

Endless 441

Chapter 441: She Wasn't Just Another Pretty Face

Chuck had no delusions that he could possibly outrun Renard when the latter was much more athletic than he could ever hope to be.

Deep inside, he was cursing the bastard. How was this any different from bullying? He knew that he might just be the weakest member of Endless Horizon, but getting targeted because of that still made him feel indignant!

In this situation, a friend should pretend he didn't notice how outclassed Chuck was by everyone else! It's the polite thing to do!

In the end, he decided to stop running and face Renard.

"You forced me!" Chuck shouted and waved his wand.

Suddenly, a Fire Whip rose from the ground and seized Renard's right leg, nearly tripping him.

However, the young man was able to regain his footing right away before yanking his leg from the Fire Whip's hold.

As he turned to give Chuck a taunting smile, Charles appeared beside him and threw a punch towards his torso.

Renard's reaction time had been honed during his previous matches, so he was able to raise his arm to guard against Charles' blow.

Just like what had happened earlier to Princess Xenia, Renard skidded for a few meters.

His eyes widened in shock. He didn't expect that Charles could punch so hard!

Taking advantage of Renard's surprise, Charles closed in to unleash another strike.

Renard smirked evilly. Surprising as Charles' growth was, how could he possibly allow the soft-spoken boy to beat him in close combat?

Just as Renard took a step forward to meet his attacker, two Fire Whips wrapped themselves around his ankles and pulled hard.

This immediately broke Renard's stance and focus.

"Argh!" A groan escaped the young man's lips as Charles' fist connected with his right cheek, sending him crashing into the ground.

"I did it!" Chuck grinned. "Did you guys see that?!"

"Chuck, concentrate!" Charles shouted as he raised his foot to stomp on Renard. "The fight is not over yet!"

Indeed, Renard had recovered his composure enough to roll away.

Using the momentum of the roll to prop himself up, Renard readied himself for a counterattack. His cool pose did not even last a second before another Fire Whip pulled his foot back.

He fell face-first to the ground as Chuck cackled.

"In your face!" yelled the troublemaker. "Who's your daddy now, huh?!"

Princess Xenia, Mary, and Eleanora all facepalmed at the same time.

"Second-hand embarrassment is real," Princess Xenia muttered.

Mary clicked her tongue and shook her head in disapproval. "That idiot will get punched by Renard later."

"I don't know that person," Eleanora said to Evangeline, who blinked in confusion.

Truly, there were few things that could unite young ladies as much as disdain for a fool.

Meanwhile, Alex was watching his battle with a hand over his mouth. He was doing his best not to laugh out loud.

Other than the lame insults, Chuck was following his strategy perfectly.

First of all, Renard was ill-equipped to deal with long-range attacks like Fire Whips. Chuck could easily disrupt Renard's movements as long as he stayed a safe distance away.

Renard was talented at close combat, but what good was a martial artist who couldn't even take a proper stance?

His arms and hands might be his main weapons, but without his feet planted solidly on the ground, his blows would lack power even if he managed to hit his opponents.

Alex's strategy was simple.

Chuck crippled Renard's movements while Charles focused solely on attacking.

Charles didn't need to defend himself because the Fire Whips ensured that Renard was too "tied up" to do anything.

Renard also understood his predicament, but there was nothing he could do about it.

He was forced to go on the defensive and tank Charles' blows, which wasn't an easy task.

The Void Touch's strength was inhuman, and Charles was only starting to access some of it.

Given enough time, he would be able to utilize all of its powers. Once that happened, he would be a true powerhouse.

"I surrender," Renard said after realizing that there was no way for him to win.

He could have been stubborn and endured till the end. But doing so would just prolong his suffering.

Chuck sauntered towards Renard and patted his shoulder.

"I don't usually fight seriously, but when I do, I scare myself," Chuck declared. "You fought well, but you're still not a match for me. Remember this—I only act weak so that others underestimate me."

Renard was so tempted to smack the living lights out of the troublemaker, but he held it in.

This battle had exposed his shortcomings, which he planned to correct before future battles.

Chuck also felt a little more confident about himself. This time, he had completely neutralized Renard—who intimidated him—without using the Conqueror's Potion.

Perhaps he didn't need it as much as he had thought. Heartened, Chuck decided to master his Fire Whips after realizing how effective they were.

"Your next fight will be tomorrow. Evangeline will be your opponent," Alex told Renard. In truth, he had half a mind to call it off after seeing how tired Mr. I-Have-Trust-Issues was.

"I can still fight once," Renard stated before Alex could continue. "I would like to fight Evangeline now."

Renard had fought many opponents in the past.

Some had been his batchmates. Others had been seniors who should have been more experienced and skilled.

Back then, he had been too focused on winning and showing everyone what he was made of.

With each win, his confidence had grown. He had reassured himself that he was strong.

Very strong.

Although he hadn't won all those fights, he had remained confident. 'I'm getting stronger and I will win my next fight,' he thought every time he was defeated.

He hadn't been the type to dwell on his losses and dissect the reason for his defeats

But now, he was different.

Renard gazed at Alex, who seemed to know him inside out.

This wasn't the first time that he felt this way. For him, the young man was mysterious, annoying, and—although he would rather die than admit it—someone he looked up to, albeit reluctantly.

"Are you sure?" Alex asked. "You're exhausted. But if you really want to challenge Evangeline today, drink this."

Alex tossed a High-Grade Stamina Potion to Renard, who caught it. Without a second thought, he chugged the potion.

He could feel his strength and stamina returning, making him feel that he could fight another battle without holding back.

“Evangeline, please fight him seriously,” Alex said. “You can do that, right?”

Evangeline nodded before walking towards Alex to whisper something in his ear.

“If I win, let’s go out on another date,” Evangeline suggested.

“Okay.” Alex nodded, his expression unchanged. “So make sure you win.”

Evangeline smiled confidently as she faced Renard.

Alex watched her closely because this was the first time that he could observe her fighting in person and from the sidelines.

He already knew what she was capable of doing in the game. Frankly speaking, the current Renard was still not capable of defeating her cheat-like abilities.

She was Evangeline Feylune, the daughter of the Vampire Lord, Nero.

She was also one of the Main Heroines of ELO, blessed by the world to stand above everyone else.

This fight was something that Alex was looking forward to the most, which was why he had made her Renard’s last opponent.

One was a Hero, the other a Heroine.

Although they should be equal in strength, Renard was at a disadvantage due to the nature of their abilities.

Right now, Evangeline was the perfect counter against Renard. Their battle would make the members of Endless Horizon understand that she wasn't just another pretty face who lacked the power to protect herself.

Chapter 442: Evangeline's Bloodline Ability

Smiling confidently, Eleanora watched her mistress from the sidelines.

She wasn't feeling the least bit worried about Evangeline getting hurt after she had observed Renard's fighting style during the past two days.

There was no way that the young man would be able to hurt her mistress. Eleanora even wondered if Alex was aware of Evangeline's abilities. That could explain why he had asked her to fight Renard without anyone's help. But...

'That shouldn't be possible,' Eleanora thought. 'My Lady wouldn't show her abilities unless it was needed.'

She couldn't remember Evangeline ever fighting in front of Alex. By right, he shouldn't know what Evangeline could do. Perhaps he was just merely trying to see for himself what she was capable of.

However, after seeing what Alex had done since he entered the academy, Eleanora couldn't shrug off the thought that this might not just be a simple coincidence.

After suffering one defeat after another, Renard understood that he could no longer underestimate his opponents.

Almost no one present knew what Evangeline's fighting style was like. Renard, of course, wasn't one of the lucky exceptions.

'She might be a mage like Nessia,' Renard mused. 'Her hands and feet don't look like she's doing any physical exercises either.'

After tentatively assuming that Evangeline was a mage, a few strategies popped up in his mind.

The moment Alex gave the signal to start the battle, Renard did something that no one saw coming.

The young man summoned a few stones in his hands and threw them at his opponent.

Seeing this, a faint smile appeared on Alex's face. Renard was finally learning to use other strategies instead of blindly charging at his opponents to close the distance.

Evangeline was just as surprised as everyone else, so she wasn't able to evade the attack. Several stones slammed against her slender arm.

Pain flashed across her face, which Renard didn't miss.

Stomping his foot forward, Renard catapulted himself towards the young lady, who was unable to react in time.

Without any shred of mercy, Renard smashed his fist toward Evangeline's stomach.

A second later, Renard was sent flying.

Yes, the one sent flying was Renard and not Evangeline.

Even Chuck rubbed his eye to check if something was wrong with his vision. He had clearly seen Renard's fist connect to his target, and the punch should have been strong enough to blow Evangeline away.

However, the opposite had happened!

Nessia frowned before writing something on her palm. A moment later, her eyes widened in shock as she realized what was happening.

“Hey, you don’t look surprised, Alex,” Nessia observed softly. “Did you already know about this?”

As they were standing side by side, Alex gave a slight nod before placing his finger over his lips. Nessia immediately understood that he didn’t want her to share her discovery with the others.

The young lady then shifted her attention to Renard, who was lying on the ground in utter disbelief and confusion.

Charles leaned closer to his girlfriend. “What happened to him?” he asked, but the young lady only shook her head.

Since her club president felt that this should be kept a secret, she decided to not say anything. Later, she would make him buy her silence.

However, she had to admit that this overturned her impression of Evangeline. This new member was far more dangerous than she appeared to be.

After regaining his composure, Renard stood up once more and focused his attention on his opponent.

He was replaying his earlier attack, hoping to uncover what had transpired for him to be hit by a blow that he hadn’t seen coming.

But no matter how hard he tried, he still couldn’t understand what had happened earlier.

‘Only one way to find out,’ Renard declared as he clenched his fists and ran in a zigzag pattern in order to confuse his opponent.

Evangeline had not shifted from her original spot on the battlefield. Her fist glowed with a faint red light.

Thinking that the moment was right, Renard closed in to strike. His fist connected with Evangeline’s right cheek.

A moment later, he felt a delicate fist deforming his right cheek, making him stagger.

However, Evangeline wasn't finished yet. She struck his left cheek as well and unleashed an attack combo, hitting Renard's chest and stomach repeatedly before finishing off with an uppercut that rattled his brain.

The young man staggered a few steps as his world spun around him. But seeing Eva move to follow up her attack, Renard forcefully punched out, not caring if he could hit her or not.

That was a very bad decision on his part because Evangeline used that opportunity to grab his arm and slam his body against the ground.

Without even giving her opponent the time to realize what was happening, the young lady raised her foot and stomped on his head. From afar, Chuck and Charles grimaced.

Eleanora was feeling giddy after seeing her mistress's dominating performance. Nessia's frown deepened.

Unlike her—who specialized in using magic for long-distance battles—Evangeline was more versatile.

As a hybrid fighter, Evangeline could use magic and martial arts. She wasn't someone who showed mercy either.

Growing up as a daughter of the Vampire Count meant that she was pressured to always present a strong front and never show any weakness.

She had been trained in an environment where she needed to fight to survive. Although she looked like a delicate beauty, the moment she started fighting, her true nature came out.

"S-She's smiling," Chuck muttered because he could tell that Evangeline was enjoying the battle. "Is she a battle junkie like Xeni—ahhhhh!"

The pitiful teenage boy felt someone pinch his waist. He didn't need to look to know it was his fiancée, who had heard his words.

"Who are you calling a battle junkie?" Princess Xenia asked sweetly.

"W-What are you talking about?" Chuck stuttered. "I wanted to say that Mary was a battle junk—ahhhh!"

Without saying anything, Alex and Charles both agreed to look away from their friend and focus on the battle. If Chuck still hadn't learned his lesson, no one could save him.

It was stupid enough to badmouth the princess while standing right beside her, but Chuck really outdid himself by attempting to implicate her maid after getting caught.

This was the perfect example of courting death, so Alex and Charles decided to offer a silent prayer in their hearts for Chuck—whose entire body was shuddering from the pain—and pretend that he was invisible to them.

Aside from Chuck's screams of agony, the sound of Evangeline's blows hitting Renard's body filled the surroundings.

At this point, Renard was no different from a punching bag who could try to defend itself. His face was beaten and battered, but he refused to give up.

He endured, endured, and endured some more, waiting for an opportunity to strike.

And with a fierceness akin to that of a lion, he zeroed in on that opportunity. Roaring, Renard grabbed Evangeline's foot as she was about to kick him.

He then swung his fist towards her shin with the intention of breaking her bones and crippling her.

At that moment, he saw something in the corner of his eye.

Evangeline's foot slammed into his face, and then... there was no then.

Renard blacked out. When he came to, he found himself sprawled on the floor of their club room.

His entire body was aching, but it was his face that really, really hurt.

Lotte then casually opened a healing potion and offered it to Renard. He accepted the bottle gratefully and downed all of the potion in one gulp.

He still didn't understand what had happened earlier.

He was certain that his punches had reached her. He had felt the impact of those blows, but Evangeline had received zero damage from them. It was so baffling.

Just as Renard was about to stand up, he saw stars. For the second time in five minutes, he collapsed on the ground, unconscious.

Fortunately, Lotte was able to catch him in time and prevent his head from hitting the floor.

He wasn't aware that the one he had fought against earlier was a very "real" illusion that Evangeline had cast on not just him but everyone else in the domain.

The young lady had simply smacked him silly while he was stuck in the illusionary world that she had made.

Renard might be strong physically, but his mental defenses weren't exactly remarkable. Even though he had strong willpower, it was not enough against someone like Evangeline.

Her bloodline ability of creating illusions was just one of her special abilities.

She had two more, which made her the perfect counter against Renard. But she hadn't even gotten the chance to use them in the battle because the illusion had been more than enough to take Renard out.

And now Charles and Chuck were taking Renard out of the club room.

As the young man was being carried away to the infirmary for further treatment, Alex showered Evangeline with praise. The young lady, who had been fighting so ruthlessly just a while ago, smiled with girlish delight.

Eleanora also told her Mistress how awesome she had looked during her battle.

Blushing, Evangeline swore in her heart that she would work even harder. She did not want to ever disappoint Alex or Eleanora.

One day, she would be able to protect Alex from her own father, who hadn't gotten along with him in the past.

She wasn't aware that Nero had already confirmed Alex's identity as that annoying little prince who had once sought asylum within his domain.

Chapter 443: Are You Ready To Call Me, Master? [Part 1]

Renard looked up at the pure white ceiling while trying to recall his fight with Evangeline.

It had taken him quite a few minutes after waking up to realize that he was in the infirmary.

While he was deep in thought, the door opened. And in came a young man whom he didn't want to see.

"I'm glad to see that you are awake," Alex said with a bright smile.

"Have you come to laugh at me?" Renard asked.

He was feeling bitter because he hadn't been able to secure a single win.

At first, he consoled himself that the match-up had been unfair from the start.

Alex had delayed the match for Nessia, resulting in a one-sided... encounter. Resentful as Renard was, he knew that calling it a fight would be too generous.

The match had proven that the young lady could dominate the battlefield as long as she had been given enough time to prepare.

Renard wasn't really upset about the third and fourth matches. Facing two opponents alone had placed him at a disadvantage, but he had agreed to participate all the same.

Since he had already known that none of his peers were pushovers, his defeats had not surprised him. In fact, they had been quite easy for him to accept.

Unfortunately, the same couldn't be said for the other matches.

He had no way to excuse his defeats by Lavinia and Evangeline.

This made him wonder if Alex had intentionally arranged the matches so that they would all end in his loss.

Miserable about his consecutive losses, Renard assumed that his "rival" had come to gloat.

"Do you know why you lost?" Alex asked despite knowing the answer.

He didn't care if the young man was feeling butthurt or salty.

All he wanted to know was whether Renard could bounce back from this experience and become a better version of himself.

"I'm sure you're going to tell me why I lost," Renard answered. "Well then, let me hear it."

His relationship with Alex had always been like this. For reasons only known to them, they were like oil and water.

"First, let's talk about your fight against Nessia," Alex said. "When you find yourself fighting against someone with a geographical advantage, it means that you have to rely on something other than your punches and kicks if you want to overcome them."

"I know that you only rely on your physical prowess and prefer to bulldoze your way through such challenges. But this won't work all the time. Sometimes you need the right equipment and artifacts to help you fight in ways that you can't on your own."

"Since you already know how effective Nessia's rune magic is, you should ask her if she can craft you some items to use in battle. For example, a ball that creates white mist when you throw it on the ground."

Renard looked incredulously at Alex. "What good will that do?"

"Smokescreen."

"Ah."

"Even something so simple can help you in more ways than one," Alex continued. "You know, I wasn't really strong or anything when I first started my journey. I relied on brittle vials filled with pepper and chili powder in order to disorient my enemies so that I could attack them freely."

Renard wanted to snort, but he remembered Dim Dim using brittle vials. Maybe Alex was really telling the truth.

"Now let's talk about your fight with Princess Xenia, and Mary," Alex went on. "There will come a time when we can't expect to fight only one enemy. If you are fighting opponents that are weaker than you, then there's no problem."

“But what if you are facing opponents who are as strong as you or stronger? Situational awareness is incredibly important. There is always a chance that those nobles will gang up on you. Worse, some of them may sneak up on you when you’re already battling one of them.”

Renard bit his lower lip, unable to refute Alex’s words. It would be naive to believe that nobles had the honor to tell him how many of them he was up against.

Seeing that Renard was really listening to his advice, Alex crossed his arms and smiled faintly.

“Then let’s talk about your fight against Chuck and Charles. Did you feel helpless when Chuck kept on targeting your feet? Although you managed to land a few punches, Charles was able to easily shrug them off because they were so weak.”

Renard nodded because this was the truth. Without a proper foundation, he could not concentrate his power into his blows.

His fight with Chuck had made him painfully aware of how crucial it was to be able to move freely. While this was commonsensical, he had taken his mobility for granted.

Alex narrowed his eyes before moving to the crux of the issue. “Your fight with Lavinia also demonstrated that you are missing one important thing. Without this, your fighting style is full of openings that your opponents can exploit.”

“And what is that?”

“Renard, you lack technique. Your fighting style is self-taught. That is nice and all, but against those who have been trained to fight from young, you fall far too short. They have a systematic way of dealing against enemies. You don’t.”

While Alex might sound condescending, this was something he had personally experienced. During his time on Earth, he had gotten into his fair share of street fights.

That was why he had gone to the gym and looked for a boxing trainer.

Boxing was nowhere as fancy or eye-catching as many other martial arts, but it was one of the most practical fighting styles in the world.

Amateurs only swung their fists against each other, but boxing taught you how to effectively block those punches and counter with your own. It didn't just teach you how to punch, it taught you where to punch.

In addition, Alex had learnt some combination attacks that could literally knock out his opponent if he pulled them off successfully.

Renard didn't have those abilities, so even the current Alex could defeat him in a weaponless fight.

"Then what about Evangeline?" Renard asked. "I don't really know what went on during that match."

"Ah, about that." Alex smiled faintly. "You were under an illusion spell."

Renard widened his eyes so much he started looking like a goldfish. "Huh?! You mean my punches didn't land? It was all a trick of the mind?"

"Yeah," Alex replied. "Just illusions. So you didn't really hit her and got hit by her counterattack instead."

Alex then tapped the side of his head, making Renard frown.

"Instead of attacking you physically, she attacked you mentally," Alex stated. "You're not trained to fight against those who specialize in mental attacks, so they are very effective against you."

Renard knew that Alex was right, but the realization that he had been "toyed" with still didn't sit well with him.

“Now, do you wish to become strong?” Alex asked. “Do you wish to overcome your weaknesses? If yes, then you should buy these two Skill Books.”

The young man took out two Skill Books from his storage ring and showed them to Renard.

“This blue book contains the Martial Skill called Berserker Dragon Barrage [EX],” Alex said like a shady business man. “This is a Unique Martial Skill that I have bought from the Black Market.”

Of course, Alex hadn’t really bought it from the Black Market. He had bought it in the Arcana Shop for 5,000 Arcana Points!

The young man believed that this was a necessary sacrifice because he was looking at the bigger picture.

A future when one of the Heroes would treat him as a treasured friend and not an annoying enemy who kept getting into people’s ways.

Chapter 444: Are You Ready To Call Me, Master? [Part 2]

“This second book is a movement skill called Tempest Step [EX]. It’s also a Unique Martial Skill,” Alex continued. “It complements the Berserker Dragon Barrage. Once you master both of them, you’ll become an unstoppable juggernaut.”

Alex then dangled the two books in front of Renard with the most devilish smile that he could muster.

“I’m pricing both these books at three hundred thousand academy points,” Alex practically sang. “Pretty cheap, right?”

Renard’s face paled after hearing how much the two books cost.

He didn’t know how Alex had come up with the price, but it would take him years to collect enough points to buy even one of the books.

“I can loan the points to you and you can pay me in installments,” Alex offered. “But I have one more condition—you won’t have to pay interest—but you are going to call me Master from now on.”

Renard barely stopped himself from saying that he would rather die than call his rival his Master.

However, he couldn't take his eyes off the two skill books in front of him.

Alex laughed internally, knowing full well that he was basically scamming Renard. Without his interference, the Hero would have "accidentally" discovered these two Martial Skill Books next year.

The silver-haired young man was simply speeding up the process because he didn't want to wait that long for Renard to turn into a true powerhouse. He had weighed the pros and cons. Bringing Renard's progress forward would be more beneficial in the long run.

Alex, like Nessia, was also never going to say no to a chance to make big bucks.

He was not going to turn down the opportunity of having one of the Heroes of ELO in his debt either.

"So, how about it?" Alex said, smiling like a loan shark. "Are you ready to call me Master? Don't worry. As I said, there won't be any interest in this loan. As long as you pay me a fixed amount quarterly, all is good."

"But what if I can't pay you?" Renard asked. He felt like swallowing his saliva, but his mouth felt dry at the moment.

Alex shrugged. "If you can't pay me with academy points, then you can also do a few errands and missions for me. These missions consist of bandit subjugation and dungeon exploration. Easy, right?"

After hearing the words "bandit subjugation," Renard immediately snapped to attention.

Renard might look like he hated almost everything—and he did. But he did not hate equally. He ranked them on a long, long list. And bandits had managed to squeeze into the top few spots.

Growing up, he had witnessed bandits attacking his village on more than one occasion.

If he could pay for Alex's skill books by hunting bandits instead of academy points, Renard wouldn't mind doing it!

Unbeknownst to him, Alex had deliberately bought it up. As expected, Renard took the bait.

As Renard started feeling more positive about this proposal, Alex also started looking slightly less like a slimy loan shark to him.

Although he was still hesitant, he also believed that this was going to be a turning point in his life.

Learning these two martial skills early would allow him to realize his potential sooner.

"I feel like I'm selling my soul to the devil." Renard sighed. "But I accept your offer."

"Don't worry. I'm nicer than The Devil." Alex smirked as he handed the two Unique Skill Books to Renard.

He left as soon as the books were in Renard's hands.

Once he stepped outside, Alex sighed in relief, his confident demeanor fading away.

He had spent ten thousand Arcana Points just to help Renard become stronger. Expensive, yes, but also a calculated sacrifice that would allow him to gain one powerful helper in the future.

Besides, he didn't want his hate-hate relationship with Renard to continue.

Alex knew how strong Renard would become within the next year or so. And after that explosive growth, Renard would become someone Alex didn't want to mess with.

'Better make him indebted to me now than suffer his revenge later,' Alex thought. 'Should I also invest my Arcana Points in Lavinia, Charles, and Chuck?'

Arcana Points allowed him to buy items in the Arcana Shop. Usually, he used them sparingly because he believed it was better to have them and not need them than to need them and not have them.

However, after meeting Nero and Luthor, Alex understood that his arrival in Arcana had set off a whole chain of effects that even he was only partially aware of.

The past of Alex Stratos, which was intricately linked to Prince Aetherius Alexian Vademont, was a variable he hadn't seen coming.

In order to overcome these unexpected developments, he would need to make the Heroes, Heroines, and supporting characters in his club stronger.

That way, when he finally had to go up against stronger opponents, he would have some dependable allies to help him in battle.

'I just hope he learns them fast,' Alex thought as he walked towards Ironheart Dormitory. 'He only has less than a month before our field trip to Solara.'

The young man smiled faintly. If Renard really won against the nobles, then maybe Celestria's parents would recognize him as someone worthy of their daughter.

If that really happened, then Alex would've "accidentally" played matchmaker between the two.

'Well, whatever happens, it's their choice,' Alex mused. 'All I did was give Renard a little push.'

The young man was now looking forward to their trip to Solara.

He wanted to see the expressions of the nobles when they realized their opponent was far stronger than they had assumed.

Of course, the streams of money flowing into his pockets would sweeten the experience even more.

As for investing Arcana Points in Lavinia, Charles, and Chuck, Alex decided to check the Arcana Shop first to see if there were skills suitable for them.

28,740 Arcana Points.

That was how much he had left after buying Renard's skill books.

If he invested five thousand points in each of his friends, they would also experience an explosive growth just like Renard.

Although losing so much Arcana Points would make him sad for a while, the future rewards would make up for it without fail.

'Okay, let's do this.' Alex opened his Arcana Shop as soon as he arrived in his room and scrolled through the Unique Martial Skills, looking for skills that would complement his friends' fighting styles.

The 50% discount slapped on every Skill Book banished the last bit of his hesitance. It might be a shopper's impulse as well since the discount only lasted for twenty-four hours.

Alex already had a good number of skills at his disposal. Adding more would not necessarily make him stronger.

For now, he planned to master his Unique Skill, Gravitas Dominion [EX], so he could use it more effectively in battle.

Chapter 445: Alex's Gifts

After a few hours of scrolling through his Arcana Shop, Alex settled on three Martial Skills that he believed would work wonders for his friends.

Lavinia was already a trained warrior, so she wasn't lacking in the technique department. On top of that, she also had the Hidden Job Class called Horizon Striker, allowing her to hit hard and strike fast.

Thanks to her superhuman speed and dexterity, she rarely had issues closing in on her opponents.

After much consideration, Alex thought that one of the ways to make Lavinia stronger was to further improve her mobility in battle.

Because of this, he decided to give her Flash Step [Ex].

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< Flash Step [EX] >

“One step closer to infinity.”

— Increases movement speed by 5,000% for 2 seconds.

— Can be used five consecutive times before entering a one-minute cooldown.

— Each Rank up after Rank 3 increases the duration of this skill and the number of times it can be used consecutively.

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This movement skill would make it seem that Lavinia was using the Blink Skill, which was similar to a short-distance teleportation.

And that wasn't all. The stronger Lavinia became, the more efficient this skill would be.

Skills ending in [EX] usually could “grow” with their wielders. As their wielders ranked up, these skills also received upgrades.

Alex believed that when Lavinia acquired this skill, she would become deadlier in battle.

‘This also means that I won’t be able to escape if she tries to run after me.’ Alex chuckled internally.

For now, giving her a gift that would allow her to survive dangerous battles was his way of reciprocating the feelings she had for him.

As for Charles, Alex thought long and hard and decided to give him Growth [EX].

— — —

< Growth [EX] >

— Skills evolve upon reaching certain milestones.

Techniques transform into advanced forms and gain new effects, modifiers, or passive bonuses.

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Just like its name implied, the skill Growth [EX] was tied to the growth of its user.

Charles was a Void-Touched, and he already had skills and abilities that defied the laws of the world.

This was probably why all the monsters in the world, especially dungeon monsters, wished to kill him.

Perhaps they instinctively felt that his very existence threatened them all.

Since Charles was very loyal, Alex believed that he wouldn't betray him, no matter how strong he would be in the future.

As such, he didn't mind giving Charles Growth [EX]. If the latter could further evolve his skills, he would become a powerhouse just as strong as the Main Heroes and Heroines of ELO.

Realizing the usefulness of this skill, Alexx changed his mind and also bought one copy for himself.

Usually, there could only be one Unique Skill in the world at a time. But since the skill book was bought from the Arcana Shop and not obtained from the world of Arcana itself, a loophole could be... exploited.

This meant that even if there were already users of Flash Step [EX] and Growth [EX], Alex and his friends could still learn these skills as long as they learnt it from skill books that had been bought using Arcana Points.

The last skill book that Alex bought was called Burning Will [EX]. It was for Chuck.

Chuck was similar to Astrea.

Unfortunately, Chuck did not share Astrea's luck. What they had in common was their mentality.

Both teenagers liked to bully the weak and feared the strong.

Chuck wasn't someone who liked to fight battles.

This was why he had gained the experience of the Fire Sorcerer, Gilgamesh, as well as the recipe for the Conqueror's Heart Potion at the Heracle Mountain.

The potion transformed him into a confident, dashing casanova. Combining this with the rich battle experience of Gilgamesh, Chuck had managed to defeat Eleanora even though she was a rank stronger than him.

Burning Will [EX] augmented his Firepower depending on how scared or confident he felt. The more fearful or confident Chuck felt, the stronger the power of his flames.

This skill had no drawbacks, only advantages, making it the perfect skill for Alex's roommate.

— — —

< Burning Will [EX] >

— Each Rank increases Fire Magic by 100%

— Current Rank: Rank 3

— Total increase in Fire Magic = 300%

— If the wielder's fear or confidence level is maxed out, an additional 100% increase in Fire Magic will take effect.

— The wielder of this skill can summon a pair of Phoenix Wings behind his back, allowing him to fly. The more fearful or confident the user is, the more intense the flames that blaze onto his wings will become.

— Has a 50% chance to negate Fire-based spells or abilities targeted at the user. If Max fear or confidence is reached, the chance of negating Fire-based spells or abilities will increase to 60%.

— — —

Dim Dim had been observing Alex from the top of his head.

It approved of the skills that Alex had chosen for their friends and was very happy that the young man cared for them.

As such, Dim Dim decided to give him a reward.

The little bun opened its Arcana Shop, then swiped to the right.

The words “Arcana Shop” disappeared, replaced by “God Shop”.

Dim Dim then hummed as it scrolled through the Divine Skill Book category to look for a skill that it believed would be helpful to Alex.

Its little eyes widened when it saw a Skill Book that had only been added recently to the list.

Called Ten Thousand Heroes [EX], it was a Divine-Ranked Skill Book.

However, when Dim Dim saw the price, its little hand that was about to click the purchase button trembled.

The Skill Book was worth one million God Points, but Dim Dim only had ten thousand God Points at the moment.

However, the little bun was determined to get the skill, so it opened the “God’s Chatgroup” to talk directly with the seller of the Skill Book.

It planned to negotiate and ask the seller to allow it to pay in installments.

As to whether the seller would agree or not, the Dim Sum God had no clue since this was the first time it had encountered this name. It could only hope that the seller was a nice God.

— — —

< God's Chatgroup >

Dim Dim: Dim Dim! @I-AM-NOT-ELYON

I-AM-NOT-ELYON: Hi. How may I help you?

Dim Dim: Dim!

I-AM-NOT-ELYON: Oh, that skill book? Yes, it's being sold for a million God points.

Dim Dim: (*_*)7 Dim Dim!

I-AM-NOT-ELYON: If you don't have God Points, I can also sell it for a magic castle.

Dim Dim: T___T Wuwuwu!

I-AM-NOT-ELYON: Don't cry, little one. Just save up a bit, okay?

— — —

Left with no choice, Dim Dim used its trump card.

From its dimensional storage, it took out a black ATM Card with the words "Dim Dim VIP Card" boldly written at its center.

At the bottom left corner of the cards were two tiny, tiny words—Elyverse Unlimited.

That was the company that had issued the card to Dim Dim as a congratulatory gift after its birth.

The little bun took a screenshot of its VIP Card and sent it to the seller.

After seeing that Dim Dim was an Elyverse VIP Card Holder, the seller's stance changed completely.

Instead of selling the skill book, the New Generation God decided to befriend Dim Dim instead and offered it the skill book for free.

The little bun was very reluctant to accept this gift and insisted that it would pay in installments.

However, Lily and Cupid, Dim Dim's best friends, joined the conversation and told the Dim Sum God to accept the book graciously and return the favor in the future.

After listening to its friends, Dim Dim thanked the New Generation God and promised to always remember this kindness.

Chapter 446: I Expect Good Things From You [Part 1]

"Dim Dim!"

The little bun proudly pointed at the floating jet black skill book above its head.

Alex could read the title—which was embossed in gold letters—just fine. However, it took him some time to process the words.

When he finally did, his mouth hung open.

"Ten Thousand Heroes [EX]!?" Alex gasped. "D-Divine Ranked Skill?!"

Divine Ranked Skills were priceless in ELO. Getting even one required meeting extremely strict conditions. Ability was simply not enough. Luck was needed. A lot of luck.

Alex had not just been a top player. He had been in the cream of the crop and a Shield Savant to boot. And yet he had never once acquired a single Divine Ranked Item from his years of playing.

It was that difficult to even stumble upon Divine Ranked Items. Those who were lucky enough to have discovered such treasures were usually tight-lipped, unwilling to divulge the secrets to their success.

Of course, most of them were not exactly sure how they had gotten these priceless treasures either. Almost no one had ever replicated this miracle.

“Ahem!” Dim Dim stood even straighter, clearly enjoying the young man’s shocked expression.

“Dim Dim!” Dim Dim pointed at Alex, making the latter blink.

“For me?”

“Dim!”

“Dim Dim, you’re the best!” Alex immediately grabbed the little bun and kissed its cheek repeatedly, making it giggle.

After patting the little bun’s head for a whole minute, he set Dim Dim on top of his head and grabbed the Divine Skill Book, eager to check its information.

— — —

< Ten Thousand Heroes [EX] >

“If Fate denies us victory, I will summon those who defy Fate itself.”

— Although this skill book is called Ten Thousand Heroes, it doesn’t only summon Heroes. It can summon anyone, including Villains and Gods.

— You can only use this skill when certain conditions are met. Even if your life is in danger, there's a chance that this skill might not activate.

— Heroes cannot be summoned at random. Depending on the environment and circumstances, an appropriate person will heed your call.

— You can only summon one Hero at a time, but there's a small chance of summoning multiple Heroes after using this skill.

— — —

Alex looked at the Divine Skill Book with awe. Still in disbelief, he asked Dim Dim if he could truly use it.

"Dim Dim!"

"Thank you again, Dim Dim."

The young man no longer stood on ceremony and used the skill book to acquire the skill.

He then hurriedly opened his Status Page, wanting to check if the skill was really registered.

— — —

Divine Skills: Voice of the End, Ten Thousand Heroes [EX]

— — —

As his ecstasy from having two divine skills toned down a little, he noticed something interesting.

The Ten Thousand Heroes [EX] skill was grayed out.

A thousand horrible possibilities flashed through his mind, but he calmed himself down to ask Dim Dim for clarifications. The little bun explained that this was not a glitch as the skill would only light up once conditions were met.

This meant that Alex couldn't casually summon a Hero anytime he pleased.

"Dim Dim, I have another question."

"Dim?"

"Can these summoned Heroes beat Paragons?"

The little bun jumped off Alex's head and landed on the bed.

It said nothing, only looking at Alex with a mysterious smile.

"Is that a yes?" Alex pressed as he crouched down to meet the little bun's eye level.

Dim Dim's only response was to smile even wider.

"Fine." Alex smirked. "I guess I'll just find out in the future, right?"

Dim Dim nodded. "Dim!"

As if waiting for that moment, the door of his room was thrown open and in strutted Chuck.

"Guess what, Alex?" Chuck asked.

“You enjoyed the spanking that Princess Xenia and Mary gave you?” Alex suggested.

Chuck’s face visibly reddened. For a brief moment, his composure crumbled. However, he soon cleared his throat and seemed to have bounced back.

“That’s not it,” Chuck said. “Me? Get spanked by those two? Impossible. Let’s not talk about them and talk about this instead.”

Chuck showed Alex the quest he had just taken from the Mission Hall.

— — —

< Escort Mission >

Escort Princess Xenia and Prince Edward to the Kingdom of Solara. Assist them as they check the state of the security and accommodations that will be used by the First Years during their field trip.

Quest Requirements: Rank 3 of any Profession.

Number of Escorts needed for the mission: 20

— — —

“An escort mission?” Alex arched an eyebrow. “Her Highness gave this to you?”

Chuck nodded. “Yes. The Student Council summoned her and Prince Edward earlier and assigned them to be the representatives of the First Year for the field trip.

“Their position requires them to travel to Solara a week ahead of the trip. They are responsible for making sure that our accommodations are safe and up to par.

“Before we hosted their students, they had also sent some people over to check our dormitory rooms. Think of it as the standard protocol for inter-kingdom events.”

Chuck then leaned closer like he had a state secret to share.

“Most importantly, this is a good opportunity to talk with the Saintess in private and get to the bottom of her relationship with Renard,” Chuck added. “We don’t want our guy to be used as some kind of tool just to avoid marriage arrangements by a noble family, do we?”

Alex smirked. “I didn’t know you cared that much about Renard.”

“Well, he’s a member of our club.” Chuck shrugged. “If we don’t watch out for each other, who else will have our backs, right?”

To Chuck’s surprise, Alex agreed readily.

“You’re right. Very well. Since Her Highness has personally handed this to you... Does that mean she has already signed all of our club members up as her escorts?”

“Yes,” Chuck answered. “Actually, no. After much consideration, she decided to exclude Renard. It’s sad that his meeting with the Saintess will be delayed by a week, but it’s best that he arrives with the rest. He might get targeted if he were to go with us and that would be quite troublesome.”

Alex applauded Princess Xenia in his heart, agreeing with her assessment.

The nobles from Solara had come all the way to their academy just to confront Renard not that long ago. That meant that the news of him being favored by their Saintess had already circulated among the upper circles.

'Fortunately, I managed to convince them to hold the duel during the field trip,' Alex thought. 'At the least, they won't come visit us to complain anymore.'

Since it would be an official duel, many people were bound to join the fun. Even Lady Celestria's father, one of the Dukes of Solara, might come and watch the duel himself. Surely any half-decent father would want to see which lad had managed to charm his daughter.

Even if the King came to join the festivities, it wouldn't be that surprising either. In that case, the duel would certainly become the talk of the town.

'Nice! That means more money for me,' Alex thought. 'I need to make sure that those who watch the duel will pay gold for it.'

Although Alex had set the ticket at a thousand gold coins each, he knew he would be asked to lower the price.

Truth be told, he would still be happy enough even if he lowered the entrance fee to ten gold coins per head.

The Colosseum could easily seat over ten thousand people. If they managed to fill it up during the duel, then Alex would earn tens of thousands of gold coins without too much effort.

As much as the thought excited him, he set this matter aside for the time being.

It was time to give Chuck his gift.

"Chuck, take this," Alex said as he handed the skill, Burning Will [EX], to his roommate.

As soon as the troublemaker's gaze landed on the red cover, his eyes immediately widened in shock.

"A-A Unique Skill Book?!" Chuck stuttered. "Are you selling this to me?"

“No.” Alex shook his head. “I’m giving it to you for free.”

Chuck’s expression immediately turned solemn. “There’s nothing free in this world except the air that we breathe. Alex, I’m your friend, so I deserve this bit of honesty. Tell me, do you plan to scam me? Are you planning to lure me into debt so you can treat me as a slave?”

“Enough with the drama. Just take it.” Alex casually let go of the book and walked away, leaving Chuck to clutch it tightly like it was a holy relic that could not touch the ground.

While walking away, Alex stole a quick glance at his roommate. His lips curved just a little. Right now, Chuck bore an uncanny resemblance to a starving fish chomping down on a rainbow prawn without realizing it was attached to a fishhook.

“Are you sure this is free?” Chuck asked. “What’s the catch? I know you, Alex. You are just like me. We won’t give something away for free unless we need a favor from that person.”

“You’re right. Although I said it was for free, this skill book has some strings attached to it.”

“I knew it! So, what do you want? You can have anything except my handsomeness.”

“” ...”

Alex and Dim Dim looked wordlessly at the thick-skinned young man, hoping to shame him out of his delusion that he was the most handsome man in the world.

However, since Chuck was as immune to shame as he was handsome, Alex and Dim Dim had to give up eventually when they could no longer endure the awkward silence.

Instead of admitting defeat, they decided to tell themselves that they were just humoring him for the time being so he could feel good about himself.

Chapter 447: I Expect Good Things From You [Part 2]

“When the time comes that I need someone to save me, I want you to save me,” Alex said with a heaviness that implied he had thought long and hard about this.

In truth, he had just come up with it on the spot. Since Chuck was so adamant that there must be strings attached to the gift, it was easier to go along with his belief than to convince him otherwise.

After hearing that request, Chuck narrowed his eyes.

Chuck had some interesting ideas about himself, but he was not stupid. He could imagine how dire a situation had to be for even Alex to be cornered. And if Alex couldn't handle it, how could he?

However, since the young man was his dear friend, Chuck would still do his utmost to save him. It's better to die trying to save a friend than spend the rest of his life haunted by his cowardice.

“Okay.” Chuck nodded. “I accept this deal.”

“Good.” Alex patted his friend's shoulder. “I expect good things from you.”

Alex truly hoped that Chuck would become one of the most powerful mages in the future. In the game, he was just a side character that appeared just for laughs.

He also wasn't highly regarded by other nobles as he didn't hold any important positions. Eventually, even his engagement with Princess Xenia was called off.

Some of the more ambitious nobles had decided to step on Chuck to get ahead. With sly comments and vague rumors, they had managed to change the King's mind.

After losing the one thing going for him, Chuck practically disappeared from the game.

With his engagement with the princess broken, Chuck's fate in the game became unknown.

No one really knew what happened to him next. However, if players sat through the ending credits, they would catch a scene of him sitting in a dark alley, looking very much like a beggar.

His eyes were glazed over like he had long lost the reason to live.

Alex wouldn't allow such a thing to happen to his friend. Chuck might be obnoxious at times, but he was a very loyal person.

Since he had already changed the fate of others, changing Chuck's fate was something he had to do as well.

As to what the consequences of this change was, Alex decided that he would face it head-on.

He was already having a full-on identity crisis, so what's one more challenge on his plate?

Now that he had given Chuck the skill book, Alex went to find Charles.

It didn't take him long. When he entered Ironheart Dormitory, he spotted Charles and Nessia chatting in the common room.

Since he also had a gift for Lavinia, he wondered if she was in her room.

Boys weren't allowed to enter the east wing of the dormitory that was meant for girls.

Alex, being the upstanding and rule-abiding student that he was, naturally respected this and asked Nessia to pass the message for him.

He also told Nessia that he would like to talk to Charles in private for a few minutes as well.

"Okay, I'll see if Lavinia is in," Nessia said. "Take your time."

Curious what the big secret was, Charles then took Alex to his room.

Alex didn't want to risk others seeing the Unique Skill Book in the common room. Since that might cause a commotion, he decided that it was better to give the book to Charles in private.

As expected, Charles' eyes widened in surprise when he saw the Unique Skill Book in Alex's hands.

During history class, their homeroom advisor, Professor Arabella, had taught them how to identify the grade of skill books they might come across during dungeon expeditions or ruin explorations.

A Unique Skill Book was always an eye-catching red that made it very hard to miss even in dim dungeons or messy ruins.

"This skill book is for you, Charles," Alex said as he passed the skill book to his friend.

Seeing the golden words "Growth [EX]" made Charles' hands tremble.

After appraising the book, he realized that the skill perfectly matched his needs.

"Alex, this..." Overwhelmed, Charles didn't know what to say. The young man had already given him so much!

He felt that even if he worked his entire life, he wouldn't be able to repay Alex for everything that he had done for him.

However, the young man only smiled and patted his shoulder.

"Charles, a time will come when I will need your strength," Alex said softly. "This world is beautiful, but it's not always peaceful. In order to live life peacefully, you must have the strength to protect it."

“You need to protect your sisters and Nessia. Of course, I am also in need of your strength. So, please, become stronger. Stronger than me if possible. That way, I will be able to live my life in peace.”

Dim Dim nodded and smiled happily.

It, too, wanted to live a peaceful life. But the world was far from peaceful.

Alex was Dim Dim’s champion, but—just like he predicted—there would come a time when even he needed someone to save him.

This was why Dim Dim had bought Ten Thousand Heroes [EX]. The little bun hoped that when Alex found himself in a challenge he could not overcome by himself, someone would come to his rescue and create a miracle.

“Thank you, Alex,” Charles said, doing his best to control the overflowing emotions inside his chest. “I promise to become strong. Stronger than you.”

“Good.” Alex gave his friend the thumbs-up. “That’s the spirit!”

After Charles successfully absorbed the skill book, the two went back to the common room.

Seeing that her boyfriend’s eyes were moist and a little red, Nessia gave Alex a pointed look that practically demanded an explanation.

But Alex simply smiled and made a small gesture telling Nessia that she should just ask Charles himself.

Lavinia also noticed this change and wondered what had happened. However, since the two boys were good friends, she believed that the two of them hadn’t fought with each other.

“Lavinia, there’s something I want to give you,” Alex said. “Let’s go somewhe—”

“You’re going to give her a skill book too, right?!” Chuck suddenly appeared in the common room. “Don’t take it, Lavinia. Alex is just after your bod—gahhh!”

Dim Dim slapped the living lights out of Chuck and did not stop even when the troublemaker was sprawled on the floor.

“L-Lavinia... run. Alex will—ugh!”

Seeing that the young man still wanted to continue spouting nonsense, Dim Dim took out its little hammer and smacked him silly.

Or rather, it knocked him unconscious.

Charles looked at the pitiful young man on the floor before heaving a sigh.

“I’ll keep watch over him,” Renard offered. “Do what you need to do.”

Renard then picked up the unconscious boy and laid him on one of the sofas in the common room.

Dim Dim also decided to stay and give Alex, and Lavinia some private time.

Since Chuck was out of commission, Alex decided to take her to his room so he could give her the book while they’re safe from prying eyes.

The Catkin’s face was already beet-red, unable to get Chuck’s words out of her mind despite her best efforts.

She understood that the troublemaker had just been making things up, but his comments still made her feel super self-conscious about being alone with Alex.

Her heart was beating so fast she wouldn't be surprised if it leapt out of her chest and revealed her innermost thoughts to the world.

Alex looked calm on the surface, but he was starting to feel nervous too.

He blamed Chuck for running his mouth, but it made him realize that he hadn't spent any alone time with Lavinia as of late.

So, the moment they entered the room, he decided to lock the door properly. Even if Chuck woke up, he would not have the chance to create another scene that would tempt Alex into bashing his face in with a shield!

Chapter 448: You're Going To Hell

In Endless Leveling Online, players could view a favorability gauge that showed how much certain characters liked them.

Alex had no idea where he stood with Lavinia and Latifa, but if he had to guess, their favorability was probably around four stars—roughly 80%.

Five stars meant 100% favorability, unlocking the character's true romance route and allowing the player to pursue a deeper relationship with their chosen partner, or partners, if they were bold enough.

He never thought that Lavinia and him would become this close. In fact, when he had met her in the Clawford Tribe, the young princess had even looked down on him.

But after some time, her attitude towards him changed.

She had even helped him in the Dungeon of Beginnings, risking her life in fighting alongside him.

After surviving that hellish experience, she had gone a step further by refusing to use her family's wealth and connections to enter Frieden Academy.

She had enrolled as a scholarship student using her own powers and abilities, making Alex recognize her as a truly capable and dependable individual.

He had never foreseen that there would come a time when this beautiful lady, who was also the younger sister of his Master, Cairo, would look at him with eyes filled with tenderness and affection.

Alex didn't know how it happened, but after closing the door and looking into her eyes for nearly a minute, he reached out to pull her closer to him and gave her a hug.

His mind went blank because this wasn't what he had planned to do when inviting her inside his room.

He had only planned to give her the Unique Skill Book and that would be the end of it.

Just as Alex was thinking of pulling back, Lavinia wrapped her arms around him and hugged him back.

Both of them didn't say anything and stayed hugging each other for what seemed like an eternity.

The room was quiet, so Alex was afraid that due to Lavinia's sharp hearing, she would be able to hear his heartbeat that was beating fast at the moment.

What he didn't know was that Lavinia was worrying about the same thing as she closed her eyes and rested her head on Alex's shoulder.

"Lavinia...", Alex said hoarsely. "I am a very greedy person. I used to live my life alone and I was fine with that. But someone forced her way inside my life and pulled me out of that empty room and tried to show me that the world was more beautiful than I thought it was."

He didn't know why he started talking about this topic. In fact, he thought that it was rude because he was talking about another girl in front of the girl who was showing her honest feelings to him.

Deep down, Alex felt guilty, but the moment he started talking, he was unable to stop himself.

“Truth be told, I didn’t have many expectations in my life,” Alex continued. “I thought that I would grow old alone and die. But I was wrong. There were many beautiful things in this world... including you.”

The young man held her a little tighter, and Lavinia’s tail slowly wagged behind her, as if the feeling that Alex wanted to convey reached her heart.

A few minutes later, Alex loosened his hold and took a step back to take a proper look at her.

The princess of the Catkin Tribe was truly beautiful. Her long silky black hair was very smooth to the touch, so Alex wasn’t able to stop himself from gently brushing her head.

His right hand then moved to gently touch her cat ears, which made her body shudder as if an electrical current passed through her.

But after that shock, Lavinia closed her eyes, giving Alex her silent permission to touch that intimate place that Catkins only allowed their special someone to touch.

Alex knew that the Catkin had this kind of culture, which was why he dared to touch her cat ears.

If Lavinia didn’t like him, she would have pushed him away because touching one’s ears was one of the ways on how to express their love and affection to someone among their tribe.

Seeing her reaction, Alex understood that Lavinia truly trusted him.

Because of this, he moved closer and whispered to her ear.

“Are you sure about this, Lavinia?” Alex asked as he stopped caressing her ear and placing both of his hands on her waist.

“Yes,” Lavinia replied firmly. “I like you, Alex.”

As if to prove her words, she planted a kiss on his cheek before hugging him once more.

Alex no longer had any reason to doubt her feelings, so he returned her gesture by kissing her head.

A moment later, Lavinia pulled back and they stared at each other for nearly half a minute before she tiptoed to kiss his lips.

The kiss only lasted for a few seconds, but the message it conveyed was clear.

"After our Field Trip in Solara, will you come with me for a quick visit to the Clawford Tribe?" Lavinia asked, looking at Alex's eyes with a tinge of anxiety.

"Okay," Alex replied. "I don't think Master will kill me, but will your parents and grandfather not kill me off?"

A giggle escaped the young lady's lips, and her eyes turned into crescent moons as if finding that scene quite amusing.

"You are our Oathkeeper." Lavinia smiled. "From the start, my grandfather already had plans to play matchmaker for the two of us."

"I had a feeling, but it seems that I can't escape the Clawford Tribe huh?" Alex smiled wryly.

"Do you want to escape?" Lavinia asked in a teasing tone.

"Nah..." Alex cupped her face gently. "But Lavinia, I have a confession to make. If you still like me after hearing everything, I promise to make you happy."

Alex then told her about the ladies whom he wanted to spend his life with.

Lavinia was already aware that Alex and Latifa were already very close. But when she heard that there were a few other girls, including Fran, Lapiz, and possibly Efa, a pout appeared on her beautiful face.

"How about Evangeline?" Lavinia narrowed her eyes like a cat about to pounce on her prey.

"I think she was my childhood friend," Alex answered. "And I think our relationship will become closer in the future."

A sigh escaped the young lady's lips, as she looked at the young man whom she had fallen in love with.

"You're a very sinful man," Lavinia stated.

"I know." Alex nodded.

"You're greedy."

"You're right."

"Womanizer."

"No excuses there."

Lavinia then moved closer and hugged Alex tightly. "You're going to hell."

"I hope not." Alex chuckled as he hugged her back. "But if I go there, will you come with me?"

"Hmph..." Lavinia closed her eyes.

She didn't say anything else and simply held Alex closely.

Time seemed to slow down or perhaps moved quickly. But both of them were not aware how long they hugged each other.

After a while, as if coming to an unspoken understanding, the two of them pulled back slightly.

Alex lowered his head, and this time, he took the initiative to kiss her lips.

Lavinia accepted the kiss, and the two of them kissed once, twice, thrice... and kissed some more.

Her tail swayed gently behind her, as if showing the happiness that she was feeling inside her heart.

Both of them weren't aware that back in the common room, Dim Dim once again smacked Chuck with its hammer to knock him unconscious, because the troublemaker had decided to try barging into the room and ruin Alex's and Lavinia's private time with each other.

Chapter 449: For Now, I'll Bid You A Sweet Dream

Alex often wondered if Catkins purred just like ordinary cats did.

After spending time with Lavinia, he got his answers.

Catkins did purr, but they would only show that in private and to their most intimate person who was touching them affectionately.

When they returned to the lobby, a knowing smirk appeared on Nessia's face, which made Lavinia's already red face turn a shade redder.

Charles may be ignorant, but seeing that Alex and Lavinia were walking while holding hands allowed him to understand that both of them were now more than friends.

As if waiting for that moment, Chuck, who had been knocked unconscious by Dim Dim many times, finally opened his eyes.

“Who am I?!” Chuck gasped as he propped himself up from the sofa. “Where am I?”

Dim Dim was very tempted to smack him for the umpteenth time, but since Alex had returned, it clicked its tongue before promptly returning its little hammer back inside its Dimensional Storage.

However, when Chuck’s gaze landed on Alex and Lavinia, who were still holding hands, realization dawned on him.

“Oh no! Lavinia has sold her body to the devil!” Chuck shouted. “Alex, you bast—arghhh!”

The troublemaker’s mind once again slipped into darkness after he received another smacking from Dim Dim.

The little bun was so pissed that it immediately started poking Chuck’s nose as if it was a whack-a-mole, venting its frustration.

Fortunately, the common room was pretty empty at the moment, so no one had heard the young man’s scandalous words.

Still, Chuck’s words prompted Alex, and Lavinia to let go of each other’s hands as if they were electrocuted.

“Come here, Lavinia,” Nessia said sweetly as she held her friend’s hand before pulling her to the girls’ side of the dormitory. “We have a lot of things to talk about.”

Lavinia didn’t resist as she was pulled away, but she still glanced at Alex and saw the latter smiled and nod his head in her direction.

The young lady returned that smile, and soon disappeared in the corridor that led to Nessia’s room.

When he could no longer see the two ladies, Alex walked towards Chuck and joined Dim Dim in poking the bastard.

“Uhh...” Chuck groaned and slowly opened his eyes.

When he saw Alex, the young man blinked once then twice before looking at his surroundings.

“What am I doing here?” Chuck asked.

“You fell asleep here,” Alex replied. “That’s what you’re doing here.”

“I fell asleep here?” Chuck frowned before propping himself up. “I can’t seem to remember how I got here.”

Charles’ shoulders were shaking as he covered his lips with his hand. He didn’t know how many times Dim Dim had pounded Chuck’s head with its little hammer, but he wouldn’t be surprised if that had resulted in short-term memory loss.

“Don’t worry, just relax.” Alex patted his friend’s shoulder. “It’s almost time for dinner. Want to head to the cafeteria together?”

“Okay.” Chuck blinked.

His memory was still hazy, but since he couldn’t remember anything, it might be a good idea to eat something first.

Alex then glanced at Charles, and the latter shook his head.

“I’ll wait for Nessia to return,” Charles said. “You two can go ahead.”

Alex nodded, and took Dim Dim and Chuck with him to the cafeteria.

Somewhere in the Academy...

“Hohoho, did you see that?” a little devil chuckled as it landed on Himea’s shoulder.

“Yes,” Himea replied.

“Your hard work has paid off.” The Devil smiled. “Now, you just need to fulfill 97 more tasks to break the contract.”

The two chains that had bound themselves firmly around the young lady’s soul shattered into pieces.

However, there were still 97 more chains left, which would take a lot of effort to break.

Himea was lying down on the ground in a fetal position as she breathed slowly. The pain racking her body finally faded and a moment of relief washed over her.

But, she understood that this was just a temporary reprieve.

“Since I’m in a good mood today, I can grant you some small favors,” the Devil said. “What do you want?”

“A dream,” Himea replied firmly.

“The usual?” the Devil arched an eyebrow.

“Yes.”

“Understood. I just hope that after all this suffering, you will get a happy ending, Himea. Because if not, you might not even be able to hope for a bittersweet ending.”

Himea didn't answer and slowly closed her eyes. She was very tired after hours of enduring the pain, so she fell asleep quite easily.

The Devil sighed before shaking his head helplessly. He then waved his hand and summoned a bed, allowing the pitiful girl to at least get a proper sleep.

“For now, I'll bid you a sweet dream,” the Devil said softly. “That is your reward for being able to endure this long.”

The dim lights in the room slowly faded. Eventually, only darkness remained.

No one knew that somewhere in the academy, a pitiful lady was enduring pain in order to pay for the price of her wish.

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The next day...

Alex opened his eyes and stared on the ceiling blankly.

The dream he had was quite unusual, but he didn't dislike it.

‘Perhaps I need to ask Latifa if she, Lotte, and Lumi can visit my dreams,’ Alex thought.

He had a very wild dream, which was filled with fluffiness.

Alex had seen a side of Lumi in that dream which he believed was impossible to see in real life.

After having some quiet and intimate moments with Lavinia in his dream, he decided to be a little brave and tried to fluff Lumi's tail, making the latter flinch.

However, she didn't resist and melted under Alex's touch.

It was a very funny scene because Latifa and Lotte tag-teamed to tease the embarrassed Lumi, who used Alex's lap as a pillow. The young man gently patted her head, her ears, and her tail, making the fierce Alter shudder from time to time.

Alex didn't want to admit it, but he felt that he had won a significant victory against Lumi, who almost always looked at him in contempt and suspicion.

"Well, she's kinda cute when she's feeling embarrassed," Alex muttered after remembering Lumi's beet-red face.

The young man then stood up from the bed and did a few light stretches before opening the window of their room to let the light of the sun and the breeze wash over him.

Another day had begun, and he hoped that it would be a wonderful day filled with happy memories that he would treasure for a lifetime.

Chapter 450: The Mirror Mask

"I'm sure all of you are already aware, but we will be going to the Solara Kingdom a week before the rest of the First Years arrive," Princess Xenia said. "Things might get complicated if you go with us, Renard. I hope you can understand where we're coming from."

The princess thought that Renard would complain. To her surprise, Renard only nodded.

"I still have things to do, so I don't mind arriving with the rest of our batch," Renard replied.

"Thank you for your understanding." Princess Xenia smiled.

Alex glanced at Renard, who looked very calm at the moment. He was certain that the young man was busy trying to master the Martial Skills from the two skill books.

"I'll also go there when the rest of the First Years arrive," Latifa chimed in while still lying on the bed. "But I will send Lumi in my stead so she can update me on what is happening in Solara."

"That's fine." Knowing that Latifa didn't really like outdoor activities very much, Princess Xenia had expected this scenario.

"Who else will be going with us?" Chuck asked.

"My Uncle, the Royal Guards assigned to me, and my brother," Princess Xenia replied. "Our club alone has nine members that will go on this escort mission, so the rest will be decided by my brother and the members of the Student Council."

Only twenty escorts were listed for the mission, but there was a possibility that Professors would also be asked to accompany Princess Xenia and Prince Edward as their advisors.

"Well, we still have two weeks to prepare, so we have a lot of time." Princess Xenia's gaze then landed on their club president. "Alex, please stay out of trouble in Solara. We don't want to handle any diplomatic issues during our stay."

Alex blinked once then twice before pointing at his face.

"Princess, does this face look like a troublemaker to you?" Alex asked.

"Yes."

Everyone inside the club room replied without hesitation, making Dim Dim giggle.

Alex scratched his head because he really didn't plan to cause any trouble in Solara.

In fact, he was planning to visit the Whispering Valley, where the treasure map that Astrea had gotten from opening the treasure chest was located.

“Alex, you should also be more careful in the future,” Princess Xenia said after sipping her tea. “We received reports that the Demon Worshipers are actively targeting you right now.

“The student council is also aware of this. Some of the councillors suggested that you should sit this one out and remain here in the academy for your and everyone else’s safety.”

Everyone turned to look at their club president, who seemed to be deep in thought.

The young man had already considered this possibility, so he purchased the Mirror Mask from his Arcana Shop for 2,000 Arcana Points.

This mask would allow him to change his appearance to something that he was familiar with.

As long as he kept the mask on, he could retain the identity of the person he was impersonating.

But there was a catch. No one would be able to take off the mask aside from him, which made it a good way to hide his identity from the Demon Worshipers.

Since he needed to accompany his club to Solara, Alex decided to share this information with his friends.

“This mask not only allows me to change my appearance but my body structure as well,” Alex explained. “It can only record one appearance, so you won’t have to worry about not recognizing me.”

Alex then put on the mask in front of everyone. A few seconds later, his body morphed to that of a stranger with short black hair and brown eyes.

He was taller than Alex and seemed a bit older. He was also nowhere as good looking, but after getting over their surprise, the members of Endless Horizon could admit that this stranger was still easy on the eye.

Latifa's eyes widened in shock because she was familiar with this face.

She had seen it in Alex's memories as well as in his dreams.

When she had first entered Alex's dream, the person she had seen there was the same person that was standing in front of her right now.

Lotte and Lumi hadn't seen this side of Alex yet. Latifa hadn't told her Alters about it. For her, this was a secret that belonged only to her and Alex.

Lavinia smiled faintly as if she found Alex's current appearance to her liking.

Evangeline blinked once then twice because even though Alex had taken a new form, she could still sense that it was him.

"You look more mature," Chuck commented as he circled Alex while rubbing his chin. "Still, you're less handsome than me, which is good. If you were more handsome, I'd probably call the Demon Worshipers and have them deal with you."

Dim Dim took out its little hammer and pounded its other hand lightly but slowly. The little bun was so small and adorable, but it undoubtedly could be menacing when it wanted to.

Chuck's body uncontrollably shuddered as if he was suffering PTSD just from seeing the little toy hammer that had whacked him a few times until he lost consciousness.

"Alex, whose face did you copy?" Eleanora asked. "What do you think will happen if the owner of that face sees you? Won't it trouble him if you use his face to cause trouble?"

"Don't worry, this face is unique," Alex answered. "No one else will get in trouble but me. Just don't tell others about my new appearance. That way, I won't be in danger in Solara. I will just disguise myself as one of Princess Xenia's guards."

“My guard?” Princess Xenia looked at Alex from head to foot. Perhaps the proposal was just interesting enough that she didn’t want to dismiss it immediately.

However, Mary had a different idea, which she whispered to her Mistress.

After hearing her handmaiden’s words, a laugh escaped the princess’s lips.

“Perfect!” Princess Xenia said. “Let’s do that. Please make the arrangements, Mary.”

“Yes, Your Highness.” Mary bowed respectfully before taking out a measuring tape and approaching Alex.

Before the young man could even ask what they planned to do to him, Mary was already taking measurements of his body.

A minute later, she returned to Princess Xenia’s side with a devilish smile.

“Being the Princess’s guard might be troublesome, so it will be best if you become her butler instead,” Mary declared.

Immediately, Lavinia, Latifa, and Evangeline imagined Alex wearing a butler uniform. The three of them nodded in appreciation at the same time.

Suddenly, the teleportation portal activated and a young lady entered the club room.

“I’m sorry, I’m late!” Lapis said as soon as she appeared. “Did I miss something important?”

Her gaze then landed on the unknown young man who was inside their club room.

"Is he our new member?" Lapiz asked.

"No," Chuck replied. "He's Alex."

"Eh?" Lapiz blinked as she scrutinized the young man, who absolutely didn't look like their club president. "Am I being pranked right now?"

Alex chuckled before taking off the mask, returning to his usual looks.

"It's me, Lapiz," Alex said. "Well then, which one do you like more? This appearance or this one?"

The young man once again wore the mask and asked the beautiful elf on which side of him she liked more.

"I think I like your current appearance more," Lapiz replied after thinking for a while.

"Oh, and why is that?" Alex was genuinely curious and surprised.

"Because your current appearance looks kinder. Your smile doesn't make me think that you're about to scam people," Lapiz answered honestly.

A moment later, everyone in the room burst into laughter because Alex really didn't have a good reputation.

There were even First Years and Second Years who tried to avoid him at all cost because they believed that the Blackmail King would completely ruin their lives if he took the slightest offense!

In the end, everyone agreed that Alex going undercover was a good idea. That way, he wouldn't need to worry about the Demon Worshipers waiting for him in Solara because they wanted to claim the bounty on his head.

Their meeting ended an hour later. Almost everyone left the club room, with the exception of Alex, whom Latifa asked to stay.

"Lavinia told me about the two of you earlier," Latifa said while resting her head on Alex's lap.

"Are you angry?" Alex asked, lightly patting her head.

"I'm not angry," Latifa replied. "I already knew from the start that she liked you and we already talked about it."

Before Alex could heave a sigh of relief, Latifa continued, "But are you serious about the other girls?"

"Yes," Alex answered despite Latifa's pout.

"Do they know how you feel about them?"

"Not yet."

"When do you plan to tell them?"

Alex sighed. "When the time is right."

"Hmph... womanizer." Latifa puffed her cheeks cutely, which made Alex chuckle.

Lumi snorted while Lotte only smiled helplessly. Both of them wanted Latifa to be happy, but it seemed that they would still need to weather some storms along the way.

Even so, the young man believed that everyone wanted happiness. Nobody wanted pain, but you couldn't have a rainbow without a little rain.

It took him two hours to make up with Latifa. In the process, he agreed to a few of her conditions.

In the end, she curled against him and claimed him once more as her personal hug pillow.

The warmth of her embrace and the gentle rise and fall of her breathing eventually lulled him to sleep as well.

Lumi and Lotte watched over the two sleeping teenagers and chatted with each other.

Both agreed that they were very curious how Alex would look like as a butler who would obey any orders that their Master might ask of him.