

## **Endless 341**

### Chapter 341: In The Face Of Absolute Strength [Part 1]

Finally came the day everyone had been waiting for.

All the First Years, including the delegations from the Solara and Faellarun Academies, had gathered in the plaza.

Emotions were running high for everyone knew that the upcoming expedition wasn't anything ordinary.

It was a competition and a battle of pride and glory.

"Have the leaders done a headcount?" Professor Rowan asked.

"All the Solara students are here, Professor," Prince Garen replied.

"Everyone from Faellarun is accounted for," Prince Kaelen answered.

The Headmaster then glanced at the Student Council President, who gave a small nod.

"All First Years are present, Professor," Theo replied.

The Student Councillors had two roles. One, they would serve as bodyguards for the guests. Two, they would monitor their juniors.

In other words, they would also enter the dungeon as observers. They would not participate in the competition in any way, but they would keep an eye out for anything unusual.

A few Professors would also accompany them to ensure the safety of the students.

Professor Rowan subconsciously looked in Alex's direction.

As usual, a cute little bun was perched on top of his head, though this time, it was wearing dramatic sunglasses that made it look like a gangster.

The Dim Sum God was certainly hyped about this dungeon expedition.

“Very well. Let’s all go.” Professor Rowan then raised his staff high, activating the magical formation in the academy’s plaza.

A second later, everyone shot towards the sky towards their destination, which was none other than Orion City.

In just a few seconds, everyone found themselves standing before the dungeon they had been wondering about for weeks.

“We’re now in Orion City,” Professor Rowan said. “And this, ladies and gentlemen, is the Orion Dungeon. We’ve booked the entire dungeon for today. All adventurers inside were asked to leave.

“So, if you meet anyone who isn’t from the academy, do not approach them. We don’t know their intentions, and they might be dangerous. The Professors and the Student Council will escort some of the teams, so if you encounter outsiders inside the dungeon, directly report it to them.”

The students nodded in understanding. After the incident in the Mistral Weave Forest during the Battle Royale, they knew anything could happen inside the dungeon if they weren’t careful.

It was an open secret that monsters weren’t the ones responsible for several deaths inside the dungeon.

Ironically, the killers were very human. This was why the Headmaster had taken the precaution of getting the Adventurer Guild to clear out the dungeon for this expedition. No outsiders would be allowed in during the duration of the competition either.

“The necklaces you were given are teleportation crystals. If you find yourself in danger, activate your crystals to escape,” Professor Rowan stated. “Your life is precious, so don’t hesitate to use them.

“Last but not least, the teleportation crystals have another special function. They allow us to see what’s happening in the dungeon. Every monster you kill will gain you points. And the higher the rank, the more points you get.

“Killing a Rank 1 monster will give you one point. Rank 2, ten points. Rank 3, a hundred. And Rank 4, a thousand. Anything above that will give you ten thousand points.

“For Mini Boss Monsters, points gained from them will be multiplied by three, Boss Monsters by ten. Remember, the dungeon is a very dangerous place. Don’t let your guard down, and don’t bite off more than you can chew. Have I made myself clear?”

“”Yes!””

Professor Rowan then gave Theo a look that indicated he was done with the briefing.

“All of you, please come back safely!” the Student Council President shouted. “Let the competition begin!”

As soon as the signal was given, the Faellarun students ran towards the entrance of the dungeon.

Lady Celestria glanced at Renard for a brief moment before following the students of Solara to rush inside as well.

All the First Years of Frieden Academy were hot on their heels, determined not to fall behind.

All the First Years, of course, except for the members of Endless Horizon.

Alex and his team deliberately stayed behind as part of their plan.

However, it seemed like not every member was on the same page

Renard slowly walked toward the dungeon entrance, drawing looks of confusion from the others.

Alex raised his hand to stop anyone from calling out to Mr. I-Have-Trust-Issues.

“Aren’t you going to stop me?” Renard asked without turning around to look at his club members.

“Life is not a matter of chance but of choice,” Alex answered. “We are not passengers of a ship that simply drifts with the current but captains steering toward a destiny of our own making.

“Just remember that I believe in you, Renard. You’re bound to become someone very strong in the future. If there’s any category I can be confident of completely triumphing over you... it’s probably handsomeness.”

As Alex’s friends looked at him in exasperation and disbelief, Chuck quickly wrote down his words in a small notebook for future reference.

As someone who prided himself as the most handsome man in the academy, Chuck believed he would be able to use this quote as well in the future.

This time, Renard stopped and looked back at Alex, holding his gaze for nearly half a minute.

The two young men seemed to have come to some sort of understanding, and that was enough for both of them.

Without another word, Renard entered the dungeon, believing he needed to mold his destiny with his own hands.

Alex knew what Renard was really asking him was not whether he should explore the dungeon alone, but whether it was fine for him to accept Lady Celestria’s invitation to transfer to Solara Academy.

This option was also present in the game as an important turning point in Renard’s path.

Regardless of his choice, Alex believed that Renard would find the answers he was looking for.

Although it would be a shame if Renard left Frieden Academy, Alex was confident that the next time they met, Renard would be more powerful than ever before.

Suddenly, Alex heard a light cough behind him.

“Why are you still here?” asked Professor Arabella, who had been assigned to supervise Alex’s team.

“Because now is not the time to show everyone how amazing we are, Professor,” Alex answered as he summoned a table and a few chairs from his storage ring.

Under everyone’s intense gaze, he casually laid the table before taking out a basket of sandwiches.

“What the...” Cassandra, the Secretary of the Student Council, had no idea what to make of Endless Horizon. She couldn’t decide if they were too confident or too frightened!

All the other students had already gone into the dungeon, eager to score as many points as possible. Then there was Endless Horizon, about to start a picnic session right outside the dungeon!

Outwardly, Professor Rowan barely reacted, but the ridiculous scene left a bad feeling nagging at the back of his head.

Professor Arabella, meanwhile, pinched the bridge of her nose and sighed loud enough for everyone—especially a certain Club President—to hear.

They were not the only ones left dumbfounded. In truth, many of the Professors and students were paying attention to Endless Horizon.

Back at Frieden Academy, magical projections had been set up to broadcast the dungeon expedition as captured by the teleportation crystals hanging around each participant’s neck.

'Just what is he up to this time?' Aeris frowned as she watched the young man eat sandwiches without a care in the world. 'Is this... is this his last meal?'

She wasn't the only one who thought Alex's end might be near.

'I hope you die inside the dungeon!' Eleanora thought hatefully as she looked at Chuck and Alex in the projection. 'I hope the monsters rip you all to shreds!'

The young lady placed her hand on her chest, right above her heart.

There, a symbol of a silver flame glowed faintly under her robe, proof of her contract with Chuck, who had forced her to submit to him.

Chapter 342: In The Face Of Absolute Strength [Part 2]

"Is Renard going to be fine?" Chuck asked after he finished eating his sandwich.

"He'll be fine," Alex answered as he looked at the projections outside of the dungeon.

He planned to move an hour after the start of the expedition. By his estimation, most of the teams would have gone to the Second Floor by then.

Charles looked calm on the surface, but deep inside, he was very worried.

He understood that the moment he entered the dungeon, a Dungeon Outbreak would be triggered, putting everyone in danger.

In contrast, Alex wasn't too worried.

Each team was escorted by a Professor as well as some elite Third and Fourth Year students.

The moment they realized something was wrong, they would immediately advise everyone to break their teleportation crystals.

Half an hour later, Alex deemed that the time was right and ordered the first team to enter the dungeon.

He and Charles would enter last, after everyone had prepared the stage for their slaughter zone.

“Nessia, Dim Dim, it’s all up to you guys,” Alex said.

“I know.” Nessia nodded.

“Dim!” Dim Dim saluted.

The little bun jumped on top of Chuck’s head and accompanied everyone to the dungeon’s entrance.

Professor Arabella and Cassandra were quick to follow them. Both were secretly relieved that the members of Endless Horizon had finally decided to participate properly.

Theo had ordered Cassandra to closely monitor Endless Horizon and report everything that they had done during the competition.

Unlike the other teams who had rushed to enter the dungeon, Alex and his friends had prepared a more detailed and thorough strategy.

In fact, they had already secured the map of the First and Second Floors of the Orion Dungeon. On the map they had marked out where they would set up traps for the monsters, who would soon go into a frenzy.

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Inside the Dungeon...

“Um, what are you doing?” Cassandra asked Nessia, who was sticking some talismans on the walls of a spacious cave from which several paths diverged.

At first, she thought Nessia was simply using a spell to find the way to the Second Floor, where stronger monsters dwelled. After all, it was more practical to defeat one Rank 2 monster than ten Rank 1 monsters for the same amount of points.

However, it didn’t take her long to realize that Nessia had no intention of doing that.

Instead, she and the other members of Endless Horizon were all busy sticking the talismans all over the place.

“Dim Dim~”

“Dim Dim~”

“Dim Dim~”

Dim Dim was humming happily as it planted talismans on the cavern’s ceiling, which was unreachable by its friends.

According to Nessia’s analysis, this space was the perfect spot to turn into a slaughter zone once the Dungeon Outbreak began.

Princess Xenia and Mary were assigned to guard the others just in case some stray monsters spawned near their location.

To the spectating students, this behavior was just strange. But the Professors, who knew better, widened their eyes in shock when they recognized the runes transcribed on the talismans!

“This...”

“Oh, these kids know what they’re doing.”

“But why are they doing that on the First Floor? Wouldn’t it be more effective if they did that on the lower floors instead?”

Many of the Professors started to question why the members of Endless Horizon were doing something wasteful.

Unbeknownst to them, the talismans would only activate when Rank 2 Monsters and above came within their range.

Cassandra suddenly felt her stomach drop. She believed that Alex and his club members would not do something like this without a good reason.

But no matter how much she tried to understand what was happening, she couldn’t come up with a reasonable explanation for their actions.

‘I have a bad premonition about this,’ Cassandra thought. ‘I hope I’m just overthinking things.’

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At the Second Floor of the Dungeon...

The students of Solara and Faellarun Academies were doing their best to look for the path that would take them to the Third Floor of the Orion Dungeon.

They had encountered countless monsters along the way, but even these Rank 2 Monsters hadn’t stood a chance against the powerhouses of these two factions.

Prince Edward and his team were not far behind, occupied with Rank 2 Zombie Wolves that were hunting in packs.

The Second Floor was a corrupted forest, teeming with Zombie-Type Monsters as strong as their living counterparts.

In the distance, rumbling sounds could be heard as Renard single-handedly obliterated four Zombie Wolves that had tried to ambush him from behind.

The young man naturally impressed those who were watching him, having managed to reach the Second Floor on his own without a team supporting him.

'I don't need anyone's help!' Renard thought as his punch annihilated a Zombie Boar that charged directly at him. 'I'll become strong on my own!'

No Rank 2 Monsters could hold their ground against the young man, who had grown stronger after fighting many strong opponents in the academy for the past month.

However, the person he wanted to fight the most was Alex.

To his immense annoyance, his Club President would say things like "I'm no match against you, Renard" or "Okay, you win" after falling to the ground dramatically.

Clearly, Alex didn't want to fight against Renard.

But the silver-haired young man refused not because he was scared or anything.

Alex just didn't want to create a situation where the two of them would always be at odds with each other. He would always take a step back when Mr. I-Have-Trust-Issues treated him as some kind of rival.

But it was already too late for that.

In Renard's eyes, Alex was already a rival.

A rival that he must surpass no matter what.

'I don't know what you're scheming.' Renard gritted his teeth as he killed a Zombie Monkey that lunged at him from a branch. 'But in the face of absolute strength, all tricks are meaningless!'

The young man knew that Alex was plotting something because he had asked him to cooperate with the rest of Endless Horizon.

But Renard had his own way of doing things and didn't really like to work as a team with anyone.

He was a lone wolf and preferred it that way.

Even now, he was starting to think that he alone could help his team win since he had managed to catch up with the other teams, which were now heading towards the Third Floor.

So far, his time in the dungeon had been smooth sailing.

Nothing on the First and Second Floors could threaten him. He felt almost underwhelmed and looked forward to fighting strong opponents on the lower floors. In fact, he wished to go as deep as he could.

Unbeknownst to him and the rest of the students, a hundred Demon Worshipers had entered the Orion Dungeon a week ago and were now all patiently waiting for them on the Fifth Floor.

Chapter 343: In The Face Of Absolute Strength [Part 3]

After killing a Rank 2 Zombie Monkey, Renard checked his points with the bracelet on his wrist.

[Renard Vale = 608 Points]

He alone had managed to accumulate that many points, topping the Solo Rankings.

Thanks to his effort, Endless Horizon was among the top ten groups.

Just as Renard was about to follow the tracks left behind by the delegation from Solara Academy, he noticed that there were four people who were observing him from a distance.

They were none other than Prince Kaelen, Lapid, Caelum, and Serenya.

"What do you want?" Renard demanded. "Have you come to eliminate me?"

The participants were allowed to fight against members of other teams as long as they did not inflict a killing blow or crippling injury.

Such force was unnecessary since a student could make an opponent withdraw from the battle by simply crushing the teleportation crystal that the latter was wearing.

"I am not here to eliminate you," Prince Kaelen replied. "I came here to ask where your Club President is."

"How should I know?" Renard shrugged. "I'm not his nanny."

Prince Kaelen narrowed his eyes at Renard's answer. "Isn't he part of your team? Are you really trying to win this contest alone? Don't tell me you came here by yourself."

"And what if I did come here by myself?" Renard retorted. "That's none of your business."

"You..." Caelum didn't like Renard's disrespectful way of talking to their prince, but Prince Kaelen raised his hand to stop Caelum from doing anything.

"You're right, it is none of my business." Prince Kaelen nodded. "I've been observing you for the past few weeks, and I have come to realize that you're not exactly a team player. But, do tell me, do you have a reason for fighting alone?"

The Elven Prince was genuinely curious because in his opinion, it was detrimental for Alex to keep someone who didn't want to cooperate as a team.

He, Alex, and Prince Garen had made a bet with each other on who the winner of the competition would be. However, with the help of his subordinates, he soon realized that Alex was nowhere on the Second Floor of the Dungeon.

Only Renard was here, busy killing monsters without help from any of his club members.

So, Prince Kaelen thought that either Alex was confident that Renard alone could win this competition for their team or... he was planning something.

Something big.

This was why Prince Kaelen had decided to approach Renard and ask him a few questions.

"I already told you that whatever I do is none of your business," Renard scoffed. "If you get in my way, I'm going to fight you!"

"Renard, please calm down." Lapid tried to mediate between her brother and her club member, who seemed to be only a spark away from a full-blown confrontation. "Brother, let's just leave him alone. He's not doing anything harmful to our team."

If this had happened a month ago, Prince Kaelen would have listened to his older sister without fail. However, after staying in Frieden Academy, he realized that humans thought differently from them.

Elves were a long-lived race, so their mentality was old fashioned as well. This was especially true for the elves that had never set foot outside of the Kingdom and seen the bigger world.

Prince Kaelen was bound to be the next King of the Elves, so although it was dangerous, his parents had reluctantly agreed to send him to the human kingdom to learn their culture.

However, after hearing how Alex had gained the title of Blackmail King, the Prince felt that he was a very dangerous person.

Any elf, especially his sisters, might fall victim to Alex's plans.

The fact that Lapis was part of Endless Horizon concerned him because he was worried that his kind and dependable sister might change for the worse if she interacted with Alex long enough.

"I see, you're quite a sad human aren't you?" Prince Kaelen said, eyeing Renard with pity. "You're like an abandoned bear forced to fend for itself."

Renard clenched his fist and glared at the Prince of the Elves.

He wasn't really affected by the prince's words. What affected him was the look of pity.

The young man had grown up seeing that expression time and time again.

"I don't need your pity!" Renard growled, remembering his childhood. "If you want to fight, let's fight!"

Without any warning, Renard charged at Prince Kaelen with the intention of giving him a good beating.

He no longer cared that this was the Prince of the Elves.

Anyone who looked down on him would have to face his fist!

Caelum and Serenya were ready to defend their prince, but he took a step forward.

"Don't interfere," Prince Kaelen ordered before he, too, lunged towards Renard, eager to fight.

Renard was a Rank 2 Berserker Juggernaut, while Prince Kaelen, who was much younger than him, was a Rank 3 Nature Savant.

Calling the Prince a prodigy was an understatement, especially since he was only twelve years old.

The Professor assigned to look after Prince Kaelen watched anxiously as the two teenagers clashed.

If something happened to the Prince on his watch, he would surely be blamed.

Renard roared as he threw a punch while Prince Kaelen stomped on the ground, creating a giant fist made from soil.

The sound of a thunderclap reached everyone's ears as the two powerful attacks connected with each other.

The giant fist shattered, but Renard was also blown away by the impact.

However, before he could regain his footing, a vine wrapped itself around his leg and slammed him into the ground without mercy.

The crystals around their necks perfectly captured the scene and transmitted it to the magical projections in the academy and outside the dungeon.

Alex could only wince when he saw what happened to Renard.

He was having tea with Charles after they'd been left behind by their team. They'd been watching the broadcast, using it as a chance to learn more about their peers' fighting styles.

"Alex, why didn't you stop Renard earlier?" Charles asked. "You already know what he's like. But I'm sure that had you talked to him, he might have at least reconsidered his decision to do this alone."

Alex didn't answer right away. Instead, he continued to watch as Prince Kaelen repeatedly slammed Renard into the ground, leaving little doubt in anyone's mind that the young human had bitten off more than he could chew.

#### Chapter 344: In The Face Of Absolute Strength [Part 4]

After watching Renard getting slammed into the ground for the umpteenth time, Alex finally turned to face Charles.

"Renard is like a clump of iron," Alex answered. "He is currently formless, so he needs to undergo certain experiences before he can become who he is meant to be. And the only way for him to learn is to face obstacles repeatedly. It's like how a blacksmith forges the finest swords."

"... That's a good way to say that he needs a good beating," Charles commented. "But are you sure that you're not enjoying this, Alex?"

"Of course not!" Alex exclaimed, looking deeply offended. "I simply care about his personal growth. I'm his Club President after all."

"Oh? Then you should stop smiling so widely whenever Renard disappears into a cloud of dust. You're convincing no one when you act like this."

Alex coughed lightly, but the smile quickly reappeared once Renard made contact with the ground again.

It was no secret that Mr. I-Have-Trust-Issues refuse to cooperate with him most of the time, so seeing him getting beaten up put a smile on his face.

"Renard will take whatever I say with a grain of salt," Alex said. "There's a 30% chance that he will do as I say and a 70% chance that he will ignore me. As you may already know, Renard doesn't like taking orders."

"He is a free spirit. He doesn't want to be shackled down by anyone. The more someone tries to bind him, the more he will resist and the more he will hate that person. I don't want him to hate me, so I just let him do what he wants."

“Is that the only reason?” Charles inquired.

“There is one more reason,” Alex admitted. “Renard believes that the only person he can rely on is himself. He doesn’t want to depend on anyone because he doesn’t want to be betrayed. Or rather, he doesn’t want to feel disappointed when someone he has come to trust fails to meet his expectations.

“If he fails in what he does, he will only blame himself for being incapable of reaching his goal. He won’t have to blame others for his shortcomings.”

Meanwhile, Renard had finally managed to break free from the vine holding him. Now, he was punching the stone projectiles—each the size of a basketball—flying towards him.

“Alex, have you met Renard in the past?” Charles suddenly asked as Renard pulverized another projectile. “You seem to know a lot about him. It’s like... when we first met. You seemed to know a lot about me even though we’d not seen each other before.”

When Alex glanced at Charles, he realized that the boy from Briarwood Village had already stopped watching the projection and was looking at him with a solemn expression.

“Didn’t I tell you, I’m a Seer?” Alex replied.

“You did.” Charles smirked. “But I have a feeling that there’s more than that.”

His gut instinct told him that Alex really knew a lot about him. It was not just him either. Alex seemed to understand their club members so well he could predict how they’d act.

Even the situation they were currently facing seemed to have been within Alex’s expectation. His preparations and plans always matched each development so seamlessly.

Sometimes, Charles wanted to crack Alex’s head open and discover his secret.

"I think it's almost over," Alex commented as Renard crashed against several trees after Prince Kaelen summoned a massive fist to swat Renard away like a pesky fly.

The Elven Prince stood a few meters away from the fallen young man with his hands clasped behind his back.

Sweat formed on his forehead, but he was mostly unscathed. The same could not be said for his opponent, who struggled to even get up.

"You're so weak." Prince Kaelen sighed. "It seems that I have overestimated you."

"Damn... you!" Renard growled as he tried to prop himself up from the ground, but he couldn't muster the strength to do so.

"It's futile," Prince Kaelen stated. "During our exchange earlier, I used a vine that excreted a paralyzing poison on your body. You won't be able to move for a few minutes."

Prince Kaelen turned to leave, but he suddenly paused and gave Renard one more look.

"You humans have a saying that in the face of absolute strength, all tricks are meaningless," Prince Kaelen said, careful to keep his tone neutral. "Unfortunately, you don't have absolute strength. So, let me give you some advice.

"A lone wolf may fight fiercely, but a wolf bound to a pack conquers far greater prey. Learn when to stand alone and when to fight alongside others. Otherwise, you will remain nothing more than a beast swinging blindly against the world."

Renard's eyes burned with defiance, but a small tremor flickered in his chest.

He wanted to dismiss the Prince's words as nonsense, to spit back that he didn't need anyone.

But something inside him, buried deep under the scars of his past, resonated faintly with what Kaelen said.

Even so, he refused to accept it!

“That’s easy for you to say because you have grown up in an environment where you are pampered everyday!” Renard shouted.

“What do you know of hunger?! What do you know of suffering?! Have you ever experienced having to fend for yourself on your own?! You know nothing! You’re just a spoiled brat who was born with everything!”

“You’re right,” Prince Kaelen replied, for what the young man said was the truth. “I don’t know the kind of life that you’ve lived. But there is one thing that I do know.”

The Prince once again gave Renard a pitying look before continuing.

“You humans have always fought stronger beasts by ganging up on them. When faced with a creature that your fists cannot slay, you rely on weapons to do it. It doesn’t matter if it’s a stone, a branch, or even the environment itself.

“Even the powerhouses in this world that have reached the Rank of Paragon didn’t get there on their own. You’re too naive, Renard. That’s why you will never defeat Alex Stratos.

“That man will not hesitate to hide behind a girl if that is his only way of winning! He is a scum! A shameless human scum! On that note, even though you are weaker than him, you’re still a better person!”

“...”

Renard, who had expected to disagree completely with Prince Kaelen, suddenly found himself tongue-tied.

He was tempted to shout “Finally! Someone who understands!” but he held himself back because he had a feeling that if he really were to do that, he would lose in more ways than one.

Renard bit his lip so hard he tasted blood. His chest heaved as he was torn between anger and a strange relief that someone had finally spoken aloud what he himself had always felt about Alex.

Charles almost choked on his tea after hearing Prince Kaelen’s assessment of Alex.

While he spluttered and coughed, he saw Alex flipping the projection of Prince Kaelen off, not caring that they were out in public.

The Professors also glanced at Alex, but decided to turn a blind eye to his inappropriate behavior towards the Elven Prince.

‘Out of sight, out of mind,’ some of the Professors thought. It didn’t cost them anything to pretend that they didn’t notice Alex giving Prince Kaelen the middle finger.

At that moment, a little white bun exited the dungeon and made its way to Alex and Charles.

“Dim!” Dim Dim shouted as it jumped high in the air, landed on top of the table, and did a dabbing pose.

“Is everything ready, Dim Dim?” Alex asked.

After hearing what Prince Kaelen thought of him, Alex itched to cause a Dungeon Outbreak!

“Dim!” Dim Dim saluted.

Nearly two hours had passed since the First Years had entered the Orion Dungeon.

Now that Endless Horizon had finished their preparations, it was now time for the real fun to start.

“Let’s go, Charles.” Alex broke into an evil smile. “Time to make that bratty prince pay for slandering me. And how dare Renard stay silent when his own Club President was getting unfairly insulted!”

Charles sighed helplessly. “Alex, you look really scummy right now.”

“Dim Dim!”

“See? Even Dim Dim agrees with me.”

Alex feigned deafness as he strode confidently towards the dungeon filled with undead monsters, ready to unleash hell on everyone inside.

Chapter 345: Death March [Part 1]

Cassandra trailed behind Alex and Charles, serving her duty as one of the supervisors assigned to them.

The moment Charles entered the dungeon, his passive ability, Challenger’s Mark [EX], activated.

With his foot as the nexus, power surged across the dungeon like raging tides.

Knowing what exactly happened, Charles clenched his fists and looked down, as if he could see what was happening in the lower floors.

“Don’t worry.” Alex lightly patted Charles’ shoulder. “Let’s find the others.”

Charles nodded and followed Alex deeper into the dungeon.

The student council secretary assumed that the Blackmail King was merely reassuring his companion that there was nothing to fear inside the dungeon.

After a few minutes of walking, they finally arrived at the spacious cavern where many paths diverged.

This was the hub of Orion Dungeon's First Floor, which the members of Endless Horizon had decided to transform into their Sanctuary.

Professor Arabella stood at the center of the space, talking to Nessia.

The History Professor was impressed when all the talismans the students had planted activated and exuded holy power, turning the place into what felt like the inner sanctuary of a Holy Temple.

When Nessia saw Alex, Charles, and Cassandra, she instantly understood why the talismans had activated on their own.

Suddenly, they heard the sound of rattling bones from one of the corridors leading to their location.

These corridors had also been littered with talismans—Alex and Nessia had prepared thousands of them.

Aside from the talismans, various magical artifacts were also stuck on the walls and ceilings to help weaken—and maybe even cripple—the Undead. Against the High-Ranking Undead, which they were expecting to arrive only after an hour or two, they needed all the help they could get.

"Chuck, Princess Xenia, and Mary, please handle the small fries," Alex said. "You don't have to use any spells, Chuck. Just whack them with a stick, and they will crumble without fail."

"Dim Dim!"

"Okay, you can go as well."

"Dim~"

Professor Arabelle frowned when she realized that the students were splitting up. However, since she knew who the VIP in Endless Horizon was, she decided to accompany Princess Xenia, who was walking toward one of the paths that led deeper inside the dungeon.

Although Mary was worried about the Princess, Alex had assured her that as long as they stayed within the corridors, they could defeat the Undead even by just slapping them to death.

“Professor Arabella, please look after the Princess,” Mary requested while giving the History Professor a deep bow.

“Don’t worry, I’ll keep her safe,” Professor Arabelle promised.

Chuck, who was just following Mary, was suddenly grabbed from behind.

“You should pick a different corridor,” Alex whispered. “Have you forgotten? What you do here will be broadcast to the academy. Show our seniors how cool and amazing you are by single-handedly dealing with dozens of Undead!”

Alex knew that Chuck was someone who always enjoyed the spotlight. There was no way the troublemaker would turn down his suggestion. As expected, Chuck happily agreed to challenge himself and headed down a different path on his own.

Latifa had stayed in the academy since she wasn’t interested in the dungeon competition. Also, she hated the Undead very much, so she had told Alex that she wasn’t going.

“Lavinia, don’t push yourself too hard in dealing with the small fries,” Alex said when the Catkin was also about to leave. “Pace yourself well until the Death Knights arrive.”

“Understood.” Lavinia nodded before picking one of the dungeon corridors.

Meanwhile, Dim Dim took out a toy hammer from its dimensional storage and bravely ventured down the last dungeon corridor that no one had chosen.

“Dim Dim, don’t forget to collect the monster cores, okay?” Alex said.

“Aye!” Dim Dim gave a salute with its hammer before continuing its mission.

“Are you sure Dim Dim is going to be fine?” Nessia, who really liked the little mascot of their club, asked.

“Don’t worry.” Alex smirked. “Dim Dim knows what it’s doing.”

Cassandra watched all of this with her hands clasped behind her back.

The faint holy power radiating from the talismans and saturating the space was strong enough to act as a deterrent for any Undead.

However, Challenger’s Mark was something none of them could resist.

Like moths drawn to a flame, the Undead Monsters started their death march to kill Charles Lambert.

All Dungeon Monsters instinctively wanted to eliminate Charles, for he held a power that could break the balance of the world and make him a powerhouse that could threaten even the might of Paragons in the future.

“Do you think our preparations will be enough?” Nessia asked.

After learning some of the most ancient runes in the Codex of Eternal Weave, her knowledge of Rune Magic had increased by leaps and bounds.

She was confident that her magical formation would cripple even Rank 4 Undead Monsters.

But the real problem was the Rank 5 Undead Monsters and above, including the Mini Boss and the Boss Monsters of the Fifth and Tenth Floors.

“Relax,” Alex answered. “If worse comes to worst, we’ll just use Ms. Cassandra as bait and run away.”

The corner of the secretary’s lips twitched.

She wanted to remind him that if he really was cornered, all he needed to do was break his teleportation crystal, and he would be sent outside the dungeon to safety.

A moment later, the sound of fighting reached their ears.

Lavinia, Chuck, Princess Xenia, Mary, and Dim Dim had finally clashed with the Rank 1 Undead Soldiers that littered the First Floor of the Dungeon.

Just as Alex had stated, the Undead were incredibly weak and fragile.

All they needed to do was slap the skeleton soldiers’ heads, and their skulls would shatter.

But since none of them wanted to touch the Undead, they simply used the wooden clubs that Alex had given them in advance.

These wooden clubs were also inscribed with Rune Magic. One spell was the Light Feather Spell, which made the clubs feel much lighter.

They were also imbued with the Bonebreaker’s Mark, which dealt 200% extra damage against Undead Type Monsters and 500% damage to Skeleton Type Monsters.

Since the wooden bats were made from sanctified wood, they also radiated a faint trace of holy magic that Undead Monsters were especially weak against.

Simply put, any Low-Ranking Undead would be easy prey to these wooden bats.

“So boring.” Chuck flipped his hair after killing a dozen Skeleton Soldiers. “Is this your worst?”

Back at the academy, Eleanora gritted her teeth in anger as she watched the bane of her existence have the time of his life!

She hoped that a strong monster would rip Chuck’s body apart so she would be free from the mark he had planted on her body, preventing her from defying him.

‘I hope the Young Miss will be alright,’ Eleanora thought as she glanced at the magical projection where Evangeline could be seen.

‘I didn’t tell her about the planned ambush of the Demon Worshipers on the Fifth Floor since she might ruin the Elder’s plans if she knew.’

The Demon Worshipers were a large organization, but they were actually not that united, with several factions vying for power.

Although they were allies, they were rivals and competitors as well. The desire to one-up another faction was always present, even if they were supposed to work together toward a common goal.

What Eleanora didn’t know was that she didn’t have to worry about the Demon Worshipers, who had planned to ambush the delegations from the Solara and Faelarun Academies.

All of them would soon be too busy trying to save themselves from the calamity that would befall them.

Chapter 346: Death March [Part 2]

On the Fifth Floor of the Orion Dungeon...

Over a hundred Demon Worshipers lay in wait for the first teams of candidates to arrive at their location.

The weakest among them were Rank 3 Experts, while the strongest were Rank 5.

They were part of the Faction of one of the Elders who wished to increase his influence among their organization.

Like the students, each of them had a teleportation crystal that would allow them to escape once they were done with their mission.

The Dungeon Contest between the three academies would end after a day. According to the Demon Worshipers' estimation, it would take the students half a day to reach the Fifth Floor.

None of them dared to go to the upper floors to attack the students since Professor Rowan could very easily render all their preparations worthless the moment he saw them.

They had already added traps near the entrance of the Fifth Floor, as well as dispersed a paralyzing poison on the ground. The poison would take effect within a few minutes of being inhaled.

With this much preparation, they were confident that they would be able to kill the strongest students before help arrived.

Even if the Paragon of Space himself came to protect the students, his ability to instantly traverse between points would be limited since the laws of the Dungeon were different from the outside world.

He would take at least five minutes to reach the Fifth Floor, which was enough for the Demon Worshipers to kill their designated targets—the Princes of the Solara and Faelarun Kingdoms.

Between the two princes, the Demon Worshipers' priority was Prince Kaelen since he was the Crown Prince of the Elven Kingdom.

If Prince Kaelen died, the Elven Kingdom would definitely break ties with the Kingdom of Avalon, even if they understood that Rowan Vademort wasn't responsible. This would be immensely beneficial for the Demon Worshipers' grand scheme.

"Leader, should we assign scouts to survey the area around the entrance?" one of the Demon Worshipers asked.

“No.” The leader of the team, who went by the name of Gaston, shook his head. “Once the Headmaster notices that something is wrong, our mission will be compromised. It is best to stick to the plan. Besides... This ambush area that we have chosen is the perfect hiding place to launch a sneak attack against those students.”

While this was happening, several of his subordinates dealt with groups of Rank Zombies that were led by a Rank 3 Zombie Knight. As this was a very common sight on the Fifth Floor of the Dungeon, the Demon Worshipers did not dare to let their guard down.

The Boss of the Fifth Floor was a Rank 4 Death Knight. There was also a roaming Rank 4 Zombie Skirmisher, which was considered a Mini Boss.

So far, the Demon Worshipers hadn't encountered any of them since they were stationed in a part of a ruined fortress not easily visible or accessible.

The only consistent problem was the monsters that spawned inside the forest. However, they didn't pose a threat to any of the Demon Worshipers. Since Rank 3 and Rank 4 Warriors made up the bulk of their small army, these monsters were at most pests.

Suddenly, Gaston stood up and glanced around the fortress from his vantage point.

“What's wrong, Leader?” one of his subordinates asked.

“Do you hear something?” Gaston inquired. “Everyone, don't move. Listen well.”

All the Demon Worshipers stopped whatever they were doing and focused on their sense of hearing.

A faint rumbling could be heard in the area, which made all of them wonder what was happening.

They had been inside the Orion Dungeon for a week, and this was the first time they heard something like this.

Even the occasional wail of a Banshee, who would appear from time to time in the Fortress, didn't make them feel the anxiety they felt right now.

It was then that one of the Demon Worshipers noticed something in the black mist surrounding the fortress.

"Over there!" he shouted, pointing in the direction where a few spots of light appeared.

Within a few seconds, the number of glowing spots increased to the dozens.

Half a minute later, countless spots of light were before them, looking almost like stars at night.

"This..." Gaston's eyes widened in shock because he immediately recognized those lights.

They weren't stars but the glowing embers from the eye sockets of Undead Soldiers! And now, a legion of them was heading toward the fortress the Demon Worshipers camped at!

"S-Sir, what is happening?" one of the subordinates asked, his voice cracking from worry.

If it had been only a hundred Undead Monsters, they could've dealt with the problem easily. But the light spots seemed truly endless.

Those at the front mostly glowed orange, but there were a few pairs of red lights.

The red spots belonged to the Rank 3 Zombie Knights, and they were leading the swarm of Rank 2 Zombie Soldiers.

Suddenly, Gaston sensed two powerful presences at the center of the monster army.

The Rank 4 Death Knight and the Rank 4 Zombie Skirmishers were also present!

Just as Gaston thought things couldn't get any worse, the wails of several Banshees, who were Rank 3 Monsters, sent chills down every Demon Worshiper's spine.

The Banshees only occasionally appeared on the Fifth Floor, but they were very common on the Sixth Floor.

Right now, Gaston could see that there were easily over a hundred Banshees hovering above the Zombie Army, slowly but surely marching toward the forest.

"L-Leader! Could this be a Dungeon Outbreak?!" one of his underlings asked, clearly shaken. "We need to get out of here now!"

"Calm down!" Gaston nearly shouted because he was also starting to panic as well.

He was a Rank 5 Warrior, so he was confident of his ability to fight dozens of Zombies at a time.

But even he knew that he alone was not enough to deal with the Undead Horde that was nearing their hiding place.

He was now left with two choices.

The first one was to head to the Fourth Floor and start their mission prematurely.

The second option was to destroy their teleportation crystals and flee while they still could.

"Everyone, head to the Fourth Floor!" Gaston ordered. "Move!"

Although the chances of their mission failing were now high, they had no choice but to abandon their original plan.

The Demon Worshipers didn't hesitate to follow Gaston as he ran toward the path leading to the Fourth Floor.

As they ran with everything they had, they encountered hordes of zombies also going the same way.

Gaston easily crushed them, preventing the worst-case scenario of being surrounded from all sides.

But in the Demon Worshipers' haste, they had completely forgotten about something important.

Realization only dawned upon them after one of their own cried out in pain, his foot struck by a razor-sharp Spring Trap, which they prepared for the students.

Soon, cries of pain, frustration, and fear filled the space as more and more Demon Worshipers were felled by their own traps.

Gaston was infuriated. Because of their carelessness, his underlings were falling into the traps that they had set up themselves!

Spring traps, pit traps, and poison traps were triggered one after the other, immobilizing, maiming, and killing whoever was unlucky enough to step into them.

Those who had fallen behind were forced to use their teleportation crystals to escape before they were killed by the Undead Army, which was now quickly closing in on them after detecting their presence.

But that was a mistake.

Since Professor Rowan was supervising the expedition, he had used his powers to seal off the area within the massive walls that surrounded the dungeon. Anyone—student or not—who broke their teleportation crystals would be forced to appear in this space.

The moment the Demon Worshipers showed up, Professor Rowan didn't hesitate to bind all of them with his magic, preventing them from escaping.

The Professors guarding the dungeon entrance were shocked to see the black-robed men appearing out of nowhere.

As more black-robed men appeared, they finally understood what was happening.

"Demon Worshipers!" Professor Zanna, one of the Alchemy Professors, exclaimed.

She immediately took out a few potions from her storage ring and threw them at the men who weren't supposed to be inside the dungeon.

"Headmaster!" Professor Nixie, who was the Magic Professor teaching the Second Year Students, shouted. "We will deal with them. Protect the students inside the dungeon!"

"Don't worry about them," Professor Rowan answered. "I have already informed the Professors escorting the students to evacuate as soon as possible."

As if to prove him right, several flashes of light appeared nearby. This time, the escapees turned out to be students.

Among them were Fran and Finn, who had experienced getting attacked by dozens of Zombie Wolves on the Second Floor.

Astrea, who also prioritized her safety above all else, led her team outside of the dungeon as soon as the Professors told them that Demon Worshipers had appeared.

The last battle royale had taught the students that they shouldn't take these warnings lightly. All of them escaped as soon as they heard the news.

Meanwhile, Alex and his team—who had gathered on the First Floor of the Dungeon—were dealing with the Rank 1 Skeleton Soldiers that were trying to reach the entrance.

Even if these skeletons numbered in the hundreds, they were no match against the members of Endless Horizon, who had prepared for this moment.

The artifacts that they had prepared had a stacking effect that weakened any Undead Monster within the vicinity.

The talismans were also giving off a gentle light that further weakened the Undead, allowing Chuck, Princess Xenia, and Mary to annihilate them without too much effort.

Dim Dim had also joined the battle, whacking the Undead Soldiers with its Toy Hammer as it bounced off the walls of the dungeon like a ping pong ball.

Alex stood at the center of the formation with his arms crossed. Nessia and Charles were by his side.

“Alex Stratos, what is happening?” Cassandra demanded. When she’d received Theo’s order to monitor Alex and Endless Horizon, she’d not expect that things would go south so quickly.

“A party,” Alex replied cheerfully.

“Excuse me?”

“An Undead Party is happening, so feel free to join us later when things get heated up, okay?”

Cassandra didn’t know what Alex was talking about. But seeing that the young man was planning something, she decided to just wait and observe him more closely.

Alex laughed internally, certain that Cassandra would not be able to maintain her composure for much longer.

The real battle would only happen when the monsters from the lower floors finally reached the surface.

And when that happened, Alex was confident that his team would be able to make a killing by defeating the monsters and farming their valuable cores and parts.

Chapter 347: Death March [Part 3]

“Wait, something doesn’t feel right,” Prince Garen said as he raised his hand.

“What doesn’t feel right, Your Highness?” one of the members of his team asked.

“My gut instinct is telling me we should get out of here,” Prince Garen answered.

Lady Celestria frowned after hearing her cousin’s words. They had been together for many years, and she’d learnt to take his gut instinct seriously.

For a warrior, the Prince’s sixth sense was better than most, allowing him to evade danger several times in the past.

“So, should we fall back?” Lady Celestria inquired.

Prince Garen didn’t reply right away. He narrowed his eyes as he looked at his surroundings, perhaps searching for the reason for his unease.

“Your Highness, the Headmaster just informed me that Demon Worshipers have reportedly appeared outside the dungeon. We must evacuate soon,” reported one of the Professors assigned to the Solara Kingdom.

“I’ve received the same report from the Headmaster just now as well,” Theo, Prince Garen’s older brother, said as he adjusted his glasses. “It’s best if we get out of here while we still can.”

Everyone’s gaze landed on Prince Garen, who seemed to be deep in thought.

"I don't mind leaving," Prince Garen replied after some time. "But let's regroup with the Faelarun Academy first. The Demon Worshipers might be targeting us and the Elves in order to ruin the diplomatic relations between the Kingdoms.

"We need to confirm that the Elves are safe. Regrouping with them will be our top priority. Also, we will inform all the students that we will meet on the way of this development. If Demon Worshipers have indeed infiltrated the Dungeon, they will be in danger as well."

Everyone was impressed with Prince Garen's decision, thinking it was something only a true member of the Royal Family would say.

"Understood." Lady Celestria nodded. "I'll use my spell to find the team from Faelarun right now."

As Lady Celestria chanted, a silver butterfly emerged from the tip of her staff.

"Find them, now!" Lady Celestria ordered.

The butterfly flew away as if it had locked onto something, prompting everyone to follow its lead.

Along the way, they happened to come across Renard, who was being mobbed by over a dozen Zombie Monkeys.

The monsters' eyes were blood red as if they had entered a Berserk state.

Renard was strong, but even he had trouble fending off the monkeys, who were fighting him tooth and nail.

The young man's arms were bloodied. He had also already received several scratch marks from the rampaging monkeys.

These monkeys were Mid-Rank 2 Monsters, but in their current state, their fighting prowess was nearly Rank 3.

As such, even though Renard could still beat them, it wouldn't be an easy fight at all.

"Help him!" Lady Celestria commanded.

The students from the Solara Academy moved and joined the battle as a single unit.

Prince Garen had already joined the battle before Lady Celestria had given the order.

Just as Theo and the Professor thought that things were under control, more Zombie Monkeys emerged from the forest, and all of them had also entered the Berserk state.

Since it was an emergency, Theo no longer held back and joined the battle.

He was a Rank 4 Solar Knight. The moment he drew his sword, blazing flames immediately covered its blade.

"Fire Wall!" Theo waved his hand, and a wall of flames appeared on the path of the crazed monkeys, who were charging toward the students.

He thought it would be enough to intimidate the monkeys since Undead Monsters were generally weak against fire.

To his shock, the monkeys passed through his Fire Wall and continued running, not caring even though parts of their bodies were now burning.

"Argh!" one of the students screamed as four monkeys took advantage of his surprise and ganged up on him, covering him in deep, bloody cuts.

"Crouch down!" Prince Garen shouted.

The student didn't hesitate to obey his leader, crouching down just in time to evade a blazing sword that slashed across the bodies of the Zombie Monkeys, cutting them in half.

Their bodies turned into black mists, leaving behind their Monster Cores.

It was at this moment that the students heard the clapping of numerous horses, prompting them to turn to their right.

There, countless Skeleton War Hounds—supposedly dwelling on the Third Floor of the Dungeon—were charging straight at them.

Nearly everyone froze, overwhelmed by the sight.

“Break your teleportation crystals now!” Theo shouted, bringing everyone out of their daze. “The Headmaster has interrogated the Demon Worshipers. It seems that a Dungeon Outbreak is underway!”

A Dungeon Outbreak was one of the things no Adventurer wanted to experience, especially when they were diving deep inside a dungeon.

No matter how strong someone was, staying inside the dungeon while all the monsters from the lower floors were rushing to the surface was suicide.

“Renard, get out of here!” Lady Celestria yelled. “A Dungeon Outbreak is happening!”

Renard glanced at her. He forcibly broke the teleportation crystal of a Solara student who had been seriously injured by the monkeys after trying to help him.

“Understood, but I'll only leave after you guys have left!” Renard shouted.

The other members of the party also urged the Prince and Lady Celestria to leave first. They were unwilling to leave before ensuring the safety of their Prince and Saintess.

Understanding they wouldn't go no matter what, Lady Celestria gritted her teeth and broke her teleportation crystal first.

A flash of light covered her body, then she was gone without a trace.

Prince Garen also broke his own teleportation crystal, not to save himself but to save the students who would not escape until he was safe and sound.

Only then did the other Solara students break their teleportation crystals.

After the last student disappeared in a flash of light, Theo was ready to leave, too. He was about to activate his teleportation crystal when he saw Renard running toward the exit that would take him back to the First Floor.

Torn between following Renard and escaping the dungeon, Theo clenched his fists, cursed colorfully in his heart, and ran after the prickly First Year.

As the Student Council President, his duty was to ensure the safety of the students. Even if it meant risking his safety, he would not leave until he personally saw Renard leave the dungeon first.

Meanwhile, Prince Kaelen and Lapis also found themselves surrounded on all sides by the Undead residents of the dungeon.

After hearing that Demon Worshipers had suddenly appeared at the entrance of the dungeon, the Elven Prince concluded that whatever was happening right now was a ploy by the underground organization.

"Everyone, break your teleportation crystal!" Prince Kaelen shouted.

"Brother, break yours first," Lapis said in a tone that indicated she could not be persuaded otherwise. "I'll leave right after you."

The Prince didn't plan on endangering his sister, so he immediately broke his teleportation crystal.

After he disappeared in front of her, Lapis followed suit. The rest of the elves followed afterward.

All the students on the Second Floor had teleported outside the dungeon. Right now, the only students in the Dungeon were the members of Endless Horizon on the First Floor.

Cassandra and Professor Arabelle had been informed of the developments inside and outside of the dungeon, and they quickly passed the news to Alex and his club members.

Alex laughed internally, having thought of a wonderful idea.

'It will be best to push the blame to the Demon Worshipers,' Alex thought. 'That way, Charles won't be under suspicion for triggering this Dungeon Outbreak.'

No matter how he looked, this was the perfect plan.

Since the Demon Worshipers were an evil organization anyway, no one would bat an eye if they were accused of something terrible.

Although the Demon Worshipers could deny being involved, they also had no way of defending themselves. Who would believe that they just "happened" to be waiting in the dungeon to ambush the students when the Outbreak started?

They had no idea that they would soon become the scapegoat of an unassuming First Year student called Charles Lambert!

Alex wanted to keep gloating, but he was also worried about Endless Horizon's black sheep. Would Renard realize that the club seemed to

Chapter 348: Prepare To Loot! [Part 1]

Renard dashed through the dozens of Undead as he rushed toward the First Floor.

His injuries had been treated by Lady Celestria earlier, so although still in pain, he was no longer bleeding.

As he made a mad dash toward the surface, the dungeon shook faintly. It was as if the very ground itself was groaning at the tide of monsters surging upward.

Theo followed Renard closely, his blazing sword cutting down stray Undead that tried to block their path.

The last thing they wanted to happen was to be encircled, which would make breaking through that much harder. Fortunately, Renard wasn't weak, so Theo didn't have to worry about protecting him.

Sparks of fire scattered with each swing of his sword, but even the Solar Knight could tell that unless they leave, they might soon join the Undead doomed to wander within the Orion Dungeon forever.

"Renard, what do you think you're doing?!" Theo yelled. "Teleport outside the dungeon now!"

"You should take your own advice," Renard replied as he continued to run. "I'm going to find my club members on the First Floor. Knowing our president, he might have already predicted that a Dungeon Outbreak would happen."

"What did you say?!" Theo couldn't believe the words spilling from the young man's mouth. "Alex already knew something like this was going to happen?!"

"I'm not entirely sure, but he has made some preparations beforehand," Renard answered. "That's why I'm heading back to the First Floor. I know for sure that he's there, probably wishing I get beaten to death by the Undead."

Theo's flames flared hotter as his blade seared through a Zombie Monkey that had lunged at him from behind.

"This is insanity!" Theo growled, sweat dripping down his temples. "If he knew this was going to happen, why didn't he warn the Academy?!"

Renard smirked dryly as he punched through a skeleton's ribcage and shattered its body completely without breaking his stride.

"Obviously, almost no one trusts him, President. You wouldn't have believed him either."

Theo clenched his jaw, unable to refute Renard's words.

Alex was not exactly the most trustworthy person.

He had been the center of attention, especially during the Battle Royale, but that didn't mean he was widely liked.

Due to the blackmailing incident, the Crest Clubs had also started treating him like a honey badger that would not hesitate to bite them to the death if they even dared to poke its nose!

'After this is over, I'm going to have a long talk with him!' Theo decided, panting.

The Student Council President was strong, but he had to admit that he was out of shape.

Continuously handling the affairs of the academy had given him very little time to train his body regularly.

He hadn't even been able to maintain his habit of jogging every morning, too sleep-deprived from preparing for the dungeon expedition.

Fortunately, according to the report of the other Student Councilors, most of the students had already evacuated the Dungeon.

In fact, only Alex's team remained behind. Upon learning that, Theo wanted nothing more than to personally kick all these troublemakers out of the dungeon!

"I can see the exit!" Renard shouted. As much of a loner as he was, he still bothered to inform Theo that they were nearing their destination.

The Undead Monsters running after them from behind numbered in the hundreds. The last thing Theo wanted was to trip and get swarmed by them.

The mere thought of that happening gave him goosebumps, so he focused his attention on running instead.

After breaking past the last hurdle, the two found themselves on the First Floor, which was swarming with Undead Skeletons.

Renard and Theo bulldozed their way through the monsters that were in their way as they retraced their steps.

A few minutes later, Theo saw a very familiar face, which made the corner of his lips twitch.

Why, it was none other than a little bun bouncing off the dungeon walls and whacking every Undead with its Toy Hammer.

"Isn't that Dim Dim?" Theo muttered when his gaze landed on the little guy, who seemed to be having fun smacking the heads of the Skeleton Soldiers and shattering them into oblivion.

When the pair got closer, they immediately sensed the power of Holy Magic, which must've made the Undead Skeletons sluggish.

"Dim Dim!" Dim Dim greeted Renard and Theo, who had finally arrived near the slaughter zone Endless Horizon had prepared.

Renard smashed the Skeleton Soldiers that were still on his path before stopping near the little bun, who looked very proud of itself.

“Ahem!” Dim Dim stood a little straighter, as if telling Renard to praise it for being a good gatekeeper.

But instead of doing that, Renard asked the most important question of all.

“Where is Alex?”

“Dim!” Dim Dim pointed behind it.

Renard hesitated before picking up the little bun and dashing down the corridor.

Dim Dim wanted to protest that it still wanted to play, but decided that taking a break was also a good option.

When they arrived at the spacious cavern where Alex, Cassandra, Charles, and Nessia were, Theo couldn't help but gasp. The entire place was filled with talismans!

All of them were radiating Holy Power, which made him hope that even the hordes of monsters that had been following them wouldn't be able to get past their camp.

“Ah, welcome back, Renard,” Alex greeted. “Did you have fun?”

Renard didn't reply. Instead, he approached Nessia and asked if she had some potions he could drink to recover his strength and stamina.

Instead of teasing him like Alex might have, Nessia gave the young man what he wanted. Renard's fighting abilities was known to all, and he'd certainly be very helpful in dealing with the High-Ranking Undead.

“President, you're here.” Cassandra immediately went to Theo's side. “I'm glad you're safe.”

“Cassandra, give me a report on what’s happening here,” Theo ordered before accepting the potion that the young lady handed to him.

Cassandra told him everything that she knew, including the Demon Worshipers and the Dungeon Outbreak.

Theo didn’t stop her, carefully listening until she was finished.

“Thank you for the report,” Theo said as he shifted his attention to Alex. “Alex Stratos, the dungeon competition will be canceled. Please take your members outside the dungeon.”

Alex shook his head. “I’m sorry, President. We still haven’t recovered our investment, so we plan to stay here for a while.”

“Are you crazy?!” Theo asked, his eyes bulging in disbelief. “The entire dungeon is crawling with Undead, and you plan to stay here?!”

“Yes,” Alex answered. “You should go back, President. I’m staying here.”

Theo wanted to crush the young man’s teleportation crystal, but he quickly realized that it was not around Alex’s neck.

Clearly, he was serious when he said that he planned to stay and recoup the investment he put into this dungeon expedition.

Just as Theo was thinking of ways to convince him, they heard a rumbling sound coming from the other end of the corridor.

Chuck, Princess Xenia, Professor Arabella, and Mary also returned to the sanctuary after sensing that fighting solo was no longer an option.

“They’re here,” Alex said with a smile. “Time to get rich.”

Theo, Cassandra, and Professor Arabella felt their blood pressures spiking after hearing this shameless declaration.

Alex was probably the only student who would treat a Dungeon Outbreak as a moneymaking opportunity.

But they didn't have the time to rebuke him because the Undead that had been running after Renard and Theo were now charging through the corridor even though it was littered with talismans.

"Prepare for battle!" Theo shouted.

"Prepare to loot!" Alex shouted at the same time.

The moment the swarm of Undead burst into the spacious cavern, all of their bodies exploded into black mists.

Countless Monster Cores fell to the ground.

The talismans that littered the corridor and the cavern were especially lethal to Rank 2 Undead Monsters and above. They would be vaporized the moment they entered Alex's and Nessia's killing formation.

It was similar to stepping onto a field filled with landmines.

Like moths drawn to a flame, the Undead died even before they could touch Alex and his club members.

Meanwhile, Theo, Cassandra, and Professor Arabella could only gawk at Alex as he used a special artifact to suck up the monster cores lying on the ground because he couldn't be bothered to pick them up one by one.

Chapter 349: Prepare To Loot! [Part 2]

Since most of the teleportation crystals had been broken, the students and the professors could only see the events that were happening around Alex and his club members.

When they saw the countless monsters cores being sucked up by Alex's magical artifact, all of their eyes widened.

Some felt envy, some jealousy, others admiration, while some thought that they should probably become Alex's disciples and learn the art of shamelessness.

There were even others who considered ambushing Alex to steal his magical artifact so that they could get filthy rich by selling the monster cores that he had looted.

However, what they didn't know was that even if they stole the magical artifact, they wouldn't get anything.

Why?

Because the magical artifact was connected to Dim Dim's dimensional storage!

Alex knew that the Professors might confiscate his magical artifact and inspect his storage rings. Who knew what might happen to his hard-earned treasures during their inspection?

But that was no trouble for a genius like him! He was one step ahead of them!

Even among the members of Endless Horizon, no one would suspect the little innocent bun to be the treasure keeper of their club.

However, this was just the start. Alex still needed more items to break even. He had spared almost no expense while preparing for this operation.

"Dim Dim!" Dim Dim reported that the monsters from the Second Floor were now rushing to the other corridors that led to their location.

“About time.” Alex grinned. “Everyone, fall back a bit. You might get buried by an influx of monster cores.”

Everyone, including Renard, took a few steps back because they weren’t sure if the stampeding monsters would all turn to monster cores or not.

Since some of the monsters might manage to resist the holy power of the talismans, the students decided to stand a bit further from the corridors so they could react in time and kill the survivors.

But the moment the Zombie Wolves, the Zombie Monkeys, the Zombie Boars, as well as the other monsters that were common on the Second Floor of the Dungeon entered the spacious cavern, all of them died instantly.

The sound of monster cores clinking as they fell like rain was music to Alex’s ears. It was similar to the sound of coins falling on top of each other. It was truly a marvelous thing to see.

“Dim Dim!”

“Um? Okay, you can use this, Dim Dim.”

Alex placed the magical artifact on the ground and Dim Dim hopped on top of it.

A moment later, all the monster cores were being swiftly swallowed by the artifact, making the little bun giggle in amusement and delight.

Professor Rowan glanced at the projection before shifting his attention to the Demon Worshipers that he had captured.

After some interrogation, he found out that there had been more than a hundred of them inside the dungeon. At least forty of them had used their teleportation crystals.

This meant that there were more Demon Worshipers inside the dungeon that still hadn't activated their teleportation crystals.

Because of this, Professor Rowan decided to stay outside of the dungeon, just in case they decided to teleport en masse.

The other Professors and the students wouldn't be able to handle such an influx of Demon Worshipers, so he prioritized their safety.

As for Alex and his team, Professor Rowan could easily come to their rescue if the Demon Worshipers arrived at their location.

But since they were coming from the Fifth Floor, it would take them several hours before they could reach the First Floor.

Until then, Alex and his group were safe.

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Somewhere on the Fourth Floor of the Dungeon....

Gaston gritted his teeth in frustration as he annihilated a group of monsters that had ambushed his forces as soon as they arrived at the Fourth Floor.

The majority of them had been Rank 2 Monsters, but there had been a few Rank 3 Monsters here and there.

The Fourth Floor was a massive cavern, and the only monsters that could be seen here were bats.

Dealing with a dozen or two was still fine, but dealing with tens of thousands of them?

It was a nightmare, especially for the lower-ranked members of his group.

Having countless Rank 2 Vampire Bats, Rank 2 Shadow Bats, Rank 2 Sonic Bats, and Rank 2 Venom Bats swarm you was enough for you to bleed to death.

As they were immune to sonic and sound based attacks, the Sonic Bats could screech all they wanted and only their human opponents would be affected.

With thousands of them screeching at the same time, all the Demon Worshipers lost their sense of hearing.

The blood flowing down many Demon Worshipers' necks revealed that their eardrums had been ruptured.

The Rank 3 Bats, which were stronger, were just as annoying.

The Rank 2 bats had a wingspan of two meters, while the Elder Bats had a wingspan of three.

It didn't help that the cavern was very dim. Without a source of light, the chances of dying here were guaranteed.

"Everyone, close your eyes and lower your heads!" Gaston's second in command, who was a mage, shouted.

"Day Break!"

A second later, a radiant light banished the darkness, making the bats screech in pain as they backed away in a hurry.

The Demon Worshipers who were slow to act found themselves temporarily blinded by the light that appeared out of nowhere.

The Mages finally regained their composure and started using spells to kill as many of the Bats as they could.

Some of them also used light magic to illuminate their surroundings, forcing the bats to retreat.

However, the damage was already done.

Nearly twenty members of their group had perished in that short period of time. Many of those lucky enough to survive suffered moderate to serious injuries.

They hurriedly drank and poured potions all over their bodies in an attempt to recover as fast as possible.

All of them knew that once the bats regained their senses, they would get accustomed to the light and mob them once again without mercy.

“Run while you still can!” Gaston shouted as he took the lead so that others could follow.

Truth be told, he was very tempted to use his teleportation crystal to escape this madness. But if he did that, he would find himself before the Headmaster of the Academy, Professor Rowan. And that was something that he didn’t want to happen no matter what.

His only hope of survival was to catch at least a student or two and use them as hostages so that he and his followers could leave the city safely.

He had already told his men to only use their teleportation crystals as a last resort to save their lives.

Until then, all of them would move as a team to reach the upper floors.

As to how many would remain by then, even Gaston didn’t dare to guess.

Currently, there were around twenty-eight members who were still with him.

If they managed to escape the Fourth Floor without having any more casualties, they had a good chance of turning this situation around.

Gaston could only hope that there were some foolhardy students still challenging the dungeon. If he could catch some of them, he might be able to ensure the survival of some of his men.

Of course, he wasn't aware that all the students on the Second Floor had already returned to safety.

If he was to survive at all, his only option was to capture Alex's team on the First Floor.

Chapter 350: He's Not A Fish, You Know?

Vaan had chosen to stay outside of the dungeon to serve as Alex's eyes and ears.

Perhaps there was no one more wary of Demon Worshipers than Vaan because he had lived a few years under Willow's control.

Truth be told, he had developed an innate fear of them. Before the expedition, he had confided this to Alex.

As such, Alex had decided to let Vaan stay outside the dungeon so that he wouldn't have to fight against the Demon Worshipers directly.

After seeing the Demon Worshipers that the Headmaster had subdued, Vaan recalled the horrors that he experienced back then.

However, since he knew that fighting against them was inevitable, he steeled himself and looked at them so that he could develop some kind of resistance against them.

Although his face had turned pale and his body would shudder from time to time, Vaan clenched his fists and refused to look away.

Alex had jokingly told him something a day before they went to the dungeon.

“If they can bleed, they can be killed,” Alex had said. “Do not forget that the majority of the Demon Worshipers are just mere mortals, Vaan. If you stab their hearts with your spear, they will die just like everyone else.”

Vaan took some deep breaths in order to calm himself.

He then glanced at Alex’s projection in front of the dungeon, as if drawing strength from his fearless leader.

Seeing Alex and Dim Dim loot the monster cores that were dropping on the ground like rain, Vaan couldn’t help but smile. Despite the fear and anxiety that had taken hold of his body, the sight of his club members cheered him up.

Little by little, his hands and body stopped shaking. A small spark of courage grew in his heart.

He once again stared at the Demon Worshipers. As his anxiety faded, he could finally notice their injured and pitiful conditions.

In fact, it was the Demon Worshipers who should feel frightened because they were facing the Paragon of Space, Rowan Vademont!

The moment they appeared in front of him, their fates were already sealed.

“Are you alright, Vaan?”

A familiar voice reached his ears. When he turned around, he saw Fran standing behind him.

“You look pale.” Fran frowned. “Are you sick? Are you hurt?”

"I'm fine, Fran," Vaan replied, touched by her concern. "Just a little under the weather."

Fran glanced in the direction where her classmate had been looking earlier and somehow understood what was happening.

She was aware that Vaan's body had been possessed by an Elder of the Demon Worshipers. He had doubtlessly suffered greatly because of it.

"Don't worry, Vaan, you're safe now," Fran said softly. "Alex and the Headmaster will protect you."

"Right." Vaan couldn't help but feel safer after hearing Fran's words.

Indeed, Alex had promised to protect Vaan from the Demon Worshipers.

Professor Rowan was also a Paragon. Even the Executives of the underground organization wouldn't dare to face him head-on unless they really had no choice.

"I know I'm safe," Vaan said, forcing a small smile. "But sometimes... it feels like their shadows are still clinging to me."

Fran didn't respond right away because she knew that a trauma wasn't an easy thing to overcome.

Knowing that Vaan was trying to overcome his fears was enough for her to believe that he truly wanted to break free from the chains that still bound him even now.

Finally, she spoke. Her voice was calm but firm, like a steady flame in the dark.

"Shadows only look big when the light is behind you, Vaan. One day, you'll learn to stand where the light shines and they'll shrink to nothing."

Vaan's eyes widened slightly at her words before a faint smile appeared on his lips. He then glanced at the young man on the projection, who was smiling from ear to ear as more monster cores dropped down on the ground in front of him.

"You're right, Fran," Vaan muttered. "And that light has always been with me since I was freed from that dark and lonely place."

At that moment, he felt his connection with Alex strengthen through the pledge that he'd made that day.

Because of that pledge, he instinctively knew where his Liege was, just like how Alex knew where Vaan was.

For better or worse, he had tied his destiny with the Oathkeeper, who would hold his oath until he breathed his last.

Vaan then closed his eyes and took a deep breath.

When he opened them again, a look of determination could be seen in his eyes.

He then summoned his spear and walked towards the entrance of the Dungeon.

"Where are you going?" Fran asked.

"To where my light is shining brightly," Vaan replied. "I don't want to run away anymore."

The dwarven lady watched as Vaan disappeared into the entrance of the dungeon.

Another projection then appeared in front of everyone. This time, the students and professors could see Vaan heading towards the slaughter zone his club members had prepared.

Prince Garen's eyes widened in shock when he saw this scene.

Although he no longer made any attempt to approach Vaan, his eyes couldn't help but look at the person whom he secretly wanted to protect.

"Are you not going to follow her?" Lady Celestria asked in a teasing tone.

"I've already broken my teleportation crystal," Prince Garen replied. "It would be too dangerous for me to enter a dungeon that is currently experiencing an outbreak. I have to consider my position and cannot be selfish at this time."

The Prince then held his cousin's gaze and smirked.

"What about you?" Prince Garen asked. "Aren't you going to go and help Renard?"

A blush appeared on Lady Celestria's face at the mere mention of Renard.

"Y-You... What are you thinking?" Lady Celestria asked. "It's not like that!"

"Uh huh!" Prince Garen laughed. "I've known you since you were seven. Do you really think I won't know what you're thinking?"

"I'm just scouting him because he has talent," Lady Celestria insisted.

"Sure, we'll go with that." Prince Garen grinned. "But, remember this, Celestria. That man is not easy to tame. You need to put in a lot of effort or he will break away from your fishing hook."

"... He's not a fish, you know?" Lady Celestria shook her head helplessly.

"So, you're telling me that he's not a catch?" Prince Garen arched an eyebrow.

Not wanting to continue this topic anymore, Lady Celestria ignored her cousin and glanced in Renard's projection.

Although she looked calm on the surface, she was actually quite worried.

A Dungeon Outbreak was no laughing matter.

And yet instead of panicking, everyone was looking at Alex and Dim Dim, who were happily looting the monster cores around them.

"This is absurd," Lady Celestria muttered. "Does he have nerves of steel or what?"

The Saintess couldn't help but compare Alex to Renard.

Both of them didn't get along, but there were times when she couldn't help but wonder what would happen if Renard actually listened to Alex.

Renard's brawn and Alex's brain would be a very dangerous combination.

'That is also the reason why I must make Renard enroll at Solara Academy,' Lady Celestria thought. 'If he remains around Alex, he will continue to feel inferior because he will compare himself to his club president's accomplishments.'

However, regardless of how the Saintess truly felt, one thing was certain.

She wished that Renard would choose her over Alex.

That way, she could help him grow into a stronger version of himself.

Free from the influence of the shameless young man, whose smile was making her feel a little upset because he too was a talent that she wanted to bring to Solara Academy as well.