

Endless 541

Chapter 541: Are You Seeing What I'm Seeing?

Chuck blinked once, then twice, before rubbing his eyes.

On the couch was Alex. And on Alex's lap sat Fran.

She was resting her head on his shoulder while he had his arms wrapped around her waist. He didn't seem to mind the countless eyes of those passing through the lobby.

It was as if he was declaring that the dwarf in his arms was now with him, that they should cut off their thoughts of her if they had any, and that they should spread the news far and wide.

Both of their eyes were closed, visibly enjoying this moment together. Although countless jealous, hateful, and envious gazes from the First Years who happened to pass them by the hotel lobby bore into them deeply, they remained completely unfazed.

When Chuck saw them, he even thought he had merely hallucinated. But after unnecessary blinks to refresh his perfect eyesight, the view still didn't change, so he turned to Dim Dim for answers. However, Dim Dim was blissfully enjoying Lapiz patting its head.

Knowing the little bun was in no capacity to answer his question, Chuck shifted his attention to Lumi, who was currently in a corner of the room with Lavinia.

She had traveled with Alex during his short trip outside of the city, so she must know the full details on what was happening at the moment. Unfortunately, the young fox lady was a bit busy talking to Lavinia at the moment.

The two ladies seemed to be discussing something very important. Lavinia would even glance at Alex from time to time.

To Chuck's surprise, Finn, who was always with his sister, was nowhere to be found.

After arriving at the hotel, Fran had decided to stay with Alex. Finn had then gone back to his room alone.

Lex had also gone out to get a drink or two, perhaps to celebrate what he felt was a special occasion.

“H-Hey, Vaan, are you seeing what I’m seeing?” Chuck asked.

“Yes,” Vaan replied, an amused smile on his face.

“Don’t you see anything wrong with this scene?” Chuck whispered before glancing at Lumi. “If Alex is playing with fire, he will definitely get burned!”

Chuck was the self-proclaimed Love Expert among the First Years. He had long sensed that Latifa, Lavinia, and Lumi had feelings for Alex.

The subtle gestures they had shared with the young man were more than enough for Chuck to piece things together.

Frankly, having more than one lover was not uncommon in their Kingdom.

Of course, it wasn’t as simple as finding more than one woman willing to love him. The man must have enough prudence to ensure that this arrangement would not end in a scandalous cat fight that would incur the judgement of other nobles.

“Alex knows what he’s doing,” Vaan replied. “And even if he doesn’t know what he’s doing, I’ll give him a shoulder to lean on when things get tough.”

“Ugh... what is the blind devotion coming from you?” Chuck shook his head because he didn’t need anyone to answer his question.

From the moment Alex had saved Vaan from the Demon Worshipers, he had already decided to make the silver-haired young man his life-long benefactor.

'I need to talk to someone with more common sense,' Chuck thought before glancing at Charles and Nessia, who were also seated together on a couch.

As if not wanting to lose to Alex and Fran, Nessia was also resting her head on Charles's shoulder while holding onto his arms with both hands.

"Tsk!" Chuck clicked his tongue because, knowing that those two were also in a world of their own and couldn't be spoken to.

As a last resort, he set his sights on Renard, who sensed his gaze and responded with a glare.

Chuck understood instantly that Renard didn't want to have anything to do with the pink, fluffy clouds spreading inside the lobby. Actually, this atmosphere seemed to irritate him very much for some reason.

'Uh... as expected.' Chuck frowned. 'Renard is also no good. This guy will be forever alone unless the Saintess or Melissa ties him to a bed and gags him to stop him from speaking.'

Mr. I-Have-Trust-Issues had always been an asocial person. He only talked to people if it was absolutely necessary or if they annoyed him so much that he had to do something to shut them up.

Then it happened.

Fran opened her eyes before planting a kiss on Alex's cheek. She then whispered something to him before reluctantly leaving his lap and heading to the stairs which led to her room.

Those who were paying close attention to the two of them, including those who were part of Fran's fan club, let out gasps of shock. They then immediately glared at Alex. The killing intent was unmissable.

The flower that they had admired from afar had now bloomed, and they were very angry that its beauty was only reserved for the bastard who already had Vaan by his side!

“This damn cheater!”

“Is he trying to toss Vaan aside after having his way with her body?! Damn it!”

“Wait... is Vaan no longer enough for him?! Does he plan to make Fran a side dish or some kind of appetizer?!”

“Don’t stop me, I’ll kick his nuts!”

“Kill! Kill! Kill!”

The commotion spreading inside the lobby did not escape Alex’s notice. He glanced at the peanut gallery.

Then he did something that made his haters hate him more than they could ever thought they could.

Alex broke into the smug smile of someone who knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that he was now a winner in life.

This provocation was something that a handful of people couldn’t tolerate, so they decided to give him a piece of their mind.

However, as if waiting for that moment, Professor Rowan, Princess Xenia, Prince Edward, and Mary appeared in the lobby together.

Seeing the Headmaster, the students were forced to pull back. Causing trouble in front of the Professor would definitely have consequences they couldn’t afford.

“Mr. Stratos, please follow me,” Professor Rowan said as soon as he saw Alex. “There is something important that we need to talk about.”

Alex nodded and followed the Professor alongside Princess Xenia, Prince Edward, and Mary.

The four of them had just met with Duke Percival and Lady Celestria, as well as the Headmaster of the Solara Academy, Professor Harry.

The things they discussed in that meeting were quite important. Since Alex came up in that discussion and was also at the center of the so-called storm pertaining to the tournament that had just ended, they decided that he should be made aware of certain details.

These matters were tied directly to two members of his club, Charles and Renard.

As Alex was the person closest to the two of them, Professor Rowan judged that it would be best to talk to him first before talking to the other two boys separately.

Chuck sighed in relief when he saw their Headmaster coming to the rescue.

He believed that if the Headmaster had been even a minute late, his roommate might have been strangled to death by the angry mob, who were still itching to give him a piece of their mind.

Chapter 542: That Is What Makes It So Fun

Professor Rowan glanced at the young man sipping tea in front of him.

Princess Xenia and Prince Edward were also quietly seated, waiting for the discussion to start.

The Headmaster had already talked to them, but they stayed out of curiosity for how the meeting with the President of the Endless Horizon Club would unfold.

“Alex, is it true that you met Charles in Briarwood Village and accompanied him in the Dungeon of Beginnings for the trial of the academy?” Professor Rowan asked.

“Yes, Headmaster,” Alex replied.

His honesty seemed to take the Headmaster by surprise for a split second. "I remember you experienced something like a Dungeon Outbreak occurring when you were in the Dungeon of Beginnings," Professor Rowan continued. "I'm inclined to think that it might not have been a one-off incident..."

The Headmaster's voice trailed off as his gaze locked on the young man who was looking back at him calmly.

"I have reason to believe that the Orion Dungeon Outbreak during our inter-academy expedition was also no accident," Professor Rowan stated.

Alex nodded. "I agree, Professor. After all, the Demon Worshipers had planned to use that Dungeon Outbreak to cause chaos and strain the relationship between the three academies."

"Are you saying that the Dungeon Outbreak was caused by them?" Professor Rowan arched an eyebrow.

"Definitely," Alex replied without hesitation. "If not them, then who?"

The Headmaster chuckled before handing the young man a scroll that contained the confession of Gaston, the Leader of the Demon Worshipers who had been captured during the expedition.

He admitted that the Demon Worshipers had planned to kidnap the VIP students of Solara Academy and Faelarun Academy, then kill the rest.

However, he refused to acknowledge that the Dungeon Outbreak had been their doing.

Alex calmly read the written confession from beginning to end before placing it back on the table.

"Headmaster, I'm sure you didn't call me here just for this," Alex said evenly.

Professor Rowan nodded. "You're right. I believe there's some connection to the previous Dungeon Outbreaks and Mr. Charles Lambert. Do you know, Mr. Stratos, that Charles is a Void-Touched?"

“Void-Touched?” Alex blinked. “What’s that? Someone who has touched the Void?”

Professor Rowan smirked. While he couldn’t be sure whether Alex knew about the Void-Touched or not, he was certain that the young man knew of Charles Lambert’s peculiar abilities.

“So, you don’t know that he is Void-Touched?”

“No.”

Of course, Alex lied. As someone who had played ELO for many years, he knew what a Void-Touched was.

Even so, he had no intention of admitting anything.

His knowledge about the game assured him that Charles would not be harmed by the Professor despite being a Void-Touched.

In fact, Professor Rowan would do his best to keep Charles safe and educate him properly about his powers.

There were only thirteen of them in the world. If something happened to Charles, the companions whom he had yet to meet wouldn’t sit around idly. They would avenge him. There was no doubt about that.

Never once during this conversation did the Headmaster or young man break eye contact. Eventually, the old man sighed deeply.

“Very well, since you say you don’t know anything about it, then I believe you,” Professor Rowan said, though his expression declared otherwise.

Alex pretended he couldn’t tell that the Professor’s raised eyebrows and subtle smile were saying, “I know you’re lying to me, but I’ll turn a blind eye this one time because I can’t prove it.”

After that first issue had been dealt with, the Headmaster tackled the next problem.

“Duke Percival has shown interest in Renard,” Professor Rowan revealed. “Whether that interest is good or bad for him, only time will tell. For now, my friend, Harry, has extended an invitation to him to transfer to Solara Academy.

“I would like you to convince him to reject that invitation. Renard is a hot topic among the nobility of this kingdom, so letting him transfer to Solara Academy might put him in the crosshairs of these people.”

Alex didn't reply right away. There were some routes in the story of ELO where Renard transferred to Solara Academy on his own accord.

He grew stronger more rapidly on these routes than the typical routes, so Alex was very reluctant to interfere with his club member's personal choice.

Besides, Lady Celestria was one of Renard's main Female Leads in the story. Being a third wheel would not do him good at this point.

Even if Duke Percival's interest veiled selfish agendas, it wouldn't change the fact that Renard would surpass his expectations.

In fact, the Duke himself would set his daughter up with Renard once he confirmed that the young man was a prodigy that surpassed all the young geniuses of the Kingdom of Solara.

However, whether that future would happen or not depended on Renard's choices.

After all, Lady Celestria was not the only main heroine supporting the young man.

Melissa was also a very strong contender. Even though Alex found the Saintess more likeable than the axewoman, he also remembered that pairing Melissa with Renard was one of the most recommended routes in the game.

“Professor, I think it will be best if we let Renard decide for himself,” Alex said after careful consideration. “It is his life after all. Whether he chooses to stay at Frieden Academy or transfer to Solara Academy, I will support his decision no matter what.”

The Headmaster eyed Alex solemnly. “Are you saying that as a friend or as someone that can’t stand him? I have heard that the two of you don’t get along.”

“Those are just baseless rumors, Professor,” Alex said with an air of indignance. “Although we are not super close, that doesn’t mean that we don’t consider each other friends. For me, Renard is a very dependable member of my club. As to how he sees me, only he can tell.”

Princess Xenia smirked, fully aware that Alex and Renard were like oil and water.

They didn’t mix well, but they surprisingly got along when it mattered the most.

When the members of their club were in danger, both of them would move mountains to help their friends no matter what.

The Princess even had a theory that Alex was doing his best to prevent Renard from being a lone wolf. She strongly suspected that Alex was trying to surround Renard with people to help him open up.

From her observation, she could say that the young man was no longer as standoffish. Sometimes, he even took the initiative to talk to others.

“Your club is filled with troublemakers, Alex,” Professor Rowan commented.

“I agree, Professor,” Alex replied. “But that’s what makes it so fun.”

Professor Rowan chuckled. Indeed, for the most part, Alex’s club was harmless.

He also had to concede that it was filled with geniuses and prodigies that shone in their respective fields.

Despite looking the least reliable among them all, Chuck excelled whenever it mattered.

As a headmaster, he had no complaints about the continued existence of the Endless Horizon Club.

After giving Alex some advice on how to handle his club members, the Headmaster allowed him to leave the room.

When he was certain that the young man was out of earshot, Professor Rowan glanced at Princess Xenia.

“Did you manage to find out Alex’s true origins?” Professor Rowan asked.

Princess Xenia shook her head. “No, Professor. I have only gotten the information that is already known to all. He appeared on the Floating Islands of Thaloria and registered as an Adventurer. After that, he interacted with the Clawford Tribe, who helped to deal with the Monster Stampede.”

“I see...” Professor Rowan leaned back on his chair.

Alex was shrouded in mysteries, but what really made him pay more attention to the young man was the fact that Lex seemed to be treating him well.

The Guardian of the North was not an individual who would associate himself with random people, especially someone of Alex’s age.

He had tried to ask Lex why he was paying close attention to Alex, but the old knight’s reply had been equally simple and frustrating.

“Why not?”

Knowing that he wouldn’t be able to get more information from Lex, Rowan decided to just observe the young man for now.

Alex seemed to be a magnet for trouble, always attracting storms that threatened to cause widespread destruction if not handled properly.

But at the same time, Professor Rowan could not deny that wherever Alex went, those storms eventually calmed down.

In fact, the young man seemed to have everything under his control, just like how he had turned the Orion Dungeon Outbreak into a moneymaking opportunity. Even the feared mass panic among the people of Orion City hadn't come to pass thanks to him.

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As Alex walked back to the hotel lobby, he mulled over Professor Rowan's words.

'So Charles has already attracted their attention,' Alex thought. 'Earlier than expected.'

The Void-Touched weren't meant to live ordinary lives.

Even if Charles tried to hide, the Void itself would inevitably ripple around him, drawing the gazes of scholars, monsters, and fanatics alike.

The fact that Professor Rowan had brought it up now meant that he knew how delicate this matter was.

Alex stopped by the staircase, looking at his friends who were lounging on the couches around the lobby.

On the surface, everything seemed peaceful.

If possible, he wanted it to stay that way so he and his club members could enjoy more of their school life without worrying about the dangers slowly creeping up on them.

Chapter 543: A Journey Doesn't Always Go In A Straight Line

The hotel stay of the Frieden Academy students had been extended for one more day.

Free to do anything they wanted, the majority of the students strolled the city, looking for souvenirs to buy. After all, they didn't know when they could come to the city of Solivane again.

Alex was no exception and took this opportunity to wander around the city alongside Lavinia, Lumi, and Fran.

They visited famous shops and local restaurant, sometimes stopping to patronize the pastry and snack stores they pass by.

One of the members of the Demon Worshipers, whom Alex had secretly made his subordinate, even came across them.

The unfortunate soul was Chris P. Bacon, who flinched as soon as he saw the young man responsible for rooting out the Demon Worshiper Branch in the city of Solivane in a single night.

In time, their organization would realize that their agents in Solivane were missing, send their people to investigate, and then replenish the manpower.

But now that they were part of the Zodiac, Chris and his comrades had to come up with an excuse.

All of them agreed to report the same story—the Branch Head of the Demon Worshipers, as well as his subordinates, had already gone missing when they arrived at the city. Not wanting to endanger themselves, they decided to keep a low profile while secretly investigating what had happened to their colleagues.

Of course, part of the story would include their very very very intensive effort to search for clues that might lead them to the answer, only to fail. And that they believed only a powerful person could be so traceless, so they feared for their safety and reluctantly stopped investigating.

There was no problem with this excuse, and there was no danger of one of them spilling the beans.

The Old Man who accompanied Alex was very thorough and had forced them to make some kind of Oath.

After helplessly obeying, they felt their very soul bind to some kind of power that prevented them from betraying their new Master, Alex.

Chris gave Alex a brief nod before walking past him and the ladies accompanying him.

When the young man was no longer in sight, Lumi glanced at Alex, recognizing Chris as one of the students whom the young man had dealt with during that fateful night.

"Is there something wrong?" Lavinia asked. "You seem to know something I don't."

Her senses were quite sharp, so the small exchange between Chris, Lumi, and Alex didn't escape her notice.

"I'll tell you later," Alex said. "Let's just enjoy our trip for now."

Since he had already recognized Lavinia as one of his people, he planned to tell her everything about the Demon Worshipers.

The Clawford Tribe and he were already joined at the hips ever since his Master, Cairo, had introduced him to their family.

Not to mention, it was thanks to them that he became an Oathkeeper, the same Profession the Founding Leader of their tribe had. They even treated as a symbol representing them, not minding that he was an outsider.

Originally, Alex and Lavinia planned to visit the Clawford Tribe on their way back from the City of Solivane.

However, after the incident in the Whispering Valley, the young man decided to reschedule their visit to another time.

Lavinia didn't say anything. Since they could always go to the tribe during the weekend, this delay was not an issue.

For now, she was just happy to spend some time with Alex and her "sisters," who loved the same person as she did.

While Alex and the three ladies were enjoying their last day of vacation in the city of Solivane, Renard found himself sitting in the living room of the Duke Percival's estate.

Lady Celestria had visited him two hours ago and invited him to their residence. She didn't beat around the bush and directly admitted that it was her father who wanted to talk with him.

Renard agreed, curious as to why the Saintess' father was looking for him.

Of course, he made sure to not lower his guard. Aside from Lady Celestria, he didn't trust anyone else.

"Your performance during the tournament was great, Renard," Duke Percival said with a smile. "How about it? Would you like to transfer to Solara Academy? I promise to handle all the paperworks, as well as sponsor you if you agree to this proposal."

"I have thought about it, Your Grace, and I have decided to stay at Frieden Academy for now," Renard replied.

"Oh?" Duke Percival rubbed his chin. "Did my offer fail to interest you? If you want to negotiate, I am all ears."

When he first heard about the fact that his daughter had become close friends with a commoner during her visit at Frieden Academy, he thought that she was just being kind.

However, when the news about the duel reached his ears, he thought that this young man that he had heard about might not be as simple as he thought.

After watching the battle, he saw that Renard possessed great potential, surpassing even the geniuses of their kingdom.

Although he had lost to Charles during their battle, the Duke's interest in him didn't diminish.

In fact, it even soared to new heights.

That battle was a very close call, and fighting against a Void-Touched toe to toe was something to be proud of.

Even so, he was certain that if Renard were to be properly trained and provided with enough resources, he would even surpass Charles in the future.

Duke Percival was someone who wouldn't hesitate to do anything for the sake of nurturing a talent that would leave a mark in history.

If Renard truly grew into the powerhouse he envisioned, he wouldn't mind if he becomes the lover of his daughter in the future.

"There's nothing wrong with your offer, Sir. I simply believe I can become stronger if I stay at Frieden Academy," Renard replied firmly.

"At first, I stayed because Frieden Academy had the only person I regarded as a rival. Though after the tournament, I found one more person I am resolved to overcome no matter what."

After hearing his reply, the Duke chuckled. He understood that having a rival was indeed a good way to push someone to their limits.

However, he thought of something that would still allow him to form a connection with Renard.

“Very well, I will respect your decision,” Duke Percival said before handing Renard a black card. “This card contains a million gold coins, which you can exchange into any currency at any bank within the three allied kingdoms of Solara, Avalon, and Faellarun.

“I know you don’t want to feel indebted to me, but let me just say one thing to you. Your two rivals will continue to get stronger, and if you don’t use every method to catch up to them, they will leave you in the dust.”

The Duke of Solara had experienced the same issue in his childhood. And when he grew up, he regretted not using his family’s influence out of foolish stubbornness.

He believed he could grow strong using only his own means, but he had forgotten that his family and background were also part of his strength.

Not utilizing the things you were born with was a waste of time and opportunity. He didn’t want Renard to go down that path, especially since he had already planned to sponsor him.

Renard was still hesitating when Lady Celestria spoke her mind.

“The path to reach the top of the mountain doesn’t necessarily mean you have to tread the journey alone,” Lady Celestria said in a serious tone. “People specialize in different things. You may be strong, but that doesn’t necessarily mean that you are a good cook.

“That also doesn’t necessarily mean that you are a good scout or tracker, who could find the fastest way to reach your destination.

“A journey doesn’t always go in a straight line. Sometimes, you have to make a detour in order to discover new opportunities that will help you on your journey.”

Her strong gaze conveyed her will, and Renard wasn’t able to refute her words.

While Alex and Charles managed to get to where they were using their own strengths, they had experienced many “fruitful encounters”.

In fact, he felt that Alex seemed to be guiding them to a path that would allow them to become stronger.

The Skill Books he received from his club president allowed him to reach his current level of strength, which he believed was something he couldn’t achieve if he were left to his own devices.

Because of this, the Saintess’ words held weight. Her words reminded him that he had already been helped by the person he considered a rival.

“Understood,” Renard accepted the black card that the Duke had given him. “I will put this to good use.”

“Excellent!” Duke Percival nodded with a smile.

He didn’t know what the future would bring, but he was certain of one thing.

Investing in the young man in front of him would allow him to see something that would make him say that everything he did was worth it.

Chapter 544: I Need To Buy More Time

“Is everyone here?” Professor Rowan asked. “Class Presidents, please make sure that all of your classmates are accounted for.”

It was now time for the students of Frieden Academy to return to the Kingdom of Avalon. The Headmaster would personally send them back.

He was the Paragon of Space, so instantaneous travel was not difficult for him.

Distances that took people days could be covered in seconds with his power.

“Headmaster, Class 1-A is all here,” Prince Edward stated.

“Class 1-B all present!”

“Class 1-C are all accounted for, Sir.”

The representatives of Class 1-D to Class 1-F also declared that none of their classmates were missing.

Professor Rowan nodded before shifting his attention to his counterpart, Professor Harry.

“Thank you for taking care of my students, Harry,” Professor Rowan said. “In the future, feel free to send your students to my place as well. I’ll take good care of them and poach the talented ones!”

Professor Harry chuckled as he shook hands with the Paragon of Space. “You bastard, you still dare to set your eyes on my talented students even after you have those two... errr three?”

Naturally, the Headmaster was referring to Renard and Charles. He only mentioned three because Alex was also a very promising student.

He not only excelled in blackmail—errr business deals, but was also a very capable student whom Harry would want to take under his wing if possible.

Professor Rowan also chuckled because he understood that having wonderful prodigies was indeed something that the Headmaster of every academy took pride in.

After bidding goodbye to the friends that they had made during their short stay at Solara Academy, the students returned to the center of the plaza, which was now glowing faintly due to a grand magical formation.

“Let’s go,” Professor Rowan said softly. “Back to Frieden Academy!”

A flash of light washed over the entire student body before they all transformed into beams of light that soared across the skies like comets.

Rewarding the students from Solara with this light show was Professor Rowan's way of repaying them for their hospitality. He was also asking Professor Harry, "I can do this! Can you?"

When the lights finally disappeared over the horizon, Harry only shook his head helplessly because he simply couldn't do what Professor Rowan had done.

Of course, had he been a Paragon, he would have been able to do something similar that could inspire potential talents into joining his academy.

Plaza of Frieden Academy...

Hundreds of beams of light descended from the heavens as the First Years finally returned to their own academy.

"Today will be a rest day, but do not forget that your regular classes will resume tomorrow," Professor Rowan reminded the students before taking his leave.

Truth be told, Alex wanted to empty his head and just relax for the rest of the day because many things had happened in the Kingdom of Solara.

But just as he was about to do that, a little bun landed on his shoulder and lightly poked his cheek.

"Dim Dim!"

"Youu want to go and play with Daisy and your friends from the farm?"

“Dim!”

“Okay. Have fun.”

After notifying Alex, the little bun leaped off his shoulder and hurried towards the farm to tell its friends that it had finally returned.

The first thing Dim Dim wanted to do was to go on a patrol with Daisy and the Forest Wolf, Rex, who were now its closest friends among the beasts of Fran’s farm.

“I’ll also go back to the farm,” Fran said with a smile. “You’re going to have lunch with me later, right?”

“I will.” Alex nodded. “See you later.”

Alex gave the young lady a hug before reluctantly pulling back to let her go.

After their experience inside the Whispering Valley, both of them had agreed to go to the Shadow Forest to see if the graves of their friends were still in one place and had not been desecrated over the years.

Fortunately, they wouldn’t have to wait long. In two weeks, there would be a holiday that would give them two days off before the weekend. That should be enough for them to make the trip.

‘Next week, I’ll visit the Clawford Tribe with Lavinia,’ Alex thought. ‘The week after that, Fran and I will head to the Shadow Forest.’

Just as he thought that he already had everything under control, Lumi tugged his shirt.

“Latifa wants to see you at the clock tower,” Lumi whispered.

“I understand,” Alex replied. “I’ll go and see her now.”

Lumi had told him yesterday that Latifa had seen what had happened in the dungeon through her.

This also meant that she was now aware of Fran's and Alex's new relationship.

After he arrived at the clock tower, Latifa immediately gestured for him to approach her bed.

Just like always, the young lady was lying on her personal bed near the glass panels of the clock tower that overlooked the academy.

Alex then sat on the bed and gazed at the young lady, whom he hadn't seen for a while.

Although Lumi looked just like Latifa, there were some minute differences between them.

Lumi had a sharper look while Latifa seemed gentler.

As for Lotte, she was a livelier version of Latifa. She socialized easily whenever she felt like it.

That was something that Latifa wouldn't be able to do because being around people exhausted her.

She preferred to sleep and laze around all day and let her Alters do everything for her.

This included going to classes, taking down notes, doing assignments, etc.

"I miss you," Latifa said as she hugged Alex's waist, prompting the young man to lower his head and kiss her hair.

Since she had no intention of sitting up, Alex decided to lie down beside her and give her a hug as well.

The two didn't say anything for a while and simply held each other, enjoying this moment of intimacy that was exclusive to them.

A few minutes later, Latifa finally spoke up.

"Alex, how about you make Fran an honorary member of our club?" Latifa proposed. "That way, she can visit us anytime once she is done with her farming duties."

"That's a great idea," Alex replied. "I'll mention this during our lunch later."

"Un." Latifa hummed before closing her eyes.

She slightly activated the power of the Verdant Throne, allowing Alex's body to resonate with hers.

Although different from the Gaia Rings, the Verdant Throne also manifested its true strength when both of its wielders were together.

Alex felt the warmth spreading across his entire body and enjoyed the sensation of the two Verdant Thrones resonating with each other.

Two minutes later, the power subsided a bit, but the closeness that they had felt at that moment remained.

Lotte and Lumi had also left the clock tower and stood guard outside the door.

They had intended to let Alex and Latifa have some time with each other because the young lady had truly missed him.

Unknown to both of them, a little devil was peeking at Alex and Lumi from a corner of the glass panels.

It had a mischievous expression, but it soon flew back to Himea.

Just like Latifa, the young lady who always wore a fox mask was also paying close attention to Alex's movements.

While she didn't know what had happened in the Whispering Valley, she sensed that the young man had grown closer to Fran.

"Two more to go," Himea murmured as she gazed at the clock tower from the distance.

A moment later, she turned into black mist and faded away in the shadows where she belonged.

The Devil joined her discreetly as she made her way back to their own tower, which was located at the northern side of the campus.

"Although it didn't progress in the way we were expecting, progress was still made," the Devil said as he landed on Himea's right shoulder. "That's a good thing, right?"

"Yes," Himea replied. "It is indeed a good thing."

"So, who will be next?" the Devil asked. "Is it the lucky girl or the elven princess who has an inferiority complex?"

Himea didn't answer right away.

Instead, she walked towards the window and allowed the breeze to ruffle up her hair.

"I don't really care who it will be as long as things proceed according to plan," Himea replied.

"Easier said than done." The Devil smirked. "After all, he has changed many things. The future that he knows may not come to pass."

Himea tucked her hair behind her ear and nodded.

“That’s why I’ll need your help when trouble comes knocking on our door,” Himea said.

“And you will have it.” The Devil patted his chest with confidence. “As long as we are not going to fight a Rank 9 or a Paragon, I will be able to let you escape by hook or by crook.”

Himea smiled faintly.

The Devil was right.

Although the story was still unfolding normally, there was no telling how long this would last.

Alex’s actions had already created a butterfly effect and introduced unknown variables to the original plot.

The Demon Worshipers, the Church of Death, the Void-Touched, as well as other factions would soon raise the tension.

Himea closed her eyes and hummed a tune.

What she could do was very limited, but one thing was clear.

‘I need to buy more time,’ Himea thought. ‘Time that will allow them all to grow.’

Since the original timelines were no longer relevant, no one would know when the true powerhouses would appear.

Himea wasn’t aware that the Vampire Lord had already made contact with Alex, leaving the young man terrified that he would be erased from the world without being able to even resist.

Fortunately, the worst case scenario hadn't happened.

But that didn't mean that something similar would not come to pass.

If Alex wasn't lucky then he might come face to face with an individual that wasn't as forgiving and patient like the Vampire Lord, who had spared him because of his history with Lex and Evangeline.

Chapter 545: It's Good To Be Young

"I baked some cookies today. Please take this, Charles."

"Charles, are you free this weekend? Why don't we take a stroll around the city? Just the two of us."

"I am the daughter of a Viscount. How about it? Do you wish to become a noble's son-in-law?"

Charles had been innocently walking around the academy, minding his own business, when he suddenly found himself surrounded by ladies.

As someone who didn't have a lot of experience with women, especially women actively trying to get close to him, the young man found himself mute and frozen.

His victory in Solara had been witnessed by all his batchmates, skyrocketing his popularity.

News of his exploits spread among his seniors as well, prompting more noble ladies to take action.

They were always on the lookout for outstanding individuals whom they could introduce to their families.

Charles defeating the prodigies of Solara had erased his disadvantage as a commoner.

No one would dare look down at such a promising young man as he might even reach a realm that surpassed everyone's expectations.

"It sure is nice to be popular." From a distance, Chuck smirked at the sight of Charles being surrounded by women who were not Nessia. "Fortunately, I didn't join the tournament. If I had, I would have become the Champion without breaking a sweat."

Alex's lips curled in amusement. However, he wasn't so quick to disagree. Chuck might have really pulled it off given his strength and skill.

In any case, Charles' status among the First Years had truly reached a new height, surprising even his older sister, Vivian.

In her two years in the academy, her classmates usually ignored her. Today was the first time so many people talked to her, though nearly all of them wanted to know more about her young brother.

"I wonder... will some of these ladies succeed in seducing him?" Chuck asked mischievously.

"He probably won't dare to do that," Alex replied. "Nessia can be really scary when she gets angry."

"Indeed." Chuck nodded quickly. "Just thinking of what she might do if Charles cheated on her gives me the chills."

Nessia had already expected her boyfriend's spike in popularity.

She just hadn't anticipated that some of the noble ladies would be shameless enough to try snatching Charles away from her by using their status.

"Alex, have you received confessions as of late?" Chuck asked with genuine curiosity. "Or are they all death threats from Fran's fan club?"

Alex sighed. Indeed, he had received a couple letters. They had been creatively mailed through magic. And their contents were bordering on harassment.

“Even Vann is receiving heat.” Chuck laughed. “Many are asking whether she’s fine with her boyfriend being stolen from her.”

“I’ve already told you that Vaan is a boy,” Alex stated. “I’m just helping him hide his real gender to keep him safe.”

“Show me proof then.” Chuck said with a smirk. “Unless you show me any evidence, Vaan will always be a girl in my eyes.”

Alex just sighed and shook his head. Even Dim Dim, who should know that Vaan was a boy, often questioned if that was really the case.

“Anyway, Vaan is probably going to talk to you about it later since everyone is quite curious on how she will handle her rival in love.” Chuck gave Alex the ‘It’s hard to be popular, right?’ gaze.

Just as Alex was on the verge of rolling his eyes at his annoying roommate, he noticed a familiar face heading towards them.

Renard had also been taking a stroll when he was suddenly pursued by noble ladies who decided that he was another worthy option.

As someone who disliked talking to people, especially those who harbored questionable intentions, Renard’s face naturally distorted in annoyance.

Even Chuck didn’t dare to comment on his scary expression, fearing that Mr. I-Have-Trust-Issues might overhear it.

When Renard saw his two club members, the frown on his face deepened. But he didn’t say anything and simply walked past them as fast as he could, desperate to escape the ladies who were hounding him like flies.

When these ladies saw Alex and Chuck, all of them visibly flinched.

Although no one wanted to admit it, the ladies were quite afraid of the Blackmail King and the infamous troublemaker.

Both of them were incredibly handsome young men, but their reputations were enough to expel them from most women's lists of eligible bachelors.

"W-Wait for us, Sir Renard!" one of the ladies anxiously called out as she ran past the two smirking boys.

The other ladies also followed her and fled as if they had seen ghosts.

"It's good to be young." Chuck crossed his arms, enjoying the situation of his two friends.

Alex nodded.

Suddenly, he sensed a familiar presence behind him.

When he turned around, he saw Evangeline and Eleanora approaching them.

Seeing the former's expression, Alex remembered that they had an appointment to meet at the old library today.

He had promised her that he would allow her to drink his blood at least once or twice a week to satisfy her blood cravings.

Eleanora had accompanied her Mistress to look for Alex. When she saw Chuck, a frown appeared on her beautiful face.

“Alex, are you free right now?” Evangeline asked.

“Yes,” Alex replied and reached out to hold her hand. “Let’s go?”

Evangeline nodded. “Un.”

The two walked away, leaving Chuck and Eleanora behind.

The members of Endless Horizon were not aware that Chuck was now Eleanora’s Master.

“Go and follow them,” Chuck ordered. “Or do you have something to report to me?”

“I don’t have anything to report.” Eleanora didn’t even give him a second glance as she hurried to follow her Mistress and Alex.

Chuck watched her go with a faint smile on his face.

The young man had guessed that there was something going on between Alex and Evangeline. But he wasn’t the type to pry.

However, that was only for friends. He extended no such courtesy to enemies. He regularly received reports from the vampire lady about the movements of the Demon Worshipers.

Chuck had ordered her to report anything that might endanger the lives of his friends from the Endless Horizon Club.

Eleanora had reluctantly agreed to his request. This was why Chuck was also aware of the incident that happened in the City of Solivane.

Since Alex hadn’t asked for his help, Chuck had decided to let him handle everything. Unsurprisingly, Alex had done so flawlessly.

Just as Chuck was thinking of where to go next, he heard someone call out to him from behind.

“So this is where you are,” Mary said impatiently. “I’ve been looking for you for an hour. The Princess wants to have a talk with you.”

“Does she?” Chuck arched an eyebrow.

“What are you waiting for?” Mary rested her hands on her hips. “Are you going to make the princess wait?”

“Of course not,” Chuck replied. “But I feel so lazy right now. Why don’t you hold my hand and drag me to where she is?”

Mary clicked her tongue, but she still grabbed the young man’s hand and dragged him away as he wished.

Chuck smiled in contentment. Peaceful days like this were so rare.

If possible, he wanted everyone to live without worrying about the dangers that were constantly trying to ruin their peace.

Chapter 546: It Seems That You Need Some Punishment

Inside the Old Library...

Evangeline kissed the wound she had inflicted on Alex’s neck, healing it completely.

Two faint marks remained, but they ought to fade before the day ended.

“I don’t know if I just missed your blood too much, but I think your blood tastes better than the last time I took it,” Evangeline said with a smile. “Is this because of what happened between you and Fran?”

"I'm not sure," Alex replied.

How could he possibly check if his blood had improved in taste because of his experiences in the Whispering Valley?

"Can you tell me about it?" Evangeline asked as she snuggled close to the young man, who wrapped his hands around her body while leaning on the wall.

Even if someone were to enter the old library, no one would be able to see them since they were on the second floor, hidden by the empty book shelves.

Of course, Eleanora was standing guard outside the door of the library, ensuring that no one would be able to disturb the two of them.

Alex nodded. "If you wish to know, then I'll tell you."

The young man then told her about his journey to the Whispering Valley, where he had coincidentally met Fran and her brother, Finn.

They had then explored the Whispering Dungeon together.

He also told her about his and Fran's previous lives, where they had traveled together as Adventurers.

Evangeline listened to the story with great interest and was saddened by the finale.

"This reminds me of what I felt back then," Evangeline said softly as she hugged Alex tighter. "I thought I really lost you. Meeting you again feels like a miracle. I'm sure Fran feels the same."

Evangeline felt a little closer to the dwarf, with whom she rarely interacted with, after hearing Alex's story.

He had already told her about his relationship with Latifa and Lavinia, so adding Fran to her group of sisters wasn't a big deal to her.

"I'll try to befriend her soon," Evangeline stated. "Although we might not have many things in common, I'm sure we will have some common ground when we talk about you."

"Are the two of you going to gossip behind my back?" Alex arched an eyebrow.

"Yes," Evangeline replied without hesitation. "What can you do about it?"

"Looks like you need some punishment, My Lady."

"Ohhh~ I'm so scared."

The two stared at each other for nearly a minute before chuckling at the same time.

Evangeline then gave Alex's lips a quick peck before hugging him once more. She then rested her head on his shoulder before closing her eyes.

The two shared this intimate moment that they could experience once or twice a week, depending on Evangeline's blood cravings.

Since she didn't want to weaken Alex by overindulging on his blood, she only approached him whenever her urge had grown too strong for her to bear.

She had been consuming blood pellets for a very long time. The moment she had started to drink blood again, the cravings she had been holding back for many years had returned with a vengeance.

The only saving grace was that Alex's blood seemed to have a calming effect, which Evangeline believed was due to the feelings she had for him.

According to her father, no matter how strong his blood cravings had been, drinking blood from her mother—whom he had loved dearly—had always calmed him down better than drinking blood from other people.

Evangeline believed that she was feeling the same thing that her father had felt, especially since the one that was offering their blood to her was someone she loved.

“Thank you, Alex,” Evangeline said softly as she pulled back to look at his eyes.

“For what?” Alex asked.

“For returning to my life.”

“...”

Alex could feel something warm spread inside his chest, which he believed was the feeling of fondness towards Evangeline.

The young lady would sometimes say very sweet things, taking him by surprise.

Seeing her now reminded him that this version of Evangeline wasn't the same lady who had set out to destroy the Aetherion Empire in the game.

The cold beauty who killed without mercy was now in his arms, looking at him with tenderness and affection.

Perhaps due to that feeling of love and happiness, he lowered his head to kiss her lips.

It wasn't a fleeting kiss, but deep and passionate, making Evangeline's heart skip a beat.

When the kiss finally ended, Evangeline stood on tiptoe to pursue Alex's lips one more time.

And he welcomed her kiss, fully knowing how much she loved and cared for him.

— — —

“Dim Dim?”

The Dim Sum God looked up at the Parrot Eagle, Captain, who was the leader of the Beasts living on Fran’s farm.

“There are many ripe fruits in the Mistral Weave Forest right now,” Captain said. “Do you want to come with us to pick some fruits to bring back here to the farm?”

“Dim Dim!” Dim Dim nodded firmly, thrilled by the idea of picking fruits with its friends.

Daisy licked the little bun’s cheek, making the latter giggle. The two were almost inseparable after not seeing each other for more than a week.

“Great! Well then, shall we go?” Captain spread his wings while scanning the faces of the other beasts that would accompany them in the forest.

The Forest Wolf, Rex, nodded in agreement.

Two Rank 4 Sun Spot Terriers and two Rank 4 Stone Belly Warthogs would also accompany them on this journey.

Captain had already asked Finn to make some baskets that could be mounted on the backs of the Stone Belly Warthogs, allowing them to carry the fruits.

These warthogs were two meters tall. Their dark skin was said to be even harder than boulders.

They were the fighters among the monsters that lived with Fran and Finn on the farm.

This was also why no one dared to bully the dwarves or mess with the farm. They were free to try, but they would have to brace themselves for the monsters' retaliation.

"Dim Dim!"

The excited little bun jumped on top of Daisy's head and pointed toward the forest, telling everyone that they should hurry and pick the fruits as soon as possible.

With Captain watching from the sky, they headed towards the Mistral Weave Forest, which students were usually banned from entering without supervision.

They could only enter if they had the permission of Professor Gareth, who was in charge of the Survival Class that taught students what to do if they ever found themselves lost in the wilderness.

The monsters from Fran's farm regularly visited the forest to forage for food and had already received the Professor's approval long ago.

Captain would also hunt pheasants for Fran and Finn. Pheasants were one of the twin's favorite foods that could be acquired inside the forest.

Dim Dim happily hummed on top of Daisy's head as they neared their destination.

It was already looking forward to its forest adventure, which would yield results that even it could not have expected.

Chapter 547: Those Who Were Touched By The Void [Part 1]

After entering the Mistral Weave Forest, Dim Dim's group headed to the northeast, where Captain had seen the fruits that were ripe for the picking.

Due to their strong lineup, most beasts in the forest wisely chose to avoid them like the plague instead of antagonizing them.

However, as they neared their destination, Dim Dim and the others heard roars, screeches, and the sound of fighting.

Captain landed on a tree branch and surveyed the scene before informing his friends that the Crimson-Furred Throwing Monkeys and Yellow-Butt Baboons seemed to be having a turf war.

After Dim Dim heard that its comrades, the Crimson-Furred Throwing Monkeys, were waging war against the baboons, it felt tempted to help them.

However, it didn't want to drag its friends into the territorial war when they were here only to pick some fruits.

"Let's take a detour for now," Captain proposed. "The battle is quite intense, so following this route might be dangerous."

Daisy and the other Beasts nodded and followed Captain as he took a new route to their destination.

Dim Dim remained silent, losing its cheerful mood after hearing about the turf war.

Half a minute later, they heard the commotion again, making them frown.

"Looks like there's another territorial war ahead," Captain said. "It's between the Forest Wolves and the Gray-Skinned Wild Dogs. Stay here for a while. I'll check if we can take another path to our destination."

With that, Captain took off to the skies once more and circled around the forest.

To his surprise, he observed that various turf wars were happening simultaneously all over the Mistral Weave Forest, which was usually rather peaceful.

It was as if something or someone was instigating these monsters.

The Parrot Eagle felt uneasy, sensing countless gaze from powerful monsters with higher ranks.

Helpless about the current situation, he decided to abort their mission and leave the forest as fast as possible.

But just as he was about to return to his friends, two flying monsters suddenly rose from the forest and engaged him in combat.

'Griffins!' Captain hastily dodged by swooping downward after the two flying monsters tried to attack him from both sides.

They were Rank 5 Monsters just like him. From how they were eyeing him, he realized that he might have accidentally wandered in their territory.

"Calm yourselves!" Captain shouted. "I was just passing through!"

However, the Griffins, which were bigger than him, didn't listen to him and continued attacking him together.

Griffins were known for their aggressiveness, so Captain knew there was no point in trying to reason with them. Faced with no other choice, he soared high up in the sky, hoping to distance itself from the two flying monsters.

That was when things took a turn for the worse.

Just as Captain was fleeing, something shot up from the forest and almost smashed into his body.

Fortunately, he was already on high-alert and managed to evade the surprise attack by a hair's breadth.

The Parrot Eagle looked down and saw a Rock Tortoise, at least four-meters tall.

Rock Tortoises had the tendency to hurl projectiles from a cannon-like attachment on their backs.

This particular Rock Tortoise wasn't just targeting Captain but the two Griffins as well.

However, the two Griffins weren't as lucky as Captain. They were hit directly by basketball-sized stones that had practically shot out of the Rock Tortoise's back.

The two pitiful creatures crashed down toward the greenery, screeching in pain the whole way down.

Such isolated incidents were not uncommon in the Mistral Weave Forest as it was the home of powerful and territorial monsters. However, these exchanges rarely evolved into fullblown turf wars.

Now that his pursuers were gone, Captain hastily circled to return to his friends.

But when he finally returned to them, he realized that they were currently engaged in a battle of their own.

Daisy's back hooves connected with the face of a Yellow-Butt Baboon that had tried to attack her from behind.

"Dim Dim!"

The Dim Sum God threw two brittle vials at another Baboon, who was trying to use that opportunity to attack Daisy from the side.

This Baboon became the first victim to experience Dim Dim's new concoction, the Red-Hot Chili Pepper Vial.

The Baboon roared in pain as a burning sensation invaded its eyes, nose, and mouth.

However, Dim Dim wasn't finished yet.

Since the Baboon was mid-air when it was hit by Dim Dim's vials, it wasn't able to change its trajectory.

The brave little bun jumped from Daisy's head, took out its little hammer, and slapped the living lights out of the Baboon and sent it flying to the side.

The little bun then used its Air Step and unleashed more brittle vials at the Baboons, who had tried to ambush them earlier.

Daisy stomped her hoof and unleashed a spray of flames to ward off another group of Baboons that had tried to charge at them.

Although the Beasts from the farm were usually quite docile, they could put up a good fight when the situation called for it. Unfortunately, the sheer number of their enemies overwhelmed them.

It was at that moment when a screech reached Dim Dim's ears.

A stone the size of an adult's fist had hit a Baboon that had tried to lunge at the Dim Sum God from its blindspot.

The Crimson-Furred Monkeys had arrived to chase down the Yellow-Butt Baboons that had tried to take over their territory earlier.

Recognizing the Dim Sum God, the Monkeys went on the offensive, hurling everything they were holding at their foes.

Captain dove down from the sky and grabbed the two Baboons who were pinning Rex on the ground before soaring up in the forest.

After flying some distance away, he then released his grip, not caring where they would end up afterwards.

Rex growled in anger and humiliation from being ganged upon by the annoying Baboons before lunging at them with renewed determination.

The battle had become so chaotic that trees were destroyed in the process.

Not far from where the battle was being waged, a young lady with a black snake tattoo smiled in amusement.

She had traveled a great distance to reach the Mistral Weave Forest after hearing from Morax that a new Void-Touched was currently studying at Frieden Academy.

The young lady was eager to see and meet her new comrade-at-arms, but her long travel had also bored her. She had decided to vent her frustration by manipulating the animals within the forest.

After all, that was her special ability. She thrived wherever many ferocious monsters lived because she could put them under her control on a whim.

Chapter 548: Those Who Were Touched By The Void [Part 2]

Charles abruptly opened his eyes and propped himself up from Nessia's lap.

"Charles?" Nessia looked at her boyfriend with concern. "What's wrong?"

The young man didn't answer right away. Even he couldn't understand what he was sensing, let alone explain it to Nessia.

Noticing his distraction, Nessia asked no more, deciding to wait for him to organize his thoughts first.

A few minutes later, Charles glanced at his lover and told her what she wanted to know.

"Something is calling out to me in the Mistral Weave Forest," Charles replied. "It's hard to explain, but I can tell that this person doesn't wish me harm. However..."

A frown appeared on the young man's face because what he was going to say might sound contradictory to his earlier statement.

"Whoever that person is, they are very dangerous," Charles added. "Really dangerous."

"Should we call the Professors?" Nessia proposed.

Charles shook his head firmly. "Calling them might escalate the situation. I think I should go, but I won't go alone. I need you, Alex, and Renard to help me."

Nessia was already aware of Charles' secret, which was none other than his passive skill, Challenger's Mark.

It was truly a troublesome ability, especially when he had to enter dungeons.

However, since the Mistral Weave Forest teemed with monsters, going there would also pose many risks for Charles.

"Let's go to the clock tower," Nessia replied. "If Alex is not there, I'm sure Latifa will know where he is."

Charles nodded in agreement. All the members knew that the sleeping beauty of their club had a knack for knowing their club president's location most of the time.

He glanced in the direction of the Mistral Weave Forest one last time before heading to the clock tower to ask his friends for their assistance.

Fortunately, when the two arrived at the clock tower, both Alex and Renard were there.

Evangeline and Eleanora were also present, and for some reason, the former seemed more lively than normal.

It was as if she had drunk some high-grade Elixir that made her skin and face look so smooth and radiant, tempting Nessia to ask her if she could get some too.

While she was admiring Evangeline's current skin, Charles walked up to Alex and Renard.

"Alex, Renard, I need your help," Charles said. "I need to go to the Mistral Weave Forest."

To his surprise, Renard nodded right away.

"Okay," Renard replied. "When should we go?"

"Now," Charles stated.

"Good." Renard nodded.

Alex knew how dangerous the Mistral Weave Forest could be for Charles. But since he was asking for his help, it meant that he needed to go there no matter what.

"Very well," Alex said. "Lavinia, Evangeline, Lumi, can you come with us as well?"

"Of course." Lavinia agreed.

"I'll come too," Evangeline replied without hesitation.

Lumi also voiced her consent, and the group left the clock tower together.

For some reason, Chuck, Vaan, Princess Xenia, and Mary were not around.

Perhaps they were doing something important, but Alex could feel that Charles was determined to go to the forest even if he were to go alone.

Just as they left the clock tower, they saw Vaan headed in their direction.

Before he could even say anything, Alex grabbed his hand and dragged him alongside their group.

“Alex... we’re in front of everyone,” Vaan said in a soft voice that could easily be misunderstood. “Don’t be too rough. Be gentle, okay?”

“Seriously, don’t say things that can be misunderstood!” Alex immediately let go of Vaan’s hand, making the latter giggle.

“Fine, but where are we going?” Vaan asked as she walked alongside his club members.

“To the Mistral Weave Forest,” Alex replied. “Charles said he needs to go there.”

“I see... but aren’t you forgetting something?” Vaan blinked. “Students are not allowed to enter the forest without permission from Professor Gareth.”

Alex and the others had completely forgotten about this part.

Due to countless student getting into accidents inside the forest, sometimes injured and worse dead, the forest had been labeled as a restricted area.

On top of that, the Headmaster and the Student Council also passed a rule that only those who had gotten permission from the Headmaster, the Student Council President, or Professor Gareth could enter the forest.

If they broke this rule, they might face severe disciplinary punishment, and expulsion was also on the table.

"I'll go talk to Professor Gareth," Alex decided to look for the Professor. "I'll tell him that our club decided to conduct our club activity inside the forest, and the topic will be Monster Habitats and Behavior."

This was a very sound excuse since their club was an "Adventure Club" on paper.

With that said, the Professor also owed Alex a favor, so getting his permission had a fifty percent chance of being approved.

"Remember, no matter what happens, don't enter the forest without me," Alex said in a serious tone. "The Headmaster might be an easygoing fellow, but he is strict when it comes to enforcing the rules of the academy."

With Alex sprinting off to look for the Professor, the group gathered at the entrance of the forest.

"The forest seems livelier than usual," Lumi said after hearing the distant roars and screech in the forest.

"It's not just lively," Lavinia commented, her cat ears twitching as if hearing something that no one else could hear. "Something is happening inside the forest. It's like... every beast is feeling restless and will attack anything that moves."

Charles frowned. He had a feeling that whoever or whatever was calling out to him was responsible for the restlessness of the monsters inside the forest.

A part of him even believed that if this matter wasn't handled properly, a Monster Stampede might occur, which would pose great danger to the academy and the students who just finished their afternoon classes.

It would be best if they could enter the forest as soon as possible, so he hoped Alex would return before complete pandemonium descended upon the Mistral Weave Forest.

Chapter 549: Let's Raise the Bar A Bit

"You want permission to enter the forest?" Professor Gareth arched an eyebrow. "And you're saying it's part of your club activity?"

“Yes, Professor,” Alex replied. “Our expedition has been delayed due to our recent field trip, but I think now is the best time to do it before any unforeseen complications crop up.”

Professor Gareth rubbed his chin for a while before nodding.

“Fine, I’ll give you permission,” Professor Gareth replied. “Take this token. It’s proof that you have my permission to enter the forest. Make sure to return it after your expedition ends.”

“Thank you, Professor.” Alex bowed respectfully.

After getting what he needed, he left the professor’s office. He raised his token at his waiting friends and smiled.

Professor Gareth watched him go before shaking his head helplessly. Alex should have followed the proper procedure to get his permission.

By right, students needed to submit a proposal to the student council or to Professor Gareth at least a week before the day of their expedition. They also needed to specify the date in advance and could not change it without going through the whole process again.

But Professor Gareth made an exception for Alex as the young man had saved his adopted son, Lucius, from being trapped inside the Chrono Maze.

A few minutes later, Alex and his friends arrived at the entrance of the forest.

“I got permission. Everyone, please listen. We will enter the forest soon, so don’t let your guard down,” Alex declared. “Charles, you lead the way. We’ll handle the rest. Nessia, stay in the middle of the formation. Renard, guard the rear. Vaan, protect Nessia.”

With that, the group entered the forest in battle formation. Charles led the way.

He was using his senses to pinpoint the location of the unknown being trying to call out to him from deep inside the forest.

Since he didn't plan to take any detours, the possibility of encountering wild monsters was quite high.

But he wasn't afraid.

Right beside him were his club members. Any one of them was strong enough to handle most of the dangers that lurked inside the forest.

From two miles away, a giggle escaped a young lady's lips when she finally sensed that one of her brethren was headed in her direction.

"Hmmm... should I give him a warm welcome?" the lady wondered as the black snake tattoo on the right side of her face twitched and slithered to her left cheek. "Why not? I think this is going to be fun."

She waved her hand and the forest seemed to tremble.

A moment later, a pack of forest wolves and wild dogs rushed to where Charles emerged.

These monsters seemed to have lost all their reasoning. It's like they had been put under a berserk state. They only had one goal and that was to attack anything on their path!

Just as the members of Endless Horizon were making good progress, Lavinia, who was running by Alex's side, gave everyone a warning.

"I feel something coming!" Lavinia shouted. "And there's a lot of them."

"Battle formation!" Alex ordered before summoning Everguard and Sacrament.

He then moved to the vanguard, right beside Charles, ready to fight whatever was coming for them.

Growls and barks finally reached their ears.

As if the forest itself was coming to life, wild dogs and forest wolves burst out from behind the trees and lunged at them with blood-shot eyes.

“Shields!” Alex took a defensive formation as he summoned dozens of magical shields in front of him.
“Shield Spike!”

Steel protrusions emerged from the magical shields. Anyone unlucky enough to be impaled by them would soon have to bid this world goodbye.

“Shield Bash!”

Matching Alex’s movements, the shield slammed on the first wave of monsters that had lunged at them.

The monsters cried out in pain as they received damage from Alex’s counterattack.

Since the Forest Wolves and Wild Dogs were only Rank 2 Monsters, Alex didn’t have any trouble dealing with them.

Meanwhile, Charles and Renard moved at the same time to target the Alphas, which were both Rank 3 Monsters and leading their respective packs.

The two young men had grown much stronger since entering Frieden Academy and were able to deal with their targets in less than half a minute.

Lavinia, Lumi, and Vaan stayed close to protect Nessia because they already expected that Renard would not be able to hold back while dealing with the monsters swarming them from all directions.

Evangeline and Eleanora, on the other hand, were casting magic and hitting the wolves that managed to bypass their friends’ defenses.

“Compared to what we experienced in the Dungeon of Beginnings, these guys won’t even serve as warm-up,” Lavinia commented.

With such an elite team working together, it was only a matter of time before the monsters were dealt with.

The mysterious young lady smirked even after seeing that the small fries that she had sent weren’t enough to handle the team of students looking for her.

“In that case, let’s raise the bar a bit.”

With a wave of her hand, she sent the forest trembling once again. This time, six Forest Ogres, which were Rank 4 Monsters, and their leader, which was a Rank 5, obeyed her summons.

Dozens of Rank 3 and Rank 4 Orcs answered the call as well, moving alongside the Ogres in a battle formation.

But there was a problem.

In order to reach their target, they would have to deal with another group of monsters that were fighting against the Yellow-Butt Baboons.

This group was none other than Dim Dim’s friends, who were all fighting alongside the Crimson-Furred Throwing Monkeys.

The lady gave their group a passing glance before ordering her monster army to trample everything in their path.

Small fries weren’t important to her.

What she wanted was entertainment.

She believed that her monsters would make short work of Dim Dim's team and deal significant damage to the students, who had already proven that they shouldn't be underestimated.

Chapter 550: Remind Me Not To Be On Dim Dim's Bad Side

Dim Dim swung its little toy hammer, smacking monsters left and right, when it sensed danger headed in their direction.

The little bun jumped and landed on top of Daisy's head before shouting a warning to its friends and allies.

"Dim Dim!"

Captain, the other farm beasts, and the Crimson-Furred Monkeys glanced at the little bun.

They then saw Dim Dim pointing at something. Instinctively, they extended their senses to check why their friend suddenly felt immediate danger coming from that direction.

Soon, the sound of trees getting either uprooted or snapped reached their ears.

"Retreat!" Captain said decisively. "Head east!"

Daisy and the other beasts obeyed their leader's command and broke through the Baboons' formation.

The Crimson Furred Throwing Monkeys followed behind the little bun, whom they trusted very much.

The Baboons had also sensed that something was headed in their direction, but they weren't in the right state of mind to think of fleeing.

The young lady with a black snake tattoo on her face had placed them under her control, making them lose their common sense.

Instead of fleeing, they chose to pursue Dim Dim's group instead.

As the group continued to escape both the Baboons and the unknown danger coming right at them, they came across Alex and his friends. Coincidentally, the latter were headed for the place that Dim Dim had just run away from.

"Dim Dim!" Dim Dim shouted at Alex, warning him that it was dangerous to continue.

Seeing that the little bun and his friends were being pursued by dozens of Baboons, Alex and his club members moved to engage them.

Soon enough, even the noisy fight failed to drown out the sounds of trees being snapped in the background.

When Alex, Renard, Lavinia, and Charles had the chance to look away from their fights, they saw two Ogres swatting the trees before them with their wooden clubs.

Behind them were four more ogres. They were all at least four-meters tall. But Alex's gaze landed on the ogre that had a slightly darker skin color and was taller than the rest.

"An Alpha," Alex muttered. "At least Rank 5."

Just as he thought that things couldn't get any worse, dozens of Orcs—at least twice the height of an average man—made their appearance.

"Sh*t..." Charles cursed, uncomfortably aware of how all the monsters were eyeing him.

It seemed that his passive skill, Challenger's Mark, had somehow affected the monsters' perception, pulling all of their focus on him.

The mysterious young lady smirked while watching the interesting turn of events.

Just as she was thinking that the teenagers would run away with their tails behind their legs, the young man with short silver hair gave an order.

“Kill! Them all!” Alex shouted. “Dim Dim, use Thousand Vial Barrage!”

The little bun jumped high from on top of Alex’s head and momentarily hovered mid-air.

The instigator arched an eyebrow as countless small portals appeared all around Dim Dim.

“Dim Dim!” Dim Dim shouted and countless brittle vials were shot out from its dimensional storage.

Alchemy bombs and other exploding artifacts that Dim Dim had made during its spare time were released en masse, causing loud explosions as they hit their targets.

“Remind me not to be on Dim Dim’s bad side,” Charles said to Alex after seeing this kind of spectacle.

Fortunately, they were able to stay upwind of the smoke and dust coming from the explosions.

Instead, the wind blew toward the other monsters that had not been affected by Dim Dim’s bombardment, causing them to cry out in pain as their eyes, ears, and noses burned from the combination of spice, fire, and smoke.

Dim Dim’s diabolical attack also reached the location of the tattooed young lady, making the latter cough and tear up because she was not immune to the acrid smoke.

Since most of the monsters had been left blinded and irritated by that attack, they started to randomly swing their weapons around them, hitting their allies instead.

Alex immediately identified the easy pickings and annihilated them, prompting his club members to fight as well.

< Level Up! >

The familiar notification made the young man grin. It had been a while since he leveled up after killing monsters.

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Alex Stratos

Age: 17

Alignment: Chaotic Good

Mana: 727/727

Job Class: Oathkeeper

Subclass: Demon Slayer

Strength – 123 [+6]

Intelligence – 35 [+3]

Dexterity – 20 [+3]

Agility – 110 [+3]

Constitution – 196 [+4]

Stamina – 196 [+4]

Magic – 724 [+3]

Luck – 34 [+3]

He quickly added the three stat points to Strength before continuing to target the Orcs that were within his strike range.

The Ogres were still swinging their clubs randomly, so getting near them was very dangerous.

Fortunately, Evangeline, Eleanora, Nessia, and Lapiz didn't need to do something like that. They simply stood a safe distance away and unleashed a barrage of magical spells at the Ogres, while their friends who specialized in short-range combat dealt with the Orcs charging at them.

Captain, Daisy, the rest of the farm beasts, and the Crimson-Furred Monkeys were also playing their part in this battle.

In fact, Daisy had charged at some of the Orcs like a raging bull, sending them all flying.

Faraway, the tattooed young lady frowned. The less her little surprise turned out the way she wanted, the more frustrated she got.

To achieve her desired scene, she planned to place more creatures under her control. But before she could even start, she felt a pair of eyes lock onto her body from deep within the forest.

The young lady shuddered, sensing that the creature's rank was higher than hers. Wisely, she stopped whatever she planned on doing.

Due to the heat of the battle, she had momentarily forgotten that there was a Beast Emperor within the Mistral Weave Forest who had formed a non-aggression pact with Frieden Academy.

This Beast Emperor was a Rank 9 Powerhouse, only a rank weaker than Paragons.

It was an existence that the young lady didn't dare to offend. At that thought, she immediately decided to stop using the monsters in the Mistral Weave Forest against the students.

The Beast Emperor sensed that the intruder had finally ceased to manipulate the monsters in the forest, but it kept exerting pressure on her for a bit longer before easing up.

Still, it gazed upon the students and their allies, lingering a few seconds longer at Lumi, who was in the middle of protecting Alex from the leader of the Forest Ogres.