

Endless 381

Chapter 381: Welcome To The Club!

The corner of Alex's lips twitched when he saw the two ladies standing behind Chuck.

A part of him wanted to shriek like a little girl. Another part of him wanted to walk calmly to the window and jump out. It didn't matter to him that he was on the highest floor. In fact, he thought it was a good thing he was on the highest floor!

"Everyone, please welcome our two aspiring club members!" Chuck said with a smile. "Let me introduce you to Ms. Eleanora of Class 2-A and Ms. Evangeline of Class 1-C!"

The club members clapped politely to welcome the two aspiring club members Chuck had suddenly brought inside their club room.

Princess Xenia and Mary narrowed their eyes at the same time when they noticed that Chuck seemed particularly close to the girl named Eleanora.

The princess then gave Mary the "investigate her background as soon as possible" gaze, to which the maid nodded in understanding, having already planned to do so.

"Chuck, can I have a word with you?" Alex asked, wanting nothing more than to give his troublesome roommate a smack on the head for bringing the two girls whom they shouldn't interact with, no matter what!

Originally, Chuck had only planned to "invite" Eleanora to the club because he wanted to keep a close eye on her.

He'd been waiting for her to show up.

Unsurprisingly, Eleanora had shown up, only that she'd been dragged by Evangeline. At this sight, Chuck had asked what was happening.

"I want to join Endless Horizon," Evangeline had said truthfully.

"Welcome to the club!" Chuck, ever the troublemaker, had just accepted her enthusiasm to join the club without asking anything else.

His reason was that since they were classmates, there was nothing wrong for Evangeline to join Endless Horizon as well.

Perhaps sensing that Alex might reject the two girls, Chuck didn't budge and crossed his arms over his chest.

"Alex, I've already given my word that they can join our club," Chuck said, determined. "I hope that you look at them kindly."

"I haven't had the chance to mention this yet, but I have updated the requirements for new applicants," Alex answered. "I'm afraid that they don't meet those requirements."

"You have?" Chuck blinked.

"Yes, I have," Alex answered.

"So, they can't join our club?" Chuck tilted his head.

"It's not like they definitely cannot join," Alex said carefully. He was tempted to let Evangeline in since she was one of the Main Heroines of the story.

However, letting Eleanora join would be akin to letting a fox into a henhouse! She was a spy of the Lord of Vampires, one of the Executives of the Demon Worshipers.

"So can they join or not?" Renard asked as he rested his chin on his palm. "I think you should let them join since Chuck has already promised them. It will not be good if rumors spread that we are not men of our word."

Chuck gave Renard a thumbs-up for the unexpected support.

Nessia had been observing Alex's reaction from the start. Although Evangeline and Eleanora were standing together, the future Phoenix Tactician had managed to pick up that Alex was wary of only Eleanora.

'So she's the problem, huh?' Nessia thought. 'But Chuck seems adamant that she should join our club. Is he being blackmailed by her? Did he fall into a honey trap?'

While Nessia was deep in thought, Lumi—who didn't like noisy discussions in the club room—made a proposal.

"Then how about we vote for it?" Lumi proposed. "Those who are in favor of letting Ms. Evangeline and Ms. Eleanora join our club, raise your hands."

Chuck, Charles, Renard, Lumi, and Lapid raised their hands.

Those who didn't raise their hands were Alex, Lavinia, Nessia, Princess Xenia, and Mary.

Technically, Latifa didn't raise her hand either, but since she was sleeping, the votes were tied.

"I really want to join this club," Evangeline said as she held Alex's gaze. "Please let me join."

Alex found himself looking at her eyes, which reminded him of that little girl lying in the snow.

He couldn't feel any malice or hostility in Evangeline's gaze. Instead, he felt longing, determination, and even a hint of desperation.

These emotions made Alex scratch the back of his head before sighing deeply.

“Fine, both of you can join,” Alex replied. “But both of you will need to sign a magical contract.”

“A magical contract?” Eleanora asked. “What kind of contract?”

The words magical contract were enough to traumatize her, especially after what had happened between her and Chuck.

“Don’t worry,” Alex said. “The contract will only state that you are not allowed to divulge anything you see or hear inside the club room.

“Think of it as a Non-Disclosure Agreement between us. Since we are basically the most famous club in the academy right now, many people want to find our weakness.”

Evangeline nodded readily. “I agree to sign this magical contract.”

“I-I also agree.” Eleanora wouldn’t allow her Mistress to join the club without her, so she had little choice but to accept Alex’s condition.

“Great!” Alex smiled. “Nessia, please write the contract.”

“Understood.” Nessia fixed her glasses with her middle finger as she squinted at Alex.

She had been overworked as of late. If not for the fact that she was being paid generously by her club president, she might have already filed for a week-long paid vacation from the club.

After Nessia had written up the contract, Evangline and Eleanora were asked to drop their blood on the magic contract to bind them to the agreement that was written on it.

A faint light shone over the contract after it absorbed the young ladies’ blood, proving that the contract was now active.

Although Alex didn't know if the magical contract was strong enough to bind Eleanora, he decided to believe in the capabilities of Nessia since she was also one of the Main Heroines of ELO.

"Welcome to the club!" Alex said with a mechanical smile. "I hope that we all get along, and may both of you enjoy your stay."

Chuck clapped his hands, prompting the others to welcome their two new members with another round of applause.

Dim Dim immediately suggested a welcoming party and didn't hesitate to fill the table with bamboo steamers, each containing a different kind of dumpling.

Evangeline was happy because she had achieved her goal. Meanwhile, Eleanora was observing everyone with a critical gaze as she munched on a custard bun.

Now that she was a member of Endless Horizon, she would do her best to investigate this little club that was making a lot of waves within Frieden Academy.

Chapter 382: I Smell Something Fishy

A sigh escaped Alex's lips, prompting Fran to raise her head from their alchemy project and look at him.

"You've been sighing since earlier, Alex," Fran commented. "What's wrong? Did I make a mistake when I mixed our ingredients?"

Her question brought Alex out of his reverie and he responded with an apologetic smile.

"I'm sorry, Fran," Alex replied. "I just have a lot on my mind right now."

"So you can't concentrate... Was that why you asked me to mix the ingredients this time?" Fran asked.

"Yes." Alex nodded. "It's a bit hard to concentrate."

The young lady smiled faintly before shifting her gaze toward the little bun throwing a few ingredients into their cauldron while perched on top of a small wooden box.

Since Alex was not in the right state of mind to participate in the alchemy lesson, Dim Dim happily took his place and helped Fran with their group experiment.

Fran watched as Dim Dim tossed a spark flower into the cauldron, causing a small, fiery eruption to rise from it.

A moment later, it tossed some snow grass inside before using a small stick to mix the ingredients well.

The Alchemy Professor for the First Years, Professor Zanna Noxley, broke into a smile as she passed over Alex's and Fran's table, amused by the sight of Dim Dim tossing a few more ingredients inside the cauldron.

Since the little bun liked her Alchemy lessons very much, she started treating Dim Dim as one of her students, allowing it to participate in alchemical experiments.

"You're doing a good job, Dim Dim," Professor Zanna praised. "Unlike some other students who are busy daydreaming in my class."

The Professor adjusted her glasses, which made Alex cough lightly. However, since Dim Dim was having fun, he didn't make any move to get in its way.

Fran smirked as she handed the next batch of ingredients to Dim Dim, letting it finish what it had started.

By the time the Alchemy Class was about to end, Alex's group had perfectly created a Cold Bane Potion, to everyone's surprise.

This potion increased the consumer's resistance against the cold and was hence perfect for expeditions in icy and snowy places.

Some even claimed that with just a vial of this potion at hand, one could survive even a blizzard.

“You’re amazing, Dim Dim!” Fran exclaimed, prompting the little bun to raise its body with pride.

“Ahem!” Dim Dim looked very smug as everyone gave it a round of applause.

Professor Zanna also complimented Dim Dim and even gave it a pouch of cookies as a reward, which Dim Dim happily accepted.

As they left the Alchemy Room, Evangeline paced herself alongside Alex and Fran and congratulated their group for getting the top marks in the class.

Fran was quite surprised, for this was her first time seeing Evangeline take the initiative to approach and talk to someone ever since the latter transferred to their class.

The young lady never really spoke to them or any of their classmates, but she would reply if someone talked to her.

Many thought of Evangeline as a beautiful lady with a cold personality. Even if they wanted to befriend her, they believed it was hard to get close to her.

But seeing Evangeline take the initiative to talk to Alex and congratulate their group, Fran started to think that her impression of Evangeline needed some revisions.

“Thank you,” Alex replied. “But it was mostly Fran and Dim Dim who did everything during class.”

“Ahem!” Dim Dim stood straighter, eliciting a giggle from Evangeline.

However, she didn’t expect that her giggle would freeze her classmates in place.

“D-Did you see that?” Chuck asked Charles. “Did Evangeline just giggle?”

"She did," Charles confirmed even though he couldn't believe his eyes and ears either.

"I have never seen this side of her before," Chuck muttered. "Maybe she is changing so much because she became our club member. This means that it's all thanks to me that Evangeline finally has friends. I'm so awesome!"

"..."

"..."

Without exchanging a single word or glance, Nessia and Charles agreed to move away from Chuck and pretend they had absolutely no idea who he might be.

Evangeline and Eleanora had joined their club yesterday, but anyone attentive enough could tell that Alex wasn't too thrilled with this development.

Nessia, ever the astute observer, had noticed that Alex was fine talking to Evangeline but refrained from interacting with Eleanora.

As someone who had been working closely with Alex for the sake of their club, she made sure to talk to him in private to ask if Eleanora was a bad egg or not.

Within Endless Horizon, Nessia was Alex's confidante.

He trusted her enough to tell her his secrets, especially when it came to future events that would require her assistance.

And just as always, Alex told her the reason why he was wary of Eleanora.

He believed that he needed someone else to monitor the movements of their newest member, especially when he wasn't around. Nessia happened to be perfect for that role.

"Eleanora is the spy of one of the Executives of the Demon Worshipers. No matter what happens, don't get on her bad side."

This news alarmed Nessia, and she immediately asked Alex why he hadn't reported Eleanora to the Professors or the Headmaster.

Alex told her that Eleanora was mostly harmless, but kicking her out of the academy or, worse, imprisoning her would be more dangerous than letting her stay in their club.

If Eleanora were to be imprisoned inside the academy, Evangeline's father wouldn't take it lying down. Eleanora was relatively close to him, and he treated her like an adopted daughter who had always served him loyally.

(A/N: Let's take this time to offer a silent prayer to our boy, Chuck. May he rest in peace.)

After a discussion, Alex and Nessia came up with a plan to deal with Eleanora.

As much as possible, Alex would not interact with her. He'd even actively avoid her unless the situation called for it. Contrary to his aloofness, Nessia would befriend her so she could better keep a closer watch on the vampire girl to make sure she would not sabotage their club.

Alex was confident that Nessia would be able to deal with Eleanora if the two of them ever ended up clashing with each other.

And now that she knew that her opponent was a vampire, Nessia decided to start making talismans that would counter her powers. If the time to neutralize Eleanora ever came, Nessia would be at an advantage.

"Is it just me or is she acting too friendly with Alex?" Lavinia asked Lumi, who was carrying Latifa in her arms.

"I smell something fishy," Lumi replied. "They're not this close before."

Lavinia nodded because this was indeed the case. However, she could also feel that Alex seemed guarded against Evangeline, who looked determined to be his friend.

Latifa slowly opened her eyes and glanced at the young lady who was walking beside Alex.

'She's not a fish,' Latifa thought. 'She's a Dhampir.'

Among the members of Endless Horizon, Latifa's senses were the sharpest. Her sensitivity far surpassed even Beastkins.

She already knew that Eleanora was a Vampire and that Evangeline was a Dhampir.

Latifa was also starting to think that the two new members intended to make Alex their blood bank.

However, she still gave them the benefit of the doubt since it was Chuck who'd invited them to join their club.

Still, she did not fail to notice the tender and hopeful way Evangeline looked at Alex from time to time.

Although Latifa slept most of the time, she had also been paying close attention to the newest additions to their club.

The moment the two ladies decided to sink their fangs into Alex, Latifa would be alert and ready to deal with any threat trying to steal and endanger her property.

Chapter 383: Is There Something On My Face?

"Finally, it's time to farm some Academy Points!" Chuck said as he rested his hands on his waist. "Isn't that right, Dim Dim?"

"Dim Dim!" Dim Dim raised its little stubby hand, completely agreeing with Chuck.

With the Mission Hall at last open to the First Years, they could finally take on some missions, which rewarded Academy Points upon completion.

(A/N: From now on, I'll refer to Academy Points as AP. Do not confuse it with Arcana Points, which is also AP.)

Inside Frieden Academy, AP was the main currency everyone used in transactions.

It was mainly used to buy items from the Exchange Center or purchase things from students who specialize in production-related services.

Even cafes around the academy accepted AP, since their customers were mostly students who had just finished their classes.

"Are you not excited, Alex?" Chuck asked.

"Not as much as you," Alex replied.

Alex now had over four million academy points after cashing in the Monster Cores he had gathered inside the Orion Dungeon.

He had given his members a hundred thousand academy points each as their share of the club funds.

Of course, Nessia had received a bigger share. After all, it was thanks to her talismans and artifacts that they could breeze through the competition without endangering themselves.

To her satisfaction, Alex generously gave her 500,000 AP.

"Let's go." Chuck grabbed Alex's hand and dragged him out of their room. "You know what they say—the early bird catches the early worm!"

“Dim Dim!”

“See? Even Dim Dim agrees with me.”

“Dim!”

Alex looked at the two with amusement, thinking they looked like kids about to go on a field trip.

Since most of these missions required students to leave the academy, it seemed accurate to consider them field trips as well.

But Alex already had a destination in mind.

Slime Paradise.

In the world of Arcana, slimes were considered the most protected monsters.

An unwritten rule dictated that slimes were untouchable, allowing them to freely travel across the land, unharmed by even the most aggressive of creatures.

In fact, Alex could carry a single baby slime with him to a battlefield and the fear of retribution would ensure that no one dared to lay a finger on him.

Since Dim Dim was the creator of Arcana and its best friend was Eiko, a baby slime, the slimes gained a divine protection of sorts.

If people intentionally hurt or killed a slime, they would soon find themselves regretting their decision.

In fact, in the MMORPG Mode of Endless Leveling Online, a player who hunted a slime would see their character imprisoned for thirty days and have their levels decreased by half.

Simply put, it wasn't worth it, so almost no one dared to hurt a slime deliberately in ELO.

So why would Alex go to the place called Slime Paradise?

It was because there was a hidden treasure chest there that would allow him to learn one of the rarest skills in the game.

It was so extremely rare that selling the skill book in an auction would net millions of gold coins.

Of course, he had no intention of selling that skill. He planned to use it for himself.

And this skill was none other than... Teleport [EX].

This skill would let him teleport to places that he had been to before.

The number of places that he could teleport to would be equivalent to his Rank.

Since Alex was now a Rank 3 Oathkeeper, he would be able to save three locations he could teleport to whenever he wished .

The good part about this ability was that he could teleport not only himself but up to seven other people.

Although the cooldown was three hours, it wasn't a bad trade-off given that Alex could cover any distance using this skill.

Unfortunately, there was no mission located at Slime Paradise. Knowing that all he had to do was pick a mission that would bring him as close to it as possible, Alex was naturally not stumped by this.

'North, huh?' Alex thought. 'It's still very far from the Aetherion Empire, but their influence has already reached that area.'

While Alex was looking for a suitable quest, Chuck spotted Charles and Renard and hurried to ask them where they planned to go.

Renard didn't answer Chuck since he wanted to do a solo mission and didn't want to risk the troublemaker coming along. As for Charles, he was naive enough to spill the details of his mission, which was to escort the children of the Sunveil Orphanage on a field trip.

"Sunveil Orphanage?" Chuck blinked. "Isn't that the orphanage where your sister is currently at?"

"It is." Charles nodded. "Actually, I originally thought of accompanying them for free, but my Aunt refused. She said she was going to commission the academy for their safety, so if I wanted to join them, I must go through the proper channels."

"Heh... it seems that your Aunt wants you to earn Academy Points while spending time with your family," Chuck commented. "So who else is going with you? I suppose Nessia is coming, right?"

At the mention of Nessia, Charles' face stiffened, which made Chuck chuckle.

"It's fine." Chuck patted Charles' shoulder. "Only an idiot won't have already noticed that you like her."

Renard pretended that he was so engrossed with reading the mission board that he briefly lost his sense of hearing. He refused to be labeled as an idiot who hadn't realized that Charles had a crush on Nessia!

"So, is she coming?" Chuck pressed.

"Y-Yeah," Charles answered. "Whenever I go to the orphanage, she comes with me to do volunteer work. So she's also aware of the mission and already registered for it."

“Attaboy!” Chuck smirked. “But you’re still slow, Charles. If you don’t make a move soon, someone might steal Nessia from you, you know?”

Charles lowered his head after hearing Chuck’s advice. Nessia might not be as eyecatching as some of their schoolmates, but she was the loveliest girl in his eyes.

She was smart, humble, kind, dependable, and made Charles feel a warmth that reminded him of home.

Seeing that his words were starting to work, Chuck moved closer and whispered devilishly in Charles’ ear.

“If you don’t make a move soon, someone else might take her away,” Chuck repeated. “For example, Alex. Have you seen how close they are?”

“That’s not going to happen,” Charles replied confidently. “If you had mentioned any other guy, I might have believed you. But Alex won’t make a move on Nessia.”

“Tsk!” Chuck clicked his tongue. He also knew that Alex didn’t see Nessia that way, but he wanted to spur Charles on.

In fact, their relationship was very similar to best friends who had each other’s backs.

“Still, you shouldn’t dilly-dally, Charles,” Chuck insisted. “Trust me. I am a love expert. I know what I’m talking about.”

“... Hey, you know I can hear you, right?” Nessia, who was only a few meters away from the boys, asked with a reddened face.

“Oh no!” Chuck exclaimed dramatically. “She found out, Charles! Now, you can’t get married anymore. Nessia, you have to take responsibility for hi—ick!”

Chuck hastily jumped back as Nessia fired a Stone Bullet near his feet in order to stop him from talking.

“One more word from you and I’ll bury you six feet under,” Nessia threatened.

“Oh dear. Look at the time!” Chuck took out his pocket watch with shaking hands and looked at it. “It’s time for me to find a mission! Bye, guys! See you later!”

The troublemaker retreated as if his pants were on fire, moving over to Princess Xenia and Mary, who were looking at the Mission Board a good distance away from the rest.

Alex laughed internally, finding Chuck’s attempt to play matchmaker to be quite amusing.

However, it did have an effect because Charles looked more determined to finally confess his feelings to Nessia.

“I see, so they’re a couple, huh?”

Alex almost jumped out of fright because he hadn’t noticed that someone was behind him!

When he turned around, he saw Evangeline smiling at him.

“Eva, please don’t do that,” Alex said as he patted his chest. “I almost got a heart attack.”

“Eva?” Evangeline blinked.

Only those close to her, including Eleanora and her Father, called her Eva.

Hearing Alex use that nickname made her heart skip a beat.

“Ah, sorry. Should I call you Evangeline instead?” Alex realized that he had acted too familiar with her, which was something that he absolutely shouldn’t have done. After all, they were not even friends yet.

"You can call me, Eva," Evangeline stated. "Please call me by that name."

"O-Okay." Alex was caught off guard by the intensity of Evangeline's gaze, making him subconsciously take a step back.

In order to change the topic, he decided to ask her what mission she was planning to take.

"I haven't decided yet," Evangeline replied. "How about you? What mission do you plan to undertake?"

"I'm letting Dim Dim choose it for me," Alex answered.

He had been distracted by Chuck's antics, so he'd asked Dim Dim to look for a mission that would allow them to visit Slime Paradise.

When the little bun had heard that Alex wanted to visit that place, it had become very motivated and jumped onto the mission board, crawling over its surface while looking for the perfect mission.

When the students saw Dim Dim, some of them asked the little bun to toss the missions that were pinned on the upper part of the Mission Board beyond their reach.

Dim Dim, being the helpful little God it was, didn't hesitate to toss the mission quests to the students who had asked for them.

"Dim Dim, don't forget our own mission!" Alex reminded the little bun, who was having fun because it felt like it was playing a game of catch with the other students.

"Dim Dim!" Dim Dim gave Alex a salute before resuming its task.

"Do you plan to go on any specific mission?" Evangeline asked out of curiosity. "Maybe I can help you find it."

“Actually, I want to visit Slime Paradise, so I’m looking for a mission that would take me close to it,” Alex answered.

Although he had tried to be more guarded against Evangeline because of her background, the sense of familiarity he felt toward her made him answer honestly without thinking.

When his brain finally caught up with his mouth, he immediately thought that Evangeline had used a Charm Skill on him.

However, he dismissed this idea aside since he was immune to Charm. Besides, he believed that the young lady beside him wouldn’t resort to something like that.

In fact, Evangeline only used her Charm Skill when the player actively decided to choose the options that would force the young lady on the Anti-Hero Route of Story Mode.

It was a skill she refused to use if she could help it because she was unnerved by the act of taking away another’s free will.

“Is there something on my face?” Evangeline suddenly asked.

“No, of course not. I was just zoning out.” Alex coughed lightly before shifting his gaze back to the Mission Board.

He wasn’t aware that Eleanora was observing him from a safe distance. Though her expression was calm, she’d come to regard him as some kind of thief who might take something precious away from her.

Chapter 384: Alex’s First Academy Mission [Part 1]

“You’re going on a mission outside the kingdom?” Lavinia asked seriously.

“Yes,” Alex answered. “Actually, I plan to go to Slime Paradise as well. By picking a mission that will bring me to the vicinity of Slime Paradise, I am killing two birds with one stone.”

Lavinia frowned. "Are you planning to go there alone?"

"I'm not exactly alone," Alex pointed out. "I have Dim Dim with me. Isn't that right, Dim Dim?"

Dim Dim nodded. "Dim!"

Lavinia wanted to accompany Alex, but she had already accepted a mission that would allow her to return to the Clawford Tribe and visit her family.

In fact, she had intended to invite Alex to come along because her grandfather wanted to talk to him in person. But since he already planned to go somewhere else, she decided to just keep this as a secret for now.

"So only you and Dim Dim will go?" Latifa asked.

Alex nodded. "That's right."

Evangeline was carefully eavesdropping on their conversation while pretending to read a book.

She had asked Alex if she could come with him on his mission, but the young man had said that he preferred to go there alone.

A part of her had wanted to insist that he reconsider, but another part of her had not wanted Alex to find her demanding.

All she wanted was to keep him safe from the Demon Worshipers, but she couldn't convince him without revealing her background.

Evangeline was worried that Alex would distance himself if she told him the truth.

The worst case scenario was that the young man would turn her over to the academy. If that really happened, Evangeline would be so heartbroken that she might fall into depression.

'Since I already know his destination, my best course of action is to also look for a mission that will bring me as close to Slime Paradise as possible,' Evangeline thought. 'It is best if I take Eleanora along because I might get lost or attacked if I travel alone.'

She wasn't bad at directions, but she understood that having two heads was better than one.

Latifa, on the other hand, was thinking of sending either Lotte or Lumi to follow Alex during his mission.

Since the two of them liked to explore whenever they weren't on guard duty, they were unlikely to turn down this opportunity.

'Now the big question remains,' Latifa thought. 'Who should I send?'

Lotte was a calm and capable version of Latifa. Although she wasn't good when it came to scary things like ghosts or monsters, she could handle most situations with grace.

Lumi was more than a little on the aggressive side, but her fighting prowess surpassed that of Lotte.

She liked to bicker with Alex, but Latifa had a feeling that if the young man ever found himself in danger, Lumi wouldn't hesitate to come to his rescue.

After weighing the pros and cons, she decided that having Lotte—who always carried out her duty perfectly—protect her while everyone else was away was better.

Lumi was the best fighter among the three of them, so she would work well together with Alex who specialized in defense.

The only problem was...

“Hah? And why would I follow him on his little quest to Slime Paradise?” Lumi asked as she folded her arms across her chest. “I’m neither his babysitter nor a stalker.”

Latifa had expected Lumi’s resistance, but that didn’t mean it was easier to deal with.

Her Alters could make their own decisions and even disagree with her on certain things.

They were parts of her that even she didn’t know about, similar to how every person had multiple aspects to their personality.

Although she was their Main Body, that didn’t mean that they had to do everything that she ordered them to do.

This was something that Latifa had accepted long ago after awakening her Innate Ability, which synchronized very well with her Job Class, Celestial Walker.

Since Lumi didn’t want to follow her orders, Latifa had no choice but to resort to negotiation.

“Then what will it take for you to do as I ask?” Latifa asked.

All their club members had already left, so only the three of them were inside the clock tower.

Latifa wouldn’t have dared to hold this conversation with her Alters in the presence of other people.

“Tell me, what do you really feel about Alex?” Lumi asked. “I think it’s about time you make it clear to us.”

Lotte glanced first at Lumi then at Latifa. She knew that Latifa liked Alex, but she also wanted to know if this fondness was the sort that existed between friends or something more.

“I...” Latifa pondered for a bit because she didn’t truly understand her own feelings either.

After they had fused together to fight against the Barbarian King, she had gotten to know him so well that they seemed like old friends.

She understood that Alex wasn't a bad person, and he truly cared about her.

Latifa didn't have any experience with having a relationship with a man, so she wasn't sure if what she felt was romantic love or friendly affection.

Seeing that she couldn't make up her mind, Lumi sighed before shaking her head.

"Fine," Lumi said. "I'll stalk him if I have to. Happy?"

"Thank you, Lumi!" Latifa hugged her Alter, making the latter sigh a second time as she patted her Master's back.

Lotte watched this with a smile on her face because she understood that Lumi cared for Latifa very much.

Since Lumi understood that Alex was important to Latifa, she decided to follow him just to make sure that he wouldn't be cheating on her!

Lumi was also aware of Lavinia's feelings for Alex.

Latifa was fine with that. She had actually already talked to Lavinia about it.

Whatever they had discussed, only they knew about it.

Even Lumi and Lotte, as Latifa's Alters, were kept in the dark because this was a secret between Latifa and Lavinia.

Chapter 385: Alex's First Academy Mission [Part 2]

A day after picking his mission, the young man had packed his things and was ready to go.

His destination was the forest a few miles away from Slime Paradise. The villagers who resided nearby were disturbed by the sudden increase in monster activity within the forest.

Since most of them were hunters, foragers, apothecaries, or lumberjacks, the forest was their livelihood.

They had often clashed with monsters in the past, but the number of sightings and clashes with the monsters had increased drastically over the past few days.

Something might be happening inside the forest, and they wanted to know what it was.

The villagers had also asked Adventurers from the nearby towns for help, but none of them wanted to visit such a remote place.

The pay for the commission wasn't good either and there was a chance that the monsters in the forest were stronger than reported.

Since the level of danger was unknown and the pay was only enough to cover the travel expenses to and from the village, the Adventurer Guild decided to make this commission an "Open Commission", allowing any branch of the Adventurer Guild to take it.

The Mission Hall of Frieden Academy worked in tandem with the Adventurer Guild and accepted these spill-over missions that no one wanted to take.

Of course, the Professors didn't seriously think that there would be any students who would accept such missions. However, they posted these missions on the Mission Board anyway so that the students had the chance to compare what was available and learn that not everything was worth accepting.

The Professors believed that this would be a very valuable lesson for the students after they graduated.

However, Alex Stratos was here to defy expectations!

“Are you sure that you want to take this?” the Receptionist in the Mission Hall had asked Alex a day ago.

“Yes, I’m sure,” Alex had replied back then.

Although the receptionist had tried to dissuade Alex from going, he had insisted that he really wanted to help the poor villagers who had no one to turn to.

His righteousness and shamelessness—errr bravery had touched the receptionist, so she decided to double the amount of Academy Points that would be rewarded to Alex once the mission was completed.

“Are you ready to go, Dim Dim?”

“Aye!”

“Good.”

Since there was no direct teleportation gate to his destination, Alex would need to teleport to three different towns before taking a carriage.

This journey would last for five to six hours and the farthest that the carriage could take him was to the base of the mountain where the village was located.

From there, he would need to hike for at least seven to eight hours before finally arriving at his destination.

Given the remoteness of the village, the villagers had to send someone to the nearby towns and purchase needed items and supplies twice a month.

Just as Alex was about to enter the portal, he noticed that Lumi was trailing behind him.

“Are you going out on a mission on behalf of Latifa?” Alex asked.

“Something like that,” Lumi answered.

“Well, take care, Lumi.”

“Mmm. You too.”

After bidding Lumi goodbye, Alex entered the portal and reappeared a few seconds later at Abbey Town.

As he was about to ask the Guard where the portal to the next town was, Lumi once again appeared beside him.

Alex didn't think much of this because Abbey Town was like an interchange, with many teleportation gates leading to the North of the Kingdom of Avalon.

'She must be headed somewhere north,' Alex thought as he followed the guard's directions to the portal that would take him to Apricot Village.

After paying the toll gate, Alex once again stepped into the portal.

And, just like before, Lumi also materialized beside him.

“You must be going far north huh?” Alex asked Latifa's alter, who was walking beside him with her hands clasped behind her back.

“Yeah,” Lumi replied casually. “I picked up a mission to investigate a womanizer and gather proof of his philandering.”

“Wow. I didn't know that the academy accepted such missions like that.”

“I know, right?”

Alex chuckled because he didn't expect that Latifa would choose such a mission. However, after thinking over Lumi's abilities, he realized that going undercover was a perfect mission for her.

“Well then, see you soon,” Alex said before entering yet another portal.

“Dim Dim!” Dim Dim waved at Lumi from the top of Alex's head, bidding its friend goodbye.

“Oh, you'll see me soon enough.” Lumi smirked as she stood in front of the portal and looked around for a clock.

She would wait for five minutes before entering this portal so that Alex wouldn't know that she was tailing him.

When the time was up, she stepped into the portal and appeared at Apricot Village.

She then turned invisible and quickly caught up with Alex as he headed to the teleportation gate that would take him to the third jump of his journey.

Alex was blissfully unaware that he had gained a stalker.

After arriving at Poca Poca Town, Alex looked for a coachman who would be willing to take him to the base of Bedrock Mountain.

Several minutes of haggling later, Alex sat at the back of a wooden wagon and was well on his way to Bedrock Mountain.

Lumi hovered above the carriage in her spirit form, bored because she had heard that it would take a few hours before they arrived at the base of the mountain.

'Even if Alex hurried, he would still arrive at Oak Village when the sun had just set,' Lumi thought. 'This guy is seriously just a busybody.'

Although Latifa didn't say anything, she knew that her Master was very worried for Alex's safety due to the danger of the Demon Worshipers.

The young man had been a thorn at their side, so she wouldn't be too surprised if someone was tracking his movements within and outside the academy.

Fortunately, Evangeline had asked Eleanora to tell the spies and agents of the Demon Worshipers in the academy that their faction had sent people to deal with Alex.

Because of this, they had backed down and were not following Alex on his first mission outside of the academy.

Evangeline knew that this trick would only work once because the Demon Worshipers would certainly become suspicious if nothing happened to the boy during his trip.

As such, Eleanora was forced to assign some subordinates whom she didn't like to head to Alex's location.

That way, even if they failed the mission, she could at least tell the other factions that she had tried to eliminate Alex.

Of course, Eleanora had ensured that the Demon Worshipers sent to follow Alex were Rank 3 Agents—strong enough that no one could accuse her of helping their enemies but weak enough that the young man shouldn't have problems overpowering them.

Chapter 386: Sir, I'm Already Taken [Part 1]

Moments before the sun set, Alex finally arrived at Oak Village.

"That was a long hike," Alex said as he walked toward the entrance of the village.

By the entrance, there was a rampart. A villager stood on top of each side, both holding an unloaded bow.

Even at the sight of Alex, they didn't nock any arrows into them, thinking Alex was just a pitiful soul who got lost in the mountains and stumbled upon their village by pure coincidence.

However, they still didn't open the gate, nor did they ask who he was.

Until Alex got too close.

"Halt, who are you?" one of the villagers asked. "Are you lost?"

"I'm not lost, Sir," Alex replied. "My name is Alex Stratos, and I have come to fulfill the mission I received from Frieden Academy."

"Frieden Academy?" The villager looked at Alex in surprise. "Are you talking about THAT Frieden Academy?"

"Yes, Sir," Alex answered. "I am a First Year student of Class 1-C. I have come to investigate the reason for the sudden increase in monster sightings in the Ashenbark Forest."

After he laid out all the details, the villagers finally believed that Alex had come for the mission they had commissioned in the Adventurer's Guild.

However, seeing Alex was so young, they were in doubt, believing he might not be qualified to take the mission, given how dangerous it was.

Regardless of what they thought, they still let him into the village. The sky was darkening, and they knew better than anyone how dangerous the outside could be around this time. Not to mention, it was inappropriate to treat someone who wanted to help them so harshly.

"I'll take you to the house of the Village Head," said the villager named Mark.

He seemed to be in his mid-twenties, and judging from the way he carried himself, he must be one of the Hunters of the village.

"Thank you, Sir Mark," Alex replied.

"But you should leave when morning comes. The Forest is dangerous right now, and going alone will endanger your life."

"Don't worry, Sir," Alex answered. "I'm not alone. I have Dim Dim with me."

"Dim!" Dim Dim nodded.

"... No offense, but what can that little thing do?" Mark asked. "Will you use it as monster bait?"

"Of course not," Alex chuckled. "Dim Dim may not look like it, but it is a very dependable companion."

"Ahem!" Dim Dim raised its body proudly, wholeheartedly agreeing with Alex's statement.

"Well, it's your funeral," Mark stated.

Clearly, he didn't want Alex to go alone with Dim Dim inside the forest, knowing it was teeming with monsters.

They even spotted several Rank 2 Hobgoblins during the past few days, and the Hunters had been on edge upon discovery.

Convinced it was no longer safe, the Village Head had started contemplating sending all the women and the children to Poca Poca Town, where they would be safe, while the rest of the villagers dealt with the monster problem.

Stopping before a house, Mark knocked on the Village Head's door.

"Old man Simon, we have a visitor," Mark shouted. "He has come here because of our commission."

A few seconds later, the door opened and revealed an old man with white hair and beard, who looked at Alex with a smile.

"Welcome to Oak Village," the Village Head, Simon, greeted Alex with a smile.

But that smile soon faded when he saw that no one else but Mark and Alex stood in front of his house.

"Young man, where are your companions?" Simon asked. "Don't worry. My house is big enough for ten people to stay in."

"It's just me, Sir," Alex answered. "I came from Frieden Academy to accept your commission."

Simon frowned before shifting his gaze to Mark, who only gave a casual shrug.

"Told you, old man. The pay you offered is too small to attract competent Adventurers," Mark commented. "Anyway, let him stay for the night. He traveled a long way to get here."

"I'm sorry, where are my manners?" Simon opened the door and made a gesture for Alex to come in. "Please come in, and thank you for coming. My granddaughter will prepare your dinner."

Alex thanked Simon and entered the house. Just as the old man had said, the house was big enough to allow guests to stay inside it.

It seemed that the Village Head's house was commonly used to accommodate those who visit their village for a short period of time.

“Alicia, we have a guest,” Simon said to his granddaughter, who was cooking in the kitchen. “Add one more serving for dinner.”

“Okay, Grandpa,” Alicia replied before peeking out of the kitchen to see their guest.

Her eyes widened a bit when she saw a handsome young man, who then smiled in her direction.

Alicia’s face reddened as she once again disappeared into the kitchen, returning to her cooking.

Simon smiled faintly after seeing this scene.

“Please forgive my granddaughter. She is very shy toward strangers,” Simon said. “Also, she’s off-limits. Dare you do something to her, and I’ll bury you six feet under. Do I make myself clear?”

“Sir, I’m already taken,” Alex replied.

“That doesn’t make me feel any better,” Simon stated. “City folks like you have a habit of picking wild flowers wherever you go.”

Dim Dim blinked once, then twice, before wondering what Alex was talking about. It had been with Alex since he appeared in Arcana, and as far as the little bun knew, the young man was still single.

He wasn’t aware that Lumi was already inside the house and was just invisible. When she heard that Alex was already taken, she immediately arched an eyebrow, wondering who that person was.

“Are you telling the truth?” Simon was overly protective of his granddaughter and had also dealt with a fair share of trouble—thugs liked to approach Alicia whenever she accompanied him to Poca Poca Town to buy their village’s supplies. “What is your lover’s name?”

“Her name is Lumi,” Alex answered without batting an eye.

He didn't dare call any of his Queens his girlfriends at the moment, but when push came to shove, he thought of Latifa's Alter, who usually didn't get along with him.

Since he was very far from the academy, he didn't hesitate to use Lumi's name. Chances were slim that she would know about this discussion.

He was wrong...

Dim Dim sensed that something was about to happen, so it didn't hesitate to jump off Alex's head, abandoning its friend without hesitation!

"What did you say, you bastard?!" Lumi materialized right beside Alex and gave the young man a slap. "When did I become your girlfriend, huh?!"

After being slapped silly, Alex staggered a few steps before disbelievably looking at the beautiful fox lady, who glared at him with a beet-red face.

"L-Lumi?!" Alex gasped, nearly forgetting the pain of getting slapped. "What are you doing here?"

Lumi paused because she had forgotten that she was supposed to just observe Alex incognito.

The young man's reply to the Village Head had made her feel embarrassed, so she acted before she could even think about it!

Simon was equally surprised after seeing the fox lady appear inside the living room of his house. He then glanced at the red mark on Alex's face before sighing in his heart.

'Ai... he reminds me of when I was young,' Simon thought. 'I was also very popular with the ladies back then.'

In the end, Simon no longer worried about Alex making a move on his granddaughter.

He might be old, but he had seen many things in his life.

A glance was enough to tell him that the girl named Lumi didn't really hate Alex. In fact, he could see that the young lady seemed to like him in her own way.

In fact, he even planned to give Alex some love advice later so he would be able to make up with the young lady, whose handprint was visible on the young man's right cheek.

Chapter 387: Sir, I'm Already Taken [Part 2]

Alicia snuck glances at their guests with great interest as she ate her dinner.

She had just turned seventeen this year. Ever since her birth, she'd never left the village, except for the times when she accompanied her grandfather to buy supplies.

Deep inside, she yearned to travel the world rather than remain stuck in this remote mountain location, growing old in the same place until her death.

While there were over a dozen teenagers her age, none of them caught her fancy.

Also, none of them was as handsome as Alex, whom she found very interesting.

Alex and Lumi didn't say a word to each other and simply focused on the simple meal served to them.

Their dinner was porridge with a few pieces of meat—warm and filling enough for a cold night like this.

When dinner ended, Simon spoke with his two guests and tried to convince them to return to the academy come morning.

"It's too dangerous to investigate the cause of the increase in monster sightings inside the forest with just the two of you," Simon said in a serious tone. "Our Hunters concluded they might be a Goblin Clan chased away from their original territory, forced to settle along these parts."

“The Ashenbark Forest spans for many miles, and even now, we’ve only explored a small part of it. Although encountering Goblins inside the forest is common, we recently scouted many Hobgoblins two miles away from the village, which is a very dangerous sign.”

Alex had been dealing with goblins since he first arrived in Arcana, so he understood the danger that the Village Head was talking about.

The Monster Stampede in the Floating Islands of Thaloria was an example of what might happen if this kind of situation were left without intervention.

“Have you seen any Rank 3 Monsters?” Alex inquired.

Back then, a Rank 2 Monster was enough to kill him. But now, he was confident that he could handle them even if he faced them in a group.

Even so, Rank 3 Monsters were tricky opponents, especially when they came in groups.

“During his scouting mission, Mark’s father saw a Hobgoblin Leader riding a Dire Wolf three miles away from the village,” Simon replied. “That leader is also accompanied by other Hobgoblin Riders.”

“Do you think they’ve discovered the location of your village?” Alex asked in a serious tone.

“The possibility exists,” Simon answered. Based on his grim look, he must’ve contemplated this problem for a few days already.

Simon was a Rank 4 Wind Mage and had been the protector of the village for many years.

There were also other Rank 3 and Rank 4 Hunters in the village, keeping everyone safe from the Goblin Scouting Parties.

They also had a Rank 4 Swordsman, who managed the defenses of the village whenever the Hunters were out.

Because of these strong villagers, Oak Village had remained safe despite its remote location.

However, dealing with a party of monsters and an army of monsters were two different things.

They wouldn't need to worry about groups of monsters attacking their village.

But an Army of Goblins was a different matter altogether.

"Don't worry, Village Head," Alex replied with a smile. "Lumi here is an incredibly good scout. She could scout enough to understand the situation without being detected. You saw what she did earlier, right? She launched a sneak attack, and I couldn't even react until she was done beating me."

"Hmph!" Lumi averted her gaze from Alex, as if looking at him reminded her of bad memories.

Simon wasn't able to refute Alex's words. Even he had failed to detect Lumi's presence earlier, even though she stood close to them.

Her concealment ability was quite impressive, and unless someone was periodically using detection magic, none of them would be able to know that she was there.

"Well, she's one thing. But how about you?" Simon inquired. "What's your profession?"

"Ahoo! Ahoo!" Dim Dim replied, raising the little fork in its hands.

Alex chuckled because he understood Dim Dim's reference. He was tempted to do the same, but doing so wouldn't be good manners to their host.

"I am a Rank 3 Oathkeeper," Alex replied.

“Oathkeeper?” Simon blinked. “That Oathkeeper from the Clawford Tribe?”

“That’s it!” Alex looked at the Village Head in surprise. “You know about the Clawford Tribe?”

“Well, I was an adventurer once,” Simon replied, as if recalling his adventurer days. “Then I took an arrow in the knee...”

Alex and Dim Dim nodded in understanding, while Lumi and Alicia frowned at the same time because they didn’t understand what Simon was talking about.

(A/N: To those who don’t know, that quote meant that he got married. Because when someone proposes, they usually fall to one knee, which symbolizes the marriage proposal.)

Simon then lightly coughed to stir the conversation back to Alex.

“I have heard of the Legend of the Oathkeeper from my friends from the Clawford Tribe,” Simon stated. “As far as I know, no one has been able to get that Hidden Job Class for hundreds of years.

“It seems I have greatly underestimated you, Alex. If that Legend holds true, then you and Lumi might be able to help us investigate this matter.”

Lumi, who had kept quiet until now, glanced at Alex. She had heard a little bit about the Oathkeeper Job Class from Lavinia, but she didn’t fully understand what it symbolized for the Clawford Tribe.

“Grandpa, can you tell me about the Legend of the Oathkeeper?” Alicia asked.

Her grandfather’s comment about Alex getting a Job Class that hadn’t been taken for hundreds of years piqued her interest.

“Okay.” Simon nodded.

He was more than happy to share the tale that his friends had shared with him in the past.

“The First Oathkeeper goes by the name Leonard Hartwell,” Simon said. “The Clawford Tribe hailed him as their greatest hero. But what made him great wasn’t because he was strong and invincible.

“It was because he stood at the front of every battle, wielding his shield and making sure to protect those who couldn’t fend for themselves.”

Simon’s eyes lit up because he liked to tell stories, especially to the children of the village, whenever there was an opportunity to do so.

His story went on for a few hours, and before the teenagers knew it, it was already past ten in the evening.

“Well, then. Would you like to share a room?” Simon asked after his story ended.

““Separate rooms, please.””

Alex and Lumi spoke at the same time, making Alicia giggle.

No one mentioned Alex’s earlier statement about Lumi being his girlfriend because her reaction made it clear that she wasn’t.

At least, only on the surface.

While their rooms were being prepared, Alex asked Lumi in private about what she was doing in Oak Village.

The young lady replied that she also accepted the mission Alex took since it was meant for a group.

Knowing she wouldn't say anything more than that, Alex let it be. He then told her that they should hold a strategy meeting in the morning so they could decide how to tackle the village's problem.

Since Lumi had already shown herself, there was no use in going back to hiding. So, she accepted Alex's proposal and decided to rest for the night.

An hour after going to sleep, Lumi found herself inside Alex's dream, who was dreaming of having a date together with her while paddling a boat on a small river located at the outskirts of the City of Harmonia.

Chapter 388: Goblin Encounter [Part 1]

Alex, Lumi, and Mark headed deeper inside the Ashenbark Forest.

Mark was going to guide them to the location where many Hobgoblins had been spotted the past week or so.

The Hunters of Oak Village concluded that this group of goblins had been defeated in a territorial war. To avoid clashing again with their victorious enemies, they had been forced to head outwards.

This was a very common thing when it came to monster territories overlapping each other.

There were times when these monster colonies would form an alliance, but if cooperation wasn't an option, a turf war would start. The defeated monsters would be forced to leave if they wanted to survive.

Just an hour after leaving the village, the three encountered Hobgoblin Riders riding on Dire Wolves.

Alex believed the six riders to be either a hunting party or a scout party.

The Hobgoblin and the Dire Wolves were both Rank 2 Monsters, which was a lethal combination because they both had speed, power, and some semblance of intellect.

Although Alex was confident that he, Lumi, and Mark could defeat them, he decided to be cautious and remain hidden for the time being.

"Lumi, can you scout the surrounding area to see if there are more than one group of Hobgoblin Riders?" Alex asked. "We'll wait for you here."

"Okay," Lumi replied before turning invisible.

Since she had agreed to cooperate with Alex, she decided that she would follow his orders and play her part as a team member.

'It's not because he treated me well in his dream that I'm doing this,' Lumi thought as she passed through the trees in her ethereal form, making sure to check if there were any other Goblins nearby.

In Alex's subconscious, they had gone on a date.

'I'm doing this so that Latifa wouldn't be sad if Alex got hurt,' Lumi mused. 'He's such a nuisance.'

As the young lady continued making excuses in her head, she came across a second group of Hobgoblins about a kilometer away from the first party.

Continuing her scouting mission, she came across a third party. Luckily, that was the last sign of goblins in the vicinity.

Nearly half an hour later, Lumi returned to Alex's side after double checking the surroundings.

She knew that if the goblins called for reinforcements, the battle might be disadvantageous to them in the long run.

"So there are three Hobgoblin Rider Parties, each about a kilometer apart." Alex rubbed his chin. "I think we can manage."

The young man was no longer the same person who had run away from goblins in the Floating Forest.

He was now strong enough to deal with a group of Rank 2 Hobgoblin Riders with Dim Dim's help.

"Are you sure?" Mark asked. "Maybe we should just let them be."

Alex shook his head. "I believe that it's only a matter of time before the village is compromised. The fact that they have Hobgoblin Riders instead of regular goblins patrolling the area is proof that they are aware that there are humans in the forest.

"Not doing anything in this situation might give the villagers a few days or a few weeks of safety. But once the Dire Wolves catch the scent of your Hunters, they can follow it all the way back to Oak Village. By then, it will be game over."

Mark's expression turned more grim because that was indeed the worst case scenario that they wished to avoid no matter what.

"The best way to deal with this matter is to either eliminate the Goblin Nest or evacuate the villagers. If you give the goblins time to increase their numbers, they will be a greater threat than ever before."

Alex understood that if there were Rank 3, Rank 4, or even Rank 5 or higher Goblin Types in the nest, a subjugation party from the Adventurer's Guild was needed to deal with all of them.

Unless Alex, Lumi, and all the able-bodied fighters of Oak Village worked as a group to raid the monsters' camp, they would stand no chance of winning.

This was why it was important to find the location of the Goblin Nest as soon as possible so that they could determine their next course of action.

"Dim Dim, support us from above the trees," Alex ordered. "If you see any Goblins from that group that plan to escape, eliminate them at once."

"Aye!" Dim Dim saluted and jumped off Alex's head towards a tree branch.

It then made its way towards a good vantage point and waited for Alex, Lumi, and Mark to initiate combat.

“Lumi, attack them from the rear while I distract them,” Alex said. “Mark, prioritize targeting the Dire Wolves instead of the Goblins. The Goblins will be easier to deal with without their mounts.”

The two nodded in understanding.

Lumi once again turned invisible and headed to where Dim Dim was, ready to strike the moment Alex came charging in.

As Alex and Mark moved closer, the young man summoned Everguard and Sacrament in preparation for battle.

When they were close enough, Mark moved a good distance away from Alex so that he could snipe the enemies from a safe location.

Once everyone assumed their positions, Alex activated his Shield Charge to close the distance between him and the leader of the Hobgoblins.

“Shield Charge!”

The moment he took action, the Hobgoblin Riders were immediately alerted.

When Alex was only a few meters away, he activated another skill that would make his Shield Charge hurt more than ever before!

“Shield Spike!”

Steel spikes sprouted on Everguard’s surface, giving additional damage equal to 100% of Alex’s Strength Stat.

The shield then slammed against the head of the Hobgoblin Leader's Dire Wolf. The wolf cried out in pain before slamming into a nearby tree and falling forever silent.

Its rider fell from its back, only to get clobbered by Alex's Warhammer.

This was just the beginning. As the other Hobgoblins charged at Alex with the intention to kill and avenge their fallen comrade.

He, on the other hand, held his ground, ready to face these ugly creatures and eliminate them as fast as he could.

Chapter 389: Goblin Encounter [Part 2]

During the chaos, Lumi materialized above one of the Hobgoblins and smashed her fist—which was imbued with purple flames—into the monster's head, turning it into meat paste.

Mark's arrows came flying from the distance, hitting the Dire Wolves with great accuracy.

"Ei!" Dim Dim started throwing its brittle vials, raining attacks on the monsters from above the trees.

The little bun targeted the eyes and noses of the Dire Wolves with its Chili Powder and Black Pepper bombs, making them recoil in pain as they were overwhelmed with the power of the spices.

One of the Hobgoblins understood that they were in a precarious situation and reached for the bone whistle hanging from its neck like a necklace.

But just as it was about to blow on it, one of Alex's magical shields that was imbued with Shield Spike smashed into its face and filled it with so much pain it no longer remembered what whistles were.

Alex didn't hesitate to use Shield Charge to finish off the Hobgoblin, preventing it from calling their reinforcements.

Within two minutes, the battle ended in the humans' victory. However, Alex didn't celebrate right away.

“Lumi, check if any of the Goblin Parties are headed this way,” Alex ordered. “Mark and Dim Dim, hide in the trees and stay out of sight.”

Lumi didn’t dawdle because she knew that the sound of fighting might have caught the attention of the two other Hobgoblin Parties.

Alex then summoned some shields and used them as steps to climb to a tree, where he readied himself to ambush their enemies.

A few minutes later, Lumi’s voice reached the young man’s ear.

“All clear,” Lumi reported. “They didn’t hear anything. What do we do next?”

After confirming that the two other Hobgoblin Parties hadn’t noticed anything out of place, Alex asked Lumi to guide them to the next party so that they could eliminate those monsters as well.

Using this strategy, they managed to annihilate the three groups in less than an hour, allowing them to continue their scouting expedition.

The deeper they traversed in the forest, the more Goblins they encountered.

Some they fought, others they evaded by making detours.

Their goal was to find the Goblin Nest and estimate just how strong the Goblin’s fighting force was.

Depending on their discovery, Alex would either advise the villagers to evacuate or join them in eradicating the goblins inside the forest.

While Alex, Lumi, and Mark were busy with their mission, a group of twelve people arrived at Oak Village.

They introduced themselves as Adventurers who had accepted the Village's mission.

Although Simon was happy that more people had arrived to help them, he felt that there was something strange about them.

The newcomers looked very friendly on the surface, but they were secretly assessing the fighting strength of the village.

Each of these "adventurers" were Rank 3, making them an elite fighting unit. They had traveled a long way to reach their destination, and frankly, some of them were tempted to take over the village and force the villagers to serve them.

At least, that was what they wanted to do, but unable to do so.

The Hunters and the Guards of the village didn't lower their guard because unlike Alex, who looked sincere in helping them, there was just something off with this new group. The villagers couldn't help but feel restless in their presence.

After a few questions, the newcomers discovered that Alex and two others entered the forest to do a scouting mission.

They thanked the villagers before making their way towards the forest to find their targets.

Originally, they had believed that they could overpower the villagers, but after assessing their strengths, they realized that it would be a very risky move.

Oak Village had a Rank 4 Mage, a Rank 4 Swordsman, and a few Rank 4 Hunters. Together, they would pose great danger to the so-called Adventurers.

In the end, they decided to prioritize the mission because dealing with Alex was easier than dealing with a whole village with many battle-hardened fighters due to the harshness of their living environment.

“Boss, I saw some cute ladies back at the village,” one of the ‘Adventurers’ said with a greedy glint in his eyes. “Can’t we have a taste before we go?”

“If you want to die, go ahead,” the Boss of their group, Eric, replied. “Use your upper head instead of your lower head when making decisions. The Village Head noticed your lustful gaze on his granddaughter and he was only a step away from using a spell to kill you.

“If not for the fact that I pulled you back, you would have died then and there. Lastly, those villagers are not pushovers. Many of us would die because of your lack of self-control. It would not be worth it. Just focus on our mission for now.”

The other man relented and no longer mentioned anything else. Alex was a hot topic among the Demon Worshipers. These ‘Adventurers’ were glad to have been given an opportunity to get the bounty on his head.

Eric was also happy because Eleanora had tipped him off on the young man’s travel plans.

He had tried to court Eleanora in the past and she had rejected him in no uncertain terms. To the young lady’s annoyance, he still hadn’t given up.

This was why when she had reached out to him for this mission.

However, Eric believed that his goddess had given him a chance to redeem himself.

If he succeeded in capturing or killing Alex, he would undoubtedly be promoted within his faction.

In that case, he could once again propose to Eleanora. This time, he would make sure that she accepted.

Of course, Eric didn't know how right he was. Eleanora had indeed tasked him with this mission because of his relentless confessions. Except that instead of uplifting him, she hoped that Alex would eliminate him for her.

In Eleanora's eyes, Eric and an Orc looked exactly the same. In other people's eyes, Eric and an Orc also looked exactly the same.

Naturally, the young lady had no intention of accepting his proposal whatsoever.

In truth, the members of Eric's team were all troublemakers in their faction.

Just like Eric, some of them had tried to make moves on her. Worse, some of them had tried their luck with Evangeline. To Eleanora, an abhorrent admirer like Eric was an annoyance she could still deal with, but some loser thinking he had a chance with Evangeline infuriated her!

Eleanora wanted nothing more than for all of them to be erased from the face of the world so that she would never see them again.

An hour after this group of twelve left the village, another group arrived.

This time, there were three people. They came to the village due to a quest that they had accepted in the nearby town of Poca Poca.

But the moment they heard that some students of Frieden Academy had entered the forest—and one of them went by the name of Alex—they didn't hesitate to try to catch up to him.

Although they weren't certain that the Alex that the Village Head mentioned was the same Alex they knew, it was more than enough to convince them to look for this young man, who was currently knee-deep behind enemy lines.

Chapter 390: The Enemy Of My Enemy Is Not Necessarily A Friend

After spending hours infiltrating the depths of the forest, Alex and his group hid themselves inside a cave to spend the night.

Their venture had been fruitful since they had successfully located the Goblin Nest. But since there were too many patrols around and they'd wandered long enough, they decided to find a safe place to rest and recover their energy.

In the darkness, the hooting of an owl broke the silence, and yet, it didn't stop the nocturnal creatures of the forest from prowling about.

After eating an early dinner, Lumi volunteered to check the Goblin Nest, planning to find out what kind of Goblin served as the clan leader.

Alex and Mark remained hidden inside the cave, aware that they lacked her ability to enter and exit the Goblin Nest undetected.

Although there was a chance that a Goblin Mage or a Goblin Shaman would sense her presence, the Foxkin alter was confident that she would be able to run away if push came to shove.

Dim Dim quietly napped atop Alex's head, exhausted from its scout duty during the day. The little bun had also fought alongside them, so Alex had no reason to stop it from sleeping peacefully after dinner.

The fluorescent crystal they used as lighting dimly illuminated Alex, allowing Mark to observe the young man.

He had thought the Friden student was all talk, but after spending some time with him, he realized that Alex seemed quite proficient when it came to team battles.

Whenever the silver-haired young man gave them orders, he did it so well and smoothly like he was already experienced in leading groups.

Technically, this was true since Alex had been one of the Raid Leaders of Endless Horizon.

Also, in every Raid Boss Battles, he would always be at the front of the main team, which had composed of the strongest units in their guild.

“Alex, what do you think?” Mark asked. “Are the Goblins being led by a Goblin Champion?”

“I don’t know,” Alex replied. “But we’ll be lucky if it’s just a Goblin Champion.”

A Goblin Champion was a Rank 4 Field Boss that could command an entire Goblin Clan numbering in the hundreds.

Based on the number of Goblins they had encountered along the way, as well as the quality, the leader of the Goblins was definitely Rank 4 at the minimum.

Mark frowned. “So you think the leader might be a ...?”

Alex didn’t reply right away. Right now, his Difficulty Rating was in Hell Mode.

He was afraid that if he were to mention a higher-ranked Goblin, it might just come true!

But even if he didn’t say it out loud, he had a strong hunch that they would soon face a higher ranking goblin.

“With a goblin army this large, I’m thinking of a few other candidates,” Alex answered carefully. “They can be a Goblin Warlord, a Goblin High Shaman, or a Goblin Berserker.”

“A Goblin Warlord sounds like big trouble.” Mark grimaced. “But a Goblin High Shaman or a Goblin Berserker... those are pretty scary.”

A Goblin Warlord was a Rank 5 Field Boss Monster, while a Goblin High Shaman and a Goblin Berserker were both Rank 6 Field Boss Monsters.

Above them was Goblin King, a Rank 7 Field Boss Monster.

Last but not least was a Goblin Overlord, standing at the pinnacle as a Rank 8 World Boss Monster.

Their mission was to investigate the cause of the recent monster sightings around Oak Village.

Now that they had found the Goblin Nest, which was only seven miles away from where the villagers lived, Alex knew everyone only had two choices.

The first one was to gather all the Hunters of the village to fight and ask for reinforcements from the Adventurer's Guild.

The second option was to evacuate to Poca Poca Town first, then ask the local noble of the area for help.

Since the threat was within their territory, the noble had to be the one to post a commission notice at the Adventurer's Guild with an appropriate reward for the monster subjugation.

However, Mark didn't believe that the Viscount of their domain would approve of this quest.

The Ashenbark Forest was quite far from most towns, so the monsters there posed no threat to them.

Most likely, the Viscount would choose the easiest way out and order the villagers to relocate to Poca Poca Town—or another nearby town—and just forget about their old home.

An hour later, Lumi finally came back, and her expression was grim.

"The one leading this pact is a Goblin High Shaman," Lumi reported. "But his second-in-command is a Goblin Warlord. I don't think it's wise to att—"

Suddenly, a scream echoed through the night, interrupting Lumi.

"That's a human scream, right?" Alex asked. "Did a villager wander this far at this hour?"

“Impossible!” Mark shook his head. “We never travel this far into the forest, especially after the recent monster sightings. Also we have a curfew. We always return to the village an hour before sunset.”

While they were talking, another scream reverberated inside the forest, shocking Dim Dim from its deep slumber.

“Lumi, check what is happening outside,” Alex ordered.

“Okay!” Lumi once again became invisible and left the safety of the cave.

“Aren’t we going to help?” Mark asked.

“It’s too dangerous outside right now,” Alex warned. “That scream would have alerted all the goblins in the surroundings. If we were to go out now, there’s a risk that they would discover us. Also, if you are correct, then those screams aren’t from the villagers.”

Seeing the villager scrunching up his face, Alex tried to be more reassuring. “Let’s just wait for Lumi to return before we make a move. I know you’re very worried about those humans, but if we make a mistake, we might find ourselves surrounded from all sides and unable to help them.”

Knowing that Alex was right, Mark forced himself to calm down. Those screams couldn’t possibly belong to the villagers since they strictly followed rules set for hunting in the forest.

Most importantly, getting discovered by the Goblins while investigating what was happening outside was a death wish.

“Dim Dim!” Dim Dim suddenly warned them after sensing some monsters moving outside of the cave.

Since the entrance of their cave was covered with vines, it would not be easy to spot them.

Even so, Mark returned the fluorescent crystal inside his storage ring, eliminating all light sources inside the cave.

Alex and Mark remained completely still, waiting for the monsters to walk past their hiding place.

A moment later, they heard the sound of battle.

Explosions from spells and goblin shrieks filled the night.

It's obvious that a battle was taking place just outside the cave. Alex and Mark couldn't help but wonder who had the bravery—or stupidity—to clash with Goblins this deep inside the forest.

While waiting for Lumi to return, an idea popped up inside Alex's head.

'Why didn't I think of that?!' Alex thought as he opened his System Map, allowing him to see the areas they had covered inside the forest.

As soon as the map appeared in front of him, Alex saw countless red dots moving towards a part of the map where twelve blinking yellow dots were located.

There was also one green dot among those countless red dots, which Alex believed to be Lumi.

The Yellow Dots represented semi-hostile creatures who wished to harm Alex, marking them as potential enemies.

The Red Dots represented the monsters, while Green Dots represented allies.

Last but not the least, if there were White Dots on the map, those represented neutral creatures.

'Enemies?' Alex thought as he looked at the yellow dots currently surrounded by countless goblins. 'The only ones I have offended as of late are the Demon Worshipers. Could they be Demon Worshipers?'

Alex had no idea how accurate his guess was. But it didn't really matter. Since they were hostile against him, he cheered silently for the goblins to eliminate whoever they were.

Half a minute later, Lumi returned to the cave and reported the information she gathered from the outside.