

D. Extraction 291

Chapter 291 For The Darkness Path

The old man had a wicked smile on his face the moment he heard that... As expected, sealing the Dark Energy from the real Philip and connecting his Dark Energy to the fake Philip would make this masked man think that the one on his right was the real one.

In the old man's mind, he guessed that the masked man tried sensing the Darkness Possession of his fellow Dark Arts Practitioner and didn't get a response from the real Philip. He probably thought that the disguise couldn't replicate the Darkness Possession of a fellow practitioner!

'Now!' The old man ordered the Shapeshifter as he attacked Vale with his summoned Spectral Hands.

As soon as the Shapeshifter received the signal he was waiting for, he opened his eyes, which were certainly different from the real Philip and tried to use a Spell.

The Transformation Artists didn't have plenty of attacking spells in their Arcane Path unless they could reach the Expert Realm, where they could slightly copy other Arcanists' Spells.

Nevertheless, the Spell he was about to use was called Forced Haunt. This Transformation Spell would consume a lot of his energy to forcefully transform the person he first saw once he opened his eyes. The transformation could be anything that the caster wanted. In this case, he was hoping to transform his opponent into a pig.

As he opened his eyes, he saw the masked man and triggered his Spell.

'Ahh?'

However, to his surprise, he failed to activate his Spell.

'What's going on?' He was baffled since he felt weakened, as if he had activated the Spell. However, he knows that he failed to activate it.

This made him confused, but something terrifying happened... He felt a few of his Spell Models being destroyed while being grabbed by the masked man!

He wasn't even able to scream in pain as he passed out shortly after!

Bam! Bam! Bam!

At the same time, the Ghost Hands stopped the Spectral Hands that were aiming to kill Vale.

"This..."

The strength of the Ghost Hands surprised the old man. He already knew that the masked person in front of him had Advanced Realm Ghost Hands. However, he didn't think too much of it because, in the first place, the Ghost Hands weren't meant to be used in combat.

He knew that it was a lot easier to increase the mastery of such basic spells since they could be nurtured even if you weren't in combat.

However, he was wrong to underestimate these Ghost Hands.

'These Hands are too tough... Don't tell me he has higher Spirit Strands than me?!' The old man thought as he shifted his attention to the Shapeshifter.

To his horror, he discovered that the man was already unconscious and had already returned to his original appearance.

The masked man was not fooled!

He seemed to have attacked the Shapeshifter before the latter could release his Spell.

'Not good...'

The old man quickly changed his tactic as he tried grabbing the listless Philip in order to use him as a hostage.

However, instead of grabbing Philip, he held a Shadow Soldier that the masked man had summoned using his Shadow!

"Y-you!" He wasn't afraid of it but annoyed at the fact that this Dark Spellcaster could always move one step ahead of him.

"Fine! Just die!" The old man said in a cold voice as he no longer planned to keep Philip and the other prisoners alive.

In any case, as long as he killed this intruder, he wouldn't get heavily punished by his Organization.

Suddenly, there was a burst of demonic energy coming out of his body. This wasn't similar to the Dark Energy that Dark Arts Practitioners use.

The energy felt more suffocating and destructive. Furthermore, the Shadow Soldier was quickly shattered...

As the energy spread, the skin of the unconscious Shapeshifter started turning black. It was the same with the other prisoners!

Of course, Vale was unaffected as he triggered his Arcane Armor the moment he noticed that something was off. Furthermore, he summoned another Shadow Soldier to rescue Philip.

'I can't use my Shadow Soldier anymore...' Vale thought as the Shadow Soldier Spell Light had finally dimmed after the last one was summoned.

As a matter of fact, even his Ghost Hands started to reach its limit as well. Fighting against the Advanced Spectral Hands was indeed too much even for him.

He even had to ask Yvaine to assist this Shadow Soldier in bringing out Philip outside the dungeon.

"Hmm? You're still not dead?! Wait—Isn't that an Arcane Armor?! Just how many Mystical Artifacts do you have with you?!" The old man was pissed off as he gathered his energy from his hand to his cane.

He wanted to strike his cane on the ground and summon a cluster of evil spirits...

However, before the cane hit the ground, he realized he could not move.

This time, Vale no longer hesitated as he used his Shadow Mutilation to freeze his movement.

Of course, he could not do this before when it was only a Level 0 Spell. However, now that it was Level 6, freezing the target wouldn't be so difficult as long as he was holding the Shadow of his target. Or at least, he was stepping on it, like what he was doing now.

"W-what did you do?" He asked while he remained in his position.

The freeze wasn't perfect, but it was enough for Vale.

"I got something good from the Shapeshifter. I hope that you have decent Spell Models as well." Vale replied as he opened his palms and patted the old man.

For some reason, the old man felt that the masked man wasn't just going to kill him but was about to do something even more sinister.

"Y-you! Stop what you're about to do! I'm Charles Blackwood! I'm the previous Headmaster of the Vermont Academy! I'm doing this for the sake of the Dark Arts Factions! At this rate, the Dark Arts Faction will be eliminated by the Association! I'm doing this to ensure the continuity of our Path!"

Chapter 292 Secrets

Charles was extremely terrified as soon as he realized that he lost control of his body.

This was something he had never experienced before. With his decades of experience, even the Forced Haunt by Shapeshifters would fail to transform him forcefully since he knows almost every counter to the Spells thrown at him.

Catching him off-guard was extremely difficult.

However, this masked man was just too weird. He was using various techniques that a Dark Spellcaster shouldn't be capable of.

This includes the insane show of strength and speed that shouldn't be found among Spellcasters! Nevertheless, he wasn't too suspicious and simply thought that his enemy used Strength and Speed Boosting Spells.

However, the Arcane Armor and the Spell Disruption shouldn't be Dark Arts. They must've come from his Mystical Items.

This made him confused since the masked man was doing too many things at once. He knew how difficult it was to control a powerful Mystical Item while casting Spells.

Furthermore, these Mystical Items should be at the Royal Rank, considering how it could stop his Decaying Aura from infecting his body.

The demonic mask shouldn't have the ability to stop this Aura. Then, the man used another unknown Spell to stop his movement!

This was just too weird for him since he didn't see any signs of Spell Activation!

After considering all these things, Charles realized that he was no match for his opponent.

As soon as he saw the masked man touching him, he felt something ominous and that his death was creeping up on him.

He had to do something...

"...at this rate, the Dark Arts Faction will be eliminated by the Association! I'm doing this to ensure the continuity of our Path!"

He had no choice but to reveal his plan.

"Hmm? You're telling me you're doing this for the sake of the Darkness Path?" Vale asked as he paused his Extraction for a moment.

Vale was actually feeling excited after he saw the result of his Extraction from the Shapeshifter.

[Extraction Successful. Energy +40]

[Extraction Successful. Intelligence +0.25]

[Extraction Successful. Agility +0.35]

[Extraction Successful. Complete Beast Shapeshift Spell Model]

[Extraction Successful. Incomplete Spell Light + 1]

[Extraction Failed.]

[Extraction Successful. Energy +10]

[Extraction Successful. Complete Human Shapeshift Spell Model]

[Extraction Failed.]

[Extraction Successful. Complete Voice Manipulation Spell Model]

[Extraction Successful. Incomplete Spell Light + 1]

[Extraction Failed.]

Those three Spell Models are awesome!

He actually didn't stop extracting and kept holding the man even after receiving a failure. He wouldn't normally do this since the Extraction could take some time.

However, since he was just holding the guy, he didn't mind continuing with the Extraction until he failed the third time.

He felt that he was really lucky today, so he wanted to extract this old man as he might get something decent.

It might even be better if he gets a Spell Model that he already has so he would no longer spend some Energy Points to increase their level.

However, the old man said something very interesting, so he decided to stop and listen. Even if he was simply trying to buy some time, Vale felt it might be important since the old man was now desperate.

"What did you just say?" Vale asked while his Shadow Mutilation was active.

Of course, he couldn't hold him for long. He could only do this for 60 seconds, so he would end his life if this old man didn't give him a satisfying answer. If possible, he would extract him to death!

There was no way he would let this old thing live after doing that to his friend. Philip may not have visible injuries, but he definitely suffered in this dungeon.

"I'm telling the truth! At this rate, the Association would gather all the powerful Factions to team up once again to destroy the Dark Arts Faction! I had no choice but to change the Faction from the inside, but I got exposed by that Jean after I invited him! He made me a criminal even though I just wanted to ensure that we wouldn't get into another war!" Charles said in exasperation.

"What does it do with Philip?" Vale asked. He didn't really care if the Association attacked the Dark Arts Faction. As a matter of fact, he was also curious why they were just allowing the Dark Arts Academy to kill people in their recruitment process! That was actually terrible!

He thought that the Association didn't care at all.

"Philip? He's important! He has the perfect physique to be the best item! With his great talent, he would be one of our best Mystical Artifacts! Perhaps, we could make a Sovereign Rank item out of him! Don't you have that Mask and Dagger? They're both made from the best Elementalists that dared to oppose their Faction. They're incomplete, but they're definitely strong, right?!"

Vale was stunned and couldn't speak after hearing this.

This was something he had never expected at all.

'They're creating Mystical Artifacts from other Practitioners?' Vale clenched his fist as he realized the dark side of the Arcane Path once again.

He couldn't help but take a deep breath to calm his raging heart. Indeed, an evil cult really exists in this world.

It was a good thing that he learned it this early.

"So it was like that... Do you have anything else to say?" Vale coldly asked.

The Dark Aura that was spilling out of his body was getting denser, and he wasn't noticing it at all.

This time, Charles could tell that the young man didn't understand him.

He was like Jean Hoffman, who didn't understand the importance of being loyal to the Association!

"You don't understand! The Dark Arts Faction is not a match against the three opposing Factions! If you include the two Churches aiming to destroy them, you'll know that changing the Faction's view is better!"

Vale shook his head at this. He already knows that the Dark Arts Faction was wanted by other Factions and Churches.

It was obvious, considering how they could disregard human lives at some point. Nevertheless, it doesn't mean that those other factions are better.

This man just admitted that they were using humans to create Mystical Artifacts!

Vale already had enough so he started his Extraction.

Chapter 293 Prepared

Once again, Vale didn't stop after getting a single failure.

[Extraction Successful. Energy +40]

[Extraction Successful. Intelligence +0.25]

[Extraction Successful. Agility +0.35]

[Extraction Successful. Complete Spectral Hands Spell Model]

[Extraction Successful. Incomplete Spell Light + 1]

[Extraction Failed.]

[Extraction Successful. Energy +10]

[Extraction Successful. Complete Corrupted Chains Model]

[Extraction Failed.]

[Extraction Successful. Incomplete Moonlight Curse Model]

[Extraction Successful. Incomplete Spell Light + 1]

[Extraction Failed.]

"Ahhh..." Vale's eyes widened as he felt something ominous after extracting the previous Headmaster of the Academy.

He wanted to take the old man's belongings and even explore the castle for a bit, but his Extrasensory Perception told him to run away quickly. He could only grab the cane that was on the ground before he decided to move.

He didn't understand what was happening, but he knew he had to follow his instincts since this Spell wasn't just for show.

He controlled the Shadow Soldier to bring Philip and ordered Yvaine to protect the two;

As for him, he also dashed out of the dungeon to take cover.

The moment he did this, a massive Formation Circle covering the whole castle appeared. The ground and the surroundings glowed brightly!

He could feel that a vast amount of energy was gathering at the center of the castle. He wasn't sure what kind of Formation Circle he was dealing with, so there was no way he would stay in the castle for long.

"Stop!"

"You thieves! Come back here!"

"The Viscount's guards are already surrounding the castle. You have nowhere else to go!"

"Surrender now or prepare to die!"

The remaining guards, who weren't Arcane Arts Practitioners, tried stopping them from leaving the castle. Unfortunately, they were too weak to hold them back.

With the Shadow Soldier's Speed and Yvaine's Deathly Gaze, they could only watch their backs as they disappeared from their sight.

Vale also had no issues fleeing the place with his current speed.

As soon as they got out of the castle, the pillars, walls, ceilings, and statues inside the castle started crumbling.

The castle collapsed in a matter of seconds, burying even the remaining guards inside!

Boom! Boom...

'This... How ruthless. They wanted to erase any form of evidence to the point of sacrificing their own people.' Vale couldn't help but sigh as he felt that this was simply too much. He couldn't imagine doing the same thing if he ever had people working under him.

"You still managed to escape?" A high-pitched female voice interrupted Vale's thoughts as he looked ahead of him.

About 30 meters away from him, a group of people started to surround him and Philip... At this time, he already ordered Yvaine to enter his Shadow and for his Shadow Soldier to disappear.

'So they're the real enemies?' Vale thought as he scanned the group of people.

There were over 50 of them, and they were all Arcane Arts Practitioners.

According to his Divine Sense, most of them are Combat Arts Practitioners. There were only 4 Holy Arts Practitioners and 5 Mystic Arts Practitioners.

The one person that alarmed him was the girl who had spoken just now. She was a Psychic Arts Practitioner with 9 Spell Lights!

She seemed like a fragile and chaste noble lady on the outside, but she was definitely rotten on the inside. Vale could feel something off on her.

Vale then fixed the mask on his face as he held Philip tightly. The previous Headmaster seemed to have used a restraining spell on Philip, so he was still listless. He seemed to be partially awake and not completely unconscious.

"Who are you?" Vale asked the noble lady.

"Oh... Right. I'm Tracie Coulston. I'm the owner of that castle you destroyed with your Dark Arts." Tracie replied.

She didn't even mind introducing her real identity, so Vale was a bit alarmed.

"I destroyed the castle?" He asked.

"Yes, you are a criminal who rescued a prisoner that our family caught. You even used explosives to destroy our castle. How cruel... As expected of the Dark Arts Faction, you even killed the innocent guards and servants in the castle."

"Ha! So you wanted to put all the blame on me? You don't even know my identity. Good luck with that."

"We don't know yet. However, it's not like you'll be able to escape from here." Tracie said with a playful smile on her face.

It appears that while Vale was infiltrating the castle, she already made up a plan to ensure that he won't be able to escape and that they could blame the Dark Arts Faction no matter what.

"You've made a mistake..." Vale muttered as he decided to end this farce.

As he said this, Tracie's False Priests finished their ritual and cast their Spells.

"Holy Chains! Bind the blasphemer!"

Vale squinted his eyes as he used his Spell Dispersion to destroy the chains.

Crash... Crash... Crash.

The chains started disintegrating as they neared him. However, there were dozens of them, and even after destroying ten snake-like silver chains, they just kept coming back!

Seeing that the chains would keep coming unless he stopped the priests, Vale changed his tactics.

He held Philip tightly with his right hand while holding the cane in his left hand. Then, he used his Lightspeed to evade the Holy Chains from wrapping him.

With his Agility and Lightspeed, the chains looked very slow in front of him.

During this time, he was also using his Spirit Vision to locate the Trap Formations they placed around the castle.

After finding an escape route, Vale left them a gift. He didn't want to stay here for long since his Dark Energy and Life Energy weren't infinite.

Anyway, the gift he left them was another Divine Lightning aiming to kill the young noble lady.

After all, there was no point using any Dark Arts in front of those False Priests. They could just use a strong Holy Aura, and his Ghost Hands, Moonlight Curse, or other Dark Spells would disappear in seconds.

However, something unexpected happened. It seemed they were waiting for the Divine Lightning all along!

"Haha! Come at me!" Tracie laughed as she noticed the changes in the sky. She doesn't seem afraid of the lightning strike! She even looked above with great expectations.

Chapter 294 Thief

Boom!

As soon as the lightning came, Vale noticed that Tracie was already holding a double-edged sword and it was pointed at the sky. She was laughing in excitement!

'Does she think she's an immortal?' Vale frowned.

As he saw that the lightning didn't create the destruction he was expecting to see, he suddenly had a bad feeling about this. They were actually baiting him to summon his lightning all this time.

They were indeed prepared to deal with his Divine Lightning!

That sword she was holding must be the bane of all Lightning Attacks!

He then heard the group cheer as they celebrated their successful operation.

"Haha! My sword is finally complete! That lightning must've really come from the heavens. This is awesome." Tracie said in delight as she looked at her sword that was emitting a strong fluctuation of energy.

"Congratulations, young miss."

"This a great news..."

"Now, if we turn Philip into a Mystical Artifact, we will be able to advance our plan."

"Perfect! Capture that masked man! Hurry!"

Vale was about to disappear with his Lightspeed when he heard their words.

'You think you've won already?' Vale silently thought as he hated the idea that they used his lightning to power up their Mystical Item or whatever they did just now.

Without any hesitation, Vale used his Ghost Hands. Three ghastly and terrifying hands appeared, and he controlled one of them to hold the cane of the previous Headmaster. Then, the other two Ghost Hands were used to protect him.

After doing this, he used his Light Absorption to remove any light in the surroundings, and at the same time, he shifted his focus to the sword and triggered his other spell.

Traceless Shift!

In the blink of an eye, Vale held the heavy double-edged sword in his hands!

"Shit! He stole the sword! After him!"

Within the darkness, everyone heard Tracie's high-pitched voice as she commanded them to chase after Vale.

Of course, the latter was already running away the moment he got the sword!

'Yvaine, can you keep these items inside my Shadow?'

'Impossible.' Yvaine answered.

Vale already knows this, but he still tried, just in case.

Whoosh~

Vale kept moving while his Ghost Hands were active.

The number of people that they mobilized was actually larger than the ones he detected a while ago.

Numerous spells would come flying at him as soon as they sensed his presence...

Luckily, Vale was still filled with stamina, and running away wasn't a big problem.

After some time, he managed to escape their pursuit, and at the same time, he felt that Philip was waking up.

No, he was coughing out blood!

Vale stopped momentarily as he put down his friend.

Vale had prepared his healing medicine for this situation, so he forcefully fed it to Philip.

It seemed quite effective and this made Vale heave a sigh of relief.

'Stay strong, Philip...'

After Philip stopped coughing, he started breathing calmly. He finally looked a lot better, but he was still unconscious.

He called out his name softly, "Philip? Philip, can you hear me? It's me, Vale."

Philip didn't respond. He didn't even open his eyes. Vale felt a surge of fear in his chest.

He checked Philip's pulse and breathing. They were weak but steady. He tried to wake him up by shaking him gently or slapping him lightly. Unfortunately, nothing worked.

After inspecting him a bit with his Spirit Vision, Vale realized that Philip was unconscious not because of physical harm but because of mental harm. If he would make a guess, someone had used a powerful mind spell on him to probably search or erase his memories or alter his personality to make him loyal to the enemy.

Vale could only imagine what they'd done. He might be overthinking, but he couldn't help but consider these things.

Vale felt anger rising in him. He should've acted wildly a bit more. However, he needed to save Philip and continuing to fight in that situation might just hurt the latter.

'Tracie Coulston... I'll remember you. Let me put a Mark on you for now...' Vale silently thought as he lifted Philip's body and carried him over his shoulder.

He cast a spell to create a cloak of invisibility around them and headed for the exit. It wasn't really an invisibility spell. It was simply his ESP spell that could isolate their presence and become 'invisible' in others' magic zone...

In short, they could only 'see' them using their eye vision and not with their Magic Zone while in this state.

'Hmm? They're still here? Just how many people did they mobilize to chase us?' Vale mused as he moved forward. He had entered the nearby forest and planned to get to the next city from there.

He was hesitating whether to stop and fight or just focus on escaping.

'Tsk... I'll just deal with you guys later on.' Vale thought.

In the end, Vale decided to be on the defensive.

Philip looked fragile right now, and a random offensive spell might end his life. His rescue mission would be completely pointless if he died right now.

He needed to get out of the Viscount's territory, or he'll just be facing more enemies and obstacles.

He used his spells, mostly his Ghost Hands, to defend himself and Philip. As expected, he didn't take some hits and wounds since he kept his focus on deflecting attacks instead of counter-attacking them.

Although he felt his strength and dark energy draining, he felt that it was more than enough to leave this place.

In any case, with his Agility, Strength, and Vitality, it was simply impossible to chase him unless they were using a vehicle or a horse in this jungle.

It didn't take that long until the enemies gave up as they exhausted their Arcane Energy and physical stamina.

In the meantime, while Vale was approaching the small village that he found, the incident about the destruction of the Murton Castle started to spread in every Association's Factions and Arcane Organizations, including the five prominent churches.

The nickname Devil Incarnate had started to spread throughout the kingdom. As a matter of fact, a wanted poster was already being printed to be sent to all the cities and towns in the kingdom!

Chapter 295 Current Attributes

Vale looked at his friend, who was still unconscious. Philip looked a lot better now after he continuously fed him his Healing Medicine.

He even made ten more of these medicines in case Philip needed more.

About an hour ago, he took his time to level up his Blessed Healing spell from Level 4 to Level 6 to enhance the effect of the "Healing Potion" he could make.

It was a good thing he did this since Philip's face started having some color afterward. He no longer looked pale, and his cheeks also started turning red.

They're currently staying in a small village, and Vale made sure that this place didn't have a single Arcanist to avoid a similar incident he had to go through when he was together with Cressida.

He would no longer make the same mistake.

'Whew... What a long day...' Vale silently thought as he looked outside the window of their room.

He spread out his Magic Zone once again, and this time, he fully concentrated on this task. To his surprise, he was able to reach 310 meters!

It seemed that the battle a while ago made him even better with his control over his Phantasm State.

Three hundred meters was a range that even Headmaster Jean wouldn't reach!

It also means that his Divine Sense could scan such a vast range if he used enough energy.

After confirming that they should be safe for now, Vale finally checked his status so he could see the improvement he made thus far.

[Name: Kyle Marshall]

[Attributes: Strength 69.35, Agility 68.25, Intelligence 100, Vitality 67.80]

[Dark Arts: Spell Dispersion Lv7, Ghost Hand Lv7, Incorruptible Body Lv8, Darkness Manipulation Lv7, Spirit Vision Lv4, Light Absorption Lv6, Create Shadow Soldier Lv7, Cursed Breath Lv4, Moonlight Curse Lv6, Darkness Coil Lv0, Spectral Hands Lv1, Corrupted Chains Lv0]

[Holy Arts: Divine Sense Lv7, Blessed Healing Lv6]

[Celestial Arts: Call of the Divine Lightning Lv4, Shadow Mutilation Lv6]

[Summoning Art: Grimoire Attraction Lv6]

[Transformation Art: Human Shapeshift Lv8, Beast Shapeshift Lv0, Voice Manipulation Lv0]

[Martial Art: Meridian Access Lv7]

[Mystic Arts: Arcane Armor Lv1, Soul Bind Lv2]

[Neutral Ability: Extrasensory Perception Spell Lv7, Traceless Shift Lv7, Lightspeed Lv7]

[Available Energy: 1857]

[Available Divinity: 2797.80]

"Mhmm... This looks great... I could probably pass as a Shapeshifter with this set of skills." Vale muttered with a smile.

The addition of the Voice Manipulation would really make him untraceable at this rate. He could already see himself freely roaming the world without being traced by any Factions once he got his shadow back.

'Eh? Wait--I'm sure that my Intelligence should've exceeded 100 by now.' Vale furrowed his brows as soon as he noticed that there was something wrong with his status.

He tried to recall his previous extractions as he looked at his attributes doubtfully.

'I can't be wrong... I extracted several Intelligence Attributes, and I should be around 107 points by now. What's going on?' Vale was speechless as he tried to think of a reason.

'Is that the limit of my attributes?' Vale thought after some time.

'Is this the limit that a human Arcanist can reach?'

Vale couldn't help but reach this conclusion. This was not good news to him since it meant he would waste his intelligence extractions from now on!

Vale shook his head in frustration.

Nevertheless, Vale still felt grateful since he had already learned about his Focused Extractions.

The limitation he discovered today means he could no longer use his Auto-Extraction as it would just waste his extraction attempt if he got Intelligence points instead.

'I guess I can't reach one thousand attributes, huh... Perhaps I have to complete something to exceed my limit?' Vale silently thought.

Anyway, he decided not to overthink this as he shifted his attention to the cane and the sword he got.

The silver and black cane was from Charles Blackwood, the previous headmaster. After entering his Phantasm State, he saw three black flames inside.

It means that the cane has the power of darkness inside.

Vale couldn't help but recall something from this. This is similar to the golden pocket watch that he had when he allowed Master Heinz to check it.

At that time, the Pocketwatch had a tiny black flame inside, which could bring misfortune to people possessing the item. This is what they concluded when they checked it before in their Phantasm State.

However, the Pocketwatch is completely different now.

After it was fixed and kept in his bag for so long, the Pocketwatch had already changed and seemed to have gathered enough mystical energy.

This is the reason why he had decided to always keep it beside him from now on.

He was actually starting to believe that this Pocketwatch was really an item that was previously owned by the Paragons! It may be in its recovering state right now, but Vale knows that it was only a matter of time until it gets back to its peak.

'This Cane should have an interesting power. I should ask Headmaster Jean about this. They have a similar Cane... perhaps I should just sell this to him if he liked it?' Vale thought to himself as he looked at the intricately designed cane.

This cane doesn't seem to suit him, so he didn't mind selling it if an opportunity came. The silver design on it makes it heavier.

He would rather choose a light wood material if he ever had a cane. He also wanted to make it with a simpler design instead of making it too luxurious.

After looking at this, he shifted his attention to the sword. It is currently shrouded in darkness and doesn't look like a sword at all.

His face turned serious as he asked Yvaine.

"Can you still restrain its power? You're not draining it, are you?"

"I can't drain it even if I want to. Lightning works well against Spirit. I might die if I went too far." Yvaine answered.

The power emitted by the sword was simply too much.

If he did not ask Yvaine to restrain it, there was no way he would be able to enter this village without garnering suspicions.

Chapter 296 Found

Three days had quickly passed after Vale infiltrated the castle.

At this time, even the students in the Academy had been informed that the place where Philip was being held was destroyed by an Arcanist known as the Masked Devil Incarnate.

No one knew which Faction this Arcanist belonged to, but according to the noble family that was attacked, the Masked Devil was capable of using Dark Arts, and he had various Mystical Artifacts that allowed him to summon lightning, use an Aura, and possess a monstrous strength.

In short, the Masked Devil certainly had an organization supporting him behind the scenes.

Because of this, the Dark Arts Faction was blamed for the death of many innocent people working in the castle.

Of course, the Faction didn't stay silent after being accused by those people. The Dark Sorcerer Refuge released a statement that the Faction wasn't involved in the destruction of the castle.

It wasn't just that. They also spread a piece of information related to the Secret Organization.

They hinted that the Viscount's family must be involved with the said Organization searching for the relics of the three Paragons. They suspected that the Organization must've offended someone they shouldn't, so they received such a strong retaliation for the Masked Devil.

In the Vermont Academy, Headmaster Jean was reading the newspaper with a frown.

He then looked at the tall, middle-aged man seated on his office couch.

"Isaac... Do you think Vale was involved in this thing? To be fair, it feels like something he could do..." Jean said after putting down the newspaper.

"Aren't you overestimating the kid?" Isaac asked as he played around with the card he was holding.

Jean shook his head at this as he explained. "I'm not saying he did this alone. However, he must be involved in some way, considering how the Dark Seers failed to account for the appearance of the Masked Devil and how Vale volunteered to check out the situation... I believe it wasn't just a coincidence."

Isaac went silent for a brief moment before he nodded.

"If he inherited the secret treasures of the Chambers Family and if Heinz didn't tell you everything about his experiment, then perhaps, this is related to Vale." Isaac said. He was also considering how the Masked Devil summoned such a bolt of lightning that even the five Churches had to be wary of.

The churches may not have spoken out loud about this matter, but according to their sources, even the Cardinals were mobilized to try and subdue this Masked Devil.

Unfortunately, this person disappeared after the incident, and until now, no one knows his whereabouts.

"Mhmm... I wonder when will he return... He's really taking his time." Jean muttered as he summoned Vale's shadow in his palm.

"Speaking of which, what about Philip's shadow?" Isaac asked.

Jean smiled at this and showed Philip's lively shadow.

"He's fine... He still has plenty of energy. It seems that he was really saved. I'm guessing that while the Masked Devil was causing chaos outside the castle, Vale must've sneaked in and saved Philip in the process." Jean replied before keeping the two's shadows back to his body.

As the two continued chatting about the news they'd recently received.

The people they've been waiting for have finally arrived.

The door of the office opened, and a group of seven Dark Alchemists entered the room.

"Good afternoon, Headmaster Jean. I'm Zach Everette, the Captain of the Vessel's Alchemy Division. I've heard plenty of things about you."

Zach, a tall and skinny man in his twenties, introduced himself with a gentle smile on his face. His blond hair, which was slowly turning white from its roots, was quite eye-catching since he was too young to have white hair.

"I should've greeted you outside, but I had another visitor to attend to—" Headmaster Jean said as he gestured to Isaac, who was sitting comfortably on the couch.

"It's alright, Headmaster Jean. We're basically interrupting your operations in the Academy by coming here on such short notice." Zack waved his hands.

He didn't really mind meeting here in the office. He felt that this was much better than welcoming them in the dockyard.

"In any case, I'm already excited to see Master Heinz's apprentice... When can I meet him?" Zach asked the Headmaster.

This time, the other six who had also come with him looked at Headmaster Jean with an expectant gaze.

In the meantime, in the middle of the day in Carmen Village, where Vale and Philip are staying, a couple of Arcanists started looking around its surroundings.

The two of them looked very calm as they silently scanned the whole village.

"Seriously, did the enemy think we won't find them here?" A man wearing a black trench coat and top hat said with a hint of confusion.

"Erika, go ahead and report this to the Viscount." The man said as he looked at his assistant.

"Sir Sherman, the enemy this time is very strong. Are you sure you can handle this yourself?" Erika asked after some hesitation.

"I'm fine. You'll just hold me back if you stay here." Sherman replied as he waved his hand to send Erika away.

Erika could no longer stop her boss as she swiftly left to find the Viscount. If she could bring back reinforcements as quickly as possible, then that would be the biggest contribution she could make.

At this time, Vale stood up as he suddenly felt something was off. He immediately entered his Phantasm State as he spread his Magic Zone...

'They found us?' Vale silently thought.

There were tiny fluctuations of energy in the surroundings. Although it was barely noticeable, there was no way he would miss these changes after being on high alert over the past couple of days.

"Is something wrong, Vale?" Philip asked after seeing Vale looking so serious.

Philip had already woken up last night. He was still weak, but besides forgetting numerous things while he was captured, he seemed okay.

Before Vale could even answer, the house they were at started shaking!

The walls and ceilings started to crack as Vale had no choice but to be on the defensive.

Boom!

A powerful tornado spell seemed to have been used as the roof of the rented house was blown away in just a few seconds!

Chapter 297 Match

'What a strong Wind Spell.' Vale thought as he looked above to see the floating perpetrator. At this time, he already had his Human Shapeshift Spell activated and didn't look like his original appearance at all.

Nevertheless, he still looked young similar to Philip's age.

At this time, he wasn't in a hurry to either escape or fight. He wanted to see if he could actually extract this person who managed to evade the natural detection of his Extrasensory Perception Spell.

The only reason he felt that something was off just now was because of his unnatural high intelligence. Having 100 Intelligence Points or 50 Spirit Strands seems to have increased his sensitivity in the surroundings.

"This... Should we not run away, Vale?" Philip softly asked while looking at the man floating above the village.

The villagers also witnessed this scene as they started panicking and running away. Seeing someone flying might be quite an awesome sight, but it was also terrifying from another perspective.

Nevertheless, Vale didn't feel the pressure facing this man for some reason. Right now, with his current set of spells, he just can't think that someone could defeat him alone. Perhaps he would consider running away if there were a dozen of them.

"Haa... So they have to send me to chase after a kid? Tsk..." Sherman said with a frown as he fixed his top hat while floating.

"Hey, are you the Masked Devil?" He added.

"Masked Devil?" Vale couldn't help but smile after hearing this. He certainly heard about this nickname after staying here for a while.

"Yes, the one who destroyed the Murton Castle? Are you his apprentice or something? You don't look that impressive." The man said as he briefly glanced at Philip before shifting his gaze to Vale.

He could guess that Philip was the one who had been rescued from the castle. On the other hand, Vale seemed too young to be the notorious Masked Devil he heard from his employer.

Since the Devil Incarnate could summon lightning and defeat the previous Headmaster of the Vermont Academy, he was expecting something more.

He was expecting a mysterious man with a deathly aura surrounding his body, holding a skull cane, with a devil-like face, sinister eyes, and evil spirits surrounding him...

However, Vale's appearance disappointed him.

In the meantime, Vale was also assessing the man. He used his Divine Sense but to his surprise, he didn't get a feedback!

The man must have a powerful Mystical Artifact to avoid the Divine Sense's detection!

Vale took a deep breath as he considered a few things for a moment before deciding not to answer the man's question. He didn't see the benefit of answering him for now.

Instead, he raised his hands and opened his palm.

'Traceless Shift...'

Vale triggered his spell as he targeted the man's top hat. He knew that it was a Mystical Artifact, so he didn't hesitate to take it. That would surely surprise the man, and Vale wanted to see how he would react once it was stolen.

However, something unexpected happened when he triggered his spell.

For the first time, he felt resistance using the Traceless Shift!

He saw how the top hat only shook for a moment before stabilizing again.

'This guy is too mysterious... This is dangerous.' Vale silently thought as he looked at the person above them with a serious look on his face.

"Ho~ What did you just do?" The man squinted his eyes as he asked curiously. He touched his top hat and inspected it briefly but didn't find anything wrong.

He was confused.

"What you did seemed harmless, so my defensive spell didn't activate. I'm curious..." He muttered.

Vale frowned at this since the man didn't seem to notice what he just did! It means his Traceless Shift was resisted without much effort!

Then, he also tried using his Spirit Vision, and once again, he actually failed to see something abnormal in the man even though he was literally floating in the sky!

After some thought, Vale decided to change his tactic.

"I'm Eustace. Who are you? Why are you doing this to us?"

He needed to know the person before him, so he decided to engage in a conversation.

"Eustace, huh... That's a rare name. Are you from the western region?"

"What if I am?" Vale asked.

"Mhmm... I just want to know my enemy. You can call me Sherman. I'm an Arcanist hired to chase after the Masked Devil, not you and your friend. Now, tell me where the Masked Devil is, and I promise as a respected bounty hunter, you won't be involved in my hunt."

He paused for a moment as he seemed to have realized something and said, "Oh, did he leave the two of you after sensing my presence?" Sherman added as he started descending.

"He must've fled by now, huh..."

With his current strength, he can't feel threatened by a couple of kids, so he appears quite relaxed.

Well, considering he was sent here to chase after the Masked Devil Incarnate, it was certain that he had the strength to back his confidence.

Vale decided that it was enough to probe this man.

He summoned his three Ghost Hands before Sherman could land beside them.

Sherman smirked, seeing the three giant Ghost Hands that Vale had summoned.

He also used a similar technique, but in his case, he used three human-sized Fire Hands to stop his Ghost Hands!

Vale felt it was a ridiculous match, but to his surprise, the Ghost Hands barely lasted for a couple of seconds before being destroyed!

"Hmm?" Vale was momentarily surprised, but he quickly collected his mind.

Whoosshh~

The three Fire Hands didn't disappear yet as they started getting closer to him.

'So Ghost Hands are a bad match against these flaming hands?' Vale furrowed his brows as he looked at the Spells coming at him.

He decided not to dodge this spell since Philip was behind him.

Instead, he confidently used his Spell Dispersion Spell to remove the Fire Hands in his sight. He even used his Shadow Soldier Spell at the same time and made it appear below Sherman while he was descending.

However, another unexpected thing happened.

'W-what? Isn't this a bit too tough?!' Vale thought as he gathered his Dark Energy in his palm and slapped the weakening Fire Hands.

Poof! Poof! Poof!

The Elemental Spell was finally dealt with.

That's right, his Spell Dispersion just now didn't disperse the Fire Spell but only weakened it to the point that he could just slap it to disappear.

The Spell Dispersion was still working, but it didn't seem effective against the man's spell!

'What's going on?'

Vale then shifted his attention to his Shadow Soldier and realized that a hand-sized mirror, held by Sherman, was beaming light on his soldier and made it unable to move!

It was even slowly melting away!

Chapter 298 Deal

"Ho~ You have some nice spells. What kind of Dark Art was that? You actually managed to weaken my Advanced Realm Molten Hands and even slapped them safely without burning your hands." Sherman said with genuine curiosity.

He looked at Vale with an amused smile as he didn't expect such a result.

The Molten Hands he used just now were simply meant to scare the two kids. He didn't intend to kill them since he felt they should be given a chance.

After all, when he was their age, he also committed various petty crimes to survive in the streets of a larger city.

Because of that, he had a soft spot for these kids that weren't on the right path. He then shifted his attention to the summoned being below him.

"This Shadow Soldier was also quite impressive. It's been a while since I've seen someone use this Spell. It's resisting my mirror really well. I didn't know you could have such a tough summon just by using a shadow as a medium. I thought it won't be stronger than Evil Creatures..." Sherman said with interest. He couldn't help but praise the Shadow Soldier that Vale summoned.

"Eustace, tell me... Are you the Masked Devil's son?" Sherman asked.

He can't tell what realm of mastery Eustace has achieved with this Shadow Soldier Spell since he had no one to compare with. Nevertheless, he knows that not just anyone can suppress this being. It was a good thing that he was the one who got this mission.

If other bounty hunters tried chasing this kid, they would certainly die just from the Shadow Soldier he was suppressing.

'It seems I have to be careful of Dark Magicians with Shadow Soldier in the future.' He added in his mind.

This time, Vale realized the threat of the man in front of him, so he answered cautiously. "I'm not... The Masked Man had already left the two of us since his mission was simply to rescue him!" Vale said as he pointed to Philip.

"I'm sent here to bring back the student your employer kidnapped. If you want to know about that person, ask the Dark Arts Faction. They might be the one who hired that Masked Devil." Vale added.

He also canceled his Shadow Soldier spell at this time since he can only use three Spells at the same time.

Because of that, three of his Spells were unusable for a few moments. They were the Traceless Shift, Ghost Hands, and Shadow Soldier.

As for his Spell Dispersion, the cooldown of this Spell was only a few seconds since he didn't use its wide-area function.

'Should I use Shadow Mutilation?' Vale pondered as he stepped closer to Philip. He also grabbed the cane and the lightning sword wrapped into a cloth bundle.

"Hmm... He already left?" Sherman repeated as he touched his shaved beard.

"Yes... If you still want to capture us, then we will fight to the death!" Vale answered though he wasn't really intent on doing that.

He was simply waiting for a chance to activate his Planar Spell. He was confident that this man shouldn't be able to defend against a Celestial Arts...

The only problem with this plan is even if he landed the Planar Spell, Vale himself wasn't confident of destroying the man's shadow.

This person had too many defensive spells and artifacts with him!

As he was considering of using his Lightspeed and Light Absorption to escape, he heard Sherman sigh as he looked at them.

"Tsk... My mission is to eliminate the Masked Devil and not to kidnap kids, alright? Don't lump me in with those nobles... I don't have the same hobby as them. However, I can't just pretend I didn't see you." Sherman paused as he thought for a moment.

"If you manage to stop one of my attacks, I'll just let the two of you go."

After hearing this, Vale realized that this person wasn't that bad. Although he was a bit dumb for not thinking that he was the Masked Devil, he seemed to have morals and wasn't that ruthless. Vale liked this type of person, so he agreed.

"Very well, Sir Sherman... Come at me..." Vale nodded as he triggered his Arcane Armor and Spirit Vision.

Although he can't observe Sherman's energy circulation with the Spirit Vision, he would at least know the flow of energy around him.

That way, he would be able to properly adjust his Spell Dispersion.

Well, if Sherman would only use his Physical Strength to attack, Vale was confident that with his Strength and Life Attributes, he would be able to survive without any issues.

However, if he uses a Spell, it would be a different story. He had to use his Spell Dispersion in this case.

"Mhmm... Nice aura. I can say that you have a solid foundation. You must have a great teacher." Sherman commented, but he didn't stop making his move.

He stretched out his hand and pointed his left index finger at Vale like a gun. Then, the Arcane Energy around them started to gather at the tip of his finger.

Philip worriedly looked at Vale as he could tell that the person in front of them was probably stronger than his father or anyone he had seen in the Hoffman Family Branch.

As soon as Sherman was reaching the limit of his attack, Philip felt droplets of cold sweat forming on his forehead and sliding down his cheeks.

He wished he could disappear, but Sherman's Aura was making him stay on his feet!

It was an invisible suppression that no First-Class Practitioner should be capable of.

"This guy is a Master Arcanist or even higher!" Philip shouted in his mind as he saw a ray of light coming out of Sherman's finger...

He closed his eyes in despair, but as he was expecting to be killed, he realized nothing had hit him.

To his surprise, Vale was still firmly standing on his spot while Dark Aura was spilling out of his body similar to the Necromancers and Dullahan Knights he had seen before!

Chapter 299 Attention

Sherman looked at Eustace and Philip, who were running away after he allowed them to leave. He couldn't help but realize how old he had gotten over the past years working as a bounty hunter.

"That fellow is only about fifteen or sixteen years old, but he actually managed to stop 50% of my full-force attack... What kind of monster did the Dark Arts Faction create this time? Did they forget how they were almost annihilated because of their experiment?" Sherman shook his head as he shifted his attention to the people behind him.

A cute and plump female Arcanist, followed by a dozen Radiant Knights, were rushing to the village.

Needless to say, the female Arcanist was Erika, his assistant. She had called for reinforcement since they were expecting to fight against the Masked Devil Incarnate.

"W-what happened here? Where's the enemy?"

Erika was shocked as soon as she saw the destroyed house and the fleeing villagers.

Sherman could only scratch his head and pointed to the spot where he attacked Eustace.

"They escaped." He said with an apologetic smile on his face.

Erika was speechless since she knew Sherman wasn't this type of person. If the enemies really escaped, he wouldn't just wait for her reinforcement and would've followed the Masked Devil instead.

Nevertheless, she didn't point this out as she looked at the area Sherman had pointed out.

It was devastated, and the surrounding was filled with rubble, but there was certainly a spot where the enemy caught or blocked Sherman's attack!

"The Masked Devil resisted your Unshaded Flair?"

Erika asked in surprise as she looked at Sherman to confirm her guess.

Sherman didn't answer, but he gently nodded and left the scene. It seems that he was no longer in the mood to chase their target.

Erika wanted to say something more, but a few villagers started surrounding them. In the end, they still caused trouble in the peaceful village, so she had to compensate them for all the damages.

'Masked Devil Incarnate... I didn't know you were that impressive. It's a pity I didn't see the battle.'

Erika silently thought.

In the meantime, while they were busy at the village, Vale and Philip ran as fast as they could.

"Ugh..."

Vale felt a sharp pain in his chest where Sherman's ray of light had hit him.

He knew he was lucky to survive, but he also wondered how he had managed to resist such a powerful attack.

"Are you okay, Vale?" Philip asked, looking at him with concern.

"You took a direct hit from Sherman. I can tell that he's a Master Arcanist or even above that... How did you do that?"

Vale wryly smiled at this as he shook his head, trying to clear his mind.

"I don't know, Philip. I just..."

'I just focused on my Arcane Armor, Spell Dispersion, and Incorruptible Body. I guess they somehow worked together to protect me.' Vale wanted to say this, but his spells weren't spells he should be sharing with others.

First of all, the Arcane Armor was not a Dark Spell, and the other two were Spells from the Malefic Branch, which wasn't recorded in the Academy as 'Safe Spell to be Recorded' yet.

"I just did it... I was lucky that my physique wasn't the same as normal practitioners." He answered.

Philip nodded as he was really impressed by what he witnessed a while ago.

A dark aura was spilling out of Vale's body, and that must be one of his secrets. He didn't mind if Vale wanted to keep it a secret, so he replied with a smile.

"That's amazing, Vale. I guess you'll get more enemies in the Academy at this rate." Philip said with a joke.

Vale smiled weakly as he knew what he was trying to say. "No thanks, Philip."

"Ugh... But I don't feel very strong right now. I feel like I'm about to collapse." Vale added as he closed his eyes for a moment. He had already consumed several bottles containing his healing medicine, but they were ineffective.

Philip wrapped his arm around Vale's shoulder, supporting him. "Don't worry, Vale. We're almost there. We just need to get to the next city, and we'll be back at the Vermont Academy."

Vale looked up and saw the path ahead of them. The sun was still bright, and they could sense a few people hunting in the forest while some were traveling on their carriages heading to the next city. The beautiful scenery around them seemed lovely and was a nice place to relax, but unfortunately, they couldn't stop right now as Sherman might change his mind and chase after them.

"Come on, Vale. We can do this." Philip said, encouraging him.

Vale nodded as he looked behind them. "Should we try asking them to give us a lift?"

Philip also looked behind and used his Phantasm State. Unlike Vale, he doesn't have a spell that helps him detect the presence of Arcanists. However, he at least learned how to sense the presence of Mystical Artifacts.

He only sensed a couple of Regular Rank Artifacts inside that carriage. They were Talismans meant to drive away bad spirits and curses.

They don't seem connected to their enemies, so after some hesitation, Philip agreed with Vale's suggestion.

He also realized that they are too eye-catching while running faster than horses. Furthermore, he couldn't use his Movement Spell for a long period, unlike Vale.

The Church of the Three Paragons was in a state of panic.

The Masked Devil, the mysterious Arcanist who had the power to summon a Heavenly Lightning, had successfully escaped after wreaking havoc in the castle.

They didn't care how he killed dozens of guards, priests, and knights... What mattered to them was that the Masked Devil had stolen the Divine Sword, a sacred relic that was said to contain the ancient power of the three paragons.

The Cardinals, the highest-ranking officials of the Church, had gathered in the Grand Hall to discuss the situation. They were all nervous and angry, blaming each other for the failure.

"How could this happen? Why was it even in the Coulston's possession?!" Cardinal Lucius, the leader of the Order of the First Paragon, shouted.

Cardinal Marcus, the leader of the Order of the Third Paragon, nodded. "Viscount Coulston had borrowed it a few days ago for a special mission. He pledged three of his mansion and all of his wealth if it was not returned in the stipulated time."

Cardinal Sophia, the leader of the Order of the Second Paragon, sighed. "It's obvious, Lucius. He was certainly called the Devil Incarnate for a reason. I heard he was safely using the Living Mask and Dagger without suffering any form of mind corruption. He probably used his devilish powers to resist. Lastly, he can use various mystical abilities because he has at least numerous Artifacts that are probably of Royal Rank."

Chapter 300 Return

Lucius clenched his fists. "Then we must stop him. We must find him and kill him before he does any more damage. We must reclaim the Divine Sword and restore our honor."

The wealth of the Viscount may be enticing, but it didn't really matter to them if the Divine Sword was missing. It was their mistake that they believed that nothing would go wrong after lending it to him. They were too confident that having various spies working for the Viscount and monitoring the sword all the time would resolve the problem.

Sophia shook her head. "It's not that easy, Lucius. He is too powerful for us to handle alone. Even the Elite Bounty Hunter that the Viscount hired failed to catch him. Furthermore, the Masked Devil didn't leave any clue aside from the fact that he uses Dark Arts. This person could be hiding anywhere. We need help. We need allies."

Marcus frowned. "What allies? Who would help us? The other Churches hate us for our arrogance and greed. The rebels and mountain bandits that could be useful at this time despise us for our oppression and cruelty. The heretics mock us for our hypocrisy and corruption. We're only allied with a few organizations taking care of Arcanists rejected by the large Factions.."

Sophia smiled bitterly. "There is one who might help us. One who can deal with the Heavenly Lightning and wanted to take one of the Celestial Bodies in our possession..."

Lucius raised his eyebrows. "Who?"

Sophia looked at him with a cold gaze and whispered.

"The Thunder Emperor..."

Vale Chambers and Philip Hoffman walked through the gates of the Vermont Academy, feeling a mix of relief and anxiety. They had just returned from a harrowing ordeal, and both of them didn't want to go through the same experience again.

'Should I look for Priscilla, first?' Vale thought but he immediately shook his head. He should just let the two siblings get together first. His matter could be done later.

It must be remembered that Vale had agreed to rescue Philip under Priscilla's request, who had promised to reveal their secret about the Arcana they were aware of.

There may be few pieces of information regarding Arcana but Vale knew they were mysterious and powerful forces that governed the world of Arcanists and Vale was eager to learn more about them.

But their return wasn't that smooth. Headmaster Jean, the leader of the Academy of Dark Arts, had summoned them to his office as soon as they arrived.

They weren't even inside the Academy when a shadow soldier appeared in front of them and told them to head to the office.

'So you can send your voice through the Shadow Soldier? How come I'm not aware of that...' Vale thought. He also felt curious why the Headmaster did not use his Telepathy for convenience.

'Ahh... Perhaps he can only use his Telepathy one at a time?'

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It didn't take long before Vale and Philip entered the headmaster's office, where they saw Priscilla waiting for them.

As soon as she saw Philip and Vale entering the room, she did not waste her time as she hugged her brother. She didn't have to speak to tell how happy she was that they were able to meet again.

It lasted for a few seconds as she recalled that the Headmaster and Vale were also in the room.

"You've become skinny..." Priscilla commented as she separated from her brother.

At this time, the Headmaster also spoke.

"Welcome back, student Vale Chambers and Philip Hoffman. I'm glad to see you are safe and sound. It was a huge blunder for the Academy to allow such intruders to kidnap its students. Because of what happened, the Academy will now waive your tuition fees and both of you will be given 10 contribution points for returning alive. But I'm afraid I have some questions for you." He said.

"Of course, sir. We're happy to cooperate." Vale said, trying to sound calm. However, deep inside, he was already celebrating. He previously had 29 Contribution Points after working as a Potion Tester for Professor Sherah. Now, he will receive another 10 Contribution Points making it a total of 39 Points!

"Good. Then tell me, where have you been for the past few days? And what do you know about the Masked Devil Incarnate?" Headmaster Jean asked.

Vale glanced at Philip, who nodded slightly. They had agreed on a story beforehand, hoping to avoid suspicion.

Philip knows that Vale was the Masked Devil but he already swore with his life not to tell anyone about it. Vale was his savior and there was no way he would put him in danger.

If it was spread that the Masked Devil and Vale were the same person, he would be the target of the Secret Organization.

"They took me to the Murton Castle, where they kept me in a dungeon. I can't recall what happened to me inside but I'm sure they extracted some information from me. I managed to escape thanks to Vale's assistance. However, it was with the help of a Master Arcanist who was also an enemy of the Coulston Family." Philip explained.

"That's right. I didn't know his name at that time but he happened to be there and I've taken the chance to save Philip while he was busy fighting against the soldiers. Then we both got injured and had to recuperate. We hide ourselves in a small village for a few days before we headed back here." Vale added.

Headmaster Jean narrowed his eyes, as if he didn't believe them.

"Is that so? And how did you escape from the castle? I heard there was a huge explosion that destroyed most of it." He asked, referring to the article he read about the incident.

"That was the Master Arcanist or the Masked Devil's doing. He used some kind of powerful spell--- Ah, No, it was done by Tracie Coulston. She's the one who destroyed the castle and blamed it on the Masked Devil." Vale responded.

"I see. And you have no idea who this Master Arcanist is? Or why he wore a mask?" Headmaster Jean asked. "As you know, the Dark Arts Faction is now being blamed for his actions. We aren't afraid to take the blame but we at least needed to meet with this Masked Devil so we'll know how to

proceed and avoid offending him." Headmaster added with a smile. He seemed to be trying to show that they were harmless and just wanted to meet with Masked Devil for negotiation.

"No, sir. We never saw his face or heard his real name." Vale replied.

"Hmm... And what about you, Priscilla? Do you know anything about this?" Headmaster Jean turned to Priscilla.

Priscilla hesitated for a moment, then shook her head.

"No, Headmaster. I don't know anything about this Master Arcanist or the Masked Devil Incarnate. I don't think our parents would be able to hire someone at that level to rescue my brother." She answered.

Headmaster Jean sighed and rubbed his temples.

"Very well. I suppose I have no choice but to believe you for now. But if you find some clues about his identity, you must let me know about it." He said.

"Yes, Headmaster. We understand." Vale and Philip said in unison.

"Good. Now go back to your dorms and rest. You have missed a lot of classes and assignments. You will have to catch up on them as soon as possible." Headmaster Jean said.

"Thank you, sir." Vale and Philip said again.

They got up and left the office, followed by Priscilla.

As soon as they were out of earshot, Priscilla grabbed their arms and pulled them aside.