

S vs Rebirth 151

Chapter 151 Life Lesson

"The first person is a merchant, the second person is the commoner, the third person is too good to be true." Noel answered.

Count Ardagan pointed at himself. "I'm the third person... Or you can say trying to live that way."

"Huh?" Noel narrowed his eyes.

"The third person is our ideal because he helps people with his kindness, not for what they can get!" Count Ardagan raised the forefinger, symbolizing the first person. "Let's talk about the first person first."

"If you meet someone like this, how are you going to approach them?"

Noel answered without hesitation, "Since they're going to suck me dry, then I don't mind fighting them as well."

"That's right. When you meet normal merchants, they'll try to set up the contract with a win-lose situation. They want to win as much as possible even if they have to destroy your life in the process. Even the nobles are like this. That's why even though they're good, they won't be liked." He then raised his middle finger, symbolizing the second person. "Then how about the second person?"

Noel had to contemplate this time before answering, "I can understand them since they have to live as well. They can be friends, but won't be more than that."

"That's right. In fact most people in the world falls into this category. They help because you have helped them or vice versa. Last but not least, how do you approach the third person?"

"They're good person and I personally like them the most. But if they're too gullible, they'll be taken advantage of. Though, I do admit that they're someone that I can trust."

Count Ardagan smiled in agreement. "This type of people will give without asking for rewards. It looks like this guy is too kind and too good to be true, but that's not the case. You can train yourself to be someone like this."

"Why should I? My wallet will be completely empty if I live like this."

"That depends on you." Count Ardagan shook his head. "When I rule people, I will extend my help when they need it without asking the commoners to give me anything. Helping people doesn't mean that you have to guarantee their lives or solve all their problems. They have to keep struggling like farming and such to sustain their lives so that they won't become lazy."

"But you still extend your help without asking anything. Just help them and solve a bit of their problems. Normally, you think that I'm the second person, but no! If I help them, I think like this, 'My money will disappear, but so what?'"

"It was true that it wasn't profitable, but I have said that most people are the second type, right? They'll try to think about helping me in the future. You don't have to expect anything from them even when making a big decision. If they don't give you anything back, then you don't have a problem since you don't have any expectation. But if they help you back, then you gladly accept them."

"So, every time you help people, I want you to think like this. Just genuinely help them and don't expect them to give you anything back. You help them because you want to. Even if they betray you in the future, you just have to deal with it. Don't think too much."

Noel lowered his head as if he understood what his father was saying. He muttered, "So, that's why Father's influence is great. You gain people's support easily and many people want to follow you even if they have to sacrifice their lives. Without you expecting anything from them, you have changed their lives. And they're the one wanting to repay you."

"And there are two more catches about this type of person. First, you will be the one with many connections that you don't expect. With that wide connection, expanding business to scrap the loss you suffer when helping them is possible. When people go to you, you'll be a person who can say, 'Don't worry. I got your back. I'll tell this guy about it.'"

"Yes. You'll be the person with the most connection. And the second advantage is that you have people's support. They can become soldiers when needed since they're ready to sacrifice their lives for you. And when you truly need help, you can simply ask them."

Count Ardagan nodded in agreement. "That's right. But you must remember, you have to help people without expecting anything back. That's the hardest part you have to control."

"I can understand. It seems that Father wants me to live this way for the Ardagan Household."

"That's right, but you're missing something. You don't have to use money to help them, so your coffer won't be that empty."

"Another form of help?" Noel widened his eyes.

"And that is..." Count Ardagan made a playful smile as if teasing Noel with the suspense and he ultimately said, "I'll reveal it next week."

Noel's eyebrows twitched. "Father!"

"I've told you that I'll be teaching one thing every week. I've made the rules, so I won't change it even if you beg me. This is what is called integrity."

"This is not fair. After you raise that suspense..." Noel clicked his tongue and still said out of spite. "Still, you just broke what you promised. You taught me about integrity, so it meant two things every week."

"Huh? You little..." Count Ardagan chuckled and patted Noel's head.

...

This memory was one of the drive forces why Noel helped people. In the fort, he helped the kids first with the fruits he gained from other people's gratitude. In the first village he visited, he helped those ladies with his speech. In the third village, he helped them by destroying the dam. Only in this city that he opened his personal coffer, the Honor Points, to help people.

That was why the mission itself was perfect for him since he could simply expect something from Ardagan, not from the people. Though, it might look like he barely became the third type.

He smiled playfully, teasing Anna. "There is a reason."

Anna's eyes brightened as she listened to Noel attentively, only to be disappointed because Noel added, "But I don't want to tell you."

"..." Anna's eyebrows twitched as she had the urge to move her fist. 'I want to punch him.'

Chapter 152 Why Always Me?

The next morning.

Noel and Anna were preparing for their assault.

"How do you inform them?" Anna asked. She had just scouted the demons and made sure they were still in their position.

"I'll simply leave the forest and inform them. Hopefully they haven't made their move yet." Noel shrugged. The plan was so simple as if Noel didn't bother to even come up with a better plan.

"What if they move when you're calling them?" She asked.

"You." Noel glanced at her.

"..." It took Anna a moment to finally understand what he meant. "You are using me as a beacon?"

"I can't do it, can't I?" Noel shrugged.

She wanted to say that Noel had the ability by releasing his second element, but it would also make him suspect her since no one should know about Noel's second element yet.

"Fine. I'll do it." She sighed. "This will be quite dangerous for me since I have to take them on if they're moving."

"We'll be regrouping with you as soon as possible." Noel nodded.

"You better do. Why do I always take up this hard job..." Anna let out a long sigh, recalling that she had to take on an Advanced Level Demon to buy time for Noel. And this time was no different.

"Sorry and thank you." After saying those words, Noel hurriedly leaped away, heading straight to the exit of the forest to inform the Saintess and the Holy Knights to go to their position. They had agreed that the Saintess would leave as soon as they got the signal, so he hoped they were already prepared to leave right now.

Noel used his fastest speed to reach the exit and as expected, the people had some trouble in maintaining the defense. They had been fighting the whole night, so it was clear that they were exhausted.

Hence, this was their last opportunity. The Saintess had to leave to use her ability to defeat the enemy after regaining some Spiritual Energy.

As soon as he left the forest, Noel tried to wave his hand to inform them. Because he wasn't clear whether they saw him or not, Noel cut down the trees next to him and planted it on the field so that everyone could see the weird, big trunk standing out of nowhere.

One of the soldiers spotted the trunk and shouted, "I saw a trunk and a man outside the forest!"

Without hesitation, he turned to the other side of the wall and shouted to the people below.

Behind the gates had already stood ten people with their horses. The one who led them was a Holy Knight Captain that had been following the Saintess with the latter being surrounded by the knights.

"It seems that everyone is ready." The Saintess smiled.

"Are you sure you're going to do this, Saintess?" The captain looked at the Saintess since this was the first time he saw Layla riding a horse on her own. She usually moved with carriage, so it was quite surprising to see her this way.

However, Layla simply nodded her head and said, "Before becoming a Saintess, I'm a knight wanna be. Don't worry."

"..." The knight captain was speechless for a moment before shouting, "Open the gate!"

As soon as she heard the Order, the Saintess used her ability to create a translucent barrier right outside the gate so that no monsters came into the city.

They walked outside the gate but still had some space between the gates and the end of the barrier, finding the demons trying to swarm this barrier.

"Close the gate!" The knight captain ordered again as he raised his sword. The white shiny sword started to bask in golden light as he swung it down the moment the Saintess retracted the barrier. "O' Moon Spirit..."

The sword released a torrential golden light forward, trying to engulf everything in its path.

"Let's go!" The Saintess shouted as they hurriedly moved outside to breakthrough. The torrential light was eliminating the demons as if they were being burned by the holy light.

However, the other demons from left and right wouldn't let this go.

The holy knights had been wearing full body armor and wielded a spear and a shield, so they put their shield in the side to protect the Saintess from both sides.

They had to risk their lives so that the Saintess didn't use too much of her Spiritual Energy before the fated battle.

With the captain riding in the front and eliminating as many demons as possible, the entire group easily ran through the demons and escaped from the city.

Still, the demons didn't want to let them go. Like Noel and Anna, they sent more than thirty demons to stop them.

However, there was a reason why they brought their own horses to escape.

The Saintess clasped her hands as if she was praying. "Dear Moon Goddess. Please grant us your strength."

Suddenly, the knights and even the horses were enveloped by golden light, amplifying their abilities.

The horses ran faster than demons as they continuously watched them getting away.

"Hoh?" Noel narrowed his eyes, impressed by them. However, this was useless.

They had to enter the forest, meaning the horses would be in danger if they crossed the forest with that kind of speed. And the demons would catch up to them soon.

That was why Noel raised his sword, preparing to engage the demons. He had to kill them before they could reinforce them.

As if sensing Noel's anxiety, the Saintess lifted her right hand and summoned a golden light. This golden light flew toward the demons that chased them and turned into a dome-shaped barrier, trapping all the demons inside. With this, they should be able to enter the forest without getting chased.

When they arrived, she smiled as if nothing happened. "Sorry for making you wait."

"..." Noel squinted his eyes as if he knew this Saintess wasn't ordinary.

"Though, I think we should kill them since we don't want any threats coming from behind." Noel explained while glancing at those demons.

However, everything didn't seem to go according to his plan because he heard a loud explosion in the sky.

"!!!" Noel turned around and looked at the signal in the sky, correcting himself. "Never mind."

Noel chose to abandon his intention in killing those demons because Anna had signaled him that the demons had begun moving.

And of course, Anna was still lamenting her position as she stood in front of the numerous demons, including the Advanced Level Demon.

"As expected, why do I have to do this the whole time?" Anna clicked her tongue while glaring at these monsters. She had taken their intention, so she had to stop them here until Noel brought the reinforcement.

Chapter 153 Late

The demons had recognized her as someone that had to be removed. But they were waiting for the Advanced Level Demon to give the command to attack Anna.

At the same time, Anna had considered the spores in her mind that could take over her mind at any time. The moment she noticed that the demon tried to control her, she would destroy it with her lightning.

Hence, the first engagement would be important.

"..." Anna examined the demons and eventually her gaze rested on the mushroom demon that stood at their back. It was clear that the demons wanted to protect him.

Since the tension kept raising as none of them actually started making their move, Anna raised her hand and made the first move to suppress them. However, this move was simply gathering the Spiritual Energy while drawing a pattern on the air.

As if sensing the Spiritual Energy fluctuation, the demons let out a roar. Even the mushroom couldn't stop it anymore as it waved its hand, ordering the demons to kill Anna.

"Tsk." Anna clicked her tongue. Since she couldn't use the Duplication Rune, she stepped back and summoned a lightning sword that she sent toward the demons.

Boom!

The light sword exploded, injuring the two demons that got impacted by it and scattering the rest of the demons.

'Sword D'Dantalian can't even kill them?' Anna squinted her eyes, realizing that the Mid Level Demon used their Spiritual Energy to block that attack at the last second. That was why no demon died.

This was also the reason why she didn't want to fight so many demons at once. Unless her power was far superior to them, fighting against these many demons was a reckless idea. She would just be overwhelmed by an attack from all directions.

'Still, I can't really run away, can't I?' Anna clicked her tongue and pointed her sword, ready to fight them head-on.

To test their reaction, Anna leaped back to force them to chase after her for a short distance.

The demons followed her as if they were only fixated on her. Some smaller demons leaped from one spot to another to avoid the trees while those who were bigger rammed their bodies and destroyed the trees to open the space. This way, Anna couldn't use any trick as well.

"..." Anna realized that it would be useless to fight them, so she just ran away to buy some time. She even ran to Noel's position, hoping that they met on the way.

However, the mushroom demon was an Advanced Level Demon. If a Mid Level Demon could utilize their Spiritual Energy and could think a little bit instead of following their instinct like the Low Level Demon, an Advanced Level Demon could master their Spiritual Energy and had the intelligence similar to that of a human.

The Advanced Level Demon recognized Anna's action and gave the signal through the fungi to let the demons know it was impossible to chase Anna since the latter could simply take them down one at a time.

Hence, the Advanced Level Demon tried to corner her by commanding the demons to loop around as if they were running to the city. The Advanced Level Demon just wanted to test her reaction to their original plan.

If Anna cared for the city, she would try to sacrifice herself to keep them here. And it seemed the demon won its gamble.

Knowing she couldn't afford to have them go to the city, Anna stepped forward, challenging the Advanced Level Demon. If she fought this demon, the rest would turn around to help the demon.

However, three Mid Level Demon stood in her ways while the rest of the demons turned around and encircled her.

"..." Anna's expression turned grim as she truly had no choice but to do this even though she hated to be in this situation.

"Kill... Kill... Kill..." Anna muttered this one word a few times as her expression became colder and colder. Instead of berserk, she felt like someone who had been keeping all the tension in her heart and was waiting for the time to explode. And that explosion would be big.

The demons didn't care about Anna's state as they continued to surround her. Some even had started to attack her.

Anna covered her sword with lightning and leaped to the three Mid Level Demons, planning to break through and go straight to the Advanced Level Demon.

The Mid Level Demons opened their mouth at the same time and shot out powerful beams from their mouth.

,m "!!!" Anna ducked down, avoiding these beams. 'Is that the ability of a Mid Level Demon? But we're talking about the controlled Mid Level Demon. Don't tell me, because they're controlled, they can utilize one hundred percent of their ability?'

Anna felt stumped as this battle would be harder than she originally thought.

After that, she continued her way toward these three demons, only to find some demons coming from behind those three Mid Level Demons, ambushing them.

Clang!

Anna struck their claws or horns to stop them, but in the end, they managed to stop her.

Taking advantage of Anna's situation, the rest of the demons gradually approached her. They rammed their heads into each other, hoping that Anna would die from either being crushed or stabbed by their horns.

Luckily, the latter managed to escape into the air while looking around to find her helper. But it was impossible for her to avoid the attacks mid-air.

The Mid Level Demons gathered their energy and let out breathes to take her down.

"Tsk." Anna clicked her tongue and covered her body with Spirit Aura Breathing, planning to take these attacks with her body. However, a half sphere appeared underneath her and blocked all the attacks.

Boom!

Boom!

Boom!

A few explosions occurred, but there wasn't a single graze on the barrier.

Not long after, a huge sword appeared out of nowhere and impaled one demon when it fell down.

Noel jumped into the barrier that caught Anna and extended his hand. "Sorry, it seems that we're a bit late."

"You are 1 minute and 23 seconds late."

"..." Noel was speechless. "That was awfully specific."

"I made that up. Hehe."

Chapter 154 Fighting The Mushroom Demon

"Anyway..." Noel rolled his eyes as he turned around, focusing on the mushroom demons. It seemed that they couldn't ambush these demons anymore because of the current situation.

"Move! Kill all these demons so that the Saintess can focus on the Advanced Level Demon." The knight captain commanded the group. Still, it looked too much for them.

Each Holy Knight was able to take on one or two Low Level Demons while the captain himself could handle the Mid Level ones. But the number was bigger than what they were capable of.

"Do you need my help?" The Saintess walked next to them as she had finally arrived after ensuring her safety.

"Can you go with Anna to stop the Advanced Level Demon? I'm going to kill some demons so that the holy knights can handle them." Noel asked.

"That's easily done." The Saintess nodded in agreement before looking at Anna to ask for her opinions.

"Alright." Anna also agreed to the suggestion and turned around. Her entire focus lied on Advanced Level Demon. She could see some demons trying to stand in her ways, but that didn't matter anymore.

"Come." She rushed forth while shouting. Lightning sparked out of her body as she channeled the lightning into her sword.

Four Points Circulation.

This was an Ancient Spirit Technique they got from the fortress' treasury. It could release Spiritual Energy from their palms or soles. This time, Anna released the lightning through her sword and spread it on the ground, creating a fan-shaped area.

The lightning tried to destroy everything on its way, including the ground itself.

The Mid Level Demons that saw it immediately used their Spiritual Energy to shoot down the lightning to stop spreading. But a translucent screen appeared out of nowhere. This golden screen received their attacks easily.

Boom!

Boom!

Two explosions occurred to take down a single golden shield, but it didn't even leave a scratch on the screen itself. Anna's lightning continued to move forth and electrocuted anyone in its path.

Roar!

Roar!

The demons, who got electrocuted, roared in pain. Due to her spreading the lightning, the power contained in each lightning was a bit lacking. They couldn't kill the Low Level Demons.

However, it was a different case because of Noel. A snowflake symbol suddenly appeared on top of these demons.

"Huh?!" Not just the demons, but also Anna and the Saintess were confused by this snowflake. Anna could see an immense cold from it while the Saintess felt the extraordinary Spiritual Energy. Anna thought, 'Noel's New Spirit Ability?'

When the snowflake fell to the ground, its cold spread and instantly froze everything in ten meters radius. Those demons that couldn't move because their bodies were electrocuted were frozen.

"!!!" Anna widened her eyes in shock. This Spirit Ability was similar to what she used earlier. If the demons were in normal conditions, they could avoid it or jump to the air to avoid the freezing ground. But because she had stopped them with the lightning, the snowflake froze and took away their lives.

She glanced at Noel who remained behind her with a serious expression. 'He has this kind of Spirit Ability already?'

She didn't know that Noel had received two optional skills. The first one was this Freezing Crystal while the second one was Undying Fire. The Undying Fire cost 20 Skill Points while the Freezing Crystal only cost 7 Skill Points. Their strength difference was clear, but Noel didn't have any plan in using it yet due to the immense cost and because he didn't want to reveal his flame yet.

Seeing his freezing ability progressed by leaps and bounds, Noel immediately shifted his focus on other demons. He leaped toward one of the Mid Level Demons while ignoring their shock.

"Tsk. I can't lose." Anna clicked her tongue and immediately went straight to the mushroom demon. She channeled the Spiritual Energy into her sword and dispersed her lightning once again.

The lightning was weak compared to what she used earlier, but it was enough to shatter the ice that froze the demons.

The shattered ice contained the demons' body and no one would be able to survive from that kind of wound.

Still, the most important thing was the fact that Anna and the Saintess could pass through them and arrived in front of the mushroom demons.

"It seems that you're eager to be beaten." Anna smirked, glaring at the mushroom demon while thinking, 'Well, there are three ways for the mushroom demon to control me. The first one is to contaminate my Spirit, like the Saintess' current situation. The second way is to use the spore in my brain. Last but not least, it's from the touch. So, I can't carelessly touch this mushroom.

She waved her sword down and released a crescent-shaped lightning that ran through the ground.

The mushroom demon looked at this lightning for a moment before it pointed its palm toward the lightning. A huge amount of Spiritual Energy suddenly erupted from that palm and struck the lightning, destroying it.

The residual Spiritual Energy continued its way to Anna, only to be blocked by the Saintess' barrier. Still, the barrier had a few black spots as the proof of contamination, and when it blocked the Spiritual Energy, the black spot reacted and became a bit bigger.

"..." The Saintess felt the contamination and furrowed her eyebrows. If she continued this way, it would be very dangerous.

Anna, on the other hand, smiled excitedly as she hadn't fought an Advanced Level Demon for a while. "I have almost forgotten the fact that Advanced Level Demons have a ridiculous amount of Spiritual Energy. It doesn't release it to the surrounding like the one I have found in the forest, but it's clear that I can't win easily."

Anna took a deep breath as she channeled the lightning into her sword. This time, her sword was covered in blue light that extended a bit farther than her sword. The light was covered with lightning as well.

This was Anna's preparation to handle a demon that she couldn't touch.

"I'm going." Anna smiled, informing the Saintess.

The Saintess' expression turned serious. Despite the contamination, she still said, "Please rest assured that I'll block all attacks coming to you."

Chapter 155 Not Controlled?!

On the other hand, the knight captain was stunned, watching Noel fighting the demons.

"What is this?"

"How in the world a kid can do all that?"

"Is it because of his Spirit?"

"Has he trained so much before entering the Demon Banner Army?"

"But Noel Ardagan is known as a lazy noble who never does anything."

The Holy Knights were watching Noel's overwhelming strength in shock.

Noel jumped to a Mid Level Demon and swung his sword. The Mid Level Demon easily struck his sword with its claws covered in Spiritual Energy.

But Noel's sword was far sharper. The Spiritual Energy from the Sword Aura was concentrated in the spot where the blade would hit the claws, enhancing its power by two to three times.

With that kind of sharpness, the claws were cut in an instant. Noel even used Mega Slash to provide with the necessary power.

This was the control he learned from the Master Blacksmith.

After cutting down the claws, Noel spun his body and kicked the demon in the stomach, releasing the Spiritual Energy with his Four Points Circulation.

Bam!

The demon was knocked back, but Noel's attack hadn't finished yet. As soon as there was a distance between them, Noel swung his sword and released a sword strike that bounced from one spot to another.

The sword strike pierced through the demon's body and bounced back to pierce another spot until there were many holes in the demon's body, killing it.

After that, Noel ducked down as two Low Level Demons almost struck him. Unbeknownst to them, the moment Noel dodged, he left behind the Snowflake Symbol on top of his head.

That was why both demons ended up running through it as the symbol popped, creating a blast of ice that froze everything around it. The two demons turned into ice crystals in an instant as Noel immediately shattered them with his Mega Slash.

Noel wanted to continue fighting this way, but he could see that the Advanced Level Demon was overwhelming Anna and the Saintess with its firepower alone. Noel glanced at the Holy Knights who were fighting the demons. "Alright. I'll leave everything to you guys."

"Leave it to us. We should be able to handle it." The knight captain nodded.

"Should? I don't like the way you phrase it." Noel snorted and used his Strength Blessing Rune and Increase Agility Rune to increase their abilities.

"This is..." The Holy Knights were stunned by the surge of strength they suddenly received. With just a look of the runes in front of Noel, it was clear this was his ability. The knight captain understood the meaning behind this action and said with confidence. "We shall handle these demons. Please rest assured."

"That's better." Noel smiled as he turned around, rushing to the mushroom.

The mushroom was releasing another burst of Spiritual Energy to crush Anna and the Saintess, but a giant sword suddenly fell from the air and split the Spiritual Energy into two so that they wouldn't get affected. It was clear that the Saintess would be more corrupted if this continued, so he wanted to take a bit of her burden.

He smiled, assuring them. "Are both of you alright?"

"Thank you for the help, Mr. Noel." The Saintess smiled.

"Ready to take down an Advanced Level Demon?" Anna smirked as she could finally go all out with Noel here.

"Of course." Noel nodded in agreement as they stood next to each other, preparing to kill this demon.

But the first thing the mushroom did was pointing its finger to Noel and Anna.

"!!!" Noel and Anna widened their eyes in shock because they could feel the same thing. The spores in their brain were trying to take over their mind. Now that they were together, the mushroom could control both of them at the same time without making any suspicion.

The mushroom poured some Spiritual Energy to give the command to their brains. Even though the mushroom didn't say anything, they could hear a sentence in their minds.

'Kill each other.'

Noel had been waiting for this command. He used his Freezing Crystal to freeze his brain. But with the help of Heisk, the brain didn't freeze, only the spores.

However, Noel still turned around and headed straight to Anna with his sword.

Meanwhile, Anna experienced the same thing and burned the spore in her head before turning to Noel. But because Noel was the one to make the first move, Noel had reached her before she could swing her sword.

In Noel's mind, a memory about Anna's apology flashed in his mind. It truly made his heart uncomfortable because he would hesitate in killing her. On the other hand, she was still her enemy. Not a single day he had forgotten that fact.

'I will stab her here. Even though I won't kill her right now because she still has some uses to me. I'll make her suffer as much as possible. I can claim this accident was caused by the spores and build up this coincidental suffering so that when she realizes I'm under control of these accidents, she'll lose her trust and feel betrayed and ultimately...'

Noel's plan was perfect. Not only could he inflict some suffering to Anna, but he could use this chance to sneak attack on the demon by making the demon think he was still under his control.

When he was one step away from Anna and prepared to thrust his sword to the side of her stomach to make it look more dramatic, he smiled excitedly in his heart, thinking, 'She'll ultimately hate me and at that time, it will be easier for me to kill h—'

But what Anna did completely blew his mind. Instead of using her sword, she actually let it go so that her body could turn faster. And she spread that arm and grabbed Noel's head.

Instead of snapping his neck like the mushroom intended too, she actually put Noel's head in her embrace as she stroked Noel's hair.

"Good boy, good boy..." She smiled gently while trying to remove the spores with her hand. The technique she got from the Thunder Berserker Spirit allowed her to channel a small amount of lightning to his brain to the point it wouldn't impact it. But she had to pull him in her embrace because she had to take him by surprise to place her hand all around his head.

But at the same time, both of them realized the same thing. Anna could move this way instead of killing him meant she had removed the mind control. As for Anna, she noticed there was nothing to remove in Noel's brain.

Both of them looked at each other with a pale face and thought in panic.

'He (She) isn't affected by the mind control?!'

Chapter 156 Overwhelming Strength

'He (She) isn't affected by the mind control?!'

Noel and Anna were staring at each other, never expecting that they both could remove the mind control spore.

Noel planned to stab Anna. Even though he didn't want her to die yet because she still had some uses, he wanted her to suffer, making her hate him so that it would be easier for him to exact his revenge in the future.

On the other hand, Anna planned to remove the mind control to make Noel owe her again and outsmart him.

But all of it was for naught when they realized that they could stop their own mind control.

And now, they were left in this embarrassing position.

"..." The Saintess tilted her head in confusion, not understanding a single thing about this situation. She couldn't see their position directly, but she understood their movement. "What are you two doing? Flirting?"

"NO!" Both Anna and Noel answered out loud at the same time. Their faces were flushed red, embarrassed by the whole situation and misunderstanding.

Of course, the Saintess might not be able to see the world with her blind eyes, but she could still see the movement of the Spiritual Energy like how she discovered the two spirits residing in Noel's body. So, she knew the mushroom did something earlier.

Anna hurriedly let go of Noel while the latter gritted his teeth in anger.

They truly wanted to forget about what happened earlier. They even had the same thought as their eyes let out killing intent.

Looking at the mushroom demon, Noel said to Anna. "Hey. What about a mushroom steak?"

"No, it must be mushroom stew." Anna answered while glaring at the mushroom.

This embarrassment could only be washed away by blood. And they were planning to kill this mushroom and eat it.

Even the Saintess felt a bit scared of their change right now. They were looking at the mushroom as if it was their arch-nemesis.

'Kill.'

'Kill.'

'Kill.'

Anna started letting the instinct from the Thunder Berserker Spirit flow as she prepared to use his power. But this time, she had agreed to this one.

'Yes. Killing is the only option.' Anna answered inwardly as her body began emitting lightning sparks.

Meanwhile, Noel used everything he could use to amplify his ability. Sword Aura, Increase Agility Rune, Strength Blessing Rune, Muscle Strengthening, and Spirit Aura Breathing. He was planning to use all of them in order to kill the monsters.

The mushroom might have done something it shouldn't have. But it was too late.

Anna had made the first move by charging straight to the demon. The only thing she had to fear was the mind control from the touch. It was much more potent than the contamination or the spore. As long as she didn't touch the mushroom, she would be fine.

That was why this lightning-covered sword was a perfect weapon for her.

She tried to slash the mushroom to cut it down. But the mushroom somehow leaped into the air and kicked the sword to the ground.

"!!!" Anna saw mushrooms growing on her sword and started sucking the Spiritual Energy. Without hesitation, Anna released the lightning, turning the sword back to a normal one.

The mushrooms followed the lightning and disappeared, allowing Anna to summon another lightning once again. If she used a normal sword and let the mushroom stay there, they would suck the Spiritual Energy she poured into her sword. So, it would be a waste.

Still, Noel took this opportunity to get closer to the mushroom and swung his sword right at the body.

The mushroom once again showed an acrobatic move by grabbing Noel's sword and using it as a support to throw its body into the air.

And the spot that it touched earlier started growing some mushrooms. Without the help of a cover like what Anna did, Noel's sword this time would be useless.

"Noel! The mushrooms are going to absorb the Spiritual Energy you pour into a sword. You should return and get them removed first." Anna warned him out loud.

Unfortunately for her, Noel wasn't even listening to her. He only smiled when he saw those mushrooms and pointed his palm to the Advanced Level Demon. A rune was formed.

Chain Bind Rune.

Two chains suddenly emerged from the runes and flew straight to the demons. Now that the demon was in the air, it couldn't possibly escape from these chains.

Noel's chains circled around the mushroom body and stopped its movement. The only thing the mushroom could do was fall down. However, the mushroom demon also did something to the chains as small mushrooms began to appear on the chain sucking the Spiritual Energy in it. If it continued, the chains would disappear in no time.

However, Noel had already expected such a move, so he came straight to the demon to cut it.

His body was hard enough to stop this attack since Noel couldn't cut the mushroom's hand when it used the sword to perform an acrobatic move. So, Noel had to pour Spiritual Energy into the sword if he wanted to cut it, albeit they would be sucked by the small mushrooms infesting his sword.

Unfortunately for him, Noel wasn't the same person as he was two months ago. He had completely grasped what the Master Blacksmith Roel taught him.

When he poured the Spiritual Energy, the Spiritual Energy moved around the sword as if it was alive. It avoided all the mushrooms so that it didn't get sucked and eventually reached the tip of the sword.

"!!!" The mushroom demon panicked because it couldn't suck any Spiritual Energy from this attack. And the chains had yet to disappear, so it couldn't perform any more acrobatic moves to stop it.

In the end, it used its left hand to stop the sword, but ended up getting sliced by Noel's sword. However, the mushroom demon somehow managed to escape from Noel's attack and avoid the worse.

Meanwhile, the Saintess had been following their battles this whole time and was stunned by their performances. Their movement wasn't like an Apprentice Knight. She was so shocked to the point she asked herself, "Do they even need me here?"

Chapter 157 Unexpected Ambush

"Do they even need me here?"

That question wasn't just her own opinion. It was a hard cold fact. After all, the moment the mushroom escaped from Noel's sword, Anna appeared behind the mushroom to strike it down.

This wasn't just two Apprentice Knights fighting an Advanced Level Demon. It was two Apprentice Knights bullying an Advanced Level Demon.

Anna struck the mushroom from behind with her lightning sword.

The demon tilted its body to the left and barely avoided it with its side getting pierced by the sword.

To escape, the demon released a huge amount of spores that it created a kind of smokes. If these two inhaled those spores, their body should be taken over.

However, the Saintess immediately covered them with her barrier by creating a spherical barrier that isolated them.

The spores were soon carried by the wind, so Layla released them to chase after the mushroom that was about to land on the ground.

"Noel!" Anna called him out loud while summoning a rune in front of him.

Noel recognized this rune because this was the Duplication Rune she used before. It was clear that Anna had been creating this rune before launching her attack.

Seeing this rune, Noel believed they could catch up to them. He swung his sword and released a beam of Spiritual Energy into the runes, duplicating it into eight.

Bouncing Spirit Slash.

Noel smiled as he controlled all the eight Bouncing Spirit Slashes. These eight slashes bounced from one spot to another, but because they numbered eight instead of one, they basically created a torrent that wouldn't leave anyone alive if they got swallowed into it.

The mushroom demon widened its eyes in shock as it couldn't avoid these slashes in the air. It tried to release another spore cloud as a defense mechanism.

The spore cloud would affect them at this rate, but the mushroom demon released the spore for a different purpose.

The spore might be able to grow on the Spiritual Bouncing Slash and take away its Spiritual Energy, but the blast from the spore allowed the mushroom demon to tilt its body a bit more.

It might not be able to reach the ground, but the mushroom managed to get into the best position to avoid all these slashes.

Still, Noel's attacks were not easily beaten. When it almost avoided his slashes, Noel changed the direction once again and tried to at least injure the demons instead of letting it escape unscathed.

In the end, six of the eight slashes managed to graze the mushroom, making it bleeding all over.

"Since when a mushroom has blood?" Anna furrowed her eyebrows. "We can't eat a mushroom that has blood."

"..." Noel's eyebrows twitched as he glanced at her. Obviously, the thought about cooking this mushroom was just an expression to his anger. But he never expected that Anna was serious about it. "You took it that seriously?"

"Eh?" Anna blinked a few times as she realized it was just a figure of speech. She became even more embarrassed at this point and turned everything into anger. "This mushroom bastard! I am going to kill it, slice it thinly, and dry it up in the sun."

"..." Noel was speechless while looking at this embarrassed woman going straight to the mushroom in anger.

Meanwhile, the Saintess once again couldn't comprehend these two knights. Despite facing an Advanced Level Demon, they still could make a joke, get angry, and flirt with each other. She couldn't help but think, 'What's wrong with these two?'

Of course, the two would deny the fact they were flirting at each other. Noel simply wanted to embarrass Anna while the latter tried to outsmart him in his argument. There wasn't any intention to flirt. But that was how others saw their interaction.

Since the mushroom demon had embarrassed them, Anna hurriedly chased after the mushroom as soon as they reached the ground. The lightning spared around her feet as she leaped into the mushroom with her fastest speed.

Even for an Advanced Level Demon, Anna's speed wasn't something that could be taken lightly. In just two seconds, she caught up to the mushroom demon that was already thirty meter away from her.

"Got you!" Anna smirked and sliced the mushroom.

The mushroom leaped into the air to avoid the sword, but Anna had predicted it and pointed her palm at the mushroom. She knew that the mushroom was acrobatic, so she could make him jump into the air so it couldn't avoid her attack.

Realizing that Anna had figured out his pattern, the mushroom opened its mouth, gathering a huge amount of energy.

Anna and the mushroom demon released their attacks at the same time. Anna's lightning was so fierce that it could penetrate the demon's body. But the beam coming from the mushroom mouth was different from those spores. It contained so much energy that it had the same amount of power as Anna's lightning. In fact, it could be stronger than Anna's lightning in terms of raw power.

When these two powers clashed, the beam from the mushroom overwhelmed Anna's lightning and pushed it back to Anna. However, the lightning's true power lied on its penetrating force. It pierced through the beam and pushed it back.

Ultimately, the battle ended up in a draw and the attacks caused an explosion. The Saintess immediately covered Anna with her barrier again to avoid any spore or explosion.

Meanwhile, the mushroom took the advantage of the smoke that was produced by the explosion to run away. It noticed that Anna and Noel's firepowers were greater than it expected. If it continued, he would lose against them.

Noel wouldn't allow such a thing as he caught up to them and sliced his sword. Anna also prepared to move as soon as the Saintess removed the barrier.

However, the mushroom demon only looked at them with contempt as if it had predicted everything.

"!!!" Suddenly, Noel widened his eyes as he spun his body, striking a demon that suddenly intruded the battlefield. There were more and more demons emerging from the side.

There was only one scene in his mind that could produce this situation. It was the spore smoke that was blown by the wind.

"Don't tell me, the spores?" Noel gritted his teeth, seeing many demons coming to the battlefield.

Chapter 158 Not Finished Yet?

"Don't tell me the spores?" Noel gritted his teeth and hurriedly formed a snowflake on top of his left hand before sending it forth.

Freezing Crystal.

The snowflake exploded, releasing a huge amount of ice and cold wind that would freeze everything in a fan-shaped area. This was the only way to deal with the demons right now. If they failed to kill the mushroom demon today, the city would fall. So, failure wasn't an option.

"Saintess! Please trap them!" Noel shouted.

"How about your defense?"

"There's no other way!" Noel decided to abandon their defense as long as they could kill the mushroom.

Meanwhile, Anna knew that the problem was already beyond their competitive spirit. Although she was embarrassed from what happened earlier, it was clear that the situation was beyond their expectation. The only person who could stop those demons were Layla.

"I understand." The Saintess agreed before the problem got bigger. Although Noel was younger than her, his ability in commanding and fighting were greater than her. So, there was no need to hesitate.

A barrier formed around the demons and trapped them inside. As long as the Saintess was here, they wouldn't be able to leave this place like how the demons couldn't destroy the barrier and attack the city every night.

Noel saw this as an opportunity to get rid of the mushroom demon. This was their only chance. The longer they waited, the higher the chances that the mushroom demon would call more demons out of nowhere.

He kept chasing after the mushroom demon with Anna, but slightly lowered his speed so that he could talk to her.

"Anna. We have to kill it before it's too late. Failure is not an option."

"Understood. Give me the plan."

"I'll take the front. You support me."

"Got it."

Now that Noel had given his command, there was no need to reject the plan since she had no plan anyway.

So, she watched Noel increasing his pace and gradually caught up to the demon.

Seeing this approach, the mushroom tried to blind Noel with another spore smoke.

The smoke was big and million of spores were contained in that smoke, so it would certainly bring more demons if the wind carried it.

That was why Noel prepared two options to handle the spore smoke. He didn't know which one was effective, so he used both of them at once.

Spiritual Energy Dispersion Rune.

Freezing Crystal.

Since the mushroom released all these spores continuously, it was clear that the spores itself were created by its Power, so there was a chance that the Spiritual Energy Dispersion Rune would work. As for the Freezing Crystal, this was Noel's best option.

When the spores touched the Spiritual Energy Dispersion Rune, some dispersed but some didn't. It seemed the majority of the spores were created by using Power, but the real spores were dangerous.

That was where the Freezing Crystal came into play. The snowflake burst and froze all the spores, but because each spore was next to each other, he ended up freezing the entire smoke.

The only way for him to go through was to destroy the ice.

"Sword D'Dantalian."

"!!!" Noel heard Anna's voice and glanced back, finding the lightning sword coming into his direction. He hurriedly ducked down and saw the lightning sword destroy the ice, allowing Noel to go through.

Noel smiled and took this opportunity to use the Four Points Circulation in his feet, boosting his speed. It only took a few seconds to catch up to the mushroom demon.

The mushroom demon opened its mouth to blast Noel with its beam. This time, he was seriously going to kill him.

However, Noel created another Spiritual Energy Dispersion Rune.

The beam split into eight and scattered due to the rune. This might be the best way to utilize this rune, Noel thought.

"Die." Noel muttered as he struck the mushroom demon. The latter grabbed Noel's sword again, preparing to dodge it with another acrobatic move.

However, Noel had prepared another trick in this situation. "Swift Strike."

The speed of his swing suddenly increased by two times, making the mushroom lose its timing. When it launched himself into the air, he ended up tripping and spinning in the air.

Noel smirked as this was the opportunity he had to seize.

"Sword Fall."

A huge sword appeared on top of the mushroom and fell down to stab it. But the mushroom tried to release its spore again to twist its body so that the sword didn't reach him.

But this was what Noel had been waiting for. When it was charging the Spiritual Energy in its body, Noel knew the mushroom couldn't defend from his attack.

Before the Mushroom Demon noticed, Noel struck the mushroom with all his Spiritual Energy and Mega Slash, slicing the demon into two.

"!!!" The demon was shocked but it was too late as its body had been split. And when the residual Spiritual Energy that was about to release came out, a snowflake appeared and exploded, freezing its dying body and eventually killing it.

"Done." Noel let out a breath of relief.

"Congratulations. You just killed an Advanced Level Demon," said Anna after catching up to him.

Though, Noel still didn't lower his guard. After taking a breather, he reminded her, "We have to go back to the Saintess and get rid of the demons. Even though the mind control has disappeared, she can't deal with all those demons."

Anna nodded in agreement and immediately headed back with Noel.

As expected, the Saintess was still holding back the demons.

She smiled when she noticed Anna and Noel's presence, knowing that this mission was a success and the city would be sav—!

"Aaaaaahhhhhh!" Layla suddenly screamed in pain as she covered herself with the barrier. But this time, the black spots had almost covered the entire barrier as if symbolizing that the mushroom was about to take over her.

"Saintess?!" Noel and Anna were stunned. They had killed the monsters, so the control and the contamination should have disappeared.

But Layla dropped to the ground while wailing in pain. She tried to endure the pain while stuttering, "The demon... hasn't... died."

Chapter 159 Undying Mushroom Demon

"The demon... hasn't... died."

"!!!" Anna and Noel were dumbstruck.

Noel hurriedly checked his system while Anna tried to look at the mushroom's previous location. They were checking if the demon had died or not. But to their surprise, the demon had truly died.

There was only one answer to this situation. "That mushroom is not the real Advanced Level Demon!"

Gasp! Anna fell silent as her expression turned grim. "Are you serious right now? If the real Advanced Level Demon is not that strong, then how's about the real Advanced Level Demon?"

Anna gritted her teeth, recalling all the memories in her mind. 'No! An Advanced Level Demon should be at that demon's level. This hiding mushroom should have the same power, but are there two Advanced Level Demon in this forest?'

Anna didn't know what to do in this situation. Handling that one mushroom alone used up a lot of stamina and Spiritual Energy. If they had to take care another Advanced Level Demon, she might end up exhausting all their Spiritual Energy before she could kill this demon.

On the other hand, Noel looked at his sword. The mushrooms on his sword had indeed died. The demon they faced earlier was real, but there was a hidden enemy.

'Is there a twin demons or something?' Noel thought. On the one hand, he wanted to believe this was a different Advanced Level Demon. On the other hand, he could relate the two demons together.

After all, their strength was awfully similar. Unless they were twins, there was no way they were a different demon.

'If that's the case...' Noel didn't have time to think, so he hurriedly revolved his brain to come up with a hypothesis. But the realization that came to him was a bit shocking. 'Wait a minute. The mushroom that I killed earlier was a fake? And this Advanced Level Demon is the real one?

'But if this is the case, then the demon's ability is to significantly raise a demon's ability to Advanced Level as a fake?' Noel sucked a cold breath and asked, "Anna. Is there any demon that can raise another demon to Advanced Level Demon for a fake body?"

"What did you say?" Anna was stunned hearing Noel's question. After all, it led to one of her memories. "Undying Mushroom Demon!"

"Undying Mushroom Demon?"

"Undying Mushroom Demon is not that strong, but its ability is like you say. It can use the take over ability to control a demon and raise its ability. Even if we kill that demon, as long as the Undying Mushroom Demon hasn't died, it will continue take over and make more and more demons like that."

"!!!" Noel was stunned, never expecting that the situation was more severe than he originally thought.

Anna also thought the same. 'Wait. The Undying Mushroom Demon is not an Advanced Level Demon in the past. It's beyond that point... A Peak Level Demon. It cause everywhere because no one can find its body. It sends one Peak Level Demon after another, so that's why it's considered a disaster. In other words, if we let this demon escape, the Saintess will be completely taken over and that demon will reach the Peak Level.'

Both of them had the same thought. They had to kill this Undying Mushroom Demon no matter what.

And Noel suddenly remembered the scene when the mushroom released its spore. The wind carrying it in a certain direction, meaning the mushroom itself was positioning itself on the opposite direction. And they had been going in the wrong direction this whole time.

"..." Noel turned grim, realizing the severity of this matter. Without hesitation, Noel shouted. "Anna. Take care of the Saintess and don't let her use her power again. Just escape from those demons!"

Without wasting a single second, Noel turned around and went straight to the opposite direction where the wind was going. He also used the Demon Hunter Medal to make sure he could find all demons around him. He was planning to check all signatures and killed those demons since he couldn't afford to let this Advanced Level Demon escape.

"W-what?!" Anna was stunned because Noel just left them behind like that. She wanted to chase after him, but she saw the Saintess still enduring the pain. Looking at the barrier, it was clear that she would fully be contaminated sooner or later. The only way to save her was to stop her from using her power. It would delay the time a bit.

She gritted her teeth and went to the Saintess. "Release your barrier and I'll carry you out of here."

"Please go with him! I'm fine." Layla endured the pain while assuring her. Noel needed a help to fight another Advanced Level Demon before finding the Undying Mushroom Demon, so he needed her help.

However, Anna was far more decisive than she originally thought.

"I don't like losing anything!" Anna broke apart the barrier that isolated her. Layla must think it could isolate her from the outside because she didn't know what would happen if she got taken over. But this barrier was far brittle than she originally thought.

"Eh?" Layla was shocked, never expecting that her barrier could be shattered just like that. She admitted that it wasn't as strong as the peak form, but even those demons couldn't break it. It was weird to find Anna breaking it easily.

Little did she know, Anna had known her weakness since she had to eliminate her in the past. This barrier could easily be destroyed by her.

Without hesitation, Anna grabbed the Saintess and carried her on her back before chasing after Noel.

"Of course, I'm going to chase after him. But I also need to bring you away from these demons. That's why we both are going. As I said, I don't like losing anything, so I'll just get both done simultaneously." Anna smiled and started running in Noel's direction. She added, "So, stop using your power. There might be another opportunity for you to utilize that power to help us."

"..." The Saintess fell silent for a moment and finally released the barrier trapping the demon. "Understood."

Their approach might be different, but Layla felt that Noel and Anna had drawn her in. She felt like it was alright to rely on them.

Chapter 160 Bad Situation

Noel was heading straight to the mushroom demon's direction while maintaining a close look to his surrounding. The mushroom demon had the ability to create another Advanced Level Demon, so if he wasn't careful, he might be killed without a chance to fight back.

'As expected, there are more and more information that I can dig up from Anna. Even when I thought she didn't have that much information, she could still give me more than I could imagine. How much knowledge does she have? She is still at my age, but her power, her knowledge, and her actions are more than mine.

'In fact, I wonder if she's actually an old woman disguised as a young girl.' Noel narrowed his eyes. All Anna had was impossible to have by a 15 years old girl, even if she was an extraordinary genius. It felt like she had a secret even more extraordinary than one could think.

'Hmm? I have known about the spirit ranks... Looking at this, it seems that Anna has a Humanoid Rank Spirit, a level above Heisk, my Ice Spirit. Can they provide knowledge like this?' Noel had a question in his mind, but it was impossible to ask now.

It seemed that after being cornered, the mushroom demon approached everything head-on.

Noel stopped abruptly when he felt a demon presence within his range.

"One, no two demons." Noel squinted his eyes and tried to find the demon in his range. Unfortunately, he could only see one demon with the other being hidden behind a tree.

The demon in front of him was a wolf.

'Is this place a wolf habitat?' Noel felt something was wrong. A wolf wasn't supposed to come here, yet he could find an Advanced Level Demon. It was clear that it was a normal wolf transformed into an Advanced Level Demon. 'Something doesn't match up. How does a wolf appear here?'

"Aoooo!" Noel had so many questions in his mind, but the wolf didn't let him. The wolf demon howled and started rushing toward him.

"So fast?" He was stunned, never expecting that the wolf could cover forty meters in just three seconds.

Luckily, his instinct managed to react within those three seconds. He raised his sword and swung it horizontally, trying to strike the wolf's fangs.

But it was at this time, the wolf's body glowed. The blue light was clearly Spiritual Energy. And as expected, the wolf suddenly increased its speed.

"!!!" Noel hurriedly spun his body as the wolf had looped around him in an instant.

Swift Strike.

Cling!

The clicking sound between the metal and the wolf's fangs echoed in the forest. Noel was overwhelmed by its speed that his strike didn't contain that much power. He had fought many demons from the one with overwhelming strength to one with impenetrable defense. But the one with speed was the most troublesome.

The demon could easily launch a sneak attack or outrun him. And the Advanced Level Demon had overcome all its weaknesses like having a light and brittle skin or lacking in Spiritual Energy.

In other words, this Advanced Level Demon might be the most dangerous monster he could face so far.

'Huft...' Noel took a deep breath, knowing that he couldn't kill the demon with this monster standing on its way.

The wolf stepped back and looped around again, trying to take Noel out from an unexpected angle.

However, Noel had one thing that could stop the demon. He summoned a rune and pointed it at the wolf. "Chain Bind Rune."

The wolf saw those chains and swiftly dodged them.

As expected, the chains were far too slow to catch the demons. However, it didn't stop Noel from using the rune.

Everytime the wolf avoided the chains, the latter continued its trajectory and ended up catching a tree.

"Tsk. Go again." Noel summoned another Chain Bind Rune to catch the wolf but to no avail.

The wolf seemed to be looking at him smugly as if he had won. And to repay what Noel had done, the wolf rushed to him and tried to rip apart Noel's head.

Noel used his sword to strike the wolf's fangs again, but he felt something different from this charge. If the previous attack came from a loop, which lack momentum, this attack had all the momentum it needed.

When Noel struck the fangs, the momentum pushed him back until he fell down to the ground.

"Kh." Noel was lying down on the ground while trying to stop the wolf with all his strength. He surely didn't want to be the wolf's breakfast.

Noel gathered his Spiritual Energy in his foot and kicked the wolf from below.

Bam!

He used the control from the Master Blacksmith and the Four Points Circulation, so the power in it was enough to blow the wolf into the air.

As soon as the wolf was in the air, he pointed his palm at the wolf. Another Chain Bind Rune appeared, shooting out chains to catch the wolf.

"Aooo!" The wolf howled, but during that time, he was gathering Spiritual Energy in his mouth. The moment it stopped howling, the wolf shot out a powerful beam from its mouth to blast both the chains and Noel.

Spiritual Energy Dispersion Rune.

Noel activated this rune in order to be his shield, dispersing the Spiritual Energy into the surroundings.

As expected, the beam was dispersed and began destroying the area. However, the Rune started to crack, showing that it couldn't handle the immense Spiritual Energy.

Noel hurriedly used his Freezing Crystal to freeze the remaining Spiritual Energy before shattering it to get another clear vision of the wolf.

Unfortunately, the wolf took that opportunity to land on the ground and start moving around.

"So, this is the true Advanced Level Demon. Its strength are far different from that mushroom... I guess the mushroom's strength is in mind control that can mobilize many demons while this wolf is the most powerful in one-on-one fight."

Noel assessed the situation while gritting his teeth. It took his all just to hold back the wolf's attacks, so he might die if he didn't do anything in the next few minutes.

"What should I do?" He squinted his eyes, examining what kind of plans could work against the wolf.