

Endless 401

Chapter 401: I Don't Know If You Are Very Brave Or Very Stupid

Alex sat and ate quietly as the villagers danced around the bonfire to the beat of the music.

The young man was mildly amused when Nessia pulled Charles towards the bonfire to join the villagers' dance.

Folk dances were common in the Kingdom. Most commoners learnt the steps when they were still children and teens. Dancing together was a crucial part of celebrations like harvest festivals and weddings.

These simple dances often had similar steps and were very different from the dances that the nobles preferred during their own gatherings.

To the nobles, folk dancing might look crude and unappealing, but for the majority of commoners, that was the only dancing they knew.

Soon after Nessia had convinced Charles to dance together with the villagers, Princess Xenia dragged Chuck along, eager to join the fun.

Alex cackled when he saw the troublemaker's unwillingness. Chuck looked like he wanted to be anywhere else than here, but the warrior princess's vice-like grip ensured he was going nowhere except where she wanted him to go.

If not for the next couple, he would've continued laughing evilly at his roommate.

With Cairo's hand in hers, Elaine practically skipped towards the bonfire. Alex made a mental note to ask Efa if anything had happened between the two of them.

"I bet you didn't see that coming."

Alex almost choked on his food when Efa suddenly appeared beside him and whispered in his ear.

After surviving the coughing fit, he narrowed his eyes at the mischievous scout. She grinned widely in response. Clearly, she wasn't going to offer any information unless he asked first.

"Did something happen between them?" Alex asked after valiantly resisting his curiosity for all of five seconds.

"Yes," Efa answered. "It happened during our trip to Heracle Mountain."

"Huh?!" Alex's jaw dropped as he wondered if exhaustion could cause him to mishear things. "You all went to Heracle Mountain?"

Efa nodded. "We did."

"Then did you take some kind of trial together?" Alex asked.

The young lady giggled. "Elaine and Cairo took a trial together. I took a different trial from them."

"Now it finally makes sense," Alex muttered. "That's why you and Efa suddenly became Rank 4 and Master became Rank 5."

Efa arched an eyebrow because Alex seemed to know exactly what they had been through.

She decided to cut straight to the chase. "Do you know about the secret of the Heracle Mountain?"

"Yes. My club members and I went there as well."

"So... that power that you used to end the battle is the ability you gained from that trial?"

Alex gave her a thumbs-up. "Yes."

There was no longer any need to keep it a secret from Efa since she had already been there too.

In fact, even if Efa and Cairo hadn't known about the secret of the Heracle Mountain, Alex would have told them about it before they parted ways once more.

He motioned for Efa to come closer.

"Do you know the second part of that Chain Quest?" Alex whispered in her ear.

Efa nodded. "It's in the Faelarun Kingdom, right?"

"How did you know about it?" Alex wanted to know how the trio had stumbled upon this secret quest that not many knew about.

"If I tell you that I became aware of it because of a dream, will you believe me?" Efa asked.

"I will," Alex answered without hesitation. "If that was how you learned about it, then I'll believe you."

Efa smiled, touched that Alex didn't even bat an eye at such a crazy idea.

She could tell from his eyes how serious his belief in her was, which made her sigh in relief.

"Then is it safe to assume that you and your club members will also go to the Kingdom of Faelarun?"

"We will go there during the Inter-Academy Competition that will be held in Faelarun," Alex stated.
"How about you guys? Are you going to head to Faelarun right now?"

Efa shook her head. She told Alex that Cairo had decided to go there after three months because he wanted to explore a dungeon that he had always wanted to challenge.

As to what the name of that dungeon was, Efa had no clue! Cairo hadn't told them where it was.

"Also, congratulations, Alex," Efa added in a teasing tone. "It seems that you have managed to get close to one of your Queens."

Alex neither confirmed nor denied her statement. He kept his silence and resumed eating his stew.

Perhaps understanding that it was still too early, Efa dropped the topic. Instead, she told Alex about her adventures with Cairo and Elaine.

They had been traveling all over the Kingdom. From time to time, they accepted quests from the Adventurer's Guild.

In exchange, Alex shared about his time in the academy, letting Efa know that he was doing quite well for himself.

"Truth be told, I thought that you would get bullied because you are a commoner," Efa commented. "I have heard many stories about how the nobles treat the commoners."

"Well, it does happen." Alex didn't feel the need to deny that bullying did happen in the academy. "That's just how it is. Unless the Professors and the Headmaster make a determined effort to put a stop to it, nothing will change."

Alex wasn't delusional enough to claim that his blackmail incident in the academy had put a stop to bullying.

The only thing it did was to prevent anyone from bullying his club members because they were under his protection.

The nobles still hated him, this was a fact. But they had chosen to just ignore or avoid him completely because he was unpredictable.

Suddenly, Alex sensed an intense gaze land on him. Instinctively, he turned to look in its general direction.

“What’s wrong?” Efa followed Alex’s eyes, but didn’t see anything unusual. “Did you see or hear something coming from the forest?”

“I... I might just be imagining things.” Alex frowned.

The intense gaze had lasted only for a moment. However, it hadn’t contained any hostility.

But, deep inside, Alex knew that it came from something beyond his league.

His sixth sense was telling him that something dangerous was out there, and yet the lack of killing intent or malice made him believe that whoever looked at him had no intention of hurting him.

Still, he decided to play it safe, and opened his map in a subtle manner.

The moment Alex confirmed his suspicion, a shudder washed over his body.

“I think I’ll go back to rest at Simon’s place, Efa,” Alex said before walking towards Village Head’s house. “Don’t mind me and just enjoy the festivities.”

Alex walked briskly, doing his best to prevent his entire body from shaking from fear and anxiety.

He should have felt safe staying with so many people, but he still chose to go away.

Why?

Because the person who was staring at him could easily kill everyone in the village even if they all worked together to resist him.

After entering the house, Alex went straight to his room and firmly locked the door. He knew that locking his door was useless, but he still did it anyway.

As soon as that door was locked, an overpowering presence locked him in place.

“I don’t know if you are very brave or very stupid.”

A cold voice spoke behind him.

“Tell me, do you know who I am?”

Alex trembled uncontrollably, not daring to turn.

He felt that if he were to look, he would not be able to walk away from this place alive. He had no choice but to keep facing forward while doing his utmost to stop his body from shaking due to the instinctive, primal fear that had overtaken him.

Chapter 402: Nero Severus Noctem [Part 1]

“I don’t know if you are very brave or very stupid. Tell me, do you know who I am?”

Alex didn’t dare to answer the cold voice behind him, not knowing what reaction to expect if he responded truthfully.

But even if he had wanted to, he had been seized by an uncontrollable shuddering that made speech impossible.

He gritted his teeth together. If he relaxed, he feared they would start chattering too.

“You’ve grown quite popular among our circle, Alex Stratos,” the mysterious man continued calmly. “My colleagues have gone out of their way to dig up any information about you, yet they have all come up empty-handed.”

Alex’s jaw was practically locked shut, but the uninvited visitor seemed unbothered by this one-sided conversation.

“Such a feat is nearly impossible to do unless you’re born in a remote village such as this. But now that I’ve seen you with my own eyes, I finally understand why they have all failed.”

The man moved closer, not bothering to hide his movement.

He had nothing to fear, confident no one in the village could stop him. Even if all the villagers and their saviors worked together to oppose him, there would only be one outcome.

Total annihilation.

“Turn around so I can have a closer look at you,” the man ordered.

Alex found himself unable to resist. It was as if the man was a puppeteer who had tied invisible strings to his limbs.

The moment Alex’s eyes met the man’s amused crimson eyes, all thoughts fled his head but one.

‘I hope I survive this.’

The man lowered his head a bit to get a closer look at Alex’s face. “I knew it... Still, this is a very interesting development. Shouldn’t you be dead already?”

Alex had no idea what the man was talking about, but there was absolutely nothing he could do about it. He couldn’t even avert his gaze even as the visitor’s crimson eyes seemed to pin him in place and looked straight at his very soul.

“Still, it’s best to double-check,” the man commented. “But before that, let’s take care of our uninvited guest first.”

The man then raised his hand. Out of nowhere, Lumi was sucked into his grasp, unable to scream or free herself.

“An Astral Body that actually has a physical manifestation?” The man raised his eyebrows. “It seems you have some very interesting friends, Alex Stratos.”

Seeing Lumi struggling to break free from the man’s grasp, Alex acted on pure instinct. He lunged forward and seized the man’s wrist with both hands.

“Let her go!” Alex hissed. “Leave her out of this!”

“Are you ordering me, child?” the man asked with a tranquil arrogance.

To Alex’s surprise, the man actually let Lumi go.

The young man hurriedly pulled her behind him, placing himself between her and the enemy, who only smirked a little in amusement at the sight.

“Lumi, don’t tell anyone what is happening here,” Alex said as he turned around to look in her eyes. “He’s a Rank 8. If he really wished to kill us, we’d be long dead.”

Alex was not only talking to Lumi but also to Latifa.

He was certain that Lumi had already asked Latifa for help. With that in mind, he warned both ladies not to do anything reckless, for they were dealing with an opponent far out of their league.

“Oh? How did you know about my Rank?” the man asked with genuine curiosity. “Did you regain your memory? I think not. The seal is still there...”

Once again, Alex had no idea what the man was talking about. He didn't think much about it either. All he cared for was to prevent any deaths from happening.

Alex had yet to make any move when a hand grabbed his head from behind, holding him in a vice-grip.

"Don't move," the man said. "If you disturb me, I might just snap your neck."

Alex remained as still as possible, while Lumi anxiously stared at him.

She wasn't the only one who had been reduced to a bundle of nerves. Latifa shared her senses, so she had also grown aware of the situation.

"The seal is indeed present. It's still strong," the man noted with a tinge of surprise. "But you seem to know who I am. Tell me, bastard, do you really know who I am? Ah, let me just remind you—if you lie to me, I'll kill one of your friends.

"The more you lie, the more I will kill. If you really care for them, make sure to tell me the truth and nothing but the truth. Do you understand?"

"Yes," Alex answered.

"Good. I like smart, obedient children." The man nodded in satisfaction. "Now, tell me, who am I?"

Alex forced himself to answer, refusing to risk his friends' lives.

"You are His Excellency, Nero Severus Noctem," Alex answered.

"And how do you know my name?" Nero asked. "Technically, this is the first time we've met each other. So how are you so confident that you have the right person?"

"It is one of my abilities," Alex went on. "I can know the names of people within a certain range around me."

Advancing to a Rank 3 Oathkeeper had upgraded his map, granting it the power to display the names of those it tracked.

Of course, Alex had to manually click the dots on the map to know the names.

The only exception was his friends and other important people, whose names automatically showed up on the map even without clicking.

"What a troublesome ability," Nero commented. "Next question, do you know what kind of organization I belong to?"

"The Demon Worshipers," Alex replied.

"That's right. The same organization that you've been messing with." Nero smiled evilly. "I don't know if you're courting death or not, but you should not poke the hornet's nest if you don't want to get stung."

Lumi shuddered after knowing the man's affiliation.

She still had no idea why Alex knew the man's name. But after hearing the other party was a Rank 8, she understood that if Nero wanted, no one in this village would be able to leave alive.

"Okay, next question," Nero continued. "You should be dead already. Even if I haven't seen it myself, I have a special artifact that will let me know if you've breathed your last."

"Your Guardian even fell into depression because he failed to protect you after the Paragon of Ice attacked you. Well, I'm still happy though. At least that old fool managed to kill a Paragon."

“He may be as strong as I, yet he’s the only one in the world who has killed a paragon and lived to tell the tale. Did that old man do something after you died? I can tell with utmost certainty that you haven’t turned into a high-ranking Undead. So how come you’re still alive?”

Perhaps sensing that the man had no intention to kill him, at least for now, Alex paid close attention to his words.

Clearly, Nero seemed to know him. And drawing on his memories of Evangeline, he could guess exactly what Nero was trying to say.

But Alex was most confused about Nero’s confidence that he should be dead.

He had no recollection of dying. Maybe this body had indeed died before, but he had no access to those memories.

‘Did I die after I was shot from that cannon?’ Alex wondered, but immediately tossed this idea to the back of his mind.

He was certain that Nero wasn’t talking about that kind of death. He was confused and that confusion quickly morphed into fear because he truly didn’t know the answer to the Vampire Lord’s question.

Chapter 403: Nero Severus Noctem [Part 2]

Lumi tried to have a good look at the man’s face, but it was blocked by a darkness that seemed to come from beneath his cloak.

The only thing she could see was a pair of glinting crimson eyes. Even if Alex had not warned her, those eyes were enough to let her instantly understand that this person was someone she mustn’t mess with, no matter what.

From what she had heard, the man knew Alex and Alex also knew him, to a certain extent.

Like Alex, she couldn’t help but wonder what Nero was talking about. Alex? Dead?

As if to answer the question inside her head, Nero continued interrogating Alex.

“Don’t you remember anything?” Nero pressed. “The only memories I sealed were the memories of your time in the villa. Surely, you still remember who your Guardian is, right?”

“Guardian?” Alex asked. “Are you referring to the Guardian of the North?”

“Hah...” Nero sighed. “It seems you really don’t know anything.”

Nero knew that Alex’s bewilderment was very much genuine. The boy really had no clue what he was talking about. The Vampire Lord was a master of lies and deception, so it was easy for him to tell if someone was honest.

From the start, he had been observing Alex. The more questions he asked, the more perplexed the young man became.

The Demon Saintess of their organization had used her powers to acquire more information about Alex Stratos.

If he had been using a fake name, she would have known right away. After all, it wouldn’t be her first time uncovering hidden pasts.

This was how the organization hunted down its enemies. An alias could hardly slow down Demon Worshipers hell-bent on eliminating a nuisance.

Since their information network had nothing to show for all that effort poured into investigating Alex, they assumed that he must’ve been using an alias.

But after the Demon Saintess stepped in, they learned that the name Alex Stratos was indeed his true name.

It was a name written in the stars, wielding its own destiny.

Nero had discovered that Eleanora had ordered some of his subordinates to hunt Alex down in Oak Village.

He found that very strange. After all, he had asked Eleanora to only observe Alex.

Because of this, he had decided to look for the young man himself. It had been quite convenient since he had already been out on a business trip to inspect one of their new branches near Oak Village.

Who knew he'd uncover such a secret? He couldn't help but recall the prophecy of the Aetherion Empire, which many believed would never come to pass after the prince's death.

"Tell me, what do you remember?" Nero repeated. "Tell me everything you know."

The Vampire Lord's command was firm and would not allow any falsehood or rejection. Knowing that this was his only chance to survive, Alex told him about waking up in the lands of Thalloria, as well as the journey that followed.

Everything that the young man said matched the intel that had been gathered by their organization, which didn't surprise Nero.

Alex had first appeared in the Town of Thalloria and registered there as an Adventurer. He had then made contact with the Clawford Tribe and obtained the Hidden Profession called Oathkeeper.

Next, he had challenged the scholarship trial of Frieden Academy and survived, allowing him to become a student.

"That's enough," Nero commanded, because Alex was not telling him anything new.

He then pondered for a bit before staring down at the young man, who might become a future threat to their organization.

Nero was very tempted to kill Alex, but he suddenly remembered his daughter, which made him click his tongue in annoyance.

“It would be beneath me to kill a mongrel like you,” Nero stated. “I’ll just let my subordinates deal with you in my stead. If you want to live, you better learn how to hide properly and keep a low profile.

“Stay inside the academy like a turtle. Don’t provoke our organization again. This will be your final warning. Remember, you have already died once... no, twice. You will not cheat death a third time.”

Nero stared at the young man for a few seconds before turning into a black mist that passed through the walls of the house.

This was Alex’s second death.

The Vampire Lord could have easily killed him but—for one reason or the other—did not.

When Alex was certain that Nero was no longer around, he finally collapsed on the floor, panting for breath.

Sweat trickled down his forehead and face as he finally survived the ordeal. It would not be an exaggeration to say that this was his closest brush with death.

Lumi lightly patted Alex’s back to help him calm down even as her own heart was racing.

A few minutes later, Latifa and Lotte materialized beside them, wearing identical expressions of worry and terror.

The former quickly hugged Alex to calm him down.

“Are you hurt?” Lotte asked.

“No,” Alex replied. “Just suffering from the loss of adrenaline rush.”

Alex had still not fully recovered from using the power of the Verdant Throne. This encounter had drained him completely dry even if he had reason to think Nero wouldn't have killed him.

Not only was Alex Evangeline's schoolmate, he also had a relationship with the Guardian of the North, Sir Luthor Vademont.

His memory of that scene made him believe that, for better or worse, he and the Vampire Lord were acquaintances.

He had bet that Nero had no intention of killing him, so he had left the celebration to give the Vampire a chance to meet him in private.

Alex had taken a gamble, putting his life on the line.

Fortunately, his gamble had paid off. He even came away from the near-death experience with fresh information.

What really concerned him was the death that he had no recollection of.

'This isn't good,' Alex thought. 'I lack the necessary information to assess the severity of the situation.' Based on what little memory he could piece together, Alex was the bastard prince of the Aetherion Empire.

But he wasn't an ordinary bastard prince. He was the prophesied prince, prompting some royals and nobles to have him secretly assassinated.

The Guardian of the North had taken him away to escape. They had somehow sought asylum in Nero's domain, where Alex had spent some time with Evangeline.

In the end, he had no choice but to admit it.

For some reason, the background story he had made for his character had become a reality.

The only way for him to know about his past was to have a heart-to-heart talk with Evangeline and ask her what she knew about the Prince of Aetherion.

Alex desperately wanted to know why the prince was forced to escape from the family with whom he was supposed to have blood ties.

A few minutes later, he finally regained his composure and was helped by Latifa to lie down on the bed.

"I have enough excitement for one night," Alex said. "Please leave me so I can rest."

"Are you sure?" Latifa asked. "He might return and kill you if you are alone."

"Even if I'm not alone, he can still kill me," Alex replied. "Don't worry, I'll be fine."

Although she was reluctant to leave, Latifa yielded and left Alex's room with Lotte.

Lumi decided to stay behind. No matter what Alex said, the young lady wouldn't budge.

She sat on the chair closest to his bed and crossed her arms. "Just sleep," she commanded. "I'll make sure that no one climbs into your bed while you are sleeping."

Alex would never say it out loud, especially not in her presence, but having Lumi around helped calm his nerves. Although it wasn't easy, he finally fell asleep after an hour of tossing and turning.

Lumi watched the sleeping boy with a complicated expression.

The young man had always been a mystery to her. The new information had only deepened the mystery.

'He mentioned the Guardian of the North,' Lumi thought. 'Are they perhaps related?'

She only knew the name of the empire where the Guardian had served all these years.

An empire so strong that their Headmaster, Rowan Vademont, had to personally step in and dissuade—with stern warnings and threats—them of their ambition to unite the entire continent under their banner.

The Paragon of Ice had been one of their pillars, but this pillar had died many years ago.

It had shaken the whole world and would surely be remembered for many generations to come. The death of a Paragon was always a big deal, but for a Paragon to be killed? That had simply been unheard of.

And now, that history was unexpectedly linked to Alex.

The only way the young man could protect himself was to know more about the truth about Alex Stratos, whom he had thought was only a character that he had played in Endless Leveling Online.

Chapter 404: Welcome To Slime Paradise

After leaving the village, Nero took out a crystal ball from his storage ring and activated it.

A moment later, Eleanora's image appeared on the crystal ball.

"My Lord, do you need something?" Eleanora asked respectfully.

"Eleanora, I will turn a blind eye to your abuse of authority, but only this once," Nero said calmly. "You are no longer allowed to order any of the members of our faction using my name. Do I make myself clear?"

The young lady on the crystal ball visibly shuddered as if she had been caught doing a crime.

"Yes, My Lord," Eleanora answered. "It will not happen again. I only did it because of My Lady's request."

"Don't make excuses," Nero said coldly. "My daughter doesn't have the authority to command anyone from our organization. Whether the other factions send people to kill Alex Stratos is none of our concern. Understood?"

"I obey your will, My Lord," Eleanora replied. "Do you have any instructions that you wish to pass to My Lady?"

"Tell her to grow up," Nero stated. "She should embrace her bloodline and start acting accordingly. Now, about that mission—what's the progress? Have you managed to bring Alex Stratos under your command?"

"I-It's hard to accomplish such a task at the moment, My Lord," Eleanora said through gritted teeth. "Alex is not someone that I can approach easily. Also, My Lady..."

"Eleanora, I didn't raise you to be incompetent." Nero eyed the young lady in the crystal ball. "If it had been too much, you should have spoken up. Now, report. What's the update on my daughter, and what have you accomplished at the academy?"

"Yes, My Lord." Eleanora obeyed and began her report. She detailed how she and Evangeline had joined Alex's club, Endless Horizon, and what she had managed to find out about its recent activities.

"My Lord, do you also wish to know more about its members?" Eleanora inquired.

"You can include that in the written report." Nero shook his head. "By the way, did my daughter say anything about Alex Stratos' childhood?"

"At the recent party, she asked Alex if he could remember a girl from when he was around ten years old," Eleanora answered. "But he fainted before he could give an answer."

“He fainted, huh?” Nero frowned. “Very well. Your only task is to watch over my daughter and Alex Stratos. You are to observe only. Do not involve yourself with the organization’s activities, no matter who tries to rope you in. Is that clear?”

“By your will, My Lord.” Eleanora promised.

Severing his connection to Eleanora, Nero returned the crystal ball to his storage ring. His gaze then drifted toward the village, a sneer twisting his features.

“You’re still chasing after castles in the sky, Evangeline,” Nero noted icily. “It’s about time you move on from your puppy love.”

A moment later, he once again turned into a black mist and soared to the sky, heading northeast, where his domain was located.

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Come morning, Alex and Latifa stood with their group and bade the villagers goodbye.

They didn’t talk about the incident and acted like they normally did.

“Alex, you said you’re going to Slime Paradise, right?” Princess Xenia asked. “I can take you there. The airship ride is about an hour. To be honest, I’ve been wanting to see the place myself.”

“I’ll happily accept that offer, Your Highness,” Alex answered. “Looks like we’re going to get a free ride, Dim Dim?”

“Dim Dim~” Dim Dim nodded happily.

“I also wanna go to Slime Paradise,” Lavinia chimed in. “Grandfather told me that it’s one of the most beautiful places here in the Kingdom of Avalon.”

After hearing Lavinia, all the members of Endless Horizon also grew curious.

“What a coincidence.” Elaine smiled faintly. “We’re also going to Slime Paradise. Isn’t that right, Efa?”

“We are?” Efa blinked before suddenly catching on to. “Right. We plan to visit it before we continue our journey.”

Cairo didn’t say anything. Accompanying his disciple on a trip was a rare occasion, so he didn’t mind taking a brief detour before heading to the Kingdom of Faelarun.

The Captain of the Clawford airship grinned. “I’ve been to Slime Paradise a few times. Since this is a good opportunity, I’ll take our warriors there for a change of pace.”

With their destination set, the two airships made their way to one of the most sacred places in the Kingdom of Avalon.

The Slime Paradise was located in a valley that spanned nearly three thousand miles.

This was the natural border separating the Kingdom of Avalon and its neighboring kingdoms from the northern factions, including the Aetherion Empire.

Saying that this wide stretch of land was the invincible bastion preventing any army from crossing over wouldn’t be an exaggeration.

If any northern kingdom wished to declare war on Avalon, they would have to send their troops by air. After all, no one dared desecrate the holy land of the baby slimes.

This was the valley where they were born. Once they turned into adults, they would either stay to protect the next generation or wander the continent to explore new lands.

No conflict would be tolerated in the Slime Paradise. Those who would dare to break this rule would find themselves facing countless Blast Bombs until—if they were lucky—only their ashes were left.

An hour later...

"I see it!" Lapis pointed at a giant rainbow that seemed to stretch endlessly across the land.

"You've got a good eye, missy." The Crawford Captain grinned. "Welcome to Slime Paradise!"

Even Alex, who had already seen this scenery from the game, couldn't help but draw in a cold breath, awed by the sheer beauty of the place.

A few dozen floating islands dotted the sky, their waterfalls cascading into the valley below. The resulting mist wove countless rainbows into existence.

When they were a mile away from the entrance of the valley, the two airships found a good landing spot.

It was an unwritten rule that, unless it was of absolute importance, no airship should fly over the valley, for it might make the baby slimes feel anxious.

Alex and his friend disembarked and walked toward the valley.

He planned to get a few hidden treasures within the Slime Paradise, which would help him and his members become a little bit stronger.

Chapter 405: She Who Must Not Be Provoked [Part 1]

"Eyah?"

"Eyah?"

"Eyah?"

Dim Dim found itself surrounded by little baby slimes, who seemed to be asking what it was.

A moment later, these baby slimes nudged their cheeks against Dim Dim's body, making the Dim Sum God giggle.

It lightly patted their heads before taking out a bamboo steamer to give them some custard buns.

Delighted, the little slimes called their friends to enjoy Dim Dim's buffet.

"They are so cute, soft, and jiggly." Fran lightly poked the purple baby slime on her hand, making it giggle.

The other ladies also found the baby slimes endearing, so they picked up a few and started to poke their cheeks.

Even Renard couldn't help but also join them.

A few curious baby slimes even crawled up his body. Some lightly pulled on his ear.

Others ruffled his hair or even slept on his chest by using his shirt as a blanket.

"Come here my little friends," Chuck said to the baby slimes, who seemed to be avoiding him on purpose. "Why won't you come to me?"

When Chuck walked to a baby slime, the latter would immediately run away. Poor Chuck was left wondering why no slimes were trying to approach him!

"Do you know? Slimes can tell if someone is a bad person," Vaan, who was covered in so many baby slimes he looked like a Christmas tree, commented with a smile. "They might be aware that you're a troublesome fellow, so they don't want to come near you."

“Nonsense!” Chuck exclaimed before looking around for a baby slime that he might be able to befriend.

Upon scanning the surroundings, he noticed a pink baby slime sleeping peacefully on top of a small rock.

Taking that as an opportunity, he stealthily approached it before picking it up before it could run away.

The baby slime opened its eyes and looked drowsily at the person that had disturbed its sleep.

“Hello there, my adorable friend,” Chuck said. “My name is Chuck. What is your name?”

The baby slime gave Chuck an annoyed glare before opening its mouth...

“Put me down, you sonnovab*tch!”

Chuck and Vaan blinked at the same time because both of them clearly heard the baby slime say something that it wasn't supposed to!

“Um, can you repeat that, my little friend?” Chuck asked. “You just cursed me, right?”

The pink baby slime blinked innocently and tilted its body to the side.

“Eyah?”

“Don't 'Eyah?' me. You cursed me a while ago.”

“Eyah?”

“Why you little...”

Vaan lightly patted Chuck's shoulder to warn him against doing something he would regret later.

Chuck turned to Vaan, only to see that the baby slimes clinging to his friend's body were all glaring in his direction.

One of them was even holding a small, round, black bomb, which was the baby slimes' signature ability.

Blast Bomb [EX].

That was the skill that was unique to all the slimes in the world.

It was said that this skill was bestowed upon them by the Great Fairy Princess, whom all the slimes worship as their Great Deity.

There was even a saying that no Paragons, or even the Major Arcana themselves, would be spared from her wrath if they ever dared to hurt her people, namely the slimes of the world.

And in return, the slimes also did their best to not kill any creature in the world. At most, they would only retaliate in self-defense.

"I think you should put down the slime gently," Vaan suggested because a few more baby slimes that were perched on his body were now holding Blast Bombs as well.

Although Chuck believed that he could evade any attacks from the baby slimes, he still chose to heed Vaan's words and gently place the pink baby slime on top of the rock where it had been sleeping earlier.

"Hmph... F*cker," the pink baby slime scoffed before crawling away to find a new sleeping place, away from the bad human, whom the slimes disliked very much.

Feeling heartbroken, Chuck went to find Dim Dim, who was currently feeding the baby slimes with dimsum.

“Dim Dim, the slimes are so cruel,” Chuck complained. “They don’t want to be my friend.”

The baby slimes that were eating peacefully earlier all moved to hide behind Dim Dim, and glared at Chuck as if he was their mortal enemy.

Dim Dim looked at Chuck, and the baby slimes behind it and asked them why they seem to hate Chuck.

“Eyah!”

“Eyah! Eyah!”

“Eyaaaaah!”

“Ei! Ei!”

The baby slimes all rushed to reply to its question. After a few moments, the little bun nodded in understanding.

“What did they say, Dim Dim?” Chuck crouched down and asked, his eyes brimming with curiosity.

“Dim Dim!”

“Huh? They are calling me a bad person?”

“Dim!”

“I’m not a bad person. Can you convince them that I’m good?”

Dim Dim blinked before turning around to look at the baby slimes hiding behind it. They all shook their heads.

Clearly, none of them wanted to get close to Chuck, who was emitting the “no-good-person-aura”.

“You reap what you sow,” Mary pointed out as she approached Chuck.

The young lady was being accompanied by two baby slimes.

One white and one black.

The white one was perched on Mary’s right shoulder, while the black one was perched on her left.

“That’s right, Chuck.” Renard, who’d overheard that Chuck couldn’t befriend any baby slimes, decided to rub salt into his wound. “This is what you get for not being a good person.”

Chuck was about to defend himself until he saw the baby slime that was resting on Renard’s head.

A moment later, the troublemaker of the academy laughed out loud as he pointed at that slime.

“Hahaha!” Chuck roared in laughter and almost doubled over. “I have always known that you’re going to wear a green hat someday. This is proof that my guess is right!”

“What are you talking about?” Renard was genuinely confused by Chuck’s outburst.

The green baby slime that was perched on top of his head also giggled as if perfectly understanding what Chuck was referring to.

Mary understood what Chuck was saying, so she looked at the laughing young man in contempt before glancing at Renard with pity.

“Don’t mind him,” Mary said. “You know that he talks nonsense most of the time.”

However before Renard could reply, another bout of laughter reached his ear.

This time, the one who was laughing was Alex. And he was also pointing at Renard's head.

"I can't!" Alex tried to stop cackling because his stomach was starting to ache from laughing. "A green hat... Pfft!"

The green baby slime felt that people were making fun of it, so it started to tear up.

"Wuwuwu!"

The slimes all turned to look at the green baby slime as it burst into tears.

When this happened, the blue baby slime on Alex's head crawled to the side of his head and gave his ear a hard pull. His laughter instantly turned into a yelp of pain.

"F*cker," the blue baby slime said as it pulled Alex's ear harder. "Stop laughing."

The blue baby slime on top of Alex's head looked bigger than the other slimes.

It had crawled to the top of Alex's head earlier and had ruffled his hair into a bird nest, amusing Latifa, Lavinia, Efa, and Lapiz.

Because of this, the young man had decided to join Chuck in making fun of Renard to vent some of his frustrations.

However, this move seemed to disgruntle the blue baby slime on top of his head, which caused it to retaliate.

After Alex asked it for forgiveness, the baby slime finally stopped pulling his ear. It then jumped to Renard's head and gave the green baby slime a hug, coaxing it to stop crying.

Suddenly, Dim Dim, who had just been feeding the baby slimes, sensed something and looked up at the space above Renard's head.

Its eye suddenly sparkled as it broke into a smile.

"Eiko!" Dim Dim greeted.

"Dim Dim!" Eiko replied and jumped towards her best friend.

"Yay!"

The two exchanged a high five before hugging each other.

Alex blinked once then twice before realizing something.

In the game, Dim Dim only had one best friend and that was a baby blue slime, who went by the name Eiko.

'D-Don't tell me...' Alex stared wide-eyed at the baby slime that was currently hugging Dim Dim.

All the players of ELO knew that this baby slime was not something that they could mess with.

A baby slime that was called the Fairy Princess, who could command legions of Undead and summon an Outer God that looked very much like Cthulhu inspired by Lovecraftian lore.

Chapter 406: She Who Must Not Be Provoked [Part 2]

According to the Lore of Arcana, Eiko was the Fairy Princess and the patron deity of all the slimes in the world.

She was also Dim Dim's best friend, but she only appeared in one main event of ELO.

'She doesn't look strong though,' Alex thought as he watched Dim Dim, Eiko, and a few baby slimes circle around each other while holding hands.

As if she could read his mind, she gave him a pointed look.

Suddenly, Boss Monster Music started playing in the background.

Alex flinched and turned to Chuck. "Are you guys hearing anything?"

"Hear what?" Chuck snapped, already annoyed that someone was disturbing him while he was busy brooding over the slimes' collective dislike of him. "All I hear is the 'Eyah!' of these baby slimes."

"Don't you hear foreboding music?" Alex pressed. "Like a sound that makes you feel that a strong monster is about to appear and fight you to the death."

"Alex, what nonsense are you talking about?" Chuck's irritation turned into confusion. "Vaan, is what he's saying making any sense to you?"

"I don't hear any music, though?" Vaan tried to extend his senses because Alex wouldn't say such things without reason.

However, no matter how hard he tried, he truly couldn't hear anything aside from the giggling and merrymaking of Dim Dim, Eiko, the baby slimes, and the other visitors.

"I'm not hearing anything Alex," Vaan said after a minute.

"Nevermind." Alex shook his head.

The Boss Monster music stopped playing after Eiko stopped looking at him.

“Well then, I’ll take a stroll around here guys,” Alex said. “No need to follow me. Enjoy playing with the baby slimes first.”

After bidding his goodbye, Alex headed towards the lake nearby. There was a hidden treasure chest under the lake, which guaranteed a random Super Rare item.

It could be a skill book, a piece of equipment, an artifact, or even a precious ore that could be used to create weapons and talismans.

But even though the item was random, it would always have the Holy Property.

If the item was a skill book, it would give a skill within the Holy Skill Tree. If the item turned out to be a piece of equipment instead, it would have the Holy Attribute.

When Alex arrived at the lakeside, he gave his friends and the slimes they were playing with a backward glance before removing his clothes, revealing his swimming trunks.

Since he had known that he would be going for a dip, he had already prepared beforehand so that he could swim as soon as he reached Slime Paradise.

But just as he was about to jump on the lake, he sensed someone appear behind him.

“You seem so carefree after what you experienced last night,” Lumi commented with her arms crossed over her chest.

“Thinking about it wouldn’t do me any good,” Alex answered as he did a few light stretches. “Also... thank you, Lumi. I know that you tried to save me last night.”

“No, the one who was saved was me.” Lumi shook her head. “I had a feeling that the cloaked man didn’t have any intention of killing you, so I merely observed the two of you while hiding. I just didn’t expect that he was a Rank 8 and easily discovered me even though I was invisible.”

She shuddered. “I felt that he planned to kill me when he grabbed my neck, but perhaps after seeing your reaction, he decided to let me go.”

If Nero had killed Lumi back then, she would have disappeared and returned to Latifa’s body.

She would have then undergone a rebirth of sorts, which would have taken anywhere from a month to a few months.

There was a small possibility that an alter might lose her personality and memories during this process.

Alex would have hated it if Lumi had forgotten about him, so he was a little thankful that Nero had shown them mercy.

“Please watch my clothes for me,” Alex said before jumping into the lake.

As soon as he entered the water, he attracted the curiosity of the baby water slimes that were swimming leisurely in the lake. One by one, they followed him.

Some of them even latched onto his body, as if they were hitching a ride.

Alex didn’t mind having a few slimes following him because they were curious by nature.

Sensing that he was running out of air, the young man resurfaced to take a deep breath before taking another dive.

After five more attempts, Alex decided to change his plans.

“Hey, do you guys know if there is a chest under this lake?”

The baby slimes nodded.

“”Eyah!””

“Then can you help me find it?”

One of the baby slime squirted water from its lips and Alex was hit square in the face.

The other baby slimes giggled. Before he knew it, all of them were doing the same, bathing him with their Water Attacks.

The young fox lady, who was watching this scene from a distance, smirked because the young man was clearly outnumbered by the mischievous slimes, who all seemed to want to play with him.

A few minutes later, Alex pleaded for the baby slimes to stop and help him find the treasure chest.

Having had their fun, the baby slimes motioned for Alex to follow them in the water.

“Eyah~”

“Eyah~”

“Eyah~”

Although they were underwater, Alex could hear the baby slimes singing beside him.

Three of them circled around his head, creating a water bubble that allowed him to breathe underwater.

After that was done, they led Alex to what looked like an underwater tunnel with many twists and turns.

'This is very different from the game,' Alex noted. 'I didn't know that there's a hidden underwater maze in this lake.'

The young man couldn't be blamed for this because the patch of grass at the bottom of the lake that the baby slimes had led him to was actually an illusion of sorts.

The baby slimes and Alex had passed through it and before he could process what had happened, he had already found himself in an underwater maze and doing his best to follow his little guides.

Suddenly, the baby slimes started to rise up and Alex followed quickly behind him.

As his face broke the water's surface, the bubble that allowed him to breathe popped a few seconds.

"Eyah!" One of the baby slimes pointed towards the underground cavern, which made Alex gasp in shock.

Seated on what seemed like a chair made out of rocks was an old man reading a book.

"Oh? It seems that I have a guest," the old man said with amusement as the water baby slimes started to crawl on his body and play with his hair, ears, and beard.

"It can't be..." Alex muttered. "Why are you here?"

"Hmm? Do you know me, young man?" the old man asked as he glanced at him. "Well, I guess I was very popular back then. The number of ladies who wish to marry me can circle the entirety of the capital city."

Alex didn't reply right away because he was focused on the old man's eyes.

His eyes were cloudy and pale, devoid of light, as if they had long forgotten how to see.

Yes, the old man was blind. And yet, the young man felt that the old man could see through him perfectly. It's like the loss of his vision had not affected his perception one bit.

But that wasn't the real reason why Alex was so taken aback after seeing the old man.

The old man was familiar to him, extremely so, which made him realize why he had disappeared in the story of ELO, even when he tried to look for him in the past.

The old man was familiar to him, extremely so. Alex finally understood why he had disappeared in the story of ELO despite Alex's best efforts to look for him.

Seated in front of him was none other than Luthor Vademont.

Luthor Vademont, the Guardian of the North, and the only Rank 8 who had killed a Paragon on his own.

Chapter 407: The Guardian Of The North

"Before I forget, let me introduce myself first. The name is Luthor," the old man said. "How about you, young friend? What's your name?"

"Alex Stratos," Alex replied. "Just call me Alex, Sir Luthor."

The old man smiled faintly as if remembering a happy memory.

"It has been a while since someone called me Sir Luthor." Luthor kept smiling even as two baby slimes began to tug on his beard. "Well then, since the slimes have taken you here, I'm sure you're not a bad person. Have you come here to learn from me and inherit my legacy?"

"Your legacy?" Alex asked, saddened that his idol had been reduced to such a state.

“Yes.” Luthor nodded. “Didn’t I tell you? Back in my younger years, I was quite a ladies’ man! If I teach you everything I know, I guarantee that you will marry a wonderful lady. You will then have four kids named William, Lux, Ethan, and Zion.

Alex blinked, but the old man continued undeterred. “You will grow old and watch your sons marry and have kids of their own. You will be a beloved grandfather who dotes on his grandchildren. And when it’s finally time, you will die peacefully in your sleep. Ah... such a happy and fulfilled life, don’t you agree?”

Alex didn’t know if he should be happy or confused as he listened to the “happy future” he was supposed to get after receiving Luthor’s legacy.

A legacy based on the old man’s tried-and-tested ways to become popular with the ladies!

“Sir,” Alex began cautiously, “it seems to me that you are the one who wants to give your kids those names.”

The Guardian of the North burst into hearty laughter. “I was just making small talk to lessen the tension. Well then, care to tell me why the slimes have brought you to me?”

“To be perfectly honest, I don’t really know they have brought me here, Sir,” Alex answered. “I told them to guide me to a treasure chest that is located somewhere under the lake, but before I knew it, I was here.”

Alex sat down before the old man and crossed his legs. Up close, Luthor’s weathered face seemed even more exhausted. It’s a face that had endured much suffering over many years.

Gone was the hardy old man who had always wanted to look tidy and composed so that he might be an inspiring role model for the rest of the knights.

He was now disheveled, with hair and beard so long that the baby slimes could use them as swings while frolicking about him.

"A treasure chest?" the old man repeated with a slight smile. "Indeed. The young should always seek treasures during their adventures. But I think the slimes brought you to the right place because my wisdom in flirting is considered a priceless treasure."

"I'm sorry, but I'll pass on that, Sir Luthor," Alex replied without hesitation. "I am confident that I'll be fine on my own."

The old man shrugged. "It's your loss. Well then, can you tell me what is happening in the outside world? I don't know how long I've been here, but I think I've been away for a few years."

"I wish I could help, but I don't know much about what is happening outside of the academy where I am currently studying."

"A student, eh?" Luthor played with his beard gently so the baby slime using it as a swing wouldn't fall off. "How old are you? What school are you studying at?"

"I just turned eighteen, Sir," Alex replied. "And I am a student of Frieden Academy."

The old man stopped stroking his beard as if he had fallen into a trance. But a minute later, a sigh escaped his lips.

"If His Highness were still alive, he would probably be of the same age as you," Luthor said softly. "He would also be in Frieden Academy and taking honors because he's a wonderful student. My Prince was a very talented person, you see."

The old man grimaced a little. "If I must point out one of his flaws, it was that he unfortunately inherited his singing voice from his grandmother. Damn... I swear that I can still hear that old bat shrieking when I sleep."

Although he was badmouthing people, the tenderness in his voice as he spoke about the "old bat" was unmistakable.

“May I know the name of this Prince?” Alex asked, keen to know if Luthor would give him the answer he was looking for.

However, the old man was not so forthcoming this time.

“I apologize, but I do not deserve to speak his name,” Luthor said sadly, his voice filled with pain and bitterness. “I have failed him and broken my oath to protect him.”

Alex couldn’t help but feel his eyes moisten as he looked at the person he had idolized while a player of ELO.

The Guardian of the North had been the sole reason behind Alex’s decision to take a Shielder Class. Luthor had taken this class himself in his youth, just before starting his adventures.

The proud and powerful knight that everyone had looked up to was now almost unrecognizable.

Forgotten, disheveled, a shell of his former self.

Alex bit his lower lip, unable to see Luthor in such a state. How could he possibly accept this?

This wasn’t the union he had been looking for. His idol was not supposed to be hapless, helpless, and hopeless!

Alex decided to do something that he knew might regret later on.

“Aetherius Alexian Vademont,” Alex said in a calm but firm voice.

Luthor’s hands that were holding the book trembled as if remembering a name that he had treasured all these years.

However, a second later, his expression turned fierce as he lunged at Alex and pinned him down on the ground.

“Who are you and why do you know that name?!” Luthor growled.

Alex suddenly remembered that the old man in front of him was a Rank 8 Prism Knight.

Despite his looks, Luthor was very strong... incredibly strong.

Those who reached Rank 8 were true powerhouses, and even among such titans Luthor was still the one who excelled the most.

Even Nero, the Vampire Lord, didn't dare to fight Luthor because he knew he wasn't the old man's match.

Luthor had killed a Paragon thanks to his reflection abilities.

making him the person who was the most difficult to kill in the world.

Any damage that landed on the Prism Knight's body or armor would be reflected back to its caster.

Such abilities were not uncommon, but Luthor was the most difficult person to kill in the world because any attack that landed on him—whether physical or magical—would be reflected back eightfold.

This meant that if Luthor was slapped once, his enemy would feel that they were getting slapped eight times!

Luthor's Profession was that incredibly broken.

Obviously, facing such an opponent would be a nightmare, but the Paragon of Ice had believed that he could emerge triumphant by using indirect damage.

Well, he had been wrong. Very wrong.

The Prism Knight could still reflect indirect damage back to those intending to hurt him.

Perhaps due to this profession being completely busted, only one Prism Knight could exist in every generation.

This Job Class also had very stringent requirements, similar to the Oathkeeper.

“Sir... I can’t breathe!” Alex struggled as the old man pressed the breath—and life—out of him.

Luthor snapped out of his trance and loosened his hold a bit. However, he continued to pin Alex down on the ground, demanding answers.

“How did you know his name?” Luthor repeated, his voice dripping with killing intent. “Who sent you?!”

“Eyah!”

“Eyah!”

“Eyah!”

The baby slimes were also surprised by the old man’s reaction. Small as they were, all of them pulled his hair and beard to separate him from Alex.

But Luthor remained still, his clouded, unseeing eyes locked on the boy’s face.

Out of desperation, Alex decided to throw caution to the wind and took a gamble.

“It is I, Luthor,” Alex declared. “I am Aetherius Alexian Vademont!”

“Liar!” Luthor roared in fury. “His Highness is dead! I watched him die! How dare you tarnish his memory?!”

Out of anger, the old man lifted Alex from the ground and slammed him against the wall of the cavern.

Hearing Alex’s cry of pain, the baby slimes became desperate and urged the old man to stop.

One of the slimes turned to its sibling. “Eyah!” it exclaimed.

The other baby slime nodded and jumped into the water, swimming as fast as it could so it could bring back help as soon as possible.

It only hoped that Luthor would not kill the young man before it returned with someone who could put a stop to this misunderstanding.

Chapter 408: It’s None Of Your Business

Alex had to admit that he had done something reckless.

He didn’t know what came over him. All he knew was that he couldn’t just accept this turn of events after seeing how pitiful and racked with guilt Luthor looked.

“Liar!” Luthor accused. “His Highness is dead! I watched him die! How dare you tarnish his memory?! How dare you?!”

Luthor slammed the young man’s body against the cave wall. The impact forced a cry of pain from Alex. All the air rushed from his lungs, leaving him gasping.

“Who are you?!” Luthor demanded as he raised Alex’s body from the ground. “Did the Empire send you to torment me?! Speak!”

Alex was in no condition to reply. The only thing that the old man could hear was a gurgling sound from his lips.

Alex's blood welled up in his throat and seeped out of his mouth.

He was a Rank 3 Oathkeeper, considered strong among his generation, but the strength of a Rank 8 was beyond imagination. This was a painful reminder that such individuals were not to be provoked, not that Alex needed such a reminder.

Perhaps angered that his questions kept going unanswered, Luthor once again slammed Alex against the wall.

"Arghhh!" Alex groaned, feeling some of his bones break.

"Answer me!" Luthor roared. "Who sent you?!"

Close to asphyxiation, Alex couldn't answer even if he wanted to. His vision intermittently blackened. He could feel his consciousness fading.

Just before he could sink into oblivion, something blue and blurry appeared in his vision.

"Shut up, F*cker!"

The cavern shook as Luthor was thrown against a wall. Alex collapsed in a heap, barely breathing.

"Dim!"

A familiar voice reached Alex's ears before he descended into complete darkness.

While Alex lay unconscious on the ground, Dim Dim lightly tapped his cheek to wake him up.

Dozens of baby slimes had surrounded the young man's body. They were using their healing skills to quickly cure him.

Eiko gave Alex a sidelong glance before shifting her attention to Luthor, who lay unmoving at the corner of the cavern.

The baby slime was completely immune to the Prism Knight's reflection ability, so she didn't suffer any backlash after slapping the old man away.

Luckily for Luthor, Eiko had controlled her strength, leaving him unconscious but still very much in the world of the living.

A minute later, Lumi appeared inside the cavern, having followed Dim Dim and a few dozen baby slimes after seeing them jump into the lake.

Finding it unusual, she had followed them to investigate. It had never crossed her mind that her curiosity would be "rewarded" with the sight of a seriously injured Alex inside an underwater cavern.

The baby slimes' healing magic helped a bit, but the damage he had received from Luthor could not be healed in a short time.

Without an ounce of hesitation, Lumi took out a high-grade healing potion from her storage ring.

"Can you guys make sure he won't choke when I force feed him this?" Lumi asked the baby slimes, who all nodded.

""Eyah!""

The young lady raised the vial to her mouth and tilted it. She then pressed her lips against Alex's, transferring the purple liquid directly into his mouth without losing a single drop.

After what happened last night, Latifa had given Lumi and Lotte some potions for emergencies.

Lumi just hadn't thought that she would be using the potion right after arriving at Slime Paradise given how safe it was known to be.

'One potion may not be enough,' Lumi thought as she pulled back and saw how devoid of color Alex's face was.

Ignoring the taste of Alex's blood, she filled her mouth with another high-grade potion and repeated the process.

After she had successfully made Alex down both potions, Luthor finally stirred. Groggily, the old man got to his feet.

"... Who... no. What are you?" Luthor's uncanny senses detected a very powerful being in front of him, stronger than the Ice Paragon he had faced in the past.

Eiko's only answer was a withering glare. If Luthor made a move to approach Alex in any way, she would smack the light out of his eyes again.

She could see how worried Dim Dim was as it fussed over Alex with tears in its eyes. Since her best friend wanted Alex to live, she couldn't possibly let the "guest" inside their Slime Paradise to continue hurting the young man.

A tense standoff ensued inside the cavern as Luthor and Eiko faced each other.

The old man knew he wasn't a match against the baby slime, so he simply sat and leaned against the cave wall while extending his senses to find out what was happening to the young man.

Amidst the darkness, he could sense the auras of dozens of slimes, all working together to heal the young man.

He could also detect a peculiar entity right beside Alex, who almost didn't seem human.

A few minutes later, Alex's breathing stabilized, but he was still seriously hurt.

It would take a while for the high-grade potions to fully take effect. The slimes' healing abilities were also first aid at most.

The sound of splashing reached everyone's ears as Latifa emerged inside the cavern.

Lumi had reported what had happened and asked her to come. If Latifa could temporarily merge with Alex, the Verdant Throne would send his regeneration abilities into overdrive.

Their shared ability gave them rapid regeneration. For now, this was the best and fastest solution Lumi could come up with.

Latifa knelt beside Alex's and pressed her lips against his.

Suddenly, she turned into particles of light and merged with him, leaving his body covered in purple flame.

The gnarly sounds of bones rearranging themselves back into position echoed inside the cavern. Dim Dim and the baby slimes watched as Alex shuddered before his broken arm corrected itself with a popping sound.

A few minutes later, Alex opened his eyes, but Lumi instantly knew that the one in control was not him but Latifa.

"Why?" Latifa asked as she looked at Luthor. "Why did you hurt him? Alex isn't the type to cause trouble to other people. Why would you hurt him like this?"

Lumi and Lotte wanted to correct Latifa and remind her of Alex's troublemaking history. But since they were on the same side, they held their tongues and focused on the old man.

"It's none of your business," Luthor replied calmly.

The old man didn't want to discuss anything with the newcomers, for the answer held a secret that mustn't be revealed to the world.

After calming down a bit, he understood that he had overreacted and had hurt the young man in a fit of rage.

However, the memories of that battle had ignited the flame he thought had long gone out.

He could clearly remember how the Paragon of Ice had frozen the Prince, turning him into a block of ice.

Laughing, the Paragon had then tossed the block of ice off the cliff. Luthor had desperately tried to save the prince everyone had wanted to die, but his futile attempt had been met with even more laughter.

After killing the Paragon in a great battle, Luthor had gone down the cliff himself.

But all he had seen at the bottom was shattered ice and frozen blood.

He could not find his Prince's remains, but even then he had known clinging to hope was useless. No one could possibly survive a fall thousands of meters in elevation.

When Latifa temporarily took over Alex's body, Luthor sensed something that made his hand tremble.

After losing his vision, he had gained the ability to sense things clearly using sound and his aura.

Since Latifa forcefully released mana to speed up Alex's recovery, Luthor felt a familiar presence on the young man's head.

Although it had been many years since then, he could clearly sense that seal belonged to Nero.

The old man's mouth opened and closed like a goldfish, unable to voice out the things that he wanted to say.

In the end, he pursed his lips and clenched his fists.

Although he still felt doubtful, he needed to know the truth.

And the only way he could do that was to wait for Alex to regain his consciousness. He intended to talk to the young man again, this time without violence.

Chapter 409: A Petty Old Coot

At first, Alex's sleep was long and dreamless.

But then, a gentle brushing against his head began to lull him back into awareness. The feeling was so soothing, so real that he wanted to know where it's from. Curious, he opened his eyes.

The first thing he saw was a familiar face, all scrunched up in worry.

"Guildmaster?" Alex said weakly.

"Yes, it's me," Noelle replied softly. "I want you to know that you're safe. We can talk more next time, but for now, rest."

Her voice, soft as a lullaby, brought back his drowsiness. Within moments, he fell back to sleep, with Noelle cradling his head on her lap.

She then started to hum, hoping to put him at ease so he would be able to focus all his energy on healing.

Outside of the dream world, Eiko sealed the cavern, preventing Alex, Latifa, Lumi, and Lotte from leaving.

She asked Dim Dim to tell its other friends that Alex and Latifa were fine and that they didn't need to worry.

Eiko estimated that the silver-haired young man wouldn't be well enough until after a day or two for he needed to heal more than just his physical injuries.

Luthor's aura had gone out of control earlier, and what he had inflicted on Alex went beyond the corporal. Fortunately, the old man had instinctively held back, but the damage had already been done.

Alex would only open his eyes once he fully recovered his internal energy. For now, they could only wait.

At the corner of the cavern, Luthor sat cross-legged and started meditating to calm his mind. After snapping out of his earlier outburst, he realized he no longer had the control he used to have over his strength.

Latifa, Lumi, and Lotte were on the opposite side of the cavern.

Latifa was still inside Alex's body, currently sleeping on a bed she always carried wherever she went.

After temporarily taking over Alex's body and realizing the extent of his injuries, the foxkin couldn't help her fury towards Luthor from bubbling over.

Her only consolation now was that the power of the Verdant Throne had activated to the fullest. She could at least feel assured that the young man would achieve full recovery.

Half an hour later, Dim Dim returned. Having conveyed that Alex was fine to their other companions, it decided to have a chat with Eiko.

The two were talking so softly that others couldn't make out what they were discussing.

After their conversation seemed to end, Dim Dim bounced toward Latifa and told her that she could leave Alex in the cavern to recuperate.

"I'll stay with him, Dim Dim," Latifa answered. "Who knows what that old man might do if Alex is left here all alone."

Luthor smiled faintly and spoke with his eyes closed. "The ladies of this generation have no respect for the elderly."

"Does someone who attacked my friend and almost killed him for no valid reason deserve respect?" Latifa asked icily. "Are his injuries a gift I ought to thank you for?"

Luthor knew nothing he could say could refute her words.

"I admit I was in the wrong, but your friend isn't completely faultless. He should have known better than to say something that shouldn't be said," Luthor stated.

"And that is?" Latifa pressed, still unconvinced.

She wanted to get to the bottom of what had transpired. She believed that Alex had done nothing to warrant this, but she wanted to know what he had done to make the old man think otherwise.

However, Luthor didn't reply, leaving her hanging.

There was nothing more annoying than having a question unanswered. Clearly, the old man knew this and had led Latifa to this outcome.

"What a petty old coot," Lumi remarked with blatant contempt. "You're demanding respect while acting so disgracefully. Is bullying people younger and weaker than you something to be proud of? Can you even see your thick face in the mirror?"

“Sorry, missy, I am blind,” Luthor answered without any sign of guilt or remorse. “How can I see such a thing?”

“Hmmp!” Lumi glared at the old man and fell silent, no longer considering him fit to speak to.

A faint smile appeared on Luthor’s lips as he sensed how much the two ladies really cared about the young man who had introduced himself to him as his prince.

The seal that Nero had placed inside his head had once again returned to a hibernation state, revealing no fluctuations that Luthor could sense.

Even so, it only gave Alex’s declaration more credibility. After all, he had been there when Nero had placed the seal on his Prince’s memories.

Outside the cavern...

Lavinia stared at the lake where Alex and Latifa had disappeared into.

She had been informed that Alex was injured but was no longer in danger.

Although she wanted to personally confirm this by seeing him, it was not possible.

A barrier had appeared around the lake, preventing anyone from entering. Only the slimes could pass through this barrier freely.

“When I first saw Alex, I didn’t think how strong a magnet he’d be for trouble,” Cairo said as he stood beside his sister. “By now, it’s not wrong for me to claim wherever he goes, trouble follows. Lavinia, he’ll probably keep facing similar situations in the future. If you want to be with him, you need to become stronger.”

"I understand." Lavinia nodded. "Before we left the village, Alex looked a little pale. But he didn't say anything, so I didn't think it's anything serious. Conflicts aren't allowed in Slime Paradise, so I didn't interfere with his plans here. I thought he could properly rest here."

"It seems that I was naive. There's no safe place. Letting my guard down is a mistake."

"It's not your fault." Cairo sighed. "Even I didn't expect him to get injured in this place. I want to know more, but Dim Dim won't say anything no matter how many times we ask it to elaborate. It seems like it wants to keep things under the wraps."

"Maybe Dim Dim thinks that some things are better left unknown," Lavinia commented. "At times like this, we can only put our trust in Latifa."

A smile tugged on the corners of Cairo's lips while he looked at his sister's expression.

"Aren't you worried?" Cairo asked in a more light-hearted tone. "Alex is alone with a beautiful lady. Who knows what might happen between them?"

"Brother, you can be mean at times, you know?" Lavinia replied, annoyed.

Cairo arched an eyebrow. "I am mean, yes, but what if I'm right?"

"So what if you're right?" Lavinia countered. "Latifa and I already talked about it."

"Oh?" Cairo smirked. "What did you talk about?"

"It's a secret between girls. It doesn't concern you."

"Fair enough. My sister has grown a lot."

Cairo was all smiles, but deep inside, he was worried about his disciple. Earlier, he had felt a strength that surpassed his own by several folds.

For a moment, he had believed that they were under attack. But then the overwhelming presence had disappeared after a while, as if it had once again gone into hiding.

He had also detected something similar in Oak Village. Back then, he had brushed it off, thinking that he might just be imagining things.

Moreover, nothing had happened that night, further convincing him his mind had played tricks on him. But two such occurrences back to back, and he could no longer think that way.

'I need to get stronger, too,' Cairo thought as he firmly gripped the handle of his sword.

When he had finally broken through Rank 5 after clearing his trial in the Heracle Mountain, he'd been ecstatic.

He had been considered a prodigy for as long as he could remember. The fact that he was still improving by leaps and bounds only seemed to reaffirm his talent.

While he wasn't too arrogant given his age and strength, his breakthrough had made him a little conceited. He didn't believe himself undefeatable, but he had allowed himself to get complacent while at Slime Paradise.

But his disciple's condition was a harsh slap across his face that reminded him Rank 5 was nothing. In life-or-death situations, the only thing that mattered was whether one could defeat their opponent and, if not, whether they could escape with their life.

Nothing else mattered.

And in the eyes of the beings who stood at the apex of the world, what difference was there between a Rank 1 fighter and a Rank 5? Both were bugs that could be easily crushed.

With these thoughts running in his head, Cairo's determination to take the second trial at the Kingdom of Faellarun blazed more fiercely than ever.

Chapter 410: A Broken Oath [Part 1]

When Alex opened his eyes, he found himself lying on a soft bed, next to Latifa, who was sleeping peacefully.

"Am I in heaven?" Alex muttered as he looked at the sleeping beauty beside him.

"Obviously not." Lumi's annoyed voice reached his ears.

Alex glanced to the side of the bed, only to see the Alter looking down on him with her arms crossed over her chest.

"Oh... since you're here, Lumi, I might have gone to hell instead of heaven."

"Very well, I'll send you to hell free of charge."

Lumi was about to smack Alex's head to oblivion, but Lotte hurriedly pulled her back. Lotte cared about Alex's safety, but she was also thinking about how embarrassing it would be if he suffered a near-death experience just to meet his end at the hands of an irritated teenage girl!

"Dim Dim!" Realizing that Alex was awake, Dim Dim jumped and clung to his face like a Koala, refusing to let go.

Alex blinked once then twice before lightly patting the head of the little bun, who looked genuinely worried about his condition.

"I'm fine, Dim Dim," Alex said softly. "Thank you for worrying about me."

"Un!" Dim Dim smiled happily before finally letting go.

The young man then scanned the surroundings. Luthor was seated at the corner of the cavern. His legs were crossed and he seemed to be meditating.

However, after sensing Alex's gaze, the old man opened his eyes, which made Alex flinch.

His fight or flight response was immediately triggered as the memories of what had happened before he lost consciousness flooded his mind.

Alex couldn't be blamed for such a reaction, especially after his near-death experience with the old man.

"Dim Dim!" Dim Dim reassured Alex that the old man wouldn't hurt him because her best friend was around.

The little bun even pointed at Eiko, who was sleeping peacefully on top of a black coffin.

The floating coffin looked eerie, but he didn't feel any kind of danger emanating from it.

He wondered where the coffin came from, or why Eiko was even sleeping on top of it.

Still, it seemed that the coffin served a purpose because the baby slime wouldn't be sleeping so peacefully in a cavern with an old man who almost murdered someone.

"Dim Dim!" Dim Dim pointed at the black coffin.

"That coffin's name is Blackfire?" Alex frowned.

"Un!" Dim Dim nodded.

"What is inside of it?" Alex asked. "I mean, is there a body inside that coffin?"

Dim Dim smirked mischievously and kept silent. Seeing its expression, Alex had the lingering suspicion that it wanted him to personally discover what was in the coffin.

Alex had no intention of courting death to satisfy his curiosity, so he decided to stop prying.

“Lotte, can you tell me what happened after I lost consciousness?” Alex glanced at Latifa’s alter, whom he believed had the answers to his questions.

Lotte gave Lumi a side-long glance before responding. “Lumi saw a baby slime jump out of the water. It called out to Eiko. I don’t know what the baby slime said, but Eiko and Dim Dim hurried to jump into the lake together.

“Lumi followed them and reported what was happening to Latifa. When we arrived at the scene, the baby slimes were using their healing abilities on you. But, it wasn’t enough.

“Latifa was forced to use the power of the Verdant Throne to help increase your regeneration abilities. Also, it has already been a day since you lost consciousness.”

“I see...” Alex glanced at the sleeping young lady, who had come to save him from harm.

He had truly been in a great deal of pain after his encounter with Luthor, but now, he felt so strong that it was like their exchange had simply been a passing dream.

Unfortunately, seeing the old man observing him from the corner of the cavern was more than enough for him to understand that everything that had happened was very much real.

But there was one more question that needed to be addressed. It was also the most important one.

What now?

Alex didn’t know if it was a good idea to talk to Luthor again. He certainly didn’t want to make knocking on death’s door a habit.

Still, he didn't know if he should feel relieved or worried that the Guardian of the North had become blind and was wasting away in an underground cavern within Slime Paradise.

He could vaguely recall the old man shouting at him and calling him a liar.

Luthor had insisted that he had seen the prince die with his own eyes.

But, if that was true, then what about Alex?

What about the memory of him saving ten-year-old Evangeline after she had tried to run away from home?

'I don't know what to believe anymore.' Alex sighed internally.

A part of him still doubted that he really was the lost Prince of Aetherion.

It was simply a backstory that he had written while creating his character, Alex Stratos, who served as his game character in Endless Leveling Online.

'Maybe I'm thinking too deeply about this,' Alex thought. 'Maybe it's not related. Maybe this is just one big coincidence.'

Yes. A coincidence.

That was the only explanation for all of this... was what he wanted to believe.

At the very least, he needed to talk to Evangeline first to put this matter behind him.

"Let's go," Alex said. "I want to leave this place."

The young man had intended to look for treasures in Slime Paradise, but he was no longer in the mood for it.

He felt confused and unsure about many things, but the people that could help him were dangers to his peaceful life.

Latifa finally stirred after being lightly shaken by Lotte.

After being informed that Alex wished to leave the cave, she shyly glanced at him, who was only wearing a swimming trunk.

“We can leave now.” Latifa stood up from the bed. “I’m sure that the others are very worried about you.”

She then returned her bed inside her storage ring and waited for Alex to jump into the water.

But before the young man could do it, the old man stood up and called out to them.

“Wait, we need to talk,” Luthor said calmly. “I apologize for hurting you a day ago. It has been years since I interacted with people and my emotions got the better of me. Please, can we talk? I promise to not hurt you.”

A part of Alex didn’t want to believe the old man, but a part of him bade him to stay.

In the end, after a brief struggle, the young man decided to agree to the old man’s request to talk.

Whether he was really the Prince of Aetherion or not, only a handful people could say. And among all of them, only Luthor was available.

“Will you really not hurt him?” Latifa asked calmly.

She couldn't gauge the strength of the old man in front of them. But she had a feeling that he might be a hidden Master, who had decided to live his life as a hermit.

"Yes, I promise upon my name that I will not hurt him," Luthor replied.

"And who are you to make such a promise?" Lumi asked. "Does your name even have value?"

To Alex's surprise, Luthor lowered his head as if Lumi's words had cut him deep.

"You're right." Luthor sighed. "My oath has been broken, so my name has no longer any value."

"Lumi." Latifa glanced at her Alter, which made Lumi nod in understanding. "Forgive her, she's just a little aggressive after what happened. Please, tell us your name, Sir."

The old man continued to "stare" at the ground in front of him, as if recalling a time when his name had still meant something.

After a short silence, he raised his head once more and glanced in Latifa's direction.

"My name is Luthor Vademont," Luthor stated. "I was once called the Guardian of the North."

This time, it was Lumi's turn to look at the old man in disbelief. Latifa and Lotte were both caught off guard by this revelation too.

Their generation knew very well about the legend of the Guardian of the North.

But many believed that after the great battle, the Guardian guarding the Aetherion Empire as a loyal subject had died after fulfilling his duty.

That was the official story that the Empire had given after his disappearance, and since he didn't appear again in the world, many believed that he was truly dead...

Until today.