Guess I really outdid myself this time.”

The dwarf looked at the magical dummy that was slowly re-assembling itself, returning to its original state.

Alex stood there, chest heaving, feeling the afterglow of power still pulsing in his hands.

Then and there, he knew Sacrament wasn't just a weapon. It was a promise, a burden, and a strength he could never afford to misuse.

"...Perfect," Alex muttered, the corners of his lips curving upward.

While using the strength of his new weapon on the training dummy felt good, he was more eager to test it against a living, breathing human.

Fortunately, he and Prince Garen were scheduled to duel later in the afternoon. He couldn't ask for a more perfect testing session for his Unique Weapon.

The Warhammer hummed faintly in his hand as if to prove its recognition of the young man as its one and only Master.

"That hammer will serve you well: rain, shine, or snow!" Magnus patted Alex's waist. "It is a Hammer for all seasons!"

Alex shuddered after hearing the familiar term "Hammer for all seasons".

"That's right," Alex said softly as the Hammer returned to its original state.

He'd asked Magnus to make him a hammer primarily to practice the martial skill, Hammer for All Seasons.

It was a legacy left to him by Kael during his Trial at the Heracle Mountain.

Although he hadn't learned the Martial Skill as a reward, Alex believed that he could recreate it as soon as he possessed a suitable Warhammer that could withstand the burden of such a powerful martial technique.

When he synchronized with Kael, the dwarf's knowledge had been passed over to him, allowing him to also understand how to forge weapons and armor like a blacksmith.

For the same reason, he had asked for his warhammer to be crafted like a dwarven smith's. This would allow him to practice his smithing skills when the chance presented itself.

For now, Alex understood that he couldn't rush things, especially learning how to forge.

He must first master the Martial Technique, Hammer for all Seasons, and rely on Magnus for any crafting commissions for the time being.

Chapter 315: Alex Stratos vs. Prince Garen

Duels were usually held in the training grounds, but the academy made an exception this time and allowed Prince Garen to use the Colosseum, usually meant to hold tournaments and other special events in Frieden Academy.

Nearly everyone in the academy joined the crowd, including the Headmaster and the Professors, who were seated at the VIP Seats.

The delegation from Solara Academy and Faellarun Academy was also seated in VIP Rooms, boasting a great view of the arena.

For some reason, Chuck had been chosen as the MC of the match, which he was more than happy to accept.

Alex's roommate liked activities that made him shine, and being the Master of Ceremonies gave him the spotlight.

"Ladies and gentlemen!" Chuck said with a smile on his face. "We have gathered today for a special exhibition match between Alex Stratos and Prince Garen Ashborne!"

Voice magnified by magic, his words were heard loud and clear throughout the entire audience stands.

Donned in expensive clothes that highlighted his good looks, Chuck waved his hand at everyone, hyping the match that was about to start.

“Without further delay, allow me to call our first combatant.” Chuck pointed at the east side of the Colosseum. “Hailing from Solara Academy, let’s give a loud cheer for Prince Garen Ashborne!”

A loud applause spread in the surroundings as Prince Garen slowly made his way toward the arena with a confident smile on his face.

He was wearing his full battle regalia, highlighting the famed Armor of the Solar Knights of his kingdom.

The armor was deep red, with a golden sun embedded in the center of his chest, as well as a cape that fluttered on his back.

Wearing a winged circlet on his head, Prince Garen not only looked good, especially for the ladies, but he also exuded an air of nobility.

The moment he stood on top of the arena, he gave the crowd a wave, earning him loud cheers.

“And now, let us welcome his opponent!” Chuck pointed to the west side of the arena. “Everyone, make way for Alex Stratos!”

Alex soon stepped foot into the arena, with Dim Dim firmly perched on top of his head.

The little bun waved at everyone, the view magnified by the large magical projection high above the arena, allowing everyone to see the cute little bun.

Many of the girls couldn’t help but smile at the visual impact of Dim Dim’s adorable appearance and the handsome silver-haired young man who had been the talk of the academy for the past few weeks.

Alex wasn't wearing his Oathkeeper Armor, which he had used during his battle with Widow in the Mistral Weave Forest. Instead, he wore the academy's combat suit, the kind students could buy with points at the Exchange Center.

The combat suit was black, resembling studded leather armor. It offered decent defense along with magical enchantments, making it the gear of choice for academy students heading out on missions.

Lavinia and Latifa couldn't help but give Alex a second look, finding him quite dashing in his armor.

Although the young fox lady was usually asleep at this time, she decided to watch the battle to offer her support to Alex.

When Alex was finally in the arena, Chuck came closer and held the microphone towards Dim Dim.

"Dim Dim, do you have anything to say to everyone?" Chuck asked.

Dim Dim raised its body in arrogance. "Dim Dim!"

"Oh? You're not going to fight alongside Alex?" Chuck inquired.

Dim Dim nodded. "Dim."

The little bun then jumped on top of Chuck's head, which made the ladies giggle at the little bun's action.

"Then, how about you, Alex?" Chuck asked. "Do you have anything to say to everyone here?"

Alex nodded. "As you may already know, I am the President of the Endless Horizon Club. I apologize for not accepting applications sent to our club. Unfortunately, we are an exclusive club, so we don't just let anyone join as they please.

“This doesn’t mean we will not have new members. I will simply offer invitations to students whom I believe have untapped potential waiting to be discovered. I guarantee that before this year is over, Endless Horizon will become the 13th Crest Club of Frieden Academy.

“We will not show our excellence through words but through our actions. Let all of you bear witness to the birth of a new Crest Club!”

The presidents of the other Crest Clubs, including Prince Edward of the Lionheart Society and Aeris of the Obsidian Fang, narrowed their eyes as they looked at Alex, who had a confident smile plastered on his face.

There had been many clubs in the past who had the same ambition, but none dared to announce it in public for fear of other Crest Clubs singling them out.

Perhaps only Alex, who had the title of the Blackmail King, could make this declaration with confidence.

After all, after making an example of the Crest Clubs themselves, who in their right minds would try to mess with him?

Chuck smiled faintly, proud to be part of Endless Horizon.

At the start, he thought that Alex was just messing around. But through his actions, he had managed to put their club in the spotlight, allowing everyone to pay attention to them.

“Before we start this battle, I would also like to have a word with the person who sparked this interesting duel,” Chuck stated and pointed at the North gate of the Colosseum.

“Let us welcome the muse of this battle, Ms. Vaan Damne!”

Vaan, dressed in Damne Viscounty’s ceremonial robes, walked with grace and confidence.

Chuck had been the one to persuade Vaan into dressing up for the occasion, and the latter reluctantly agreed to it.

His charming look made both the guys and girls sigh—sure enough, Vaan was a beauty for whose favor two heroes dueled.

When Vaan arrived at the side of the arena, Chuck jumped down and approached her with a smile.

“Ms. Vaan, please say something before the battle starts,” Chuck said with a smile.

Vaan nodded and accepted the microphone from Chuck before glancing in Alex’s direction.

A mischievous smile hung on her—errr, his lips, which made Alex suddenly feel anxious.

“Alex, if you win this battle, I will let you do the deed with me,” Vaan said firmly. “I mean, I will give you the deed of the land as promised.”

His beautiful, angelic voice spread across the Colosseum, making every girl’s face redden while screaming “Kyaaaah!”

As for the guys, they all glared at the handsome silver-haired boy, whose lips were currently twitching nonstop at the moment.

Clearly, Vaan had deliberately phrased it to sound misleading before correcting himself.

But the damage had been done.

The Colosseum erupted with cheers, screams, and curses from the students, who were giving Alex the middle finger!

“Prince Garen! Kill that scum!”

“Castrate him!”

“Break his balls!”

“Kill!”

“Kill!”

The audience’s roars shook the entire Colosseum, their voices blending into a thunderous storm of curses, cheers, and laughter.

Chuck, ever the opportunist, raised his hand to calm the crowd. But his grin betrayed how much he was enjoying the chaos.

“Well, well! This just got spicier than a dragon’s breath!” Chuck declared. “Ladies and gentlemen, the stakes for this duel are now higher than ever!”

The students erupted again, their chants echoing through the arena like war drums. Some screamed Prince Garen’s name, others Alex’s, and many just shouted obscenities for fun.

Prince Garen’s grip tightened around his sword hilt, a nerve bulging on his head. He gave Alex a death glare so sharp it could cut steel.

“You bastard...” Prince Garen growled under his breath, his pride as both a prince and a man thoroughly trampled. “I’ll make you regret ever stepping into this arena.”

Lavinia and Latifa, who were also watching, both glared at Alex as if they wanted to give him a piece of their mind.

“Hah...” Lotte sighed in exasperation, while Lumi by her side simply shook her head.

Clearly, Latifa's two Alters understood that Vaan was just messing with everyone to keep the duel more lively.

Fran, on the other hand, subconsciously clenched her fist tightly, which made her frown.

"Huh?" Fran blinked in confusion, unsure why she suddenly felt concerned after hearing Vaan's declaration.

Finn glanced at his twin sister before shifting his gaze back at Alex. Whatever the young dwarf was thinking at the moment, no one knew aside from him.

"Well, then, since all sides have already made their peace, I hereby declare the start of this duel!" Chuck raised his hand.

"Battle Start!"

Chapter 316: Praise The Sun! [Part 1]

The sound of the gong echoed across the Colosseum, its deep metallic ring swallowed by the roar of the crowd.

Prince Garen immediately drew his gleaming longsword, its golden runes blazing to life. The sunlight above seemed to bend toward him, empowering his presence as though the heavens themselves favored his blade.

His aura exploded outward in a dazzling brilliance, pressing down on the arena like a crushing tide.

"Radiance... Descend!" Garen's voice boomed, and a halo of light formed behind him, casting his figure like a war god in mortal flesh.

The students gasped in awe, some shielding their eyes.

'He's going all out from the start,' Alex thought as he, too, summoned his weapon and shield.

The moment his right hand held Sacrament, Alex's senses became sharper than ever.

Svalinn, who looked like an unassuming, round, black shield, firmly latched onto the young man's left arm.

Chuck, as well as the members of Endless Horizon, noticed that Alex was wielding a weapon they hadn't seen before.

Renard narrowed his eyes, as if understanding that the Warhammer in his rival's hand wasn't an ordinary weapon.

While striking on his own right, compared to Prince Garen's imposing figure, Alex looked very plain. Those not in the know would think he was the Challenger in today's battle.

Prince Kaelen looked at his sister, Lapid, who was observing the battle with a solemn look on her face.

"Who do you think will win this fight, sister?" Prince Kaelen asked.

Lapid frowned before giving her answer. "I don't know. But since Alex is the president of our club, I want him to win."

"I see." Prince Kaelen narrowed his eyes and shifted his attention back to the two combatants in the arena.

Deep inside, he also wanted to show his sisters how strong he had become and make them proud of him.

Caelum and the Elves, who had lost to Alex in the Battle Choir, knew that they were no match against him in a singing battle.

However, duels were different.

Even now, Caelum believed that Alex was not a match against him if they were to fight in the arena. This thought prompted him to guide Prince Garen into initiating a duel against Alex, citing it as the defense of the prince's honor.

'Show me, Alex Stratos,' Caelum thought. 'Show me how strong you really are!'

His gaze locked on the silver-haired young man, who was about to fight an opponent a rank higher than him.

Prince Garen took a step forward, and the ground under his feet exploded, launching the prince toward Alex like a blazing sword in flight.

"Sword Stream!"

Alex didn't back down from the Prince's charge. In fact, he placed his shield in front of him and also took a step forward in order to meet him up close.

"Shield Charge!"

Alex charged with his shield raised in front of him.

While he knew that Prince Garen was stronger due to the difference in stats, he also had several trump cards in his sleeve, which he was itching to use in today's duel.

The first clash between the two young men was akin to a thunderclap.

A loud booming sound erupted as Alex's shield met Prince Garen's sword.

The raging flames were blocked completely by the shield, which was very resistant to the flames of the sun.

This unexpected outcome made Prince Garen's expression serious. His attack should've blown Alex away the moment their two attacks collided with each other.

There was one more person just as surprised as Prince Garen—the student council president of Frieden Academy, Theo Ashborne.

Theo was a Solar Knight just like his brother, which made him one of the top three strongest students among the Third Years.

The one who held the top spot was none other than Aeris, who was Lapis's and Prince Kaelen's older sister.

Theo understood the level of destruction Sword Stream boasted. After all, this was the trademark skill of the Solar Knights. It allowed them to close the distance with their enemies and break their defenses, as well as buy them a chance to unleash another powerful strike.

But the shield, Svalinn, held the Sword Stream at bay.

In fact, Alex could vaguely feel that after his shield was exposed to Sun Magic, it suddenly felt more alive, as if feeling competitive.

'That's right,' Alex smiled faintly as he firmly planted his feet on the ground to deliver his next move. 'You are the Shield that guards the world from the sun. You will not falter from this pitiful imitation!'

The black shield hummed as if reacting to Alex's thoughts. Runic patterns appeared on its surface, changing the plain shield into a majestic one that seemed to have awakened its fighting spirit!

"Impossible..." Garen muttered under his breath, his eyes narrowing. "My sword should have cleaved through any mundane defense!"

Alex's lips curled into a smirk. "Then it's a good thing this isn't a mundane shield."

Putting strength into his arm and feet, Alex lunged forward.

“Shield Bash!”

Alex swatted the sword aside, and the flames that covered it dispersed completely as if it were all a lie.

This left Prince Garen wide open, allowing Alex to land the first blow in today’s duel.

Holding the Warhammer in his hand, Alex swung it with a determined glint on his face.

“Hammer for all Seasons, First Form...” Alex growled as he spun his body to add momentum to his strike, moving in accordance with the technique he had used in the Trial of the Heracle Mountain.

“Bone Breaker!”

A loud banging sound erupted in the surroundings as Alex’s warhammer smashed against Prince Garen’s chest, sending the latter flying several meters away from where he stood.

Renard narrowed his eyes. Of all his peers, only Alex was worthy to be called his rival, and this show of strength cemented that.

Celestria, the Radiant Lily of the Solara Academy, couldn’t help but gasp after seeing Alex’s explosive display of power.

Her cousin, Prince Garen, had outstanding talent—the number of First Years in the academy who could fight him in close combat could be counted by the fingers.

In fact, she even felt sorry for Alex at first, believing no one in Frieden Academy was her cousin’s match.

She only went to the Colosseum to heal Alex after the battle, ensuring there would be no grudges between him and the students of Solara Academy.

But the outcome before her eyes made her uncontrollably feel that she had truly underestimated the Blackmail King of the Academy. To her impression, while the young man was proficient in a battle of words... the same couldn't be said for that of swords and shields.

Lavinia and Latifa happily hugged each other as they cheered for Alex landing the first blow.

However, after realizing what they had done, the two became embarrassed and hurriedly stopped hugging each other.

Both their faces were beet-red from failing to hold back their enthusiasm after seeing Alex's amazing performance.

The cheering of Alex's supporters was drowned out a moment later by the sound of steel scraping against stone.

Prince Garen pushed himself back to his feet, the dent on his chestplate glowing faintly with molten cracks, as if his armor itself rejected the damage. His breathing was heavier, but his golden eyes burned brighter than ever.

"... Impressive," Garen admitted, his voice carrying through the Colosseum. "You managed to draw first blood. But don't think for a second that this battle will end with that single strike."

His longsword blazed with even greater intensity, the runes along the blade expanding into radiant patterns that spread up his arm like molten veins.

The halo behind him flared, transforming into the image of a Phoenix wreathed in fire.

A screech reverberated across the Colosseum, announcing its arrival as if promising that nothing would be the same from this point onward.

Alex calmly gazed at his opponent, his blue eyes glowing faintly as the power of the Verdant Throne slowly reinforced his stamina regeneration and health regeneration, as well as boosted his physical defenses.

At that exact moment, he heard a notification sound inside his head, and a blue window screen appeared in front of him.

— — —

< Hidden Quest Unlocked! >

Mission Name: Blaze of Glory!

Objective: Defeat Prince Garen.

Rewards: 1,000 Arcana Points, 2 Level Ups!

— — —

Sacrament and Svalinn both hummed at the same time as if to remind Alex that he should not lower his guard, for his opponent would now cease holding back.

“Don’t worry,” Alex muttered, assuring his partners that he had no intention of underestimating his opponent.

A few magical shields suddenly appeared and spun around Alex like satellites, waiting for him to issue a command.

The second clash between the two young men was about to commence, and with it, everyone held their breath as they waited for the two combatants to clash for a second time.

Chapter 317: Praise The Sun! [Part 2]

“I’ve heard rumors about you, Alex Stratos,” Prince Garen said as he took a fighting stance, his sword once again blazing with the flames of the sun. “You fought against the Demon Worshipers and saved Vaan. For that, I am grateful.

“A knight saving a princess from danger is a tale as old as time. I’m sure Vaan feels nothing but gratitude and adoration for you, normal for anyone who had been saved.

“But I will not allow you to take advantage of her feelings of gratitude to make her indebted to you for life! You even made her promise that if you win this battle, you will do the deed with her! How can you be so shameless?!”

Alex blinked once then twice before opening his mouth to refute the Prince’s words.

But after thinking about it, he didn’t bother. No amount of explanation would save him.

Vaan had already said that she—errr, he would agree to do the “deed” with Alex if he won in order to rile everyone and cause mischief.

In the end, Alex decided he would not play the victim—though he was one.

No.

He decided to play the villain instead!

“You’re right,” Alex replied with a smile. “If I win this duel, Vaan will belong to me, both in heart and body. I cannot wait to have my way with her... slap her bum repeatedly, and make her cry out in pain as she gave me an apology.”

Yes.

Alex wanted to spank Vaan so badly for causing that misunderstanding, tricking everyone into believing that he wished for the heir of the Damne Viscounty to surrender her heart and body to him.

“You bastard!” Prince Garen roared in anger. “I will not allow you to desecrate my Goddess!”

“Your Goddess huh?” Alex sneered. ‘Bro, you have no idea—you and Vaan have a lot in common.’

Obviously, he had no plans to expose the beautiful young man’s secret.

That said, he found it more convenient to just keep up the Villain act and make everyone fear him.

He was already the Singing King and the Blackmail King of the academy. Having one more title wouldn’t make a difference!

“I’m going to say this now, Vaan is mine,” Alex said, looking all smug. “She has surrendered her future, her destiny, and her life to me! If you wish to stop that go ahead! But do you have the strength to do so?”

Alex wasn’t lying.

Vaan had made a pledge to the world, and the world had acknowledged his sincerity.

For better or for worse, Vaan Damne was now a Knight who had sworn fealty to his lord, and Alex had to uphold his honor as his first Knight!

“Damn you!” Prince Garen shouted as he swung his sword, and the Phoenix that had materialized behind him flew toward Alex with a deafening screech.

“Phoenix’s Desceeeeeeeent!”

Alex didn’t back down and gazed at the Phoenix flying toward him as if it was just an ordinary bird that was covered in flames.

But before he could even do anything, Svalinn flew out of Alex's grasp and slapped the head of the Phoenix silly. It was sent flying to the other side of the Arena, slamming at the barrier the Headmaster had erected when the battle started.

"Impossible!" Theo, watching from the VIP Seats of the student council, stood up from his seat. "That was Phoenix Descent! A special attack that only the Solar Knights can unleash, and a casual toss of a shield slapped it away?!"

Alex blinked at this sudden turn of events. He glanced at Svalinn who had once again returned to his arm.

For some reason, he could sense that the shield seemed very satisfied about slapping the Phoenix away, as if it was venting some of its frustrations from an incident that happened hundreds of years ago.

The young man understood that whatever happened was not of his doing, but since he was playing the Villain, he decided to raise his chin in arrogance and mock the Prince of Solara in front of everyone.

"Is that all?" Alex asked in arrogance. "Are you sure it's called Phoenix's Descent, not Chicken's Descent? All I did was toss my shield, and your Phoenix got cooked."

Celestria gripped her staff tightly, disbelieving what she had seen just now.

She could also use Phoenix Descent since the bloodline of the Royal Family flowed in her veins.

It was something she prided herself on and one of her Trump Cards.

The sight of it being casually deflected by an ordinary skill made her doubt her eyes and senses.

An attack that could have instantly killed a Rank 4 Field Boss was treated like a measly Fire Bullet!

"Good!" Prince Garen held his sword with both hands. "That was just a warm-up."

The sword in the Prince's hands doubled in size, making it deadlier in the spectator's eyes.

He was inwardly shocked about one of his strongest attacks failing to leave even a scratch on his opponent's face. But as a Prince of the Solara Kingdom, he must keep his composure at all times.

The students of Solara all rose and started cheering for their Prince, who was their idol.

They could afford to lose to the students of Frieden Academy, but their Prince alone could not!

He was their face!

He was their symbol!

He was their idol!

All of them wanted to be like him, so they didn't want him to lose to Alex in front of so many people.

Caelum, Serenya, and the Elves all had solemn expressions on their faces.

Even they couldn't possibly shrug off the Phoenix's Descent so casually like Alex had done.

"It seems that we still underestimated him," Serenya said in a volume that only Caelum could hear.

"Yes," Caelum nodded. "Not only is he a calamity class singer, but he is also a capable warrior. Such a combination is simply frightening."

[E/N: If you stuff him in a high-end battlefield, as long as he's singing while fighting, no one can defeat him.]

Prince Garen's aura intensified as he raised his sword skyward. The golden runes etched upon its blade pulsed with a furious rhythm, each beat in sync with the pounding of his heart.

The Colosseum itself seemed to tremble as waves of heat rolled outward from him, the very air rippling under the might of the Solara Prince's fury.

"I will not forgive your arrogance, Alex Stratos!" Garen roared, his voice shaking the air. "I will strike you down here and now!"

The crowd roared in answer, a tidal wave of voices that shook the arena.

Alex, however, merely lifted Sacrament onto his shoulder and rested Svalinn lazily against his arm. His smirk never faltered, silver hair fluttering in the heat waves like a flag of defiance.

"Strike me down?" Alex tilted his head as if amused. "Please, Garen, I've heard better threats from the Aunties in the cafeteria when I asked for a second serving."

"I'll end you!" Garen shot up toward the sky.

He raised his sword up high.

It then freed itself from the Prince's hand, turning into a giant fireball akin to a miniature sun.

The fireball rose higher, its size simultaneously expanding until it was half the size of the entire arena!

"Garen stop it!" Theo shouted. "Are you mad?!"

Celestria's face also lost all of its colors, understanding that her cousin was about to unleash the last resort of the royalties, the strongest attack passed down to the descendants of the Solara Royal Family.

"Headmaster, should we stop them?" asked one of the Professors seated beside Professor Rowan.

“Don’t worry, I already casted a special magic that will instantly teleport anyone out of the arena if they were in any danger of dying,” Professor Rowan stated. “Let’s see this battle to the end, shall we?”

The Headmaster glanced at Alex, who had a faint smile on his face, before shifting his gaze to the Prince of Solara, who was channeling all of his magic power in the ultimate attack he meant to end this duel.

As the blazing sun above the sky reached its limit, Prince Garen spread his arms wide, as if welcoming the arrival of a God from the heavens.

“Praise the Sun!”

The giant fireball, now the size of the entire arena, descended from the sky, giving Alex no place to run nor hide.

The arena turned white-hot, the ground sizzled, and the barrier walls groaned as cracks spread across their shimmering surface.

Students shielded their eyes, some even turning away, unable to watch what looked like the birth of an apocalypse.

Chapter 318: Praise The Sun! [Part 3]

Praise the Sun.

The signature catchphrase the citizens of Solara say whenever they honor “The Sun,” whom they treat as their Deity.

One of the first Apostles of The Sun had founded the Solara Kingdom. Since its establishment, everyone who hailed from the kingdom had remained loyal to the God who watched over them.

Thanks to their fate, the people living in that domain were blessed with Sun Magic, especially the Royal Family, who could wield a fraction of their Founder King’s power.

Simply put, only the chosen ones could become a Solar Knight, Solar Saint, and Solar Saintess, most commonly exclusive to those who possessed the bloodline of the Royal Family.

Celestria was a Solar Saintess who sometimes received visions from The Sun.

In fact, she learned from one of her visions that when she arrived at the academy, she would meet someone who would change her life forever.

She was certain that this person wasn't Alex.

Even so, she could tell that he would play a role in helping her find the person whom her Deity had told her about.

'No!' Celestria thought. 'I must save him!'

Just as she was about to use her power to disperse the miniature sun only a few seconds away from colliding with Alex, a voice spoke directly inside her head.

"Worry not, Celestria. That child is in no danger. My flames will never reach him."

It was the voice of her Deity, and she, who had heard its voice several times, could sense a faint trace of helplessness in its tone, shocking her.

'Your Excellency! What do you mean your flames cannot reach him?! Does that mean that the Solar Knights cannot beat him?!' Celestria inquired in anxiousness.

"He can be beaten with might, but not my flames. He alone is someone whom my flames cannot burn."

Celestria's eyes widened in shock at this revelation.

A deafening boom shook the arena the instant the miniature sun smashed against the young man. Under the sheer power of Prince Garen's attack, most spectators expected him to be thrown from the ring immediately.

Perhaps Celestria was the only one who knew that his cousin's attack would not harm Alex in any way.

The Colosseum trembled as the rumbling sound of flames and destruction spread across the barrier protecting the students from harm.

Prince Garen panted for breath as he looked down at the hellish inferno he had unleashed upon the world.

'I might have gone too far this time,' Prince Garen chastised himself for using an unreasonable attack in a sparring match.

If he could, he would blame it on the smug look on Alex's face, triggering him to go all out and wipe that smile off his face.

Even so, after calming down, he realized that this was not the proper behavior of a Knight of Solara.

In the end, he decided to apologize to Alex and try to make up to him once the dust had settled.

All the students gazed at the still-burning arena, their faces filled with fear.

Lavinia, Latifa, and Fran were all clenching their fists subconsciously as they looked at the sides of the venue, restlessly waiting to see Alex in safety.

But no matter where they looked, they couldn't see the silver-haired young man anywhere, making them feel anxious.

After two minutes, Professor Rowan waited no longer and waved his hand, using the power of space to disperse the flames that were rampaging just a few seconds ago.

White smoke rose from the remains of the arena, making everyone sigh in their hearts.

“It’s over,” Caelum said with finality. “No one would be able to survive such destruction.”

Serenya and the other Elves nodded in agreement.

“Kaelen, help me,” Lapiz said as she raised her hand, pointing it toward the arena.

The Prince understood what her sister wanted from him, so he nodded and joined her in what she planned to do.

Chanting to summon Wind Spirits, the two elves used a gust of wind to blast away the white smoke blocking the sight inside the arena.

They wanted to see the outcome of the chaos that Prince Garen had shown everyone.

The nature-loving Elves, understandably, held a deep aversion to Fire Magic. After all, the littlest flame could graze their home, the forest, down to ashes.

As the smoke finally disappeared from the arena, everyone’s gaze landed on a sight they didn’t expect to see.

“W-What in the Moon’s name just happened?!” Caelum exclaimed, his voice much higher than his normal voice.

Serenya also looked at the same scene in disbelief, and she was not alone in her reaction.

Nearly everyone in the Colosseum stared in shock, with some of them even rubbing their eyes to ensure that they weren’t seeing things.

Professor Rowan chuckled as he looked at the young man, seated on a chair while casually sipping some tea. If they didn't know better, they'd think the fight had a tea break.

"Oh? Is it over already?" Alex asked as he placed the porcelain cup gently on the small table, crossing one leg over the other as though he were in the middle of a garden party rather than the aftermath of an apocalyptic assault.

The audience's jaws collectively dropped.

Theo nearly collapsed back into his seat. "H-He's... drinking tea... after that?!"

The students of Solara could only gape, their pride crumbling like the melted arena floor beneath Alex's feet.

Alex exhaled in satisfaction, savoring the last trace of warmth from his drink, then slowly raised his eyes toward Prince Garen. His smirk widened into something wicked.

"Not bad, Prince Garen," Alex said, his voice carrying through the stunned silence of the Colosseum. "But no matter how hot your flames burn, they'll never be hotter than me."

The young man then brushed his hair backward, his coolness prompting Chuck to furiously write the words Alex said in a notebook, planning to use it in the future.

Dim Dim smirked. Just like Celestria, the Dim Sum God knew why Alex could act so shamelessly in front of everyone. Especially since it also knew that Svalinn couldn't be melted by the flames nor the heat of the sun.

Prince Garen slowly landed on the ground and collapsed not long after.

He no longer had any strength to fight. After using everything he had, Alex remained unscathed, and even had the time to drink some tea, making him feel as if everything he had done was all for naught.

But as if reading his mind, Alex decided to finish him off with a compliment.

“Prince Garen, your flames were wonderful,” Alex said as he lifted a kettle. “It was hot enough to let me brew some tea. Well done, mate.”

Prince Garen’s eyes rolled out of their sockets as he fainted on the spot due to grief and shame.

The Solara students who had been cheering moments ago fell into a deafening silence.

How could they not be humbled?

The flames they had treated sacred were used to merely heat up a teapot so Alex could enjoy some tea in the middle of a duel.

This feeling of helplessness and grief was simply too much, prompting some of them to tear up.

The Student Council President, Theo, pressed his palm over his face as if he had seen the biggest lie of his life.

“First, he slaps away Phoenix’s Descent... then he uses the flames of Sunflame Annihilation to heat a damn kettle. I... I can’t anymore...”

The Elves were just as dumbfounded as everyone else, making even Prince Kaelen look at Alex as if he were looking at a monster for the first time in his life.

“U-Unbelievable,” Serenya whispered, her sharp eyes filled with disbelief. “He made light of Solara’s ultimate technique and treated it as a joke.”

Caelum nodded. “If news of this reached the ears of the Royal Family of Solara, they would no doubt treat Alex as the bane of their existence.”

The Elf glanced at the VIP seats of the Solara Students, his gaze landing on Celestria.

Celestria, however, did not share the same despair as the others.

Her gaze lingered on Alex, her lips parting ever so slightly as the words of her Deity echoed in her mind.

“My flames will never reach him...”

For the first time in her life, the Saintess of Solara trembled, not out of fear—but out of awe.

“This boy...” she whispered under her breath. “Just who... no, what are you?”

The arena remained silent, the tension so thick it was suffocating. Even Professor Rowan refrained from breaking it, his sharp eyes glimmering with amusement as if he had just witnessed the opening act of a grand play.

Then, as if he were completely unaware of the storm he had caused, Alex stretched his arms, stood up, and stifled a yawn.

“Hey, Chuck, isn’t it about time for you to wrap things up?” Alex asked.

The young man’s reminder made Chuck, who had retreated to safety along with Vaan, snap out of his daze.

“Wow! That was an amazing battle!” Chuck shouted. “Everyone, give a round of applause to the winner, Alex Stratos!”

Everyone was too shocked to start clapping, so the silence continued for a few seconds until it was broken by the clapping of a single person.

Vaan clapped his hands and looked at Alex with a starry gaze, like a damsel in distress once again saved by her hero.

That single clap was like a spark that ignited a flame, soon spreading across the Colosseum.

The second to clap was none other than Charles, who looked at Alex with a proud smile on his face.

Lavinia, Latifa, Fran, and Nessia also started to clap.

Soon, everyone else was also clapping until it became a thunderous roar filled with cheers.

Alex smirked and waved at everyone, enjoying the applause given to him.

Suddenly, something jumped up high and landed perfectly on top of Alex's head.

Dim Dim also smiled happily and waved at everyone, making the girls cheer louder for the little bun.

And that was how the first duel between Alex and Prince Garen ended... but it wouldn't be their last.

Chapter 319: A Visit To Endless Horizon [Part 1]

Chuck happily approached Alex, visibly proud of his roommate winning the duel.

"Well, then—would the winner of this duel like to share a few words with everyone?" Chuck asked.

"I do," Alex replied after taking the microphone off Chuck's hand.

He then flashed Vaan a devilish smile before sincerely speaking his thoughts out loud.

"Vaan, prepare yourself," Alex said evilly. "I will give you a good spanking tonight."

Fully immersed in his villain mode, Alex decided to just throw caution to the wind and publicly announced his intentions toward the mischievous pretty boy—to properly discipline him that night.

With no one knowing the context, everyone took his words the wrong way.

Lavinia, Latifa, and even Fran all glared at Alex, as if they wished to pinch him to oblivion!

“Hohoho!” Chuck chuckled as he took the microphone away from Alex before running toward Vaan.
“You heard him, Vaan. What do you have to say?”

Vaan blinked as Chuck handed his microphone to him. However, it didn’t take long before a blush crept on his face, and he held the mic near his lips in a shy manner.

“It’s my first time, so please be gentle with me,” Vaan replied.

“”””Whoaaaaaaaaaaaaa!””””

The guys all shouted in anger and gave Alex the middle finger!

“Damn it! Damn it!”

“T-To think that our Vaan will be soiled by that bastard! I can’t accept this!”

“Preposterous! Indecent!”

“This should not be allowed! This should not be allowed!”

All manner of curses and protests rained upon Alex, who finally snapped out of his Villain mode.

A part of him understood he got carried away, but since those words had already been uttered and had reached everyone, he could no longer take them back, could he?

Suddenly, someone appeared beside Chuck and Vaan, making the bodies of the two teenagers stiffen.

Professor Rowan took the microphone from Vaan's hand.

"Mr. Stratos, any inappropriate conduct is not allowed within the academy. This will be your first and last warning. Please pay more attention to your words and actions."

Alex immediately apologized to the Headmaster and declared he was going by the flow and was just joking.

A few protesters calmed down, but some still believed he was serious about his plan to give Vaan a good spanking.

After Alex replied to him, the Headmaster proceeded to thank the students of Solara Academy, as well as Faellarun Academy, for following the rules and showing sportsmanship in the duels they had fought these past few days.

He also added that he hoped the three academies could continue fostering good relationships with each other and promote future collaborations together.

The medics were already tending to Prince Garen, and according to their diagnosis, the Prince had fainted not from injuries but from draining his magic power.

A good rest was all he needed to recover and return to his usual self.

Knowing her cousin's confidence had received a massive blow, Celestria planned to share the revelation she received from their Deity. It would be best to emphasize that even if the strongest warrior of Solara had been the one to fight Alex, they would still lose the same if they purely relied on Solar Magic to fight him.

Alex then made his way out of the arena with Dim Dim in tow and headed straight to the clock tower, wanting to avoid any students for the time being.

A few minutes later...

"That was an amazing battle, Alex," Charles said as he sat beside Alex. "Truth be told, I was very worried about you during the match. It seems my worry was uncalled for."

"I was just lucky, Charles," Alex replied. "I only won because Prince Garen relied more on his Solar Magic instead of his physical skills."

When it came to stat points, the prince had the advantage. Had he used Solara Martial Skills in his duel against Alex, he wouldn't have been hopelessly beaten. The winner might've been him as well.

Of course, his win wouldn't be guaranteed. Even if they fought with Martial Skills alone, Alex could still win with his very high defense. Not to mention, with his new Unique Weapon, as long as he could land a good hit on the Prince's body, their difference in strength wouldn't be a big deal.

"At least you didn't win by luck this time," Renard, who had also arrived at the club room, commented as he sat on his usual seat at the round table.

"Indeed." Nessia smiled faintly as she, too, sat on her seat. "That was really a good battle, President. With that, the prestige of our club will increase once more."

"I know right?" Alex raised his head proudly. "It's all part of the plan."

"Ahem!" Dim Dim also raised its body proudly, imitating its partner in crime.

"Hmph! Don't be too happy with your win." Lumi, who had materialized beside Alex, scoffed. "Do you know? Those in the audience were itching to challenge you to a duel as well before you left."

"Eh?" Alex looked at Latifa's third Alter in surprise. "Really?"

“Yes.” Lumi nodded. “Also, I noticed Prince Kaelen looking at you with a serious gaze. There is a chance that he might challenge you as well.”

Alex rubbed his chin as he pondered for a while.

He had already labeled Prince Kaelen as his future brother-in-law, and making the twelve-year-old look up to him might make him his loyal supporter in the future.

The problem with fighting Prince Kaelen, who was a Rank 3 Nature Savant, was that Alex would truly be at a disadvantage.

He only won against Prince Garen since Svalinn countered him perfectly.

As for the Prince who specialized in Nature and Earth Magic, that battle would definitely be an uphill battle.

Suddenly, Alex sensed the arrival of a few people at the front door of their clock tower.

He could sense that one of them bore the mark of the clock tower, while the rest had none, so they must be guests who wished to see him.

‘This mark belongs to Lapiz...’ Alex thought. ‘So that means....’

The young man decided that this was a good opportunity to score some brownie points, so he left the club room and teleported to the ground floor of the tower to meet their guests.

As soon as he opened the door, he was greeted by Lapiz’s cuteness, which made his heart skip a beat.

However, when his gaze landed on Prince Kaelen, Caelum, Serenya, and two more elves, who seemed to be acting as the Prince’s bodyguards, Alex placed his hand over his chest and bowed respectfully.

“Welcome to the clubroom of Endless Horizon,” Alex said respectfully. “What do I owe the honor of this visit?”

Prince Kaelen glanced at his sister, and the latter nodded as if to encourage her brother to talk to Alex without worries.

“My sister said she’s part of your club,” Prince Kaelen replied. “After leaving Sister Aeris’ club, she joined yours, so I was confused. But after that duel, I guess you have the qualifications to become her club president.

“I’m here for an inspection. I want to see if your clubroom is appropriate for my sister to stay in.”

Alex nodded in understanding, so he decided to move aside and made a gesture for the elves to enter the clock tower.

“Please come into our humble abode,” Alex said. “We will do our best to accommodate you during your stay.”

Lapiz smiled faintly and walked past Alex while holding her brother’s hand.

Since she was already a club member, she had the ability to use the teleportation circle, which would directly send them to the clubroom of Endless Horizon.

Chapter 320: A Visit To Endless Horizon [Part 2]

The runes beneath their feet glowed softly as the magic circle activated, enveloping the group in a gentle light before sending them directly into the spacious clubroom above.

When they arrived, Charles, Renard, Chuck, Nessia, and Lumi immediately turned their heads toward the newcomers.

The sudden arrival of the royal prince and princess, along with their escorts, instantly made the atmosphere more formal, prompting everyone to straighten their postures.

“Your Highness,” Nessia greeted respectfully as she rose from her seat. “Welcome to Endless Horizon.”

Renard, Chuck, and Charles followed with polite bows, though their gazes lingered curiously on the elven prince.

Lumi, on the other hand, crossed her arms and tilted her head as if scrutinizing Kaelen’s presence.

Kaelen’s sharp green eyes swept across the room.

The enchanted interior of the clock tower impressed him—the floating lamps, the enchanted bookshelf, the round table with engraved sigils, the large bed at the corner of the room near the windows, and even Dim Dim, who hopped on top of the table and waved its hand at the visitors in greeting.

Caelum, Serenya, and the two other elves looked around them, taking in the sights of the clubroom where their Princess stayed during their club activities.

“This round table...” Prince Kaelen’s gaze landed on the round table with the intricate design.

He could see and sense the powerful runes that were embedded in the table, which gave it additional functions.

As if to test it, he rested the palm of his hand on top of it and activated one of its runes.

Immediately, a projection of his sister, Aeris, who was currently talking with the other elves from the Faellarun Delegation, appeared in front of everyone.

“Remember, do not offend or antagonize Alex Stratos,” Aeris warned the elves in front of her. “As you have seen earlier, he’s not a pushover. Also, he is called the Blackmail King for a reason. You’d better not cross him, no matter what. Do I make myself clear?”

“”Yes, Your Highness!””

Alex's smile stiffened. He didn't think Prince Kaelen would be able to activate one of the secret functions of the round table.

Of course, Alex knew about that feature.

But he kept it a secret from his club members, except for Nessia, who had already discovered it when she learned about the high-level runes from the Codex that she found in the hidden dimension within the clock tower.

In the game, their club room served as a temporary headquarters of the Heroes and the Heroines when they were dealing with the attacks that happened within the academy, as well as the capital city of Harmonia.

This was also the reason why Alex had asked for the clock tower to become their clubroom. With it, Heroes who were now part of his group would be able to use its secrets without needing to meet certain conditions.

Chuck, Renard, Charles, and Lumi all looked at Alex in disbelief, as if wanting to know if their club president was aware that their round table had this feature.

Alex sighed and nodded his head before lightly tapping the round table and dispersing Aeris' projection.

"Your Highness, please ask for permission before you activate any of the spells you will discover inside our clubroom," Alex said in a solemn tone. "While some of them are harmless, there are defensive runes here that might accidentally kill you if they identify you as an intruder."

Alex wasn't joking.

There were indeed special defensive runes inside the clock tower, which would automatically attack anyone who tried to fiddle with them without permission.

Only the registered members were not affected by these defensive measures.

Knowing they had guests, Alex had temporarily disabled them to ensure that no one would get hurt and cause trouble for him and the academy.

"I'm sorry," Prince Kalen said. "I was just curious if the runes on this round table are working."

Suddenly, Alex sensed the arrival of his other club members: Lavinia, Latifa, Vaan, and Lotte.

Sensing the four club members appear behind the elven delegation, the elves moved to the side so the ladies could enter without interruption.

Lotte carried Latifa to her bed, and the latter didn't hesitate to close her eyes to sleep.

Vaan and Lavinia sat on their respective seats on the round table and looked at their guests with curious gazes.

"I sure hope you don't use that projection feature to spy on my sisters whenever you please, Mr. Stratos," Prince Kaelen stated.

"Of course not," Alex replied. "In fact, I haven't used that feature yet. After all, I respect the privacy of others. Even my club members are only seeing it for the first time."

"Really?"

"Really."

Prince Kaelen stared at Alex long and hard, trying to discern whether he was lying or not.

As the future King of Faelarun, he had been strictly taught how to read the eyes and body of the people who wished to have an audience with him.

His senses told him that Alex wasn't lying, and from the reaction of the young man's club members, the prince could tell that this was indeed their first time seeing the round table's ability to show the projection of others in real time.

"By the way, what does your club do?" Caelum asked in curiosity.

"Good question." Alex smiled. "Actually, we are more of an expedition club. We plan to explore ruins, dungeons, and other places that might hold secrets that no one else discovered.

"In our last expedition, we went to Heracle Mountain and spent a few days hiking."

Of course, Alex had no intention of telling their guests about the trial that they had faced in that same mountain.

"I see, so this club functions similarly to my sister's club," Prince Kaelen nodded. "So you mean to compete with her, right?"

"Not really," Alex answered. "I don't want to brag, but comparing us with the Obsidian Fang is like comparing heaven and earth."

"Oh?" Prince Kaelen smiled faintly. "So who is Heaven, and who is the Earth?"

"Of course, our club is the Heaven, and the Earth is Obsidian Fang," Alex answered without hesitation. "That is why we are called Endless Horizon because our potential is endless."

Chuck almost choked at Alex's shameless answer, while Charles covered his face with his hand.

Renard, however, smirked faintly as if enjoying the bold declaration, and Nessia simply shook her head with a helpless smile.

Lavinia crossed her arms, clearly satisfied with Alex's confidence, while Vaan's lips curved into a mischievous grin.

Latifa smiled in her sleep, and her two Alters smirked at the same time.

Lapiz pressed her lips together, but her faint blush betrayed her pride in Alex's boldness.

Dim Dim smiled and nodded in agreement because it believed that Alex would take everyone to greater heights.

Prince Kaelen, however, narrowed his eyes. "Strong words. But words alone are meaningless unless they are backed by strengths and facts."

Alex was unperturbed by Prince Kaelen's comment and simply sat at the head of the round table.

"Then, how about we play a little game, Your Highness?" Alex proposed.

"A game? What are the stakes?" Prince Kaelen, feeling a little competitive.

"At the end of this month, the Headmaster will take the First Years on a Dungeon Expedition," Alex stated. "No one knows what kind of Dungeon it will be, and only the Headmaster knows about the details.

"He plans to let the students explore it, and there will be a point system. The higher the number and quality of monsters killed inside the dungeon, the higher the points their teams will get.

"If the Faelarun Team scores higher than my Club, then you win. But if my Club scores higher, then we win. Very easy to understand, right?"

"Indeed." Prince Kaelen nodded. "So, what are the stakes?"

"If I win, I want you to assist us in the expedition that we will do in the Kingdom of Faelarun half a year from now," Alex replied.

“An expedition in Faelarun?” Prince Kaelen frowned. “And half a year from now? Wait... are you thinking of going there during the World Tree celebration?”

“That’s right.” Alex nodded. “The Inter-Academy Events, including the Inter-Academy Singing Competition, will be held at Faelarun this year, right?”

After hearing the words Inter-Academy Singing Competition, the Elves, with the exception of Prince Kaelen and Lapid, all shuddered.

Their trauma resurfaced once more, making their bodies shake uncontrollably for a period of time.

“H-Hey, what’s wrong with you guys?” Prince Kaelen noticed that Caelum, Serenya, and the two elves with him didn’t look so good.

In fact, all the colors seemed to have disappeared from their faces.

“W-We can talk about it later, Your Highness,” Caelum replied.

Thinking that his fellow students weren’t comfortable with the subject, Prince Kaelen decided to change the subject.

“And what if I win?” Prince Kaelen asked.

“You can ask me to do anything for you,” Alex answered without hesitation. “As long as it doesn’t go below my bottom line, I’ll do it without fail.”

“Interesting.” Prince Kaelen smiled. “Very well, you have a deal. If you win, I will assist you in the expedition that you will undertake in my Kingdom. But if you lose, do not forget to keep your promise, okay?”

“I won’t,” Alex answered. “In fact, why don’t we sign a magic contract? That way, this will become an official bet between us.”

“You sure have guts, but I don’t mind dealing with gusty people,” Prince Kaelen, who was inspired by Alex’s battle earlier, wanted to beat the young man in a fair match.

Unfortunately, the match they were about to have wasn’t fair.

Alex already knew what kind of dungeon the First Years were going to explore and had already made his preparations to score the highest points.

Although he felt bad for tricking Lapid’s little brother, Alex believed that his assistance would be greatly appreciated when they traveled to the Kingdom of Faelarun, where the second part of the Chain Quest was waiting for them.