

Endless 51

Chapter 51: The Temple Of The Lovers [Part 2]

A gentle light wrapped Alex's body, as if trying to access everything he had experienced.

Not long after, the orb would then show suitable professions based on his experience and preferred weapons of choice, as well as his fighting style.

He had seen this many times in the game, but this was the first time he was experiencing it in reality.

And truth be told, it felt a little ticklish. He couldn't help but smile a little as the light glowed faintly on his body.

Because he was too immersed in the sensation of being appraised, he didn't notice Svalinn also glowing faintly, as if it was communicating with the orb.

The orb responded in kind and blinked twice in rapid succession as if it had agreed to Svalinn's request.

< Appraisal Complete! >

< Showing list of Job Classes >

[Swordsman]

— The most common starting class for those who wish to wield the sword.

[Shielder]

— A humble but sturdy class trained in traditional shield combat. Good all-around defense.

[Blade Initiate]

— A beginner studying under a formal sword school.

[Novice Duelist]

— Trains in one-on-one sword fighting techniques and timing.

[Rookie Skirmisher]

— Lightly armored and agile, trained for fast combat.

[Dawnblade]

— Young hero-type who believes in justice and carries a hopeful heart.

[Iron Guard]

— Basic shield-bearer trained in battlefield formations. Prioritizes defense and crowd control.

[Tower Warden]

— Carries oversized shields and controls choke points. Ideal for defending narrow passages.

[Runeshield Initiate]

— An arcane trainee who asks Mage Classes to etch protective glyphs onto their shield.

[Shieldbrand]

— Uses a marked shield that enhances certain sword techniques.

[Bronze Valiant]

— Entry-level ceremonial soldiers trained to hold the line and look sharp doing it.

[Flamepoint Guard]

— Sword and shield users trained to fight near fire or carry torches into battle.

[Oathkeeper]

— Locked since requirements are not met.

The young man blinked once, then twice, when he saw the last profession on the list.

'Oathkeeper... isn't this the Hidden Class Master Lord Ramza talked about back then?' Alex mused. 'It's grayed out, which means it cannot be chosen.'

Still, he was confused why and how it even appeared in the list of choices.

Something like this shouldn't have happened, at least based on what he remembered from the game.

Out of curiosity, Alex tapped the Oathkeeper Job Class to see the kind of requirements needed to unlock it.

[Oathkeeper]

“Some fight for glory. Others for gold. But the Oathkeeper fights for a promise never broken—even if it costs them everything.”

[Requirements to unlock Job Class.]

- Prove your will to protect by literally stepping in front of death. (Cleared!)
- Have a preference for using a shield in battle. (Cleared!)
- Block 100 attacks from a Boss Monster or a Mini Boss using a shield. (Not Met!)
- Successfully complete a rescue mission for a captured or kidnapped ally. (Cleared!)
- Win a difficult fight without running away. (Cleared!)
- Make an Oath (Not Met!)

[The Oathkeeper is about making an Oath. In order to make an Oath, you must first clear the other requirements before returning to the temple to make your oath.]

- The harder the Oath, the stronger this Job Class would be.
- The moment you break this Oath, you will lose the benefits of this Job Class and acquire the Oathbreaker Profession in its place.

Alex frowned after reading the description.

The thing that truly caught his attention was the oath making part that was required in order to acquire this Hidden Class.

The young man believed he couldn't take an oath lightly, for once it was broken, the consequence would be dire.

'I see. Maybe this Job Class appeared because I'm so close to meeting the requirements?' Alex wondered, unaware that the shield in his hand might have played a significant role in allowing him to see the requirements of the Oathkeeper Job Class.

After looking at the requirement he still hadn't met yet, Alex thought about blocking one of the attacks of the mutated jumping spider. Very obviously, that idea was immediately trashed.

The scene of it viciously sinking its fangs into the Rank 3 dire bear's neck was still fresh in his mind.

No matter what kind of simulation he ran in his head, it was difficult to block it, let alone take a hundred attacks from it. As such, fighting against the Boss Monster was not an option.

Which led him to the only choice he had.

'Block 100 attacks from a Mini Boss,' Alex thought. 'This, I can do.'

After making his decision, the young man left the temple with Dim Dim to return to the center of the domain, where the crimson salamander was located.

Instead of taking the Shielder Job Class, he believed becoming an Oathkeeper would suit him more perfectly.

While the young man was off to face off against the Mini Boss, the Catkins on the first floor were busy searching for his whereabouts.

Lavinia was very angry because Lioren hadn't woken her up even realising that the young man had gone missing from their camp.

She only knew about it when she woke up in the morning and realized that Alex was no longer around.

"Young Miss, I'm sorry," Lioren said. "I didn't mean it."

"Save your lies for those who will believe it," Lavinia sneered. "I don't even need to ask my brother or grandpa to confirm what happened last night. I trusted you, and you chose to betray it. That's all there is to it."

The Catkins looked at their two leaders anxiously.

They knew Lioren disliked the human, but that their Young Miss treated him kindly because he was her brother's disciple.

Clearly, Lioren was in the wrong, so the other Catkins completely sided with their Young Miss.

Even Lioren's close friends, including the one who had been forced to keep quiet about Alex's disappearance, knew which side to choose during this moment.

"Find Alex and bring him back here safely," Lavinia ordered. "Those who find him will be rewarded."

The Catkins nodded and spread out to search for the young man on the first floor of the domain.

Cairo, Ramza, and the Elders who saw this couldn't help but sigh. If only they could, they would tell Lavinia that Alex was no longer on the first floor but on the fourth floor.

Although they could still communicate with the teenagers, they were unfortunately left with one last chance. So, they didn't dare to use it unless it was of the utmost importance.

Cairo had spoken with Alex earlier because he was in a dangerous position and needed directions.

The Elders understood that the prodigy of the Hartwell Clan did the right thing at that moment.

Lastly, for some unknown reason, all of them were starting to hope as they watched the young man who was about to head to the center of the fourth floor.

They didn't know what kind of Job Classes he had seen during the appraisal, but they clearly saw the young man leave the temple without choosing a profession.

This meant that he might not have seen the Job Class that he wanted and wished to return to fight against monsters in order to gain more battle experience.

Perhaps by doing so, he would finally obtain the key that would allow him and the other Catkins to survive this tribulation that no one had seen coming.

Chapter 52: Weak Men Create Hard Times

After fighting a few monsters along the way, Alex and Dim Dim finally returned to the center of the fourth floor, where the crimson fire salamander was resting.

"Are you ready, Dim Dim?" Alex asked as he prepared himself mentally to face the Mini Boss Monster.

"Dim!"

"Okay, let's do this!"

Alex took a deep breath and walked out of his hiding place.

Holding Svalinn in his left hand and a stone in his right, he cautiously approached the crimson fire salamander and its bodyguards with determination.

Given his deliberate lack of concealment, the three monsters immediately noticed his arrival.

And just like all fire salamanders inside the Etherion Domain, they greeted him with a bombardment of Fire Bullets.

The young man paid close attention to the crimson fire salamander's attacks, knowing it mattered the most.

Unlike regular Fire Bullets that were the size of tennis balls, the Fire Bullets unleashed by the crimson salamander were about the size of volleyballs.

Seeing how big the attacks were, Alex immediately raised his shield and braced for impact.

It was at that moment that he saw a surprising notification that made his heart sink a little.

—

< Svalinn's Fire immunity has been changed to Improved Fire Resistance. >

[Improved Fire Resistance]

— Increase resistance to fire-based attacks, but it doesn't completely negate the effects.

—

'Oh sh*t...' Alex cursed internally when he realized that his Fire Immunity had disappeared.

The next moment, he felt the impact of the lizard's attack, causing him to skid a few meters from where he had stood earlier.

It was like getting body slammed by a bodybuilder while holding a shield.

Although he didn't receive a serious injury, he could feel the impact the attack had on his body.

The attack of the two lesser fire salamanders, on the other hand, wasn't as powerful as the Mini Boss' attack, but it was still as painful as getting flicked on the arm and leg with fingers.

Although it didn't hurt a lot, it still made the affected skin area redden slightly.

After regaining his composure, Alex lowered his body and raised his shield once more to tank the incoming attacks from the three monsters.

The sound of "Peng! Peng! Peng!" echoed through the surroundings as he tanked one hit after another. And every time a fire bullet from the crimson fire salamander landed on his shield, Alex would be pushed back.

Not only was his left arm starting to feel numb, but every hit he took also made him feel as if all the air inside his lungs was being knocked out of him.

Perhaps Svalinn didn't want Alex to take the easy way out, so it decided to remove its Fire Immunity, forcing the young man to experience what it was like to truly tank the hit of a Mini Boss.

There was a popular saying on Earth: "Hard times create strong men. Strong men create good times. Good times create weak men. And, weak men create hard times."

Since this was a trial to become an Oathkeeper, Alex needed to withstand the attacks of the Mini Boss to unlock this Hidden Job Class.

If he got it so easily, then he might not receive the recognition of the temple, which judged everyone fairly.

Only when he truly deserved to be an Oathkeeper could he become an Oathkeeper!

After taking ten hits from the Mini Boss, Alex made a hasty retreat. He could no longer feel his left arm, and blood was also seeping from the corners of his lips.

The young man understood that if he didn't escape now, he might not be able to escape later.

Fortunately, the three salamanders didn't follow him.

When he was certain that the Mini Boss didn't pursue him, the young man finally groaned in pain before kneeling on the ground. Beads of sweat covered his forehead as he wiped the blood from his mouth with the back of his hand.

"Dim Dim!"

Alex nodded after hearing the Dim Sum God's reminder to use the healing potions Cairo had given him before entering the Etherion Domain.

To be honest, he had forgotten about them. Far too many explosive events had transpired after he entered this dungeon-like environment, leaving him little time to think about other stuff.

After drinking every drop of the bittersweet potion, the young man immediately felt its effects washing over his body. The numbing pain on his left shoulder was now gone, and his mind was also starting to clear up.

"Thank you, Dim Dim," Alex said after regaining his composure.

"Dim." Dim Dim nodded.

The young man glanced at the round black shield on his left arm and sighed helplessly.

While he still didn't know if Svalinn was sentient, he had a strong hunch that it was paying close attention to him.

"Dim Dim, do you know how many hits I tanked from the Mini Boss?"

"Dim."

"Ten? It felt like I tanked at least eighty of them."

The Dim Sum God giggled, understanding that Alex was simply exaggerating.

Dim Dim's amusement was contagious and the young man cracked a smile, but it quickly disappeared as soon as he realized that he needed to return a few more times to complete the Oathkeeper's requirement.

He now understood that if he hadn't had Svalinn, tanking those hits would've been impossible.

Even with Improved Fire Resistance, he had felt his entire body aching from the recoil of every hit he had taken from the Mini Boss. If he hadn't had any form of fire resistance from the start, he would not have even dared to take this challenge.

He would be lying if he said that he wasn't feeling afraid or anxious about facing the Mini Boss again. But he also understood that if he couldn't survive the crimson fire salamander, then he would have even less of a chance against the mutant spider that he had to face sooner or later.

Given his resistance to fire, his odds of winning against the crimson fire salamander were drastically higher compared to winning against the jumping spider.

With this thought in mind, the young man gritted his teeth and headed back to pick a fight with the Mini Boss, who was just chilling with its bodyguards.

Last time, he took a one-sided bombardment.

This time, he planned to at least hit it with a stone or two so he could vent out the frustrations rising in his heart.

Chapter 53: A Narrow Escape

A bruised and battered young man made his way toward the temple.

His left arm hung limply by his side, while his right arm held a wooden spear in a vice grip as he relied on it to support most of his weight.

He could barely stand, and his face had lost nearly all of its color.

No, that wasn't accurate.

There were traces of blood on his face, located at the corners of his lips and his right cheek.

Step by step, the young man pushed forward, barely clinging to consciousness.

If an Ash Hound or a Flame Scarab appeared now, it would definitely spell death for him.

But the very anxious and worried Dim Dim made sure to guide Alex to places without any monsters.

Although it would take them longer to reach the temple, this was still the safest route that the young man could take.

"Dim Dim..."

"Don't worry... Dim... Dim.. I can... still walk."

Cairo had only given his disciple six potions, so Alex endured every hit until his very limit before taking one.

Having rinsed and repeated such a painful process a few more times, he soon ran out of healing potions, forcing him to finish his quest through sheer willpower.

And after taking exactly one hundred hits from the Mini Boss, Alex dragged his heavily injured body from the battlefield and made his way back to the temple, where he would be safe.

With his slow traveling speed, it would be night when they arrived at the temple.

However, that would only be possible if Alex's strength didn't give out before they reached their destination.

Unfortunately, he was already running dry. Despite assuring Dim Dim that he could still go on, his vision was already getting blurry.

He put all of his focus into taking one step at a time, enduring the pain and unwilling to stop until he could no longer walk.

And after doing just that for nearly twenty more minutes, his legs finally gave way and he ended up kneeling on the ground.

"Dim!" Dim Dim lightly patted Alex's cheek, as if telling him not to fall asleep.

"I... don't have... any strength... left. Let... me rest a bit... I'll be fine after... I take a short... nap."

The young man collapsed on the ground and slowly closed his eyes.

He had truly pushed himself to the limit and could no longer take another step forward.

“Dim Dim!”

The Dim Sum God tapped Alex’s face repeatedly, but the young man didn’t open his eyes. Understanding that the young man truly no longer had any strength left, it was forced to make a decision.

“Dimmmmmm Dimmmm!”

With a loud shout, the Dim Sum God summoned bamboo steamers around the young man, covering his body and masking his scent so monsters wouldn’t know there was a human hidden among the pile of bamboo steamers.

When it was certain that Alex was truly concealed from sight, it ran in the direction of the temple.

Dim Dim knew it was racing against time, so the sooner it arrived at the temple, the safer Alex would be.

It was not only Dim Dim who was feeling anxious at the moment.

Cairo, Ramza, and the Elders of the Hartwell Clan all looked at the young man who was covered with bamboo steamers.

They had witnessed Alex endure the punishment of blocking a hundred strikes from the crimson fire salamander. None of them could deny that the young man’s determination had moved them.

Although they were not certain, they believed the young man had actually discovered a way to unlock the Oathkeeper Job Class.

They watched over the young man anxiously as the minutes passed by. Then, those minutes became an hour.

Suddenly, four Ash Hounds appeared in their field of view, and everyone who was watching from the secret room almost stopped breathing at the same time.

These hounds looked at the pile of bamboo steamers with curiosity, but they didn't approach it right away.

Since their leader still didn't make a move, all of them remained in place.

Two minutes later, the leader of the Ash Hounds was overcome with curiosity, so it walked toward the pile of bamboo steamers with its pack trailing behind it.

Cairo's eyes turned bloodshot as he looked on. His fists were clenched so tightly that his nails dug into the palms of his hands.

When the hounds were about five meters away from the young man, Ramza's heart was already beating wildly inside his chest.

He could still interfere one more time, but if he did, he would no longer be able to save his granddaughter later if the mutant spider went after the teenage Catkins.

Even though he wanted to save Alex, his granddaughter's life was more important to him, so he could only apologize to the young man in his heart.

The leader of the Ash Hounds sniffed the pile of bamboo steamers and flinched when it smelled something bad that made its nose itch.

Out of anger, the hound swatted the bamboo steamers aside hatefully.

But as it did so, the pile shifted a bit, revealing a human hand originally hidden beneath.

As soon as the monster saw that, its eyes turned red. It could sense that the hand belonged to a living, breathing human.

As the hound was about to give the order to attack, a loud and powerful shout reached their ears.

“Dimmmmmmmmmmm Dimmmmmmmmmmmmm!”

When the leader looked in the direction of the sound, the first thing it saw was a basketball-sized rock heading straight for its face.

A second later, a pained grunt escaped the hound’s throat before the force of the blow sent it flying backward.

The blow was so strong that the monster dissipated into particles of light before it could even hit the ground.

The other Ash Hounds didn’t fare any better as several flying rocks slammed into their bodies, eliminating them one by one.

Cairo and Ramza, who saw this scene, were both shocked by the unexpected turn of events.

However, after the shock faded, it was replaced by relief and happiness.

They watched as two guardian golems ran in Alex’s direction, with Dim Dim perched on top of one of their heads.

The Dim Sum God had gone back to the golem to ask for their help. Although Ramza and the Elders had no idea how Alex’s pet had succeeded in getting the golems to cooperate, they were just happy because the young man was now safe from harm.

“Dim Dim!” With a wave of Dim Dim’s hand, the pile of bamboo steamers disappeared.

One of the golems raised its hand and used some kind of levitation magic to gently lift the young man off the ground so it could carry him back to the temple.

Dim Dim crawled down the golem’s arm until it reached the young man’s chest.

It then closed its eyes to better sense Alex's heartbeat.

Although it was faint, it assured the Dim Sum God that everything was going to be fine.

Cairo watched as his unconscious disciple was carried away by the guardian golems before telling his grandfather that he planned to rest for a few hours.

He had been awake for nearly thirty hours. Now that everything seemed stable, he decided to sleep so that by the time he woke up, he'd also find his disciple conscious.

Chapter 54: I Am No Hero [Part 1]

When Alex regained his senses, he felt himself floating in what seemed to be the vastness of space.

Far ahead, a bright light flickered.

An invisible force began pulling him toward it. Before he knew it, he was speeding forward. Panic surged through him.

'W-Wait! Did I die?!' Alex thought anxiously. 'Am I about to get reincarnated?!'

Before the young man could even brace himself, the light expanded, enveloping his entire body.

Inexplicably, he found himself standing on top of a hill, overlooking a vast plain.

"Am I in heaven?" Alex muttered as he looked at his surroundings.

"Not yet."

The sudden reply from behind him almost made the young man jump in fright.

When he turned around to look at the person who spoke, he saw an old Catkin with long white hair and green eyes.

The old man looked frail from his age, but the resoluteness of his gaze convinced Alex that he was looking at someone who had fought countless battles and overcome impossible odds.

“Don’t be afraid, Alex Stratos,” the Old Catkin said. “You are not in heaven or in hell. At least, not yet.”

“Y-You know my name, Grandpa?” Alex asked.

“Yes.” The old man nodded. “And since I know your name, let me introduce myself as well. My friends call me Leo, and I will be happy if you call me that as well.”

“Understood, Grandpa Leo,” Alex replied. “Can you tell me where I am?”

“You’ll know in a bit,” Leo answered. “But first, take a good look at that group of people.”

The old Catkin pointed at a group of caravans that seemed to be heading in their direction.

“They are a newly formed tribe traveling the land to look for a place they can call home,” Leo said softly.

“Some of them were exiled, some chose exile, some were abandoned, and some were orphaned. Every single person in that group didn’t belong anywhere, so they have banded together for the sake of safety.

“But in the lands of Avalon, numbers alone don’t equate to safety. Even a school of fish can’t deter predators from eating them. The most they can do is reduce their chances of being eaten by their hunters by hiding within a bigger group.”

The old man then pointed at a group of Orcs riding on savage boars. They just so happened to be traveling toward the caravans.

Even from a glance, Alex knew this wouldn't end up well. And just as he thought, tragedy struck the Catkin Tribe.

The few warriors fought valiantly to repel the Orcs. Even those who couldn't fight still took up arms to protect those whom they held sacred.

Although the Orcs were defeated in the end, they still managed to kill nearly a third of the members of their tribe.

It was truly a tragedy. Some of the children had even lost their parents in a skirmish that lasted less than half an hour.

Alex watched as the Catkins buried their dead and held a short funeral for them.

However, since they were in a dangerous territory, they had no choice but to quickly head to the nearest town for safety.

"The tribe used to be bigger, but as they traveled across the land, they met similar dangers along the way," Leo said sadly. "With every battle, many lives were lost, and with each heartbreak, hope started to disappear from everyone's hearts."

Back then, the leader of the group decided that someone needed to stand at the front lines to show everyone that hope was still not lost.

The leader of the group wasn't anyone special.

No. He was just an average Catkin without any talents.

He wasn't good with the sword or any other type of weapon. Nor was he good with magic.

The people only elected him as the leader because no one else wanted to lead them.

And so, he carried this burden and decided that even someone as untalented as him could do something for the sake of his people.

The scenery changed, and the old man and the young man both appeared inside of a smithy.

"I'm not here for a weapon. I'm here for a shield. The strongest and sturdiest shield you can give me."

"The strongest shield?" the Dwarf laughed. "I make weapons, not shields. But... why not? I need a break anyway. I've been racking my brain trying to make the strongest weapon in history, but I'm stuck."

The old Catkin smiled faintly as he looked at the arrogant Dwarf.

"Little did the leader of the tribe know that the Dwarf he had commissioned to make the strongest and sturdiest shield would one day become a legendary blacksmith. The Dwarf's name was Marcus and, oh boy, he sure was one very annoying prick."

Although Leo sounded like he was insulting the Dwarf, there was a hint of respect, recognition, and gratefulness in his voice.

The scene changed once again, and Alex saw Marcus adding some runes on a round gray shield that was at least a foot bigger than Svalinn.

He then placed a claw-like design at the center of the shield.

When that was done, he put the finishing touch by adding more runes under the claw.

Everguard.

The last runes that Marcus had engraved onto the shield was its name.

Although this was the first time he was crafting a shield, he did so to the best of his abilities at that time.

He sincerely wished that the shield would be able to protect its wielder, as well as those whom its owner wished to protect.

“Everguard was a fine shield,” the old Catkin said. “It might not have been as strong as the legendary shields crafted by the elusive blacksmiths in the continent, but it was made with great passion that wouldn’t lose to any of those masters.”

The scene changed once more, and Alex found himself in a battlefield.

There, the leader of the tribe stood in front of everyone with Everguard, hoping that it would allow him to protect his people.

In front of him was a giant Troll, wielding an entire tree as a weapon.

“A shield is meant to protect,” the Old Catkin went on. “But a shield is just a shield. The one wielding it should also have the strength to endure the aftershock of the blows he would receive from his enemies. Unfortunately, a shield and a heart filled with determination weren’t enough to overcome the disparity in strength.”

With a single blow from a Troll holding a wooden club, the Catkin was sent flying, and tragedy struck once more.

That day, he didn’t just lose that fight.

He also lost someone very dear to him, and it almost broke his heart completely.

Chapter 55: I Am No Hero [Part 2]

Chaos ensued as all the remaining warriors in the tribe fought tooth and nail with the Troll to protect everyone else.

Among them was a lady who wielded a spear. After seeing the Troll send her husband flying with a single blow, she immediately blocked the path of the culprit.

“Her name is Melissa,” said the old Catkin with tenderness. “She’s the bravest and kindest woman I’ve ever known in my life. Someone I greatly treasured and wished to protect.”

The two watched as a dozen Catkins surrounded the Troll and attacked it repeatedly from its blind spot.

But the regeneration ability of a Troll was simply too fast. Even with a dozen warriors teaming up to inflict numerous injuries, it still held its ground.

When Melissa saw an opportunity to deliver a deadly blow to the monster, she didn’t hesitate to lunge with her weapon, ready to strike.

Unfortunately, the Troll had deliberately set up this trap by pretending to take a defensive stance from its attackers.

The moment Melissa entered its attack range, it immediately unleashed a powerful blow against her, sending her flying through the air.

“Noooooooooooo!” the leader of the tribe shouted as he propped himself up from the ground, abandoning his heavy shield and running to where his beloved lay, dying.

“Melissa, don’t leave me,” the leader of the Catkin cried as he begged his wife, whose clothes were dyed with her own blood.

He made her drink some healing potions, but these potions wouldn’t be enough to save someone who had been fatally wounded.

At most, it would only delay the inevitable, giving her enough time to say her final words.

“I’m sorry... Leo,” Melissa apologised as tears streamed down her eyes. “Please protect and raise our kids well.”

"N-no... you can't do this, Melissa," Leo insisted. "Kael and Seris still need you. Don't leave us. Please, I beg of you. Don't leave us!"

"My... love... my two darlings..." Melissa said with sadness and unwillingness. "I'm sorry..."

With that, the light in her eyes faded. Her eyes remained open, looking at the heavens as if asking them why she must leave behind the people that she loved.

The scene changed once more. This time, it showed Leo and two children, who Alex assumed were between four to six years old.

They stood in front of a grave. The two kids were crying as they called out for their mother.

"Life is truly precious," the old Leo said to Alex. "We only realize how precious it is when those we love part from us forever. Her death devastated me. If not for the fact that I had two kids to take care of, I would have also followed her to the afterlife so both of us could be together."

The elderly Catkin paused as he looked at the two crying children, who had lost their mother at a very young age.

"I am no Hero. I was merely someone who wished to live a peaceful and happy life with my family," Leo stated. "I just wanted to find a place we could call home, so we would no longer have to travel and face the dangers of the world with each passing day."

The scene once again changed, but the location remained the same.

It was night, and the world was lit only by the full moon and the stars.

Leo knelt in front of the grave of his wife, with Everguard firmly planted on the ground before him.

"I've never prayed for mercy or salvation," Leo went on. "But on that night, I prayed desperately for the Gods to give me the strength to protect those who couldn't protect themselves."

“I was willing to do anything, even form a contract with the Devil in exchange for my soul if it meant that my son and daughter would be able to live in peace.”

“I begged, prayed, and begged some more to whatever deity, demon, or entity would hear my call. And just as I was about to succumb to despair, they came to me.”

A pair who ruled over the domain of true love as well as steadfast bonds.

The Lovers stood where souls embarked, not to offer comfort but to bind fate.

And to the one who knelt in grief yet vowed to protect, they spoke.

“You, who love through sorrow, who swear in the shadow of pain—you are the flame that does not falter. You knelt in mourning, and still, you swore to shield. That is love made immortal.”

The world faded, and Leo found himself kneeling in a place beyond time, a quiet meadow under a sky of stars that did not move.

A soft wind carried the scent of something long forgotten—lavender, ash, and hope.

Alex watched as The Lovers gently reached out to touch the side of Leo’s face.

“We are not here to mend what was broken.”

“We are here because even in your grief, you reached outward.”

“Love, when forged into an oath, does not die. It becomes a shield.”

Faint light from the heavens descended upon Leo, bathing him in golden light.

“You weep for what is gone. But what you protect now is what gives your grief meaning.”

“Rise, not in anger. Rise, not in vengeance. Rise... because love still lives within you. And because someone must stand when no one else will.”

The Lovers then spoke in unison as they gave Leo their blessing.

“Rise, Oathkeeper. Your vow has been heard, and we will bind you to it.”

Alex couldn't help but get emotional when he saw this scene.

He had seen something similar in ELO, and that was when he gained the Hidden Profession of Shield Savant.

Just like Leo, he obtained this power through one of the Deities in the game.

The only one he had met after playing the game since its public release.

‘So, the Oathkeeper isn't just a Hidden Job Class,’ Alex realised. ‘It's a profession bestowed upon by The Lovers. It's a Hidden Prestige Class!’

However, Alex had never heard of anyone acquiring the Oathkeeper Job Class in the game.

No one in top 200 or in any other Rankings of ELO had the profession Oathkeeper.

In the game, there were NPCs who had unique Job Classes that no one else possessed.

Alex had assumed that the Oathkeeper was one of them.

But now, he understood its origin and how Leo became the very first and probably the last Oathkeeper to grace the world of Arcana.

“The Oath of an Oathkeeper is binding,” Leo said to Alex. “It is not an oath that should be done carelessly, for The Lovers would not allow their blessing to be tainted by greed, corruption, and lust for power.”

“Unlike me, I know you are only after a profession that might allow you to overcome the danger that haunts the Etherion Domain at this moment. But I am not here to judge you. All I want to know is the reason why you fight. I want to know who you want to protect.”

Alex held the gaze of the Oathkeeper, who was looking at him with a calm expression on his face.

He understood then and there that he couldn't treat this matter carelessly, for the person in front of him had made an oath that he kept until his dying breath.

To take that lightly was to tarnish Leo's will, and Alex understood that The Lovers would also pay close attention to him if he chose to inherit one of their legacies that had been buried in the pages of history.

Chapter 56: Rise Of The Oathkeeper [Part 1]

Seeing Alex unable to answer his question, Leo smiled faintly.

“Think about it,” Leo said. “But do not think for long. A day has already passed, and you are left with only one more day to decide about your choice.”

The old Catkin then raised a finger.

“The first choice is to stay here where it is safe and wait until the domain expels you after ten days.” The Catkin then raised another finger. “The second choice is to return to the first floor and face that monster alongside the members of the Clawford Tribe.

“There is also a third choice, but that choice is yours to make. I do not have the power nor intention to tell you otherwise.

"I am only a Will left behind by my original body before I passed away. My purpose is to wait until my successor appears before I, too, vanish, from the face of this world."

The old Catkin then waved his hand, and the world around them started to crack.

"It's time to return to reality, Alex," he said. "You can't sleep forever because you have promises to keep."

With a snap of Leo's fingers, Alex found himself being pulled back by an invisible force.

When he regained his bearings, he found himself floating in what seemed to be a pool of water, with Dim Dim perched on his chest and nibbling on some beef jerky.

"Dim Dim!" Dim Dim went to hug Alex's neck as soon as it noticed that the young man was finally conscious again.

"Did I make you worry, Dim Dim?" Alex asked as he lightly patted the Dim Sum God. "I'm sorry, and thank you for taking care of me while I was unconscious. But where are we?"

"Dim Dim."

"We're back in the temple? But how? Did you carry me?"

"Dim Dim."

"The guardian golems did? But how? Why did they carry me?"

"Dim Dim."

"As expected. Dim Dim is really capable."

“Ahem!”

After hearing Dim Dim’s explanation, Alex finally understood what happened.

Because the little one couldn’t carry him back, it had hurried back to the Temple to ask for help.

It then convinced the guardian golems to come and bring him back to the temple. When they arrived at where Alex collapsed, they realized a group of ash hounds had found him first.

Fortunately, the golems immediately treated the monsters as a threat and attacked them from a distance, saving Alex from being mauled to death.

After taking him to the temple, the golems placed him in the temple’s inner pool, which had healing, restorative, and regeneration properties.

Unfortunately, the golem had placed Alex in the pool while he was still clothed, so his clothes were now soaking wet.

But that was the last of his worries.

He remembered Leo’s warning and immediately thought about the seal on the first floor that would only last for one more day.

Still, there was some good news.

Alex felt refreshed. Soaking in the pool for a couple of hours had effectively cured his injuries. It was as if he had woken up from a good night’s sleep.

The young man then understood that time was of the essence, so he left the pool and took off his wet clothes.

He had bought a lot of clothes, so it wasn't a problem.

When he was done changing, Alex and Dim Dim went back to the Appraisal Orb, where the Job Change would be done.

Without any hesitation, the young man placed his hand on top of the orb and checked the Job Classes available to him.

And just as he had expected, the Oathkeeper Job Class was now available, and all he needed was to make an Oath to complete the process.

Taking a deep breath, he no longer hesitated and chose the Oathkeeper profession.

Immediately, Alex found himself kneeling in the same place where Leo had been blessed by The Lovers.

A quiet meadow under a sky of stars that did not move.

The soft wind that blew on his body carried the scent of lavender, ash, and hope.

Suddenly, an angelic voice that seemed to belong to a man reached his ears.

"The stars wheel ever onward, and the fate of men is written in their turning. I shall divine the road that lies ahead. Answer me true."

A blue window screen appeared in front of the young man, and a series of questions and answers appeared before him.

"A stranger arrives, injured and asking for aid. Though tending to them may endanger your kin, would you offer shelter?"

Yes. To turn them away would be inhuman.

I would offer aid, but keep them at arm's length.

No. My family comes first.

"I would offer aid, but keep them at arm's length," Alex answered.

He wasn't a Saint, but helping people was a very human thing to do. However, for the sake of safety, he would not trust them completely.

The angelic voice spoke once more and asked him another question.

"A ruler you serve orders you to carry out a cruel act. Do you obey?"

No. I would rather die than stain my soul.

I obey, but question my place in their service.

Yes. The burden of command is not mine to judge.

"No. I would rather die than stain my soul," Alex replied.

He believed he was capable of doing cruel things, but he also firmly believed that there should be a limit to everything.

The angelic voice didn't ridicule or praise his answer. It simply asked him another question.

"You are offered power in exchange for a vow—one that may force you to betray your own ideals. What do you do?"

Refuse. No power is worth the price of my soul.

Accept. I will find a way to twist it toward good.

Accept. Power is the only path to change.

“I will refuse that power,” Alex answered. “I don’t need a power that will force me to betray my ideals.”

Just like the previous times, the angel simply listened to his answer before asking another question.

“Love and duty come into conflict. One must be abandoned. Which do you choose?”

Love. Without it, what am I fighting for?

Duty. My path must serve the greater good.

Neither. I will defy fate and choose both.

“Neither, I will defy fate and choose both,” Alex answered firmly.

The angel once again spoke, and this time, there was a finality to his tone.

“This is my last question, answer only with the truth.”

“In a time of war, truth becomes a weapon. Do you speak it or bury it for the sake of peace?”

I speak it. Truth is sacred.

I bury it. Peace must be preserved.

I weigh the moment. Sometimes silence saves more lives.

"I weigh the moment. Sometimes, silence saves more lives," Alex replied.

Suddenly, the sound of pealing bells echoed in the surroundings.

< Final Alignment: Chaotic Good (with Neutral Leanings) >

You're someone who follows their heart and personal code even when it clashes with authority or conventional morality.

You're not reckless. You weigh decisions carefully (neutral influence), but when it comes down to it, you'll defy fate, protect what matters, and stand for what you believe is right, even if the world stands against you.

You're the type to become an Oathkeeper by choice, not by destiny, and you'll do it, knowing full well the cost.

< Your Status Page is updated to include your Alignment. >

< Since you have chosen to become an Oathkeeper without any oaths to pledge, I will generate some Oaths for you to choose from. Make sure to choose wisely, for once chosen, you will be bound by this Oath for life. >

Alex felt relieved because this was truly his problem.

He didn't know what kind of Oath to make, so having some options to choose from would give him a better idea on what kind of oath he wanted to fulfill.

Rows upon rows of text appeared before him, and the first oath at the very top of it made the young man scratch his head.

< Oath to Protect the Clawford Tribe >

“The Oathkeeper was made to protect the Clawford Tribe. If you chose this Oath, you would be duty-bound to protect them when they face a danger that they alone cannot overcome.”

Choosing this Oath will give you the following benefits.

- The Clawford Tribe will treat you as their Guardian and support you in any way possible.
- You will gain +40 Stats to Strength, Intelligence, Agility, Dexterity, and Constitution.
- When defending any member of the Clawford Tribe, your defense will increase by 500%
- You will automatically learn the skills, Shield Throw, Shield Bash, and Shield Charge.
- You will be rewarded with three High Grade Magic Crystals, which will unlock your Magic Stat.
- The Patriarch of the Hartwell Clan will allow you to become the fiancé of his granddaughter.

Note: Wealth, influence, and a beautiful wife. What more can you ask for?

P.S. This is not a bribe, but this offer isn't bad, no?

It was very obvious that the option to choose an Oath to protect the Clawford Tribe was prioritized.

Not only did it give a whopping +40 to all stats, it also offered skills and Magic Crystals, as well as Lavinia, as a complete package.

Alex would be lying if he said that he wasn't tempted, especially since Lavinia was beautiful and was also his Master's sister.

Becoming the future Heaven Sword's brother-in-law wasn't a bad thing.

But Alex knew in his heart that this vow wasn't the one he wanted.

As such, he checked the other Oaths because he believed that the one he wanted would be somewhere in the list of choices that was presented to him.

Chapter 57: Rise Of The Oathkeeper [Part 2]

"I see. So this kind of Oath is also possible," Alex muttered when he saw the other Oaths meant for the Deities of the world of Arcana.

< The Fool's Oath >

"With the Fool's leap, our journey starts. A Wanderer with an open heart."

Choosing this Oath will give you the following benefits.

— Those who receive the blessings of The Fool will treat you as a sworn friend and will help you in any way possible.

- The Church of The Fool will become your steadfast supporters.
- You will gain +20 Stats to Strength, Intelligence, Agility, Dexterity, and Constitution.
- When defending anyone related to The Fool, your defense will increase by 300%
- You will automatically learn the skills, Leap of Faith, Fool's Protection, and Fool's Rhythm.
- You will be rewarded with two High-Grade Magic Crystals, unlocking your Magic Stat.

P.S. Choosing this Oath might make you addicted to parkour, for the Leap of Faith allows you to jump from any height, and land perfectly unharmed on the ground.

Alex then glanced at the next Oath, which pretty much followed the same template as The Fool's.

< The Magician's Oath >

"The Magician's will, so strong and true, shapes the world with a wand's swift cue."

Choosing this Oath will give you the following benefits.

- Those who receive the blessings of The Magician will treat you as a sworn friend and will help you in any way possible.
- The Tower of Magic will become your ally and allow you access to its vast collection of magical spells inside its Arcane Library.

- You will gain +20 Stats to Strength, Intelligence, Agility, Dexterity, and Constitution.
- When defending anyone related to The Magician, your defense will increase by 300%
- You will automatically learn the skills, Enchant Element, Elemental Shield, and Arcane Defense.
- You will be rewarded with four Middle-Grade Crystals and three High-Grade Magic Crystals, unlocking your Magic Stat.

Note: You will unlock the route of a certain Arch Wizard who can only cast Explosion Spells.

The corner of Alex's lips twitched. Arch Wizard who can only cast Explosion Spells? That sounded veeeeeeeery familiar.

Upon checking the list, he noticed that all the Deities of the Major Arcana offered similar benefits with each other.

Since he didn't want to be tied down to a single faction, the young man scanned the list and saw a particular Oath that made him pause.

< Oath of the Heart – (Sacred Path) >

"I follow no crown nor creed. I protect because my heart tells me so."

Choosing this Oath will give you the following benefits.

- The Oath of the heart will give you the strength to protect those whom you wish to protect.
- You will gain +10 Stats to Strength, Intelligence, Agility, Dexterity, and Constitution.
- You will gain +20 to Luck.
- When defending anyone whom you genuinely wish to protect, defense will increase by 200%
- You will automatically learn the skills, Oathkeeper's Duty, Shield [EX], and Shield Bash
- You will be rewarded with one High-Grade Magic Crystal, unlocking your Magic Stat.
- You will learn Shield-related skills much faster.

Note: "Tell me, Oathkeeper... How long will you shield others before your own heart cracks beneath the weight? How long will it take before you break this Oath? Tell me, future Oathbreaker, is choosing this profession worth it?"

< Oathkeeper's Duty >

Effect: If a nearby ally is about to die from a lethal blow, you may intercept the damage by instantly teleporting to their side.

- This skill can be used once every hour.
- You will not die from this attack, but your health will be reduced to 1 HP.

— When you block using Oathkeeper's Duty, the attacker would be Stunned for three seconds regardless of Stun Immunity.

< Shield [EX] >

— Summon a magical shield that costs 5 Mana Points.

— This Skill can allow you to unlock other types of shield-related skills as long as the necessary conditions are met.

—

< Shield Bash >

— This Skill costs 5 Stamina Points.

— Deal damage equal to the defense of your shield.

— Has a 20% chance to inflict Stun upon the target for three seconds.

— If you use Shield Bash and hit the opponent's head, the chance of inflicting Stun on the target increases to 30%.

— Using Shield Bash on a hostile creature a hundred times will unlock the skill Shield Charge.

—

< Shield Charge >

— This skill costs 10 Stamina Points.

— Charge into a straight line, increasing movement speed by 300%

— Damage dealt is equivalent to Shield Defense + Agility Stat + Strength Stat

— has a 20% chance to inflict Stun upon the target for three seconds.

— If you use Shield Bash and hit the opponent's head, the chance of Stunning the target increases to 30%.

— —

Upon reading the note under the information of the Oath of the Heart, Alex remained silent.

When he had still been a Shield Savant, people praised him for his ability to tank the attack of Boss Monsters, keeping those at the rear safe. However, at the end of every battle, everyone would tell him, "It's the role that you play, so you can't complain about it."

He understood it was indeed his role to tank hits while the other members dealt damage to the enemy.

It was because they had different roles to play that made ELO a wonderful and immersive adventure.

But at the end of the day, Alex understood.

Not everyone was grateful to be protected.

For them, it was his duty to protect.

It was his job, his profession, and the role of his existence.

But when he had still been on Earth, he hadn't carried any shields to protect himself from the harshness of reality.

During the darkest moments in his life,

When he had been the one who needed protecting,

When he had been the one who needed saving,

Had there been anyone to protect him?

Had there been anyone who protected his heart?

The image of a young lady, who was about the same age as him, flashed inside Alex's head.

"Dim Dim?" Sensing Alex's sadness, Dim Dim reached out to touch the young man's cheek.

"I just thought about some stuff from the past, Dim Dim," Alex replied. "I'll be fine."

Despite the sadness and loneliness he felt, he still remembered that hand that was smaller than his own.

He remembered her, who shone like a star in the darkness.

She was none other than...

"Death Kiss," Alex muttered, remembering his Guildmaster, who had reached out her hand when he had needed it the most.

"We help not because we're asked, but because we know it's the right thing to do," the young lady, whom Alex admired, had told him in the past. "Just like how we help an old lady cross the street. We do it not because she asked us to help her, but because we know that it's what makes us human."

"But not everyone deserves to be helped," Alex commented. "You can't help those who don't want to help themselves."

"You're right," the young lady replied. "But unless you make the first move, you'll never know if that person wants to be helped or not."

"Just like how some authors touch the lives of their readers, making them wish that they could also touch the lives of others in the same way. Do you know? Some people started writing because they were inspired by the stories that they had read."

"Are you one of them?" Alex asked.

"No," the young lady replied. "But, my favorite author, Ely, was the same. He started writing because a story touched him in ways that made him wish that he could do the same for others."

As that memory faded, Alex took a deep breath and made a decision.

"I don't know if I'll break my Oath in the future or not," Alex said softly as he raised his hand to choose the Oath he wished to take. "I'll just cross that bridge when I get there. Besides, an Oathbreaker sounds cool as well."

Dim Dim giggled and told Alex that he shouldn't worry too much. Regardless of what happened in the future, the Dim Sum God would accompany the young man in the world of Arcana, where countless possibilities and endings existed.

Chapter 58: Rise Of The Oathkeeper [Part 3]

"Are you sure this is the Oath you wished to take?" the angelic voice asked, giving Alex one last chance to change his mind.

"After a process of elimination, I have deemed that this oath will not limit my growth and the paths I wish to take in life," Alex replied.

"Even if it means that you might be betrayed by the people you have vowed to protect?" the angelic voice asked.

"I'm not a martyr or a doormat," Alex said simply. "Just because I take hits doesn't mean I can't hit others back. If they betray me, then I'll just beat the crap out of them and feed them to fishes."

The angelic voice went silent for a moment, as if processing everything it had just heard.

It had met many people in the past, and many of them had the same mindset as Alex.

However, each individual was still unique in their own way, which was the reason why it didn't know if it should be amused, or be concerned about the young man's answers.

"...Feeding them to fishes is not an officially sanctioned part in the Oath," it finally said, but the voice now sounded slightly less majestic and slightly more confused.

"Well, good thing I'm a freelancer." Alex shrugged. "No employer, no HR."

A glowing figure began to descend from the heavens.

It was a handsome youth with long red hair, and there was a mischievous spark in his eyes as he looked at Alex.

But as if being observed by a higher power, the handsome young man's expression unnaturally switched to a serious one, and he placed his hands on his hips.

"You stand here as the second Oathkeeper who will make their mark on the world," he stated. "Do you, knowing the weight and consequence, truly intend to swear the Oath of the Heart?"

Alex crossed his arms. "Yeah. Big heart, stronger abs. Let's get on with it."

"The path is one of selflessness, service, and sacrifice—"

"That sounds like my last group defense in college."

"There will be pain."

"Did you see my fight with the crimson fire salamander?"

The angel hesitated again, then consulted what looked suspiciously like a celestial clipboard made of light.

"...And you're aware that, should you break the Oath, you will fall from grace and become an Oathbreaker—"

"Edgy antihero mode unlocked, got it."

"There will be brooding."

"I brood recreationally."

"There may be... eye shadow."

Alex paused for a few seconds before giving a thoughtful nod. "Noice."

The angel sighed. "Very well. Kneel, and—wait, are you eating?"

"Bro, I haven't eaten for nearly a day," Alex answered as he finished the last bite of Dim Dim's roasted pork bun.

The angel coughed lightly and took out a sword.

Alex understood that the time for jokes was over, so he knelt like a knight about to be given a responsibility he must carry out for the rest of his life.

“You come under The Lovers’ gaze, not for honor, not for recognition, but to bind yourself to something greater than pride. Are you prepared to give your heart freely, knowing it may break?”

“I am prepared.”

“Will you protect those whom you have vowed to protect, even when the world turns its back on them?”

“I will.”

“Will you stand against cruelty, even if it means you will stand alone?”

“I will stand even if I’m alone.”

“Do you vow to listen to the cry of the heart, even when it leads you away from comfort, power, or safety?”

“I do.”

“Will you raise your shield for the sake of others without expecting anything in return?”

“I will raise it without fail,” Alex replied with conviction.

“Should those you protect turn on you...

Should your name be cast aside, your efforts forgotten...

Will you remain true to the Oath, not out of obligation, but because it is who you are?"

"For as long as I can keep it, I will stay true to my Oath," Alex answered.

"And in your final hour, when your shield cracks and your breath is thin,

Will you still choose to protect, even if no one sees it but the stars?"

"Even then, I swear to it," Alex stated.

From the sky, a shield slowly descended.

It was a round gray shield, looking old and battered yet still pulsing with the power to fight.

A claw emblem was embedded at its center, making Alex's eyes widen in shock.

The shield landed in the hands of Leo, who had now appeared to complete the ceremony of passing his legacy on.

"Rise, Oathkeeper," Leo said as he handed the shield to the young man. "The world will not always know your name. But it will feel your presence, and that shall be enough."

"It is my honor to receive this shield from you, Sir Leo," Alex replied, doing his best to keep his voice from cracking due to the myriad of emotions he was feeling at the moment.

< You have received Everguard >

< Everguard recognizes you as its new master >

< Everguard >

“You hold it not because you are unafraid but because someone has to be brave.”

Item Grade: Super Rare

Stats: +50 Defense

Active Skills: Taunt [EX]

Passive Skills: Last Bastion, Knock Back Immunity, Guts, Charm Immunity, Petrification Immunity.

< Taunt [EX] >

— Costs 5 Stamina.

— Range: 30 Meters.

— Force any creature to attack you once.

— As long as you shout at a creature to provoke it into attacking you, Taunt [EX] will automatically activate.

< Last Bastion >

— When the wielder of this shield enters a critical state or has received very serious injuries, a dome of light will wrap around them for twenty seconds, reducing all incoming damage by 95%.

< Knockback Immunity >

— While holding this shield, the wielder cannot be pushed back by anything, but they will not be immune to damage received.

< Guts >

— Attacks that can instantly kill you will not kill you. Instead, it will leave you with 1 Health Point remaining.

< Charm Immunity >

— The wielder of Everguard is immune to the Charm Skill.

— — — — —
< Petrification Immunity >

— The wielder of Everguard is immune to Petrification.

— — — — —
As Alex held the faded, battle-worn shield in his hand, he could tell that Everguard only had one last battle left in it.

Cracks could already be seen in several places on the shield, and yet, Alex understood that it wouldn't break until it fulfilled its last vow to protect the Clawford Tribe.

Alex raised his head to face Leo, who was looking at him with a faint smile on his face.

"Please, protect them one more time in my stead," the Catkin said.

"I will do my best," Alex promised. "But my best may not be enough."

The old Catkin nodded in understanding. "I know. That's why I will use the last strength in this Will of mine to help you as well."

With that, Leo turned into particles of light that flew off.

When Alex and Dim Dim understood what the old Catkin had planned to do, the young man decided to make a very shameless request.

Leo laughed heartily and agreed to the young man's request.

Since the young man was willing to risk his life for the Clawford Tribe, he decided to lend him his strength and allow him to have a higher chance of fulfilling his first Oath as the Oathkeeper.

Chapter 59: Time To Learn Magic!

Alex held one of the rewards he received after becoming an Oathkeeper.

It was none other than a High-Grade Magic Crystal, which would unlock his magic stat.

One of the reasons he wanted to go to Briarwood Village was to meet Charles. But another reason was that he also wished to gain the Rare Items hidden in that location.

Truth be told, there was a Hidden Dungeon in Briarwood Village that would appear a month from now.

Alex wanted to explore that dungeon so he could defeat the Boss Monster there and access a treasure chest that contained two Middle-Grade Magic Crystals that would help him unlock his Magic Stat.

But, to his luck, he had unexpectedly acquired a High-Grade Crystal. This meant he could unlock his Magic Stat earlier.

In the past, those nobles without any Magic Affinities had thought that they could simply absorb Magic Crystals to compensate for their defect. Unfortunately, there was a limit to the number of Magic Crystals that one could absorb before they stopped working for them.

This meant they could never surpass those born with Magic Affinity, whose magic and mana could reach over a thousand.

Five Low-Grade Magic Crystals, four Middle-Grade crystals, three High-Grade crystals, two Legendary Magic Crystals.

Those were the maximum number of Magic Crystals a person not innately blessed with Magic Affinity could absorb in their lifetime.

The magic points people could obtain from absorbing a Magic Crystal weren't fixed.

For example, a low-grade Magic Crystal could raise a person's Magic Stat anywhere from 1 to 5 points.

In short, luck was involved when it came to things that didn't have a fixed value.

After becoming an Oathkeeper, Alex gained 20 points in Luck, which was something unavailable in the other Oaths that had been presented to him.

A High-Grade Magic Crystal could give him anywhere between 30 to 60 Magic Points, which would allow him to use the skills he gained after becoming an Oathkeeper.

But it didn't end there.

Now that he could use Magic, he would gain one additional point in Magic for every three points in Intelligence.

This wasn't a bad thing, but for those born with magic affinity, every point in Intelligence gave them two points in Magic.

That was the major difference between the magically gifted and those who only forced themselves to use magic.

However, Alex wasn't someone who worried about such trivial matters.

The ability to use Shield [EX] with Magic points was something Alex had been looking forward to ever since he first received the Super Rare Skill Book as a reward for completing his tutorial quest. Back then, the skill he had wanted most was none other than Shield [EX].

Yes. The skill that he planned to get using the book was a skill he would be given to him as a freebie after he chose his Job Class.

'Fortunately, I didn't use the skill book right away back then. I mean, I still couldn't use Magic that time,' Alex thought as he looked at the High-Grade Magic Crystal in his hand.

Now that he could get another [EX] skill from the skill book, Alex felt a little more confident that he would get a higher chance of defeating the mutant Boss Monster.

'Times like this, I wish I had the wallpaper of Astrea with me,' Alex thought.

Gacha game players usually performed rituals to raise their chances of getting a good roll.

It might sound silly, but some people really believed these rituals were effective, and Alex wasn't an exception.

There was a custom in ELO to pray to Astrea's poster before opening a treasure chest so they could get rare items.

Who was Astrea?

A tomboyish noble character who bullied the weak and feared the strong.

She was a very interesting NPC and one of the top five beauties in the game. Unsurprisingly, a lot of players wished to enter her romance route.

Astrea's profession was a Minstrel. She could sing, dance, and was very good at poetry.

But that wasn't the reason why people prayed to her whenever they opened treasure chests.

The main reason was that she was the "luckiest" character in the game.

She could take a stroll, get lost, and find super rare equipment while running away from monsters.

That was how lucky she was.

There were even players who founded the Church of Astrea, believing they would be lucky if they worshipped her as a Goddess.

And what many people didn't know was that Alex had been one of the founding members of the Church of Astrea.

Since he had no poster of the young lady, he placed the Magic Crystal on the altar, clapped his hands twice, and took a deep bow before picking up the Magic Crystal again.

"Okay, ritual complete," Alex muttered. "Time to learn magic!"

Without any hesitation, he placed the High-Grade Magic Crystal on his chest.

A blue window screen then appeared, asking the young man a question.

< Do you wish to absorb the High-Grade Magic Crystal? >

< Yes / No >

Obviously, Alex chose yes.

A second later, the Magic Crystal merged with his body.

Alex felt a refreshing breeze over him, filling him with power.

< Magic Crystal successfully absorbed. >

< You gained 50 Magic Points. >

< Your Magic Stat has been successfully unlocked! >

< Intelligence Stat will now be linked to your Magic Stat! >

< Adding additional points to Magic through conversion has been completed! >

The young man did a fist pump because getting 50 points for Magic from a High-Grade Magic Crystal wasn't that bad.

He then opened his Status Page to take a look at his updated stats with a wide smile on his face.

— —

Alex Stratos

Age: 17

Alignment: Chaotic Good

Mana: 59/59

Job Class: Oathkeeper

Strength – 35

Intelligence – 27

Dexterity – 20

Agility – 58

Constitution – 58

Stamina – 58

Magic – 59

Luck – 24

Available Stat Points: 0

AP: 240

Active Skills: Oathkeeper's Duty, Shield [EX], Shield Bash, Shield Charge (requirement not met.)

Passive Skills: Improved Stone Throw, Head Shot.

[Difficulty Level: Hell Mode]

— —

“Shield!” Alex chanted, and a magical round shield hovered in front of him.

The magical shield only had twenty defense.

But the good thing was that it could block both physical and magical attacks.

Even so, a single shot from the Rank 2 fire salamander could destroy it, but Alex didn't care.

This was the first time he had ever used magic, and seeing the magical round shield materialize in front of him filled him with joy.

Being able to cast magic was one of his childhood dreams.

Of course, many people also wished to use magic, which was why some players chose magic-related Job Classes in ELO. That way, they could cast magic, even if it was only in the game.

'So, this is what it feels like to become a Ranker,' Alex thought as he summoned two more magical shields in front of him. 'With Shield [EX], I can experiment with different kinds of Shield Skills, and I can learn them faster.'

He then thought about the super rare skill book in his possession and wondered if he should use it now.

After pondering for a while, he decided to put that plan on hold because he might need a different kind of skill to overcome threats like the mutant spider in the future.

Alex had now broken over the threshold, surpassing the 151 Stat Point requirement to become a Ranker, which meant he was now stronger than a normal human.

He was now a Rank 1 Oathkeeper, proving that he had grown a lot during his short time inside the Etherion Domain.

The young man then sprinted, heading toward the exit of the temple.

He had invested the majority of his stat points in Agility, and now, he wanted to test just how fast he was.

'I think I increased my max speed by fifty percent,' Alex thought after reaching his destination. 'If I were back on Earth, I could definitely win that gold medal in the Olympics.'

It was not only his speed that increased.

Alex's reaction time had also increased by fifty percent, allowing him to react faster when fighting against monsters.

"Dim Dim!"

"No, we're not playing tag, Dim Dim. I just wanted to test something out."

"Dim?"

"Yes. We'll play tag after we defeat the mutant Boss Monster, okay?"

"Dim!"

"It's a deal!"

After the two agreed to play when all the threats had been eliminated, Alex headed out of the temple.

"Is it time?" Leo, who had been waiting for the young man, asked.

"Yes, Sir Leo," Alex replied. "Let's go."

The original Oathkeeper nodded and followed the young man, who wished to have a rematch with the crimson fire salamander that had beaten him up so badly in the past.

Chapter 60: I Came Here For A Revenge Match

The crimson fire salamander raised its head from its slumber after it detected a familiar presence.

With a sword and a round gray shield in his hands, the young man stood several meters away from it.

The two stared at each other for nearly half a minute, but there was a hint of disdain in the monster's gaze.

"I came here for a revenge match," Alex declared, pointing his sword at the monster that was eyeing him with contempt. "Do you dare to fight me one-on-one?"

The crimson fire salamander's reply was none other than a barrage of Fire Bullets, each of which was the size of a volleyball.

Alex smirked as he evaded the attack, testing his speed and reaction time.

'Not bad,' he thought as the Fire Bullets flew past him. 'I can do this.'

Gaining confidence from that exchange, the young man charged at the crimson fire salamander, dodging the attacks he could and tanking what he couldn't.

The two fire salamanders that served as the Mini Boss' bodyguards also attacked Alex.

But before they could unleash a barrage of flames at their target, two rocks the size of the crimson fire salamander's fire bullets hit their bodies, sending them skidding off the ground.

This sudden turn of events surprised the larger fire salamander, forcing it to stop attacking Alex and look at his helper instead.

"Dim Dim!"

The Dim Sum God raised its little hand as if telling the two bodyguards to stop interfering with Alex's revenge match.

Dim Dim was currently perched on the head of a guardian golem, whose role was to deal with the two normal fire salamanders so Alex could fight the Mini Boss without worries.

“What are you looking at?”

Alex’s voice snapped the Mini Boss from its daze, and it turned to look at him once more.

But what it saw wasn’t the young man but the surface of an old, cracked shield only a meter away from its face.

“Shield Bash!”

Alex slammed Everguard against the crimson fire salamander’s head, making it screech in pain.

The Stun effect of Shield Bash activated, rendering the monster unable to react for Alex’s follow-up attack.

Without any hesitation, he used the sword in his right hand to stab one of the monster’s eyes, drawing blood.

Another scream reverberated through the surroundings as the crimson fire salamander twisted its body to use its tail to attack Alex.

With his feet firmly planted on the ground, the young man simply raised his shield and blocked the attack.

Alex’s body shuddered from the impact. However, thanks to Everguard’s skill, Knockback Immunity, he wasn’t pushed back by the monster’s desperate attack.

“Shield Bash!”

Alex forced himself to charge forward and bashed the head of the monster with his shield once more. Unfortunately, Stun didn't activate this time, and the monster retaliated with a swipe of its claws.

Although the crimson fire salamander was stronger than a normal salamander, its attack patterns were the same.

Alex deftly dodged the incoming strike before swinging his sword to attack the monster's face.

The blade cut through its scales, and a streak of blood dripped down its cheeks like tears. Alex had destroyed one of its eyes and left a shallow wound on the Mini Boss' right cheek, angering it.

Since he had successfully blinded the monster's right eye, Alex focused his attacks on the monster's right side, making full use of its blind spot.

The two other fire salamanders could no longer stand by and watch their leader suffer, so they didn't hesitate to lunge in the young man's direction.

However, two boulders smashed into their bodies, as if already expecting their move. They cried out in pain as they rolled several meters away from the force of the impact.

Alex gave the two bodyguards a sidelong glance before resuming his attacks on the Mini Boss, which was desperately using its claws, tails, and entire body to fight him.

The sound of dull clanging could be heard as Alex used Everguard to block the blows he couldn't dodge.

Clearly, the Mini Boss and the young man were locked in a battle of attrition.

The first one to back down would be the loser of the fight, so both sides fought tooth and nail with each other.

"Dim Dim!" Dim Dim pointed at the two fire salamanders, which had regained their footing.

Immediately, the guardian golem no longer held back and unleashed its Rock Blasts at the two bodyguards to end their misery.

Since the both lizards were already seriously injured, the Rock Blasts were enough to annihilate them.

Now that the two fire salamanders had finally turned to particles of light, Alex no longer feared getting attacked from behind.

This made his movements faster and his attacks bolder and more precise.

Still, the Mini Boss wasn't going down so easily, so the two clashed over and over again.

"Shield!"

Alex used his magic skill, Shield, at point-blank range, using it to block the monster's vision.

The crimson fire salamander bit the shield, shattering it completely.

But Alex's gamble paid off.

With a sword thrust aimed at the monster's remaining eye, the young man put the entire weight of his body in that single strike.

His timing was perfect, preventing the remaining fire salamander from reacting on time.

A hiss filled with anger and frustration reached Alex's ears, but he paid it no heed.

His strike had landed exactly where he wanted, but instead of pulling his sword back, he thrust it deeper, roaring at the same time to empower his strike.

The crimson fire salamander evidently thought that enough was enough. It started to do a death roll, intending to drag its enemy to mutual destruction.

Alex's sword was deeply embedded in the monster's eye, but that didn't mean he was spared the monster's body slam. Upon impact, he could taste blood.

Although having the Knockback Immunity was a good thing, there were times when getting pushed back would allow someone to mitigate their attacker's blows.

It was at this moment that Alex felt the frustration of not having enough strength to deliver a killing blow to his enemy.

The Mini Boss was already blind, but its death roll was still very dangerous to face head-on.

Because of this, Alex distanced himself a bit to avoid the monster's rampage at close range.

Suddenly, a thought hit him.

If he couldn't fight the Mini Boss up close because it was rolling like a madlad, then what was stopping him from attacking it from far away?

The monster was already suffering from Bleed Damage, which meant its health was slowly, but surely, decreasing from blood loss.

Alex deposited his sword and Everguard in his storage ring before taking out a bow and arrow. Hitting a target only ten meters away wasn't a problem for him, so he fired one arrow after another, aiming at the monster's head and body.

The way he fought filled the crimson fire salamander with helplessness, and it could no longer do anything but accept its fate.

After Alex fired over forty arrows, the lizard's bloody body finally stopped moving.

< Level Up! >

The moment Alex heard the notification, he became certain that the monster was indeed dead.

As the Mini Boss turned into particles of light, a treasure chest appeared in its place.

Alex didn't open it right away. He first exchanged a high five with Dim Dim, who had already closed the gap between them.

"Dim Dim!"

"Thank you, Dim Dim. I wouldn't have done it without you and Sir Leo."

The guardian golem chuckled after hearing the young man's words.

Leo's will had decided to fight alongside Alex against the Mutant Boss Monster as his last service to the Clawford Tribe.

But since Alex asked him for help to deal with the crimson fire salamander, Leo agreed to deal with the two Rank 2 Monsters so Alex and the Mini Boss could fight a one-on-one battle.

"An Oathkeeper using a bow and arrow... Well, that's something you don't see every day," Leo remarked as he patted Alex's back lightly. "But since you are already learning the ways of the sword, make sure to learn some powerful attacks aside from Slash, okay?"

Alex had used the Slash Skill against the crimson fire salamander.

But since his stamina was limited, he couldn't use it many times and had to rely on Shield Bash to Stun the monster, giving himself some breathing time.

“Now then, open that chest, and we’ll be on our way to the second floor,” Leo said. “The kids still need our help.”

Alex nodded and placed his hand on the lid of the treasure chest.

While he didn’t show his excitement, he was actually looking forward to the items he would get from defeating the Mini Boss of the fourth floor of the Etherion Domain.