

Endless 561

Chapter 561: A Little Bun's Treasure Hunting Adventure!

Armed with a compass, Dim Dim started its mission. The little bun started its treasure hunt, following the direction of the needle.

As Dim Dim made his way to the mysterious treasure, it happily hummed its best friend's favorite song while swaying side to side.

It hadn't forgotten what Morax told it a while ago about the compass.

The compass would point to what its owner considered their treasure. Dim Dim itself had no idea what it considered a treasure, so it was very eager to find out.

The students of the academy greeted the familiar trio who regularly patrolled the academy.

Daisy used to intimidate them, but they soon realized that the Doom Cow had never shown a single sign of aggression toward the students, so some grew brave enough to go close to her.

Also, everyone found the lively "Nature Spirit," Dim Dim, cute, and the little bun was more than happy to befriend everyone. Students, mostly the ladies, would even gift it some snacks like cookies whenever they came across the Dim Sum God in the middle of its daily patrols.

After a few minutes, the little bun noticed that the compass was pointing at the magical knight training ground.

"Dim!" Dim Dim pointed at the entrance, asking Daisy to head inside.

This wasn't the first time that they had patrolled the training ground, and even the Professors were already used to seeing them there.

No one was too surprised when the Academy Police arrived at the training ground.

To its surprise, the needle of the compass was pointing to a young man with short silver hair, who also noticed the little bun's arrival.

"Hmm..." Dim Dim checked its compass to make sure that it was properly working.

It even shook it a bit to see if the result would change, but the compass still pointed at Alex, and was even following him as he moved across the training ground.

"Dim Dim?" Dim Dim blinked once then twice before asking Daisy to approach Alex.

When they were only a few meters apart, the young man walked up to Daisy and patted the little bun's head.

"Are you patrolling the training grounds today?" Alex asked.

"Dim Dim." Dim Dim shook its head.

"You're treasure hunting?"

"Dim!"

"Heh..."

Just as Alex was about to ask more, Lavinia called out to him to continue their sparring match.

"Alex, the Professor is looking," Lavinia said. "Let's finish our spar before you play with Dim Dim."

"Coming!" Alex replied before bidding the three goodbye.

Suddenly, the compass moved and pointed in Lavinia's direction, making the little bun scratch its head.

“Dim Dim?”

But, just as the little bun was thinking that the compass might be broken, it moved once more to point at another person.

This time, it pointed at Renard.

Its curiosity got the better of it, so Dim Dim asked Daisy to walk toward Renard.

The young man sat on the grass, watching everyone continue their sparring matches. It seemed that his spar with his classmate had just ended, so he was taking a break.

“What’s wrong, Dim Dim?” Renard asked. “Do you need me for something?”

Renard usually didn’t like to take the initiative to talk to people unless it was absolutely important.

But maybe he saw Dim Dim more like a pet than a person, so he found it significantly easier to talk to the bun without thinking too much.

“Dim Dim~”

“You’re doing treasure hunting? At this place?”

Renard frowned. Clearly, the training ground was the last place where someone would bury a treasure.

Suddenly, the needle of Dim Dim’s compass moved once more, prompting the little bun to continue its little adventure.

It left the training ground and headed to the location of the different cafes that catered to the students in the academy.

There it saw Vaan.

The young lady—errr, man was surrounded by ladies who were happily sharing gossips in the academy.

Alex's secret Knight looked like a delicate lady on the outside, but in truth, he was actually a young man forced to hide his identity for his own safety.

The little bun often wondered what would happen if the academy discovered Vaan's true gender. Would the young ladies surrounding him remain his friends? Or would they feel betrayed because they were sharing their deepest darkest secret to a boy?

"Hello there, Dim Dim," Vaan greeted the little bun that had come close to the outside table where he was sitting with his friends. "Do you want a drink?"

Vaan stood up and offered the fruit juice that had just been delivered to him by the waitress.

Dim Dim drank the juice using the straw and found it to its liking.

"Would you like some too, Daisy?" Vaan inquired.

The Doom Cow shook its head and waited until Dim Dim finished drinking all of the fruit juice in the cup.

The little bun gave a satisfied burp after drinking its fill. It then bid goodbye to Vaan to once again follow the direction the compass was pointing to.

As Dim Dim continued its treasure hunting, it came across Nessia, Lapiz, and Evangeline.

It then continued its journey and came close to the old library.

Since the compass was there, Dim Dim decided to peek at the window to see what was happening inside.

“Wrong answer!”

The sound of someone getting whipped reached its ears, making the little bun’s body shudder because it saw something scary.

“M-Mary, let’s talk about this,” Chuck pleaded. “Calm down, okay?”

“Calm down?” Mary smiled as her grip on her whip tightened. “I’m very calm, Chuck.”

“No, you’re not!”

“Yes, I am.”

“Wait! Let’s arrghhh!”

The little bun covered its eyes as the sound of whipping echoed inside the room. It then peeked a little bit from its stubby hands, but seeing that the situation was hopeless, it decided to make a strategic retreat.

“Mooo?” Daisy asked the little bun who looked as if it had seen something it shouldn’t have seen if it was alright.

“D-Dim!” Dim Dim assured Daisy that it was fine, and there was nothing to worry about.

It then took out its compass to check it one more time.

And saw it pointing towards the Forest Wolf, Rex.

The little bun looked at Rex, then at the compass, then back to Rex again, which made the Forest Wolf tilt its head in confusion.

Then the compass moved to point at Daisy, who lowered its head to lick the side of Dim Dim's face making it giggle.

It was at that moment when Dim Dim finally realized where the compass was pointing at.

Morax didn't lie when he said that the compass would lead its owner to the place where their treasure could be found.

Since everyone thought differently, they also had different views when it came to what their own personal treasure was.

For Dim Dim, its treasure was its "Friends."

Ever since it was born in the Celestial Realm, the Loli Goddess, Lily, and Cupid took care of it, treating the little bun as their friend and family.

For Dim Dim, those days were the happiest days of its life, which it treasured very much.

As a newborn God, Dim Dim had the power to create its own world.

And so it did with the help of Lily, Cupid, and the God of Games, Eriol.

The world of Arcana was the manifestation of Dim Dim's divinity, which greatly weakened it in the process.

Even so, it didn't regret making this wonderful world where it could play, laugh, cry, and face challenges with them.

All of this would allow the Dim Sum God to gain experience, and better understand what "living" really was.

For a brief moment, Dim Dim felt a little bit of its divine power returning to it after it reached a level of enlightenment.

This was the reason why Lily, and Cupid had asked Dim Dim to live temporarily in Arcana, so that it could regain its powers and grow as an individual.

Dim Dim's best friends wanted their friend to continue living a happy life.

But not every day was a happy day.

There would be sad days, cloudy days, and rainy days.

As Dim Dim experienced all of this firsthand, it would slowly mature until it became a true God who could make miracles happen.

Though that day was still far, the little bun smiled happily as it jumped back on Daisy's head, planning to continue their little adventure to find more treasures before returning to the farm, where Fran was waiting for them so that they could share a meal together.

Chapter 562: Compared To You, I'm Practically A Saint

"How long do you plan to follow me?" Morax asked without turning around. "If you want to talk, we can talk after my meeting with your Headmaster."

Charles stepped out from behind the tree, understanding how pointless it was to continue hiding after he'd already been discovered.

Both of them could sense each other, for they were touched by the void.

“Why are you here?” Charles asked.

“Why ask a question you already know the answer to?” Morax replied. “I came here to pick up Diona.”

“You shouldn’t have sent her here,” Charles added.

A chuckle escaped Morax’s lips before turning around to face the young man, whom he found glaring at him.

“Sooner or later, you will meet your brothers and sisters,” Morax stated. “Since that’s the case, what’s wrong with letting Diona meet you now? Besides, she had grown complacent as of late. This little lesson will surely remind her that there are many things she can but shouldn’t do.”

“And... does that apply to you as well?” Charles asked evenly, but there was a provocative edge to his tone.

Morax didn’t respond right away. He sized up the soon-to-be member of his organization before crossing his arms.

“Of course,” Morax answered. “As the leader of the Void-Touched, I am responsible for setting the rules so that none of us will act out of line with our powers. Charles, I’m sure that by now, you know the kind of power you possess, right? It can destroy the people around you as much as it could protect them.”

Charles clenched his fists because that was absolutely true. The moment he had realized that he had the potential to become a Dungeon Conqueror, everything had changed.

He hadn’t thought it’s possible for someone to have the power to summon countless monsters and raze cities to the ground just because they felt like it.

But after meeting Diona and understanding how their Challenger’s Mark worked, he had no doubt in his mind that he would definitely become one of the most feared beings in the world the moment he awakened his true powers.

“Since you’re not saying anything, I’ll take that as a yes.” Morax shrugged. “Diona’s behavior might have caused you to suspect that we are some kind of evil, shady organization hell-bent on gaining dominion over the world, but I can assure you that this isn’t the case.

“Being touched by the Void doesn’t make one evil. It is up to us to decide whether we use our powers for evil or for good. For example... If I wished for it, I could turn nearly every student here in the academy into my puppets.

“But I would have to consciously decide to do such a thing. As long as you don’t forget your humanity, you will remain a human no matter what form you end up with in the future. Even if you were to grow horns on your head, you’re still a human as long as this place remains human.”

Morax tapped his chest lightly.

Truth be told, Charles had assumed that being part of the Void-Touched meant that he would become the enemy of humanity.

Also, he had started to feel his body changing. Morax seemed to be addressing his worries directly. He might not be worrying specifically about growing a horn, but he was indeed worried that his body was changing in ways that would alienate him from others.

“C-Can I remain as a human?” Charles asked.

“Didn’t you listen to what I said? As long as your heart remains human, no matter what form you take, you are still human regardless of what anyone says. Even if the world were to stop treating you as a human and stop calling you a human, I would still recognize that you’re a human.”

Morax bade the young man goodbye before taking a step toward the Headmaster’s office. The old man was still waiting for him.

He disappeared instantly, using his teleportation to leave a cool impression to the young man who was still dazed after their conversation.

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“Nice pep talk,” Professor Rowan said the moment Morax appeared inside his office. “I almost believed that you’re a good person.”

Morax shrugged before casually sitting on the chair facing the Headmaster.

“If you’re a good person, then how come I can’t be one?” Morax asked with a sneer. “Compared to you, I’m practically a Saint.”

To his surprise, the Professor nodded.

“You’re right,” Professor Rowan replied. “Compared to me, you are indeed a Saint. Anyway, what do you think of Charles?”

“He’s a sweet summer child,” Morax answered. “Still too innocent. Still too ignorant and naive. Well, spending a few years in this academy will at least protect that innocence before he realizes the weight of his existence.”

“I do hope that you won’t suddenly kidnap him without prior notice,” Professor Rowan waved his hand, moving the teapot and cups to serve his guest some tea. “But I suppose it won’t be a kidnapping if there’s prior notice. Even if he’s a Void-Touched, I would like Charles to live his youth to the fullest.”

“I don’t mind letting him stay here,” Morax agreed. “But is he living his youth to the fullest? After all, the Void-Touched spend their early years running away or hiding from the challenges of the world.”

The leader of this mysterious organization then looked at his reflection in his tea cup before taking a sip.

“... Your tea tastes like horse piss,” Morax said.

“Oh, dear. I might have served you horse piss by mistake,” Professor Rowan said apologetically. “My bad. You know I am rather advanced in years. I’ll be sure to be careful next time.”

The two men stared at each other for nearly half a minute before both of them broke into smiles.

However, although they were smiling, the tension inside the room only spiked. The sound of space itself cracking echoed faintly, like two forces colliding non-stop in a parallel dimension.

“Where is Diona?” Morax asked. “Is she well?”

“As well as she’ll ever be,” Professor Rowan replied. “But she seems to be plotting against my students.”

“Is that so?” Morax rubbed his chin. “Then, how do we settle this?”

“We will make her regress her Rank... at least temporarily.” Professor Rowan smiled evilly.

This time, Morax narrowed his eyes. “How much will her rank regress?”

“Rank 5.” Professor Rowan raised his hand, showing five fingers. “Take it or leave it. If you don’t agree, I’ll let her stay inside my domain until Charles graduates.”

“Of course, I’ll take it,” Morax answered without hesitation. “As if you’ll even allow another choice to begin with.”

“It’s her fault for trying to mess with my students. I’m already being nice by only dropping her Rank.”

“Sure. Whatever, old man.”

The two then discussed a few more important matters in regards to Diona. Since she would no longer be as strong as before, Morax proposed that she stayed in the academy.

Maybe she would learn how to be “nicer” if she was surrounded by students.

Professor Rowan actually thought that it was a good idea, especially since the academy was a little short on manpower at the moment.

From deep inside the Headmaster’s Domain, Diona shuddered. A chill ran down her spine.

“Morax might be thinking something bad about me right now,” Diona muttered. “I just have this feeling that something bad is going to happen to me.”

The young lady didn’t know that she was going to be a helper in the academy to pay for her crimes, which would lead to some unexpected scenarios that Alex hadn’t experienced while playing Endless Leveling Online.

Chapter 563: The New Bestiary Professor

Breaktime in Class 1-C...

“Have you heard the news?”

“Our Bestiary Professor is going on a sabbatical and will be replaced by another teacher?”

“There’s nothing strange about that. Professors often do that so they can focus on research and come back with more stuff to teach us.”

“So, we are getting a temporary teacher? Who is it this time? An old man or an even older man who has come out of the sticks?”

“Neither! From what I’ve heard, the new professor is a very gorgeous young lady!”

“”Ohhh!””

The ladies of the class couldn't help but scoff at the boys getting excited after hearing about their new Professor's beauty.

Of course, there were some guys who weren't affected by it and some who were interested but dared not voice out their opinion.

"M-Mary, why are you here?" Chuck asked the young lady seated beside him. "This isn't even your class, you know?"

"Her Highness has asked me to keep you company for the time being," Mary replied.

Chuck was aghast. "What for?"

"She is afraid that you will tarnish her reputation by failing your upcoming exams. In addition, she wants me to report back to her your reaction to the new Professor. I've seen her already, so I'm simply here to watch you react once she arrives."

Chuck's expression immediately—and foolishly—changed after hearing that Mary had already seen their new Professor.

Even the guys that had been casually chatting earlier were paying closer attention to her words right now.

"So, what is she like?" Chuck asked, genuinely curious. "Is there any chance of her falling in love with yours truly?"

The handsome young man casually flipped his hair and flashed Mary a winning smile that gave her the strong urge to pinch his waist at that moment.

Fortunately, she managed to hold herself back, albeit barely. Chuck wouldn't be so lucky if it weren't for the huge number of student paying close attention to her right now.

“She is indeed a beauty,” Mary replied. “But I don’t think there’s anything wrong with her eyesight. She will not be interested in a piece of trash like you.”

“So you say... but you can’t live without this piece of trash in front of you, right?” Chuck said confidently before holding Mary’s hand. “No matter how many times you whip me, the one who always loses in the end is you.”

The young man even moved closer to whisper something in the young lady’s ear, which was something that nearly all the boys wanted to know.

Unfortunately, they were too far away to hear Chuck’s words!

Alex glanced at his roommate and wondered if he truly was courting death right now. But to his surprise, he didn’t see Chuck getting slapped with a one-way ticket to the afterlife.

Instead, he saw Mary’s cheek redden a bit before she averted her gaze.

Chuck smirked cockily while he intertwined his fingers with hers.

Seeing this, Alex didn’t know if he should be impressed by the troublemaker’s confidence or be surprised that he hadn’t been fed to the fishes yet.

Clearly, the power dynamic between Chuck and Mary was an ever-evolving mystery that perhaps even they could not pin down. Their relationship surely surpassed that of a maid watching over her employer’s fiancé.

Suddenly, the bell finally rang, prompting everyone to head for Bestiary class.

This class was held at an open space near the entrance of the Mistral Weave Forest, allowing everyone to better appreciate some of the Monstrous Beasts that roamed the continent.

When they arrived at their destination, they saw a lady with ash-brown hair tied in a ponytail.

Her emerald green eyes gleamed with predatory intelligence as her gaze landed on her students.

She was wearing framed glasses and a dress that looked amazing on her. However, there was a bit of disparity between her physical loveliness and the killing intent emanating from her body.

"Dim Dim, have we seen her before?" Alex asked the little bun that was perched on top of his head.

"Dim Dim?"

"Right. She looks familiar."

Charles coughed lightly to catch Alex's attention. "That's Diona."

"What?!"

"Dim Dim?!"

The wild girl who had looked like an amazon had mysteriously turned into a sophisticated young lady exuding a deadly charm that made all the guys look at her with rapt attention.

This sudden change of appearance was something that made Alex wonder if she was really the Beast Conqueror who had tried to mess with them a few days ago.

"What are you looking at, you maggots?" Diona glared at the boys, especially the silver-haired boy with a little bun perched on his head. "You all want to die, huh?!"

"Omg! Is this what they call a moe gap?!"

"Damn... this girl is a bit wild. I like it!"

“It’s a good thing that we have a new Bestiary Professor. Now I won’t get bored of this subject!”

Even the ladies of the class seemed to be very curious about their newest professor. Everyone was intrigued. Everyone, of course, except the members of Endless Horizon who had had the misfortune of encountering her in the Mistral Weave Forest.

“My name is Diona Lambert,” Diona said before fixing her glasses. “Just call me Professor Diona.”

Nessia subconsciously snapped the pen that she was holding in her hand after hearing Diona’s introduction.

The Beast Conqueror really had the audacity to add Charles’ surname to her name before Nessia!

Seeing his girlfriend’s reaction, Charles decided to confront the Professor that was making her uncomfortable.

“Professor Diona, please don’t use other people’s surnames as you please,” Charles said. “It’s not funny.”

“Husband, just call me Professor. If that’s too distant, you can use Darling if you like,” Diona replied. “Don’t worry, I’ll make sure you won’t fail my class.”

All the guys gasped in shock before glaring at Charles.

They knew that Nessia was already his girlfriend, so having a hot professor as another lover irked them very much.

Most of the students liked to entertain the delusion of a professor and a student falling in love like those famous romance stories that were being sold in the market.

But seeing it happen right in front of them made the boys curse Charles internally while the ladies looked at this love triangle with great interest.

“Professor! I have a question!” Chuck raised his hand in an attempt to diffuse the situation.

“Ask, maggot,” Diona replied.

Chuck cleared his throat and stood up straight, adopting the posture of a scholar about to ask a very important academic question.

“Is your relationship with Charles... uh... part of the Bestiary curriculum?” Chuck asked seriously. “Like, are we supposed to classify it as a mutual symbiosis, a parasitic bond, or an illegal endangered species interaction?”

The class went dead silent for half a second.

Vaan immediately facepalmed. “Chuck, sit down before you die.”

Diona slowly turned her head toward Chuck, her emerald eyes narrowing behind her glasses.

“Oh?” Diona looked at the handsome young man with a smile. She was someone who liked handsome people, so she wanted to humor this foolish yet brave boy who dared to ask her such a personal question.

“So you’re curious about my relationship with my husband?”

“Yes, Professor!” Chuck replied enthusiastically. “Purely academic curiosity! I just want to know if he tamed you or if you’re the one who put a collar on him.”

Alex whispered to Dim Dim, “If Chuck survives this, I’ll start believing in miracles.”

Dim Dim nodded in agreement.

But there were no miracles. At least, not a miracle concerning the troublemaker's current situation.

Mary pinched Chuck's waist to oblivion, making the troublemaker scream like a dying pig that was about to be slaughtered.

Chapter 564: I'm Talking To You, Maggot

"Listen up, you maggots! Who knows the difference between an Orc and a Goblin?" Diona asked the students who were now seated around her.

A few of the students raised their hands, including Chuck. But after sensing that Mary's finger had moved to his waist, he hurriedly put it down.

"Okay, you there, what's your name?" Diona pointed at one of the young men who seemed so eager to answer her question.

"Cliff Hanger, Professor," Cliff replied.

"Very well, what's your answer?" Diona placed her hands behind her back, looking aloof.

"An Orc is larger, physically stronger, and tends to favor direct confrontation," Cliff answered calmly. "A Goblin is smaller, relies more on ambushes and tools, and often fights in groups to compensate for its weaker individual strength. They also..."

Diona and the class waited patiently for Cliff to continue his explanation, but he seemed to be stuck.

"They also what?" Diona prompted with a frown.

"They also have excellent teamwork," Cliff added.

Diona nodded and asked Cliff to sit down. "That is what you call a perfect textbook answer. If this were a written exam, you'd get full marks."

Cliff smiled faintly, feeling a bit proud of himself. Even his classmates were impressed by his answer. The annoyance they had felt when he had left them hanging disappeared completely.

However, he wasn't able to feel happy for a long time.

"But this isn't a written exam," Diona declared, making the students straighten their backs at once.

Diona paced in a slow circle around them, memorizing the faces of Charles' classmates. She then pointed out what Cliff hadn't mentioned in his explanation.

"Here's the part books like to forget," Diona said. "Orcs have pride. Wound that pride, and they'll chase you even if they know that they might be heading into a trap.

"Goblins don't have pride. They have grudges, and patience. Lots of it. You can even say that they are a race that takes grudges seriously."

Unnerved, a few students swallowed after hearing this.

"An Orc will roar before charging," Diona continued. "A Goblin will smile. If you ever see a Goblin smiling at you, congratulations. You've already lost something. You just don't know what you have lost just yet."

She broke into a feral smile, showing her white, pearly teeth that seemed a little too small for her mouth. Chuck couldn't help but wonder how many times she brushed her teeth everyday.

"You." Diona pointed at Chuck. "You're thinking about something rude about me, right?"

"O-Of course not, Professor!" Chuck stood up in order to defend himself. "I-I am just thinking about Orcs and Goblins!"

“Really?” Diona arched an eyebrow. “Then by all means, ask a question.”

All of his classmates’ gazes landed on his body, putting pressure on him. However, who was Chuck?

His skin was as thick as any city or castle wall in the Kingdom of Avalon.

His shamelessness knew no bounds.

Using these two “talents” that he had nurtured for many years, he casually flipped his hair and struck a pose, buying his brain some time to figure out how to bullsh*t his way out of this predicament.

Suddenly, a flash of inspiration struck him!

“Professor, I am just wandering,” Chuck said as he crossed his arms. “What if you run into both monsters at the same time? What should we do in that situation?”

Diona flashed Chuck a sweet smile that made the boys in the class swallow their saliva subconsciously.

“There are three things you can do.” Diona raised her three fingers. “The first one is to fight them. Of course, doing so when you’re not strong enough to wipe them all out is akin to suicide.”

Everyone’s faces became serious as they waited for Diona to tell them the two other strategies. Orcs and Goblins were the most common monsters that they could encounter in the wild, but most of the students were self-aware enough to know they couldn’t pick the first option.

“The second one is to run,” Diona continued calmly, folding another finger down. “Preferably in a direction that neither of them expects. Orcs will chase you out of pride. Goblins will pretend to lose interest, then cut off your escape route ten minutes later.”

A few students visibly reconsidered their life choices.

“The third one,” she said, lowering her index finger, “is to make them fight each other.”

“But, Professor, aren’t they allied races?” Chuck asked. “Usually where Goblins reside, there would be a few Orcs in there as well.”

“Allied races?” Diona adjusted her glasses with her middle finger, making sure that Chuck could see it properly. “They tolerate each other, but they are not allied races.

“Like I said, Orcs are prideful creatures who recognize strength above all. They hate the weak, sneaky, and cowardly goblins the most. As for the Goblins, they hate the Orcs because they are loud, strong, and bigger than them.

“While these two races might cooperate, that cooperation is very flimsy and can break at any time. All it needs is a little nudge...”

Diona then glanced at Alex and pointed at him.

“You,” Diona said. “Tell me. How can you make the Orcs and Goblins fight each other if they have you surrounded?”

Alex looked to his left. Then he looked to his right. Then he twisted his body around to look behind him. Finally, he pointed at his face to confirm if the Professor was indeed talking to him.

“Yes, I’m talking to you, maggot,” Diona sneered. “Stand up and answer my question. If you don’t give me an answer, I will award you some demerit points.”

Charles frowned after hearing Diona’s threat. It was clear that she was purposely targeting Alex for a reason, and that reason was him.

Alex stood up and decided to throw caution to the wind.

“First, I’ll look at the Goblins and shout something like... ‘Who was the one that called that Orc over there a pig?! Step forward! I heard you loud and clear!’”

Everyone in the class blinked, and no one was able to say a word after hearing Alex’s answer.

But the young man wasn’t finished just yet. He gave another bullsh*t answer, just because he could.

“I will continue to instigate, but side with the Goblins in the end,” Alex added. “I will praise them because they are smarter than Orcs, and obviously the most superior race between the two. I will even declare that Orcs only win battles because their enemy is too busy covering their nose due to how smelly they are.”

“What nonsense are you talking about?” Chuck muttered.

Just as everyone thought that their new Professor would penalize Alex with ten thousand demerit points, a giggle reached their ears.

“It seems that you will be able to survive such a confrontation perfectly well.” Diona was all smiles, but her brain was furiously taking notes. ‘Then I won’t use Orcs and Goblins against you. I’ll just order a Manticore to end your life when I get the chance.’

Since her Rank had regressed due to Professor Rowan’s seal, she could only control lower-ranking creatures that were Rank 1 up to Rank 4.

Orcs, and Goblins were the perfect cannon fodders that she could use with her current authority, which she had planned to use against Alex if a good opportunity presented itself.

She had brought up the topic of Orcs and Goblins to see how Alex would react in such a situation. She had wanted to assess his thinking ability so she could better formulate a plan to end his life.

In her heart of hearts, she believed that Alex was standing in the way of Charles becoming the Conqueror that he was destined to become.

Chapter 565: Eyes That Linger In The Shadows

Despite Charles' worries, the Bestiary Class ended on a good note.

Although Diona's way of teaching was a little crude—or rather, very crude, because she called everyone maggots—the lesson was actually quite informative.

Even Alex and Renard found her teaching quite easy to understand. Chuck also learned many things about survival, while the other boys finally had a new Professor to simp for.

Diona watched as the students left her class. Her apathetic gaze changed the moment her eyes landed on Alex's back. It was as if she wanted to pierce it with her hand.

Of course, she couldn't possibly do that... at least not now. The Paragon of Space had placed safeguards across the academy to prevent his students from getting hurt by her.

When she was certain that her students were out of sight, she beckoned to something from the entrance of the forest.

A small creature the size of her hand jumped from one of the tree branches and landed on her shoulder.

"Follow him and report to me anything of importance," Diona ordered the small Black Wolf Spider without looking at it.

The spider clicked its mandibles a few times to acknowledge its Master's order.

It jumped into the air and turned invisible, disappearing without a trace.

Diona smiled faintly before taking off her glasses and the hair clip holding her unruly hair together.

All of her classes for the day were over, so she no longer had to follow Morax's instructions and look the part.

Morax had the power to command the members of the Void-Touched. Needless to say, his orders were absolute.

Even if she didn't want to look prim and proper in front of her students, she had no choice but to do so.

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As Alex and his friends walked toward the dormitory, Dim Dim turned around to look behind them.

The little bun blinked once then twice before looking left and right as if trying to find something.

But after seeing nothing, it scratched the side of its head.

Since it didn't find anything, it assumed that it had just been imagining things. Unbeknownst to it, the Black Wolf Spider remained frozen in place, waiting for the little bun to stop looking at its surroundings.

A few minutes later, Dim Dim bade Alex goodbye and went to play with its friends on the farm. Sometimes, Alex would accompany it so that he could have dinner with Fran and Finn despite noticing that Finn seemed to dislike his visits.

The young man wasn't dense. He knew that Finn didn't like him. Fran had once told him that she and her brother were inseparable ever since they had lost their parents in an accident.

However, after the events that transpired inside the Whispering Dungeon, Finn understood that no matter what he did, he would be unable to kick Alex out of Fran's life from that moment onward.

And that made him grumpy.

Alex was like an itch on his back that he couldn't scratch no matter what.

“Will you have dinner with us in the cafe later?” Chuck asked Alex as soon as he placed his books on his desk.

“No,” Alex replied. “I’ll have dinner with Lavinia and Fran before we make our way to the port where the flying ships are docked.”

“You’re going to elope with both of them?” Chuck arched an eyebrow. “Can I tag along?”

“No, you silly goose,” Alex scoffed. “Only Lavinia and I will visit the Clawford Tribe. Fran is busy right now, so she can’t go with us. And you need to study for the exams. If I take you with me, Mary will definitely strangle your neck when we get back. Heck, she might even strangle me too!”

“... Yikes.” Chuck lightly touched his neck because he was certain that Mary would indeed do that if he escaped. “Then just bring me back a souvenir.”

“I can do that.” Alex nodded. “I’ll take a shower first.”

The young man then headed to the bathroom, while Chuck went to the closet to get a change of clothes.

Perched right outside the window, the Black Wolf Spider leapt away to inform her Mistress about this piece of information.

It had been briefed that if Alex were to leave the academy at any point in time, it must tell her right away.

Several minutes later...

Alex left the room wearing casual clothes. Lavinia was already waiting for him in the common room. She had also showered a bit because she had sweated a lot during Martial Arts Training earlier.

“Let’s go,” Alex said and held Lavinia’s hand, not caring about the looks that the other students were giving them.

“Is it really okay?” Lavinia asked. “I might be intruding on your time with Fran.”

“I already asked her for permission if you can join us for dinner, and she agreed,” Alex replied. “You have nothing to worry about.”

Since he and Fran would also go on a journey next week to head to the Shadow Forest, Alex thought that it would be a good idea for Lavinia and her to get closer.

The Catgirl was already very close with Latifa. There were even times when Lavinia would sleep over at the clock tower and listen to Lumi’s stories about Alex’s most embarrassing moments.

The Alter had made it her habit to stalk the young man while invisible. Because of this, she was able to see many sides of Alex that not many knew about.

Latifa didn’t always merge her consciousness with her Alters because she also respected their freedom and privacy.

Only when Lumi was guarding Alex on important missions would Latifa connect her senses with her, ready to support them if ever they faced danger that they weren’t able to handle by themselves.

When they arrived at the farm, they saw the white smoke that was coming out of the chimney of Fran’s and Finn’s house.

Alex didn’t hesitate to knock on the door to inform Fran that they had arrived.

The door opened, and the first person they saw was Finn.

“Come in,” Finn said unenthusiastically. “Fran is almost done with her cooking.”

Alex thanked the dwarf and followed him towards the dining room.

The house where they lived was big enough to accommodate a family of six. This house had already been here when Fran and Finn enrolled.

After hearing that they wanted to have a small farm, the Headmaster had given them permission to live in the house and tend the land around it.

Truth be told, Alex was curious why the two dwarves were given such privileges by the Headmaster. However, he never asked this question as a sign of respect to Fran's private life.

To his surprise, Dim Dim was already setting the table.

"You're such a hard worker, Dim Dim," Alex praised the little bun after it placed a plate in front of him.

Dim Dim then placed a spoon and fork right beside the plate before raising its body with pride.

"Ahem!"

Lavinia giggled and lightly patted the little bun's head. According to Alex, Dim Dim decided it wouldn't accompany them to the Clawford Tribe.

Its reason?

It wanted Alex to spend time alone with Lavinia and didn't want to become a third wheel!

But in truth, Dim Dim had already made plans to explore the Mistral Weave Forest with Daisy and Rex during the weekend.

The Crimson Furred Monkeys had offered to be their guide, so the little bun had accepted their invitation.

Alex was a little bit happy about this development because that would give him some alone time with Lavinia, which rarely happened.

“Time to eat,” Fran said, carrying two trays of food in each hand.

She was stronger than most dwarves, so caring this much at once didn’t pose a problem to her.

Alex’s gaze on his sister didn’t escape Finn’s notice. Although he had already “accepted” their relationship in his own way, he still didn’t like Alex.

For him, the young man was taking his only family member away from him. This made Finn feel annoyed, anxious, and sad.

None of the five who were eating their dinner in peace noticed the Black Wolf Spider watching them while hanging from the ceiling of the house.

Its beady eyes locked onto Finn’s troubled expression. Clearly, it sensed the dwarf’s complicated feelings.

And this was something that might prove useful to its Master, who also didn’t like Alex very much.

Chapter 566: These Damn Youngsters!

“Nice work,” Diona praised the black wolf spider on her shoulder. “You did well.”

The spider clicked its mandible a few times, very happy to hear the praise of its master.

“They’re leaving tomorrow, huh?” Diona narrowed her eyes. “I think I’ve heard of the Clawford Tribe in the past, but I can’t remember anything about them.”

After pondering for a few minutes, Diona realized that there were pending matters more important for her to work on than wracking her brains for information about the Catkin Tribe.

'It's Saturday tomorrow, so there are no classes,' Diona thought. 'I better make preparations to depart earlier than them.'

She might be under a couple of restrictions, but it didn't limit her freedom excessively. She could leave the academy anytime as long as she was back by the time she had to teach in class.

Fortunately, she only had classes on Wednesdays and Fridays. On days she had no classes, she had some leeway to work on her plans.

The next day...

Alex left his room before the sun even rose from the east.

He met with Lavinia at the Common Room before the two of them headed to the port where the Airships were docked.

When they arrived, people were already lining up to buy tickets. It was a good thing they had already bought their tickets in advance a few days ago, so they simply climbed up the ship and stood on the deck for the time being.

Each ship could only carry up to a hundred people at a time. The trip would also take around eight hours, inclusive of the few stopovers along the way.

Suddenly, Alex felt someone's gaze lock onto his body.

The young man turned around to look behind him, searching for the source. But the place was too crowded, and it was practically impossible to pinpoint from where the gaze was coming from.

After pondering for a while, he justified that it was normal to get plenty of stares from the crowd. After all, he was with a beautiful Catkin.

It was nothing new. Back in the academy, he'd lost count of the times when students, mostly men, had glared at him out of envy and jealousy. To think of it, in most of those instances, he'd been walking with Vaan.

"What's wrong?" Lavinia asked.

"Nothing," Alex replied. "Let's go to our room."

The young man held Lavinia's hand and no longer bothered with the gaze he felt earlier.

When the two had finally left the deck of the airship, the disguised Diona clicked her tongue in annoyance.

'He does possess sharp senses,' Diona thought. 'I should be more careful when looking at him in the future.'

She liked to ambush her prey. But when that prey suddenly sensed that something was off, it meant that she needed a new strategy to catch it.

Diona had done her research, so she knew it would take them a few hours to reach their destination. To avoid exposing herself and mishaps that could come with it, she decided to stay in her room until the airship announced that they had finally arrived at their destination.

After an hour of waiting, the Airship finally took flight.

"We're finally moving," Alex said as his hand momentarily stopped from petting Lavinia's head.

"Mmm..." Lavinia hummed in contentment as her lover resumed petting her head.

She didn't know if they would have an opportunity to spend some private time like this once they arrived at the Clawford Tribe, so she decided to ask Alex for a bit of intimacy during their trip.

Alex was more than happy to oblige. Regardless of his status and bravery, he wouldn't dare do something naughty under the nose of Lavinia's grandfather, Ramza.

Their agenda in visiting the Clawford Tribe was to inform Lavinia's family about her relationship with Alex.

This was indeed a joyous occasion, but the atmosphere might change once Alex declared that he intended to have more than one lover aside from Lavinia.

Latifa, Evangeline, and Fran were now technically Alex's girlfriends as well.

And if he got lucky... or unlucky, this number might still increase in the future.

No.

It would definitely increase, so Alex needed to smooth out his relationship with his future in-laws before his love story suddenly turned into a horror story.

A few minutes later, Lavinia finally reached her limit. She rose to wrap her arms around Alex's neck to give him a kiss on the lips.

The young man was more than happy to receive this kiss, and returned it with a kiss of his own.

It didn't take long before only the sound of kissing echoed faintly inside the room, which had now become the world of the two lovebirds.

In the room right next to theirs...

"What the hell?" Diona muttered. "Just what are the people on the other side doing right now?"

Due to her sharp senses, she could hear the bed creaking a bit on the other side, making her frown.

Suddenly, she heard a loud moan coming from the other side, which gave her the strong urge to pound the wooden wall and tell them to, "Shut the f*ck up!"

But she controlled her urges, not wanting to cause a commotion in the Airship.

If she was discovered by Alex and Lavinia, her plan to deal with the young man while he was away from the academy might encounter a mishap.

It was at that moment when she heard something that made her eyes widen in shock.

"I-It hurts!" a lady gasped. "Alex... it hurts."

"I'm sorry. I'll try to be more gentle," a young man's voice, more than familiar to Diona, spoke from the other side. "Just relax, the tip is already in."

"It really hurts, Alex. please..."

"Don't worry, Lavinia. I'm halfway in..."

Diona's face slowly twisted into something between disbelief and offense.

"...The tip is already in?" Diona muttered. "Halfway in?!"

Her hand twitched. Veins popped on her temple.

'These damn youngsters! Doing that in an airship?!'

She raised her fist, already imagining the satisfying thud of wood meeting knuckles and exposing Alex's true nature!

Suddenly, the sounds on the other side suddenly changed.

There was a dull thump.

Then another.

"Ow! Careful!" Lavinia complained.

"I told you to sit down properly," Alex replied. "If you keep wiggling, of course it won't go in smoothly."

"...Because it's too tight," Lavinia said defensively.

"Yes. does it still hurt?"

"A bit. But I think I'll be fine now."

Diona's curiosity got the better of her, so she stuck her ear right next to the wall to listen more to what was happening on the other side.

Earlier, she was tempted to bash the wall, but now, she wanted to see it through till the end.

"This would have been easier if you put it in yourself," Alex said softly. "But you kept on insisting that I should be the one to do it."

"Of course, it has to be you," Lavinia replied in a pained voice. "I will not let anyone do this aside from you. This is a gift that you gave me, so you should take responsibility for it."

"Fine. I'll take responsibility."

“Mmm.”

“...Responsibility?” Diona echoed under her breath, her eyebrow twitching.

On the other side, there was a brief rustling sound, followed by something unmistakable.

Tap.

Tap.

“...Try standing,” Alex said calmly. “If it feels uncomfortable, we can take it off and try again later.”

“Standing?!” Diona hissed. “This bastard really deserves to die!”

Lavinia let out a small gasp. “W-Wait! Don’t rush me! I’ve never worn something like this before!”

“That’s why I told you to break it in slowly,” Alex replied. “You insisted on wearing it today.”

“...Because it’s special,” Lavinia said, her voice softening. “You gave it to me.”

There was a pause.

Then the sound of fabric shifting, followed by a very distinct sound.

Clack.

Clack.

Clack.

Diona stiffened.

"I didn't think that wearing high heels is this difficult," Lavinia complained. "How do those noble ladies manage to walk on these things?"

"You're just not used to it. Here, hold my hand. Let's practice until you can walk properly."

"Fine..."

Diona face palmed because she finally understood what was going on.

She had already planned to kill Alex. But after this incident, her desire to beat the crap out of him intensified because he made her think of inappropriate things while she was still a maiden!

'Damn it, this guy is really the worst!' Diona gnashed her teeth in anger.

She went back to her bed in order to meditate a bit to regain her calm.

The Beast Conqueror couldn't believe that she had been played like this so helplessly by her target.

While she was doing her best to regain calm, Alex was busy helping Lavinia get used to walking while wearing the high-heel shoes that he had bought specially for her.

Chapter 567: I'm Very Lucky To Have You

"Hello, Passengers! In thirty minutes, we will arrive at Etherion Village. Those who will disembark, please make sure that you have all your belongings with you when you depart the ship.

"It's been a pleasure flying with all of you, and I hope you will join us next time. On behalf of the crew of Seiboo Pacific, I wish you all a wonderful day. Cabin crews, please prepare for landing."

Alex glanced at Lavinia, whose head was resting on his chest. He then kissed her forehead before propping himself up from the bed.

He picked up his shirt and pants, which were lying on the side of the bed, and put them on.

Lavinia watched her boyfriend put on his clothes, enjoying the view of his lean and toned body.

She had made sure to plant a few kiss marks here and there, which was now hidden well by his clothes.

“Not planning to dress up?” Alex arched an eyebrow before he picked up Lavinia’s dress and moved to her side of the bed.

The Catkin lazily stood up from the bed, and motioned for Alex to put her clothes on for her.

Of course, he didn’t voice any complaints, for this was one of the privileges of being his lover.

When she was fully dressed, she stood on tiptoe and planted a kiss on Alex’s lips before taking out a comb from her storage ring.

“I’ll comb your hair first,” Lavinia said with a smile.

“Okay.” Alex nodded and sat on the bed.

This was the first time someone volunteered to comb his hair, and it didn’t feel bad to have someone else do it for him.

A few minutes later, Alex’s hair was no longer unkempt. Lavinia had messed up his hair during their intimate session earlier.

She then approached the mirror and combed her own hair, humming as she did so. Her pleasant mood showed on her face.

Alex watched as she carefully fixed her silky smooth hair in place before putting it up in a ponytail using the red long bow hairpin he had gifted her.

Once done, she looked like a true noble lady with an excellent upbringing. Those who didn't know her would think she was a sheltered, gentle young lady, not a fierce warrior who fought with swords and smiled in the face of danger.

"You're beautiful, Lavinia," Alex said as he reached out to hold her hand, and kissed it softly. "I'm very lucky to have you as my girlfriend."

"I'm glad you know how lucky you are," Lavinia replied in a teasing tone. "Now, let's see if your luck will hold against my parents and my grandfather. I hope my brother is also there when we arrive. That way, I can see his reaction when you inform him that we are now lovers."

For a brief moment, Alex felt a chill run down his spine. He frankly forgot his Master, Cairo.

While they did have a good relationship, Lavinia was still his Master's precious sister. He might have already sensed something during their past interaction.

Alex just hoped that his Master would give them their blessing. Otherwise, his only option was probably to hug Lavinia's thigh so that she would protect him against the future Heaven's Sword.

It didn't take long before they sensed the airship finally descend.

Lavinia moved toward the window, taking in the familiar forest that spanned as far as the eye could see.

A few minutes later, she finally saw her village in the distance, nestled at the center of the forest where she had lived most of her life.

Alex hugged her from behind and looked at the village from the sky.

He would be lying if he said that he wasn't feeling anxious. But he understood that he had to meet Lavinia's family sooner or later and let them know about their relationship.

The young man knew the best case scenario would be him informing them in person instead of passively waiting for them to discover their relationship.

The Hartwell Clan and the Clawford Tribe had always treated him well, so he didn't want to do anything wrong that might sour their relationship.

When the airship finally landed, Alex and Lavinia left their room together.

Meanwhile, Diona stood by the door and listened to their footsteps.

When she was certain that they had already climbed up on the deck, she put on her mask and left her room as well.

'A forest teeming with monsters?' Diona couldn't help but laugh internally. 'Are the heavens on my side? It seems that following them here is the right choice.'

Actually, Diona could summon two Rank 7 Monsters. They were the Overlords of their respective domains, so Diona only summoned them whenever it was absolutely necessary.

Unfortunately, she couldn't do that since her rank had regressed. There was a chance that those two Rank 7 Monsters wouldn't listen to her.

The possibility of them breaking free from her control and attacking her was also a risk she couldn't afford to take.

Fortunately, the forest surrounding Etherion Village had countless monsters she could control to obey her orders.

'Should I just instigate a monster stampede and wipe this village from the land?' Diona pondered before shaking her head. 'If I do that, it will be too obvious. Morax and that old coot, Rowan, will definitely know it's my doing.'

Also, her Rank regression meant that she could only control up to Rank 4 Monsters. In her original strength—Rank 8 Beast Conqueror—wiping the Etherion Village would be a very simple task for her.

At least, that was what she believed.

Whether the village would really be destroyed or not was still unknown. For the most part, there was something that Diona didn't know about the village.

Everyone there was a warrior.

Only those with enough strength and ability could live in the location where the Clawford Tribe reside.

Any other villages would have long been crushed if they didn't have the means to protect their daily lives.

Diona watched as Alex and Lavinia disembarked on the ship, walking hand in hand like the couple that they were.

The Beast Conqueror liked handsome men, and she truly felt it was a pity to kill Alex.

However, since she believed that he was weighing down Charles, Diona had decided to nip him in the bud before he could influence the newest member of their organization any further.

A minute later, Diona also disembarked from the Airship and ordered her Black Wolf Spider to follow Alex and Lavinia.

She wanted to know where they would be staying, allowing her to devise the perfect plan to end the young man's life without the authorities tracing it back to her.

Chapter 568: The Oathkeeper's Return [Part 1]

"It feels like I was here just yesterday," Alex muttered as soon as he disembarked from the airship. "I won't mind living in a place like this once I retire from all my travels."

Lavinia smiled faintly, happy to hear the words of her lover.

"Then I guess we better start looking for a piece of land where we can build our home," Lavinia commented. "It must be big enough to fit our family inside."

"Sounds like a plan," Alex replied. "Well then, shall we go?"

The young man held Lavinia's hand firmly before walking toward the village gate.

The villagers recognized their princess, as well as their Oathkeeper, right away.

Lavinia's personal maid, Roselia, also stood by the gate, watching the young couple take all the time in the world to walk, just like tourists on a sight-seeing trip.

"Good afternoon, Young Miss, Sir Alex," Roselia said respectfully before bowing. "I'm glad you have arrived safely. Welcome back to Etherion Village."

"Thank you, Roselia," Lavinia replied.

"Thanks, Roselia." Alex smiled.

The maid moved to the side and gestured for the two teenagers to enter the gate.

"The Master has been waiting for your arrival," Roselia said. "I'm sure he had already seen the airship descend and must be expecting the two of you to head to the Hartwell Residence as soon as possible."

Alex and Lavinia exchanged a glance and nodded at the same time.

They had originally planned to take a stroll in the village and watch the sunset together first.

But since Ramza and probably Lavinia's parents were waiting for them, they decided to not take any detours for the time being.

The villagers bowed respectfully the moment Lavinia and Alex walked past them. This had happened in the past, so Alex was already used to it.

Lavinia might look like an ordinary Catkin to some people, but within the domain of the Etherion Village, she was akin to royalty.

Suddenly, two young Catkins, both around three to five years of age, ran up to Alex and looked up to him with curiosity.

"Mister, are you the Oathkeeper?" the little boy asked. "My father said that our Oathkeeper is strong. Are you strong?"

Alex crouched down and met the young Catkin's gaze.

"Not as strong as my Master," Alex replied. "His name is Cairo, and he will be the Heaven's Sword in the future"

"Wow!" the Catkin exclaimed as he tightened his grip around his sister's hand. "I also want to become a Heaven's Sword!"

"Of course, you can be one too," Alex replied before patting the boy's head. "Train hard and become strong enough to protect your sister."

"Un!" The boy nodded happily.

The villagers had wanted to stop the boy earlier from approaching Alex, but they had also wanted to know how their Oathkeeper would react to curious children.

The little girl, who seemed envious of her brother getting patted on the head, mustered up the courage to talk to Alex. "Me too?" she asked shyly.

"Of course," Alex replied and also patted the girl's head a few times before finally standing up.

For a brief moment, he thought of Dim Dim. If the little bun had been here, it would have given these two kids some dim sum and played with them for a while.

After that short encounter, Alex and Lavinia resumed their stroll. The people of the village gave Alex a smile as he passed by them.

Some of them had heard the stories of how he fought to save the children inside the Etherion Dungeon. Others had been told of his heroism during the Siege of the City of Thalloria.

The Oathkeeper was a special existence in the hierarchy of the Clawford Tribe. Regardless of whether Alex was strong or not, all he needed to do was say the word, and the villagers would take up arms and fight by his side.

Lavinia had already told him about this and warned him to be careful, for his words would be taken seriously by her people.

As they walked the street leading to the Hartwell Residence, Lavinia saw a few young ladies blushing as they looked at Alex.

Some of them were close to Lavinia's age, and she could tell that their gaze was that of a lady looking at a prospective marriage partner.

If not for the fact that they were walking hand in hand together, some of these girls might have already taken the initiative to approach the handsome young man and flirted with him in the open.

Catkins were a brave and bold race. If Alex had been an ordinary human, none of the Catkins would have paid attention to him. But he wasn't an ordinary human.

He was their Oathkeeper, so having him as a mate was considered the greatest honor among them.

Roselia couldn't help but smile faintly. Who could've known that the young man, whom Cairo had brought to their village, would become someone larger than life.

A living legend who would be protected by everyone in the Clawford Tribe down to their last breath.

'What? Is this brat someone important in this village?' Diona thought while observing Alex from a distance. 'And Lavinia is considered a princess here? Just what in the world is going on?'

She had come to Etherion Village with a mission. And for that mission to succeed, she needed to do a bit of research. Rash as she was, she knew it was foolish to do anything in a foreign environment without doing basic research.

But first, she needed to know where Alex and Lavinia would be staying. This was why she followed them at a safe distance.

Still, getting too close could blow her cover. In the end, she decided to go to an inn to book a room for two days.

She would also ask the locals more about Alex and Lavinia. In the meantime, the Black Wolf Spider would follow her targets by jumping from one roof to the next.

A few minutes later, the two teenagers finally arrived at the stairs leading to the Hartwell Residence.

Alex looked at these stairs fondly. These had given him a lot of bonus stat points in the past.

Those points had greatly boosted his physical prowess, allowing him to survive inside the Etherion Dungeon during its early days.

Lavinia glanced at the young man beside her before looking at the stairs in front of her. She could still remember the first time she had met Alex. Back then, she had looked down on him.

Remembering those memories, she couldn't help but blush in embarrassment.

As if reading her mind, Alex gave her hand a light squeeze and grinned at her.

"When we first met here, you acted like the classic noble lady, looking down on a commoner," Alex teased.

"Please forgive me already," Lavinia replied, fully knowing that she was the one at fault back then. "Let's hurry up. Grandfather is waiting."

Alex chuckled as he allowed himself to be dragged by his girlfriend up the stairs to meet her family.

He no longer received any notifications about any stat boosts since the Stairs of Trial was a one time thing.

However, there was another trial waiting for him, and this trial was something that he had to pass no matter what.

The young man was feeling hopeful that the Hartwell Family would give them their blessings, unaware that Diona had sneaked inside the village, hoping to get an opportunity to end his life.

Chapter 569: The Oathkeeper's Return [Part 2]

"Welcome back, Lavinia," Ramza said as hugged his granddaughter for the first time in a long while.

"I missed you, Grandpa," Lavinia replied.

"Is he the only one you missed?" Lavinia's mother, Elena, asked in a teasing tone.

“Of course not, Mother.” Lavinia smiled as she moved to hug her mother. “I missed you too.”

It was at that moment when another Catkin entered the room with a smile.

“You miss your mom more than me?” Lavinia’s father, Vega, pretended to be scandalized and shocked.

But soon, he joined his wife and daughter in a loving embrace. They had been on a business trip during Alex’s first stay at Etherion Village, so hadn’t seen the young man before.

While they had sent her letters and she had replied to them in kind, she lamented the fact that they hadn’t been able to send her off to Friden Academy back then.

“Father, of course I missed you too!” Lavinia replied, enjoying the love of her parents. “But I love mom more than you.”

“Where did my little girl go?” Vega sighed dramatically, but a smile tugged at the corners of his lips.

“Back then, you followed me wherever I went. Now that you’re all grown up, you’ve forgotten all about me.”

“Dad, you know that’s not true!”

“Uh huh.”

Alex watched this family exchange and wondered if he would’ve gotten to experience the same thing had he not been an orphan.

He had grown up in an orphanage, and although he considered everyone there his family, the warmth of a real family was something he had known in the past.

Ramza walked towards Alex and patted his shoulder. “Welcome back, Alex. I hope you’ve been well in the academy? Have you made many friends?”

"I've been well, Sir Ramza," Alex replied. "As for friends, I have plenty."

Ramza nodded. "That's good to hear. Lavinia sent me a letter informing us that the two of you would come to visit. But she didn't say anything aside from that. Is there any other reason why you two have come here?"

The old man was smiling mischievously. It seemed that he had a hunch why the two had travelled to Etherion Village. If his guess was correct, an impromptu celebration feast would be held by tomorrow.

"Yes, there is another reason for this visit, Sir," Alex answered before glancing at Lavinia and her parents.

As if sensing that their guest had something to say, Elena and Vega shifted their attention to him.

"I came here today to tell Lavinia's family that the two of us are dating," Alex said firmly.

Roselia covered her lips with her hand, looking surprised. But in truth, she was just stopping herself from laughing out loud.

Still, her body shuddered from time to time as she held back her giggle while giving Lavinia the "has the rice been cooked already?" gaze.

Lavinia was too tense to notice Roselia's gaze because her father and mother were now scrutinizing Alex from head to toe.

"Are you Alex Stratos?" Vega asked, his voice suddenly authoritative and powerful. "The Clawford Tribe's new Oathkeeper?"

"Yes, Sir," Alex replied.

"Are you also here to ask for my daughter's hand in marriage?" Elena arched an eyebrow.

"Yes, My Lady." Alex nodded. "I would like to ask for the Hartwell Family's blessing."

Vega and Elena exchanged a glance before shifting their attention back to Alex.

"Lavinia informed us in her letters that you are also fond of other ladies. Is this true?" Vega narrowed his eyes like a cat that was about to pounce on its prey.

"That's true," Alex had no intention of lying because that would just cause trouble in the future. "Aside from Lavinia, I also have three more girlfriends... and that number might also increase in the future."

"Might?" Elena's voice rose a bit.

"I mean, it will increase in the future," Alex said firmly.

"Hoh..." Vega held her daughter close to him while glaring at Alex. "Do you honestly believe that I'll let my daughter marry someone like you?"

Alex blinked because he already expected something like this to happen. He had prepared a few replies, including a baseball reference about hitting the homerun and stealing all the bases.

However, he had a feeling that if he were to do that, he and the Hartwell Family would be at odds with each other.

In the end, he chose the option that had the best chance of succeeding.

"According to Lavinia, the Clawford Tribe has a tradition," Alex said. "If someone passes the Etherion Challenge, the Clawford Tribe will grant them a wish no matter what it is. I would like to take part in the challenge in exchange for you blessing my relationship with Lavinia."

Ramza had been keeping silent during the exchange, but after hearing Alex's reply, he understood that it was his granddaughter and Alex were on the same page.

“So, both of you have come prepared huh?” Ramza grinned. “But the Etherion Challenge hasn’t been invoked for a long time because the death rate was extremely high. Are you sure you want to take this challenge?”

“Yes,” Alex replied firmly.

The Etherion Challenge was an extreme challenge where Alex needed to face all of the warriors of the Clawford Tribe in a survival game.

He would be given five minutes to hide inside the forest. After that, the warriors would try to hunt him down.

This challenge would start when the sun was at its highest and end at sunset.

If Alex were to survive this challenge then the Hartwell Family would grant his wish.

Of course, there were other rules.

If the Challenger was only Rank 5 or below, only Rank 5 and below were allowed to hunt them down.

If their rank was higher than Rank 5, the Masters of the village would also participate in the Etherion Challenge.

Since Alex was only a Rank 3 Oathkeeper, all the warriors in the village who were Rank 5 and below were eligible to join the challenge.

If Alex ended up defeated by these warriors in battle, then that meant that he didn’t pass the challenge.

If he managed to survive until sunset, then he would be deemed as the winner.

The warriors of the Etherion Village grew up near the Etherion Forest. To them, it was practically their backyard.

It would be nearly impossible to hide from them due to their superhuman senses, so the challengers usually had to fight their way out against hundreds of warriors.

These challenges didn't always end in the challenger's survival. Most of the challengers died because those who opted for these challenges were criminals who wanted to regain their freedom.

It was also a way to train the warriors of the village, so these challenges were always taken seriously.

Of course, no one in the Etherion Village would dare to kill their Oathkeeper. At most, they would beat the crap out of Alex until he could no longer resist.

This was one of the reasons why Alex dared to do this challenge.

The second reason was that he had his map, allowing him to see where the Catkins would be as they hunted him down.

With that advantage, he could steer clear of them and find the best route to hide from them.

Also, he had the Verdant Throne and the Gaia Ring.

This time, the power of the Gaia Ring was focused on defense, boosting Alex's defensive abilities.

The Verdant Throne gave him increased stamina and health regeneration, allowing him to recover from any injuries he received from battle.

He also had his skills as the Oathkeeper, which further gave him the confidence to pass this challenge.

But whether he could truly pass it or not would depend on many variables.

“Interesting, so you plan to take the Etherion Challenge huh?”

A handsome Catkin stepped inside the manor with a smirk on his face.

“It has been a while, Alex,” Cairo said calmly. “Very well, I will also participate in this challenge. Show me if you really deserve to marry my sister.”

Alex looked at his Master and bowed his head respectfully. He wasn’t too surprised to see him in the village because Lavinia had informed her family about their visit.

However, now that his Master would also participate in the Etherion Challenge, Alex needed to tweak his plans for a bit to ensure that the future Heaven’s Sword would not succeed in cutting him down.

An hour later, the news of their Oathkeeper accepting the Etherion Challenge to gain Lavinia’s hand in marriage spread across the entire village like wildfire.

Diona found this news to her liking because according to the rules, outsiders were also allowed to participate.

‘Perfect!’ Diona did a fist pump. ‘Absolutely perfect! With this, I have a good excuse to go all out!’

Since she was in a good mood, Diona started asking the locals about the Etherion Challenge. The locals, caught up in the excitement and buzz, chatted freely with her.

Since the heavens had given her the perfect opportunity to kill Alex and make it look like an accident, she would definitely make her preparations beforehand.

Two hours later, the Beast Conqueror headed deeper inside the Etherion Forest.

Since the Etherion Challenge would be held tomorrow, she would create an inescapable net composed of monsters, which would make this challenge the most brutal one in the history of the Clawford Tribe.

Chapter 570: A Title That Would Be Put To The Test

While Alex and Lavinia enjoyed an early dinner with the young lady's parents, Ramza went to the village plaza and ordered all the warriors who were Rank 5 and below to gather.

Of course, even the stronger warriors had voluntarily come to hear what their Lord had to say.

"I'm sure you've already heard that our Oathkeeper will take the Etherion Challenge tomorrow at noon," Ramza said calmly. "And his reason is to gain our family's blessing to take Lavinia's hand in marriage."

The older Catkin paused to give the warriors some time to process this information before continuing.

"Without a doubt, Alex is strong enough to protect Lavinia. However, since he intends to take more wives, he must prove himself capable of protecting all of them. Thus, he has decided to take the Etherion Challenge."

He scanned the faces of the warriors, who were all looking back at him with smirks on their faces.

That alone was enough to tell him that they intended to "play" with the Oathkeeper and allow him to win the challenge by not going all out against him.

Ramza had already expected these warriors to let Alex off easy, but he refused to accept such an attitude. He didn't want the Etherion Challenge to look like a joke, for it was an important tradition of their village.

Fortunately, he had a way to sway the mood of the crowd and make his warriors take this challenge more seriously.

"I'm sure that many of you here respect and care for our Oathkeeper," Ramza said before pressing his right hand over his chest. "I feel the same way as you. But our Oathkeeper, Alex, said something that I find troubling."

Ramza then gestured for the maid Roselia to come close to him, which made the onlookers suddenly think of something that made their eyes widen in shock.

Seeing their reactions, the old man knew that his plan was working, so he no longer held back and told them what they dreaded to hear.

“Alex said that aside from Lavinia, he wishes to take Roselia as his Mistress,” Ramza declared. “She will become his personal maidservant and care for him for the rest of his life. You know that that means, right?!”

“”What?!””

“”No way!””

“”Not Roselia!””

“”Damn it!””

Roselia was actually very popular in the village. In fact, a lot of their warriors were motivated to grow stronger in hopes that one day they could propose to her.

The maid always wore glasses and a frilly maid uniform. But whenever she went into battle, she would take off her glasses and her persona would change completely.

Many warriors had witnessed this change during hunting missions. She was silk hiding steel, and many Catkin warriors longed to impress her.

The warriors were not delusional enough to entertain fantasies of marrying the untouchable Lavinia. Marrying Roselia, however, was within the realm of possibility.

The memory of her drop dead gorgeous face and wonderful figure—which could only be seen when she wore her skin-tight battle gear—was enough to make all the guys present roar in anger.

How dare their Oathkeeper set his sights on their Roselia! And he only wanted to add her to his harem instead of treating her as the one and only light of his life!

“Lord Ramza, we can break his bones, right?!”

“Of course, you can!” Ramza replied.

“We can beat the crap out of him as long as we don’t kill him, right?!”

“Go ahead!” Ramza gave the warrior a thumbs-up.

“If the Oathkeeper wins the challenge, will he XXX and XXX Roselia?!”

The Patriarch of the Clawford Tribe smirked, making everyone focus their attention on him.

“Ask yourself this.” Ramza raised a single finger. “If you were in Alex’s shoes, would you not do it?”

“” ””
...

“” ””
...

“” ””
...

Silence spread in the plaza that lasted for a few seconds before furious roars of anger spread far and wide.

Even Alex and Lavinia, who were all the way into the Hartwell Residence, could hear the crowd, making them wonder what was happening in the village.

Fortunately, Lavinia's parents had been informed of Ramza's plan ahead of time. They had deliberately kept the two inside the house, preventing them from knowing the plot that the Patriarch was cooking.

""Damn it! Damn it all!""

"Roselia! I will protect you!"

"We won't allow you to be XXX and XXX by the Oathkeeper!"

""Roselia!""

""Roselia!""

""Roselia!""

The maid looked at the bloodthirsty warriors calmly. A moment later, she broke into sobs before tearfully thanking everyone who wished to protect her.

"Thank you, everyone," Roselia said through her crocodile tears. Clearly, she was in cahoots with Ramza to make the challenge more interesting. "Please do your best in the challenge. I don't want to become the Oathkeeper's mistress. I'm afraid that he would not even let me sleep at night. May fortune shine upon all of you!"

""Yeah!""

""We won't let him have his way!""

""Ohhhhhh!""

""For Roselia's happiness!""

""Marry me, Roselia!""

"Beat the Oathkeeper!"

""Beat him!""

"Smack him silly!"

""Smack him!""

Diona was getting swayed by the crowd and raised her hand to join the chanting.

"Kill him!" Diona shouted. "Death to the Oathkeeper!"

But no matter how loud she shouted, her words were drowned out by the crowd. Everyone was pumped to fight Alex tomorrow in the Etherion Challenge.

Still, those who had strong hearing heard her exact words and paid careful attention to her from a distance.

Ramza and Roselia zeroed in on Diona, but were careful to keep their expressions subdued. The Oathkeeper was a special existence to them. They might have instigated the warriors into taking the challenge seriously, but they also knew that none of the young men would actually dare—or even want—to kill Alex.

A few minutes later, Ramza and Roselia headed back to the residence together.

When he was certain that no one was nearby, Ramza called out, seemingly to no one in particular.

“Come.”

Five Ninjas appeared in front of him and kneeled in servitude.

“You all saw that lady earlier, right?” Ramza asked.

“Yes, Master,” the leader of the Ninjas answered.

“Pay close attention to her,” Ramza ordered. “If she does anything funny, neutralize her right away.”

“Understood!” the Leader nodded before turning into black mist.

The others also followed suit, eager to carry out their Master’s order.

Ramza and Roselia continued their stroll back to the residence in peace.

When they reached the stairs, Ramza turned around and looked at Roselia apologetically.

“I’m sorry for using you in this manner, Roselia,” Ramza said. “It was a low move, even for me.”

“No, Master.” Roselia shook her head. “I understand this must be done to verify Alex’s sincerity toward the young lady.”

Ramza sighed before looking at the plaza, where a few warriors lingered. They were busy discussing strategies to neutralize Alex as fast as possible in tomorrow’s Etherion Challenge.

Deep inside, the Patriarch of the Clawford Tribe wanted to see how much the young man had grown since the last time he had seen him.

Even back then, Alex had struck him as someone special.

As to how special Alex was... Well, that was what the old man wanted to find out.

If Alex really managed to survive the warriors' pursuit until sunset, the Catskins would be spurred into training harder.

Ramza was using Alex as a whetstone to further strengthen the resolve of the younger generation, the future of their tribe.

'I sure hope you succeed, Alex,' Ramza thought as he continued to move up the flight of stairs. 'But I guarantee you that it will not be easy.'

He was already old, but for the first time in many years, he could feel his fighting spirit burn. It almost felt like he was back to his youth, when he had actively fought battles to expand their domain.

Those days were long gone, but the future of his tribe looked brighter than ever before.

The Oathkeeper was the symbol of the Clawford Tribe, and for the first time in centuries, this title would once again be put to the test.