

Endless 431

Chapter 431: The Birth Of A Unique Skill [Part 2]

When Alex regained his senses, he suddenly found himself in a situation that he wasn't prepared to face.

A younger version of Luthor, when he was still the Guardian of the North, stood in front of him, while someone who was exuding incredible chillness and power hovered in the sky above them.

"Luthor, step aside," the man wearing a white robe said coldly. "He is someone that mustn't exist. Are you betraying the Empire?"

"Betray? I have never betrayed the Empire," Luthor replied proudly. "I am protecting its future!"

"Have you grown senile? Did you forget the prophecy?" the man sneered. "The Empire is said to stop existing as long as that... thing is alive. You have defended the Empire for many years, so I don't want to kill you. Don't force me, Luthor. You can still walk away."

"Did the King send you?" Luthor asked with narrowed eyes. "Did he really send you to kill his own son?"

"Of course the King sent me," the man answered. "Choosing between the Empire and his son is a very easy decision for someone who sits on its throne."

"Fools!" Luthor roared in anger. "The Aetherion Empire is not that weak that it will crumble just because one of its princes is alive!"

"Hah... there's no point in talking to you. If you want to die with him then die!"

"You're the one who's going to die, you bastard!"

Alex tried to talk, but found himself unable to. He tried to move, but his body wouldn't listen to him.

In the end, he realized that he was in a state of possession. This had also happened during the trial in the Heracle Mountain.

He was simply there to witness the event as it had happened, unable to interfere with this bit of history he was seeing for the first time anymore than he could travel to the past.

While he stood rooted on the spot, a fierce battle between the man and Luthor took place.

A glance was enough to tell him that Luthor's opponent was none other than the Paragon of Ice.

The middle-aged man with short-blue hair and blue eyes locked onto his opponent like a hawk that was about to kill its prey.

However, Luthor wasn't a helpless bird that would die because he was facing a Paragon.

The Paragon of Ice learned this the hard way after he tried to "indirectly" target Luthor, thinking that indirect attacks wouldn't trigger his reflection ability.

The battle continued to a stalemate until the Paragon made a feint.

The Guardian of the North thought that his opponent would attack him. Instead, the one that was attacked was the Prince who was standing a distance away from him.

When Luthor realized what the Paragon of Ice had done, it was already too late.

Alex felt his entire body freezing in place as he was trapped inside a block of ice.

Surprisingly, the Prince was still alive because he was wearing some life saving artifacts that Luthor had made him put on in order to protect him from harm.

Just as Luthor was about to come to his rescue, the Paragon roared and unleashed an attack that sent the frozen prince falling off the cliff behind him.

“Noooooooooooooooooooo!” Luthor shouted. “Aetheriuuuuuuuuuuuuuuus!”

As Alex fell at the bottom of the cliff, he heard the Prince’s muffled cry from within the ice.

“I can’t die...” Prince Aetherius. “Not like this...”

A moment later, the block of ice crashed at the bottom of the cliff, shattering into countless pieces.

The Prince lay on the ground, his body parts shattering like ice.

The Paragon of Ice had the power to freeze a person until their entire body turned into ice.

That was what he did to Prince Aetherius.

Only his head was intact, but the Prince was still alive.

Still, he wouldn’t be alive for long.

As his consciousness was starting to fade, a two-meter-tall apparition appeared in front of him.

“Child, do you want to live?” the Apparition asked.

“Yes,” Prince Aetherius replied. “I still have... many things I want to do. People that are waiting for me...”

A single tear escaped the prince’s eye and fell onto the ground as a bead of ice.

“Very well.” The Apparition nodded. “Although your life is meant to end today, The World will always find a way.”

After saying those words, the prince’s head as well as his body parts transformed into particles of light that flew into the Apparition’s hand.

The Apparition then turned to the side, looking straight at Alex, making the young man shudder.

“Though the crown is shattered and the flesh undone, the soul of the Prince shall not perish, for The World remembers its own,” the Apparition said softly.

“When the sun rise upon the twelfth age,

His light shall descend as mercy upon the fallen realm.

Through him shall the broken be made whole,

and the name of Arcana shall be restored in grace.”

The Apparition then smiled at Alex before looking up at the heavens. It then raised its hand that was holding the orb of light and spoke as if it was bidding someone goodbye.

Suddenly, Alex felt himself getting drowsy, and soon fell on the ground sound asleep.

He didn’t know what happened next after that because he was embraced by darkness.

When he finally opened his eyes, several notification messages popped up in front of him, waiting for him to give a reply.

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< Congratulations! You have successfully completed a Hidden Quest! >

Quest Name: ????

Rewards: +10 Level Up, +200 Magic Stat.

Aside from the notification window that told him that he had completed a Hidden Quest, Alex also saw over a dozen windows that represented the Unique Skills that he could choose from.

“This is different from what I expected,” Alex muttered before propping himself up from the ground.
“My trial ended just like that?”

Alex tried to recall everything before he had lost consciousness, but everything was a blur.

The only things he could clearly recall were Luthor’s battle with the Paragon of Ice and his fall off the cliff.

What happened after that was blurry to him, but he still remembered seeing a silhouette appear in front of the dying prince and told him... something.

The young man believed that it was something very important, but no matter how hard he tried to remember, the elusive memory slipped through his fingers.

Still, he had a feeling that he would once again recall those words when the time was right.

Because of that, he decided to focus his attention on the Unique Skills that were all hovering in front of him, waiting for him to make his choice.

Chapter 432: Dream, Believe, Survive

After using up his Stat Points to gain ten level ups, Alex finally focused his attention on the Unique Skills that had appeared before him.

He was supposed to undergo a trial, but he witnessed a scene that had happened in the past instead.

A part of him believed that Prince Aetherius had died, but another part was open to other possibilities.

After all, if the Prince had really died then why did Evangeline insist that he was the Prince in her memories?

She was a Dhampir and the taste of his blood was more than enough proof for her to believe that she had finally reunited with her childhood friend.

Still, Alex set aside these thoughts for now. He had a feeling that a time would come when everything became clear, so there was no need to mull so much over the questions inside his head.

All in all, there were at least sixteen Unique Skills that were hovering in front of him.

When he finished reading all of their descriptions, Alex shortlisted four Unique Skills and separated them from the rest.

These four Unique Skills were truly unique, and Alex didn't think that he would be able to learn them with his profession.

These four unique skills were...

Draconic Ascension [EX], Summon Seraphim [EX], Twin Flame Genesis [EX], and Gravitas Domain [EX].

< Draconic Ascension [EX] >

Type: Transformation

“When words are not enough, let the world hear my roar!”

— Alex temporarily fuses his Oathkeeper essence with the will of an ancient divine dragon, transforming into the Dragon Knight of the Oathbound Flame.

— Gains draconic wings and scales that halve all elemental and physical damage.

— Physical and magical power increase by 200%.

— Weapon attacks will be imbued by Divine Fire Damage.

— Able to use Dragon Fear against enemies and make lower ranked creatures submit to his will.

— This skill will last for five minutes. Every time the Oathkeeper ranks up, the duration of the transformation will increase by two minutes.

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This skill caught Alex’s interest because transforming into a Dragon would not only increase his physical and magical defenses, it would also bolster his physical and magical power by 200%.

Not only that, Dragon Fear was something that worked like an intimidation ability and would make his enemies feel pressured.

However, it was not enough to rule out other skills like Summon Seraphim [EX]. A powerful summon would help him fight against strong opponents as well.

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< Summon Seraphim [EX] >

Type: Summoning

“Answer me, herald of my vow. Descend where hope yet stands.”

- Calls forth a divine guardian bound to Alex’s Oathkeeper soul.
- This summon will remain active until it is defeated or unsummoned.
- The Strength of the Seraphim will always be one level above the Oathkeeper’s current Rank.

[Abilities of the Seraph]

- Radiant Ward: Increase Magical and Physical defenses of allies by 100%.
- Sword of Dawn: Executes wide-range holy slashes.
- Sanctuary: Heals allies in a wide area.
- Heaven’s Call: Unleash a barrage of Holy Light at a single or multiple targets.

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Having a powerful summon to fight by his side was also a good option. Also, his summon having a Rank higher than him showed promise.

If there would come a time when Alex broke through a higher rank, wouldn't that mean that his Summon alone would be able to deal with most of the enemies that stood at the peak of the world?

The young man's gaze then moved to the third Unique Skill that he had shortlisted.

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< Twin Flame Genesis [EX] >

Type: Elemental Fusion

"Two absolutes may never coexist—unless bound by an oath unbroken."

— Merges the opposing elements of Fire and Ice into a balanced yet volatile form of divine energy.

— Creates the Sacred Equinox Flame, which burns and freezes simultaneously, dealing double elemental damage and bypassing resistances.

— Covers Alex in an Aura of Fire and Ice, giving him the ability to fly freely in the sky and gain a high resistance to Fire and Water based elemental attacks or magic.

[Twin Flame Genesis [EX] additional abilities.]

Blazefrost Strike: Every attack releases dual-element shockwaves.

Genesis Strike: Unleash a ranged magical attack that is imbued with Fire and Ice, bypassing all resistances.

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Alex could think of many ways this skill could compliment his fighting style, especially its ability to bypass resistances.

As someone who relied on physical attacks, having his own magical specialty would allow him to unleash devastating magical attacks while imbuing his physical blows with the power of twin flames.

Last but not least was another exceptional skill that made Alex wish that he could choose more than one Unique Skill.

< Gravitas Dominion [EX] >

Type: Gravity / Dominion Field

“My vow anchors the heavens and my will commands the earth.”

— Creates a vast dome of shimmering golden gravity that suppresses flight, teleportation, and levitation.

— Enemies inside the Domain will feel crushing weight equivalent to the Oathkeepers Rank (Example: The Oathkeeper is currently Rank 3. This means that everyone inside the domain will feel 3x more gravity).

— This domain will last for ten minutes. Every time the Oathkeeper ranks up, the duration of the domain will increase by two minutes. The effects of the gravity will also increase by 1 (Example: If Alex becomes a Rank 5 Oathkeeper, the effect of the gravity will also be multiplied by 5).

[Additional Effects]

— Increase or decrease the weight of Alex’s equipment by up to 1,000%. This effect can also work on inanimate objects that the Oathkeeper is touching.

— Alex will be able to manipulate your own gravity, even exempting himself from its effects.

— Oathbound Pull and Push: Alex can manipulate localized gravity fields up to twenty-five meters away to forcibly draw creatures and objects toward him or repel them away. The effectiveness of this ability is influenced by the target's size and weight and not their Rank.

The heavier the target, the weaker the effect. However, any creature or object whose total weight (including equipment) is less than or equal to 300% of the Oathkeeper's weight and equipment will find it nearly impossible to resist the pull of the command.

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Any of these four Unique Skills brought so much versatility that Alex was finding it extremely hard to choose.

However, he must make a choice, so he closed his eyes to create a simulation using all of these skills in order to find the best one of them.

A few minutes later, the young man finally opened his eyes and reached out to touch the Unique Skill of his choice.

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< Would you like to learn the Unique Skill, Gravitas Dominion [EX]? >

< Yes/No >

— — —

Alex firmly pressed the Yes button. A moment later, he felt a surge of power enter his body.

It was a hard decision, but after weighing his options, he deemed that being able to control Gravity would most enhance his fighting ability.

“It will be hard to master this skill, but it will be worth it in the long run,” Alex said softly as he felt his consciousness returning to his original body.

But just as he was about to disappear from the Domain of the Skill Book, he saw a two-meter tall Tarot Card materialize in front of him.

The lady inside the Tarot Card smiled faintly at Alex and gave him a playful wave.

Alex forced himself to look at the top spot of the card to see the number that was etched on it.

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“So it’s you...” Alex muttered before the world around him shattered completely.

The Deity, who symbolized the completion of the Fool’s Journey, said something that managed to reach Alex before he completely disappeared from the Domain.

“Dream, Believe, Survive.”

Only three words, and yet those three words represented the things that Alex needed to do if he wanted to complete his journey in a world of endless possibilities.

Chapter 433: Alex’s New Trump Card

After gaining his new Unique Skill, Alex headed to the Mistral Weave Forest in order to test it out.

Dim Dim found Alex’s new skill quite amusing because the young man was able to pull and push the Horned Rabbits around them.

Alex then decided to jump and negate the gravity that was holding him down. Just like he expected, instead of falling down, he continued to rise up until he was well above the trees of the forest.

At first, Alex found this fascinating, but when he rose about three hundred meters and still showed no sign of stopping, he immediately summoned a shield and grabbed it for dear life.

He then canceled gravity, sending himself plummeting towards the earth like a rock. However, Alex was already prepared for this outcome.

“Shield Chaser!”

The shield immediately flew forward, allowing Alex to stop himself from falling to his doom.

A few minutes later, the shield gently landed on the ground. Alex finally breathed a sigh of relief.

Just as he was thinking that he should be more careful when using the skill in the future, he sensed someone looking in his direction.

Looking up, he saw Lotte standing on a tree branch with an amused expression.

“What are you doing, Alex?” Lotte teased. “One moment you are flying, the next second you are falling. If things had really gotten out of control, I was prepared to catch you before you hit the ground. Fortunately, you managed to save yourself in time.”

“H-Hahaha...” Alex could only laugh nervously because it had indeed been a close call.

But Dim Dim seemed to have enjoyed that near-death experience, even telling Alex to do it one more time.

The Dim Sum God had been perched on top of Alex’s head all that time. To the little bun, the experience had been an impromptu roller coaster ride.

In order to change the topic, Alex turned to the Alter.

“Lotte, please tell me that it’s a coincidence that you’re here and that you’re not stalking me like Lumi does,” Alex said.

The young man even looked around as if expecting that Lumi would pop out at any moment.

“Don’t worry, Alex,” Lotte replied. “This is just a chance encounter. I was actually foraging in the forest when I saw your... amusing attempt to fly?”

As if to prove her point, Lotte turned around and showed Alex the basket that was hanging on her back.

Inside of it were mushrooms, fruits, and vegetables that were native in the Mistral Weave Forest.

After seeing her haul, Dim Dim asked Lotte if it could join her in foraging for edible plants in the forest.

Of course, the young lady happily accepted the offer. The two then left Alex alone to continue experimenting with his new Skill.

When Lotte and Dim Dim were out of his earshot, Alex decided to continue experimenting.

He summoned a dimensional shield and grabbed it with his hand. He then increased its weight before throwing it to a tree.

The sound of the tree snapping in half and falling on the ground after getting hit by the shield was incredibly satisfying.

‘I knew it,’ Alex thought.

He then picked a fist-sized rock on the ground and threw it away. But just before the rock left his hand, Alex increased its weight by ten times.

The rock pierced through the tree stump, creating a gaping hole.

A moment later, Alex thought of an idea.

He approached the fallen tree he had struck earlier and suppressed its gravity until it became almost weightless.

Of course, that didn't mean he could lift it effortlessly. But once he managed to tilt and lift it enough that it no longer touched the ground, the rest was easy.

Alex swung the tree around as if it was only a mere twig.

If others were to see him from a distance, they would think that Alex had monstrous strength, capable of fighting a giant without needing magic or weapons!

After proving his theory, Alex then threw the tree towards another tree in the distance.

When the tree left the range of Alex's gravitational field, it once again regained its weight and slammed at Alex's target, destroying another innocent tree in the process.

'Exactly twenty-five meters,' Alex thought. 'That is the range of my Gravitas Dominion. But once I Rank up, it will extend by another five meters. This will be a good trump card in battle.'

The majority of the students, staff, and even Demon Worshipers already knew about Alex's fighting style.

So, he planned to keep his new ability a secret so that no one would be able to devise a strategy to counter it.

After a few more tests, Alex opened his map to look for Lotte and Dim Dim.

The two were a good distance from him. He wondered if he should join them or not.

After giving it some thought, he decided that it would be best for him to continue practicing his new ability until he mastered it to a level where he could truly use it in battle.

However, he refrained from destroying any more trees because the Mistral Weave Forest had a Guardian, which was a Rank 8 Monster.

Of course, he knew what kind of Monster it was and where it was resting.

But Alex intended to, as the saying went, let sleeping dragons lie. The last thing Alex wanted to do was to wake up to something that could kill him with a sneeze.

A few more hours passed before Dim Dim and Lotte finally returned to look for Alex. They informed him that they had filled the basket with all sorts of wonderful ingredients for future meals.

Together, the three of them returned to the clock tower.

Upon their arrival, Lotte once again demonstrated her excellent culinary skills, making Alex, who was very tired from his training, feel revitalized.

“Whoever marries you will be incredibly lucky,” Alex said as he patted his stomach with a smile.

“Really?” Lotte gave Latifa a side-long glance before shifting her gaze back to Alex, who looked very pleased with her cooking.

“Of course.” Alex nodded. “You and Fran are both good cooks. I would love nothing more than to eat your dishes my entire life.”

“Is that a proposal?” Lotte asked.

But before Alex could reply, she took out a handkerchief from her pocket and wiped away some sauce on his lips.

When she was done with that task, she pressed her finger on his lips, and said in a volume that only Alex could hear.

“Words are cheap,” Lotte said. “If you’re serious, you better make Latifa happy.”

After saying those words, she picked up Alex’s and Dim Dim’s plates and went to the kitchen to wash them.

The young man watched her go and understood her intention.

Lotte, Lumi, and Latifa’s two future Alters—Lulu, and Lala—were part of a single person. If he wanted to make all of them happy, he would need to make Latifa happy first because her happiness was also their happiness.

Alex made a vow in his heart that he would work towards that goal so that all of them could live happily ever after in a world that no one knew... was headed for destruction.

Chapter 434: Formal Challenge [Part 1]

“Alex! Big news!” Chuck burst into the room, almost out of breath. “Something big happened!”

Alex glanced at his roommate with an arched eyebrow. “Let me guess—Mary whipped you while wearing a dominatrix suit?”

“How did you—” Chuck immediately coughed before shaking his head. “That’s not it! Something big happened. Several Nobles from Solara visited the academy today and challenged Renard to a duel. They said they objected to a commoner getting engaged with their Saintess, Celestria!”

Alex blinked once, then twice. A devilish grin appeared on his face. “Really? They’re engaged? Is this confirmed?”

Who could've expected that Renard's relationship with the Saintess would progress so quickly after their meeting at Frieden Academy.

"I don't know. Renard didn't say anything." Chuck admitted. "The President kicked those nobles out for trespassing, so they're now kicking up a ruckus."

Wanting to find out more, Alex accompanied Chuck to the gate of the academy, where the nobles were said to be making a ruckus.

As they approached the gate, the shouts of young men—all roughly in their late teens—grew louder and louder.

"Fight me, you coward!"

"How dare a commoner like you seduce our Saintesse?! Unforgivable!"

"Come out and fight us, you mongrel!"

"You are a toad lusting after swan meat! Have you no shame?!"

Alex looked at the five nobles with amusement, even recognizing two of them. In the game, those two high-ranking nobles were suitors of Celestria.

No matter which of the three Main Heroes a player chose, these two suitors must be dealt with in order to progress with her romance route and get a happy ending.

One of them was the second son of a Duke and the other was the heir of a Marquess. Both of them were considered geniuses in their own right. Currently, they were far stronger than Renard.

If a player had chosen to play as Renard, they would have to wait until the end of the school year before they're strong enough to face off against his two rivals in love.

'That's Emil and Henry,' Alex thought. 'But knowing Renard, I doubt he has yet to make a move.'

Alex knew that the current Renard still had trust issues. Even if he and Celestria might have become close, their relationship did not go beyond friendship.

This only led to one possibility.

'Celestria might have said she had no interest in getting engaged because she liked someone in Frieden Academy,' Alex mused. 'Since there were other students with her when she got here, those nobles might have interrogated them until someone probably mentioned Renard's name.'

As news of what was happening spread like fire, more students gathered at the gate, hoping to catch some free entertainment.

The majority of them were looking at Renard, who stood at the other side of the gate with his arms crossed.

He remained silent, but his arrogant smirk further infuriated the nobles, who were cursing him for being a mongrel, a commoner, and a frog.

Theo, along with the other members of the student council, was there. The light in his eyes dimmed. He was starting to get a headache.

They were nobles from Solara, so they were Theo's responsibility. However, since they were actually important, he couldn't just brush them off.

The last thing he wanted was to get summoned by his father for admonishing the nobles from their Kingdom in front of Frieden students.

"President, what should we do?" Cassandra asked. "More students are coming here. Before long, I'm afraid this situation will escalate into something out of control."

“Do you have any recommendations?” Theo asked. “I’m open to suggestions.”

The student councillors all pointed at a First Year with short silver hair, who seemed to be enjoying the situation.

Theo recognized Alex right away and finally understood what his subordinates were hinting at.

Without thinking twice, the student council president approached Alex and asked him to handle this matter.

But Alex wasn’t someone who would do things for free.

After a brief negotiation, Theo agreed to give Alex ten thousand academy points if he could resolve this matter peacefully.

“Leave it to me, Sir President!” Alex patted his chest confidently. “I’ll solve this problem without fail!”

“Dim Dim!” Dim Dim saluted from the top of Alex’s head, assuring Theo that they would handle this as peacefully as possible.

With the student council watching him from behind, Alex walked toward the gate as if he was a righteous man who had come to mediate the conflict between the Nobles from Solara and Renard.

His gaze first landed on Emil Milan.

Unlike the others, Emil wasn’t undignifiedly shouting. He simply glared at Renard with his hands clasped behind his back.

In the game, he was known to be elegant, soft-spoken, and effortlessly charming.

Emil carried the refined grace of an aristocrat who valued intellect over power. With his silver-blond hair and thoughtful sapphire eyes, he was often lost in the quiet world of books and poetry.

After observing Emil for a few seconds, Alex shifted his attention to Renard's second rival, Henry Moriz.

Where Emil's charm lay in grace, Henry's presence exuded charisma and courage. With silky black hair, sea-green eyes, and a knight's confident posture, he embodied the ideal of a noble protector.

In the game, he was known to be a brave, outspoken, and fiercely loyal knight. He fell in love with Celestria after meeting her at a ballroom party.

"Can you all please stop shouting?" Alex said loudly but calmly. "Are you guys really nobles? More like merchants hawking their wares at the market."

Alex's words instantly drew the aggro of the nobles and made them all look in his direction.

"And who are you?!" Henry was the first to snap at the new face. "Mind your own business!"

"That's right! You're not involved in this, so get out of our face!!" one of the nobles shouted.

"Are you that mongrel's friend?" another noble sneered. "Just a glance is enough for me to know that you are a mongrel as well! Get out of here, you dog! If I tell you to sit, you will sit! If I tell you to scam, you will scam!"

Behind the crowd of students who had gathered to watch this drama, Eleanora was busy holding back Evangeline, who wanted nothing more than to beat the crap out of the guy calling Alex a mongrel.

"Unhand me, Eleanora," Evangeline hissed. "I'll end that guy right now!"

"Calm down, Eva!" Eleanora replied as she made sure that her hold on the younger girl was secure. "You'll only complicate things. Alex will not be easily triggered by that petty taunt, you know?!"

“I don’t care. That guy is dead!”

“Oh no, you have to care!”

While Eleanora was desperately holding Evangeline back, something similar was happening in the distance.

“Don’t stop me, Vaan,” Lumi said as she rolled up her sleeves. “The only one who can badmouth Alex is me. I’m going to clobber that guy until he forgets his own name.”

“Oh, I’m not going to stop you,” Vaan said lightly. He was smiling, but it didn’t reach his eyes. “By all means, go and snap that guy’s neck. I promise to help you bury the body.”

The delicate looking young man was holding a whetstone and using it to sharpen his spear.

Clearly, he would not allow someone to insult his benefactor—whom he had sworn allegiance to—and live.

Chapter 435: Formal Challenge [Part 2]

The noble who had badmouthed Alex earlier suddenly felt a shiver run down his spine.

For that brief moment, he felt as if his life was truly in danger. Fortunately, before Alex’s friends could murder him, the Blackmail King of the Academy spoke up once more.

“I know you came here to challenge Renard, but you’re attracting too much attention at the moment,” Alex said calmly. “I am the President of Endless Horizon. Renard is my club member.

“Since you gentlemen are here to challenge him, do you want to fight him one on one or five on one? The way I see it, there’s nothing noble in ganging up on someone. However, even if you’re not nobles but common thugs, I’m afraid that I still can’t allow you to bully my club member.

“If you don’t want to fight an honorable duel, then can you dogs go back to your kennels? This academy is not the place for nameless mutts.”

The young man even made a shooino gesture as if he was chasing away toothless strays which had suddenly arrived at the gate, hoping to beg for scraps.

Theo and Cassandra both nodded in satisfaction. They, too, were also getting annoyed by the nobles who had barged into their school without permission.

'As expected of Alex Stratos. He definitely knows how to taunt people,' Theo thought.

'That noble's face is turning red from anger. Such an insult is enough for a commoner to be whipped to death in some noble circles.' Cassandra chuckled internally even as she kept her face smooth and expressionless.

Emil had not spoken since their arrival, but seeing that his friends were being mocked by Alex, he finally took the center stage.

"And who might you be?" Emil asked.

"I am the King of Frieden Academy," Alex answered arrogantly. "If you don't know who I am, then you're too unprepared and naive to challenge anyone here!"

The spectating students—including the student councillors—gasped at the same time after hearing Alex's declaration.

However, after remembering that he both had the titles of Blackmail King and Singing King, they decided not to question it. After all, he was technically correct in more ways than one.

Seeing that none of the Frieden students were refuting Alex's words, a frown appeared on Emil's face.

"Are you perhaps Prince Edward of Avalon?" Emil asked.

"I believe I said King and not Prince," Alex replied. "If you don't want to embarrass yourself, you should refrain from talking, Mr. Smarty Pants."

""Pfft!""

The Solara nobles who were studying at Frieden Academy couldn't stop themselves from chuckling. Even Henry had to resist breaking into a smile.

It was an open secret within their circles that Emil hated being called "Smarty Pants" the most. For him, it was the greatest insult. Unsurprisingly, he was now glaring at Alex, who looked as if he was dealing with a kid.

"Can everyone quiet down, please?" Alex raised his hand to stop the laughter that was spreading around him. "If you don't stop laughing, this pretty boy might faint out of shame. We're all civilized people here, right? We shouldn't bully people."

After hearing his words, the students controlled themselves. But the majority of them still had smiles on their faces.

When everyone had settled down, Alex once again faced the nobles, who had calmed down a bit.

"Like I said earlier, since you guys want to challenge my club member, I will accept it in his stead," Alex said without even bothering to look at Renard, who was glaring daggers into his back. "However, if you want to challenge him, you need to meet a condition."

"And that condition is?" Emil asked, his face still beet-red from anger. However, he forced himself to not lash out in public so his image wouldn't be ruined.

"Money, of course," Alex replied shamelessly. "If you want to fight Renard in a duel, you have to pay first. Let's see... a thousand gold coins for each challenger will suffice."

"What?!" One of the nobles looked at Alex in disbelief. "You're asking us to pay to fight him?"

“Are you insane?” another noble commented. “Since when did such a thing become the norm in duels?”

Henry and Emil were about to support their colleagues, but Alex’s next words made them shut up.

“Oh, you can’t pay?” Alex sighed before shaking his head. “I didn’t know that the nobles of Solara were so... lacking. I mean, it’s just a thousand gold coins, right? I’m not a noble, but that amount is just pocket change for me.”

To prove his point, Alex opened his storage ring and dumped out all the gold coins that he possessed in his inventory. Clinking against one another, they formed an impressive heap before him.

After exchanging his Academy Points so that he could bid at the auction in the city, he had a good number of gold coins in his possession and they continued tinkling as they fell.

“Oh, sorry. A commoner has accidentally spilled his pocket money. How careless of him! Now, if you will excuse this clumsy oaf...” Alex sighed dramatically. “Oh dear, I hate being poor. Now I have to pick up over a hundred thousand gold coins one by one.”

Everyone felt their lips twitching after hearing such shameless words. The majority of them, especially the commoners, wanted to offer their help in picking up those gold coins!

Dim Dim jumped from the top of Alex’s head and landed perfectly on the ground. The Dim Sum God then took out the vacuum artifact that they had used to collect monster cores inside the Orion Dungeon.

Before about a hundred pairs of jealous eyes, the little bun slapped on its gangster sunglasses and used the artifact to suck up all the gold coins until nothing was left.

“Good job, Dim Dim,” Alex exclaimed as he picked up the little bun.

“Ahem!” Dim Dim saluted to tell Alex that its mission was completed.

The young man then glanced once more at the nobles, who had suddenly fallen quiet after his show of wealth.

“So, are you going to fight Renard or not?” Alex arched an eyebrow. “All of you can still back down if you don’t have money.

“I mean, if you can’t even pay a thousand gold coins for a duel, then what makes you think that the Saintess will think highly of you? Just because she is a Saintess doesn’t mean she has to do charity! I talked to her when she was still here and she said that she hated poor people, you know?”

Renard flinched after getting hit by Alex’s friendly fire. Although he didn’t know if Alex was telling the truth about Celestria hating poor people, his status as a poor commoner was a fact.

Not wanting to be looked down by others, Henry finally stepped up and accepted Alex’s challenge.

“Fine, a thousand gold coins!” Henry stated. “I’ll pay you now in cash.”

“Why are you in a hurry?” Alex blinked. “Do you think I’m poor? Do I look like someone who is in desperate need of money?”

Henry wanted to shout at Alex, but he resisted. ‘First you ask for money,’ the noble complained mentally. ‘Then you refuse to accept it. Bro, can you make up your mind?!’

“One month,” Alex said as he raised his finger. “In one month, the First Years will have a Field Trip to Solara. I want the five of you to reserve the Colosseum there and spread the word of this challenge.

“Also, make sure to tell everyone that only those who can pay a thousand gold coins will be allowed to watch the duel. That is the price of the ticket, okay? Dim Dim and I will be collecting it at the gate so that no one can watch it for free.”

Nessia was scribbling desperately on her notebook while Charles looked at her blankly.

“What are you doing?” Charles asked.

“I’m trying to write down ways to earn easy money,” Nessia replied as she continued to write. “Alex makes scamming people look so natural. I need to learn from him.”

Charles didn’t know if he should laugh or cry. He would soon have a rich girlfriend, but at what cost?

In the meantime, everyone else was paying close attention to Alex’s next words.

“Make sure to spread the news far and wide,” Alex continued. “You have one month to advertise this duel, so make it count. Also, tell those who will open betting stalls that I must get a ten-percent share from all transactions. This is non-negotiable.”

Theo looked at Alex with a conflicted expression. He was starting to think that leaving this matter to the Blackmail King might have been the wrong decision.

If his father, the King, learned about the outcome of this incident, he would certainly receive quite a bit of nagging. The King would surely want to know how a disagreement between a few young nobles and commoners became such a public spectacle.

In the end, the nobles of Solara reluctantly agreed to Alex’s demands and left.

The young man was still grinning as he watched them depart like dogs with tails between their legs. He was blissfully unaware that his get-rich-quick scheme would result in consequences he could have never accounted for.

Chapter 436: I’ve Been Waiting For This Day, You Prick

“Shouldn’t you consult me before accepting a challenge on my behalf?” Renard confronted Alex as soon as Alex had pulled him, along with their other club members, back to the clock tower.

“Why?” Alex arched an eyebrow. “Did you perhaps have plans to refuse their challenge?”

“That’s not the issue here,” Renard complained. “The invite is addressed to me, so I should be the one to accept it, not you.”

With a faint smile, Alex crossed his arms over his chest. “I’ll be honest, Renard. The you right now have no chance to defeat them. You know that too, don’t you? That’s why you said nothing even when they were shouting insults at you.”

The other club members also looked at Renard, waiting for his answer. They were also wondering about the same thing earlier.

Although they weren’t very close with Renard, they knew for a fact that the Renard of the past would never hesitate to say yes to a challenge, even if there was a chance he’d lose.

And yet, when the nobles targeted him, he simply stood in silence, neither lashing back nor defending himself.

“I know why you didn’t speak up earlier,” Alex continued his explanation. “You can’t afford to lose. You wouldn’t think twice before accepting if the challenge only involved you, regardless of whether you win or not.

“But because Saintess Celestria’s name is on the line, you don’t dare to accept without thinking about the consequences of your actions.”

Renard narrowed his eyes, but kept his silence. This was enough proof for everyone to know that their club president was correct.

“You have one month left before our field trip to Solara,” Alex stated. “In that one month, we will train you until you can defeat your challengers.”

“I don’t need your help,” Renard replied.

Alex had already anticipated this stubbornness from Mr. I-Have-Trust-Issues, but he knew the trick on how to make him accept his proposal today.

“The Saintess is being forced into marriage,” Alex said in a serious tone. “That’s why she told her family that she already has someone she loves.

“Of course, if you’re fine with Celestria being unwillingly married off to another family, then suit yourself. But... can you really watch that happen without feeling anything in return?”

The young man had played Renard’s route a few times in the game. Because of this, he also knew that among the heroines in the game, the Saintess, Celestria, had the highest chance of becoming Renard’s lover.

The two of them complemented each other, and it was also Celestria who had opened Renard’s heart to start trusting other people.

Although the setting was a bit different from Renard’s normal route, the current events still loosely followed the original plot progression of the story.

Alex could see that Renard was starting to falter, so he decided to give him one last push.

“If you agree to my training regimen, I guarantee that you can defeat those snotty nobles,” Alex stated. “After all, it also holds the secret as to how I defeated enemies stronger than me. How do you think I defeated the Demon Worshiper who had possessed Vaan’s body?

“How do you think I defeated a Rank 7 Barbarian King in the trial of Heracle Mountain? Simple. It’s because I follow a training routine that allows me to overpower stronger opponents!”

Dim Dim blinked as it looked at its partner, who was clearly spouting a bunch of bullsh*t.

For the most part, Alex didn’t defeat the Demon Worshiper, Willow, who had taken over the young noble’s body, fairly.

He mostly relied on his reflection ability to deal damage to his enemy, which worked perfectly.

Second, his battle against the Rank 7 Barbarian wasn't a one-on-one battle.

It was a Five versus One battle.

Alex and Latifa had supported the trial's two main characters, Princess Yvrain and her blacksmith lover, Kael.

Dim Dim also played a role in the fight, allowing them to win against the powerful enemy.

Lumi smirked, Lotte averted her gaze, while Latifa pretended not to hear anything.

The three ladies knew that Alex was simply tricking Renard into believing him, but since they also thought that the young man was seriously trying to help their friend, they decided to keep silent for the time being.

"If you're still in doubt, why don't you fight me?" Alex patted his chest. "Both of us are Rank 3, so the fight will be fair, right? If I win, you can only accept my training. If you win, I'll let you be. Heck, I'll even become your wingman and support your relationship with Celestria."

"I'll also be young Wingman, Renard," Chuck said before flipping his hair. "I'm the Love Maste—ahhhh!"

The pitiful troublemaker was pinched on the waist from both sides by Princess Xenia and Mary, eliciting a dying scream out of him.

Eleanora, who was also inside the club room, sighed in happiness. Chuck's screams were music to her ears.

She even cheered them on silently, urging them to punish him more. Through their actions, she was vicariously venting all the stress she'd built up after he subjugated her.

"Very well," Renard replied. "I agree to this duel."

Alex knew that what Renard needed right now was an excuse to be trained by him.

As long as there was a valid reason where his honor was on the line, Mr. I-Have-Trust-Issues would 'reluctantly' agree to be trained by the person whom he treated as his rival.

"Great. Now follow me," Alex made a gesture to Renard to follow him into the special room where Nessia had discovered her Codex.

It was a special domain that could also be used as a training ground in the game. This was one of the perks of having the clock tower as a club room—it allowed the Heroes to train there and reap great results each time.

"Are you ready?" Alex asked after summoning Everguard and his warhammer, Sacrament.

Renard didn't answer. Instead, he raised his fists and equipped his Dark-Steel gauntlets, the equipment he had obtained in the Heracle Mountain.

It had been a while since he had fought with Alex, so he planned to fight using all his strength.

"I've long waited to settle my scores with you," Renard said with a fearless grin on his face.

"The feeling is mutual," Alex said. "I've been waiting for this day, you prick."

The two teenagers held each other's gaze for half a minute before both of them charged at each other.

They had always had a hate-hate relationship, so this was the perfect opportunity to go all out and teach their opponent a lesson they would never forget.

Chapter 437: If You're A Man, Then Fight Me Properly!

"Damn it, you cheater!" Renard complained as he propped himself up from the ground after getting hit by Alex's Shield Bash at point-blank range.

“Is that loser talk I hear?” Alex asked in a teasing tone. “Are you a chicken? Cluck! Cluck! Cluck!”

Alex even imitated a chicken flapping its wings to further anger his opponent, who was looking at him with bloodshot eyes.

While the two were having a battle of words, Vaan observed them from the side, watching Alex with a solemn gaze.

‘He’s grown stronger again,’ Vaan thought. ‘Alex is always improving, while I still haven’t reached my goal.’

It was not only Vaan who was paying close attention to this battle. Charles did the same.

He not only looked up to Alex because the other was his benefactor, but also because he was a kind, dependable person.

The silver-haired young man was his role model, and he strived to become someone whom people could also depend on. Seeing him have the advantage against Renard, whom Charles had recognized as someone stronger than him, a fire of competitiveness lit in his heart.

Surprisingly, even the usually goofy Chuck had a rare expression of seriousness plastered on his face.

As someone who also wished to be strong, he had looked up to his club members because they had the courage—something he couldn’t muster unless he drank the Conqueror’s Heart Potion.

He longed for the day he would no longer need such a crutch, then carve his name into history.

“Fight me fairly, you coward!” Renard complained.

“Shut up,” Alex replied. “Stop making excuses when you are getting beaten up. Have you no shame?”

“You’re the shameless one here!”

“No. You have serious skill issues, Renard. Accept your weakness and improve it!”

Truth be told, Alex was using his newly gained power to mess with Renard’s battle rhythm.

Whenever his opponent distanced himself away from him, Alex would use the power of gravity and pull Renard within striking range, allowing him to use his Shield Bash when the latter least expected it.

Whenever Renard went all out to get close to him, Alex would push him away using the power of gravity to break his momentum.

Of course, Alex made sure to use some stupid names for his skills to confuse Renard.

If he was going to pull him, sometimes he would shout, “Come over here!”

When he was going to push, he would say, “Bye Bye Sucker!”

Sometimes, he would even mix them up. Even though he’d say, “Come over here!” prompting Renard to adjust his stance, instead of being pulled, he’d get pushed mid-strike.

Alex was openly messing with him, prompting Renard to voice his injustice.

“The problem with you, Renard, is that you are strong,” Alex said as he gazed at the young man, who was once again lying on the ground. “However, your strength is useless if you can’t hit your target.

“Also, your attacks are so straightforward. Your enemies can predict what you are going to do next. You should learn how to use feints and tricks in order to get some good shots at close range.”

“Shut up, coward!” Renard shouted. “If you’re a man, then fight me properly!”

Alex chuckled in contempt, grating his opponent’s ears.

“Renard, the only people who fight fair and square in this world are the strong,” Alex replied. “If you’re not strong, you have to use everything in your arsenal to win against your enemy.

“You call me a cheater, but do you know? If this were a real battle, you’d be dead many times over. The way you are now, you won’t be able to beat Chuck in battle.”

Renard flinched after hearing this from his opponent. Almost everyone in the club had regarded Chuck as the weakest among them, except for Alex, and Vaan.

The two teenagers knew that the moment Chuck stopped being a coward, he would become one of the strongest fighters among them.

“Dim Dim, did Alex just praise me?” Chuck asked the Dim Sum God, who was eating some potato chips and drinking from a can of soda.

The little bun glanced at Chuck and blinked innocently before giving its answer.

“... Dim!”

“Hey, I heard that pause, you know?”

“Dim Dim?”

“Sheesh! Never mind!”

Alex’s and Renard’s battle continued, with the latter unable to land a single hit against his opponent.

In the end, Alex decided to call it quits and let his opponent rest.

“Starting tomorrow, we will start your training,” Alex declared. “But I will not be your opponent. Tomorrow, your opponent will be Nessia.”

“Hey! Why would I fight him?” Nessia complained.

“I’ll give you 20 gold coins,” Alex replied.

“Make it 30, and we have a deal,” Nessia stated while fixing her glasses.

“Deal.”

“Good. I want to receive the money in advance. Thank you.”

Charles looked at Nessia with worry and tried to discourage her from fighting against Renard.

“Relax, she won’t lose against Renard,” Alex said, making sure that Renard could hear his words.

Renard clenched his fists before leaving the domain in a huff with the intention of heading to the training grounds to spar with other people.

When he was certain that Renard was no longer within earshot, Alex looked at his club members and smiled at them.

“All of you will also help train Renard,” Alex smiled faintly. “It will be a good opportunity for you guys because Renard is strong. Tomorrow, Nessia will be fighting him.”

“The next day, it will be Lavinia. After that, it will be Charles and Chuck fighting him together. Then it will be Princess Xenia and Mary. Next will be Evangeline’s turn.”

“Will Eva fight Renard alone?” Eleanora frowned. “Why don’t I team up with her like the rest?”

“No need.” Alex shook his head. “Eva is more than enough to handle Renard at his current level.”

The girls and the guys quickly noticed that Alex was now calling Evangeline Eva, which made it seem that they were pretty close.

Of course, Evangeline didn’t mind since this was what she had asked Alex to call her.

The young man then imparted the strategy that his club members would use against Renard, training him in several fields.

Alex believed that this would also allow his club members to gain more experience against a strong fighter, who was determined not to lose to anyone in the upcoming duels one month from now.

Chapter 438: She Was Already Evil Before You Met Her

“Are you sure Nessia is going to be fine?” Charles asked Alex.

“You should be worrying about Renard instead of your girlfriend,” Alex replied. “Do you know why I asked Nessia to be Renard’s first sparring partner?”

“Why?”

“Because she will completely obliterate Renard and show him no mercy.”

Alex laughed internally because he already knew the outcome of this battle.

If Renard had asked Nessia to fight him on the spot yesterday, Nessia might have not won against him.

But today?

Nessia could wipe the floor with Renard even if she were wearing a blindfold.

She was the future Phoenix Tactician, but her growth would not stagnate. Eventually, she would be known as the Rune Saint.

Alex did Renard dirty by giving Nessia time to prepare for their duel.

A master of Rune Magic became an especially scary opponent once given the opportunity to prepare beforehand.

When Alex and Charles arrived at the clock tower, they saw Renard seated with his arms crossed.

Nessia, on the other hand, was reading a book, seemingly unfazed by their upcoming match.

“Are both of you ready?” Alex asked.

The two nodded at the same time.

The other members of Endless Horizon were also looking forward to this battle. One by one, they trailed behind Alex and entered the special dimension to witness who would emerge victorious.

“I’m not sure if you are aware of this, but this special dimension works just like our school’s training grounds,” Alex explained. “You cannot die here, so you can fight to your heart’s content without holding back.

“Remember, Renard, you should think of this as a real duel. Just because Nessia is a girl doesn’t mean that she will hold back against you. Isn’t that right, Nessia?”

Nessia nodded. "I have no grudges against you, Renard. But Alex paid me thirty gold coins to beat you up. No hard feelings, okay?"

"That's my line," Renard replied. "No hard feelings, Nessia."

The young lady smiled brightly and opened her fan.

She looked like a delicate noblewoman as she fanned herself, but Alex knew that Nessia only opened her fan so that no one would be able to see her smile widening.

Clearly, she couldn't wait for the battle to start! She was itching to show everyone the fruits of her labor.

Alex could practically read her mind, so he no longer delayed the battle and raised his hand.

"Battle Start!"

As soon as the signal was given, Renard charged at Nessia with the intention to subdue her before she could even cast a spell.

But he had only taken five steps when the ground under his feet exploded.

The explosion sent the young man flying backwards, but he was able to regain his balance mid-air.

Renard landed on normal ground and skidded for a few meters before coming to a halt. Confusion was written all over his face.

"What's wrong?" Nessia asked, while fanning herself softly. "Is that your best? You give commoners like us a bad name."

Lavinia moved closer to Alex and tugged his shirt. "Your bad side has rubbed off on Nessia."

He shook his head. "No. She was already evil before you met her."

Suddenly, Renard shouted and stomped his foot on the ground. A shockwave expanded outwards, causing minor explosions inside the domain.

"I knew it." Renard frowned. "You put Magic Formations in this domain before our fight started."

Nessia clapped her hands. "Congratulations! I never thought you had a brain. I guess when you're at rock bottom, the only way is up."

Her taunts surprised the spectators. They had believed that vicious mockery was Alex's—and only Alex's speciality.

"Are you sure she's not your adopted sister?" Chuck asked nervously.

"Well, I won't mind having a sister like her." Alex grinned before glancing at Charles. "Are you sure you can handle her, buddy?"

Charles reddened because he was seeing a side of Nessia that he hadn't seen before.

"Alex, you are a bad influence," Charles said. "I hope Dim Dim doesn't get corrupted by you."

Alex wasn't able to dismiss Charles' worry because he knew he hadn't really been a good role model to the Dim Sum God.

"Kukuku!" Dim Dim chuckled from the top of Alex's head, its gangster sunglasses gleaming dramatically.

Clearly, it was enjoying the battle. Impressed by how cool Nessia looked, the little bun kept cheering for her.

Thinking that he had already disabled the runic formations that had been set up in the domain, Renard once again tried to close the distance between him and his opponent.

But just when everyone thought that Nessia's formations had already been neutralized, countless fire bullets rained down from above.

"Arghh!" Renard tried to defend himself from the merciless onslaught, but the attack was unending.

Nessia continued to fan herself, looking quite content that Renard was moving according to her plans.

She hadn't been naive enough to only plant runic formations on the ground.

No. Despite her taunts, she knew Renard wasn't so stupid that he would be clueless about her fighting style. To cover her bases, she had filled the entire space—including the sky of the domain—with magical formations.

Everyone except Alex and Dim Dim watched on in horror and disbelief when giant fireballs started shooting down from the sky like meteors.

The ensuing explosions seemed to shake the very domain itself.

However, just as everyone thought that it couldn't get worse, they heard Nessia chanting.

"O void beyond stars, where even light dares not wander. Hear my call."

"From silence older than creation, from the black sea where gods relinquish their names condense."

"Let law break, Let fate bend,

Let all that is false be severed."

“Manifest now—

A blade that even reality cannot endure!”

From the tip of her finger, a powerful orb of light manifested.

“Explosion!”

A ray of blinding light erupted from Nessia’s fingertip and obliterated everything that was in front of her, including Renard, who obviously wasn’t able to defend himself.

The attack left Chuck gasping for breath.

He was also a mage, so he knew exactly how powerful Nessia was to be able to cast such a spell. He had never felt the gap between their abilities so keenly.

Momentarily deafened by the explosion, the spectators couldn’t help but panic even though they knew they should be safe.

When the light receded, Renard was nowhere to be seen.

Unlike everyone else, he had been teleported back to the club room, his body still smoking from the attack that had just killed him.

Chapter 439: Something That Renard Doesn’t Have

“That kind of firepower belongs to a Rank 6!” Chuck exclaimed when he finally regained some composure. “How did you do that?!”

“Prep time,” Nessia answered. “Nothing is impossible with enough preparation. Have you already forgotten about our time in the Orion Dungeon? What seemed like a hopeless situation was easily handled without anyone getting hurt.”

“Chuck, don’t be too surprised,” Alex added. “Even you can do something like that... probably.”

“Y-You think I can do that too?”

“Of course... maybe.”

“Huh?!”

Charles ignored his friends’ banter and focused on Nessia. He had been very worried about her earlier, but now he understood that Alex had been right.

After placing so many rune formations inside the special domain, it had been very easy for Nessia to cast a spell that had a destructive force equivalent to that of a Rank 6 Mage.

All she had needed to do was gather the magical energy of all of those runic formations and unleash it in a concentrated strike.

The group then returned to the club room, where Lotte was already pouring some healing potions on top of Renard’s head. The potions soaked his hair and dripped unceremoniously all over him.

Although you wouldn’t die inside the domain, you could still receive moderate injuries from it.

The domain’s creator had believed that there could be no gain without pain. So even if death could be avoided, pain would remain.

As soon as Renard saw Alex, he immediately opened his mouth to complain. But Alex cut him off completely before he even got a word out.

“I know what you’re going to say. I also understand that you feel that you’ve been cheated,” Alex said. “But nobles don’t play fair. They will scheme against you and use everything in their arsenal to remind you of your place as a commoner.”

After hearing those words, Renard bit his lip. This wasn't the first time that something like that had been done to him.

When he had still lived in his village, a son of a Baron had come to harass his friends.

Naturally, Renard had protected them, but the noble had gotten angry and challenged him in a duel.

Just when Renard had thought he was about to win, the noble had used an artifact to unleash a fireball at him.

If not for the fact that the Village Head had cast a barrier to protect Renard from that magical attack, he might have died then and there.

"Remember this, you will be fighting in their domain," Alex continued. "So expect that they have already rigged the place beforehand. Of course, now that you know that, you can prepare for it."

Alex then looked at the injuries that Renard had received from the battle. He was happy to see that Renard's wounds were healing fast due to the High-Grade Potions that he had prepared beforehand.

"Can you still fight?" Alex asked. "Your next opponent will be Lavinia. Don't worry, she is a warrior who values honor above all else. Since you want to fight someone fair and square, you can fight her to vent out your frustrations."

"Okay," Renard replied and stood up.

He was still in pain, but he had felt much worse in the past and survived.

Renard turned to Lavinia to indicate that he was ready.

"Are you sure that you can still fight?" Lavinia asked as she eyed him calmly. "I won't hold back even if you are injured."

"I can still fight," Renard replied.

After receiving his answer, everyone returned to their special domain once more.

"Who do you think will win?" Chuck asked Alex.

"Lavinia, duh."

Chuck's eyebrows shot up. "And what makes you so sure?"

"Because she has something that Renard doesn't have," Alex answered.

"And that is?"

"Technique."

A few minutes later, Chuck finally understood what Alex was talking about.

Renard panted for breath as Lavinia toyed with him. Her strikes were swift, sharp, and cut deep against his defenses, never failing to draw blood.

Every time Renard tried to close the distance between them, Lavinia would simply dodge before retaliating. It was as if she could read her opponent like a book.

Actually, that was exactly what she was doing.

Renard's moves were all straightforward enough that an experienced warrior like Lavinia could safely evade his strikes and easily land her counterattacks.

The young man was self-taught. While that was effective when fighting against monsters, it fell short when battling experienced warriors.

A monster was a monster, and demi-humans were smarter than monsters.

Alex was giving Renard a training course so that he would understand his weaknesses and shortcomings.

No matter how strong he was, it wouldn't matter if he couldn't hit his targets.

Knowing that he wouldn't win against Nessia using his original fighting style, Renard added some feints to his attacks.

But Lavinia effortlessly saw through all of them and brutally wiped the floor with him.

Even Chuck couldn't help but wince. It was difficult to not feel sorry for Renard as the spar turned into a one-sided beating.

The troublemaker even started to wonder if he could defeat Renard on his own in a duel. However, this thought only lasted for a few seconds before he tossed it to the side.

The only way he could win against Renard was by using the Conqueror's Heart Potion and turning into the suave and charismatic Chuck who had managed to defeat Eleanora in a lopsided battle.

"I surrender," Renard said through gritted teeth while kneeling on the ground and panting for breath.

He struggled to accept his defeats in previous rounds because Alex and Nessia had used tricks against him.

However, Lavinia was a true warrior who had beaten him fair and square. Moreover, she had shown him that he was still lacking in many areas.

It was almost more painful that Lavinia hadn't felt the need to resort to underhand tactics when fighting him.

Renard was starting to think that maybe, just maybe, Alex already knew his weaknesses and was trying to show him what they were.

The young man forced himself to look at his nemesis before collapsing and losing his consciousness.

He had forced himself to fight Lavinia despite his injuries, wrongly believing that he would surely win in a fair match.

But now that he had fought with everything he had, he could not even muster the strength to remain conscious. The worried voices of his club members faded as he drifted off into a long and dreamless sleep.

Chapter 440: I'll Prepare The Whips And Candles

A day had passed since Renard's battles with Nessia and Lavinia. Now, it was Princess Xenia's and Mary's turn to spar with him.

Truth be told, the princess wanted to spar with Renard one-on-one, but Alex had told her that Mary should fight alongside her.

There was a lesson that he wanted to teach Mr. I-Have-Trust-Issues that would be useful for him in the long run.

When the battle began, Renard didn't hold back and attacked at full power. Princess Xenia's sword blocked his initial blow, but the momentum behind it was no joke.

The princess was forced back several meters and almost lost her balance, having underestimated Renard's strength.

Fortunately, a strike from Mary forced him to dodge before he could follow up and take advantage of Xenia's surprise.

This window of opportunity allowed Princess Xenia to regain her balance and rejoin the fight.

What they didn't know was that Alex was using this opportunity to teach both sides what their weaknesses were.

Renard was one of the Main Heroes of ELO.

He wasn't some random cannon fodder that could be stepped on so easily.

He might not have the power of plot armor, but he was still blessed by the world. That alone separated him from his peers.

Being caught off guard so early in the battle made Princess Xenia realize that if she wanted to win against Renard, she had to fight with the intention to kill.

As a Princess Knight, she usually fought against monsters. Her experience with human opponents was really very limited because her godfather, Alphonse, and Mary usually took care of them, unwilling to let her hands be dirtied.

Renard was her complete opposite.

If he won, it wouldn't be his first time killing someone.

His village was often attacked by bandits. Before leaving his home, he had made sure to "clear out" the bandits to ensure that his friends and family wouldn't be hurt during his absence.

As she faced the young man's killing intent and bloodlust, Princess Xenia finally understood that her opponent could easily overpower her if she didn't fight with her full power.

Mary was just like Lavinia. With her two daggers, she specialized in speed and lethal attacks at point-blank range.

She had been trained since a young age to become an assassin who could also serve as the princess's maid and bodyguard.

If Princess Xenia's life was in danger, Mary wouldn't hesitate to eliminate the threat without even the slightest shred of mercy.

Actually, the one pressuring Renard wasn't the princess, but her maid.

Mary didn't hold back, targeting the young man's vital points relentlessly.

Renard hissed as he dodged an attack meant for his eyes, knowing full well that he would either be rendered helpless or ejected out of the domain if he was hit by any of the handmaiden's blows.

He might be stubborn, but he was a quick learner.

After fighting Nessia and Lavinia, he had realized the importance of being prepared. He had also developed his own strategy to counter fast-moving opponents.

Unfortunately, he wasn't up against just one opponent.

If he had been fighting either Princess Xenia or Mary, he would have won hands down.

However, the two girls' seamless cooperation prevented him from neutralizing either of them.

All three teenagers were Rank 3. It was not obvious who would triumph.

Although this was a match between friends, the spectators ended up watching with bated breaths because both sides often came very close to victory.

The battle lasted for nearly twenty minutes. Eventually, Renard fell for one of Princess Xenia's feints, allowing Mary to pierce his back with her dagger. His "death" triggered the safety mechanism of the domain, and he was expelled once more.

Although they had won, the two ladies felt unsatisfied as sweat streamed down the sides of their faces.

No one pointed it out, but it was obvious that they did not have as easy of a time as Nessia and Lavinia had.

"Mary, after this, we will go and train," Princess Xenia said. "I am getting rusty."

"Yes, Your Highness," Mary replied as she bowed her head.

She was also unhappy with her performance during the battle.

"Are you guys ready to fight Renard?" Alex asked, turning to Chuck and Charles.

Chuck blinked. "Aren't we fighting him tomorrow? I mean, I don't mind doing this today, but Renard might already be tired."

At that moment, Renard reappeared inside the domain and walked towards Chuck.

"Who's tired?" Renard asked. "You?"

"A-Actually, I am tired," Chuck admitted.

Unlike the others, Chuck was not competitive. He didn't feel like he must fight Renard. However, Princess Xenia glared daggers at him until he had no choice but to reconsider.

He also noticed that Mary was still clutching her daggers.

"I'm ready to fight anytime," Charles stated. "Let's go, Chuck. Alex already told us what strategy to use yesterday."

Chuck redirected his attention from Mary's daggers to Alex.

"Are you sure that strategy of yours will work?" he asked.

"One hundred percent," Alex answered.

His confidence failed to infect Chuck. The troublemaker took out a golden potion from his storage ring.

Just as he was about to down the potion in one gulp, a little bun snatched the vial from his hand and bounced out of his reach.

"Dim Dim!" Dim Dim glared at Chuck before tossing the Conqueror's Potion inside its dimensional storage.

Clearly, the Dim Sum God was against Chuck using the potion in this sparring match.

"You won't need the potion." Alex patted his friend's shoulder. "Just stick to the plan."

"Alex, if I die, I will haunt you for the rest of your life," Chuck threatened unconvincingly as Charles dragged him away to face Renard.

"You won't die," Alex assured him. "Just follow the plan."

Left with no choice, Chuck took a deep breath before whisking out his wand and adopting a fighting stance.

Charles did the same, trusting Alex's strategy.

The young man's right arm transformed into obsidian, and his hand into claws.

Charles was a Void-Touched. Behind closed doors, Alex had been teaching him how to use his powers fully.

Seeing that everyone was ready to fight, Alex raised his hand.

"Battle Start!"

Charles and Chuck immediately split up and ran in opposite directions, making sure that Renard wouldn't be able to close in on both of them.

"Wait! Why are you targeting meeee?!" Chuck complained because Renard didn't hesitate to chase after him with the intention of eliminating him first.

"It's because you're weak!" Eleanora shouted helpfully. "Weakling!"

"Just you wait, Eleanora!" Chuck yelled back. "I'll spank you later!"

All the ladies in the room blinked once then twice before glaring at Chuck.

"Hoh... Did you hear that, Mary?" Princess Xenia said icily.

"I'll prepare the whips and candles, Your Highness," Mary commented. Her voice reeked of contempt as her gaze locked on the running bastard, who would soon be subjected to something worse than a mere spanking.