

Endless 351

Chapter 351: Are You Guys Afraid Of The Dark? [Part 1]

"I love Hell Mode!" Alex laughed out loud as the wave of monsters turned into waves of monster cores.

Although he knew Rank 5 Monsters and above were on their way to the surface, he showed no worry whatsoever.

Why?

All of them still had their teleportation crystals. If things got too dangerous, everyone from Endless Horizon could just teleport out and leave the rest for Professor Rowan to handle!

Alex had no plans to risk anyone's life, including his, by futilely fighting against powerful monsters like Liches and Death Lords.

He also knew some Demon Worshipers remained in the Dungeon and were currently struggling to survive, but he didn't fear meeting them.

After all, he'd already thought of it. By the time the Demon Worshipers reached the First Floor, they would be too exhausted or too injured to pose a threat to them.

And even if that wasn't the case, Alex had already prepared a big surprise meant for them.

He'd already figured out what must be done if the Demon Worshipers still had the energy to pick a fight. So, he wasn't even worried even if they arrived right now.

'I'm sure Gaston is cursing his bad luck after encountering a Dungeon Outbreak during this mission,' Alex thought. 'If I remember correctly, he should be a Rank 5 Warrior at the moment.'

As someone who had played the game, Alex already knew Gaston's strengths and weaknesses.

In fact, the silver-haired young man looked forward to dealing with the Captain of the Demon Worshipers, who was under the command of one of their Elders.

The higher-ups of the Demon Worshipers consisted of nine Elders, four Executives, and one Demon Lord.

Willow was one of the Elders, but she was now dead, so only eight Elders remained.

The Demon Lord was the head of the organization, but he didn't give a hoot about what his subordinates were doing.

It was more accurate to say that the Demon Lord was just an honorary position, coincidentally at the very top, probably as a figurehead. He didn't need to do anything at all.

Simply put, the real decision makers of the organization were the four Executives and the remaining eight Elders.

Each had their own role to play and were mostly autonomous in their actions.

These factions collaborated only whenever necessary, but most of the time, they simply competed with each other.

That said, the only one Alex was more weary about was Eleanora's Master, one of the Executives of the organization and the Vampire Lord.

He had lived for thousands of years and was a Rank 8 Powerhouse.

'Only stupid people will mess with Eleanora,' Alex thought. 'The best way to deal with her is not to deal with her in the first place!'

The moment this thought appeared in the young man's head, he heard a sneeze not far from him.

“Someone must be thinking I’m the most handsome guy in the academy right now,” Chuck said before flipping his hair. “Haters gonna hate.”

Hearing such outrageously shameless words, Eleanora flipped off the screen.

None could top the hate she had for Chuck right now. Nothing and no one!

Unfortunately for her, reporting the incident to her Master was not possible since she was bound by a powerful contract that would immediately erase her soul if she were to betray her new Master in any way.

As such, Eleanora found herself stuck in a very passive position, to her vexation.

If Alex only knew that the most troublesome spy of the Demon Worshipers had already been dealt with, he wouldn’t be worrying about how to deal with her right now!

At that moment, Vaan appeared inside the spacious cavern and didn’t hesitate to walk toward Alex.

“Did something happen?” Alex asked, believing Vaan had no reason to enter the dungeon.

“The Demon Worshipers have been neutralized by the Headmaster,” Vaan replied.

“Then, are you alright?” Alex looked at the pretty boy, whose face was still a little pale.

“Yes.” Vaan nodded. “I just want to have a change of scenery... and maybe loot a few monster cores as well?”

Alex smirked. “Go ahead. There’s plenty for everyone.”

“O-Oi! That’s not what you told me earlier!” Chuck immediately complained. “You said those monster cores are for our club funds?”

“That’s right.” Alex smiled faintly.

“How come Vaan can get a few monster cores, but I’m not allowed to get even one?”

“Why? Because Vaan is Vaan.”

“... What the hell, dude?”

Vaan giggled at the sight of Chuck’s indignant expression that basically screamed ‘What is this discrimination?’

“Alright, don’t make a fuss.” Alex sighed. “You can take a few monster cores. Happy now?”

“How many is few?” Chuck asked.

“You can get thirty Rank 2 Cores.”

“Deal!”

The self-proclaimed most handsome guy in the academy didn’t hesitate to pick up his share of the loot.

Meanwhile, Vaan remained standing by Alex’s side with his hands clasped behind his back.

“I thought you wanted to pick up some monster cores?” Alex arched an eyebrow.

“I’m just joking,” Vaan answered. “Since it’s for our club funds, I’m sure you will put those cores to good use.”

Although the pretty boy looked fine on the surface, Alex could tell that Vaan was still feeling anxious.

Little did Alex know that Vaan's true purpose for coming in was to protect him, just in case the Demon Worshipers arrived.

Vaan had a deep-seated fear for them, but he also knew that if he didn't fight, he would remain afraid of them till the day he died.

For him, this was his first step in overcoming his fears.

Unknown to Vaan, the symbol VII glowed faintly on the back of his right hand.

Since he was clasping his hands behind his back, he wasn't able to see it.

As an Apostle Candidate, one of the requirements Vaan must meet to become an official Apostle was to overcome the fears in his heart.

Only then would he be able to charge across battlefields, riding on the Sun Chariot that would trample those who dared to block his way.

A few hours later, the Monsters on the lower floors surged like raging tides.

The Mini Bosses and the Boss Monsters of the Fifth and Tenth Floors had already reached the Third Floor.

Meanwhile, Gaston and his twelve remaining subordinates had finally reached the First Floor after their horrific experience on the Third Floor of the Orion Dungeon.

Chapter 352: Are You Guys Afraid Of The Dark? [Part 2]

Gaston and his men ran as fast as they could.

It was hard to tell what colours their clothes had originally been. They were all in red, dyed by the blood of themselves, their allies, and the monsters they had killed on their way to the surface.

Blood continued to seep through their clothes, but they were unable to heal their wounds as they had used up all their potions when they'd been faced with a massive swarm of bloodthirsty bats on the Third Floor.

While they managed to hold their ground at first, they were only human and had limits to their stamina.

Although they could still fight, they knew they wouldn't last and that escaping was their best option.

Even the Mages who could cast powerful spells had spent nearly all their mana and had started to reserve their power for moments of great danger.

With all their resources gone, they were pushed into dire straits.

'Sh*t!' Gaston cursed for the umpteenth time as he once again sensed the presence of the Zombie Skirmisher, a Rank 4 Mini Boss.

This zombie monster moved so fast that Gaston couldn't land a direct blow on its body despite being a Rank 5 Warrior.

The monster's claws also had a very potent paralyzing poison, causing the unjust deaths of many of his subordinates.

All it took was a graze of its sharp claws and they would be paralyzed in minutes, helpless to defend themselves from the bats who would swoop in for the kill.

The Death Knight was easier to hit, but hard to kill.

What it lost to the Zombie Skirmisher in terms of speed, it more than made up with its strength.

Its Strength Stat was higher than Gaston's, so every time they clashed, Gaston was the one being pushed back.

If not for the fact that he had gone all out to kill the Death Knight's horse, the Boss Monster would have also given them trouble when they climbed to the upper floors.

"Noooooooooooo! Arghhh!"

"Save me, Leader!"

A scream from his subordinates reached Gaston's ear, but he forced himself to ignore it.

As a spent candle himself, he didn't have the strength to help anyone.

Running, fighting, and doing his best to survive had already pushed him to his limit.

The only thing that kept him going was the faint hope of stumbling upon a student whom he could use as a hostage to escape the Headmaster of Frieden Academy.

But that hope had started to die.

One of the reasons why it took him some time to reach the First Floor was because he made a detour on the Second Floor to look for any stray students.

He had found several tracks in the forest, so he chose to follow them, only to come to a dead end every time.

The students had used their teleportation crystals, so their trails stopped abruptly.

He'd lost count of how many times he considered using his teleportation crystal.

He knew that if he did, he would immediately face Professor Rowan. And that was no different from a death sentence.

So, despite how desperate his situation was, he still clung to that hope that there were still some stupid students who refused to leave the dungeon.

Suddenly, he heard the sounds of what seemed to be monsters fighting against someone.

“Men, prepare for battle!” Gaston shouted, informing his remaining subordinates that they had finally found a way to survive.

But when he glanced behind him, he only saw four people still following him.

The rest was nowhere to be seen, making him grit his teeth in frustration.

Clearly, the Zombie Skirmisher had neutralized his men, and if he didn’t escape soon, he would suffer the same fate as them.

As he and his men ran through the corridor, they were able to see a light at the end.

All of them sped up subconsciously and made a mad sprint towards the light.

The moment they stepped into the spacious cavern, their gazes landed on a few students.

Who stood only dozens of meters away from them.

However, just as Gaston and his men were about to neutralize these naive students, the young man who seemed to be their leader smiled and spoke in a teasing tone.

“Are you guys afraid of the dark?” Alex asked as he tore the magic scroll in his hands.

When the magic of the magic scroll activated, Gaston and his men immediately lost their vision.

It was not only their sight that they lost, but all five of their senses.

The Demon Worshipers blanked out for a brief moment before resuming their charge in the direction where they last saw the students.

Having lost their sense of touch, they didn’t even realize they hit an Earth Wall—which Professor Arabella had cast—and were falling to the ground.

They even thought they were still running when, in reality, they were just squirming on the ground like beetles that had been turned upside down!

Renard, Charles, Theo, Mary, and Cassandra all moved in unison to neutralize the Demon Worshipers and knock them out.

They didn’t have a hard time doing so since their enemies were already on their last leg.

Alex looked at the defeated Demon Worshipers and finally sighed in relief.

He had spent five hundred thousand academy points to buy the scroll.

The name of the magic spell was “No Sense,” an AOE attack effective against Rank 5 opponents and below.

It also worked against Boss Monsters, though it would only last for a minute. This was Alex’s trump card against the Demon Worshipers, and it worked to his favor.

“I think that’s all of them,” Alex said, relieved.

As if to confirm his words, he heard a notification sound inside his head as a blue window screen appeared in front of him.

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< You have completed a Hidden Quest! >

< Quest Name: The Ambush in the Orion Dungeon! >

< Mission Goal: Defeat the Demon Worshipers who are planning to kill the students of the three academies! >

< Rewards: 5,000 Arcana Points, 1 Super Rare Skill Book of your choice! >

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'Sweet!' Alex almost did a fist pump after seeing the rewards that appeared after completing the hidden quest.

Arcana Points were difficult to obtain, so he wasn't getting a lot as of late. Also, the Super Rare Skill Book was a godsend.

There were a few skills that he wanted to add to his arsenal. Having this opportunity would further strengthen his fighting ability.

As he was still caught up in the delight of receiving such rewards, the Zombie Skirmisher jumped out of the corridor with its claws ready to strike.

However, Chuck was quick to bind it with his flame whip. He then held it mid-air for Dim Dim to throw brittle vials at. Each vial was filled to the brim with Holy Water, and the Dim Sum God used five just in case.

The pitiful Mini Boss screamed as its entire body ignited in flames before turning into a black mist, leaving its Monster Core behind.

Alex's killing zone could greatly weaken monsters up to Rank 5.

In short, the moment the Mini Boss entered the sanctuary that Endless Horizon had prepared, it became as weak as a Rank 2 Zombie Wolf, which was quite easy to kill.

Just as Chuck picked up the Rank 4 Core, the sound of countless bats screeching reached their ears.

"Alex..." Nessia frowned.

"Don't worry." Alex gave the young lady a thumbs-up. "Trust your rune magic."

A moment later, countless Rank 2 Bats flew into the cavern, only to screech their last.

The dozens of Rank 3 Bats, who were mixed in the group, were easily handled by Dim Dim. It simply tossed brittle vial after brittle vial of Sun Stone Powder.

These brittle vials detonated and unleashed a radiant flash of light, exploding like fireworks within the dark mists caused by the dying bats.

< Level Up! >

< Level Up! >

< Level Up! >

The sound of leveling up was like music to Alex's ears. He had already leveled up thirty-five times since the start of the Dungeon Outbreak. His goal to reach Rank 3 seemed more and more achievable with each passing moment.

When he entered the dungeon, his combined stats were 330.

After leveling up thirty-five times, his combined stats were now at 435.

The moment his overall stats—excluding Stamina, Magic, and Luck—reached 500, he would finally break through to the next rank.

With his opponents getting stronger, Alex badly needed a powerup right now. Fortunately, the Dungeon Outbreak was the perfect place to gain some experience points, which not only benefited him but his entire team as well.

"Is it just me, or have I been getting stronger?" Chuck muttered as he casually used his Fire Whips to hit the Rank 3 Bats that were barely alive after entering their sanctuary.

It was not only him who felt this way.

All of them, excluding Professor Arabella, Theo, and Cassandra, had indeed become stronger through their party-wide experience sharing.

In order to avoid this topic, Alex coughed lightly and made a declaration.

"Those bats are from the Fourth Floor," Alex said to inform everyone. "Once the bats disappear, we will evacuate the dungeon."

Alex believed that he could still handle the monsters from the Fifth Floor. However, he didn't want to take any more chances.

As soon as he reached Rank 3, he would leave the Dungeon without a second glance.

He had more than enough monster cores to gain a profit from this experience. He had also decided to dump all of his stat points to Constitution.

Why?

Because he planned to raise his Health Points, so he could lean on his stacked passive reflection ability from his skills and equipment!

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Alex Stratos

Age: 17

Alignment: Chaotic Good

Mana: 327/327

Job Class: Oathkeeper

Subclass: Demon Slayer

Strength – 85 [+6]

Intelligence – 35 [+3]

Dexterity – 20 [+3]

Agility – 110 [+3]

Constitution – 185 [+4]

Stamina – 185[+4]

Magic – 324 [+3]

Luck – 34 [+3]

AP: 23,740

Divine Skill: Voice of the End.

Unique Skill: Power of the Verdant Throne.

Active Skills: Oathkeeper's Duty, Shield [EX], Shield Bash, Unyielding Pact, Echo of the Sworn, Balance Breaker, Shield Charge, Rear-Ender Thrust, Enchant Fire, Enchant Holy, Culling Blade, Grand Cross, Light.

Passive Skills: Improved Stone Throw, Head Shot, Rebuke of Steel, Shield of Thorns, Multi-task.

[Difficulty Level: Hell Mode]

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Just like how he'd defeated Willow in the Mistral Weave Forest, Alex finally decided to become a tank since his Strength and Agility stats were now high enough for him to fight at close quarters.

Also, his Unique Skill, which was the power of the Verdant Throne, would be more effective the more he put his points into the Constitution stat.

< Second Half Of Verdant Throne >

- Increases your stamina regeneration rate by 200%
- Increase your healing regeneration by 200%
- increase your physical defense by 100%
- Once a day, when your health point goes lower than 10%, you will instantly regain 50% of your maximum health.

'Once I become a Rank 3 Oathkeeper, I will gain more skills in my Oathkeeper Skill Tree,' Alex thought.

The young man believed he would need to become a Rank 3 Oathkeeper in order to face the Third Arc of the Story, which would happen in the Kingdom of Faellarun, where the Second Chain Quest was waiting for him and his club members.

He had one more trump card, and that was the First Half of the Verdant Throne, which was with Latifa for safekeeping.

The moment he and Latifa fought together, like they had in the Trial, Alex's strength would once again gain a power-up, which might be enough for him to face Rank 4, and even Rank 5, opponents if the conditions were right.

For now, his priority was to gain as many experience points as possible to reach Rank 3 and end this dungeon expedition with a bang.

Chapter 353: Using A Scapegoat

Renard sighed in his heart as he looked at his pitiful position on the rankings.

He had assumed he would easily top the Dungeon Expedition in terms of solo kills, but his performance didn't even come close to the actual winner.

Nessia.

While Renard's score was close to a thousand, the young lady's points were in the tens of thousands.

To be more specific, 45,280 points.

The number of points she had accumulated was so absurd that no one else could even dream of replicating her feat.

Since Nessia had made the talismans, all the points automatically went to her.

Alex had zero points, but did that even matter right now?

Renard glanced at their club president, who was lounging on a beach chair and sipping some fruit punch while inside a dungeon.

Who could blame him?

With all the monsters dying as soon as they entered the sanctuary, the only thing that needed to be done was to collect the monster cores, which Dim Dim was doing happily.

The other club members easily dealt with the monsters that barely survived, while the club president took a break.

This was the first time anyone had seen something so outrageous! Even Theo, who was usually calm and stoic, felt his eyes twitch when he saw Vaan giving Alex a shoulder massage.

“A little harder on the right... Yes, that’s it,” Alex said with a sigh. “Thank you, Vaan.”

With all the Demon Worshipers taken care of, Alex had nothing else to worry about except making sure that all monster cores were picked up. But even that task was being taken care of by Dim Dim. He only had to watch his stats go up!

But Alex’s carefree life came to a sudden end when the other Student Councilors and some of the Professors arrived to retrieve Gaston and his remaining subordinates.

“Mr. Alex Stratos, does it feel good lying on that chair?”

The familiar voice made Alex immediately stand at attention because it belonged to none other than the Headmaster of the Academy.

Professor Rowan Vademont.

“H-Hahaha. Good day, Headmaster,” Alex greeted. “Nice weather we’re having, eh?”

The other members of Endless Horizon averted their gaze. It seemed that their club president’s head had suddenly short-circuited.

Nice weather? Inside a dungeon?

“The competition has already been canceled,” Professor Rowan said, not bothering to entertain Alex’s sad attempt at small talk. “Have you not been informed that there is a Dungeon Outbreak?”

Since the Headmaster was confident that Gaston’s group was the last batch of the Demon Worshipers inside the Dungeon, he decided to personally take a look at what was happening inside.

He had already tossed the other Demon Worshipers inside his personal domain, where they would be interrogated at a later date.

“Oh dear, a Dungeon Outbreak?” Alex blinked. “That’s... dangerous, right?”

“It should be,” Professor Rowan answered. “Normally, it should be dangerous. But... the current situation is a bit abnormal. Don’t you agree?”

The Headmaster glanced at Dim Dim, who was still steering the magical artifact about to suck up all the monster cores on the ground.

The Professor had to agree that this was a very efficient way of farming monster cores, but he couldn’t help but be suspicious of Alex.

Seeing how meticulously the magical formation had been laid out, he inferred that these students already expected a Dungeon Outbreak. This would also explain why most of them did not venture deeper inside the dungeon.

At first, when the members of Endless Horizon had been setting up the formation, the Headmaster had assumed that they were just being cautious.

But now, things were falling into place.

“Are there a few things you’d like to tell me, Mr. Stratos?” Professor Rowan inquired.

Alex blinked once, then twice, before thumping his fist on the palm of his hand as if he had suddenly thought of a great explanation.

“Headmaster, I already mentioned this in the past, but I’m actually a Seer,” Alex explained.

“Uh huh.” Professor Rowan crossed his arms over his chest. “So you’re telling me that you made this preparation after seeing a vision?”

“Exactly!” Alex nodded.

“Then why didn’t you tell the academy? You should have approached me so I could have chosen another dungeon for the expedition.” Professor Rowan narrowed his eyes.

Alex wanted to say, “And why should I do that?” but he held his tongue and simply smiled.

If the Headmaster had really gone with another option, Alex wouldn’t have had such an easy time gathering cores since this magical formation only worked against the Undead!

“There’s a good explanation for this, Headmaster,” Alex said seriously. “It’s because even if I had told you, there’s a chance that you wouldn’t have believed me. I mean... if I had said that not only would there be an outbreak in the Orion Dungeon, but Demon Worshipers would also be planning to ambush us, you would not have believed it too, right?”

“At least, you should have told me about it,” Professor Rowan reiterated. Clearly, he had no intention of backing down.

However, Alex had already prepared what he was going to say next!

“There is also another reason why I didn’t say anything, Headmaster.”

“And that is?”

“It’s because of Lady Celestria.”

The Saintess of the Solara Academy, who was listening to Alex and the Headmaster, frowned in response.

The members of her delegation, including Prince Garen, also looked at her, as if asking her to explain what Alex was talking about.

"I-I don't know anything!" Lady Celestria exclaimed, flustered by the intense attention the students and some of the Professors were giving her.

Professor Rowan also furrowed his brows because he also had no idea what Alex was trying to say.

"Um, it's like this." Alex coughed lightly. "Since Lady Celestria is the Saintess, she often receives divine messages, right? Then, since she was going inside the dungeon, which means she didn't receive any revelation from her Deity, I wondered if my vision might have been inaccurate."

One was a Seer, and the other was a Saintess who regularly received divine visions and messages.

Since they hadn't received the same information, Alex's statement might not have been considered credible enough to be taken seriously.

After realizing what the young man was implying, everyone finally understood why Alex had kept it a secret.

If he hadn't said anything, he wouldn't have been called a liar. However, he had also decided to take things into his own hands and prepare for the Dungeon Outbreak with his club members.

Professor Rowan's frown didn't disappear, but he couldn't deny that Alex had a point.

In fact, the Headmaster had only thought that Alex was a self-proclaimed Seer, so he hadn't paid much attention to this.

But after the young man and his club members had handled the two incidents with the Demon Worshipers, Professor Rowan decided that he would have a private talk with Alex later about his "Seer Ability".

Meanwhile, outside the dungeon, Lady Celestria's face had reddened. She hadn't received any revelation from her Deity, which suggested that Alex could see the future better than she did!

'Your Excellency, did you really not know that there would be trouble waiting for us in the dungeon?' Lady Celestria asked her Patron Deity.

"... Of course, I knew. I just didn't say anything because this was a trial that you and the rest from Solara Academy had to face."

"..."

The Saintess didn't miss the hesitation in the voice of her Patron, but she wasn't stupid enough to question the words of a divine being.

In the end, she shifted her attention back to the shameless guy using her as a scapegoat for his selfishness!

Chapter 354: Reaching Rank 3

After reluctantly accepting Alex's explanation, the Headmaster asked another question.

"How long do you plan to stay here?" Professor Rowan asked.

"Actually, we're conducting a very important experiment right now, Headmaster," Alex replied solemnly.

"An experiment? What kind of experiment?"

"My club is trying to test how strong this magical formation is in warding off the Undead. As you can see, it instantly annihilates Rank 2 Monsters, while Rank 3 Monsters and above are seriously weakened.

"I believe it can also reduce the strength of Rank 5 Monsters by half, but we still need to see if it will really work. You see, our Club goes on some expeditions, and there's always a chance that we might encounter Undead Monsters during our explorations.

“As such, I have deemed it prudent to test how well this kind of formation works on Higher-Ranking Undead. When we determine the limit of the formation, we will be able to assess when we should run away or stay put.”

Alex was so passionate that even the Headmaster was starting to believe him. In fact, the results spoke for themselves. The formation was indeed very effective against Rank 2 Monsters.

As for Rank 3, even a simple slap would be enough to kill those monsters since they could barely hang on after encountering the formation. Rank 4 Monsters were also seriously affected. Even though they could survive the formation, they were at most as powerful as Rank 1 Monsters.

The ancient runes that Nessia had learned from the Codex of Eternal Weave were far more effective than any runes known to scholars at the present time.

“So you plan to stay here until the formation loses its effect?” Professor Rowan inquired.

“Yes, Headmaster,” Alex answered without hesitation.

Of course, he had no plans of telling Professor Rowan that he was waiting until he became a Rank 3 Oathkeeper.

If the Headmaster had known what Alex was thinking, he would have already dragged the young man out of the dungeon by force!

‘I’m very close to reaching Rank 3.’ Alex clenched his fists. ‘There’s no way I’m leaving now!’

Fortunately, the Headmaster was also very curious about the formation and went to talk to Nessia.

Since she had the highest score in the Solo Rankings, it was very obvious that she was the one responsible for the magical formation protecting everyone from the Undead Monsters.

Even the students and Professors watching the projection in the academy finally took notice of Nessia. Some even thought about how beneficial it would be to befriend her.

Alex was finally able to breathe a sigh of relief. At least the Headmaster seemed to agree with letting them continue their so-called experiment.

The Rank 4 Death Knight had finally made its appearance, but it was easily defeated by Chuck and Dim Dim, who worked together to whack its head.

It was then that everyone truly understood how powerful Nessia's formation was.

Their teeth itched when they saw how her formation reduced a Rank 4 Boss Monster to something so easily defeated by a few hits from Dim Dim's Toy Hammer.

The Rank 3 Zombie Knights that had reached the First Floor didn't pose a threat at all either. They all perished without much fuss, further boosting Alex's experience gain.

Since these experience points were shared between his party members, all of them greatly benefited from it.

Just like Alex, Renard was also very close to reaching Rank 3, except he was a Berserker Juggernaut.

An hour later, Alex finally saw the notification that he had been waiting for.

< Congratulations! >

< You are now a Rank 3 Oathkeeper! >

< Rewards >

— 10,000 Arcana Points.

— Your Magic Stat will increase by 200 Points.

— You have unlocked the Skills, Mana Heart Oath [EX], Spike Shield [EX], Mirror Shield [EX]

— — —

< Mana Hearth Oath [EX] >

— Passive Skill

— Increase Mana Regeneration by 150%

— Once the Oathkeeper reaches Rank 4, the Mana Regeneration of this skill will increase to 300%

— — —

< Spike Shield [EX] >

— Active Skill

— Create spikes on your shield that deals 100% of your Strength Stat.

— If this skill is active when you use Shield Bash or Shield Charge, the damage is increased to 300%.

— The spikes will be destroyed after three uses. You can cast it once more when that happens.

— Once the Oathkeeper reaches Rank 4 the spikes on your shield would deal 200% damage to your Strength Stat.

— — —

< Mirror Shield [EX] >

— Active Skill

— This skill will reflect any magical spells or attacks that are Rank 1 spells and below back to their casters. (Example: Magic Bullets).

— Once the Oathkeeper reaches Rank 4, this skill will reflect Rank 2 spells and below back to their casters.

— — —

‘Wow!’ Alex was quite surprised by the rewards.

Truth be told, he felt very limited by his Magic Stat since he would only get one point in magic for every three points in intelligence.

It wasn’t very cost-effective for him to dump stats in Intelligence because he wasn’t born with Magic Affinity.

However, now that he has an additional 200 Magic Points, as well as a skill that passively increased his mana regeneration, he would be able to utilize his skills better.

Also, since his reflection ability didn’t work against magical attacks, getting the Mirror Shield [EX] was a very lucky coincidence.

He had actually planned to buy the skill, Mirror Shield [EX], with the Super Rare Skill Book he had acquired. With this, he could choose another useful skill.

Last but not least was the Spike Shield [EX].

This was a skill that Alex had also longed for—he could just imagine coating his shield with steel spikes, then using it to bash people!

Yep, that would definitely hurt!

It would also increase the damage output of his Shield Charge, making it a very scary skill to possess.

'A Rank 3 Oathkeeper is no joke!' Alex thought.

The young man was extremely happy with his new set of skills, which made him more confident in facing future challenges he could not avoid.

Now that he had accomplished his goal, he told his club members that it was finally time to leave, which made Professor Rowan and the Student Councillors sigh in relief.

"All of you, exit the dungeon and look for the other professors," Professor Rowan instructed. "I'll deal with this Dungeon Outbreak so it will not endanger anyone anymore."

Since the students were leaving, there was no longer any need for him to hold back in cleaning up the monsters that were still heading to the surface.

Rank 4 Monsters didn't pose a threat to most people, but Monsters that were Rank 6 and higher were a problem.

Although Professor Rowan still had his doubts about the whole situation, he had to deal with the Dungeon Outbreak first before anyone else got hurt.

Chapter 355: A Strategic Military Asset

The moment Professor Rowan stepped in to deal with the Dungeon Outbreak, Alex and his club members left the dungeon like the obedient students they should have been.

Now that he had become a Rank 3 Oathkeeper, there was no need for him to stay in the dungeon and cause trouble.

'Although they probably didn't feel it, Nessia and Chuck also reached Rank 3,' Alex thought. 'Renard is also close to that rank. He just needs a little push, and his path to greatness will officially begin.'

He stole a glance at Mr. I-Have-Trust-Issues. 'I just wonder if he will stay in the academy or follow Lady Celestria to the Solara Kingdom. Either way, he'll still return to Frieden when he becomes a Second Year. Letting him leave now might also be for his own good.'

The moment Alex stepped out of the dungeon, countless pairs of eyes locked on him.

He had already expected this to happen, so he continued walking forward calmly and imagined he was one of those celebrities making their way down the familiar red carpet.

Before leaving the dungeon, Alex had asked Charles to walk in front of Nessia and shield her from the gazes of others.

Alex stood at the very front to take the brunt of everyone's curiosity, sparing his club members from the scrutiny.

To Alex's relief, there was someone else who could handle the pressure.

"Friends, I know I'm handsome," Chuck declared before flipping his hair. "So I don't mind if you all stare at me! In fact, keep on staring. You don't have to pretend to look elsewhere! I know I was born in this world to be the object of everyone's affections!"

"..."

“ ... ”

“... Hey, do you have tomatoes? I’m very tempted to throw it at someone right now.”

“Maybe the market nearby sells them. Since you plan to go there, can you get me an egg too? Actually, get me a whole carton. The older, the better.”

Clearly, Chuck had been born with the natural gift of attracting everyone’s aggro. Practically all the guys were glaring daggers at him. Even his good looks could not redeem him in the eyes of the girls.

As the members of Endless Horizon regrouped with the other students and Professors, Prince Garen and Prince Kaelen approached Alex with smiles on their faces.

“It’s quite unfortunate that our competition has been canceled,” Prince Garen said. “But judging by the outcome, it would have been your win, Alex.”

“He’s right.” Prince Kaelen nodded. “Are you really a Seer?”

“Yes, brother-in-law,” Alex replied shamelessly. “I’m really a Seer.”

As soon as those words left Alex’s lips, Prince Kaelen immediately moved to stand between the young man and Lapiz, who blushed and tried to hide her face.

Alex had already told her that he was her future husband twice in the past. Now, he was implying it again indirectly!

“Don’t call me that,” Prince Kaelen stated. “You’re giving me goosebumps.”

“Understood, brother-to-be.”

“... I told you to stop.”

Lavinia gave Lapid a side-long glance before shifting her attention back to Alex.

She didn't know if Alex was simply teasing the Elven Prince or if he was being serious.

Of course, she was aware that Alex had told Lapid that he was her future husband. Latifa had mentioned this during one of their sleepovers.

As a lady, Lavinia also understood that Latifa was very interested in Alex. But she didn't know if Latifa wanted a romantic relationship with him or a close friendship instead.

"Let's just say that everyone won," Alex suggested, changing the topic. "With this, we can all be friends, right?"

"Hah, that's a roundabout way of saying we can ask you for favors huh?" Prince Garen grinned. "Fine, I'll be your friend."

"As long as you keep your distance from my sister, I'll become your friend as well," Prince Kaelen replied.

"Thank you, future bro."

"I just told you to stop..."

Lapid glared at Alex with a reddened face, which made the young man raise his hands in surrender.

Now that the dungeon competition was over, the delegations would stay at Frieden Academy for three more days before returning to their respective kingdoms.

Tomorrow, Frieden Academy would hold a grand ball. It'd be the farewell party for these VIP guests.

Now that Alex had formed connections with Prince Garen and Prince Kaelen, he believed he could ask for their assistance in the Second and Third Phases of their Chain Quest.

The visit to Faelarun Academy would be scheduled around the Month of the Hermit. The visit to Solara Kingdom would be done at the end of the year, most likely during the Month of the Hanged Man.

With two collaborators secured, Alex could now focus on other things since the path to the Tower of the Hermit was already set in stone.

“But are you really a Seer?” Lady Celestria asked, giving Alex the ‘I know what you did to me earlier’ gaze.

“Yes,” Alex replied without hesitation.

“So you get visions?” Lady Celestria inquired.

“Cinematics... I mean, yes, I do get visions,” Alex answered.

Although she was still suspicious, Lady Celestria had no choice but to recognize the young man’s ability. He did treat the Dungeon Outbreak like a vacation.

Some of the students also wondered if Nessia could create a truly powerful Magic Formation effective against Rank 6 Undead Monsters and above.

If she could do that, then even the Thirtieth Floor of the Orion Dungeon might be within reach. If they protected her so that she could set up a formation there, they could lure monsters into her slaughter zone.

In fact, Lady Celestria and Prince Kaelen were very tempted to poach Nessia and bring her back to their Kingdoms.

Only fools would not recognize such a talented Rune Magician, who could very well become a Strategic Military Asset.

Of course, Alex had already thought of this possibility, so he had warned Nessia to be wary of being poached by other people.

She was an important asset of the Endless Horizon Club. Alex would not allow the Heroine to be taken away from his organization!

Even now, several First Years, who belonged to the nobility, were chatting with the young lady, hoping to form connections with her.

He was certain that a few young men would even send some marriage proposals her way.

Alex couldn't help but smile when he saw Charles, who was standing next to Nessia, glumly memorizing the faces of the young men looking at the young lady like she was a ticket to fame and fortune.

With Nessia's popularity on the rise, Alex hoped Charles would no longer take things for granted and seriously make some moves to close the distance in their relationship.

Of course, it was all up to them. Alex didn't want to force the situation and planned to enjoy the show from the sidelines.

Suddenly, Alex felt someone staring at him more intensely than the others.

When he turned around to look behind him, he saw Renard with his arms crossed.

He looked calm, but he also seemed to be observing Alex quite closely.

For a brief moment, Alex had this feeling that Renard wanted to know what made him tick, which sent a shiver running down his spine.

Even as a Rank 3 Oathkeeper, he didn't want to face Renard once he became a Rank 3 Berserker Juggernaut.

Because the moment Mr. I-Have-Trust-Issues stepped into that rank, he would gain various skills and abilities that would make him disgustingly strong.

Strong enough to defeat even those with Rank 4 Job Classes, which set him apart as a Main Hero of the world of Arcana.

Chapter 356: Are You Trying To Seduce Someone?

"So Gaston failed, huh?"

"Yes, My Lord."

Eleanora was kneeling in front of the mirror that she used to communicate with her superior.

"Their plan wasn't bad," commented one of the Executives of the underground organization. "But their luck was. Ambushing students during a Dungeon Outbreak? I'm surprised he lasted that long without using his teleportation crystal."

The Executive laughed a little. "I'm sure that fellow who sent nearly a third of his troops to this mission is currently cursing his bad luck."

Eleanora didn't dare to look at the mirror, keeping her gaze on the floor while she knelt.

The contemptuous and mocking tone her superior used clearly implied his amusement toward the unexpected turn of events.

"How is Evangeline doing?" the Vampire Lord asked. "Is she enjoying her school life?"

"She's doing well, My Lord," Eleanora replied. "It seems that she has even made some friends."

"Hah.... Friends?" the Vampire Lord smirked. "Are you sure they're her friends, not mere blood banks?"

"No, Sir," Eleanora answered. "When she needs to feed, she just relies on blood pills to sustain herself."

"Absolutely disgusting." The Vampire Lord clicked his tongue in annoyance. "That one is rather stubborn. Just like her mother."

Eleanora stayed silent.

"Anyway, continue to monitor the academy and Evangeline. Do not make any unnecessary movements, and do not attempt to collaborate with the other factions that have infiltrated the academy.

"If they're not stupid, they should be lying low right now. Also, did anything notable happen as of late? You seem a little depressed right now. Have you exposed your identity to others?"

"No, My Lord," Eleanora replied, doing her best to keep her voice steady. "I'm just tired because I haven't had the chance to get some delicious blood."

"Hmm... that is indeed a problem." The Vampire Lord smiled. "I have heard of this amusing guy called Alex Stratos. Try to make him your subordinate. He seems useful."

Eleanora flinched, but managed to regain her composure right away.

"I'll do my best, My Lord." Eleanora wanted to say that this was her original plan, but she'd made a blunder by trying to use Chuck as a pawn to pull Alex to her side.

She regretted that decision terribly, but she couldn't possibly tell her superior that she was now under a magical contract that made the infamous troublemaker of Frieden Academy her second Master.

"Make sure to give me your weekly report. Don't hesitate to contact me if something unexpected arises," the Vampire Lord ordered. "Keep a low profile and just focus on making Alex Stratos your subordinate."

“Yes, My Lord,” Eleanora replied.

A moment later, the mirror hanging on the wall returned to normal.

Only then was Eleanora able to breathe a sigh of relief.

But that relief didn’t last for long, for she now faced a problem she didn’t know how to solve.

“What am I going to do?”

Now that her superior had given her an explicit command to make Alex her subordinate, she would soon need to show him some progress. But for that to happen, she would need to actually get close to Alex...

Unfortunately, Chuck had given her a firm order.

“Do not approach any of my club members, or I’ll make you regret it.”

Eleanora’s hands were tied. She needed to find a way to bypass Chuck’s direct order so she could somehow manage to form connections with Alex.

Had she known that the young man in question wouldn’t dare to touch her even with a twelve-foot pole, she might have already flipped a table out of frustration.

‘Calm down.’ Eleanora took a deep breath. ‘Tonight is the farewell party for the delegations from the Solara and Faelarun Academies. I might be able to talk to Alex if he talks to me first.’

Since she wasn’t actively approaching any of the members of Endless Horizon, that wouldn’t be going against Chuck’s order, would it? She would simply be responding to someone who’d struck up a conversation with her first.

But how could she do that?

She'd been pretending to be a dull student who could kill a conversation within three lines.

If she dolled herself up a bit, she would be a stunner.

However, if she really did that, the effort she spent to keep a low profile all this time would be wasted.

After a brief internal struggle, Eleanora sighed before pinching the bridge of her nose.

In the end, she chose to remain the ugly duckling in Class A, whom the other noble students bullied.

Suddenly, someone knocked on her door, breaking her out of her thoughts.

"Who is it?" Eleanora asked.

"It's me, Eva," Evangeline replied.

Eleanora didn't hesitate to open the door, but she also closed it as soon as Evangeline entered her room.

"Why did you come to find me?" Eleanora asked.

Instead of answering her, Evangeline asked, "Are you going to the grand ball tonight?"

"Yes," Eleanora answered.

"I'm not good with fashion, and I don't have any fancy clothes with me," Evangeline continued. "Can I borrow some of your clothes?"

The two ladies had similar figures, so Eleanora's clothes would fit Evangeline just fine.

Eleanora would be glad to lend her Young Mistress her clothes. However, she now desperately wanted to know why her Young Mistress, who didn't usually dress up, wished to wear something pretty for tonight's Grand Ball!

"Are you trying to seduce someone?" Eleanora, who was depressed a minute ago, suddenly perked up.

"No," Evangeline replied, but that didn't matter because Eleanora heard a very loud "Yes."

"So it's because of a boy, huh?" The corners of Eleanora's lips curled up. "My Mistress is finally acting like her age."

"... I shouldn't have come here." Evangeline stood up and headed to the door, but Eleanora was quick to grab her hand and hold her in place.

"Okay, I won't say anything." Eleanora smirked. "If you want to dress up, you've come to the right place. I'll make you look so stunning, you will steal the spotlight at tonight's ball."

Evangeline didn't know if Eleanora was joking or not.

The way the Second Year looked at her made her feel like she was a dress-up doll. Evangeline really wanted to flee, but if she hoped to shine during the party everyone was looking forward to, who else could she trust but a fashionista like Eleanora?

Chapter 357: The Fiery Path To Hell

Inside Alex's and Chuck's Dorm Room...

"How do I look, Dim Dim?" Chuck asked as he struck a pose, even wiggling his eyebrows. "Am I handsome enough?"

"Dim!"

“Will it be a good idea to enter the ballroom with a rose between my lips? I’ll look fifty percent cooler than usual if I do, no?”

“Yuck!”

“Um? Did you say something, Dim Dim?” Chuck blinked in confusion, thinking he’d misheard Dim Dim say something out of his dim-dim-dim vocabulary.

“Dim?” Dim Dim blinked back, looking like the innocent bun that it was.

“It might just be my imagination then.”

“Dim!”

After posing a few more times in the mirror, the young man walked to Alex, who had just finished changing into a new set of uniform for the upcoming party.

“Alex, you’re not wearing a uniform to the party, are you?” Chuck asked in a serious tone. “Nobles are also coming to meet the delegates from Solara and Faelarun. Why don’t you change so you can make a good first impression?”

“I don’t really need to do that,” Alex answered.

“Yes, you do,” Vaan stated in a serious tone. “The Montclair Family is also coming today.”

“Montclair?” Alex frowned. “Are they important?”

Chuck lightly patted his forehead, as if to admonish himself for forgetting that Alex wasn’t a noble.

“The heir of that family is one of Vaan’s most ardent suitors,” Chuck said in a serious tone. “There was even a scandal about him drugging Vaan in the past. Fortunately, nothing happened, or it would’ve been a true scandal.”

His roommate’s words reminded Alex of Vaan’s backstory, and he soon recalled the other party’s identity.

“Victor Montclair,” Alex muttered.

“Yes, that’s him!” Chuck clicked his tongue. “That guy is a real trash. Not only is he a womanizer, but some rumors also say that he’s conducting illegal activities in his domain. Of course, even if it’s true, no one will dare to persecute him. His father spoils him to a certain degree and will clean up his mess.”

“Does Vaan know about this?” Alex inquired.

“I don’t know.” Chuck sighed. “But if they see each other there, that guy might make a ruckus.”

Victor Montclair was the only person who knew that Vaan was actually a boy, not a girl.

He learned of it after spiking the pretty boy’s drink and attempting to take advantage of the latter. Shocked about the discovery, he was fortunately too stunned to do anything.

Vaan’s servants had arrived on time to rescue him, and the situation had been locked behind closed doors.

But with the Montclair Heir’s impending visit, things could become ugly if not handled properly.

“Well, then. Although it’s a bit early, I’ll go meet some friends first and ask them if my attire is good.” Chuck patted Alex’s shoulder. “But bro, do yourself a favor and wear something fancy. It’s not every day that you get a chance to socialize with the nobility at a party.”

After saying those words, Chuck left the room, leaving Alex and Dim Dim behind.

Dim Dim yawned and jumped on top of Alex's pillow, planning to take a short nap before the party started.

Meanwhile, Alex thought of Vaan, and decided to have a chat with him for a bit.

The young man headed to Vaan's room and knocked on the door. Usually, Ironheart Dormitory residents shared a room with one other fellow student. But the Headmaster himself had granted Vaan a special exception, allowing him to solo a room.

With such a convenient setup, the pretty boy didn't have to worry about a roommate finding out his true gender.

"Vaan? It's me, Alex," Alex said as he knocked on the door. "Are you there?"

"Coming!" Vaan's voice sounded from the other side of the door, which made Alex sigh in relief.

Just like Alex, Vaan was dressed in the academy uniform meant for girls.

It seemed that he didn't plan on wearing a dress out of self-awareness that it would make him stand out from the crowd.

"Please sit," Vaan said as he placed a chair beside his bed. "It's rare for you to visit me. Did something come up?"

"Chuck mentioned that the Heir of the Montclair Family will attend today's party," Alex answered as he sat down. "I was wondering if you knew about this."

The smile on Vaan's face immediately disappeared after hearing what Alex had to say.

"I know he's coming," Vaan nodded. "Did you come here because you're worried about me?"

A playful smile appeared on his face, but he didn't look as lively as he usually did. Clearly, he was also worried about Victor's arrival.

"Maybe you should skip the party," Alex said in a serious tone.

"It's already too late." Vaan sighed. "Prince Garen made me promise that I will attend. He asked for a first and last dance with me before he returned to Solara."

The teenage boy, who truly looked like a delicate girl, smiled bitterly, also worried about meeting Victor at the party.

However, his eyes looked determined. He clearly had no plans to run away from one of the traumas in his life, believing it was the first step to moving on from it.

"Very well. I'll block him for you," Alex said with a smile. "I'll make sure he doesn't approach you during the party."

"Thank you, Alex, but it would be best if I faced him head-on," Vaan replied.

"He might try to blackmail you, you know?" Alex frowned.

"I'm sure he will." Vaan sneered. "He and his family have been eyeing our lands since my family's death. They want to get it through me by marriage, but if that doesn't work, they'd likely resort to destroying me and my reputation."

Alex gazed at his friend, who had suffered many hardships in his lifetime. Not only was he the last surviving member of the Damne Family, but he also needed to hide his gender to protect himself from being killed by those who wished to obtain the Damne Territory.

Believing Vaan was a girl, they hadn't been too threatened with her taking the position of the Clan Head of the Damne Family. In their minds, Vaan had no other option but to give birth to a male heir, who would then inherit the territory.

That said, they would rather have their sons take Vaan as their wife, so they could legitimately take over the Damne Family's lands without the need of fighting anyone.

Unbeknownst to them, Vaan was actually a boy, effectively crushing their supposed fool-proof plan to acquire the Damne territory through marriage.

Except Victor—the only noble who knew that Vaan was a boy.

However, he kept it a secret. As long as he was the only one who knew about it, he believed Vaan would have no choice but to submit to him.

"Alex, thank you for worrying about me, but I'm tired of running away," Vaan said solemnly. "I've made many mistakes in the past, and I'll probably make many more in the future.

"But I will no longer let anyone treat me like a doormat. I'm no longer someone they can step on any time they liked, and no longer someone who can't fight back. If he thinks he can have his way, he is in for a surprise."

The more Vaan talked, the more color returned to his face. He no longer looked pale, but looked like a beautiful maiden, who was about to make her debut in the ranks of the nobility.

"Out of curiosity, what would you do if he told everyone that you are a guy?" Alex asked.

"Oh, that?" Vaan smiled evilly. "I'd like to see him try."

Suddenly, Vaan stood up, placed a finger on Alex's chin, and raised it up a bit.

"I thought of a good idea," Vaan said. "Since I plan to walk the fiery path of hell, would you like to accompany me, My Liege?"

"Are you planning to create trouble?" Alex inquired.

“Yep,” Vaan answered without hesitation. “I’ll make the world burn.”

Alex smiled back. “Where do I sign?”

A chuckle escaped Vaan’s lips. Whenever he was with Alex, he felt that he was invincible.

Sooner or later, he had to face Victor Montclair and his family.

Truth be told, if he was alone, Vaan wouldn’t dare to face them on his own.

But now, he had company.

He had someone he looked up to, someone willing to brave the dangers alongside him.

“I was just planning to wear my uniform to the party, but now, I changed my mind,” Vaan placed his hands over his hips, making him truly look like a spirited young lady. “But first, we need to dress up for the occasion.”

Vaan went to his wardrobe and took out something. He then handed it over to Alex, making the young man blink in confusion after seeing the thing that Vaan wanted him to wear.

“You’re serious?” Alex inquired.

“Very serious,” Vaan replied.

“Well, I guess I’ll have to rain on Chuck’s parade tonight.” Alex shrugged. “But knowing him, I’m sure he would approve of this.”

“Right.” Vaan chuckled. “Let’s just steal the show.”

The two then smiled evilly. While they didn't know what would happen during the party, they were certain of one thing.

They would go to the ballroom prepared for a battle, and they had no intention of losing.

The party would start in two hours, and Alex and Vaan decided to meet up after three hours.

That would give the guests enough time to gather in the ballroom, making their entrance have a more lasting impact in the eyes of everyone in the party.

Chapter 358: Start Of The Grand Ball

When the sun finally set, the students all gathered in the grand hall where parties, concerts, and other events were held.

It was very easy to spot who the nobles and commoners were.

The nobles were dressed expensively and fashionably, while the commoners wore their uniforms.

But this wasn't a problem for most students because they only came there for the chance to form connections with the people that they had set their sights on.

Charles, Nessia, and Renard sat at one table, people-watching as they ate.

They knew their place as commoners, so they were fine with just enjoying the good food and observing their friends and acquaintances.

Lotte was also at the party, talking to Latifa's friends as her representative.

Latifa was watching the event through her Alter's eyes as she rested on the bed in the clock tower.

She wasn't really that good when it came to socializing, preferring to sleep instead of hanging out with anyone who wasn't a part of her club.

Chuck, on the other hand, was busy talking to the ladies. Although he was a troublemaker, that didn't change the fact that he was truly handsome, easygoing, and the son of a Duke to boot.

His brother, Caspian, looked much better after Eleanora had stopped drinking his blood.

He had already forgotten about Eleanora because the young lady had canceled their Master and Servant relationship.

She had made sure to create a fail-safe plan to prevent anyone from uncovering any information about her if they managed to capture and interrogate her subordinate.

"You seem to be enjoying yourself, Chuck."

The young man heard a familiar voice coming behind him and turned around.

"Good evening, Your High... wow!" Chuck wasn't able to stop himself from gasping after seeing a dolled-up Princess Xenia.

The princess was wearing a red dress that complemented her long red hair, which was neatly but elaborately styled.

Her backless dress was not particularly daring, but the young man suddenly had the urge to throw his cape over her shoulders so that others wouldn't be able to ogle at her!

Chuck had to use his willpower to forcefully shift his gaze to something else because he was truly captivated by her beauty.

That was a mistake.

His gaze then landed on Mary, who had also dressed up for the occasion.

Although her clothes weren't as fancy as the princess's, it still flattered her figure very much.

She was wearing a black cocktail dress with a frilly hem. She had picked it herself while shopping at a boutique in the city.

Even Chuck couldn't help but be mesmerized by the maid, who usually sent withering glares his way whenever he got distracted by other beautiful ladies.

"Eight out of ten," Chuck muttered as he stared at Mary for several seconds without remembering to blink.

Instead of being annoyed or offended, Princess Xenia and Mary actually smiled a little. Chuck's sincere amazement was really quite endearing.

Both of them felt that their preparations were worth it because the troublemaker's reaction was priceless.

Suddenly, Chuck repeatedly tapped his cheeks as if trying his best to break free from the charming appeal of the two ladies who had managed to get his full attention.

After regaining his senses, he then coughed lightly to hide his embarrassment.

"Both of you look lovely," Chuck said with a polite smile. "But the temperature will surely drop as the night goes on. Your Highness, can I interest you in my cape?"

"Sometimes, I just feel bolder than usual," Princess Xenia replied.

Just as Chuck was about to respond, he saw someone that made him frown.

Seeing his reaction, Princess Xenia and Mary turned to see what had displeased him.

A handsome man, who seemed to be in his early twenties, had entered the grand hall through the main entrance and was now scanning the surroundings, looking for someone.

Anyone who didn't know him would think of him as a very honest-looking man. But those who knew him understood that he wasn't someone that people should mingle with if they had a choice.

He was none other than Victor Montclair, who had come to use this opportunity to meet the dignitaries of the Solara and Faelarun Academies.

After seeing Lady Celestria, who was wearing the ceremonial white dress of the Saintess, he didn't hesitate to approach her.

"You look like you've eaten a fly," Mary commented, not missing an opportunity to take a dig at Chuck.

"I'd rather eat a fly than see that scum." Chuck clicked his tongue.

Among the members of Endless Horizon, he got along best with Alex and Vaan.

Charles was a good friend of his as well, but Charles was too honest and modest.

Vaan was mischievous by nature, so he and Chuck got along like they were partners in crime.

In short, Vaan's enemy was Chuck's enemy. Seeing Victor at the party made him worried for Vaan.

The Professors and the Headmaster were already there inside the hall, greeting the guests that had traveled from afar.

Several Elven dignitaries had also arrived and would serve as Prince Kaelen's escorts as he returned to the Kingdom of Faelarun.

Aeris, Lapiz, and Prince Kaelen were currently having a chat with Prince Garen and Lady Celestria.

That was when Victor arrived to introduce himself to them and tried to strike up a conversation.

“His skin is as thick as Alex’s,” Princess Xenia noted as she took two glasses of fruit juice from a server’s tray. “He really headed straight for foreign royalty.”

“Nah, Alex’s skin is thicker,” Chuck commented as he accepted a glass from her. “That guy can take a slap from an Ogre and still smile afterwards.”

Princess Xenia almost choked on her drink, but fortunately she was able to force it down before making an embarrassing scene.

It was at that moment when another beautiful lady entered the hall, drawing almost everyone’s attention.

Her long blonde hair was in a princess style and she was wearing a lavender dress that seemed to flow like water as she walked into the grand hall.

Evangeline’s sun-kissed skin looked vibrant under the chandeliers, giving her a very young and healthy look.

She usually didn’t pay too much attention to how she was perceived, so although she was a beauty, many thought that she was unapproachable because she would exude this cold and “do-not-come-near-me” aura.

But now, seeing the hint of a smile on her face, the guys were unable to resist praising her in their hearts, believing that she was showing more of her true self.

“Nine out of ten...” Chuck muttered.

However, a second later, a pained groan escaped his lips as Princess Xenia pinched his waist in annoyance.

Had she waited even a fraction of a second more, Mary would have done it in her stead.

Clearly, they weren't too happy with Chuck paying attention to another lady when both of them were around.

Eleanora entered the hall a few minutes later, looking like the dull girl that she had always pretended to be.

However, she couldn't help but smirk and give herself a thumbs-up because she had done a good job in dressing up Evangeline.

'Hmph! My Lady is the most beautiful girl in the hall,' Eleanora thought with pride. 'Even the Saintess and the Princesses here cannot compare to her when she is dressed up properly.'

When Evangeline had approached her for advice, Eleanora had wondered if it was for a boy.

When she'd asked who that boy was, Evangeline had only glared at her, prompting her to giggle and give up for the time being.

Even Victor, who was just talking with the Saintess, couldn't help but stare at Evangeline as a thought rapidly took form in his head.

With a skin as thick as the thickest of Harmonia's city walls, Victor smiled and excused himself before walking towards the beautiful lady, hoping to become her acquaintance.

As if waiting for that cue, a little bun entered the Grand Hall.

Dim Dim was wearing a cute tie that was wrapped around its body and carrying a little trumpet, which it played right beside the main door, as if announcing the arrival of someone.

Professor Rowan and the other Professors looked at the Dim Dim with curiosity.

However, Professor Arabella, the homeroom professor of Class C, suddenly felt anxious.

'I hope that Alex isn't going to do something embarrassing!' Professor Arabelle looked at the doorway with bated breath to see what her no-good-student was up to.

Chapter 359: A Match Made In Heaven [Part 1]

Ten minutes before Dim Dim entered the Grand Hall...

Alex and Vaan sat side by side in an open carriage that was being pulled by the Doom Cow, Daisy.

Dim Dim sat happily on top of Daisy's head, holding its little trumpet and waving at nearby students.

This was quite a comical sight. The beautiful carriage was so white it practically sparkled in the darkness, but it was pulled by a creature that looked thoroughly pissed off.

But no one burst out laughing because their gazes were fixed on the two passengers.

Those who were taking a stroll along the path all automatically moved to the side to allow the carriage to pass.

Those who recognized them also reacted the same way as the others.

The students gawked, gasped, and gazed at the passengers heatedly, as if they wanted to burn the scene in their memories.

"Are you nervous?" Alex asked in a teasing tone.

"Do I look nervous?" Vaan asked back mischievously.

“You don’t look nervous, but you’re gripping my hand tightly,” Alex replied.

“Maybe I am a little nervous,” Vaan admitted. “I just didn’t expect that you would go along with my insanity.”

“Well, there will come a time when you look at this memory and cover your face in embarrassment.” Alex chuckled. “At that point, I’m sure that even if you want to forget, no one will allow you to forget.”

“Then how about you?” Vaan asked. “Aren’t you afraid that your reputation will take a hit in the future? I’m more worried about you, you know?”

“I’m not worried,” Alex answered. “I’ll just think of this as a precious memory of you taking that necessary step to move forward, even though doing it in this manner is a bit crazy even in my opinion.”

“Well, being a little crazy is part of growing up. Let’s just dig a hole in the ground together and hide ourselves when we get teased in the future.”

“Sounds like a plan.”

Vaan looked at the person whom he owed his life—and perhaps his future as well—to.

He had never thought that someone would come to his rescue and even free him from the cage barring him from his own body.

Being possessed by Willow was a dark Chapter in his life, but if there was darkness, there was also light.

Alex had pulled him out from that darkness and stuck with him through his selfishness.

There was no one in the world that he wanted to repay more than Alex, so he hadn’t hesitated to pledge his allegiance to him.

Whenever Vaan was with Alex, he felt confident that he could change for the better.

He felt that he could be brave and be honest with himself.

And right now, one of the people that thought that they could chain him down with the secrets of his past was waiting for him at the Grand Ball.

But Vaan no longer wanted to run.

Also, he was no longer the same person that Victor had known back then.

He had already experienced many things and was now an Apostle Candidate.

Although he was still not fully an Apostle, he had gained some powers that made him confident that Victor would no longer have any hold on him.

When they arrived at the foot of the stairs leading to the Grand Hall, Dim Dim turned around to look at them.

“Go, Dim Dim,” Alex said as he stood up to help Vaan disembark from the carriage. “Announce our arrival.”

“Dim!” Dim Dim saluted with its trumpet before thanking Daisy for her help.

Alex and Vaan also thanked Daisy and watched the Doom Cow pull the carriage back to the farm.

“Well then, shall we go?” Alex asked as he offered his arm to Vaan like a gentleman.

“Yes,” Vaan replied. “Let’s do something crazy.”

The moment they heard Dim Dim's trumpet, the two climbed the stairs and entered the hall together.

"That son of a..." Chuck couldn't help but curse after seeing this.

Princess Xenia and Mary blinked once then twice before looking at each other in disbelief.

Lotte and Lavinia, who were having a drink together, looked at the doorway with their mouths hanging open.

Alex was wearing black military clothing with golden embroidery, complete with a matching red cape that made him look like a prince.

He was already handsome to begin with, so by dressing up he was giving a face to many ladies' dream men!

The devilish smile on his face that was oozing with mirth and confidence only made him look more attractive in the eyes of others.

But the person walking beside him didn't lose to his splendor.

(A/N: To not confuse anyone, I'll refer to Vaan as 'she' on this part.)

In fact, Vaan took the breath of the guys with her white princess dress.

Her long black hair that was usually tied in a ponytail had been braided into a crown to support her silver tiara.

Her purple eyes, which held a charm that very few possessed, looked at everyone while she smiled sweetly.

Even Victor didn't manage to recognize Vaan as his earlier appreciation of Evangeline vanished without a trace.

He was transfixed by the delicate young lady who looked like an angel that everyone should protect.

"Goodness... if I only had known, I should have volunteered to be her escort," Prince Garen murmured as he gradually broke into a tender smile.

"Aren't you jealous?" Lady Celestria wondered.

"Surprisingly, I'm not," Prince Garen replied. "I can feel that Alex is here to protect her. They're not here to announce their relationship as a couple."

"Aren't they a match made in heaven?" Prince Kaelen asked while observing Lapiz's reaction.

Lapiz was in a daze, as if this was her first time seeing Alex.

The young lady only thought of her club president as a mysterious and bold maverick eager to leave his mark in the academy's history.

But now as she looked at him, she had the same opinion as Prince Garen.

Alex didn't look in love. He looked very protective of the person hanging to his arm, yes, but he didn't look besotted.

He was like a prince in a fairy tale, here to rescue the princess whose charm had attracted everyone's attention.

Suddenly, a soft melody started to play, surprising everyone.

The musicians were still preparing their instruments, so it took them a while to notice where the music was coming from.

The Fairies, Doh, Reh, Mii, Fah, Sue, Melodina, as well as the other Fairies were playing a song that Alex had asked them to play.

Alex then took Vaan to the dance floor, taking it all for themselves.

The young man had collaborated with the fairies to make their entrance the talk of the academy for many days to come.

As the music played in the background, Melodina took her microphone and started to sing.

“Tale as old as time...”

Alex took the lead and danced with Vaan to the tune of Beauty and the Bestie, a popular song back on Earth, which he and Noelle had sung many times in the Karaoke Bar together.

< Note: The Copyright God scoffs at you from the Celestial Realm. >

Alex simply smirked at this system message.

This song was being played in Arcana for the first time. Those who were hearing it couldn't help but appreciate its melody.

And as the song came to an end, Melodina's voice plucked the hearts of those who watched the two teenagers dance with smiles on their faces.

“Tale as old as time

Song as old as rhyme

Beauty and the Bestie..."

As Alex and Vaan bowed to each other, they were showered with applause by the entranced spectators who all felt that their hearts had skipped a beat.

Chapter 360: A Match Made In Heaven [Part 2]

Surrounded by the applause of nearly everyone in the Grand Hall, Alex escorted Vaan towards the table where Charles, Nessia, and Renard were seated.

"Bravo!" Chuck happily went to his roommate and flashed a cheeky smile. "The two of you stole the show. A match made in heaven! Alex, you look dashing in that suit. However, you are still a level below my handsomeness."

Alex's eye twitched, but Chuck continued, "Still, I'm very happy that you listened to my advice to dress up. As for you, Vaan, you look very lovely! I almost fell in love with yo—awwww!"

Mary pinched Chuck before the bastard could even finish what he was going to say.

Standing beside the handmaiden, Princess Xenia was smiling sweetly as she thought of a hundred ways to beat the crap out of her so-called fiance.

(A/N: I'll still refer to Vaan as she during the party to avoid confusion).

While Nessia chatted with Vaan and praised her dress, Alex glanced at the fairies and gave them a thumbs-up for doing a marvelous job in supporting them.

The fairies returned his gesture before flying away to the dessert table in order to enjoy the party.

"Alex, you keep on surprising me," Prince Garen said with a smile. "I'm very tempted to invite you to Solara Academy so you can spice up my school life. Of course, I want Vaan to come along too."

"I'm sorry, but I'm happy here in Frieden Academy," Alex replied.

“What a shame,” Prince Garen said, sighing. “How about you, Vaan? Are you interested in becoming my fiancée?”

“I’m sorry, Your Highness,” Vaan answered. “My place is to be by Alex’s side.”

“Alex, swap places with me,” Prince Garen ordered.

“I’ll pass, Your Highness.” Alex smirked. “Vaan might be too feisty for you to handle.”

“I like feisty ladies.”

“Hahaha! Then you’re in for a royal surprise!”

Victor was paying close attention to the conversation. Thanks to his exceptional hearing, he caught everything that Alex, Prince Garen, and Vaan were saying.

‘T-That’s Vaan?!’ Victor looked at the angelic beauty in disbelief because he didn’t recognize her right away.

However, his surprise didn’t last long before a thought crossed his mind.

Knowing that this was the perfect opportunity to corner the last member of the Damne Family, Victor decided to approach their table with a smile.

“That was an amazing dance, Vaan,” Victor said in a gentlemanly tone. “It has been a few years since we last met. Seeing you now makes me regret the opportunity I missed to form a deeper bond with you.”

He made sure to subtly but noticeably stress the words “deeper bond” so Vaan would know exactly what incident he was referring to.

"I'm sorry, but who are you again?" Vaan asked, smiling so sweetly she could rot anyone's teeth.

"Oh dear, how could you possibly forget someone like me?" Victor grinned like Vaan was cracking an inside joke. "It is me, Victor Montclair, your fiancé."

"Fiance?" Prince Garen arched an eyebrow. "Is he really your fiancé, Vaan?"

"Of course not, Your Highness," Vaan answered. "He's just a toad that is hoping to eat a swan."

The smile on Victor's face stiffened when Vaan referred to him as a toad.

The ladies who heard her words giggled and whispered at each other while giving Victor mocking glances.

Feeling humiliated, Victor took a step forward in order to grab Vaan's hand.

However, Alex casually swatted his hand away, making the arrogant noble frown.

"Hey, do you know who I am?" Victor demanded.

"Yes," Alex replied. "A toad who has no manners."

"You!" Victor glared at the young man he'd never heard of or seen before. "State your name!"

"Why should I?" Alex retorted. "If you don't know who I am, it means that you're a nobody. Everyone here knows who I am, and yet you don't? Just what kind of rock have you been living under?"

Dim Dim jumped on Alex's right shoe and started climbing up until it reached his shoulder.

The little bun harrumphed cutely, looked squarely at Victor, and spat, "Peasant!"

Chuck burst out laughing and took his place beside Alex. "Oi, Victor, why don't you scram? This is not a place where you can do whatever you like. You have no power here."

"And a bastard of a Ducal Family thinks he can talk on equal terms with me?" Victor sneered. "Do not forget that I'm the heir of the Montclair Viscounty."

"You're only heir in name," Chuck pointed out. "Have you forgotten something rather important? You still need the King's approval before you can inherit your family's domain. Isn't that right, my love?"

Chuck shamelessly took Princess Xenia's hand and patted it.

The princess's lips twitched because this was one of the troublemaker's specialties.

What was that specialty?

Why, it's none other than hiding behind his fiance's title so that he could get away with almost anything!

However, Victor had been acting very shamelessly since his arrival.

Even if Princess Xenia did not know exactly what had transpired between Victor and Vaan, she could tell that the Montclair heir's intentions were anything but innocent.

How dare this slimy creature target a member of her club!

Xenia promptly wrapped her free arm around Chuck's waist, rested her head against his shoulder, and smiled languidly.

"I have heard," the princess began breathily as she eyed the arrogant scoundrel before them through downcast lashes, "that the Montclair Family has not been blessed with a good heir."

“Those are just not rumors, honey,” Chuck said. “Where there’s smoke, there’s fire.”

“You are right,” Princess Xenia murmured. “We’re lucky to have the Montclair heir with us today, and look at how he... exposes those rumors with his conduct.”

Chuck smirked. “Sometimes gossip is completely different from reality. I am sure the Montclair Family has many jealous enemies lusting after its title and domain.”

For a split second, Princess Xenia’s golden eyes flashed with emotion. “Yes, I should let father know just how baseless these rumors are.”

Victor might be able to look down on Chuck, but he could never look down on a Princess of Avalon.

As such, he decided to tone down his words a bit. Angering the royalty of his kingdom was not in the best of his interest.

“Your Highness, I apologize for taking Chuck’s banter too seriously.” Victor bowed respectfully. “I merely want to get reacquainted with Vaan, whom I haven’t seen for a very long time.”

Before Princess Xenia could respond, Prince Garen moved to stand between Victor and Vaan. “You should leave,” he said, looking coldly at the toad who had been getting on his nerves.

Victor found himself at the center of attention.

Everyone at this table was regarding him with contempt, disdain, or outright hostility, and this was drawing the curiosity of others in the grand hall. He’d be lying if he claimed he was not at all intimidated.

However, since he knew of Vaan’s secret, he held his ground.

“Vaan, jokes should have limits. We might have been engaged secretly, but that doesn’t mean our engagement is any less real,” Victor said with a confident smile plastered on his face. “Surely you cannot bear to have your fiance misunderstood by everyone, right?”