

Endless 531

Chapter 531: Now You Also Have Nowhere To Hide [Part 1]

Having arrived at the witching hour, it was still dark when Alex and Fran reached the camp of the Demon Army.

Just as they expected, the demons were on high alert. However, the Demon Lord and the Demon Generals were nowhere to be seen, probably recuperating in an underground shelter or some other hiding place.

The pair didn't have the time to check these locations, but it didn't matter.

As long as the Demon Lord and the Generals were close to the camp, they were bound to appear after Alex and Fran unleashed chaos upon their subordinates.

Fran once again started chanting, adding more magical power to her already powerful attack.

They had retreated a good distance away, leaving some wisps to monitor the aftermath of the spell Fran was about to unleash.

"Meteor Fall!"

The night lit up as dozens of blazing boulders descended from the sky. Since the mages of the Demon Race were ready and alert, they timely cast barriers to block the brunt of the attack that could have annihilated all of them.

The first wave of meteors was successfully blocked, but the second wave shattered their barrier.

Fortunately for the Demons, the damage they received was minimal, and no one died.

"Let's see if you can still handle round two!" Fran raised her hands high and chanted a second time.

“Meteor Fall!”

Since the spell was high level, the Demon Mages didn’t expect a second bombardment to fall upon their heads so soon.

Although they managed to raise another barrier, they weren’t as ready as the first time, so the first wave of meteors broke their defenses.

The second volley caused mass destruction, killing demons in the dozens.

Fran panted for breath from on top of Alex’s head.

Casting two Meteor Falls was her limit, and she would need to rest for at least an hour or two to fully recover.

With her current state, the only spells she could cast right now were low-ranking spells like Magic Bullets.

“The Demon Lord and the Demon Generals still haven’t shown up,” Fran said after a few minutes. “They’re either too deep down in the ground to notice the blast or switched to a farther location.

“On the bright side, I’ve killed at least sixty demons. That’s about twenty percent of them gone, isn’t it?”

Alex nodded. “You did well, Fran. I’ll handle the rest.”

The teenage boy then took out a bow from his storage ring and nocked an arrow.

Although not as great as Medina in archery, he was a fairly decent archer, trained from the times he had provided rear support to their team.

Ron and Carlo didn't want to let Alex fight on the front lines, so he was mostly at the back with Fran and Medina.

Not wanting to be a burden, he had asked the elf to teach him archery, which Medina was more than happy to do.

He pulled the string as far as he could and zoomed in at his target using the skill Eagle Eye.

The moment he released the arrow, it streaked toward a demon and pierced its chest, jutting out of the target's back.

The demon died not knowing how he died, surprising the demons near him.

Unfortunately for them, they were Alex's next targets.

In rapid succession, four more demons were taken down by the teenage boy's arrows. The young man only paused when the Demons were close to finding their location.

Alex and Fran were no fools. The moment Alex fired his last barrage, he immediately ran in a different direction.

He deliberately chose a location that gave him a good view of the demons who were headed in his earlier location.

Then, at the right moment, Alex started his second killing spree.

Only after losing a dozen of their comrades did the demons finally had enough and retreated to their underground shelter.

"Too bad I can't cast another Meteor Fall," Fran lamented. "I'm pretty sure I can bury all of them with one solid hit."

“Don’t push yourself,” Alex cautioned. “Don’t forget that Mana Exhaustion is bad for you.”

Fran sighed, knowing Alex was right. Some time ago, she had pushed herself to the limit, after which she was sick and incapacitated for a whole week.

Alex even had to take care of her while they were on the run. It was easily one of the most miserable experiences that Fran had endured after getting trapped inside the Shadow Forest.

“Are we really going to call it quits?” Fran asked. She was very unwilling to stop here, but she understood that this might just be a trap set for them by the Demon Lord.

Alex also felt reluctant about stopping now, but he understood that pushing their luck would be incredibly risky.

In the end, he prioritized their safety and made future plans in order to deal with a fully recovered Demon Lord and subordinates.

By this point, the pair was confident that the Demon Lord would no longer forcefully destroy the barrier but put all of his energy into hunting them down, even if he had to burn the entire forest just to find them.

Because of this, Alex and Fran made a Plan B, allowing them to hide deep underground.

Thanks to the Gaia Rings, they could expand their senses under the ground. Eventually, they found an underground river and a few caves that led to it.

Their plan was to hide underground for months, even years if they had to.

Alex had hunted countless beasts from the forest and had stolen the demon army’s food supplies.

The amount of food he had could feed him for a decade, even if he didn’t minimize his meals. If he wanted, he believed he could just wait for their enemies on the surface to starve to death.

“Let’s go, Fran,” Alex said.

“Un!” Fran nodded.

Together, they headed to the entrance of one of the caves that led to the underground river.

These entrances were powered by illusions, as well as riddled with traps that only affected their enemies.

In fact, some of these traps would cause the cave to collapse if the enemies were to enter its depths, trapping them deep underground.

As for Alex and Fran? They would simply head to the other underground tunnels that led to safety, allowing them to escape any kind of pursuit.

Chapter 532: Now You Also Have Nowhere To Hide [Part 2]

Two years had gone by since their final clash with the Demon Lord’s army. Many things had happened during that time.

In the first year, Alex and Fran spent their time training deep underground, honing their skills.

They both understood that hiding while doing nothing was not sustainable, and the Demon Lord might find them later, so the least they could do was strengthen themselves by mastering the Gaia Rings to their limits.

In the second year, they felt the ground shake as if an earthquake had hit. It was so intense that they thought the underground caverns would collapse.

Some entrances that led to the underground rivers collapsed due from the quake, but both of them were fine.

For the first time in two years, they had finally decided to scout the surface world to check what was happening.

To their surprise, there was no longer a forest.

Just as they expected, the Demon Lord had run out of patience and burned everything to the ground.

Not wanting to expose themselves, Fran summoned a few wisps and had them explore the surroundings to check the situation.

To their surprise, they saw the Demon Lord sitting cross-legged at the center of the forest.

The moment he sensed the wisp, he immediately opened his eyes, making Fran jump back in fright. Her senses were connected to the wisp, so it felt like he had directly looked at her.

“Come out. Let’s talk,” the Demon Lord said. “I won’t hurt the two of you.”

Alex and Fran weren’t born yesterday, so they didn’t even bother to reply and simply went into hiding.

Fran left the wisps around the Demon Lord to monitor his movements.

They would see him chew on some jerky and drink water from time to time.

As for what kind of jerky he was eating, Alex and Fran didn’t want to know.

The wisps explored several places in the forest, and after a thorough search, they had confirmed that the only demon remaining was the Demon Lord.

The Demon Lord talked to the wisp from time to time, telling it stories about the Demon Realm.

About the reason why the Demons decided to invade the human world, and his goal to make peace with the humans after gaining enough fertile land to support his people.

He talked calmly and exuded an atmosphere of friendliness.

If not for the fact that he was the one responsible for killing their party members, Alex and Fran might have been moved by his words.

But they also understood that even if the Demon Lord really wanted to be friends with them, the fact still remained that there were only two methods to escape the Shadow Forest.

One was to forcefully destroy the barrier, which was nearly impossible with the Elves guarding the perimeter.

The other was for Alex and Fran to die, fulfilling the condition that had allowed the barrier to manifest.

So, the two returned to their underground shelter, leaving the wisp monitor the Demon Lord, who seemed to have a lifetime of stories to tell.

Another year passed, and this stalemate was finally broken when the Demon Lord stopped talking.

He sat cross-legged with his eyes closed, and from the look of it, he had either died, fell asleep, or in a very deep state of meditation.

Alex and Fran continued to monitor him for a few more days, but the Demon Lord remained on his spot, neither eating nor drinking.

After talking with each other, the two decided not to risk it and continued to hide.

Months passed since the Demon Lord had spoken or opened his eyes.

"Is he dead?" Fran asked.

"I don't know," Alex replied. "But it's already been months since he last made any movement."

The two felt very conflicted.

They wanted to check the Demon Lord's condition and see if he was really dead.

Best-case scenario, he was truly dead.

The worst-case scenoria, he was merely saving all his strength for one last hurrah to kill the two of them.

"He doesn't seem to be breathing," Fran commented as the wisp came closer to get a better look of the Demon Lord.

"We can't risk it, Fran," Alex shook his head. "He is stronger than the two of us combined. One wrong move, and both of us are dead."

Even after training underground for two years, he believed that they were still not a match against the Demon Lord in a direct battle.

Demons had the uncanny ability to thrive even in the most barren of places, and they were also known for cannibalizing each other.

Some even mutated and gained powers that made them especially dangerous.

Alex and Fran had learned all of these information from Ron, back when he was still alive.

In the end, Alex and Fran decided to wait for one more year before going back to the surface.

Even if the Demon Lord was still alive, they believed that by then, they would finally have the chance to win against him.

In their third year of hiding, Alex and Fran finally returned to the surface.

The Demon Lord had still not moved all this time, and the two finally decided to check if he was really dead or not.

Fran raised her hands towards the heavens and began to chant.

“O wandering stars that sleep beyond the firmament,

Hear my call and answer my will.”

“Tear through the veil of the skies,

Burn away false dominion,

And return all things to ash.”

“Meteor Fall!”

A rain of blazing rocks descended right above the Demon Lord’s head.

This was the most efficient way to check if he was dead or alive. It could be cast from a long distance, allowing Alex and Fran to escape if he was merely playing dead to lure them in.

Just as the first meteor was about to fall, the Demon Lord finally opened his eyes and screeched madly, unleashing a crescent blade that was as red as blood that easily sliced through the falling meteors and cut them in half.

Loud explosions reverberated across the sky as all of Fran's meteors were destroyed.

"I knew it!" Fran shook her fist. "You're still alive, you bastard!"

The Demon Lord charged at the two with bloodshot eyes, his hands extended like claws wanting to rip them to shreds.

Gone was his friendly and calm look back when he told them stories about the Demon Realm.

Fortunately, Alex and Fran weren't deceived by his act and had already prepared countermeasures for when he was still alive.

The first thing Alex did was run away, using his fastest speed, while Fran hid inside his clothes.

His speed was already impressive in the past, and after three years of training, he had maxed his speed to the limits.

"You can't run anymore!" Vanaac shouted. "Do you think I've been doing nothing for the past two years?!"

As if to prove his words, the Demon Lord raised his hand toward the sky before clenching it into a fist.

"Blood Domain Compress!"

A magic circle encompassed nearly the entirety of the shadow forest. A moment later, this domain shrank rapidly until the space was only a square kilometer wide.

“You can no longer run from me!” the Demon Lord laughed. “Today is the day both of you will die! Today is the day I regain my freedom!”

Alex, knowing that he no longer had anywhere to hide, stopped in his tracks and faced the Demon Lord, who looked very confident in his victory.

“Good. Now you also have nowhere to hide,” Alex said before taking out his dagger.

Fran peeked out from Alex’s shirt, and sneered at the Demon Lord, who didn’t know that they had come to the surface with the intention of ending this battle once and for all.

Chapter 533: The Final Showdown [Part 1]

Alex and Fran had resolved themselves to fight the Demon Lord once and for all before coming up to the surface.

They had no idea how he had been able to survive without eating, drinking, or moving. In any case, it was pointless to wait any longer if he were alive.

With this mindset, they had decided to stay underground for one more year to train hard and fully understand the extent of their powers. Only after doing so did they decide to fight him one last time.

Fran flew out of Alex’s shirt. Facing him, she extended her clenched fist toward Alex. The teenage lightly met her fist with his own, their Gaia Rings clinking against each other as if to toast for a promise.

Golden light erupted from the rings and cloaked the pair, drastically enhancing their physical, magical, and spiritual powers to its limits.

From outside of the barrier, the Elves who were keeping watch on the barrier of the Shadow Forest all looked up to the sky, sensing a powerful presence spread across the land.

A moment later, the tolling of a bell reverberated in the heavens, as if to announce a once-in-history event... at least in the next few thousands of years.

“Divine power...” one of the Elves muttered in surprise. “It’s really divine power. The power of The World!”

The other elves also felt this incredibly familiar sensation, for they had always been protectors of nature and worshiped both The World and The Moon.

The Demon Lord frowned slightly, but he sensed that he was still more powerful than his opponents.

In his eyes, this was simply Alex’s and Fran’s last desperate attempt for survival.

He had sacrificed all of his subordinates to create this special domain, the perfect trap for Alex and Fran. The two could never escape his grasp.

Fortunately for him, the two had no plans of escaping.

Fran hovered beside Alex and started to chant.

“O World that bears all life,

Witness my resolve and answer my vow.

I cast aside flesh and fleeting form,

Returning what was borrowed to the soil of creation.”

“Let my will be honed beyond its limits,

Let my spirit be tempered by eternal law.”

“Not as fairy, nor as companion,

But as judgment made manifest!”

“By covenant sworn beneath heaven and earth,

By the promise sealed within the Gaia Rings,

I offer my existence to be a temporary blade for the person I hold dear.”

“Become edge.

Become silence.

Become divine.”

“I am the dagger that slays the impossible!”

Fran’s body glowed brilliantly as she transformed into a dagger. On its cross guard emblazoned the emblem of the Gaia Ring.

Alex held the Divine Dagger with his right hand, which wielded his own Gaia Ring.

The two rings resonated better, further empowering the weapon Alex wielded. This was the attack that would give them a winning chance against their opponent.

With Medina’s dagger on his left hand and Fran on his right, Alex took the stance of a dual wielder, his golden aura wrapped around his body, ready to assist him in battle.

“Petty tricks.” The Demon Lord sneered before lunging at the teenage boy, planning to finally end his long imprisonment from the forest.

Alex didn't move and simply waited until the Demon Lord was only dozens of meters away from him.

The teenage boy then took a single step forward, and his figure blurred from the world.

"Flash Step."

With a single step, Alex appeared right in front of the Demon Lord and stabbed his sword forward, aiming for the latter's chest.

The Demon Lord had fought countless battles in the past, so the moment Alex moved, he immediately sensed a threat that could possibly end his life.

Knowing this, he had also prepared to dodge whatever attack aimed at him. When Alex reappeared, he'd barely stepped to the right. The blade grazed the side of his chest, the wound superficial.

Seeing his attack fail, Alex moved forward and distanced himself from his enemy in order to prepare for another strike.

Naturally, the Demon Lord wouldn't kindly let him have his way. He unleashed a wide area of effect spell, meant to annihilate the pesky insect that refused to die.

"Crimson Annihilation!"

A cone of flames expanded outward, scorching everything in its path.

Alex ran to his right, barely escaping the raging flames that would have killed him if not for Fran timely casting a barrier, which bought him a few precious seconds to escape.

"Be careful, Alex."

The dagger in his hands hummed, prompting him to nod his head.

“Thank you, Fran. This guy is really a pain to deal with.”

“Don’t worry! We will defeat him together!”

Without even waiting for the Demon Lord’s spell to stop, Alex once again increased his speed and headed to where their enemy was standing.

The Demon Lord sensed his presence, and moved his hands to target Alex with the remaining power of his spell.

“Flash Step!”

Alex didn’t use the spell to close the distance between him and the Demon Lord and instead evaded the deadly spell that would have turned him to ashes.

When the spell was finally expended, the teenage boy crossed the distance to unleash a strike at the Demon, who had also summoned his Cursed Sword.

The sound of two weapons clashing against each other spread in the blazing battlefield, sending sparks flying every time they clashed.

“Don’t worry, Alex! I’m strong, this measly sword will not break me! Just focus on fighting!”

Alex was still holding back a bit, fearing that Fran, who had transformed into the dagger in his hand, might shatter if he continued to clash with the Demon Lord.

Because of this, he primarily used Medina’s dagger to parry from time to time, only switching to his Divine Dagger to launch an attack when an opportunity arose.

The Demon Lord suddenly grinned as he stomped his feet on the ground, creating a wave of flames that expanded outward.

Caught by this surprise attack, Alex was blown away and found himself in mid-air.

“Try to dodge this!” the Demon Lord roared as he slashed the teenage boy, whom he believed couldn’t escape in mid-air.

“Annihilation Slash!”

The cursed sword blazed in crimson flames, making this particular strike more deadly than ever.

But Alex remained calm.

He firmly planted his foot in the air and used it to propel himself to the side, which made the Demon Lord’s eyes widen in shock.

“Flash Step,” Alex said calmly before stepping a second time on the air, propelling himself to the Demon Lord this time.

“Gaia Slash!”

The arm of the Demon Lord was neatly severed from his body. His blood sprayed in front of him, dying Alex’s clothes with demonic blood.

But the teenage boy wasn’t done yet. He understood that if he missed this opportunity, he might not get another chance again, so he once again used his Flash Step, allowing him to step on anything, regardless if it was the ground, water, or air.

With a resolve to kill the Demon Lord, Alex slashed sideways, cutting the Demon Lord’s body in half.

After that, he initially thought that the Demon Lord was finally down, but he had doubts. When he had supposedly cut through the enemy's flesh, he felt no resistance at all.

The body that he had cut in half turned into blood mist, covering Alex's entire body in blood.

The blood then moved toward the teenage boy's mouth, as if trying to possess his body.

Suddenly, Alex stood motionless, even dropping the daggers in his hands on the ground.

The Demon Lord was not only a powerful warrior but also a very talented sorcerer.

The one field of magic that he secretly cultivated without telling anyone was Blood Magic.

Using his own blood as a medium, he could manifest in many ways, even directly attacking his opponent's body and taking over it, making it his own.

"Alex!" Fran, who was still in dagger form, called out to the teenage boy, who was frozen in place.

She didn't know what just happened, but there was no way that her partner wouldn't let go of his weapons, especially at this very crucial moment.

Deep inside Alex's Sea of Consciousness, the Demon Lord had taken form.

He planned to take over his body. To do that, he must erase the young man's spirit first, which he bound by chains made up of the blood that had invaded the young man's consciousness.

"Your body is trash, but it will still serve its purpose," Vanaac said. "You should be honored that I will be using your body for the greater good!"

"Who are you calling trash, you bastard?!" Alex roared in anger. "Fight me like a man if you dare!"

Alex tried to break free from the chains that bound his soul, but they were simply too strong and too hard for him to break.

He could feel that he was at a great disadvantage on what was going to happen next, so he did what he could only do. He reached out to the power of the Gaia Ring, which had also called out to Fran's soul so she could help Alex inside his Sea of Consciousness.

Chapter 534: The Final Showdown [Part 2]

As much as Vanaac didn't want to change his vessel, the current situation left him with no other choice.

Once Alex and Fran died, the barrier would disappear. It went without saying that he'd next contend with the Elves, who would definitely kill him without a second thought.

To avoid that scenario, he made up his mind to possess Alex's body and infiltrate the human kingdoms.

The Gaia Rings also captured his interest, for it enabled the two pesky insects to survive so long inside the Shadow Forest.

It didn't matter even if he had to wait for several years to regain his full strength. His patience could endure that much, and his new vessel was still young.

Besides, he had plenty of time to look for his next host. Once a suitable one appeared, he could simply switch and prolong his life.

"Surrender and offer your body to me willingly," Vanaac said calmly as he walked toward Alex's soul, bound by his chains. "Consider it as the greatest honor of your life."

Alex struggled to break free, but it was of no use.

Just as Vanaac's hand neared his chest, a radiant light appeared on top of it, forcing the Demon Lord to withdraw.

“I won’t let you have your way!” Fran had also appeared inside Alex’s Sea of Consciousness.

The Gaia Rings were connected to each other, helping her realize the teenage boy’s current situation.

“Alex, listen to me!” Fran said in a solemn tone. “This is your Sea of Consciousness. In other words, this is your own territory. The Demon Lord might be strong, but inside this world, you are stronger.

“He can only overpower you because of his better mastery in mental and soul battles. As long as you believe in yourself, this world will manifest its strength to bend to your will! You must believe in yours—ack!”

Fran was about to say more, but a red beam hit her back, sending her flying in the opposite direction.

“Fran!” Alex shouted after seeing his dear friend get hit by a soul attack.

“I-I’m fine,” Fran replied as she tried to prop herself up from the ground, only to fail miserably.

She had expended a lot of soul power to push the Demon Lord away from Alex. Not to mention, the urgency of the matter made her rush into his Sea of Consciousness without sufficient preparation.

Because of the Demon Lord’s attack, her soul had been injured, and her Astral Body wouldn’t be able to move anytime soon.

“Damn you!” Alex roared in anger, seeing Fran not as fine as she claimed to be.

Out of pure desire to protect her, he broke through the shackles binding his body, and it shattered like brittle glass.

Seeing the young man’s resolve and determination grow by leaps and bounds, the Demon Lord decided to erase the teenage boy’s soul before he could fully unlock his potential!

“Crimson Annihilation!” the Demon Lord swung his cursed blade. “Die!”

Alex nimbly stepped to the side, letting the attack pass him harmlessly.

He might not be a strong, exceptional warrior like his party members, but one of his strengths was his belief in them.

He took Fran’s words wholeheartedly, so he imagined his Sea of Consciousness as some kind of Domain that gave him a great advantage.

In this territory, he was strong, he was powerful, he was God!

“Hellfire Nova!” Vanaac roared and unleashed hellish flames that expanded outward. He decided to muster and pour all of his strength into this attack, wiping everything inside Alex’s Sea of Consciousness.

Although he risked damaging it beyond repair, he still decided to push through, knowing that if he didn’t do so, he would lose his chance to win.

As the hellish flames spread like wildfire, Vanaac believed victory was his.

Just as he was about to celebrate, the flames dispersed completely, and Alex’s charging form appeared in front of his eyes.

“Oh world that bore me, answer my will!” Alex pulled back his right hand, and the Gaia Ring shone like the sun.

“Gaia Impact!”

“Two can play that game!” Vanaac roared as he released a punch as well, targeting Alex’s fist that made him feel fearful. “Crimson Burst Nova!”

Alex's and Vanaac's fists collided, resulting in a powerful shockwave that expanded outward.

Crimson and Golden Flames clashed fiercely against each other, neither backing down in the slightest.

Vanaac felt as if an entire mountain was crushing him with its weight, while Alex felt as if the very flames of hell were trying to burn him alive.

Both understood that this exchange was something they couldn't afford to lose.

Losing would mean their soul seriously getting injured, or worse, ceasing to exist completely.

Their roars magnified as they put everything on the line for their final strike, which seemed evenly matched from a distance.

'N-No, I'm losing!' Alex could feel that in the span of a few seconds, the crimson flames would turn him to ashes.

He was putting everything on the line, but the Demon Lord's lifeforce and soulpower were many times stronger than his.

Matching Vanaac was only possible because the battlefield was his own Sea of Consciousness.

If the situation had been reversed, he wouldn't even last a minute against his enemy.

"Don't worry. You're not alone."

A voice filled with determination reached Alex's ears.

He then saw Fran place her hands on his fist, allowing the Gaia Rings to resonate with each other.

This made Alex's waning golden flames blaze brighter than ever, to the point of being blinding.

"Now, Alex!" Fran shouted, merging herself with Alex's fist, allowing him to create a miracle that might never be replicated again.

"Gaia Breaker!" Alex poured every ounce of his soul power in this final attack, breaking past the hellish flames that he thought was impossible to defeat.

His fist then collided with Vanaac's face, hitting him right at his nose with a force of The World!

A blinding light covered the entirety of his Sea of Consciousness, and then...

There was no then.

A booming explosion rocked the entire world, until all sounds ceased to exist.

A moment later, the teenage boy collapsed and turned into particles of light.

Chapter 535: Nearly Five Hundred Years Of Solitude [Part 1]

When Alex opened his eyes, he found himself in what seemed to be a narrow alley.

His body ached all over, but upon realizing he was all alone, he forgot all his pain and forced himself to stand up, wanting to get a better understanding of his current situation.

"Fran?" Alex looked at his surroundings. "Where are you, Fran?!"

After calling out to the fairy's name multiple times, reality finally hit him. She was truly nowhere.

Emerging from the alley, the crowded bustling streets welcomed him. Special decorations were hung all around the place, as if there was some sort of festival going on.

Alex stopped the first local he saw to ask what was happening, to which the latter happily answered.

"Today is the victory celebration for the time when the human kingdoms successfully drove the Demons away from their territories," a chubby man said with a smile. "After the Demon Lord entrapment in the Shadow Forest, the demons struggled and failed to mount up any form of resistance, then we won.

"To this day, the Demon Lord is apparently still trapped there, unable to leave. Even the Elves are keeping watch on the place to ensure that the barrier will not break apart."

Alex's eyes widened in shock after hearing this story. No one understood what was happening inside the dome of darkness inside the Shadow Forest more than he did, so hearing that the humans had used this opportunity to drive the demons away was new to him.

"Relax." The chubby man patted Alex's shoulder. "It's been five hundred years since the Demon has been trapped inside that forest. Even if he manages to escape, he won't be able to threaten anyone anymore."

"W-What did you say?!" Alex looked at the chubby man in disbelief. "Five hundred years?!"

"Young man, is there something wrong?" The chubby man blinked. "Do you have amnesia or something?"

"C-can you please tell me the date today?" Alex pleaded. "And where am I right now?"

The chubby man frowned, but still answered the question asked of him.

"Today is the 12th Day of the Empress in the 845th Era of The Fool," the chubby man replied. "Also, we are in Arian City. Do you see that giant building over there? That is the Little Hearth Orphanage.

"The Heroes who protected the realm from the Demon Lord were the one who founded it. The King bestowed it with a special privilege and made sure that it became a beacon of light for children who had lost their families and home."

The revelation shocked Alex to his core. It had been five hundred years since he and Fran had been trapped inside the Shadow Forest.

But the most surprising fact of all was the date.

“The 12th Day of the Empress...” Alex muttered.

This was a significant piece of information because Fran’s and Alex’s birthday was on the 13th of the Month of Empress.

However, he remembered another piece of information that made his face turn pale.

“Sir, is the barrier in the Shadow Forest still active?” Alex asked, desperately hoping for a miracle.

“I passed through that forest a month ago, and the barrier is still up,” the Chubby Man replied. “I’m sure that it will remain that way for many more yea—”

Alex didn’t even wait for the chubby man to finish his words and rushed toward the north gate of the city.

Since the barrier was still up, it only meant one thing.

‘Fran!’ Alex gritted his teeth as he forced himself to run despite his entire body aching all over.

But perhaps his current state was simply too frail that he tripped and fell on the ground.

“Ugh...” Alex groaned as he rolled his body to the side in order to prop himself up. But when his gaze landed on a mirror that was facing his direction, his eyes widened in shock when he saw his reflection.

A young man with silver-white hair and blue eyes stared back at him.

"T-This..." Alex was seeing his own reflection in the mirror.

He no longer looked like the Thief "Alex" who had accompanied the Dawnseekers in their adventure.

His shock lasted for nearly a minute before he finally pushed himself up from the ground in order to stand up.

The young man then dragged himself to the North Gate of the Forest.

After leaving the city, Alex summoned a magical shield and jumped on top of it.

Facing the direction where he and his party members had traveled in the past, he activated his skill, Shield Chaser, allowing his shield to soar across the sky like a missile.

The consumption of mana to activate this skill for long periods of time was harsh, but Alex poured all of his strength to get as close to the Shadow Forest as possible.

He would travel for an hour, then rest for two hours, then repeat the same process over and over again.

What had taken seven days by carriage was only reached by a single day through his Shield Chaser skill.

When Alex finally saw the dome of darkness in front of him, he couldn't help but feel an ache in his heart as he guided his shield to descend from the sky.

The Elves guarding the barrier glanced in his direction, but after seeing that he was a human, they no longer paid any attention to him.

As soon as he landed, Alex pressed his hand on the barrier. But, the barrier repelled him, which sent him flying.

The elves who saw this smiled faintly as this wasn't the first time they had seen this happen.

It had almost been a tradition to see curious people go to the Shadow Forest to check if the Heroic Stories were true or not.

Alex was already exhausted from his journey, and yet, his desire to see Fran overcame all exhaustion and weakness.

Slowly but surely, he walked once more towards the barrier with shaky legs.

The Elves watched him with amusement but didn't make any move to stop him.

The young man slowly reached out his right hand to touch his barrier, fully knowing that he might get repelled again.

However, he didn't stop. The moment his hands touched the barrier, he felt as if an electric current had struck his body, but he didn't back down and kept holding onto it.

A moment later, something unexpected happened.

Golden light shone radiantly on Alex's right hand, particularly on the place of his ring finger.

There, a ring slowly materialized in existence, and it was none other than the Gaia Ring.

With a roar that refused to surrender, Alex pushed against the barrier that was trying to repel him away.

However, the Gaia Ring wrapped around Alex's body, allowing him to pass through it, making the Elves gasp in shock after seeing that someone actually managed to enter the barrier that they had been guarding for five hundred years.

Alex didn't know what kind of commotion he had caused outside the barrier nor did he care.

Panting for breath, he slowly stood up, and walked toward the center of the forest, hoping desperately to find the person that he was looking for.

Chapter 536: Nearly Five Hundred Years Of Solitude [Part 2]

Alex could barely hold himself together as he slowly made his way to the center of the forest.

His continuous journey had exhausted him, and he was riddled with injuries from his attempts to cross the barrier.

But his determination pushed him to persevere until he found the person who must've been waiting for him somewhere in the forest all these centuries.

For humans, a hundred years felt like eternity. But, for some races, it was merely a short period of time.

Dwarves and Fairies usually lived up to five hundred years, while elves lived for thousands of years.

And from what he'd heard... nearly five hundred years had passed since the battle in the Shadow Forest.

Every labored breath, every determined step, Alex endured it all.

Why?

Because he wholeheartedly believed that someone out there had endured loneliness for hundreds of years.

The barrier surrounding the entire forest was proof that they were still alive, but he knew... living a long life in isolation wasn't a blessing but a curse.

After a few hours, he finally saw a clearing in the forest that should have been burned down to the ground by the Demon Lord.

A long period of time had passed, and the forest had once again regained its former glory.

And yet, no birds sang...

No animals roared...

No insects chirped...

It was void of everything except the rustling of trees as the wind blew past them.

When he finally arrived at a clearing, Alex felt a lump in his throat as he looked at the scene before him.

A beautiful flower field, filled with flowers of different colors, sent a fragrance that revitalized his senses.

And at the center of it all were five markers that could easily be distinguished.

These markers were made up of stone, and in them inscribed words and symbols that made Alex's heart ache.

At the center of it all, sitting on a grave marker, was a small fairy with her back against the young man.

Alex bit his lip as he took a step forward.

He didn't want to step on the flowers, but there was no other way for him to reach his destination, so he apologized to them in his heart.

When he was only a few meters away from the fairy, she finally moved, slowly turning her head to look in his direction.

The years had not been kind to her, and the exhaustion on her face was evident.

An old fairy with long white hair and wrinkles on her face looked at Alex with a smile.

“What took you so long, Alex?”

Her voice was no longer as mischievous and smooth as he remembered.

It was hoarse as if she hadn’t talked for a very... very... very long time.

But her sincere smile that seemed to stem from the bottom of her heart made the young man tear up. Then and there, he knew what Fran was thinking.

‘Finally, before I met my end, I saw you again.’

Instead of replying, Alex crouched down on the grave marker where Fran sat and kissed her head.

“I’m sorry, I made you wait for so long,” Alex said softly, his tears streaming down his face. “It must have been hard, Fran.”

Fran blinked a few times as if forcing herself to not cry. She even smiled and reached out to wipe the tears from Alex’s eyes with her hands as if she were an older sister who was coaxing a baby to not cry.

“You don’t look like the Alex I remember, but I’m sure it’s you, Alex,” Fran said, her voice slowly regaining a little strength in it. “I’m glad to see you again. Also, stop crying. Are you a child? This is why humans are no good. They cry so easily. You should have been reborn as a fairy instead.”

Alex did his best to smile, but the tears just won’t stop.

Fran continued to nag at him, his playful tone returning bit by bit. However, she would cough from time to time, as if speaking was a bit hard for her.

“Hey, stop crying already. Look if I did a good job on these grave markers,” Fran said. “See that? This one beside me is your grave. I even put a good epitaph for you.”

Alex wiped away his tears, and looked at the grave marker that Fran was pointing at. Through his blurry vision, he read the words written there.

“Alex loved Fran with all of his heart,” Alex said as he read the epitaph. “He promised that when he reincarnates, he will be a fairy so that he can be with her until they grow old together.”

There was also an added small word at the bottom that said “Liar,” which looked like it had been added after a few years had passed.

Alex couldn’t help but chuckle despite his tears, fully knowing that the fairy had taken liberty in writing the epitaph on “his grave.”

The young man then glanced at the epitaph of the marker on the other side of where Fran sat and read it aloud.

“Here rests my loving older sister, who cared for me and Alex.

May you find peace within the World Tree.

You will always be remembered, Medina.”

He then glanced at the one beside Medina’s, which was none other than Ron’s.

“Here rests Ron, a peerless swordmaster and true leader.

His blade was raised not for glory, but to protect the people.

May his courage be remembered through the ages.”

Alex then glanced at the grave marker on the left side of his grave, which belonged to Carlo.

“Carlo raised his fists against the world,

and stood unbroken so his friends would not fall.

A shield in life, a guardian in memory.”

Finally, Alex glanced at the grave marker where Fran was perched on and read it.

“Fran, a fairy of gentle light and unyielding will.

With her beloved Alex, she defied the Demon Lord and saved the world.

A guardian in legend,

and forever, the Queen of Hide and Seek.”

Fran chuckled before closing her eyes softly.

“I’m getting a bit old, you know?” Fran said. “When fairies die, we do not leave bodies behind. We return to nature and become part of it once more. All of your bodies are buried under these markers, but all I can leave is this legacy.”

The fairy then reached out to touch the side of Alex’s face and smiled softly.

“After all, it will be a very sad thing if those who tried to save the world are forgotten, right?”

Alex nodded. "You're right, Fran. You did well."

"Of course!" Fran lightly patted her chest. "Just who do you think I am?"

A moment later, the fairy coughed a few times, which almost made her fall from the grave marker.

Alex hurriedly supported her body with his hands, making sure that she wouldn't fall or hurt herself in the process.

"Say, Alex, it has been a while, so why don't we do it?" Fran asked after she stopped coughing.

"Do what?" Alex replied, feeling a bit anxious because the fairy now looked very pale.

"What else? A game of hide and seek," Fran said mischievously. "I have been the Hide and Seek Queen, and no one has ever found me since the day I was born. How about we play that game one more time, what do you think?"

Alex wanted to say that she should just rest, but her determined gaze made him understand that she wouldn't take no for an answer.

"Alright," Alex reluctantly agreed to her request. "We will play hide and seek."

"Good!" Fran's face brightened up a bit. "But this time, give me a handicap, okay? I'm already old so count up to one hundred. Just close your eyes, but no peeking!"

"Understood." Alex nodded. "I'll start counting now."

Alex turned around and closed his eyes. He then started to count.

Fran slowly stood up, and flapped her wings to fly away.

However, she just managed to fly a few inches from the grave marker before she slowly crashed on the ground.

“A-Alex, I changed my mind,” Fran said through labored breath. “Give me a handicap and count up to three hundred!”

After hearing Alex’s affirmation, she once again tried to flap her wings, and managed to fly away for a meter before crashing once more.

She tried to flap them again, and again, but she no longer had the strength to fly.

In the end, Fran decided to crawl, using all of her strength and willpower.

Her destination was the biggest flower in front of her, which was only four meters away from her grave marker.

Sometimes, she used that place to rest when it was raining, giving her some shelter.

So, she decided to use it as her hiding place for this last hide and seek with the person she had waited for... for nearly five hundred years.

Chapter 537: The Ending Of A Fairy Tale [Part 1]

I could still remember the time when Alex and I fought against the Demon Lord, Vanaac, in his Sea of Consciousness.

Centuries had passed, yet whenever I closed my eyes, the memory would play in my head very vividly.

We had won that battle, but the price we paid was painfully steep.

When the battle ended, Alex fell into a coma for an entire month. If not for the fact that he was still breathing, albeit barely, I would’ve thought that he had truly died.

The fear I felt back then couldn't be described with words. Losing him would've been no different from losing my last family.

When he opened his eyes a month later, I was ecstatic. Although he must've felt weak then, the first thing he did was smile at me and greet me with a, "Good Morning, Fran".

That alone melted the fear and anxiety in my heart, like ice on a hot summer's day.

Unfortunately, that happiness didn't last long.

Alex's soul was seriously injured from that fight, and it had drastically cut his lifespan.

Ten years.

He could only stay alive for ten years, and during that time, we spent every waking hour together.

It was also the most beautiful, sweetest time of my life.

Compared to his meager lifespan, mine was long... hundreds of years long.

Together, we buried the bodies of our party members and finally put them to rest.

Then our ten years of living together began.

For some reason, Alex and I both knew that he only had ten years to live.

Perhaps it was thanks to the Gaia Ring. After Alex and I teamed up to deal with Vanaac, our connection grew so strong that the secrets we had kept deep in our hearts had been known to each other after we fought together inside the Sea of Consciousness.

That slimy bastard teased me repeatedly when he found out that the reason why I always bullied him was because I had a crush on him!

It was the most embarrassing moment of my life, but he should not be one to talk either. I also found out that he secretly liked being bullied by me as well.

Well, it couldn't be helped, right?

I was a very cute fairy, and getting bullied by me should be seen as an honor!

The years of happiness went by so quickly, and before we knew it, Alex became twenty-two years old, and I, eighteen.

By then, only five years remained of his life. We spent those five years happily together, nurturing our feelings for each other.

Of course, the racial differences were a hurdle. There were simply things we couldn't do because of the difference in size.

Still, kissing, snuggling, and watching the sunrise, sunset, and the stars together was a truly romantic experience.

But this all changed after I became eighteen-years old.

The Gaia Ring had unlocked one of the extremely rare trait of my species, and that was to adjust my size

When I learned about this ability, I decided to surprise Alex.

The expression on his face when I changed my size to match my age as a human was priceless.

At first he rubbed his eyes a few times, thinking that he was hallucinating or I had cast some kind of illusion spell to make me look that way.

However, when he reached out to pull me close to his chest and hugged me tight, he finally realized that what he was holding was real.

Perhaps, that was also the first time that my heart had beaten so fast. I even felt like it was about to jump from my chest.

We then shared a passionate kiss... the sweetest one we shared together.

And on the night of that miraculous change, he and I finally became one.

Never in my life did I think that I would get to experience something like that.

Fairies weren't born the way humans were.

We just came into existence from places with high magic power or in locations where the power of nature thrived strongly.

Fairies were born like how flowers bloomed for the first time in their life.

These flowers would be nourished by the power of nature or any place with high concentrations of magic power.

Depending on the environment, the nature of the Fairy would also be different.

Fairies born near volcanoes were Fire Fairies.

Those born under the water were Water Fairies.

And I was born out of nature, so I was a Forest Fairy.

But I didn't share the mindset of my fellow fairies, who were content to live their lives in the forest.

I wished to see the bigger world, so when I met Medina, Ron, and Carlo in one of their expeditions in the forest where I was born, I decided to come with them to see the human world.

That was when I met Alex and where our journey as a party began.

Watching him grow up from a teenage boy to a fine young man made me feel happy about being there with him all the way.

And with the feelings we had for each other, our days... and nights had become more memorable than ever.

My only regret was that I couldn't give birth to his child.

For that was not something that could be done, even with the power of the Gaia Rings.

Still, he cherished me until the last day he drew his last breath.

He even promised that he would do his best to be born as a fairy and find me as soon as possible.

After that one, final kiss we shared together, he finally breathed his last, dying with a smile on his face.

Medina once told me that saying goodbye to a loved one was hard.

However, she also added that it was also hard for those who would be left behind.

Holding onto Alex's promise, I endured the loneliness of the passing years.

I always looked at the epitaph he had asked me to write on his grave marker. I desperately hoped that one of these days, he would appear as promised so we could live a life filled with happiness for a second time.

Chapter 538: The Ending Of A Fairy Tale [Part 2]

A hundred years had passed...

Then two hundred years...

Three hundred...

Four...

"Liar..."

I said as I added that very word in Alex's epitaph.

I have now grown old, and a few strands of my hair had already turned white.

My end was drawing near, and I could feel it, so I decided to make my own grave.

Fairies wouldn't leave anything behind when they died.

We simply cease to exist... returning to nature, just like how we were born.

Winter, spring, summer, and fall...

I waited, and waited... and the seasons passed through it all.

Sometimes, I would spend my time perched on my own grave marker, dreaming of those happy days when we were together.

I had a very strong memory, you see, so I could practically re-live those memories whenever I wanted.

They were the most bittersweet memories in my life.

My precious memories with the person I loved.

The forest had once again regained its former glory.

Trees stood tall... and a flower field surrounded the graves of my beloved humans.

One day... I would also leave this world, leaving only a legacy that was written on my grave.

"Alex... I miss you."

I spoke these words more often as the last years of my life went by.

Then one day, something unexpected happened.

The World spoke to me.

I could still remember her beautiful face, and her eyes filled with tenderness and sadness as she looked at me.

"I'm sorry."

That was what the Deity of this world had told me back then.

I didn't know why she was asking for forgiveness, nor could I think about it, for the sadness she radiated overwhelmed me into crying.

This wasn't the first nor probably the last time I cried during my hundreds of years of solitude.

But on that day, I cried so much that I might have cried more than I had in my entire lifetime combined.

"You may not meet him in this lifetime and the lifetime after that, but I promise that you will meet him once more no matter how many years and lifetime it takes," The World said softly as she gently held me close to her bosom, like a mother telling her child that they shouldn't cry because everything was going to be fine.

"But we won't remember each other by then," I said, feeling sadness overwhelm my heart.

"Both of you will remember," The World promised. "This I promise you, my child. To you who have endured so much, that is the very least that I can do. So, before you pass away, I will give you a dream of the future."

"A dream?"

"Yes, my beloved Fran. A dream that will give you the strength to wait for him in your next lifetime."

I didn't really understand what she meant by that dream... but now, I think I do.

"Ninety-one... ninety-two... ninety-three..."

A faint smile appeared on my face as I continued to crawl toward the flower where I planned to hide.

Perhaps, this was the dream that "The World" had promised me.

A beautiful dream that truly made me feel loved from the bottom of my heart.

'I don't care if this is really a dream,' I thought as I forced all my strength and willpower on my hands and feet as I crawled like an ant toward my destination.

All that mattered was that I had seen him again and played with him one last time.

My breaths grew ragged, and for a brief moment, I felt like I no longer had the strength to move.

I tried to force myself to continue crawling, but I was a spent candle.

Suddenly, a gentle breeze blew, lifting me off the ground and gently placing me behind the flower, where I wished to hide.

"Thank you, Mother," I said softly to 'The World,' whom all Fairies see as our mother. "Thank you for this wonderful dream."

I then leaned on the flower and tried to catch my breath. Alex was still counting in the distance, helping my nerves calm down.

When I finally regained my composure, I closed my eyes and waited for him to finish counting.

This might not be the best hiding place in my career as the undefeated Hide-And-Seek Queen, but it was the best I could go with the meager strength I had left.

A few more seconds passed, and I could finally hear the last countdown.

"Two hundred ninety-seven... two hundred ninety-eight... two hundred ninety-nine... three hundred! Ready or not, here I come!"

I smiled faintly and waited.

Alex had never been good at hide-and-seek, so I didn't believe that he would be able to find me right away.

However, I felt something warm enclosing my entire body. He held me as if I was a delicate, extremely precious treasure.

"Ah..."

When I opened my eyes, I saw Alex looking at me with tender eyes as he gently scooped me up from my hiding place.

"I found you, Fran."

Tears started to form in the corner of my eyes.

These weren't tears of frustration but tears of happiness.

Perhaps a part of me had waited to hear those words for a very long time.

Maybe I wished for someone to find me all these years, and this wish of mine had finally become a reality.

Alex then brought me near to his face and kissed my head tenderly.

The warmth and love coming from him made my heart feel more alive than the past four hundred years of my life.

"Thank you for finding me, Alex," I said as my tears finally fell from my place. "Thank you for keeping your promise."

The young man in front of me was different from the Alex of my memories, but the love in his eyes as he held me like a priceless treasure was more than familiar.

“Fran... I’m sorry,” Alex said as tears streamed down his eyes. “I’m sorry it took me so long to find you.”

“Don’t say sorry,” I replied. “Say I love you instead. I miss hearing you say that to me.”

“I love you, Fran.” Alex held me close. “I love you so much, it hurts.”

“I love you, too, Alex,” I said, feeling that my moment was finally near. “I love you more than words can ever say.”

I slowly stood up from the palm of his hand and reached out to touch his face.

Since he was too far he moved me closer, allowing me to hold him close one last time.

My body was feeling very light, as if I was about to fly.

So I kissed his lips three times before pulling back.

Both of us were crying, and my vision had also blurred considerably.

My strength was failing me once more, so I slowly laid down on his palm. Lying there felt very nice.

“Fran... you...” a sob escaped Alex’s lips as he looked at me.

I then looked at my hand and saw golden particles of light rising from it.

In fact, it was not only my hand that was emitting that kind of light, but my entire body.

“Alex, I’ve waited for you for a very long time,” I said in a teasing tone. “So do you promise to also wait for me?”

“I do!” Alex replied. “I promise I will wait for you!”

“Good.” I nodded. “I won’t say goodbye, because goodbye hurts. Instead... I’ll say this.”

Looking at my beloved as my body slowly became transparent, I made sure to tell him my heartfelt words.

“I love you, Alex. I’ll see you soon.”

Alex then said something, but I could no longer hear it.

I thought back to the Fairy Tales that I have read during my free time and thought that humans thought highly of us.

I mean, why do they call it Fairy Tales when not all of those stories had fairies in them?

Still, while not all of their endings were something I desired, the majority of what I read all had happy endings.

There was even a story about a red-headed Half-Elf, where he met his beloved before returning to his world.

That was one of my favorite stories, and I could still remember the words that he had said to her.

“You are the beginning of a letter, the content of a poem... and the ending of a Fairy Tale.”

And although his and my story both had bittersweet endings, I was certain that both of us were happy to see our beloved one last time.

As I thought of that story, Alex's words that I wasn't able to hear a while ago, finally reached me.

"I love you, Fran! I love you very much!"

A smile appeared on my face, for I know that this wasn't the ending of our Fairy Tale.

It was only the beginning of a story that would last the test of time.

— — —

Alex looked up at the particles of light that slowly flew to the sky.

The moment it touched the barrier, cracks spread on top of it, and expanded until it finally shattered completely.

The barrier that had been put in place for over five hundred years had finally disappeared, allowing new life to arrive at the forest, where new stories and new beginnings would be born.

"Fran..." Alex sobbed as he looked at the palm of his hand, where his beloved lay a few seconds ago.

Nothing was left of her, except for the Gaia Ring that she had worn like a promise for hundreds of years.

The young man knelt down and cried, sobbing sadly at the loss of his beloved.

His heart was in pain just thinking of the hardships, loneliness, and sadness that Fran had endured all those years... alone in a forest, where she had finally died with a smile on her face.

Chapter 539: Will This Be The Start Of Our Fairy Tale?

Alex sobbed all alone inside the forest, as if he were the last man in the world.

No one broke his reverie, and his tears had been incessant for a few minutes until a pair of hands wrapped around him from behind.

Instead of being surprised, the young man felt like the last piece of the puzzle had finally fallen in place.

Upon turning around, he saw a young lady with pink hair and pink eyes looking at him with tears on her face.

Alex reached out to hug her, and he held her tightly, as if to confirm that she was real, not an illusion.

Fran reciprocated his gesture, savoring his warmth as she realized that he was real too, not a mere illusion created by her loneliness and sadness.

Not a single word was spoken, for it was unnecessary.

They simply held each other, confirming that both of them were alive and together once more.

In a place that both of them couldn't see, the Dim Sum God wept bitterly.

Lumi gently picked Dim Dim up and placed it on her chest, patting its head and letting it cry its heart out.

If one were to look closely, tears were also streaming down her face. Just like the little bun, she had also seen everything that happened from Alex's perspective.

However, the two of them weren't the only outsiders present.

Finn, who was Fran's brother, and Lex were also in that special domain and had watched Alex's and Fran's journey in their past life together.

Lex was blind, that much was true. But the entire scenario had been directly played in his mind, allowing him to see everything as if his eyes were working perfectly.

That said, he made a mental note to himself—he must treat the young lady with great care, for he knew that his Young Master would wish to spend his lifetime with her by his side.

After hugging each other and crying for nearly an hour, Alex and Fran finally regained a bit of their composure.

They pulled back and gazed at each other.

Then, as if coming to an understanding, both of them wiped each other's tears. They had separated for countless years, but finally, they were together again.

With cheeks still wet from tears, both of them smiled at each other.

"Fran..." Alex said before taking off the ring in his hand. "There are still many things that I need to do in his lifetime, and there might be times when I won't always be by your side. However, know this... wherever I may be, my heart will be with you, always."

After making that promise, Alex slid the ring he had been wearing into Fran's ring finger.

The ring adjusted its size, allowing itself to fit perfectly on the young lady's finger, as if returning to its rightful place.

"Alex, even if the entire world becomes your enemy, I will be there by your side, through sickness and in health, till death do us part," Fran declared as she took the ring lying on the palm of Alex's hand and slid it onto his ring finger.

This was the ring the Fairy Fran had worn for nearly five hundred years and had accompanied her through the bittersweet cold nights inside the Shadow Forest.

“I wasn’t aware that I have been waiting all this time for this moment to happen,” Fran said as she gave Alex’s hand a gentle squeeze. “But, now... I am thankful that ‘The World’ had created this miracle, allowing us to meet again.”

Alex smiled faintly, for calling it a miracle was putting it nicely.

He was now in the world of Arcana through a series of events.

If one of those things didn’t happen, there was a chance that things could have ended quite differently.

Even now, his newly discovered identity as the Prince of the Empire of Aetherion weighed heavily on his shoulders.

His and Fran’s previous lifetimes had somehow entered that delicate balance, bringing them together at this point in time.

Also, Alex realized one more crucial detail.

“The World” had also been the one to talk to him after he fell down the cliff, frozen in a block of ice.

Perhaps, thinking that the time was right, the Deity used her divinity to do something, fulfilling a promise that was made, hundreds... perhaps even thousands of years ago.

The two Gaia Rings in their hands glowed faintly, as if cheering happily for their reunion.

Alex and Fran stared at each other for a long time before hugging each other once again.

Their faces both turned red, clearly feeling embarrassed about this revelation.

Frankly, Alex wanted to kiss Fran so badly. But doing it now in her current form seemed to be a little awkward.

Little did he know, Fran was struggling from the same dilemma.

The memories of their past and the promise they shared had finally come full circle. But they still needed time to organize their feelings for each other.

Neither of them were in a hurry since they understood that they would spend this lifetime together.

So, after hugging for a while, the two pulled back and looked at each other with a tender gaze.

As if wanting to seal the feelings they had for each other, the two moved closer and kissed each other on the lips.

The kiss was fleeting, lasting only for a mere second.

And yet, it conveyed everything that they were feeling at that time.

“Alex, will this be the start of our Fairy Tale?” Fran asked in a teasing tone.

“Yes,” Alex answered, holding her gaze. “Let’s work hard to have a happy ending, okay?”

Fran nodded before hugging Alex once more.

Alex smiled and also hugged Fran tightly.

An entire lifetime was waiting for them, and this time, they would do their best to be happy in order to make up for those lifetimes where the two of them weren’t together.

Somewhere in Arcana, 'The World' smiled sweetly.

She then raised her hand to give the two of them a blessing, wishing both of them all the happiness that the world had to offer.

Chapter 540: Dungeon Rewards

Alex and Fran just stood unmoving, hugging each other. They only stirred when the space around them suddenly started glowing faintly.

The forest disappeared, and they found themselves in a spacious room, where a meter-tall golden core floated in front of them.

"Dim Dim!"

After hearing Dim Dim's call, Alex turned and saw the little bun jump from Lumi's embrace to his side.

With one smooth gesture, the young man caught the little bun and started to gently pat its head.

Dim Dim looked at him with a smile, but Alex noticed that the side of the little bun's face seemed a little wet, prompting him to wipe it with his handkerchief.

Fran then looked at her brother, who was standing beside Lex, and Lumi. Both looked at her with a complicated gaze.

She and Alex had yet to know that Dim Dim, Lumi, Finn, and Lex had seen their adventure from start to end.

"Are you alright, Fran?" Finn finally spoke, as he walked toward his sister and took her hand.

"I'm fine, Brother," Fran replied. "How about you? Did anything happen after we have been separated?"

Finn shook his head. "Nothing happened."

Lumi had also approached Alex and used her handkerchief to wipe the tear stains on his face without saying a word.

Alex smiled faintly and allowed her to do what she wanted to do.

When the young lady was finally done with her task, she finally looked around their surroundings.

"This might be the Dungeon Core Room," Lumi said before looking at the dungeon core that was hovering at the center of the room. "And that must be the Dungeon Core."

Alex nodded in agreement. While this might be his first time personally seeing a Dungeon Core in real life, he was already familiar with what it looked like from playing ELO.

The side quests in the game commonly included conquering Dungeons until players defeated the Final Boss, which then gave them a chance to enter the Dungeon Core Room.

Perhaps the mechanism wasn't the same in real life. They hadn't fought any Final Boss, yet here they were, standing inside the Dungeon Core Room.

"What do you want to do, Young Master?" Lex asked with his arms crossed over his chest. "Do you wish to take the Dungeon Core or just leave it be?"

There are three ways to handle Dungeon Cores.

First involved selling it in an auction house, which would make Alex incredibly rich.

Dungeon Cores could serve as a power source, which could power formidable weapons like Magical Cannons, Golems, and Air Destroyers, as well as other artifacts.

The second option was to leave the Dungeon Core, allowing it to manage the dungeon. In other words, the dungeon would not cease to exist and Adventurers could hunt monsters and acquire a steady supply of materials, which could then be sold to the Adventurer's Guild.

For this reason, all Dungeon Cities have protectors stationed inside the Dungeon Core Room to ensure that no one would dare to take it.

In any case, dungeon cores were national treasures that provided an unlimited source of materials, which could be used to craft many weapons, armors, accessories, and other items that made the kingdom prosper.

The last option was to absorb the Dungeon Core.

Absorbing a Dungeon Core could raise the Rank of the one who absorbed it to the next level as long as the user's current rank was Rank 6 and below.

So getting the core and absorbing it after reaching Rank 6 was a shortcut that a few people had tried in the past.

Since absorbing a Dungeon Core absorption could only be done once in a lifetime, only those under Rank 6 and were desperate enough used it.

Alex pondered a bit before glancing at Fran.

To his surprise, Fran was also looking at him, and she simply nodded her head as if telling Alex that she would trust his decision.

"Dim Dim, please take the core and store it for the time being," Alex said to the little bun.

Dim Dim gave Alex a salute. "Dim Dim!"

The little bun then jumped on top of the hovering Dungeon Core.

A second later, a dimensional gate appeared below it, and the core slowly descended into it as if it was slowly being stored away.

When the core was about to be completely stored inside Dim Dim's dimensional storage, five beams of light flew out of it.

Four of those beams transformed into four treasure chests, while the last one landed on the old knight's forehead, merging with his body.

These are perhaps the rewards given to the ones who conquered the Dungeon using a secret method.

But Alex and Fran knew that this dungeon wasn't an ordinary dungeon.

It was a dungeon created specifically for the two of them—to fulfill a promise made thousands of years ago.

This was a gift from "The World," and they would accept it gratefully.

The only surprising thing was the beam of light that had shot to Lex's forehead. Alex tried coming up with a feasible explanation but failed.

So, for the time being, he decided to deal with the four treasure chests at hand.

"Please store these treasure chests as well, Dim Dim. We will let Astrea open them back at the Academy."

"Dim Dim!"

Lumi blinked because she had no idea why Alex needed someone else to open the treasure boxes for her.

However, since Dim Dim seemed to agree, she decided to just ask Alex this question later when they were alone.

Suddenly, the sound of a tolling bell reached their ears.

It was the signal that a Dungeon had been conquered, and only those inside of it would be able to hear this sound.

A moment later, Alex and his comrades found themselves standing on top of a hill, overlooking the place where the dungeon once was.

It was no longer there. All that was left in the valley were the tall walls, which had kept a secret no one had discovered for countless years.

“Let’s go back everyone,” Alex said as he reached out for Fran’s hand.

Finn thought of grabbing Alex’s hand to prevent him from touching his sister. But he refrained from doing so after seeing Fran also reach out to take Alex’s hand.

For some reason, Lumi felt competitive, so she held Alex’s left hand, which made the old knight smile faintly.

Earlier, the Dungeon Core had given him a gift, and this gift was quite precious.

It allowed him to “see” despite being blind, which was truly a miracle born from The World’s blessing.

Perhaps the Deity knew that the old man was Alex’s protector, so she had granted him a gift that would be very useful for him.

Lex had no intention of letting anyone know of this secret because being known as blind had its perks.

If people thought of him as someone who couldn't see, they would be more careless in his presence, allowing him to see some secrets he wasn't supposed to.

Holding two beautiful young ladies in his hands, Alex took the lead to head to the path they had taken earlier.

The mist that had been troubling the travelers within the territory of the Whispering Valley had long disappeared, giving everyone a good look of their surroundings.

Finn and Lex walked behind the three teenagers, guarding the rear.

They had not forgotten about the countless monsters roaming the domain. Lowering their guard would be foolish, so they had to remain vigilant until they reached the safety of the capital city of Solara, the City of Solivane.