

Endless 81

Chapter 81: The Tale Of Charles Lambert [Part 1]

A week after the battle in the Town of Thaloria ended...

Alex looked at the monument that had been built at the plaza of the town with a confused look on his face.

'Did this monument really look like this in the game?' Alex thought as he observed the monument up close. 'I remember it being a shield as well, but why does this shield look like Svalinn?'

Players only spent a few hours in the Town of Thaloria, and just like everyone else, Alex had seen the Heroes Monument in the past.

But he could vaguely remember that the design of the shield seemed to be different in the game.

While he was deep in thought, a familiar voice spoke from behind his back.

"The Elder helped in creating this monument because he specialized in Earth Magic," Cairo said. "Do you like the design he made? He actually planned to put the claw of the Clawford Tribe at the center of that shield, but I talked him out of it."

"So that's it!" Alex finally understood why the shield looked like Svalinn.

If the Elder of the Hartwell Clan had been the one to design the monument, he would of course have favored one of the treasured shields of their Clan.

"Master, it is fortunate that you managed to talk him out of it," Alex said. "Things might be awkward if he had added your tribe's emblem to that shield."

"Right." Cairo nodded.

He had also been a little embarrassed by the Elder's attempt to advertise their clan's contributions to the defense of the Town of Thaloria.

"Alex, what are your future plans?" Cairo asked, changing the topic. "You once told me that you planned to go to Briarwood Village, right?"

"Yes, Master," Alex answered. "If possible, I want you to accompany me as well because I may... find myself in a similar situation like the monster stampede that happened here..."

"... What?" The Catkin looked at his disciple in disbelief.

Alex had already prepared himself to explain everything to his master in a roundabout manner.

"Master, actually, I'm some kind of Seer," Alex said calmly. "I get visions of things that might happen in the future. I'm actually going to Briarwood Village because of a vision I saw."

Cairo had been there when Alex had told Lavinia that he was a seer. At that time, his only disciple had been in the process of climbing the stairs of the trial that led to the residence of the Hartwell Clan.

Back then, he hadn't really taken Alex seriously. But seeing how serious his expression was now, Cairo was starting to feel that his disciple might really have some kind of clairvoyance ability.

Alex really wanted to tell the absolute truth to his Master, but he couldn't possibly do that.

How could he say that he knew about the future because he played a game with the people of Arcana as the NPCs?

This was why he decided to use a roundabout method. In the case something similar happened in the future, Cairo would just think that it was because Alex had seen another vision of the future.

"Tell me everything you can tell me. Why do you insist on going to Briarwood Village?" Cairo asked. "I'll make my decision after hearing your full story."

Alex nodded and began his tale.

About Charles Lambert's predicament and his wish to reunite with his sisters in Harmonia.

However, he was unable to do that because he would die inside the Dungeon of Beginnings. And he would die because of his passive ability, Challenger's Mark.

— —

< Challenger's Mark >

"The will to defy. The flame that dares every foe."

— Passive Skill

— Monsters within 10 meters of the bearer are instinctively drawn to their presence, as if challenged by an unspoken call to battle. This skill automatically generates aggro from all hostile creatures within range.

— When entering a dungeon, the effect intensifies dramatically, extending to a 2-kilometer radius, marking the bearer as a beacon of defiance no monster can ignore.

— —

"... What kind of broken skill is that? Can it even be considered a skill?" Cairo, who had been listening to Alex's explanation of Challenger's Mark, couldn't help but feel sorry for the person named Charles Lambert.

"Now I understand why you saw him dying inside the Dungeon of Beginnings. That means it's active on the entire floor he is on, right?"

Alex shook his head. "No, Master. This skill also works vertically inside a dungeon. So the monsters on the lower floors will be drawn to him as well."

"... Isn't this guy seriously unlucky?"

"You can say that again, Master."

Even now, Alex and the other players of ELO hadn't known why Charles was blessed or perhaps cursed with such a skill.

Technically, he was the perfect tank because his aggro skill was always active. As long as he didn't enter a dungeon in his life, he would be fine.

Unfortunately, he had no choice but to enter the Dungeon of Beginnings because it was the first step in the Trial of Frieden Academy.

No one could take the second trial unless they took this trial first. There were no shortcuts, and anyone caught bypassing this rule would be blacklisted from taking the trial again for the next three years.

Alex, who also planned to enroll in Frieden Academy, needed to take this trial as well.

Although he could choose one of the many villages, towns, and cities that were connected to the Dungeon of Beginnings, he chose to enter through Briarwood Village so he could help Charles overcome his own trial.

"You weren't joking when you said that this is similar to a monster stampede," Cairo commented after Alex finished his tale.

Alex nodded. "Yes. Master."

“But must you really help him?” Cairo inquired. “I’m not saying what you intended to do is a bad thing. But the most logical thing to do is to talk him out of entering the Dungeon of Beginnings.

“Although it is regrettable that he won’t be able to enroll in the academy, at least he will be able to live and take care of his sisters, no?”

Alex shook his head. “His sisters are now in the capital city and are being taken care of by their aunt.

“Charles is their foster brother, and their aunt doesn’t recognize him as part of her family. Since his adoptive parents are already dead, his sisters are the only family he has left. He is not allowed to see them unless he passes the trial.

“Also, his little sister, Eris, has the Child Bane Disease. Charles has heard the news that a Pill that can be exchanged with Merit Points in the academy can cure it.”

“The Child Bane Disease?” Cairo frowned. “That incurable disease that kills children before they reach ten years of age?”

According to researchers, it was a cruel, virulent disease of unknown origin. Its most noticeable feature was a lotus-like black tattoo on the child’s forehead, as if they had been marked by the God of Death itself.

The child would also suffer from black rashes in the shape of thorns or vines. Not only that, but they would also experience daily bouts of pain, which could last anywhere from a few minutes to an hour.

Most children suffered immense pain in their final years, which was why some parents chose to end their children’s lives rather than let them suffer in pain for years.

Alex nodded. “Yes. Eris is only five years old, and Charles desperately wants her to be cured. This is why, even if it is dangerous, he will not give up enrolling at the academy—even if it costs him his life.”

Cairo sighed and shook his head helplessly.

At first, he had simply thought Charles was just another pitiful, unfortunate soul.

But now he understood. Charles was shouldering a burden far heavier than he'd imagined, which was why he would willingly risk his life for the slim hope of finding a cure for his sister's illness.

Chapter 82: The Tale Of Charles Lambert [Part 2]

"You're not going to change your mind?" Cairo asked one last time.

"No," Alex replied. "I already made my decision, Master."

"You only have seven weeks before the trial for the Dungeon of Beginnings starts," Cairo stated. "What are your plans?"

Alex pondered a bit before giving his reply.

"Originally, I planned to go two weeks before he entered the Dungeon of Beginnings," he answered. "But since there is no longer a reason for me to stay here in the Town of Thalaria, I'm thinking of going to Briarwood Village when the next airship heading to the capital arrives."

"That airship will arrive in three days," Cairo commented. "So, you will be leaving in three days?"

"Yes, Master."

Another sigh escaped Cairo's lips as his helpless gaze lingered on the young man beside him. Now that he knew the real reason behind his disciple's journey to Briarwood Village, he could no longer feign ignorance.

After learning the details, he could now understand why Alex insisted on helping Charles Lambert instead of just turning a blind eye to his predicament.

Ignorance was bliss. Once it was replaced by awareness, one would bear the guilt if nothing was done about what was already known.

“Fine,” Cairo said with finality. “I will go with you.”

“Thank you, Master,” Alex replied with a smile. “With you around, the chances of me surviving are high.”

Cairo snorted. “How strong are the monsters we’re going to face in that dungeon?”

“The strongest will be Rank 4 Monsters,” Alex replied in a heartbeat. “As long as we run quickly, we might be able to barely escape their pursuit.”

When the young man had been playing Charles’ character, he had placed all of his stats in Agility and simply focused on running away.

It was a gamble. One mistake, and he would die from a single attack from a monster Rank 2 or above.

That was how he had barely managed to clear Charles’ tutorial quest, which had won him an invitation from the God of Games, Eriol.

“Make sure to give Elaine and Efa a proper goodbye before you leave,” Cairo said. “Also, you should not really drink a lot if you can’t hold your liquor.”

The young man’s face reddened a bit, unable to refute his Master’s words.

Being carried away back to his room every time he got drunk by Elaine and Efa wasn’t helping his image as a man.

“Understood, Master,” Alex replied.

After chatting for a bit longer, Cairo left. Before accompanying his disciple on a journey, he first had to send a message back to his grandfather through a courier pigeon.

He planned to tell him that he would accompany Alex to Briarwood Village and escort him safely to the Capital City of Harmonia so his disciple could take the second test of Frieden Academy.

“Dim Dim, please help me find Elaine and Efa,” Alex said to his little companion, who was about to take a nap on top of his head.

“Dim Dim,” Dim Dim yawned before telling Alex that Elaine and Efa were in the Adventurer’s Guild.

After thanking his little friend, he no longer bothered the little one and let it sleep while still perched on his head.

When he arrived at the Adventurer’s Guild, he was immediately greeted by the receptionist, Dahlia, who informed him that he had been promoted to a Rank D Adventurer.

Alex had just been a Rank F Adventurer not long ago.

But since he had played a major role in the defense of the Town of Thaloria, Darius, who was the Guildmaster, had decided to rank him up two times.

The young man was quite happy with his promotion and handed his Guild Card to the receptionist so she could update it.

“Hey, Alex, did you come to look for me?” Efa hugged Alex from behind. Her body stuck close to his, making some of the nearby Adventurers whistle in Alex’s direction.

“You came to see me, not her, right?” Elaine also approached Alex and rested her hand on his shoulder.

The other Adventurers started to cheer and tease Alex because two of the most famous lady adventurers of the town seemed to be interested in him.

“Actually, I came to look for the two of you,” Alex answered honestly. “There’s something important I need to say before I leave this town.”

“... Y-You’re leaving?” Efa, who had been hugging Alex from behind, asked in surprise.

“Yes. I plan to leave three days from now and head to Briarwood Village.”

Elaine frowned after hearing the young man’s reply. “You did mention your plan to go there eventually. I just didn’t expect that it would be this soon.”

Alex nodded. “I didn’t intend to leave early, but after careful consideration, I decided to go to Briarwood Village to make some preparations before I enter the Dungeon of Beginnings.”

The young man’s main goal when he had arrived at the Town of Thaloria had been to get stronger.

He had planned to raise his strength to Rank 1 and get a Profession before heading to Briarwood Village.

The young man had given himself two months to achieve this goal, but he had crossed them out on his checklist sooner than expected.

In fact, one could even say that he had surpassed his own target. Instead of being a Rank 1 Shielder, he was now a Rank 2 Oathkeeper. Alex was confident he could now fight against Rank 1 and Rank 2 Monsters on his own without any help.

More importantly, he wanted to meet Charles as early as possible so he could form some sort of connection with him.

This would allow him to form a party with the unfortunate young man, who planned to challenge the Dungeon of Beginnings for the sake of reuniting with his sisters and finding a cure for Eris’ illness.

Elaine and Efa were sad to hear that Alex was about to leave.

But they also understood that Frieden Academy was a good place for Alex to study and train, and that would pave the way to future success.

While the two ladies were feeling a little sad that their handsome friend was going to leave them, Dahlia returned and handed Alex's Guild Card back to him.

"I overheard your discussion, and I sincerely wish that you will be able to enter Frieden Academy," Dahlia said with a smile. "Just make sure not to forget us when you become a successful man, okay?"

"I won't forget," Alex promised.

"Good." Dahlia nodded. "I won't be able to bid you farewell on the day of your departure, but I can treat you to dinner tomorrow after my work shift ends. Treat it as a parting gift from a friend. Do you accept?"

"Of course, Dahlia." Alex was more than happy to eat a home-cooked meal by the pretty receptionist, who had taken good care of him during his stay in the Adventurer's Guild.

"The two of you can also join us, you know." Dahlia gave Elaine and Efa a knowing wink. "I don't mind."

"Then we'll accept your invitation, Dahlia," Elaine replied.

"I'll help you cook as well," Efa offered. "Since Alex is going to leave, I'll make sure to cook the best dish I know."

After agreeing to meet tomorrow night for dinner together, the young man left the Adventurer's Guild and returned to the Cat Tail's Inn to get some proper rest.

Chapter 83: The Oathkeeper's First Oath

The sound of clashing wooden swords echoed faintly in the background as Alex and Cairo sparred with each other.

Their spar was pure swordsmanship, so Alex didn't wield a shield. He wanted to learn as much as he could from his master on how to wield the sword properly.

Perhaps Cairo knew his disciple's intention, so he didn't hold back and attacked seriously.

The Catkin Swordsman had seen the young man's explosive growth, and frankly, he was feeling a little pressure himself.

He remembered how weak Alex had been when he'd volunteered to teach him the ways of the sword.

However, after visiting the Clawford Tribe and experiencing the Etherion Domain, the young man's sudden growth spurt made Cairo think that maybe his disciple was actually a genius.

Of course, he wasn't aware that Alex had leveled up several times during the monster stampede because the Clawford Tribe had actually "carried" him, allowing him to gain massive experience points.

"You've improved a lot," Cairo said as he reached out to offer his hand to the young man, who was seated on the ground and panting for breath. "Well done, Alex."

"Thank you, Master," Alex replied as he took his Master's hand and pulled himself off the ground.

"Your posture while swinging the sword is getting better," Cairo noted. "This will add more power to your strikes. Although you have grown a lot stronger since we first met, make sure to continue training the basics. A solid foundation will not fail you."

"I understand, Master."

"Good." The Catkin smiled. "Have you said proper goodbye to your friends?"

"Yes," Alex answered. "Actually, Elaine, Efa, and I will have dinner at the house of one of the receptionists of the Adventurer's Guild that took good care of me when I was just starting out. Her name is Dahlia."

"Don't cause trouble for them, okay?" Cairo reminded him. "It's fine if you end up drinking with them, but drink moderately."

“Yes, Sir.” Alex gave his master a military salute, making the latter chuckle.

“I still have things to do, so I’ll see you tomorrow,” Cairo said before glancing at Dim Dim, who was resting on the side. “Dim Dim, make sure Alex doesn’t get into trouble, okay?”

“Dim Dim!” Dim Dim also imitated the young man and gave Cairo a salute. Alex saw this and found the little one’s actions quite amusing.

He then glanced at the sun and understood he still had a few hours before noon.

Because of this, he decided to visit the Library and also bid goodbye to the librarian, who had allowed him to borrow books from the library.

Dim Dim, who had also developed a close relationship with the librarian, decided to give her a parting gift, which was four bamboo steamers filled to the brim with different dumplings.

The library had been mostly untouched during the battle and hadn’t suffered any damage like the rest of the town.

The librarian herself was a Rank 3 Sorceress and had joined the ranks of the defenders during the previous battle.

Although she had been wounded, her injuries were only minor and had already been healed by the Priests of the Church of the High Priestess.

“I am quite a lenient lady, so I will turn a blind eye on the two of you eating in the library,” the librarian said before biting a custard bun that Dim Dim had given her. “However, not all librarians are as kind as I am.

“Make sure not to do this in the capital city, as well as in Frieden Academy. If I hear any of my acquaintances complaining about your bad behavior in their library, I’ll make sure to give you an earful.”

Alex nodded seriously because a glance was enough for him to tell that although the cute librarian looked harmless, she had a feisty side to her too.

After leaving the library, the young man decided to take a stroll around the town.

He only had very few acquaintances that he really cared about, so he had no one else to say goodbye to.

On the other hand, Dim Dim was, as usual, popular with the kids.

When Alex appeared, the kids who were six years old and younger gathered around him, asking Dim Dim to play with them.

“Go and have fun with them,” Alex said with a smile. “Make sure that you also tell your friends goodbye properly, okay?”

“Dim!” Dim Dim nodded and joined the kids in playing tag.

Alex left and continued to stroll around the town until he arrived at the town’s plaza, where the Monument of Heroes stood.

The names of the individuals who had died protecting the city were written in clear letters, honoring their sacrifice and bravery.

Those who had decided to evacuate the town were returning one by one.

Many of them volunteered to help with the repairs of the town, allowing it to slowly recover.

Only two days were left before Alex, Dim Dim, and Cairo left the Town of Thaloria.

Alex didn't know when he would be able to return to the town because he was certain that he would have a busy life in Frieden Academy if he ever passed the enrollment test.

"I wonder what Charles is doing right now?" Alex muttered as he looked in the southeast direction, where Briarwood Village was located.

Truth be told, the young man was feeling anxious about meeting the unique NPC that he had played for nearly a year.

Alex knew many things about Charles.

His dreams.

His worries.

His loneliness.

His stubbornness, as well as his desire to reunite with his sisters and find a cure for his little Eris.

"Don't worry." Alex raised his fist, pointing it to the southeast as if he was fist bumping Charles over a great distance. "I'll make you meet your sisters and help you cure Eris. This, I promise to you."

Suddenly, he heard a notification sound inside his head, and a blue window appeared in front of him.

—————

< You have unlocked a Hidden Quest! >

< Quest Name: The Oathkeeper's First Oath >

— You could have turned away. You could have forgotten. Yet in a fleeting moment, you chose to defy the world's silence and bind yourself to a promise unseen by most.

— Deep beneath the weave of fate, something ancient stirs. It is watching, weighing, waiting for the conclusion of your Oath.

— Fulfill your first Oath, and step onto a path veiled in mist and shadow, where loyalty carves deeper than any blade, and broken promises echo forever.

— Know this: the Oath remembers. Even if you forget. So, Oathkeeper, don't make promises you can't keep.

< Quest Objective: Help Charles Lambert reach the Capital City of Harmonia through the Dungeon of Beginnings. >

< Failure Penalty: You will become an Oathbreaker >

< Reward: ??? >

< Hidden Consequence: ??? >

—————

Alex's expression became solemn after he read the information about his First Oath as an Oathkeeper.

He didn't expect that some hidden law or power within the world would respond to his promise.

'Maybe this is the effect of the Oathkeeper Job Class,' Alex thought.

Although he had no intention of backing away from this challenge, this experience allowed him to know a little more about his profession.

Because of this, Alex made a mental note to not easily make promises in the future because his profession would bind him to his promise, regardless of how big or small this promise was.

Chapter 84: Would You Like To Take An Elaine, A Dahlia, Or Me?

“Is this the right place?”

“Dim.”

Alex looked at a medium-sized house near the northeastern edge of the Town of Thalaria.

This was the part of the town where the town’s officials, as well as the staff of the Adventurer’s Guild, lived.

Simply put, it was a neighborhood meant for important people, so it was more developed than most places.

It also used to have heavy security, so no one could easily enter the neighborhood unless they got a personal invitation from one of the residents living there. The address that Dahlia had given him led to this particular area. As soon as he found Dahlia’s house, Alex approached its door and knocked, announcing his arrival.

“Coming!”

The familiar voice replied from the other side of the door, making the young man sigh in relief.

When the door opened, Alex saw Dahlia wearing casual clothes, which only made her beauty shine even more brightly.

But there was one thing that Alex noticed right away, and that was... Dahlia’s skirt.

It was simply too short.

Alex glanced in that direction for a few seconds before forcibly raising his gaze to smile at the receptionist.

“Good evening, Dahlia,” Alex said. “You look good.”

“Thank you,” Dahlia replied. “Elaine and Efa are already inside. Please come in.”

The young man nodded and entered the house, admiring its stylish interior.

‘It looks and feels like a western home,’ Alex thought as he followed behind Dahlia.

When they arrived at the dining area, he saw Elaine and Efa arranging some dishes on the table.

Efa was wearing an apron, making her look like a cute housewife waiting for her husband to come home.

Elaine, on the other hand, also looked very good in casual clothes.

She had dressed up a bit and was wearing a crop top, displaying her sexy abs. The sight made Alex gulp.

“Looks like the appetizer is to Alex’s liking.” Efa giggled after seeing the young man’s honest reaction.

However, she was feeling playful, so she approached Alex with a sweet smile on her face.

“Welcome Alex. Would you like to take an Elaine, a Dahlia, or me?” Efa inquired, bending her knees a bit while looking up at the young man to highlight her own cuteness.

“I feel like if I answer that, I won’t be able to handle the consequences,” Alex replied easily, as if unaffected by her bold question.

He was already starting to get used to the playful Scout, who was older than him by a few years, and yet, shorter than him by a head.

“Don’t worry,” Efa whispered in Alex’s ears. “I have seen it already, and I’m sure any of us can perfectly handle the consequences.”

“S-Seen what exactly?” Alex inquired, feeling that the cute lady’s words had a deeper meaning.

“I’ve seen your bravery.” Efa smirked. “What’s wrong? Are you hoping I have seen something else?”

As if to make her point, the young lady looked at Alex’s bottom half before looking up again to give him a cheeky grin.

“Okay, that’s enough teasing,” Elaine called out from the side, making the young man sigh a breath of relief internally. “You really like to tease Alex, huh?”

“His reactions are all very cute,” Efa replied. “Alex, you should try to develop a poker face next time. You wear your heart on your face, so it’s very easy for people to read you.”

Dahlia nodded in agreement. “But I think it is one of Alex’s charms. Because of his personality, we instinctively know he’s not a bad person.”

Alex gave Dahlia a thumbs-up in his heart because the receptionist had always been supportive of him ever since he became an Adventurer.

“Now, let’s go and eat,” Dahlia said, pulling a chair for Alex to sit in. “Elaine and Efa also cooked some dishes, but we’re not telling you who cooked what. That way, you can be honest and tell us which dishes you truly like and dislike.”

“Oh, I can already feel the pressure.” Alex eyed the table covered with many different dishes. “I look forward to trying them all. Dim Dim, let’s eat a lot, okay?”

“Dim Dim~” The Dim Sum God nodded because it also liked to eat delicious food.

Everyone sat and started to fill their plates with food.

The young man didn’t even need to do anything because Elaine, Efa, and Dahlia filled his plate with different dishes.

It was very obvious that they gave him food they had prepared personally, and they wanted to see if their cooking would impress his taste buds.

Alex didn’t hesitate and took a bite of the roasted duck that Elaine had placed on his plate.

He had only eaten duck once in his life. To be honest, he could no longer remember what it tasted like.

The tender and juicy meat of the duck was so delicious that Alex wasn’t able to stop himself from taking another bite.

Elaine smiled slightly after seeing how much the young man was enjoying her dish.

Of course, Alex knew that he just couldn’t focus on the roasted duck, so he ate the next dish on his plate, which looked like a mix of pan-fried mushrooms and some vegetables.

The crunchy, delicious taste assaulted his senses, making his eyes widen in shock.

He didn’t expect that mushrooms and vegetables mixed together with only salt, pepper, and a few spices could taste so good.

“I could eat this all day,” Alex said his thoughts out loud before he could even stop himself.

His sudden outburst made Efa nod her head in satisfaction, as if she had already got this food competition in the bag.

Dim Dim, who was also eating the mixed mushroom and vegetable dish, looked very pleased with it as well.

After eating to his heart's content, the young man shifted his attention to what Dahlia had put on his plate.

It looked like a dish made up of some green leafy vegetables with a heavy dose of cream.

"Um, what is this dish?" Alex asked the receptionist, who was looking at him expectantly.

"That's creamed spinach," Dahlia answered.

"Creamed spinach?" Alex blinked. "There is such a thing?"

He wasn't aware that spinach also grew in this world, making him more interested in eating something that would make him remember his own world.

Alex no longer hesitated and took a bite of the dish that Dahlia had made.

"Oh, this is surprisingly good," Alex admitted. The young man then took some meat from the roasted duck and ate it together with the spinach. The combination of flavors was very satisfying.

Dahlia looked visibly happy that Alex also enjoyed the dish she had made.

"You made this dish to complement the roasted duck, right?" Alex inquired.

"You're right," Dahlia answered. "I don't want any leftovers, so I decided to make something that would match with the dishes Elaine and Efa had already made."

“Good decision,” Alex gave the pretty receptionist a thumbs-up. “With this, I feel like I can eat a lot. How about you, Dim Dim?”

“Dim Dim~”

The Dim Sum God also liked the creamed spinach and was eating it alongside Efa’s mixed mushrooms and vegetables.

With the informal cooking competition coming to a draw, the girls dug in. Soon, everyone was enjoying the food while exchanging light banter.

“So you will be taking the trial of the Dungeon of Beginnings in Briarwood Village,” Dahlia said. “I heard that hundreds and even thousands of teenagers take this trial every year.

“The Dungeon of Beginnings is vast, and there are multiple entrances in different locations around the kingdom. Some even say that the founder of Frieden Academy was the one who created the dungeon to test whether someone was worthy enough to enroll in his school.

“Although you only need to find the exit on the first floor of the dungeon, it is still not an easy task. It also cannot be mapped, so it’s quite a difficult challenge for some people. Are you confident that you can pass the test?”

The young man didn’t give her an answer right away.

Alex only answered after he had finished organizing his thoughts.

“Actually, I’m not that confident,” Alex answered truthfully. “But since Master will be accompanying me, I think I stand a chance.”

Elaine exchanged a glance with Efa before shifting her attention back to Alex.

"I heard those who plan to take the trial can have four people accompanying them," Elaine stated. "Are you only taking your master with you?"

"Maybe you need a Scout to help you find the way?" Efa patted her modest chest. "I am confident in my tracking skills. Even if the dungeon changes its interior, I will be able to find the way if I put my mind to it."

"I'm sorry, but I can't take you both with me," Alex said in a solemn tone. "It will be a very dangerous trial, and I don't want to drag you down with me."

"Oh?" Elaine arched an eyebrow. "The first floor of the Dungeon of Beginnings only has Rank 1 Monsters. Although Rank 2 Monsters occasionally appear, they won't pose a problem to us."

"That's right." Efa nodded. "This isn't the first time I have escorted someone in the Dungeon of Beginnings. I did it just last year, so I know what to expect."

Alex shook his head. "This year, it will be different. A Dungeon Outbreak will happen."

Elaine, Efa, and Dahlia looked at the young man, dumbfounded.

A dungeon outbreak was just as bad as a monster stampede.

In fact, depending on the size of the dungeon and how many floors it had, a dungeon outbreak could be more dangerous than a monster stampede.

The scary part was that Elaine, Efa, and Dahlia instinctively knew that Alex wasn't joking.

This made them feel that the young man truly believed that a dungeon outbreak would happen, which could potentially kill many trial takers who were hoping to enroll in Frieden Academy.

Chapter 85: Alex's Compromise

"I know this might be hard to believe, but it's the truth," Alex asserted. "I am a seer, so I can see bits and pieces of the future. The reason I want to go to Briarwood Village is to minimize the damage."

Alex didn't know what would have happened to the monsters that usually gathered on the first floor of the Dungeon of Beginnings.

He only knew that Rank 4 Monsters had appeared when Charles Lambert was midway through his quest to look for the exit that led to the City of Harmonia.

After his death, there had been no other information about the monsters. Alex didn't know if the monsters had returned to their respective floors or emerged to the outside world and rampaged to their hearts' content.

It was only an IF scenario, but it was one that had a high chance of happening in this world.

With that many monsters gathered on one floor, a dungeon outbreak was likely going to follow. If that happened, all the exits leading to the various cities, towns, and villages would be in danger of being overwhelmed by their numbers.

Reality was different from a game, and what Alex wanted to do was to help Charles find the exit as soon as possible to minimize the damage.

The sooner he left the dungeon, the faster things would return to normal. However, the young man knew this wouldn't be an easy task.

There was also one more thing that made Alex feel nervous.

It was none other than the level of difficulty that had been forced into him during his transmigration.

Difficulty Level: Hell Mode.

When he had entered the Etherion Domain, a Mutant Boss Monster had appeared.

He wanted to shrug it off as mere coincidence, but doing so would only leave him unprepared if something similar happened again. And next time, he might not be as lucky.

Alex was certain that if he accompanied Charles inside the Dungeon of Beginnings, clearing it might even become harder.

This was why he didn't want Elaine and Efa to accompany him. He truly cared for his first close friends in the Town of Thalloria.

"If a dungeon outbreak is going to happen, we need to report this to the guild at once, so they can send an expedition team to check the condition of the Dungeon of Beginnings," Dahlia said seriously.

"Frieden Academy should also be informed since the ones who will be in great danger will be the trial takers who plan to enroll in the academy."

Alex agreed with her line of thinking, but even if the Adventurer's Guild sent a team to investigate, they wouldn't find any signs of an impending outbreak.

"It's no use, Dahlia," Alex said. "Even if a team does investigate, they won't see anything. There's a condition that will trigger this dungeon outbreak."

"A condition?" Dahlia furrowed her brows. "Then, can we prevent that condition from taking place?"

"We can't." Alex shook his head. "But don't worry. Like I said earlier, I am thinking of ways to prevent it from ending in the worst-case scenario. So, Dahlia, do me a favor and don't tell this to anyone."

"If your superiors were to conclude that I was spreading misinformation to cause panic to the people, my Adventurer's License would be revoked."

Elaine pressed her hands together and held Alex's gaze. "Is this the reason why you don't want us to accompany you?"

“Yes,” Alex replied. “It is very dangerous. I don’t plan to fight the monsters inside the dungeon. My goal is to find the exit, and that is what I will prioritize.”

“But, are you sure that you and your master will be enough?” Efa asked. “Elaine and I might just be Rank 2 right now, but we are only a step away from becoming Rank 3. We’re still stronger than you, so if you can do it, then why can’t we do it?”

“Efa, it’s just best that you and Elaine don’t get hurt at all,” Alex replied. “After all, it’s not your battle to face.”

“That may be true, but we still owe you a debt for rescuing us from those Goblins,” Elaine pointed out. “We won’t feel at ease until we repay that debt.”

“That’s right.” Efa nodded. “Our fate would’ve been worse than death if you hadn’t come to our rescue. If you plan to risk your life for this mission, we’ll also gladly risk our lives to help you clear it.”

Alex wanted to say more, but Efa reached out to press her finger over his lips. The Scout gave the young man a mischievous smile to tell him that whatever he planned to say would be of no use.

“Even if you don’t agree for us to accept our help, we will still go to Briarwood Village when the test of the academy starts.” Efa smirked. “Until then, Elaine and I will steadily increase our strength and raise our rank to Rank 3.”

The young man sighed because there was no way for him to prevent Elaine and Efa from going to Briarwood Village and following him.

“Okay, but you can only accompany me if you and Elaine become Rank 3,” Alex stated. “If you still haven’t reached that rank before the trial starts, then don’t bother going to Briarwood Village. Do we have a deal?”

“Deal,” Elaine replied before Efa could reply.

Alex settled for a compromise because he understood that the two Adventurers were serious about repaying their debt.

Suddenly, Dahlia clapped her hands to get everyone's attention.

"Now that the issue has been settled, let's put it aside for now and continue our feast!" Dahlia suggested before pouring some fruit juice into Alex's cup.

"This is a fruit punch," the receptionist said. "Don't worry, I only put a little alcohol in it. Elaine and Efa have said that you are a lightweight, so this shouldn't knock you out completely."

"Thank you." Alex gratefully tried the drink. To his surprise, it tasted really good.

He could feel the faint trace of alcohol, but it was so light that it was almost negligible.

The party continued until the late hours of the night because Alex and the girls exchanged some stories of their adventures.

As Alex talked about his first battle with Goblins, the ladies regarded him with endearment, amused by his hit-and-run tactics.

Elaine and Efa also shared their stories, as well as the reason why they had decided to become Adventurers.

To his surprise, Dahlia also used to be an Adventurer, albeit only for a brief time.

After her friends died during a mission, she had decided to switch jobs and become a receptionist in the hope that she could give sound advice to newbies like Alex, so they wouldn't try to challenge quests that were out of their league.

Although there wasn't much alcohol in the fruit punch, Alex drank so much that he felt drowsy.

Soon, he had fallen asleep while sitting on the couch.

“He really is a lightweight, huh?” Dahlia lightly poked the young man’s right cheek to see if he would wake up.

But Alex was sleeping deeply. The hostess shook her head helplessly.

“Don’t worry.” Elaine chuckled. “We’re already used to carrying him. I’m going to take him to the guest room. Is that alright?”

“Yes.” Dahlia nodded. “Efa and I will clean up first, then we’ll follow you later.”

The receptionist picked up the sleeping Dim Dim and placed him on a small basket with a cushion, which would become the Dim Sum God’s bed for the night.

Just like Alex, the little one had drunk a lot of fruit punch and was sleeping soundly without a care in the world.

Chapter 86: Whoever Marries You Is Going To Be Very Lucky

Sleep pulled him deep, heavy and slow, like drifting into a warm tide.

Somewhere in the darkness, a pair of hands found him, brushing against skin, trailing along his chest, and running through his hair.

He murmured something wordless, caught between dreaming and waking. Was it a dream? He couldn’t tell. Laughter, soft as breath, curled around his ears.

A body pressed against his side, lithe and warm.

It was like a feather. Light and daring.

Fingers traced idle patterns over him, exploring as if they knew him, or wished to.

Lips, perhaps, brushed his jaw. A sigh escaped him involuntarily.

The world tilted, and a gentle weight moved with him, surrounding him and drowning him in sensation.

Heat built, slow and inevitable, and somewhere far away, he thought he heard someone whisper his name, a murmur full of devotion or maybe hunger.

He spoke the name of someone dear to him.

Someone he had shared a passionate night with due to emotions that had spiraled out of their control.

“Deathkiss,” Alex said softly.

He never fully woke. He only sank deeper, caught in the undertow of touch and dream, until the night itself seemed to fold over him like a lover’s embrace.

When Alex finally opened his eyes, the wonderful dream that had taken hold of him seemed to slip past his fingertips.

The faint light of the early sunrise peeked through the window of his room, letting him know that a new day was about to start.

Looking around, he found himself in an unfamiliar place.

A soft bed, a soft pillow, and Dim Dim sleeping on a basket on top of a table near him.

‘For some reason, I feel refreshed,’ Alex mused, thinking that it was due to the good dream that he had.

Unfortunately, he could no longer remember what kind of dream it was or the identity of the person who accompanied him in that dream.

Propping himself up, he noticed that he was only wearing pants again, which didn't surprise him anymore.

Elaine and Efa might have taken his clothes off once more and wiped his body with a cloth like they always did whenever he went drinking.

His clothes were neatly folded on top of the table, just beside Dim Dim's basket

The little guy was breathing softly, and a faint smile could be seen on its face.

Perhaps, Dim Dim was also having a good dream, just like Alex had a few minutes ago.

The rustling of clothes echoed faintly inside the room as Alex put on his clothes.

He glanced at the sleeping Dim Sum God and wondered if he should wake it or not.

Thinking it might be best for Dim Dim to keep on sleeping, Alex left the room as silently as he could.

As he walked down the stairs, he noticed that there was already some activity happening in the kitchen.

"Good morning, Dahlia," Alex greeted the receptionist, who was humming a tune as she cooked some bacon and eggs.

"Good morning, Alex," Dahlia greeted back with a smile. "You're up early. I thought you'd be sleeping till noon."

"I'm used to waking up early because I train every morning," Alex replied.

"I see." Dahlia nodded. "I checked on Elaine and Efa a few minutes ago, and both of them are still asleep in their room. It's a good thing today is my rest day, so I don't need to go to the Adventurer's Guild."

"So you also have a day off?" Alex smirked. "I almost always see you at the Adventurer's Guild, so I thought that you were a complete workaholic."

"I'm not a workaholic." Dahlia shook her head. "But since I live alone, I have nothing else to do aside from working."

"I already applied for leave because I had guests coming over last night. I thought that having a day off today could be considered a reward for working hard every day."

"... So, you really don't have a rest day?"

"I do. Once or twice a month."

"Ugh..."

Alex wanted to say that she should get more rest days, but since Dahlia seemed to love her work very much, he decided to just keep his thoughts inside his heart.

"Here, take this to the table," Dahlia said, handing Alex a tray of food that was good for two people. "I'll just cook for Elaine and Efa later when they have woken up. By the way, where is Dim Dim? Is it still sleeping?"

"Dim Dim is still sleeping. I can't bear to wake it up because it seems to be having a good dream."

"You know, I still don't know what kind of creature Dim Dim is," Dahlia commented. "Even my coworkers who are well-versed in monsters have no clue what it is. Maybe it's a new species that no one has seen before?"

Alex chuckled nervously instead of giving an answer.

There was no way he could tell Dahlia that the little guy was actually a Deity, right?

The two then ate, sharing friendly banter as they enjoyed their simple breakfast.

“Will you still continue taking quests as an Adventurer after becoming a student of the academy?” Dahlia asked.

“I’m not sure if that is possible,” Alex replied. “I’ll be busy with schoolwork, and I probably won’t have time to take on some quests unless I am short on money.”

The young man didn’t really know what he should do after enrolling in the academy.

However, he knew that many events would take place in Frieden Academy.

Hidden enemies lurked within its walls, and they would become the challenges that the Heroes and Heroines need to overcome to become stronger.

As for Alex? He didn’t know if he should remain a bystander and let things progress naturally or actively participate in the story.

But these events weren’t the ones that mattered to him at the moment.

His mission to help Charles clear the Dungeon of Beginning was currently his priority.

“You know, my former party mate is teaching in Frieden Academy as an instructor,” Dahlia said. “But she’s teaching the healing arts, so you probably won’t be taking her lessons anytime soon.

“However, I will write you a letter of introduction. If you get hurt, don’t hesitate to ask for her help. She owes me a favor, and since I can’t cash it out myself, you take it instead.”

“Thank you, Dahlia,” Alex replied. “You’re so sweet. Whoever marries you is going to be very lucky.”

“You’re right.” Dahlia nodded. “They might have saved a world in their past life if they can marry me.”

“You’re not denying it?”

“Why deny the truth?”

The two then broke out laughing at their own nonsense.

Still, Alex enjoyed moments like this because he had rarely gotten to talk with someone in real life.

He had only spoken to his friends through chat messages, and that wasn’t the same thing as meeting in real life to hang out together.

Only their Guildmaster, Deathkiss, had visited him regularly to make sure that he was at least eating proper meals from time to time.

Remembering his Guildmaster, whose beauty would put some models and actresses to shame, Alex couldn’t help but feel an ache in his heart.

He would no longer be able to see her again, which was one of the only regrets he had after going to the world of Arcana.

High above the Celestial Realm, Eriol placed his hands behind his back.

A frown appeared on his face because he had discovered an irregularity within the world of Arcana.

However, he decided to observe for the time being. The irregularity wasn't malicious and didn't seem hostile to the world of Arcana.

Also, his instincts were telling him that perhaps, this was also the Will of the world, which he hoped that Alex would be able to protect in the future.

Chapter 87: Arrival At Briarwood Village

When Alex came to Arcana, he had no one but Dim Dim.

Now, he had a handful of people he could genuinely call his friends.

Unfortunately, it was time to say goodbye. Who knew how long it would take before they met again?

"Nobles can be an annoying bunch, and they usually look down on commoners," Dahlia told Alex. "If they bully you, don't hesitate to ask my friend for help. She's a Professor, and she can definitely intimidate those guys."

"Understood." Alex nodded. "Thank you, Dahlia."

The young man then shifted his attention to Elaine and Efa, who had also come to bid him goodbye.

"We will keep our promise and head to Briarwood Village once we become Rank 3." Elaine patted the young man's shoulder. "Don't die until then."

"I won't," Alex promised.

Efa hugged the young man tightly for a few seconds before planting a kiss on his left cheek.

"That's for good luck," Efa said mischievously. "I think you'll need all the luck in the world so you can do whatever you need to do."

Alex blinked once, then twice, before pointing to his right cheek.

“Since I need all the luck in the world, how about you add another kiss here?” he asked with a smile.

The young man had already gotten used to the Scout’s playful attitude, so he decided to tease her before he left the Town of Thalaria.

He thought she’d back down, so when he felt something soft press against his right cheek, he was caught by surprise.

Before Alex could react, the Scout also picked up Dim Dim from his head and gave it a kiss.

“Look after Alex for us, Dim Dim,” Efa said softly. “I’m sure he will listen to you.”

“Dim Dim!” Dim Dim nodded with a smile, promising the young lady it would do its best.

Satisfied with the little one’s answer, she returned the Dim Sum God to its spot on top of Alex’s head and took a few steps back.

Cairo shook his head but was quite amused. He was also happy that his disciple had made good friends during the short time that he had spent in the Town of Thalaria.

Parting was a little sad, but the time for them to leave finally came.

“It’s time to go, Alex,” Cairo said.

“Yes, Master,” Alex replied before following the Catkin towards the airship, which would take them to Briarwood Village.

The young man then waved at the three ladies from the deck of the ship and bid them goodbye one last time.

Soon, the sound of a whistle spread through the surroundings as the airship slowly rose toward the sky.

It was headed to the Capital City of Harmonia, and Briarwood Village was one of its stops before it arrived at its final destination.

The trip lasted a full day since the airship needed to make a few stops along the way.

Cairo looked at the small village that appeared in their view with a calm expression on his face.

From the sky, Briarwood Village didn't look special.

It was not unlike the many small villages they had passed by along their journey.

"We will be landing a distance away from the village since it doesn't have any platforms to accommodate our ship," the conductor of the airship told Alex and Cairo.

"You'll have to walk the rest of the way. It's only a kilometer away from our drop point, so it's not that long of a walk."

Alex and Cairo nodded and thanked the conductor for telling them this information.

A few minutes later, the two disembarked from the flying ship and walked across the fields of the village.

Several farmers tending to their fields looked in the direction of the two people, whom they had never seen before.

The young man could recognize some of them. When he had been playing Charles Lambert's Story Mode, he had interacted with some of these people.

Also, Briarwood Village wasn't a big place.

Naturally, it became a tight-knit community where everyone knew each other.

“Are we going to meet Charles right away?” Cairo asked.

“No, Master,” Alex replied. “We will stay at the inn for now and observe him from a distance. When the time is right, we will make contact with him and introduce ourselves as trial takers who wish to enroll in Frieden Academy.”

Cairo nodded in understanding.

The Catkin had no intention of going to Frieden Academy to study. The only thing he wanted to do was to find the way of his Sword Dao, which required him to travel to many places and vanquish demons along the way.

He was a Demon Slayer. Some of the Demons might be good, but he intended to hunt down all the bad ones and prevent them from harming the innocent.

Cairo only planned to accompany Alex until he had safely enrolled in the academy. After that, he would return to his wandering and would only send letters to keep in touch with his first disciple.

“Room for two, please,” Alex said to the innkeeper.

“Three coppers for a night,” the innkeeper replied. “How long will you be staying?”

“Until the Trial of Frieden Academy begins,” Alex answered.

“Oh, so you’re a trial taker.” The Innkeeper smiled. “Then, I’ll give you a discount and only charge you 8 silver coins per person.”

“Thank you.” Alex took out a gold coin and six silver coins from his storage ring and placed them on top of the counter.

Cairo wasn't the type to bring a lot of money whenever he traveled, so Alex decided to bear the expenses for his Master's lodgings.

The Catkin thanked Alex and decided to go to his room to rest.

The young man had already told him earlier that he didn't plan to do anything special today, so the Swordsman decided to take a short nap until lunchtime.

Alex also went to his room. However, unlike Cairo, he took out his journal and started to write down a few things about Briarwood Village.

"The Dungeon of Beginnings will open two weeks from now," Alex muttered as he noted down his thoughts in his journal. "With Master's help, we will be able to clear it easily."

However, Charles couldn't completely depend on them either. "I will give the Whirlwind Sword from the treasure chest to Charles, so he will get a good weapon for the trial," Alex decided.

The Whirlwind Sword's name came from a skill imbued in it, Whirlwind Slash.

Alex planned to learn Whirlwind Slash first before giving the sword to Charles. How would he learn the skill? He would use the skill repeatedly until he understood how to do it naturally.

That was one of the ways to learn Sword Skills in ELO.

It was similar to how he had learned the skill Shield Charge after using Shield Bash against monsters a hundred times.

At that moment, Shield Charge was Alex's strongest physical attack because its damage scaled with his shield defense and stats.

— —

[Shield Charge]

Stamina Cost: 20

Type: Physical

— The user surges forward in a sudden burst of speed, slamming into their target with the full weight of their shield.

— Shield Charge deals physical damage that scales with the user's Shield Defense, Strength, and Agility, combining raw power, defensive force, and momentum into a single brutal impact.

— Enemies struck may be staggered or knocked back based on the difference in mass and momentum.

Damage Formula: Shield Defense + Strength Stat + Agility Stat

Cooldown: 2 minutes.

Range: 15 meters.

— —

The only problem with this skill was its rapid stamina depletion, so Alex must carefully choose the right moment to use it.

On the other hand, Whirlwind Slash was an AOE skill, so it allowed its user to hit multiple targets at once, which was incredibly effective when surrounded by monsters.

Charles, who had the passive skill, Challenger's Mark, would benefit greatly from acquiring this skill.

The young man then continued to jot down notes on his journal, listing down every information he knew about Briarwood Village, which he and the Eris Brotherhood had gathered after playing the character Charles Lambert for a very long time.

Chapter 88: Whenever You Are With Me, Always Expect The Worst

The next day...

From a distance, Alex and Cairo watched a teenage boy practice his sword swings in the backyard of his house.

As a Swordsman, Cairo could tell that the teen at least knew the basics of holding a sword.

His strikes were strong and steady, making the Catkin smile faintly in approval.

"He might have been trained to hold the sword from a young age," Cairo said.

"Yes," Alex replied. "His adoptive parents were both Adventurers, and his father taught him how to wield the sword so he can protect his sisters."

The young man had already told his Master that Charles' parents had died during their last dungeon expedition.

It was a very common tale among children whose parents made a living by risking their lives to hunt monsters both outside and inside the dungeon.

The life of an Adventurer could end with just a single mistake.

This was also why there were different Ranks for Adventurers. That way, they were restricted to only tackling missions within their abilities.

"Master, do you think he is now a Ranker?" Alex inquired.

He was still unable to gauge how powerful someone was just by looking at them.

Only experienced warriors like his master would be able to tell if someone was strong or not with a glance.

“He is very close to becoming a Ranker,” Cairo answered. “Perhaps he will become one a few days before the trial inside the Dungeon of Beginnings starts.”

Alex nodded in agreement.

Even in the game, the time allocated for Charles was just enough for him to become a Ranker.

Charles was a Swordsman, and his goal was to become a Knight.

His adoptive father had once been a Knight. However, the lord he was serving died in a tragic accident. To continue supporting his family, he could only shift to the life of an Adventurer.

Using his knightly abilities, he gained enough fame to make a name for himself.

That was also how he met his wife and formed a family with her.

Charles was the son of one of their party members, who later died in an escort mission.

Since the party members treated each other as family, the couple decided to adopt Charles and raise him as their own child.

For many years, they lived happily with each other.

But those happy days came to an end a month ago.

Charles and his sisters were forced apart by their aunt, who didn't recognize the teenage boy as part of their family.

However, she had given him a chance, perhaps out of pity.

She would recognize him if he was able to become a scholarship student of Frieden Academy and survive the Dungeon of Beginnings.

Charles didn't know if his aunt meant her words or simply wanted him to die at the hands of monsters.

However, since he didn't want to part with his sisters, he had agreed to the condition and was now training hard for the upcoming trial.

"Are there things we need to pay attention to once inside the Dungeon of Beginnings?" Cairo asked.
"You said we would be facing Rank 4 Monsters. While I think they are indeed a problem, we can just run away if we meet them inside the dungeon."

"Master, let me just say something," Alex said with a serious expression on his face. "Whenever you are with me, always expect the worst."

"Huh? What do you mean?"

"Um, just think of me as someone who raises the difficulty of anything I poke my nose into. For example, instead of Rank 4 Monsters, we might encounter Rank 5 Monsters inside the dungeon."

Since Alex couldn't say that something called "Difficulty Level: Hell Mode" was attached to him, this was his way of preparing Cairo for the dangers they would face later.

"Is this that so-called flag that you mentioned in the past?" Cairo asked. "That Murphy's Law?"

“In a way, yes, Master,” Alex replied. “When you are with me, think about Murphy’s Law, and it will come to pass.”

“Alex, remind me not to take you with me when I dive into High-Level Dungeons.”

“Okay.”

Alex was very tempted to say that taking him was still better than taking Charles. But since he didn’t want Cairo to look at him with pity, he decided to keep his silence instead.

“Have you already thought of a strategy we can use inside the dungeon when the monsters start to head in our direction?” Cairo crossed his arms over his chest.

“The strategy is simple, Master,” Alex answered. “Run as fast as we can for as long as we can. If we find the exit first, we win.”

“Then what of the other trial takers?” Cairo arched an eyebrow. “Won’t they be in danger too?”

“I have a solution for that, Master.” Alex smirked. “We just need to delay entering the dungeon. Let’s give everyone a day as a head start. By then, they will have already found the exit.”

Trial takers were allowed to form a party of five when entering the Dungeon of Beginnings.

Some Adventurers would sometimes accept missions to escort trial takers inside the dungeon, just like Efa had a year ago.

For most people, entering the Dungeon of Beginnings was merely a formality because they had the means to clear it with the resources available to them.

Hiring a group of Adventurers was still cheaper than enrolling in the academy without a scholarship as the school fee was ten thousand gold coins per student.

Only noble families could afford the tuition, so commoners had no choice but to be more resourceful when taking the trial of the academy.

"I think that's a good plan." Cairo nodded. "As long as no innocents will be involved, we can simply focus on finding the exit."

"Right." Alex shifted his attention back to Charles, who was still practicing his sword swings.

Once upon a time, he had stood at that same spot, repeating the same sword swings again and again just to raise his sword proficiency in the game.

Seeing Charles' diligence in person only made Alex more determined to help him.

Now that he had confirmed that the teenage boy wasn't neglecting his training, it was time to familiarize themselves with the monsters inside the Dungeon of Beginnings.

Leaving Charles to his training, Alex and Cairo headed to the dungeon to get a better idea of what enemies they would be fighting in a few weeks' time.

Chapter 89: Rest In Pieces [Part 1]

First Floor of the Dungeon of Beginnings...

"So far, we've only seen horned rabbits, black bats, crag wolves, and feral boars," Cairo said. "Among the four, I think only the crag wolves will be a relatively big threat for beginners since they sometimes come in groups of twos and threes."

Alex nodded in agreement. He already knew which monsters could be found on the first floor since he had seen them so many times in the past.

However, the main reason why he asked his master to accompany him to the first floor was because of another matter.

He wanted to test the mapping feature of his map and see if it worked for a party.

“Master, can you walk in that direction by yourself?” Alex asked. “I want to test something.”

Cairo nodded and walked straight, leaving his disciple behind.

Alex paid close attention to his map. After a few seconds, he noticed some of the black fog on the map clearing, which meant that partymates could indeed unlock parts of the map.

After discovering this feature, a faint smile appeared on the young man’s face as a plan started to form in his mind.

‘With this, we can ensure that no innocent will be involved even if Charles enters the dungeon and triggers a dungeon outbreak,’ Alex thought before running towards his master to catch up to him.

“Are you finished with your test?” Cairo asked.

“Yes, Master,” Alex answered. “I thought of something, and if it’s okay, I’d like to test something else.”

“What do you have in mind?” Cairo inquired.

“I’ll be leaving Dim Dim in your care for a while, Master. It can tell you which way to go, so you won’t get lost here in the dungeon,” Alex explained. “My plan is to explore the dungeon in two different directions for an hour. After an hour, we will both regroup and try the main experiment I have in mind.”

Cairo didn’t know what Alex was thinking, but he still agreed to his request.

“Won’t you get lost if Dim Dim goes with me?” Cairo allowed the little guy to crawl up his arm and rest on his shoulder.

“Don’t worry, Master,” Alex replied. “I won’t get lost.”

“Okay. I don’t think you will encounter anything that can threaten you here on the first floor, but don’t lower your guard, okay?”

“Yes, Master!”

The two then parted ways with Alex heading to the east and Cairo to the west.

The young man’s plan was to map the dungeon’s first floor and find something that would prove helpful later.

When he had still been playing the character Charles Lambert, he had accidentally stumbled into a hidden room inside the Dungeon of Beginnings.

That hidden room had contained a treasure chest. Although he had only gotten a bottle of healing potion from the chest, it was still something he had only stumbled upon once during his one-year playthrough. After that, it had never happened again.

Alex planned to map the first floor first, then activate the new feature of his map, which allowed him to see hidden rooms, secret passageways, treasures, and traps.

It could even tell him the location of unique monsters that might be within the dungeon.

Truth be told, he was quite excited about the possibilities the Map of Forgotten Paths would open up for him inside dungeons.

The special map function would last for three hours, which was a good amount of time to go treasure hunting.

The only downside of the map feature was that it had a cooldown time of 24 hours.

Even so, Alex believed this would allow him to get some rare items during his dungeon expeditions, which would in turn make him rich in the future.

Seeing Cairo and Dim Dim uncover a good chunk of the map within half an hour, Alex also increased his pace, killing the monsters that blocked his way.

In the past, he might have struggled against a horned rabbit because of its speed, or against crag wolves because of their group tactics.

But now that he was a Rank 2 Oathkeeper, these monsters posed no threat to him whatsoever.

His experience fighting stronger and more dangerous monsters had allowed Alex to learn a few things, which made killing weaker monsters so much easier.

[Level Up!]

The young man made a slashing motion and sent the blood staining his sword to the ground.

Alex looked at his map and deemed that it was now time to regroup with his master and Dim Dim.

Together, they had only mapped a fifth of the first floor of the dungeon, but he decided it was best that he first test how the Map of the Forgotten Paths worked in practice.

A few minutes later, he saw a group of five Adventurers encircling two teenage boys, preventing them from moving forward.

'Those guys...' Alex frowned as soon as he saw the faces of the five Adventurers.

They were all very familiar faces from the game.

They were the party of Adventurers called Blade Fangs, and they usually operated on the first to the fifth floors of the Dungeon of Beginnings.

The only thing memorable about this party was quite negative—they hunted Adventurers inside the dungeon, stealing their items and equipment.

During Charles Lambert's tutorial, Alex had once died because of the Blade Fangs. Ever since then, he had steered clear from this dangerous group.

"W-We don't have anything else!" said one of the teenage boys fearfully. "We just started diving today, and we haven't gone far."

"And?" the leader of the Blade Fangs, Jarik Grint, sneered. "That leather armor you're wearing looks nice. How about you give it to me?"

"B-But!" The teenage boy was about to protest when Jarik took out a dagger and held it close to his neck.

"But what?" Jarik asked coldly.

"You can't do this!" shouted the other teenage boy. "We are all Adventurers, so why are you guys trying to steal from us?!"

"Did you hear that, boys?" Jarik asked in mock disbelief, prompting his four companions to laugh in response. "You want to know why we are stealing your stuff? It's because we can. If you want to blame someone, blame yourself for being weak!"

Just as Jarik was about to stab the teenage boy's shoulder with his dagger to teach him a lesson, he sensed something heading in his direction.

Out of instinct, the man used his dagger to slash whatever was about to hit him, only to hear the sound of something breaking.

A moment later, a scream of pain echoed through the dungeon as the contents of Alex's brittle vial came into contact with the bastard's eyes.

The Blade Fangs, now aware of Alex's existence, immediately raised their guard in preparation for battle.

Alex simply stood there with a devilish smile on his face, making the Adventurers narrow their eyes.

"Who are you, and why are you attacking us?" one of the Jarik's lackeys asked. "Don't you know it's illegal for Adventurers to attack one another inside the dungeon?"

"Very funny." Alex smirked. "After killing so many people here in the dungeon, you have the audacity to say such hogwash? You seem to think this rule only applies when you're on the receiving end, no?"

"What are you talking about?" another member of the Blade Fangs sneered. "We are just teasing these kids so they'll be more careful inside the dungeon in the future."

"What a coincidence," Alex sneered back. "I am also teasing you guys so all of you will be more careful inside the dungeon in the future as well."

"Bastard! You really think we're scared of you?!" the Swordsman in Jarik's party shouted. "Let's kill this brat now!"

However, before he could even draw his sword to charge at Alex, he felt something cold and hard press against his neck.

"Did you just say you're going to kill my disciple?" Cairo asked icily.

Dim Dim had urged him to hurry after it had sensed that Alex might be in danger. Worried, the Catkin had run as fast as he could, following the Dim Sum God's instructions.

Alex had noticed his master speeding up toward his direction in the map, which had actually made him more confident about confronting the Blade Fangs.

He wanted to save the two teenagers before they were killed by the notorious Adventurer party, whose hands were soaked in the blood of Adventurers they had killed inside the Dungeon of Beginnings.

Chapter 90: Rest In Pieces [Part 2]

With the edge of Cairo's blade pressed against his neck, the Blade Fangs Swordsman didn't dare to move. He gritted his teeth, enduring the sting from the Catkin's sword even as it drew blood.

"I-I think we are having a misunderstanding here," the Scout of Jarik's party said. "Why don't we all back down and talk this out in a civil way?"

Cairo ignored the Scout, his attention solely on Alex. "Disciple, explain the situation."

Alex nodded. "Master, this group is called the Blade Fangs. They like to target newbie Adventurers. They steal all their victims' items and, if they feel like it, kill them as well."

"What nonsense are you talking about?!" Jarik yelled, still struggling to open his eyes after getting hit by powdered chili and pepper. "We have never done such a thing! Where is your evidence?!"

"Evidence?" Cairo narrowed his eyes. "All of you reek of blood. It isn't from a monster... You killed a human just an hour ago, didn't you?"

"H-How did you know—" The Scout immediately covered his mouth, knowing he had accidentally blurted out something he shouldn't have.

Before any of the Blade Fangs could do anything, Cairo made his move, leveraging the flat part of his sword to knock the Adventurers unconscious.

The two teenagers, whom the group had bullied earlier, profusely thanked Alex and Cairo for saving them.

"Leave this place for now," Alex said. "It's not safe here."

“What are you going to do with them?” one of the teenage boys asked as he pointed at Jarik and his men sprawling on the ground.

“I’ll leave the answer to your imagination,” Alex replied. “Now go along, and be more careful in the future. Always remember, the most dangerous creatures in the dungeon aren’t the monsters but your fellow humans.”

The two teenagers exchanged glances before thanking Alex and Cairo once more. They then left in haste, their premonition telling them they wouldn’t want to see what was happening next.

“What do you plan to do with them?” Cairo asked. “Are you going to kill them?”

The Catkin lived a life of killing monsters and people corrupted by demons.

As a Demon Slayer, hunting Demon Worshipers was one of the roles he played in the world.

Cairo wouldn’t mind killing the members of the Blade Fangs to save his disciple from dirtying his hands.

However, Alex also had no intention of letting his master sully his hands from killing such scums. Instead, he resolutely drove his sword into Jarik’s leg, forcing the latter awake with a deafening scream.

The young man didn’t stop there. He took out a brittle vial from his storage ring and smashed it on Jarik’s head. The bastard’s screams only got louder.

His party members eventually stirred from his cries of agony, but Alex was one step faster than them.

Four more brittle vials appeared in Alex’s hand, and each one soon shattered against the face of a Blade Fang member. In an instant, the silver-haired man found himself and his master surrounded by screams of pain.

But this pain was only temporary, and too light a punishment. So, Alex once again wielded his sword and impaled all their limbs with it.

With this, the five Adventurers wouldn't be able to run away or use their weapons. As their scream intensified, they drew the attention of the crag wolves in the vicinity.

This prompted the wolves to investigate the source of the sounds, which was part of Alex's plan. Soon, the Blade Fangs would experience the terror their victims had experienced at their hands.

As soon as Alex saw the crag wolves appear, he asked his master to follow him and observe from a distance.

There was a difference between personally killing someone and letting them die.

Alex had never killed a human in his life and he didn't intend to start now, but he wasn't a saint who would allow the Blade Fangs to live after what they had done.

As such, he used the crag wolves as a borrowed knife to land the killing blow on the rogue party. At most, all Alex did was cripple them, so their deaths would not weigh too much on his conscience.

"Nooooo—arghhhh!" Jarik shouted in fear, anger, and frustration as one of the wolves bit his neck.

Of course, he didn't die right away since he was still a strong Adventurer. But that wasn't a good thing.

In fact, it only prolonged his suffering.

More crag wolves soon showed up, and they soon joined their comrades in feasting on the flesh of the Adventurers.

Jarik's party had done something similar in the past.

After robbing their crippled victims clean, they would watch from a distance as the latter were killed by monsters, viewing it as some form of entertainment.

If Alex hadn't found them and the two teenage boys, these monsters in human skin would have continued their evil ways.

Cairo, on the other hand, calmly watched the gory scene with his arms crossed over his chest.

He had no intention of letting the members of the Blade Fangs live.

If, by some miracle, the Adventurers somehow managed to drink a healing potion or fight off the wolves, Cairo would be ready to swoop in and finish them.

"You have done a good thing, Alex," the Catkin said as his way of alleviating any potential guilt his one and only disciple might feel for the deaths of the scum of society.

Alex didn't reply, thinking of the hardships that Charles had experienced at the hands of the Blade Fangs during his first attempts at clearing the Dungeon of Beginnings.

The young man was certain that if he hadn't appeared in Arcana, this wicked party might have been the ones to end Charles' life inside the dungeon. They would have done it casually as a way to pass time.

'Rest in pieces,' Alex said internally. 'You all deserved it.'

Suddenly, the young man heard a voice behind him, which made him turn around.

"Thank you."

Those words sounded like they came from a young lady.

"What's wrong?" Cairo asked after seeing Alex's reaction. "Is something behind us?"

“No, Master,” Alex replied. “I just thought I heard something.”

The young man didn’t know if he was just hearing things, but for some reason, he felt as if someone had really thanked him from the bottom of their heart.

When the monsters had finally finished their meal, they looked at Alex and Cairo, wondering if they could also eat the two humans who had watched them feast on the fallen Adventurers.

But Cairo’s gaze intimidated them, so they all ran away, leaving only pieces of clothes and armor on the ground.

On that day, one of the most notorious Adventurer parties terrorizing the Dungeon of Beginnings disappeared from the world, changing the fate of many who could have perished under their wicked hands.