

Endless 571

Chapter 571: Start Of The Etherion Challenge

The day of the Etherion Challenge finally arrived.

Alex carefully put on the battle gear that he had prepared for this occasion. It was an armor set that he had bought from the Arcana Shop for two thousand Arcana Points.

He then opened his status page to look at his stats and smiled faintly. He had come a long way from being a helpless and weak human that had to “fight” goblins by running away.

Now, he could easily dispose of them.

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Alex Stratos

Age: 17

Alignment: Chaotic Good

Mana: 727/727

Job Class: Oathkeeper

Subclass: Demon Slayer

Strength – 126 [+6]

Intelligence – 35 [+3]

Dexterity – 20 [+3]

Agility – 110 [+3]

Constitution – 197 [+4]

Stamina – 197[+4]

Magic – 724 [+3]

Luck – 34 [+3]

AP: 4,740

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

Unique Skill: Power of the Verdant Throne, Gravitas Dominion [EX], Growth [EX]

Active Skills: Oathkeeper's Duty, Shield [EX], Shield Bash, Unyielding Pact, Echo of the Sworn, Balance Breaker, Shield Charge, Rear-Ender Thrust, Enchant Fire, Enchant Holy, Culling Blade, Grand Cross, Light, Mirror Shield [EX], Spike Shield [EX], Shield Chaser [EX]

Passive Skills: Improved Stone Throw, Head Shot, Rebuke of Steel, Shield of Thorns, Multi-task, Mana Heart Oath [EX],

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Alex was quite happy with his growth before his gaze landed on his age, which would soon change.

Yes. A month from now, he would turn eighteen.

Suddenly, he heard a knock on his door, prompting him to close his status page for the time being.

"Come in."

The door opened, and Lavinia entered the room. Despite her curiosity, she made sure to lock the door behind her.

The young lady then walked towards Alex and gave him a tight hug before kissing his lips.

"You look really cool right now," Lavinia said, smiling. "This is the first time I'm seeing this style of armor."

"It's an Assassin Cre*d Exclusive. It's made for Aura farming," Alex replied. "Pretty expensive too."

"Assassin Cre*d Exclusive?" Lavinia blinked. "Aura farming? What's that?"

"Simply put, it is worn to make me look suave." Alex cupped the young lady's face and pecked her lips three times.

Lavinia giggled because Alex was being playful right now. But she didn't mind it. In fact, she would rather he be playful than injured in today's challenge.

"I'm really worried," Lavinia admitted, while trying to hide the anxiety in her voice. "This challenge is very brutal. I won't be able to forgive myself if you get crippled because of me."

"That's not going to happen," Alex assured her. "Please trust me. I won't carelessly throw my life away."

After a few more kisses, Lavinia finally calmed down.

The two were starting to get in the mood when someone else knocked at the door to remind Alex that the challenge was about to begin.

“Alex, are you ready to go?” Roselia asked from the other side of the door. “Everyone is waiting for you at the plaza.”

“Understood, Roselia,” Alex replied. “Just give me a minute. I’m trying to raise my Good Luck Charm.”

“You have two minutes.” Roselia stated before finally moving away from the door.

She had seen Lavinia enter the young man’s room and kept the other servants from disturbing them. But it was almost time for the challenge, so she decided to remind Alex and Lavinia about it in case they had lost track of time.

Using the last two minutes that was allotted to them, Alex assured the anxious young lady that he already had a plan in mind.

The two then shared one last passionate kiss before Alex pulled the hood over his head. Since he wanted to make an impression, he had to dress up for the occasion.

And, just like he expected, Roselia arched an eyebrow after seeing his get-up.

With a faint smile on his face, the young man walked past Lavinia’s personal maid.

He then headed towards the plaza like a warrior that was about to fight a war.

Everguard was strapped to his left arm. This shield was the symbol of the first Oathkeeper, whose legacy he now carried.

As he passed by the villagers, all of them couldn't help but look at him with respect.

Since he was wearing a hood, it was hard for the others to see his eyes. The shadows over his face gave him a mysterious persona.

This was what Alex had aimed for when he bought this Assassin Set.

While many would think that he couldn't see properly with the hood covering his face, he could in fact, see everything as if the fabric were transparent.

Roselia guided Alex to the small stage that had been set up in the plaza so that everyone could see him.

Ramza, Vega, and Elena were already there waiting for him.

And just like everyone else, they were impressed by the young man's choice of lightweight armor.

"Today, I have come to take the Etherion Challenge," Alex declared. "Not as an Oathkeeper, but as a man who wishes to gain the approval of the Hartwell Family. I plan to make Lavinia—and a few ladies as well—my wife."

Hearing the words "a few ladies as well" made the warriors glare at the young man as if he had betrayed their brotherhood.

Diona glanced at the young man with a sneer plastered on her face. She was wearing a mask so that Alex wouldn't recognize her later when she joined the other warriors in pursuing him.

She had also noticed the surveillance of the Ninjas. This made her realize that going to the forest before they took notice of her was the right move.

The Beast Conqueror had already relayed her orders. Later, all she needed to do was give the monsters a signal and they would make their move.

There was only one result that Diona wished to see.

Alex's lifeless body drenched in his own blood.

"I don't know how many of you will be joining the challenge today," Alex stated. "But there will only be one result. My victory... So, go all out and try to catch me... That is if you can even catch up."

He tilted his chin provocatively, fueling the fighting spirit of everyone in the plaza.

Ramza and Vega had to calm themselves down because they almost felt like joining the challenge in order to personally kick the young man's butt as punishment for him being cocky.

"Well then, our Oathkeeper has spoken," Ramza said with a politician's smile. "I hold in my hand an hour glass. The moment all of the sands are gone, the hunt will begin. This challenge will last until sunset. Warriors of the Clawford Tribe! Do not bring shame to our name!

"Don't treat this young man before you as the Oathkeeper but as a challenger who is throwing down the gauntlet to all of us right now. Do you want to lose to scum—errr to him?!"

""""Noooooooooooo!""""

"Do you want him to mock you for life?!"

""""Noooooooooooooooooooo!""""

"Then you know what to do! Beat the crap out of him until he pukes blood!"

""""Yeah!""""

The corner of Alex's lips twitched because he felt that his future grandfather-in-law might be taking things a little too personally.

However, he thought that this was only Ramza's way of firing everyone up, so he decided to go with the flow for now.

"Are you ready, Alex?" Ramza asked.

"Yes" Alex replied.

"Then let the Etherion Challenge begin!" Ramza declared before turning the hourglass upside down.

With that signal, Alex summoned a magical shield and jumped on top of it, fully intending to use it as a skateboard.

"Shield Chaser!" Alex shouted.

A moment later, the shield shot towards the forest, leaving a cloud of dust in its wake.

He had originally planned to just run towards the forest before summoning his shield to head deeper inside.

However, when he had opened the map, a familiar name had greeted him and made him realize he had no choice but to go all out from the start.

Diona's name was highlighted in red, which meant that she was here to target Alex personally.

He already had an idea on what the Beast Conqueror had prepared for him, but he would not allow her to get what she wanted.

In the map, he could see hundreds of red blinking dots inside the forest. These were the monsters that Diona had prepared in advance.

If Alex hadn't had the map, he might have been put at a great disadvantage. But since he could now see the position of his enemies, he chose the location where the monster encirclement was thinnest.

He would break through it with brute force.

Chapter 572: Alex's Strategy

Diona stared at the hourglass intensely, wishing the sands could empty out faster. With no way to tamper with the hourglass, she simply eyed it unblinkingly, as if doing so would shame the sands into moving more quickly.

Five minutes was a short time, yet it felt like five years to her. When there were only two minutes left, she and the Catkin warriors readied themselves to hunt down the fleeing Oathkeeper.

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Inside the Forest...

As everyone else waited for the grace period to end, Alex ventured deeper into the forest.

Alex wouldn't be Alex if all he did was run. To set up the scheme, he'd throw daggers at some of the trees he passed by.

Knowing he'd be up against hundreds of warriors at once, he had prepared considerably before their trip. The daggers he threw went through Nessia, who imbued them with rune magic.

The runes inscribed in the daggers had two effects.

One, it masked Alex's scent. This partially negated the advantage of the Catkins, who had superhuman senses.

Their sense of smell might not be as good as that of the Dogkin Tribe, but they mustn't be underestimated.

Two, it gradually generated mist inside the forest, further helping him conceal his traces.

He had no plan to passively flee from his pursuers.

If he could, he'd fight the Catkins as little as possible. But he had no intention of giving Diona the same treatment.

All the Catkins were represented by yellow dots on his map, which meant that they did not want to kill him.

Diona was different.

Her dot on the map blinked like a red, glowing eye. This meant that she wished to eliminate him, making her an enemy.

The Beast Conqueror even strategically planted her monster army all over the forest. Fortunately, Alex could see their locations on the map. He could just kill them to prevent issues.

'I still have a minute,' Alex realized as he glanced at the countdown timer on his map. 'I better hurry up and deal with the small fries first.'

Although they were small fries according to his mouth, these beasts were actually Rank 3 Forest Wolves.

This was also their domain, so they could hunt easily as packs.

Alex simply didn't fear Rank 3 Monsters anymore, especially since he had a few abilities that could easily deal with them.

A pack of ten Forest Wolves had sensed the young man's presence before he even saw them.

But Alex didn't need to see them to know where they were. He had the map, so the moment the wolves started charging in his direction, he already prepared to meet them halfway.

"Gravitas Dominion!" Alex waved his hand, and the charging wolves suddenly found a powerful pressure descending on them, slowing their movements drastically.

This was one of the Unique Skills Alex had gained in the past.

The strength of the gravity his enemies were subjected to depended on his rank.

For example, Alex's current rank was a Rank 3 Oathkeeper. This meant that his enemies within the effective range of his skill would find themselves being subjected to gravity three times stronger than normal.

Alex then summoned his Warhammer and Sacrament, then smashed the skulls of the Forest Wolves using the martial skill, Hammer For All Seasons.

He even used the power of gravity to lighten the warhammer, allowing him to swing it up easily, only to increase the gravity to make it heavier mid-swing.

It was a devastating combination that Alex hadn't mastered to the fullest. But now that he was using it in an actual fight, the prowess of his Unique Skill shone through.

The wolves died just like that, and Alex went past them without bothering to dig out the cores from their body.

The difference between monsters found in the wild and those found inside dungeons were very clear.

Dungeon monsters vanished and dropped their cores and some other items when they died.

As for monsters in the wild, their bodies remain intact.

When Alex dealt the killing blow to the last Forest Wolf, the five minute grace period also ended.

For now, he continued his plan to escape while throwing daggers left and right to give him an environment where he could target Diona from her blindspot.

A faint smirk was plastered on his face as he glanced at the small yellow dot that was following him.

Throwing a dagger, he pierced the spider's body and finally ended the life of Diona's scout, who had been keeping tabs on him.

In the plaza of the Etherion Village...

Lavinia watched as the warriors of the Clawford Tribe all rushed toward the forest to pursue the Oathkeeper.

Diona did the same. However, she simply followed behind the other warriors, not wanting to stand out too much.

However, she had sensed that Alex had defeated one of the wolf packs located at the northeast of the forest.

'He's a sly one. I'll give him that,' Diona thought with a sneer. She had sensed the death of her little spider, but instead of being angry, she simply felt amused.

Earlier, Alex had dashed toward the southern side of the forest. However, the moment he had vanished from everyone's sight, he had changed his direction and headed northeast.

He had circled around the perimeter of the village in order to throw off his pursuers, who would likely follow the path that he had taken. But Diona wasn't fooled.

When she entered the forest, she jumped from branch to branch and headed towards her dead minions.

Her rank had been sealed, reducing her to become a Rank 5 Beast Conqueror, but the experience she gained from life-and-death battles remained with her.

She believed that a mere Rank 3 Oathkeeper wouldn't be able to defeat her. In fact, she was enjoying this game of cat and mouse, thinking of herself as a predator.

Alex was her prey, and she would enjoy hunting him down.

She didn't know that while she was thinking on how she would kill her target, Alex was also thinking on how he would beat the crap out of her in their battle.

He had no intention of killing Diona since it would be foolish to make Morax his enemy.

The leader of the Void-Touched was overly protective of his brethren. The one at fault here was clearly Diona, but Morax still would not let Alex get off scot-free even if he was protected by the Paragon of Space.

Alex understood that if Morax wished for it, he could control the minds of his friends and acquaintances. Of course, there were limitations since Morax could only control human beings.

But, that was enough to make the young man's life a living hell.

All the human kingdoms would become his enemy. Those who were precious to him would also be in danger.

Although it was an unfair situation, he understood that it was impossible for the current him to offend this powerful organization.

He was already at odds with the Demon Worshipers. Adding the Void-Touched to his ever growing list of enemies would be pure suicide.

'Come, Diona,' Alex thought. 'Let's see what you've got.'

He wasn't sure if he could defeat her in a one-on-one battle, but he was certain that he wouldn't lose to her.

At most they would both suffer serious injuries unless Alex managed to gain a bit of advantage using the tactics that he had prepared beforehand.

He had several trump cards in his arsenal. In fact, one of them was a gift from Dim Dim.

This was an artifact that he only planned to use as his last resort if things spiraled out of his control.

Chapter 573: Who Is The Hunter, And Who Is The Hunted? [Part 1]

'As expected, she has a general idea of my location,' Alex thought while looking at his map.

The red blinking dot labeled with Diona's name moved toward him. Her monster army also spreads out strategically. From the looks of it, they were planning to trap him in an encirclement.

Alex was confident about defeating Rank 3 Monsters and below with ease. But Diona's Rank had only regressed to a Rank 5 Beast Conqueror. In other words, she could still control Rank 4 Monsters.

As a mere Rank 3 Oathkeeper, Alex was bound to struggle fighting against Rank 4 monsters. Of course, he could defeat them.

However, it would take him significantly more time. Enough time for the Hunters to pinpoint his location and mob him to oblivion.

Alex's strategy was simple. He wouldn't venture too far from Etherion Village. In fact, he planned to stick as close to it as possible.

There was a famous saying, "It is darkest under the lamp." The hunters were more likely to assume that the Oathkeeper would try to distance himself as far away as possible, buying time until sunset.

Sometimes, people fail to notice those closest to them. Even people who lose their items, like pens or glasses, often end up finding it in their pockets or somewhere near them despite looking for them far away.

People tend to overlook the obvious, and so Alex planned to exploit this weakness.

He planned to circle around the perimeter of the village, until he arrived back at the southern entrance of the forest, where people had seen him escape earlier.

By then, the effect of the runes that Nessia had imbued on his throwing daggers would have already taken effect, covering the area in mist.

He had no intention of running on foot since it would leave traces that the pathfinders and scouts could use to track him down.

The young man had set a goal for himself—to create a favorable battleground for his fight with Diona.

Sometimes, the only way to make a bully stop was to make them understand that bullying them was not worth it.

Just like a skunk. If you tried to approach a skunk, and it felt threatened, it would spray you with one of the most intoxicating perfumes in the world.

The kind that could end friendships and relationships.

In short, getting sprayed at by a skunk was not worth the trouble.

And Alex would make sure that Diona understood that messing with him was not worth it.

'This is fun,' Alex thought as he maneuvered his flying shield outside the detection range of the monsters in the vicinity.

Even Diona, who initially knew his location, now struggled to find him.

Little did he know that a handful of people in the village knew where he was.

“Why did you change your mind?” Ramza asked his grandson, Cairo. “I thought you planned to join the hunt to test Alex’s skills.”

“I have a feeling that Lavinia will hate me if I participate and prevent Alex from winning,” Cairo replied.

Ramza chuckled after hearing his grandson’s reply. Cairo doted on his sister in his own way, and although he wasn’t an excessive sison, he’d rather not be hated if he could help it.

Besides, Alex was his disciple. He didn’t mind if his disciple married his sister.

“Still, Alex is very sly.” Ramza smirked. “To think that he’s playing a trick on our warriors.”

Cairo nodded. “It’s a good strategy. Sometimes, the most dangerous place is the safest.”

Ramza knew where Alex was exactly located as the Lord of the territory. He had a special ability that allowed him to pinpoint the exact location of anyone he wished to find within his domain.

Cairo also knew Alex’s location because when they met again in the village, he planted a tracking spell on his disciple.

After two hours, the confident warriors of the Clawford Tribe were starting to lose their confidence.

Even their best trackers had no progress in tracking him due to the rune magic the daggers released.

Not only did it hide Alex’s scent, it also generated a mist that was starting to spread in the forest.

Diona was also starting to lose patience because the Catkins were also killing her monsters whenever they crossed paths.

Just like everyone else, she had moved away from the village, assuming Alex would run far away.

After one more hour, everyone's patience started to run out.

By this time, the mist had become quite thick. The funny part was that it amplified the runic magic that erased the scent of others.

In fact, the mist prevented any scent from being detected by their senses, including the scent of the other warriors.

While everyone was panicking, Alex was resting on a tree branch, conserving his energy.

His gaze was locked onto Diona's location, which was moving randomly within the forest, hoping to stumble on Alex's hiding place.

Time passed by slowly until there were only two hours left before sunset.

"It's time," Alex muttered before standing up from his tree branch and doing some light stretches.

He was simply waiting for the warriors to be separated from each other before making his move.

The young man had no intention of waiting for the time limit without doing anything.

Now that Diona had decided to travel on her own without the escort of her Monster Army, Alex decided it was about time he dealt with the Beast Conqueror.

The young man didn't want to admit it, but he was also a very competitive person.

After seeing Charles and Renard's progress, he itched to gain some enlightenment by fighting real battles.

And the best opponent to achieve this goal was someone who genuinely wanted him dead.

The warriors of the Clawford Tribe wouldn't really fight him with killing intent.

But Diona was the perfect opponent. Alex wouldn't miss the chance to fight one of the strongest opponents he could face with his current rank.

Summoning a shield, Alex jumped on it and activated his Shield Chaser skill.

It was now time to find out who was really the hunter and the hunted in the Etherion Challenge.

Chapter 574: Who Is The Hunter, And Who Is The Hunted? [Part 2]

'Where is he?'

'Where is he?!'

Diona gritted her teeth as she scanned her surroundings. The mist had gotten so thick that the range of visibility was now limited to a couple of meters.

To make matters worse, the mist also weakened her sense of smell, preventing her from picking up Alex's scent.

Suddenly, she saw something move at the corner of her eye.

Out of reflex, Diona threw a punch to her right and shattered the magical shield that flew toward her.

A few more shields zoomed out of the mist from different directions, targeting her blindspots.

The Beast Conqueror dealt with all of them with great ferocity, shattering them all without too much effort.

Her rank might have regressed to Rank 5, but the battle experience she had accumulated over the years didn't disappear.

It wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that she might be the strongest Rank 5 in the world right now.

"What are you doing here, Professor Diona? Are you here to kill a student? You shouldn't do that, you know? I believe that's against the academy's code of conduct."

Alex's teasing tone reached her ears. Incensed, she jumped at where his voice came from.

Even without seeing him, she unleashed a powerful punch that obliterated everything within ten meters in front of her.

"Wow, so scary. If that had hit me, I might have died instantly."

Without any hesitation, she lunged to her left and unleashed another punch, demolishing the trees in front of her.

"Based on how you're going all out, it seems that you really want to kill me, huh? I better report this to Professor Rowan when I get back."

The Beast Conqueror frowned, thinking her attacks should have already seriously injured her opponent.

But the young man's voice sounded so carefree as if to make it clear that he was deliberately toying with her.

“Where are you?!” Diona growled. “Stop hiding, you coward!”

“Coward? Me?” Alex chuckled. “Between you and me, who’s the one wearing a mask right now? Who’s the one afraid of getting captured by the Paragon of Space?”

“Shut up!” Diona took off her mask and crushed it. “Come and fight me, you coward!”

Alex’s chuckles filled the surroundings and bounced around, making it hard for Diona to pinpoint his location.

Actually, Alex was using some artifacts that allowed him to project his voices from different places. Originally, he had planned to tease the warriors of the Clawford Tribe with these artifacts.

But since someone had come to harm him, he decided that he would mess with her first.

“I will fight you on one condition,” Alex said. “Tell me why you want to kill me. If you don’t, I’ll just continue hiding until the challenge ends. After this, I will tell the Clawford Tribe that you tried to kill me.

“Although they are currently hunting me right now, we are actually on the same side, you know?”

Diona snorted. She didn’t bother giving a reply and focused on sharpening her senses.

Suddenly, she saw something moving in the distance. Without even thinking twice, she charged and attacked mercilessly.

Once again, the trees in front of her were pulverized.

But when she saw what she had hit, the rage in her heart burned stronger.

Hiding behind a tree was a scarecrow Alex had planted while Diona had been busy dealing with his magical shields.

"I'll ask you one last time," Alex declared. "Why are you trying to kill me? If you don't answer, I'll just leave and complain to Professor Rowan when I get back."

"Are you sure about that?" Diona sneered. "If you don't fight me, I'll instigate a monster stampede and wipe out the Clawford Tribe from the face of the world. Are you sure you want that to happen?"

Alex didn't reply right away. He could tell that Diona was seriously planning to command the monsters in the forest to attack the Clawford Tribe if pushed into a corner.

Seeing that he wasn't giving any reply, Diona sneered because she had found one of Alex's weaknesses.

"What's wrong?" Diona asked. "Cat got your tongue? Where is the confidence you showed me earlier?"

The Clawford Tribe and Alex seemed to have a good relationship with each other. As long as she threatened their safety, wouldn't she gain the upper hand in this exchange?

Although the aftermath would be ugly, she was fine as long as she succeeded in killing Alex.

To her surprise, Alex's response shut her up completely.

No. Alex didn't say anything.

He laughed.

His laughter reverberated in the forest, annoying her.

"I'm sorry, you what?" Alex asked. "You plan to wipe out the Clawford Tribe from the face of the world? Well, then. Go ahead and try. I dare you. Do you know that Lord Ramza and Professor Rowan are good friends? How do you have the guts to offend the Headmaster in so many different ways? I sure don't have even half your bravery!"

Alex once again laughed.

The kind of laughter that grated on Diona's ears.

The Beast Conqueror stomped her foot, crushing everything around her within a hundred-meter radius.

A moment later, she dashed at the place where the mist was thickest and unleashed her strongest attack.

"Die!" Diona roared because she had used the power of that shockwave to pinpoint Alex's true location.

And she succeeded.

She had indeed found Alex. But instead of running away, the young man raised his shield and charged forward.

"Shield Spike!"

"Shield Charge!"

Earlier, he had been wearing his Assassin Gear. But now, he was wearing the Oathkeeper Battle Regalia.

The same Regalia he had used in his fight against Willow while she was controlling Vaan's body.

A loud explosion erupted at the point of impact. Both fighters were blown away by the impact of their clash.

Diona coughed out a mouthful of blood because Alex's passive reflection ability—that was now well over a hundred percent—returned the force of her blow back to her.

Alex tanked the damage, but was still blown away by Diona's fierce strike. The only reason he survived was thanks to the combined power of the Gaia Ring and the Verdant Throne.

One increased his defense, the other his regeneration ability.

It had been a while since Alex felt truly hurt. But instead of feeling anxious or fearful, he actually smiled.

"What's wrong?" Alex asked as soon as he propped himself up from the ground. "Cat got your tongue?"

He wiped the blood seeping from the corner of his mouth with the back of his hand and sneered.

Diona's reply was a roar filled with anger, and she charged for the second time.

But Alex had already anticipated this.

With a wave of his hand, Dim Dim's Brittle Vials, Alchemy Bombs, and other explosive consumables were thrown out of his storage ring.

An earthshaking eruption took place, blowing away the mists that permeated the location where Alex and Diona were fighting.

The sound was so strong that all the warriors couldn't help but glance in the direction of the explosion. Even those at the village took note.

"Alex..." Lavinia muttered while gazing at the mushroom cloud that rose up in the distance.

Ramza and Cairo exchanged a glance, but none of them made any move.

The Etherion Challenge was still active. None of them could interfere, for this was not a battle they could freely stop even if they wanted to.

Chapter 575: The Harbinger Of The End [Part 1]

Dim Dim had a best friend named Eiko, who liked to throw explosives at her enemies. Influenced by her bomb-throwing fanatic best friend, Dim Dim had long learned the enjoyment of throwing things.

After Alex had first introduced the brittle vials to the little bun in their fights against low-ranking monsters, Dim Dim had developed the hobby of stockpiling these vials in bulk.

The Dim Sum God had even purchased Alchemy Bombs and other ingredients from both the Arcana Shop and the Exchange Center in the academy.

The Dim Sum God had amassed an arsenal of vials that contained anything from simple ingredients like powdered black pepper and red chilli to unusual substances like volatile acid, skunk spray essence, Troll blog slurry, Kraken ink rot extract, and Aunt Karen's home-made broth.

And when all of these mixtures combined into a powerful explosion, the outcome would only result in a wide-area devastation.

Diona's skin prickled as flames washed over her body. As someone who had reached the pinnacle of a Rank 7 Beast Conqueror, the flames didn't do much damage to her.

But since her ability revolved around the superhuman senses of the monsters that she could emulate and control, the side effects of Dim Dim's brittle vial barrage hurt her more than the explosion did.

Diona's eyes, nose, and throat were burning due to the mix of spices, rotten smells, and other ingredients with questionable origins and even more questionable uses.

In short, her superhuman senses backfired on her. Her earlier advantage was now a liability.

"Lion's Roar!"

A powerful roar expanded outwards, blowing away the flames that surrounded the young lady.

Alex was about to launch a long-ranged attack against Diona but found himself unable to move. To his shock, a red notification appeared on his Status Page, informing him that he was affected by Paralysis.

The young man had decent resistances against Status Debuffs, but Diona's Lion's Roar was special.

It ignored immunities and bypassed all defenses. However, there was a catch.

The Lion's Roar only had a 40% chance of success in triggering its absolute Paralysis.

Unfortunately for Alex, he was currently in Hell Mode, so he was bound to always end up with the unluckiest outcome.

'Sh*t!' Alex cursed as he tried to move his body, but the effect of Diona's roar lasted for ten seconds.

Ten seconds might be a short period of time, but in a battle of life and death, ten seconds was more than enough for the enemy to deal a devastating blow.

Since he couldn't move, Alex did the only thing that he could do. He forced himself to calm down and minimize his presence as possible.

His opponent was still unable to see, hear, and smell properly. So while she was neutralized, he would use this opportunity to recover.

But who was Diona?

She had survived many life-and-death battles. This wasn't her first time being subjected to such tricks!

Her Lion's roar also acted like a sonar, giving her Alex's exact location.

“Die!” Diona confidently lunged at the young man despite the fact that she couldn’t see.

“Shield Chaser!” Alex shouted.

He summoned a shield in front of him and used it to knock his body upward.

The young man then activated his Unique Skill, Gravitas Dominion [EX].

Alex removed all traces of gravity on his body, so the blow that hit him pushed him upward to the sky, beyond Diona’s reach.

The Beast Conqueror delivered a punch to where Alex had been just a few seconds ago, slamming her fist on the ground.

A powerful shockwave pushed everything back, uprooting all the trees in the affected area.

If Alex had been a few seconds late, that punch would have dealt him a serious injury. He still hadn’t fully recovered from his earlier clash with the Beast Conqueror.

Getting hit a second time was a risk he didn’t dare to take.

The moment he recovered from his Paralysis, Alex summoned more shields and hurled them towards the Beast Conqueror on the ground.

To his surprise, his attacks actually hit his target, making Diona cry out in pain, surprise, and indignation.

“Damn it!” Diona cursed as she wiped the tears from her eyes using the back of her hand. The lingering effects of Dim Dim’s diabolical concoctions was preventing her from fighting to the fullest.

Several warriors from the Clawford Tribe had already arrived at the scene.

However, none of them tried to attack their Oathkeeper. They eyed Diona warily. Lord Ramza's subordinates had already secretly informed the warriors that this particular lady seemed to harbor evil intentions against Alex.

While they did want to beat the crap out of him, they had no intention of killing him.

But Diona was different.

They could sense the killing intent oozing from her body. There was no doubt that her malice was directed at their Oathkeeper.

Still, they decided not to interfere, wanting to see how this battle would end.

Alex's opponent was two ranks higher than him. But whether he would lose or not depended on his strategy.

After the constant bombardment that was raining at her from the sky, Diona changed her strategy.

A pair of bat-like wings emerged from her back. With one flap of her newly formed wings, she took off to the skies.

She then let out an ear-piercing screech. Unfortunately, she was not throwing a tantrum but a sonar attack that also allowed her to pinpoint Alex's location.

Diona had taken the form of the Ferocious Vampire Bat that could instinctively sense the location of living creatures in her surroundings.

This was a Rank 6 Field Boss Monster that hunted during the night.

If not for the fact that Diona had regressed to Rank 5, she might have been able to summon this creature to shred the annoying young man to pieces!

A dozen portals appeared around the flying Beast Conqueror. She had summoned a dozen Rank 4 Rabid Geese, which were known to be very territorial monsters.

“O-Oi! Fight fair!” Alex shuddered after seeing these monsters.

In his childhood, an idyllic visit to the countryside had ended up the stuff of recurring nightmares when he accidentally wandered near the nesting ground of a pair of geese, which then proceeded to ruthlessly hunt him down.

That had been a traumatic experience for him. So just seeing the similar creatures with a wingspan of four-meters was enough for him to switch tactics.

“Shield Chaser!” Alex dived down towards the forest, zigzagging across the trees in order to escape the pursuit of these rabid monsters.

The geese tried to chase him, but they couldn’t dive too low because the trees blocked their path.

The only thing they could do was follow his movements from above, allowing their Master to know the young man’s location.

“You’re dead!” Diona had finally recovered from the lingering effects of Dim Dim’s brittle vials.

Her bloodshot eyes locked on Alex as she plunged from the sky.

Alex understood that his situation was very disadvantageous to him.

Even with his Gaia Ring and the power of the Verdant Throne, fighting against a dozen Rank 4 Monsters and an enraged Diona was suicide. A very creative and unusual suicide, but a suicide nonetheless.

It was at that moment when he remembered the conversation that he had with Dim Dim before leaving the academy.

— —

“Dim Dim!” Dim Dim handed Alex a powerful artifact which it believed would help him during dangerous situations.

At first, Alex thought he was being pranked because the Dim Sum God had given him a megaphone.

According to the little bun, the Megaphone could amplify his voice up to five thousand times.

There was a little dial on the side of the megaphone that allowed him to control how loud it could be.

“I see! So you want me to shout at my enemies to distract them, right?” Alex clarified.

“No!” Dim Dim shook its head. “Dim Dim!”

“Eh? You want me to sing?”

“Dim!”

“I see! Are you referring to my Divine Skill, Voice of the End? Is that it?”

Dim Dim blinked. “... Dim.”

“Um? Why did you hesitate?” Alex asked. “Am I wrong?”

“Ahem!” Dim Dim coughed before telling Alex that he was right.

Actually, it didn't matter if Alex used his Divine Skill or not.

The Dim Sum God believed that even if Alex sang naturally, his off-key "singing" was enough to incapacitate all the Beastkins that relied on their superhuman hearing.

If they managed to survive Alex's song until the end, the Dim Sum God would tip its little hat to them in respect.

But unless they were deaf or had no musical sense, the chances of them surviving Alex's amplified singing was nearly zero.

After making up his mind, Alex summoned Dim Dim's Megaphone and stopped his escape.

He took a deep breath before singing the first lines of his "Song of the End," which would make Diona, as well as the other Catkins in the Clawford Tribe, understand that there were things in this world that shouldn't be heard no matter what.

Chapter 576: The Harbinger Of The End [Part 2]

After summoning his Megaphone, Alex cranked the dial to the maximum.

This was his first time using this megaphone, so he had no idea how loud his voice would be at five thousand times amplification.

Not that it mattered.

Right now the only thing he could do was trust the little bun and his Divine Skill, Voice of the End [EX].

"Die, Alex Stratos!" Diona roared with fury.

The flock of Rank 4 Rabid Geese had also spread out, ensuring the young man would have no place to hide.

It was the perfect encirclement. Those spectating couldn't help but worry that the Oathkeeper would be helplessly trapped and mobbed.

Then, they heard it.

"NigHt tiMe sHarPeN heiGhtEn EaCh SensAtiooooooooooN!"

Hit by such a powerful, diabolical sonic attack at a very close range, the Rank 4 Rabid Geese all forgot how to fly.

The pitiful birds fell and crashed head first into the trees and ground.

But Alex wasn't done yet. Oh, no. He's just getting started.

"DaRknesS wAkEs aNd sTiR ImaGinaTiOOOOn!"

"SileNtLy tHe sEnSes aBanDoN tHeir DefEnSeeeeees!"

"Argh!" Diona felt like she had been hit by an invisible truck and sent flying backward.

Despite spectating from afar, the Catkins weren't spared by Alex's diabolical singing.

Some even fell from the tree branches they stood on. Others suddenly had epileptic seizures on the spot.

They were a race with superhuman senses, so Alex's singing affected them more than ordinary humans.

"S-Stop!"

“O-Oathkeeper! W-We’re on the same side! On the same side!”

“Friendly fire! Stop the friendly fire!”

“MOM!”

Alex was so impassioned by his singing that he didn’t notice the rows of text that appeared in front of him.

— — —

< Ding! >

< You have successfully cleared the Hidden Quest: The Singer With Hidden Talent!

< Singer With Hidden Talent >

“Some talents are meant to be hidden. This is one of them!”

< Rewards: 3 Level Ups! >

< Ding! >

< You have successfully cleared the Hidden Quest: Who Wants Friendly Fire?!” >

< Who Wants Friendly Fire?! >

“Even if they are allies, experience points are still experience points!”

< Rewards: 2 Level Ups! >

< Ding! >

< You have successfully cleared the Hidden Quest: Vocal Weapon of Mass Destruction! >

< Vocal Weapon of Mass Destruction! >

“Scholars will debate whether this was music, magic, or an off-key song equivalent to a natural disaster.”

Title Acquired: One Man Show!

One Man Show: +50% Mental Damage when you sing with confidence!

— — —

“What in tarnation is happening over there?!” Ramza covered his ears. He might’ve been lucky enough to be quite far away from the cursed singer, but his superhuman hearing could still pick up the destructive voice.

The corner of Cairo’s lips twitched as well, but he did his best to remain calm. He was starting to wonder if Alex had been a hybrid subclass of Exorcist and Tone-Deaf Bard. How else could he sing so confidently in such a manner.

Lavinia blinked once then twice before tilting her head. She could also hear Alex’s singing. However, she found it rather pleasing.

“Roselia, why is everyone writhing on the ground?” Lavinia asked. “Also, why do you look so pale? Are you alright?”

"N-No." Roselia was feeling extremely nauseous. Among the Catkins in their village, her sense of hearing was among the best. "I'm feeling sick."

As the majority of the villagers wondered if they were being subjected to a terrorist attack, the battle in the forest continued.

Diona puked out everything she had for lunch, and yet, she still didn't feel any better.

Using a tree as support, she stood on shaky legs and looked at the bastard who seemed lost in his own singing.

"SoFtly, DefTly, mUsiC sHaLL caReSs yOu..." Alex sang as he clobbered one of the Rank 4 Geese with his Warhammer. Since they were still experience points in his eyes, he made sure to whack them repeatedly until he got the notification of the experience gain.

"HeAR iT, FeEl iT, sEcReTly poSseSs yOu..."

Alex smacked the living hell out of another goose, which had lost the strength to fight back.

"OpEn uP yOuR mInd. Let yOur fAntaSy UnwInd iN thiS DaRkneSs whIcH yOu kNow yoU cAnNot fight!"

Alex eliminated one more geese as he sang in a more off-key note.

"ThE dArknEsS oF tHe muSic oF tHe nliiiiiiiiiigHt!"

Diona coughed another mouthful of blood. Unfair! This bastard was killing her monsters using a tremendously foul move.

It was then that she realized something going on in her body.

She was shaking.

Her entire body was shaking.

Her instincts were telling her to run away!

“No way!” Diona hissed. “Run away?! Against this weakling! No way!”

Her rank might have regressed to Rank 5, but she had originally been a Rank 7 Beast Conqueror.

She had pride in her strength and experience!

She wasn’t afraid of anything.

She feared no man!

But looking at Alex, she couldn’t help but shudder. Her lips and mind might be saying that she wasn’t afraid.

However, her body was different.

It feared Alex!

With a loud roar, Diona forced herself to break free from the terror that had taken hold of her body.

“Lion’s Roar!”

Once again, she used her powerful ability that had a fifty-percent chance to paralyze even those with immunity to paralysis and stun.

But as if waiting for that moment, Alex began the chorus.

“LeT tHe dReAm bEgIn. Let yOur dArkEr siDe giVe in tO tHe pOwEr oF tHe muSic thAt I wrItE. The pOwEr oF tHe mUsic oF tHe nIght!”

Against this off-key and tone-deaf singing, Diona’s Lion Roar was drowned and sounded like a kitten’s meow.

Another invisible sonic attack slammed against her body, sending her crashing against the trees behind her.

The last thoughts in her mind before she lost consciousness was “I fear no man... But that thing... It scares me.”

It wasn’t only Diona who thought this way.

Almost all the warriors of the Clawford Tribe that had come to hunt Alex no longer had the strength nor the courage to face their Oathkeeper, who had shown them that there were some things in this world that weren’t meant to be seen... or heard.

After Alex sang the last lines of his song, he truly felt refreshed.

But after seeing that nearly all the Catkins had foam frothing from their mouths, he grew alarmed.

“Um? What happened?” Alex blinked as he gazed at his surroundings.

Suddenly, a thought came to his mind.

“Okay! Time to sing an upbeat song in order to wake them all up!”

But just as Alex was about to sing for a second time, Ramza appeared beside him and snatched the Megaphone from his hand.

"I'm confiscating this!" Ramza said in a slightly higher voice than usual. "The trial is over. You pass! Congratulations!"

Alex blinked once then twice before striking a cool pose.

"I wasn't called the Singing King for nothing," Alex said proudly. "I won the battle with a song."

Ramza was very tempted to smack the living lights out of the young man who had no idea that the Clawford Tribe had put his name on the blacklist of all singing contests.

In the future, whenever Alex offered to sing for them, they would always turn him down. They were all traumatized and didn't want to suffer a relapse and relive their gruesome experience during the Etherion Challenge.

Chapter 577: O-Of Course Everything Is Negotiable!

A groan escaped Diona's lips as she struggled to open her eyes.

It didn't take her long to realize that her arms and feet were shackled to the wall. One glance at her surroundings was enough for her to know that she had been detained inside some kind of prison room.

However, freeing herself didn't cross her mind. Not yet. Her head was pounding, and she desperately wanted to get rid of the pain before attempting anything else.

Her ears were ringing and her throat was also very itchy. It was the consequences of her humiliating defeat at Alex's hands.

The thought of her defeat brought back the traumatizing memory of the Oathkeeper's damnable singing voice. Her entire body trembled uncontrollably.

"Stop it!" Diona shouted. "Stooooooooop singing!"

There were times when people had that one song stuck inside their head. It was often referred to as Last Song Syndrome or LSS. But to have Alex's song on loop playing on someone's head wasn't a form of entertainment nor pleasure.

It was torture.

Raw, unfiltered torture.

"Ahhhhhhhhhh!" Diona screamed as she shook her head from side to side. She hoped that by doing so, the song would be erased from her mind.

"Damn it! Damn it! Damn it! DAMN IT!!! MAKE IT STOOOOOOOOOOOP!"

The proud Beast Conqueror, who had defeated many foes in battle, wished nothing more than to be knocked out unconscious right now.

While she was busy screaming her lungs out, a presence made itself known outside her prison cell.

"So you're finally awake."

An icy voice reached Diona's ears. When she stilled herself enough to look ahead, she saw Alex's Master, Cairo.

The Catkin's eyes glowed faintly in the dark. He had come to ask Diona some questions—like why she had targeted his disciple with the intention to kill him.

"You... who are you?" Diona growled like an animal about to strike.

"Cairo Hartwell of the Clawford Tribe," Cairo replied. "I am Alex's Master."

After hearing the word “Master,” Diona’s expression became serious. With her superior senses, she could tell that the Catkin in front of her had just stepped into the Initial Stages of a Rank 5.

A lot of people might consider a Rank 5 strong, but in Diona’s eyes, it was just a small fry.

“Do you have any idea who you’re dealing with?” Diona hissed. “The organization backing me can easily wipe this village from the face of the world.”

Cairo didn’t reply right away. Instead, he put on some high-quality ear plugs and took out Alex’s Megaphone from his storage ring.

“Wanna hear a fun fact?” Cairo asked with the slightest hint of glee. “This artifact has a recording feature.”

He gave Diona some time to process his statement before continuing. “Alex’s glorious singing is stored in this bad boy here. In other words, the only one who can ask questions is me. If you don’t want to answer, that’s fine. I can just press play and leave for twenty minutes.”

All the colors instantaneously disappeared from Diona’s face.

She had been prepared for torture.

She had been ready to get hurt.

She could endure pain.

But this... Was there anyone in the world who could endure this!?

Twenty minutes of Alex’s singing?

Even the Gods would weep if they were to hear it!

“W-Wait! I was just joking earlier!” Diona’s attitude immediately flipped after Cairo pointed the megaphone’s mouthpiece towards her. “I-I’m sure we can talk something out!”

Cairo’s face remained calm, but truth be told, he also feared hearing Alex’s song a second time.

He even wondered if his earplugs would be enough to keep him from fainting on the spot after Alex’s song started to play.

Although he couldn’t hear Diona’s reply, he could read her lips.

The future Heaven’s Sword sighed in relief internally. Fortunately, his threat was very effective.

To be honest, he was starting to see the appeal of Alex’s voice. He even hoped to use his own recording crystal to make a copy of his disciple’s... unforgettable singing.

‘Imagine how easy it will be to interrogate people with this,’ he thought.

Some people had high pain tolerance.

But Alex’s singing penetrated right through the soul. Cairo didn’t believe anyone else but Lavinia could tolerate that voice.

Cairo attributed it to his little sister being blinded by love or, in this case, deafened by love. As her brother, he could only be happy that she had gained an immunity to something so destructive.

Cairo had already obtained some of Diona’s information from Alex.

The Catkin knew the Void-Touched were people no one, including their village, would dare to mess with.

While the village did not lack strong warriors who could fight the normal members, Morax was another beast entirely.

Morax had the power to dominate and control humans. All he needed to do was manipulate the leaders of each Human Kingdom and they would wage war for his sake.

His ability wasn't a threat anyone could ignore, so wrapping up this incident nicely would be the best-case scenario.

"First, tell me your name," Cairo said. Although he already knew her name, he wanted to see how amenable she was to answering his questions honestly.

"Diona," Diona replied. "I am the proud Beast Conqueror of the Void-Touched!"

"Why are you targeting my disciple?"

"Because he is in the way of Charles' evolution!"

"Evolution? What evolution are you talking about?" Cairo arched an eyebrow.

"That is none of your business," Diona snapped. "I won't give you an answer even if you threaten me with that bastard's song!"

She would rather die than tell anyone that Charles' End Game was to become a Dungeon Conqueror.

An existence so powerful that many nations in the world would want to make him a part of their power.

As long as they could get the Dungeon Conqueror on their side, it didn't matter if they had to resort to marriage offers, coercion, threats, bribery, or any other methods. For many, Charles would be powerful enough for them to abandon all morals just to get him to join their side.

As such, Diona decided to risk suffering instead of betraying one of her people!

Cairo no longer talked about Charles and asked other questions. Diona answered some of them, but others she only responded with defiant silence.

She was adamant on revealing nothing regarding the Void-Touched, which Cairo respected. He would have done the same had he been in her position. Perhaps nothing in the world would prompt him to divulge the secrets of the Clawford Tribe to their enemies.

“Last question: Are you willing to stop targeting my disciple and make peace with him?” Cairo asked.

“N-Nev...” Diona’s voice trailed off as soon as she noticed Cairo cranking up the dial of the megaphone. “O-Of course, everything is negotiable! I mean, I am a Professor of Frieden Academy. I can’t possibly try to kill a student over and over, right?”

She planned to bullsh*t her way out of this conversation for now. Once she was back in the academy, she would be more meticulous with her plan to get rid of the obstacle hindering Charles’ growth and preventing him from becoming the powerhouse he was meant to be.

Unfortunately for her, Cairo had a special ability. He could easily see through people’s bullsh*t.

Since Diona didn’t want to abandon her plan of killing Alex, a little bit of suffering was in order.

The Catkin placed the megaphone on the ground, pushed the play button, and bolted out of the prison without looking back.

Cairo had set the recording to play after a delay of thirty seconds, which was enough time for him to escape the prison and shut its door completely.

A static sound that lasted for nearly thirty seconds played before Alex’s voice finally revealed itself.

“NigHt tiMe sHarPeN heiGhtEn EaCh SensAtiooooooooooN!”

“NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!”

Alex’s song was played on loop for twenty minutes.

This meant twenty minutes of suffering.

Cairo only returned to the prison when exactly half an hour had passed.

When he returned to check on Diona’s condition, the proud Beast Conqueror was foaming at the mouth. Her now pale face was streaked with tears and snot.

Chapter 578: Tradition Of The Hartwell Family

“Drink up, eat up, and enjoy the feast!” Ramza raised his mug and the other villagers followed suit.
“Cheers!”

“”””Cheers!””””

After the Etherion Challenge ended, a feast was held in order to celebrate Alex’s victory. But that wasn’t the real purpose of the celebration feast.

This was Ramza’s compensation to everyone who had needlessly suffered the traumatic experience earlier that day.

Alex and Lavinia were assigned the seats of honor. Secretly holding hands under the table, they looked at everyone enjoying the feast.

“Here, drink a bit.” Roselia poured Alex a fruit beverage that contained a little bit of alcohol. “It will warm up the body.”

“I’m still underage.” Alex said apologetically.

“This is a special occasion, and the alcohol content of this beverage is very low,” Roselia replied. “In fact, it is what the ladies drink on celebrations like this. Isn’t that right, My Lady?”

“Yes.” Lavinia nodded. “Try it, Alex. It’s good.”

She had started sipping this fruit juice a while ago. Based on how she looked, she was far from being drunk.

In the end, Alex accepted Roselia’s drink and took a sip.

“It’s not bad,” Alex said. “Actually, it’s really good.”

“Right?” Lavinia smirked. “Cheers.”

“Cheers.” Alex raised his glass and clinked it with Lavinia’s.

Now that he had completed the challenge, the Hartwell Family would no longer oppose his relationship with Lavinia. Not that they had the intention to turn him down in the first place.

After drinking for nearly half an hour, the villagers started to sing some folk songs that had been passed down for generations.

Alex was in the mood to join them, so he stood up and raised his drink.

“Allow me to offer a song for this special occasion!” Alex declared.

All the noise from inside the village plaza came to an abrupt halt. A deafening silence descended upon everyone, lasting for a few seconds, as their brains tried to process their Oathkeeper’s words.

Alex singing = Death.

If Alex sings = Everyone will Die.

Everyone will die = If Alex sings.

This conclusion had already been cemented in everyone's mind. The moment Alex started to take a deep breath in preparation, time seemed to slow down.

Everyone entered a fight or flight mode. A glance was enough for them to see that their Oathkeeper's face was flushed, which meant that he might be drunk right now.

Drunk singers usually sang just fine. At worst, they might be a bit off-key and way too loud.

But regardless of whether Alex was drunk or not, his singing deserved to be banned in Etherion Village for the rest of eternity.

Ramza, Cairo, and Vega all lunged at the young man so swiftly that they managed to exceed the speed of sound.

"Alex, my boy! You don't have to sing," Ramza exclaimed heartily as he patted the young man's shoulder. "You already have a great singing voice. Give others a chance, okay?"

"That's right, Alex," Cairo said calmly. "Actually, we have a tradition here in the Clawford Tribe. Those who are engaged to the Hartwell Family are not allowed to sing until they get married."

Lavinia blinked. "We do?"

""We do!""

Vega, Selena, and Ramza replied at the same time.

Ramza coughed lightly. "It's indeed a rather ancient tradition but must nonetheless be followed without fail. But don't worry. This tradition is not that restrictive.

"Alex can sing anywhere he likes as long as it's not within the territory of the Clawford Tribe. Isn't that right, everyone?!"

""That's right!""

The villagers supported their Lord, for all of them had just realized how much they wanted to see tomorrow's sunrise.

They didn't give a damn if Alex sang somewhere else. After all, that would no longer be their problem.

The Catkins did have some sympathy for the poor souls that would be subjected to Alex's singing. It's just that his talent was so immense that they preferred for this misfortune to land on someone else's head instead!

"Oh!" Alex nodded, eager to learn about the Clawford Tribe's way of life. "In that case, then I should just sing after I marry Lavinia." He then sat down once more and continued to eat and drink. "Look forward to my song after we are married!"

Everyone in the village wiped the beads of sweat on their foreheads because they had narrowly escaped death. But for how long?

To think that their Oathkeeper had such a hidden talent... He should just keep it hidden! Forever!

That was what everyone was thinking at the moment.

A few hours later, Alex could no longer hold his glass properly. He was dead drunk.

"It seems that Alex is not a heavy drinker," Ramza noted as he played with his beard. "Even the drinks made for the ladies are enough to knock him out."

Lavinia looked at her boyfriend, whose head was resting on her shoulder, and smiled faintly.

Alex was an incredible person. There were times when she felt that he was too good to be true. Seeing this vulnerable side of him made her realize that he wasn't perfect and had flaws and weaknesses just like everyone else.

Perhaps emboldened by her drink, Lavinia momentarily forgot where she was and planted a kiss on Alex's forehead.

When she realized what she had done, she hurriedly looked at her parents, her grandfather, and brother.

All four of them were not looking in her direction. Instead, they were busy chatting and drinking with each other.

This made her breathe a sigh of relief. Unbeknownst to her, her family members, Roselia, and a few other villagers had seen what she had done.

Still, they pretended that they hadn't seen it to avoid embarrassing her.

"I think Alex should rest now," Ramza said a few minutes later. "Roselia, please take him back to the residence."

"Yes, Master," Roselia replied.

But just as she was about to carry Alex, Lavinia shook her head. To everyone's surprise, she took the initiative to pick her boyfriend up in a princess carry.

The villagers whistled, laughed, and hooted after seeing their Princess take good care of her future husband.

Lavinia blushed a bit before hurriedly leaving the stage. Roselia followed a few steps behind her, acting as her bodyguard.

Although Diona was currently unconscious after hearing Alex's singing for twenty minutes straight, they couldn't rule out the possibility that there might be other individuals seeking to harm their Oathkeeper during his most vulnerable moment.

It was better to be safe than sorry.

Once they were safely inside the residence, Lavinia took Alex not to his bedroom, but to her own.

Roselia bowed respectfully before closing Lavinia's door and left her Mistress to take care of her fiance.

"I didn't know you're a lightweight drinker," Lavinia said as she laid the young man down on her bed.

She took off his shoes, socks, and shirt to make him more comfortable.

Alex seemed to be really tired because he started snoring lightly the moment his head touched the pillow.

But that was fine.

He had fought against someone who was stronger than him and managed to emerge victorious. While his method was... unconventional, Lavinia was relieved that he hadn't been too injured during the challenge.

"Good night, Alex." Lavinia kissed the young man's cheek before lying beside him.

She then hugged him and closed her eyes. Although they were in the same academy, they rarely had the chance to do something like this.

This was because Lavinia had been too shy until recently. She hadn't taken the initiative to tell Alex how she truly felt about him.

Among his lovers, Latifa and Evangeline were the most direct ones when it came to love. They hadn't hesitated to ask Alex to be with them so that they could share some intimate moments with him.

Lavinia also wanted some private time with Alex.

Go on dates with him.

Study together.

Train together.

And simply be together.

"It's fine," Lavinia said softly while hugging the young man tighter. "This time, it will be different."

Somewhere in the forest, a young lady wearing a fox mask was standing on a tree branch while eyeing the Hartwell Residence.

"... That boy's singing can even exorcise demons," the little Devil said with a shudder.

"What are you talking about?" Himea asked. "He's an incredibly good singer."

"Girl, I am no doctor, but there is definitely something wrong with your ears. Are you sure that it's not a side effect of our contract?"

"Hah... You just don't appreciate good music."

The devil blinked once then twice before scratching his head. He was starting to wonder if the problem lay with him or the young lady guarding Alex from the shadows.

“Anyway, do what you want to do,” the Devil said as he landed on the young lady’s shoulder and sat there. “I’ll keep watch.”

“Thanks.” Himea leaned on the tree and closed her eyes.

The darkness hid her from the watchful eyes of the Guardians of the Clawford Tribe.

Now that a certain fox lady was not around, she had the freedom to do what she wanted without having to worry about interference from those who held the young man close to their hearts.

Chapter 579: This Time, I’m Going All Out

“Hah... That spot feels good.”

“Do you want it harder?”

“Yes.”

A bead of Alex’s sweat fell on top of the young lady’s body. Her skin was so smooth and soft to the touch.

His hands moved effortlessly across her lower back, kneading it with enough pressure to make her feel really good.

A sigh of bliss escaped Noelle’s lips as the young man had his way with her. Every part of her had been touched, with the exception of the places where Alex didn’t dare to touch without her permission.

After he finished giving the young lady a back massage, Alex fixed the young lady’s bikini top, securing it in place before asking her to lie on her back.

Noelle obeyed and looked at Alex with a flushed face.

Seeing her in this sexy state, he couldn't help but gulp subconsciously.

"What's wrong?" Noelle asked. "Aren't you going to finish what you started?"

"I-I'll finish." Alex quickly lathered his hand with a bit of oil before taking the young lady's arm to give it a massage.

The young man knew he must be dreaming. After all, it wasn't possible for him to be on a private beach with his Guild Master, let alone massage her.

In fact, he was half expecting Lumi or Latifa to suddenly appear out of nowhere and ask him to apply some sunscreen on her back as well.

Well, whatever he was doing now also started off as a simple sunscreen application. Before he knew it, he was already giving his Guild Master a full body massage.

Alex couldn't stop his eyes from wandering to places that he shouldn't look at. The red bikini that Noelle was wearing was truly eye-catching. Even if this was only a dream, he was happy that no other men could see her in her swimsuit.

In the past, there had been more than one occasion when he and Noelle had come to a private beach on their own.

She came from a very rich family of, according to her, shamans and exorcists.

Due to their profession, they often received special commissions to go to places where evil spirits were said to manifest.

They also performed exorcisms and were well connected with many top officials in the government.

Whenever they went out to the beach, there would be no one but the two of them. Even public beaches would be empty, leaving the vast beaches to just the two of them.

He didn't know if it was just a coincidence or if Noelle pulled some strings to ensure that no one would disturb their quality time together.

"Alex, what are you thinking?" Noelle asked in a teasing tone. "You've been staring at my chest since earlier."

"H-Huh?!" Alex was deep in his thoughts that he didn't notice that his gaze was currently locked on the young lady's chest.

"I guess you really like these, huh?" Noelle smirked, enjoying the young man's reaction.

"Well, I won't deny it," Alex replied. "Guys are simple creatures, you know?"

Since this was only a dream, he thought that it wouldn't matter if he let his real feelings known.

Although he didn't want to admit it, he really missed the young lady.

Sometimes, Alex would wonder if their relationship would have progressed to that of real lovers had he remained on Earth.

He liked Noelle... No, he loved her.

Since they couldn't be together either way, he didn't bother denying that she held a very special place in his heart.

Alex sighed, feeling melancholic that he could only meet Noelle in his dreams. She was too far away for him to reach.

He hoped that this dream would last a little longer because he was certain that the moment he woke up he wouldn't be able to talk to her like this again.

"What's wrong?" Noelle reached out to touch the side of Alex's face. "You look sad, Alex."

"Maybe I am," Alex replied.

He then lightly pressed his hand on Noelle's hand that was cupping his cheek.

"I miss you, Noelle," Alex said softly. "Do you miss me now that I'm no longer around?"

The young lady didn't reply right away. She propped herself up from the beach chair and planted a kiss on Alex's lips, lasting for two seconds.

"Do you still think of me despite being surrounded by beautiful ladies day and night?" Noelle asked. Her voice sounded mischievous, but Alex understood that she was asking him a serious question.

"I do think of you from time to time," Alex admitted. "And sometimes, I regret not confessing to you properly when I still had the chance."

"Were you afraid that we would have stopped being friends if you had confessed?" Noelle asked. "Were you afraid that you'd be rejected?"

"Maybe?" Alex answered. "You're very popular after all. I can easily name at least six guys from our guild who are head over heels for you."

Yes. He hadn't confessed to her because he thought that he was lacking compared to the others.

Some of them were heirs of big corporations. One was the son of a high-ranking politician. The others were not as impressive, but they were all good enough he seemed like a pathetic shut-in in comparison.

Even so, his Guild Master still made time in her busy schedule to visit him personally. She even cooked for him at least once a week.

Twice if he was lucky, and If he was truly lucky, she would invite him to go on an outing with her.

“Alex...”

“Ye— Awwww!”

Noelle pinched and pulled Alex’s cheek, making the young man cry out in pain. While he didn’t know why he was feeling pain in his dream, he momentarily forgot this after hearing Noelle’s next words.

“You really understand the importance of something when it’s gone,” Noelle said softly. “Perhaps, the two of us were both afraid to take that step, so we took our relationship for granted. Maybe we didn’t want things to change. But you know something? Change is inevitable.”

The young lady reached out to pull Alex’s head to her chest and patted the back of his head.

“We didn’t mind raiding S-Rank Dungeons and fighting S-Rank World Bosses,” Noelle continued. “But when it came to things that we should have really fought for... both of us simply lacked the courage to take that final step.

“That’s why this time... I’m going all out, Alex. Even if I need to pay a price to make sure we can still hold each other like this.”

Alex wasn’t able to hear everything that Noelle had said because her voice had become too low.

Still, he felt like she had just said something very important, so he decided to ask her to repeat what she had just said.

“I’m sorry Alex, but time’s up,” Noelle pulled back and cupped his face. “It will be a while before we see each other again, so don’t forget me, okay?”

Noelle then kissed Alex's cheek before pulling back.

"Wait... there's something that I want to ask you, Noelle." Alex tried to hold her but the young lady shook her head.

"Stay safe, Alex," Noelle murmured. "Until the next time we meet."

"Wait! Don't go!" Alex reached out to grab hold of her.

But when he came to his senses, he was grabbing onto thin air while lying on the bed.

"Alex?" Lavinia woke up the moment Alex shouted. "Are you alright? Did you have a bad dream?"

The young man slowly lowered his hand and brought it to cover his face.

"I'm fine," Alex replied after regaining his composure. "Sorry if I woke you up."

Lavinia didn't know what happened, but she could sense that her boyfriend was feeling sad right now.

So, she did what she could for him. She reached over and embraced him tightly. Alex returned her hug and closed his eyes.

Noelle was right.

Sometimes, you would only understand how precious someone was when you could no longer reach out to touch them and say how much you loved them.

Chapter 580: Deep Rooted Fear

After using the megaphone a few times, Cairo finally confirmed the effectiveness of his disciple's singing voice as a torture tactic.

Alex and Lavinia would soon return to the academy, so Cairo decided to set Diona free.

Just to be safe, his grandfather had sent a message to Professor Rowan, asking him to personally pick up his errant professor.

When Professor Rowan arrived, he could tell with a glance that Diona was not in her right state of mind.

“What did you do to her?” Professor Rowan asked Ramza.

“My grandson went overboard and made her listen to Alex’s singing for three hours straight,” Ramza replied.

The Paragon of Space winced after hearing how Diona ended up so dazed. She even laughed to herself and scolded empty air from time to time.

It would be a miracle if she could recover in a day or two. Even Gods wouldn’t be safe, much less a mortal.

Fortunately, the two nurses in the infirmary of the academy were very good in dealing with... cases like this. They had practice. Tons.

After bidding goodbye to his friend, Professor Rowan left the Clawford Tribe with a wry smile on his face.

Meanwhile, Alex and Lavinia walked to the flying ship that would take them back to the academy.

The Hartwell Family had come along to bid them goodbye. Cairo took this opportunity to return the megaphone back to his disciple and to also ask Alex for a favor.

“Alex, record your songs with a recording crystal and send it to me,” Cairo said.

“Master! Do you like my songs that much?!” Alex looked visibly touched because this was the first time that his Master asked something of him.

Vega and Elena looked at their son as if he were out of his mind. But they kept their smiles from breaking as they thought it would be rude to say something inappropriate before their future son-in-law was out of earshot.

“Uhh... yeah,” Cairo replied. “But can you be silent for the first two minutes before singing when you record yourself? Those two minutes are very important, okay? I need time to prepare myself so I can better enjoy your singing.”

Seeing how happy his disciple was, he didn’t have the heart to tell him that he only planned to use his songs to torture and interrogate people.

“I’ll send you as many songs as you like, Master!” Alex patted his chest with confidence. “You can count on me!”

Cairo smiled. He could already see himself raiding a bandit fortress with Alex’s singing voice.

All he needed to do was throw a recording crystal into the bandits’ stronghold and wait for them to come running out and screaming!

“Lavinia, I have heard there are many specialists in the capital city,” Elena whispered. “Make sure to set an appointment with a Cleric who specializes in hearing problems, okay?”

Lavinia blinked. “But, Mother, my hearing is just fine?”

“Lavinia, there’s nothing wrong with a consultation,” Vega chimed in. “Remember this: prevention is better than cure.”

Although she still had no idea why her parents wanted her to set an appointment with a Hearing Specialist, she decided to just follow their advice. She promised to do as she was told and her parents nodded in relief.

A few minutes later, the airship finally departed.

Alex and Lavinia waved at the Hartwell Family until the Etherion Village vanished from their sight.

“Let’s visit them again when we’re free, okay?” Alex said while hugging his lover close.

“Un,” Lavinia agreed. “Sounds like a plan.”

Meanwhile in Frieden Academy...

“Who am I?” Diona blinked. “Where am I?”

“Sis, looks like she has finally regained her consciousness.”

“Well, after getting slapped repeatedly, it will be hard for her to not regain her consciousness.”

Lin and Rin, the twin nurses in the infirmary, looked at the still disoriented Diona. They had just finished giving her some first aid, which helped her regain a bit of her sanity.

But after recalling the torture that she had been through, Diona passed out a second time.

“What a pain.” Lin raised her hand and slapped Diona’s right cheek without holding back. “Heal Slap!”

Rin raised her fist and punched Diona’s left cheek without mercy.

“Feel-Better-Fist!”

“Buguu!”

Diona snapped awake a second time and held her cheeks with both hands.

“Stop!” Diona cried out in pain. But a few seconds later, the pain disappeared completely. “Um? It doesn’t hurt anymore?”

The Beast Conqueror glanced at her surroundings and found herself in the infirmary of the academy.

“Are you feeling better, Professor?” Lin asked.

“Do you want me to double-check if there are still some lingering side effects of our treatment?” Rin asked, while holding a metal bat in her hand. “Don’t worry. This won’t hurt me as much as it will hurt you.”

“O-Oi! Put that bat down!” Diona raised her hand to stop the crazy nurse who seemed eager to whack her a few times with her bat. “I’m good! I’m feeling fine!”

“Treatment completed,” Rin declared before doing a peace sign.

“Now, if there’s nothing else wrong with you, please leave the infirmary,” Lin said. “We have an appointment with Vaan.”

Diona was curious if Vaan was hurt or something. Why else would he have an appointment with the two nurses? But since this was none of her business, she decided not to pry.

The Beast Conqueror sensed that Lin’s tone was a little impatient. She took the hint and thanked the nurses before hastily leaving their territory.

“That damned Alex...” Diona gnashed her teeth.

However, just mentioning the young man's name prompted those painful memories to flood her brain once more.

Diona slapped both of her cheeks repeatedly, hoping to use the pain to overcome the thoughts that were intruding inside her mind.

When she finally regained her composure, she came to a realization.

"No... This cannot be." Diona looked at her hands. "I-I'm shaking? Am I... afraid just thinking of that bastard?!"

Just the thought of killing Alex for the torture she had suffered was enough for Diona's body to start shaking.

After being forced to listen to that cursed song for three hours straight, a rotting cave had opened up deep inside her heart and soul.

Just the mere thought of getting near Alex was enough for Diona to feel nauseous and start having panic attacks. She was paralysed by a deep fear she couldn't control.

Cairo had only wanted her to suffer for trying to kill his disciple. Little did he know, his creative interrogation tactic had given the Beast Conqueror a trauma that would prevent her from harming Alex ever again.