

S vs Rebirth 31

Chapter 31 Talent

After receiving the new tasks, Noel woke up.

"Mhm..." He let out a small groan while moving his body around. Although he didn't feel much pain, the fatigue still wore down his body.

"You have woken up." Shale's voice echoed in his ears as Noel hurriedly turned his head to the side. "Because your group has helped Anna Stargaze in minimizing our casualty, you're exempted from the test as well. And because of that incident, it seems that the test will need to be canceled."

"I..." Noel looked down and found his bag on the side of his bed. He immediately grabbed it and took out a pouch with ten crystals inside. "I don't have a group and this is my proof."

Shale raised his eyebrows in surprise and checked the bag. He had heard from Alfred that Noel chose to go by himself.

Hence, he still claimed that Noel was with them, simply to help Noel. However, he might have underestimated Noel.

"Did you gather these alone?"

"Yes."

"Traps?"

"It took me a while to find a good spot and build some traps, but yes..."

"I see." Shale nodded in understanding before handing back the pouch. "I'll still consider you as a part of the group."

"But..."

Shale waved his hand, denying his claim. He said, "Instead of getting swallowed by your pride and hatred, it's better to use those crystals to get stronger."

"Get stronger?" Noel tilted his head in confusion. Shale hadn't talked about the usage of the crystal, so he wasn't aware of the reason why they wanted to gather these crystals.

"Do you know why the lamps on the street can shine continuously? It is because the Spiritual Energy from the crystal has been converted to lit it up. In other words, the crystal is a source of Spiritual Energy."

"I'm sorry, I don't quite follow what you said."

"To put it simply, the crystal is the core of the demon that supplies Spiritual Energy. Although your spirits will let you know how to use them, you still need Spiritual Energy to wield them. And we, humans, can get stronger by absorbing the Spiritual Energy from this crystal.

"And each human has a limit to what they can absorb, so it's not like you can buy a hundred thousands of crystals to become the strongest person in the world. How much can you actually grow depends on your conversion rate.

"Conversion Rate itself is similar to that of talent. If you have 100% Conversion Rate, you can become the best after absorbing all the crystals to your limit. Of course, having 100% Conversion Rate is close to impossible.

"Even I only have 50% Conversion Rate. Even that genius, Anna Stargaze, has 95% Conversion Rate according to the rumor. So, instead of getting fixated on your pride or hatred, I want you to use these crystals to increase your Spiritual Energy.

"As for how high your Conversion Rate is... It depends on your Spirit. Just ask them... At the very least, I know that the Spirit can't lie."

Noel looked down for a moment and said, "So, this conversion rate is talent. The higher your conversion rate is, the stronger you can become."

"Exactly."

"How many crystals can we absorb in our lifetime?"

"According to our research, you can absorb 2500 Low Quality Crystals, 1500 Mid Quality Crystals. That's what you need to know for now."

"Low Quality Crystals?"

"Yeah. They come from Low Level Demon Above it is Mid Quality Crystal from Mid Level Demon. It continues... but there's no way you can fight against a High Level Demon for now, so just give up that idea."

"What happens after we reach the limit?"

"You will find yourselves unable to absorb more of them. The Spiritual Energy will simply leave your body. The research used 10,000 people, so it's pretty accurate."

"I see." Noel looked down, contemplating. He also remembered what Heisk and Ardagan said. It was true that he hated everything, but it seemed that his action was a bit too much.

If he swallowed his pride, he might be able to achieve more than this by taking advantage of Anna Stargaze. If he hid his hatred and lowered Anna's guard, the chance of him killing her would increase.

'It seems my eyes have been clouded by revenge this whole time. I almost forgot that my current objective is to get stronger. I can't achieve my revenge if I'm not strong.' Noel closed his eyes, calming his heart down. Noel nodded, "Thank you, Sir Shale. I've recognized my mistake and will do my best from now on."

"Is that so?" Shale nodded. "You're free to rest until tomorrow. The classes will resume the day after tomorrow and the test will be rescheduled to one week from now. Because the participants are stronger by that time, we'll lower the number of people per group. So, there will only be two people per group."

"Understood. I'll prepare myself."

"Alright. That's all you need to know." Shale then rose from his seat and checked the other trainees, wondering who had woken up.

Meanwhile, Noel meditated again, planning to ask Ardagan and Heisk about this conversion rate.

Surprisingly, their answer was beyond his imagination.

"I have 100% Conversion Rate," Ardagan proudly stated.

"I have merged with Ardagan, so I also have 100% Conversion Rate now." Heisk added, "Though, what's more important is that... There are two spirits inside your body. It means your limit is doubled. In the future, you can become twice as strong as that Anna Stargaze."

"Don't forget about my medal's effect. The more demons you slay, the better the effect will be. You can become even stronger than that. However, it will mean nothing if you become full of yourself and get killed somewhere because of that confidence."

Noel nodded with a smile. "Don't worry. I know what I should do right now."

"Then, we wish you to get stronger as soon as possible, Master."

"Alright. Thank you for the help, you two." Noel smiled and returned to the reality. He checked his body's condition and muttered inwardly, 'I have this free time, so I need to focus on my training as well as helping the citizens to get more Honor Points in the meantime. I also have the mission to kill the Ancient Demon Tree... I need to reconsider my approach this time. For now, let's go back.'

Chapter 32 Help

After coming back to his house and taking a rest for a little while, Noel went around the town to help the people. Of course, he simply wanted to get more Honor Points.

However, when he was strolling around, he encountered an unexpected meeting. It was with the woman he saved yesterday, Kirika.

"Welcome. Do you want any fruits?" Kirika smiled, greeting his customer before finding Noel was the customer. "Eh? Noel Ardagan?"

"Oh?" Noel didn't know how to respond since Kirika always wore a cold expression during the training. He never expected that Kirika could make a big and warm smile like this. She would become a star in everyone's heart if she showed such a thing to the trainees. Unfortunately for her, Noel didn't have any excitement seeing such a smile because he had lost too much, including a part of his emotion toward women. Even though he accepted that his eyes were clouded by revenge, he still couldn't accept women in general, especially those around his age.

"Oh, my. Who is this, Kirika?" A middle-aged woman rose from the ground after taking out some fruits from the basket on the ground.

"This is... Noel Ardagan."

"Ah, he's a noble? I-I'm sorry for disrespecting you, Sir." The woman panicked and immediately lowered her head. She even went all the way to kneel on the ground to ask for forgiveness.

Noel only smiled and said, "It's fine, Ma'am. I'm just a fallen noble, you don't need to respect me."

The woman was stunned for a second as she didn't know how to respond.

"He is Noel Ardagan. Although he is a fallen noble, he is one of the most hardworking men among the trainees. He also saved my life yesterday."

"Ah, so he was the gentleman that saved you from the demons?" The woman widened her eyes in shock.

"It's fine. I was the one who placed the traps, so it might be my fault."

"I've heard the story from my daughter. Whether it's the trap or not, I know that the demons are scary. If not for your traps, my daughter would have been in a more dangerous situation." The woman looked at the fruits and immediately picked some of the best. "Please have this as my thanks for saving my daughter."

"No, no. You don't need to." Noel smiled, rejecting it softly.

However, the woman pushed the basket to Noel and said, "I don't know much about Fallen Noble, but I know that you must haven't lived that well in the past few weeks. You should eat some fruits. They're very nutritious."

"No, no. Please don't think much about it. I saved her because of my own traps. If I take all these fruits, your business will receive the impact, so—"

"Please." The woman looked at him with a sad look. "I can't do much as her mother. Even these fruits are not equal to my daughter's life, but this is the least I can do as her mother."

"Please." Seeing her mother's action, Kirika couldn't help but lower her head, asking for Noel to receive it.

"Is that so? Well, I'll take it then." Noel ultimately accepted it. He couldn't help but remember the time he helped the people here.

They were so nice and sometimes even offered something to repay him even though he only did it only for a mission. Of course, he never expected to receive anything from them.

'I never harmed or helped commoners before because I wasn't interested in them. But now... I know that not every help will go rewarded and some will even bite the hands who feeds them, but somehow looking at their actions and feelings puts my heart at ease...' Noel thought while closing his eyes. 'This is the life that I'd never know had I locked myself up in my mansion the whole time.'

Little did he know, there was a change in his heart. He might still help people for the mission, but he would do it more sincerely from now on.

"Thank you, Ma'am." Noel smiled and waved his hands. "I'll excuse myself then."

"Yes." The woman nodded and saw him off until he disappeared into the crowds. After that, she looked at Kirika and said, "That boy is so bright. This is the first time I have seen such a polite boy."

"He is indeed different."

"What do you think about him?" She smirked, assessing her daughter's feelings.

"Eh? What do you mean?" Kirika looked away, knowing what her mother was implying, so she refused to say anything, only to get pestered by her mother for a while.

Meanwhile, Noel went around for a bit and decided to eat one or two fruits by the fountain in the city center.

There he could see people going around and watched everyone's expression without fearing his status as noble like in the past.

"I don't know if I can finish all these fruits by myself before they go bad." Noel sighed, looking at the fruits. Suddenly, he found a kid wearing a tattered rag looking at his fruit basket with watering mouth.

After their gazes interlocked, he slowly approached Noel and raised his hand as if he was trying to beg for fruit. "Sir... Can..."

Noel looked at him for a moment, thinking, 'Even in the Ardagan Territory, there will always be people like this.'

However, he remembered the lady that gave him the fruits and muttered, "Someone's kindness goes to another person and it will continue to another person. However, this kid will continue to starve if it's like this, so..."

After some contemplations, Noel said, "Do one thing for me and I will give you two fruits."

"That... That's..." The kid was afraid that Noel wanted him to do bad things.

But that suspicion was shattered when Noel continued, "Dance for me."

The kid was hesitant but immediately did it when he heard, "I don't care if it's bad. Just do it and you will get two fruits."

The kid awkwardly danced. He looked like a fool, but after one minute, Noel fulfilled his promise by giving him two fruits.

Surprisingly, the kid politely bowed to him and ran away.

"Wait." Noel stopped him. "Where are you going?"

"Ah..." The kid scratched the back of his head and looked at the fruits. "My sister needs this more than me."

"So, you have a sister? Is there any other kid like you?"

"Un." He nodded.

,m "Then, eat those two fruits. The one who earns it has the right to eat it. If your sister wants to eat, she also needs to dance like you. So, after you finish eating these fruits, go back and bring your sister and other kids... I have twenty fruits here, so bring a total of ten people."

The kid hesitated again, but Noel continued, "Listen, kid. If you keep begging like this, you will continue to starve for who knows how many days. I know that you're bad at everything, but everyone is like that. But you still need to do it, your hundredth time doing it is better than your first time.

"If you want to eat every day without that uncertainty, you need to work hard for that future instead of letting others decide it. That's why eat it and bring your sister and nine other kids here."

After hesitating for another minute, the kid ate the fruits and hurriedly went back to inform his sister and the other homeless kids before Noel left.

Just like the first kid, they danced awkwardly. However, Noel only smiled and clapped his hands as if he was enjoying the show before giving them the fruits he received from Kirika's mother.

There were people who looked at these kids in disgust, who didn't bother themselves with them, or just enjoyed like Noel. However, Noel didn't care about them because helping them opened something in his heart. Although he was just fulfilling the mission, he still sincerely felt happy for helping others. This was a life that Noel would never experience had he stuck in that mansion.

Chapter 33 Partner

Unbeknownst to Noel, one of the bystanders was Anna Stargaze. She almost dropped her jaw when she saw Noel talking to a kid.

'Wait a minute. Isn't that kid... the famous twin Sword Dancers? He should have a twin sister. Noel shouldn't have known about his talent, so why did he help him?'

Her opinion soon changed when she saw the kid dancing awkwardly. She couldn't even call it a dance at that point.

And what even more absurd was when the kid brought other people with him, including his twin sister.

In that instant, she realized something.

'Noel helps them simply because he wants to help them. If it were me, I would have helped the twins simply because of their talents and made them owe me. But it's because he helps them randomly, people naturally like him.

'In my past life, there were many great figures Noel saved, including the twins. Those who felt indebted to him helped him during the rebellion against the Royal Family. That was why they had a hard time fighting against Noel.

'And this is also one of the reasons why I haven't killed Noel yet. He is a great asset to make the kingdom prosper. It seems I need to suffer a bit. Time to train a bit more, so that he can't surpass me.' Anna sighed and disappeared. She was taking a stroll to get something to eat and found a commotion which Noel caused. Since she had gotten what she needed, she chose to return to her place, making sure she was strong enough to handle Noel's hatred until it could be resolved.

Meanwhile, Noel said goodbye to the kids before running around for his training.

He also checked his system to see the progress of his mission.

Medal: Excellent Citizen Merit

Requirement: Help 25 Townspeople (16/25)

Reward: Excellent Citizen Medal and 4 Honor Points

'Hmm? I helped 11 kids just by feeding them today? But who are the two others? Kirika and her mother? Kirika aside, her mother?' Noel widened his eyes, realizing that an indirect help could also be counted as helping people. 'Still, I need to experience how indirect can it be for it to be counted as help.'

After receiving this sign, Noel didn't hesitate to use today and the next day to help some more people, finally completing the mission.

Before going to the barrack again, he checked his system.

[Shop]

Available Points: 6 HP

1 Skill Point (2 HP)

Disinfectant Bandage (1 HP)

Water Bottle (1 HP)

Torch (1 HP)

"Hmm... I had 1 Honor Point left before going to the forest and received three points after completing the Demon Mission. I used two of them. But with the additional four points from helping the citizens, I could buy three Skill Points right now.

"I have two options. First, the next level of Mega Slash and Ardagan Swordsmanship will cost 3 Skill Points, meaning all of what I have right now. On the other hand, I can spend only one Skill Point and save the rest if I choose to learn Swift Strike.

"What should I do?" Noel narrowed his eyes. After remembering the Rivalry Medal, he immediately used all his Honor Points to buy the Skill Points to advance his Ardagan Swordsmanship.

"The test is rescheduled one week later. In other words, I can get more Honor Points to spend later." Noel smirked.

After receiving all the knowledge about the swordsmanship, he went to the barrack as Shale had prepared a big announcement.

There were certainly less people after the previous incident. Although the casualty had been minimized by Anna, there were still at least ten people dying in the forest.

After a while, Shale arrived with Anna in the training ground and shouted, "Attention!"

All of the trainees hurriedly gathered and became quiet.

"15 people out of 60 people have passed away during the last outbreak. Thanks to Anna Stargaze here, we somehow cut our loss more than half. In other words, if not for her, there would be more than 30 people losing their lives. So, make sure you thank her.

"Because of this sudden outbreak, we're going to reschedule the test. The military personnel shall check the condition within the forest first so that this situation won't happen again. Because the number has been reduced this much, we're going to change our method.

"I'm sure that you've realized it but it will be hard for you to kill a demon on your own. You need to get the help of other groups or traps which I have taught you for the past week. Of course, you have no idea how to coordinate with each other as well because you might have known your teammates not long ago.

"Hence, you're going to train in a pair because the test will be in pairs instead of a group of three. There is one week from now. You can learn more about your pair, learn what you need to do and prepare as much as possible. This will allow your pair to be better than the previous three-person group.

"Of course, you're free to add traps and join hands with other groups like the previous test. Because the number is odd, Anna Stargaze will join you as a trainee. That's all. You have 30 minutes to decide your partner and register it. Go!" Shale stepped down.

As expected, Anna instantly gathered the attention of all people because they knew how strong she was. If they could pair up with her, their group would become the top group.

Yet, Anna never accepted their invitation and instead, walked to Noel with a cunning smile.

"Well, Noel... It's been a while."

"!!!" Everyone widened their eyes in surprise.

"Why did she go to him?"

"Did they have a relationship?"

"Certainly, but not a good one."

"What do you mean?"

"Her family was the one that destroyed Noel's Family. In other words, they were enemies."

"The rumor said she was the one giving that idea."

"So, Anna wanted to torture Noel using this opportunity?"

"Damn. Even I couldn't help but sympathize him at this point. He can't really catch a break."

The people were whispering to each other about the information between the two houses. Even Alfred and Lezlev who once partnered up with Noel furrowed their eyebrows.

Anna ignored all their words and said with a cunning smile as if she was inciting his anger. "What do you think, Noel? Do you want to partner up with me?"

Their prediction came true. Anna truly wanted to torture Noel at this point.

But to everyone's surprise, Noel gave her a calm answer. "Sure."

"Eh?!" All of them dropped their jaws, not believing what Noel said. It was clear that Noel needed to refuse it if he didn't want to experience a miserable life, but he actually accepted her invitation.

Even Anna's eyes opened wide.

"Why are you shocked too when you're the one inviting me?" Noel looked at her coldly.

"No, I mean..." Anna couldn't find any words because she had prepared a few pick up lines that could make use of Noel's anger to make him join.

However, Noel took out his sword and pointed it at her.

"This is..." Anna took a step back, feeling a bit relieved since this was how Noel was supposed to act.

"I don't know the reason why you won't kill me right now... Maybe you like to torture me or whatever, but I'll take this chance to have something from you too. I want you to fight me seriously at least three times a day because I'm going to kill you for real. I've said to you that you're going to regret for not killing me." Noel stated with a cold tone.

Anna smirked as she'd got what she wanted today. "Sure. I can agree to that terms. But I need to remind you that you're too weak to even make a scratch on my body."

"We don't know anything about that yet." Noel snorted.

However, both of them thought the same thing in their head. 'Got her(him).'

Chapter 34 Ignorant

For Anna, joining hands with Noel meant she had more time to persuade him and settle the hatred between them. On the other hand, Noel wanted to spar with Anna simply for killing her as well as finishing the mission.

Still, no matter how they looked at it, Anna looked like she wanted to use this chance to beat Noel up. Even those who bullied Noel in the past week hesitated to do the same because of Anna.

In fact, Lezlev had been spreading the words about Anna not wanting to give anyone a chance to bully Noel because she wanted to do it herself. Although she looked like a horrible person, this was the way she protected him.

In thirty minutes, all people finally found their own pair. Alfred seemed to have gotten used to Lezlev's style, so he chose to go with him. Meanwhile, Kirika had a different person as her group died because they left her behind.

"Alright. Since you've got your own pair, I will inform you about your schedule." Shale stepped up again after the time limit was up. "The schedule in the morning won't change. You will focus on your individual strength.

"However, you need to train with your partner after lunch. There will be three sessions. The first session is Free Training. You're free to do anything you want with your partner, whether it's sparring, training alone, and so on.

"The second session is compatibility training. In this session, you will find some training where you need a pair to complete. You will understand what kind of training this is after experiencing it later.

"The third session is survival training. I'm sure you've known this, but traps and working together are effective against demons. So, we'll make sure that in a group, both of you know what to do if the pair somehow gets separated. This shall be your schedule from now on. Without further ado, we'll start our training. First, running!"

"Yes, Sir!" The trainees hurriedly ran like they used to do.

When running, Anna approached Noel and asked, "It seems that we can't really fight three times a day. You won't be able to fight another battle after our spar."

"One before the individual training starts, one during the free time, and one before the training ends," said Noel with a calm expression.

Anna widened her eyes, not believing Noel's change. If it were the Noel in the forest, he would rage at her. However, Noel somehow became calm and saw the bigger picture.

'Did my strategy work? It seems planting a doubt in his heart is working. This way, the hatred can be solved easier.' Anna smirked.

Still, Noel added, "I simply consider the best time for me to kill you."

"Fine then." Anna accepted the terms. However, she was smiling inwardly as if looking something cute, 'He's probably too embarrassed to admit his raging incident and don't want to apologize to me because of the hatred. Well, he's simply someone playing hard to get... Somehow, he looks cute.'

After conveying the message, Noel went away from her and clicked his tongue. His thought was the same as Anna, they both completely misunderstood each other's reaction.

'Her face was too calm. She must have realized I'm planning something because of this abrupt change. Should I explode my rage once in a while to make her believe me? I need to consider another plan to fool her.'

Either Noel or Anna knew each other's secret. As someone with a system that allowed him to progress rapidly, Noel had already started looking at the future, not only about killing her, but also the full revenge against the royal family. Hence, he was planning to use her to gain more information from observing her reaction and expression.

But Anna was a regressor. Her soul was much older than her actual age. And she had the memory of Noel's future. Someone who could help hundreds of thousands of people shouldn't be that bad. Solving the hatred was enough. That was why she looked at Noel like looking an edgy kid.

In the individual training, she noticed that Noel's physical ability wasn't that bad at all. With the addition of his fighting style, Noel turned out to be better than most people here. If he started using his Spiritual Energy efficiently, he would be the top among these trainees.

'No, wait. It's a basic knowledge that Spiritual Energy can strengthen your body. Even without the connection with spirit, as long as one can feel Spiritual Energy, they can use it. This army is supposed to teach the trainees about this after they're acknowledged as a real soldier, which is delayed due to the outbreak. But the way he acts... He doesn't seem to be someone knowledgeable of Spiritual Energy. Is he ignorant or something?

'Now that I think about it, Noel was someone uninterested with anything. According to what I know, he never participated in social gatherings and simply relied on the wealth of his family to live alone. I see, so that's how it is... Noel lacks common sense and knowledge because he's been spoiled. The difference between him and those arrogant young nobles is Noel is stuck in his home while those people are aggressively showing their power. I can finally understand him now.

'If that's the case, Noel must have found his Spirit. And he does it without all the basic knowledge? Is this his talent?' Anna shivered by the thought alone. Even she needed an extensive knowledge and time to find her Spirit for the first time.

'Let's check my theory.' Anna approached Noel again and said, "So, you've met your Spirit... If you haven't found your Spirit, you would have used the Spiritual Energy to strengthen your muscle to make you stronger."

"..." Noel remained silent but the slight twitch on his eyebrow didn't escape Anna's eyes. Noel snorted, "I don't know what you're talking about. I agreed to make a pair with you, but I didn't agree to answer any of your questions."

"Yeah, yeah." Anna smiled as she had gotten what she wanted to know. Then, she gave a tempting offer. "How about I teach you about Spirit and Spiritual Energy?"

Even Noel paused for a moment, considering the offer carefully.

'Did she seriously say that? What does she want? What if she provided a wrong information that might cause me harm in the future? I can't trust her. It's better to ask my Spirits or Sir Shale instead...' Noel didn't answer her as he simply moved away from her as if running from devil's temptation.

Chapter 35 Spar

Huft!

Noel panted a few times even though he was standing still. He just finished his personal training and went to eat.

As expected, despite becoming a pair, Anna chose to sit far away from him. Although she looked like she was trying to get closer to him, she didn't become closer than necessary.

When Noel looked at her, he thought, 'I see. So, that's what she wants. She's trying to approach me during the training because my mind can get tired and accidentally give away information. The rest of the time will be her avoiding me. What a cunning woman.'

However, his exact thought was actually the opposite of what Anna had in mind. She was even smiling inside, thinking, 'I can't get too close to Noel just yet. I know that the marquis house will hear about my action here. If I become too close without showing some distance, they'll suspect me and Noel. It will simply danger both of our lives. So, this is the best for us right now. I'm thoughtful.'

Noel didn't know why Anna came here, so he could only see the scheme coming from her while the person herself believed she was thinking the best option to avoid the unnecessary danger.

There was also an option to discuss this matter with Noel, but with how Noel acted a few days ago, she doubted Noel would believe her. There might even be a potential of a sudden betrayal, so she decided to move slowly but surely.

After finishing their meal, the trainees returned to the training ground as they had time for free training with their partner.

All the attention was gathered at one spot. Anna and Noel were standing in front of each other while holding wooden swords.

"You should have that sharp sword if you want to kill me." Anna smirked, taunting him.

"The tip is still sharp enough to kill you and the edge is still useful enough to leave a scar on your face." Noel snorted.

"Heh." Anna narrowed her eyes as she pointed her sword at Noel's neck.

Noel took a deep breath. Instead of raising his sword as the sign he was ready for the battle, Noel actually lowered his sword.

Anna became suspicious of his action before she noticed Noel's fingertips reddened as if he put more power into them.

The sign was followed by Noel's immediate action as he jumped to Anna and slashed straight to her neck.

"You should know that you need to raise your sword to show that the fight will start, right?" Anna said while taking a step back to gain some distance.

However, Noel followed her movement and tried to stab her heart while saying, "Say that to a demon or assassin."

"That's true, but..." Anna blocked the sword with her own but soon let Noel's sword slide on her sword as she pulled Noel in. After that, she kneed him in the stomach. With the additional force from the Spiritual Energy, Noel was thrown a few meters back. "...We're not in both situations!"

"Gah!" Noel spat a mouthful of acid. He felt the food he just ate earlier rose from his stomach. A knee was all it took for him to almost throw up.

Anna smiled excitedly as she said, "You're a bad guy, aren't you?"

"Not as evil as you." Noel gritted his teeth, enduring all the mess in his body. He also forced himself to stand up so that Anna didn't take that chance to attack him.

"Since you said, 'I'm evil,' I won't hold back anymore." Anna leaped forward and slammed her sword to Noel's waist.

Surprisingly, Noel managed to react and stop it with his own sword.

After that, Noel took a step to the side before swinging his sword to Anna's neck. Anna did the same thing. She blocked the sword and used that chance to attack him.

Clak!

Clak!

Clak!

Without anyone realizing, Noel and Anna somehow had exchanged ten blows.

'Hmm... How is his swordsmanship this good? He shouldn't have been this good when he first attacked me in the forest or when he fought against a Mid Level Demon. Did he train like crazy? But two days were not enough...' Anna was confused by Noel's sudden leap of ability. Ultimately, she could only link his improvement to his talent.

Of course, Anna's swordsmanship was beyond what she had shown so far. She simply hid it because she didn't want too much attention under those many eyes. If she showed a superior swordsmanship, not only would it crush everyone's heart but she would also become suspicious.

She limited herself to the level of what she could show right now.

Even so, it was already a quite high level, so Noel's swordsmanship was quite astonishing to be able to keep up with this level.

However, she also wanted to confirm Noel's level once again by provoking him. "Why don't you use your Spiritual Energy? I know that your ability can be stronger than this."

Noel gritted his teeth and almost bit that provocation, albeit he remembered the fight against the Mid Level Demon. His power was certainly not enough to kill a Mid Level Demon. And Anna was the one that killed the demon. Even though she hit his sword, that hit actually cut two-thirds of the neck's flesh.

So, if he showed that power, it would just make him in a disadvantage for a few reasons.

Hence, Noel refrained himself from using it.

"Useless provocation!" Noel shouted as he jumped forward, attacking her a few more times.

"Since you don't want to do it, then I need to remind you how ignorant you are... I've told you earlier that you can strengthen your muscle with it..." Anna slashed downwards, hitting Noel's sword.

Although she didn't cover her sword with Spiritual Energy to sharpen it, Noel felt as if he just got hit by a huge boulder.

'Kh. Too heavy.' All the veins on his head bulged out just from enduring the weight of that strike alone. When the first strike was successfully received, a second strike came from the side hit him.

Noel tried to block it but his hands were numb after that first attack, so it ended up blowing his sword away and knocked his body to the ground.

"Gah!" Noel gritted his teeth, enduring the pain on his side.

"What's wrong? How about I teach you the basic of Spiritual Energy?" Anna smirked. She wanted Noel to learn more to see his the true extent of his talent, but she didn't realize that her words would cause a misunderstanding since in Noel's perspective, it was the same as telling him that he needed to beg her to teach him the basic of Spiritual Energy.

Chapter 36 Hand-To-Hand Combat

"No." Noel snorted coldly, rejecting the offer without hesitation. However, there was a progress in his temperament since the previous Noel would have said, 'I'd rather die than learning from you.'

Anna also noticed it. Although the timing was a bit absurd, she just felt happy about it.

Hence, she decided to show it to Noel instead of teaching him. With the talent Noel had shown this whole time, there was a chance that Noel would understand what was going on and implemented his knowledge by himself.

Even Noel saw her body releasing yellow-colored particles. Normally, she never spent this much Spiritual Energy because it wasn't cost effective. However, she needed to make sure Noel could see everything.

Noel furrowed his eyebrows, observing the Spiritual Energy.

'The Spiritual Energy comes out of the body... Now that I think about it, how do you use a Spiritual Energy?' Noel imagined the feeling he felt when using Mega Slash. It felt like something in his body was sucked outside.

The movement came from his heart to his hands before flowing into his sword. There was only cold sensation followed by a bit of pain.

'Now that I think about it, other than using the Mega Slash, I have never touched the Spiritual Energy itself.' Noel took a deep breath as he shifted his blade to the side. His other hand gently touched the wooden sword while his right hand still prepared to swing the moment Anna make a move.

'Mega...' Noel followed the Mega Slash motion and started muttering inwardly to enhance the imagination.

He suddenly felt something warm in his other hand as the blue light started coming out of his sword.

'This is...' Noel glanced at the blue light and thought, 'I do feel drained like losing my blood. My temperature will also drop. But the Spiritual Energy is such a warm thing... It's like a blood but the texture is similar to that of air. Something like that in my heart...'

Noel tried to imagine that power and draw more from his heart, but he couldn't feel anything. There wasn't a movement at all.

After standing still for thirty seconds, Anna finally made the first move.

She leaped to his side and struck him from below.

Noel took a step back to gain some distance and slashed downwards, hitting her sword right in the middle.

Mega Slash.

Bang!

The moment the two swords collided, Noel broke Anna's sword apart due to Anna not covering her blade with Spiritual Energy.

"What?!"

"Is he stronger than Anna Stargaze?"

"Impossible."

No one could believe it because losing one weapon would mean losing the battle. However, Anna didn't think that was the case.

She proved it by letting her sword go.

After breaking her sword, Noel's swing continued on its path, preventing him from pulling back.

'No! She baited me!' Noel widened his eyes and wanted to change the path of his slash, but Anna was one step ahead.

She grabbed Noel's wrist and spun her body before lifting Noel with her back, throwing him.

"Kh." With his body hanging upside down in the air, Noel knew that Anna wanted to take this chance to defeat him, especially with the fact that her Spiritual Energy gathered on her fist.

Noel hurriedly raised both arms, protecting his body.

"Not good enough." However, Anna responded by touching his arms gently as if she never planned to harm him.

But the next thing he realized, the Spiritual Energy burst out, giving a powerful shock wave that was concentrated on his arms.

Bam!

The shock wave shook the entire training ground as it blew Noel several meters.

He crashed to the ground on his back, but instead of his back, Noel was overwhelmed by the pain on his lower arms.

"Argh!" Noel gritted his teeth, trying to endure the pain.

"Even if you lose your weapon, you will use everything around you as your weapon. I'm sure that the instructor has taught you that," said Anna with a calm expression, reminding everyone that everything hadn't been set in stone just because they lost a weapon.

Noel's hands were shaking. It was clear he had a hard time moving them.

'Kh. This is not enough. I need to draw the Spiritual Energy from my heart. It seems there is a kind of reservoir in my heart that stores the Spiritual Energy. The fact that I can use Mega Slash before absorbing the crystals means there is an initial cup that allows me to draw a portion of its power... But I don't think I can do this right now... Even Shale said it will take a long time to even use Spiritual Energy...'

Although he was a bit disappointed about it, he decided to stop focusing on the Spiritual Energy in this fight. Instead, he planned to rely on something else.

Just like Anna said earlier, losing a weapon didn't mean losing the battle. He might not be able to use a sword with this sword, but he still had a few ways that could injure Anna.

Even though he couldn't grasp his sword, he still could held the dirt. While he was rolling around to endure the pain, his hand grabbed the dirt.

The moment Anna dropped her guard, Noel pushed himself back to his feet and threw the dirt right at her face.

Anna was surprised that Noel used this tactic. Luckily, her soul seemed to retain her instinct. She leaped back to gain some distance, avoiding the dust.

After that, she leaped back to Noel, but somehow stopped in her tracks, avoiding Noel's kick.

'A kick, huh. He can't use his hand, so he uses his foot.' Anna thought before gathering her power in her calf and put her left foot on his way.

Noel hurriedly retracted his foot because he knew kicking Anna would just injure him.

'She can envelop her body with the Spiritual Energy while I can't. The only thing that can injure her is my Mega Slash right now... Should I stop to retain some of my stamina? If I injure myself foolishly, it will just lower my chance to wound her.' Noel narrowed his eyes, assessing the current situation.

Chapter 37 Progress

'I have injured Noel's hands... At least, he won't be able to use those arms for another one hour. And with the small internal injury, I don't think he can easily run around after this. If I continue, the wound will be too much for his body to handle the next training. I guess this is when I need to stop... Though, he might not agree with me based on his personality.'

Anna thought while searching for the words that could convince Noel.

"It's time for us to stop. More injury will make you unable to continue the rest of the training," said Anna as she prepared the next sentence the moment Noel refused.

"Sure."

"Right? I know that you're going to refuse. It seems I need to suppress you all t—What?" Anna widened her eyes, staring at Noel dumbfoundedly. She couldn't believe that Noel actually agreed without making a fuse.

"Why are you the one getting shocked when you're the one who is expecting it the most?" Noel glanced at her coldly.

"No, no." Anna waved her hands and coughed once to regain her bearing.

"Since we're done with the sparring, I'm going to leave." Noel turned around and started walking away as if he didn't want to talk to her any longer.

"Wait a minute."

Noel stopped for a moment and glanced back.

"My offer still stands."

"I don't need it." Noel harrumphed and finally left the field.

No one knew where he was going since Noel actually went to find Shale to ask about the Spiritual Energy.

Unfortunately for him, Shale rejected his request. "I'm sorry, but I can't favor you too much. I need to make it fair for other trainees as well. I have taught you about Spirit and asked Evan to heal you. So, you need to wait for a week."

"A week?"

"Yes. The reason why there is a test so soon after you just become a trainee is that we want to prepare you as an elite soldiers. I didn't give you the reason why you needed to bring back ten crystals, right?"

"That's because we will hand them back to you and train you about Spiritual Energy by using those crystals. All basics about strengthening with Spiritual Energy to the advanced level depending on your speed in comprehending the technique itself.

"Hence, it's better for you to wait for another week and learn it together with the others. I'm sorry, but I can't help you more than this."

Noel looked down while clenching his fists.

Shale noticed his reaction and said, "Your partner is Anna Stargaze, right? You can learn from her. I might not be able to teach you, but I can't stop other trainees from teaching the others. In fact, people will start asking around about the Spiritual Energy since you make that flashy fight."

"..." Noel obviously loathed the idea of asking Anna to teach him. But surprisingly, Noel said while walking away, "I will learn on my own way."

'Hoh?' Shale squinted his eyes, looking at Noel's back. 'If it's the previous him, he would have rejected it with guts. It seems he has grown a bit. Whether it's bad for him or not, only time will tell.'

Of course, Noel didn't want to go back to learn from Anna. Hence, he returned to the field and sat down on the ground, away from others.

He saw the people flocking Anna to know the secret of her success. Currently, Anna didn't tell them anything.

He tried to connect with his spirits and ended up learning that the Spirit itself didn't have a way to teach him because they only let Noel use their power. As for how Noel would use it, it would depend on himself.

In the end, Noel learned it alone by recalling the sensation over and over again, not caring about everyone's thoughts about him.

After the free training session ended, Shale returned and informed them the reason of having the test. It made everyone look forward to have the same strength as Anna.

In the next few days, Anna completely beat him up every spar because of his lack of control over his Spiritual Energy. Even so, Noel didn't say anything to this situation as if he had come to term with it.

Luckily, he completed the mission on the second day.

Medal: Rivalry (Completed)

Requirement: Spar with people you consider your rival (0/5)

Reward: Rivalry Medal, 5 Honor Points, and Ice Control Ability

Medal: Rivalry

Effect: Learning and Teaching +1%

This was the first time he saw the medal's effect give so much despite being the first medal. If Anna could see this, she would have realized the reason why Noel always fought against her in every chance.

Whether it was his luck or not, his progress in helping the citizens as well as his Rivalry went smoothly, allowing him to finish the next mission as well.

Ultimately, he received 21 Honor Points, Excellent Citizen Medal, Perfect Citizen Medal, Rivalry Medal, and Rivalry II Medal.

He exchanged 18 Honor Points with 9 Skill Points and leveled up Ardagan Swordsmanship, Mega Slash, and Swift Strike.

With all these preparations, he was ready to fight against Anna seriously in their last match since he had been hiding his Ice Control Ability that turned out to be the last thing he needed to understand the Spiritual Energy.

Although his control wasn't as good as Anna, reinforcing a part of his body was possible for the current him.

Unfortunately, no matter how hard he tried to hide it, Anna realized his swordsmanship had gotten significantly better again.

Their last spar was held on the last day before dinner. This might be the last dinner they could have with all the members since they needed to head back to the forest the next day.

Noel and Anna agreed that their fight wouldn't be observed by anyone, since Noel planned to go all out.

And as soon as everyone left to eat, Noel and Anna stood in the middle of the training ground, preparing their last fight.

Noel's Progress:

[Training]

Training: Running 80 Km

Reward: Stamina +0.25% (Accumulation: 1.20%)

Training: Push Up 1000 times

Reward: Constitution +0.25% (Accumulation: 1.20%)

Training: Swinging a Sword up and down 1000 times

Reward: Sword Mastery +0.25% (Accumulation: 1.20%)

Training: Rivalry

Requirement: Spar with people you consider your rival (5/10)

Reward: Spiritual Energy +0.25% (Accumulation: 0.75%)

[Medal]

Medal: Best Citizen Merit

Requirement: Help 100 Townspeople (48/100)

Reward: Best Citizen Medal and 10 Honor Points

...

Medal: Military Service II Merit

Requirement: Kill 25 Low Level Demons (0/25)

Reward: Military Service II Medal and 5 Honor Points

...

Medal: Rivalry III

Requirement: Spar with people you consider your rival (4/15)

Reward: Rivalry III Medal and 15 Honor Points

[Career: Swordsman]

Skill: Swift Strike (1/5)

Requirement: 3 SP

Skill: Ardagan Swordsmanship (3/15)

Requirement: 7 SP

Skill: Mega Slash (2/5)

Requirement: 5 SP

Skill: Ice Control Ability (1/1)

Requirement: -

Name: Noel Ardagan

Job: Swordsman

Weapon: Ardagan Sword

Main Medal: Rivalry II (Learning and Teaching +3%)

Low Quality Crystal - 10/5000

Chapter 38 Last Spar

"This is our last spar before going to the forest again. I'm sure that you know it, but I'm not planning to hold back in the forest. I don't care about the speed record because my original plan is to kill as many demons as possible to get their crystal," Anna explained her plan since they were a pair.

"I know. I don't know if I can defeat a Low Level Demon by myself or not, but I'm not planning to back down. My kills might be more than you, who knows." Noel shrugged, turning her explanation into a provocation.

"Heh." Anna raised her sword. "In that case, show me whether you can do it or not."

"You might die." Noel also did the same, pointing it at Anna's neck.

The atmosphere became silent as both of them were observing each other's movement. Noel enhanced his muscle so that he didn't lose against Anna's strength.

The moment Anna slightly moved her foot, Noel jumped forward, taking advantage of that movement to catch her off guard.

However, Anna swiftly struck Noel's sword as if she had been expecting it. In fact, she might make that small movement to invite Noel in.

Once she repelled the sword, she spun her body and used that momentum to attack him.

Bang!

The two wooden swords suddenly hit each other again as Noel somehow made a swift swing after getting deflected.

"!!!" Anna widened her eyes because she saw the Spiritual Energy in that one swing. If not for her reaction speed, she would have lost her sword earlier. It seemed both of them almost fell to each other's trap.

'Swift Strike is not fast enough?' Noel narrowed his eyes and took a few steps back to regain some distance.

'What is that speed? Even his Swordsmanship is too good. He must have hidden his power this whole time.' Anna frowned, increasing the danger level of Noel.

Not only had Noel changed to be a calm and collected person, but he also could hide his skills until the right moment. It seemed Noel had changed to be a more dangerous person that might be able to kill her the moment she lowered her guard, she thought.

Meanwhile, Noel was frustrated that Anna could still react to his swing. If he had taken out her sword earlier, his winning chance would increase drastically.

Unfortunately for him, the moment he regained his distance, Anna chased after him, trying to pressure him so that he couldn't show any of his hidden power again.

Noel wasn't scared of her, so he met her sword skillfully, deflecting all her swings. It seemed Anna didn't have any intention in using the Spiritual Energy in her sword except when he used his own ability.

It made their clash became even fiercer as both of them exchanged fifty blows within thirty seconds.

Noel managed to keep up with Anna's fighting style, but now that he had understood more about Ardagan Swordsmanship, he could see that Anna's movement was quite lacking.

It wasn't her skill that was lacking, but the speed and power in each blow as if she was holding back.

Her technique might be higher than what she currently showed.

'So, you're still looking down on me.' Noel's expression became cold as he made his decision. 'In that case, keep underestimating me because it shall be your doom.'

The two continued their clash for another few minutes before Noel was the first to bail out of this fight. He jumped back a few times while panting.

As expected, his stamina still couldn't hold that kind of clash for too long.

"Hu..." He took a deep breath to regain his breathing.

Unfortunately for him, Anna didn't let him do whatever he wanted. Despite using the same amount of energy as Noel, she had yet to break a sweat.

Noel could only grit his teeth and continue swinging his blade while searching for a chance to attack her.

After another thirty seconds, Noel made a powerful swing by covering his sword with Spiritual Energy. Of course, Noel could only control the Spiritual Energy to enhance his muscle for now. This kind of control was only possible because he was using Mega Slash.

With that huge amount of Spiritual Energy, Noel struck Anna as hard as possible.

Anna grabbed her sword with both hands and received this attack, getting pushed back for five meters.

'It's become more powerful...' Anna sucked a cold breath. Even though she had protected her hand with Spiritual Energy, the numbness still struck her fingers. 'I need to release a bit more of my power. I'm really lucky to have the chance to regress since I can deal with this monstrous talent skillfully.'

After knowing what to do, Anna ran forward to face Noel again. But to her surprise, Noel's expression changed for the first time.

"Heh." Noel suddenly smirked as if Anna had fallen into his traps.

"A smirk?" Anna gasped and suddenly felt the Spiritual Energy fluctuate on the ground. "Ah?!"

The moment she lowered her vision, she saw a small spot on the ground that was covered in a thin layer of ice. And her left foot stepped on it, making her fall.

Noel had raised his sword with both hands, preparing a hard strike at her head to kill her.

'A trap? How many times I have fallen into his trap in my previous life... And I still couldn't escape from it?' Anna panicked for a moment. Still, her soul already picked up the habit of reacting to Noel's trap.

"No!" Anna gritted her teeth and forced her hand to move, stabbing the ground with the sword to support her body so that she didn't fall to the ground.

Sadly, no matter how fast she moved, she wouldn't be fast enough. And she also realized it.

Hence, Anna chose a different option. The moment the sword reached the ground, albeit sideways which couldn't support her body, she used that little force to launch herself to Noel.

She then spread both arms to tackle Noel's body, specifically his stomach.

"I'm not going to let you achieve what you want!" Anna shouted.

'She can still react to that?' Noel gritted his teeth as he couldn't believe her reaction speed. He waved his sword, but it was too slow compared to Anna.

In the end, Anna was the first to reach him. However, due to her slipping and the lack of support, she didn't reach the place she intended to, which was Noel's stomach.

Instead, the target was a bit lower than the stomach... Yes, it was his crotch.

Her face was the first to hit it while her arms circled around Noel's butt.

But for Noel... He wailed in pain as he almost passed out from the pain alone. The momentum then made him fall to the ground.

"Uuuu..."

Chapter 39 Misunderstanding

"Uuuuu..."

Noel somehow regretted using that trap. He could only lie on the ground as he tried hard not to pass out.

Meanwhile, Anna could easily get back up.

"Ah!" She looked at Noel with a dumbfounded expression. Even though she was older than her current age, this was the first time she had this much intimate contact with an opposite gender.

Although she didn't want to admit it, it was her left cheek that made Noel like this because she could clearly feel it earlier. The embarrassment that surged in her heart made her depress.

"You..." Noel gritted his teeth.

"Uh, sorry. I mean it, but isn't that because of your trap? You share the blame too because if I didn't react, I would be dead."

Noel's plan was perfect. The only miscalculation he had was the fact that Anna would be able to react to that kind of fall.

"Ugh, let me bring you to the infirmary first." Anna grabbed Noel's weakened body and carried him to the infirmary. She carried him on her back so that he didn't see her face the whole time.

On the way to the infirmary, she had a lot of thoughts in her mind.

'What did I just do? Did I just bury my face in... in... in his crotch? If someone saw that fight, they would think I'm a horny sl*t. If my family heard this, I could somehow twist the story, but there would be many misunderstandings...

'Argh. What the hell...' Anna felt her body become warm as her face was flushed red. She was too embarrassed to even look at anyone. The only way to calm her down was to remind herself of her age. 'Don't be like that, Anna. You and Noel are still fifteen years old, your soul might be older, but you need to act like one.

'But wait... The marriage among nobles are around 12 years old. We've gotten all the necessary knowledge about it before then... Won't they think I... I've done it with him?'

Anna's imagination ran wild while Noel was enduring the pain. It was truly too much even for him. The pain was extremely different than the likes of cut wound or even bruises.

Fortunately, they reached the infirmary in just three minutes.

Anna immediately laid him down on a bed and asked Evan to treat her.

"Please, Mr. Evan."

"Well, I can do that much at least." Evan nodded with a calm expression and examined Noel, only to find no external injuries. "Hmm? Where's the injury again?"

Anna embarrassedly pointed at Noel's crotch before running away as she couldn't endure the shame.

'What has happened?' That was the first thought Evan had in his mind. 'Did they...'

Evan shook his head helplessly and said, "Oh, boy. Shale told me that you two made a pair and kept sparring against each other. It seemed that you two had another one without anyone watching you this time. Was that because you couldn't control your lust?"

"No, we were just sparring!" Noel gritted his teeth, denying all the accusations that led to their relationship being good.

Unfortunately, no matter how hard he tried to correct Evan, there was no way that Evan would think something else.

"Sparring eh... Then, tell me what did she use to hurt you? I won't heal you if you don't tell me."

"That's..." Noel hesitated for a moment before answering, "Her...cheek."

"Cheek? The head?" Evan raised his vision as his imagination started revolving. He muttered inwardly as soon as he got his answer. 'Ah, mouth service...'

He didn't know that Noel used a trap to make her slip and she somehow used that to tackle him. Of course, there was no way they would be able to come up with that conclusion. Even if Noel explained the entire thing, not many would believe it.

Ultimately, Evan nodded with a smile, praising him. "You're good, boy. To exact your revenge, you make the talented and proud noble Anna Stargaze fall in love with you. And a few years later, I wonder what Marquis Stargaze would see when his enemy actually made a child with his daughter. A good way to exact your revenge..."

"You're wrong..." Noel tried hard to explain, but the pain was still too much.

"Yeah, yeah. Don't worry.. I'll keep this a secret." Evan nodded in understanding and started healing him, reducing the pain.

After that, Noel had a long talk with Evan, explaining every little detail that happened. Sadly, Evan didn't listen to him seriously, keeping the misunderstanding.

In the end, Noel returned to his room. His face was completely filled with despair. For Noel, there were many ways to avenge his parents, but this wasn't one of them.

"Anna Stargaze... I'm going to make you pay for this humiliation." Noel gritted his teeth.

Sadly, no matter how hard he cursed Anna, nothing would happen. In the end, he was too tired to even continue.

He also didn't do anything within the few hours where he could help some more people in the town.

He was thinking about how to pay her back for this embarrassment.

...

The next day.

Noel returned to the training ground. His head was filled with anger.

When he saw Anna, it was truly hard for him to control his outburst. At the same time, Anna could only look away as she was too embarrassed to even look at him.

Meanwhile, other trainees didn't bother with Noel anymore because they had seen his fight against Anna for an entire week. It was clear that Noel's improvement was tremendous.

Without Spiritual Energy, his swordsmanship alone could rank among the best. And with the Spiritual Energy that he learned by observing Anna, his combat power surpassed everyone.

What made his pair stand out was the fact that his partner was the current strongest person among the trainees, Anna Stargaze. It was clear that this was the strongest pair.

They had tried to persuade Anna and Shale to teach them about Spiritual Energy, but both of them refused because they needed to pass this test first.

And they somehow envied Noel who learned Spiritual Energy first. Yes, all the boys were jealous because they wanted to be paired with Anna as well.

Little did they know, Noel and Anna's relationship had become worse last night.

Chapter 40 First Time Working Together

"That's all. Grab the equipment from me and immediately head to the forest. I can assure you that another outbreak won't happen under normal circumstances."

Noel and Anna exchanged looks as they walked to Shale. The latter only smiled at them as he had been told the situation by Evan.

"Good luck, both of you. Don't forget to work together and focus on the demons," said Shale, reminding them not to bother with physical intimacy when they reach the forest.

Noel's eyebrows twitched while Anna just ignored him.

"You carry the tent and cooking utensils. I carry the remaining tools as well as our bottles." Anna handed him a backpack.

Noel just wanted to leave this place as soon as possible, so he accepted the bag without making a fuss.

After that, the two ran to the forest. Their training had strengthened them and improved their stamina, so Noel could go at a faster speed without getting exhausted easily.

Anna, of course, didn't go too fast either because they were not competing this time.

"Anyway, we will get ten crystals to complete the mission. After that, we will get half of the loot."

Noel listened to Anna's suggestion and agreed without hesitation. Although he didn't want to admit it, Anna was stronger than him. Yet, she wanted to give him half the loot.

He might hate the fact that he lived on the grace of his enemy, but over the past week, he had learned how to swallow his pride and shamelessly take everything. The faster he became stronger, the quicker he could exact his revenge after all.

Anna also noticed Noel's calm behavior. At least, he wouldn't be an impulsive young man that could endanger their group anymore.

"Well, I don't think both of us need a trap to handle a Low Level Demon. If you utilize Spiritual Energy, it will be easy to cut Low Level Demons. So, we only need to worry about the Mid Level Demon. I'm planning to hunt some Mid Level Demons in the Inner Region. What do you think?"

"Set up a base in the inner region and make traps."

"..." Anna scratched the back of her head. She just said that traps weren't needed, but Noel seemed to be firm about his opinion. Remembering Noel's fighting style, she reluctantly agreed. "Fine. But make the traps when you're on your night watch! We won't have too much time during the day."

"I don't think I need to remind you this, but I can wake up if I sense you coming to the tent. So, don't try to sneak up on me. I'm going to make you regret it when you do that."

Noel snorted. "Fine. But I'll be the one to choose the camping spot and where to go."

"I don't have a problem." Anna felt satisfied that they could finally make an agreement. This was an improvement in their relationship.

Little did she know, Noel only buried his anger. And that anger didn't disappear.

After making a decision where to go, they then headed straight to the inner region which would take two hours to reach.

On the way, they found their first Low Level Demon.

Without hesitation, Anna and Noel took out their weapons at the same time. As if the beast could sense the danger from Anna, it attacked Anna first with its claws.

However, Anna skillfully cut the claws as well as the paws of this demon.

But this time she had a more reliable teammate than Alfred and Lezlev. As soon as the demon was stopped by her, Noel used his Mega Slash, swinging the sword with both hands.

The sword cut through the monster's neck in a single swing.

"Hu..." Noel took a deep breath, feeling relieved that he could kill a Low Level Demon with a single swing. After all, this was the proof that he had gotten stronger.

"Don't be too proud of yourself. Killing one Low Level Demon don't mean you're strong. A Low Level Demon is the lowest rank among the demons. In a war, their number is the highest. Sometimes, you will be surrounded by a thousand demons."

"I have heard that the Demon Banner Army is going to train you for a year. If you complete your training, you can handle thirty to fifty Low Level Demon by yourself. But the elites in the Demon Banner Army are even stronger.

"According to the rumors, a single wave of the commander's sword can kill a thousand of Low Level Demons." Anna added, making sure Noel wasn't too proud of himself.

However, Noel only snorted. "I know that already. Do you think I'm satisfied with this? I'll only be satisfied after killing you."

"Yeah, yeah. I don't care about that. I just want you to know that even the commander is afraid of the demons. The reason is simple. Their number is overwhelming. Can you imagine a single fort taking the full brunt of millions of demons? What if we add Mid Level Demon or even those above them in the mix? I'm sure you know this already, but what you see here is just the edge."

"You don't need to tell me twice. I don't care if there are strong demons or not. I only need to become stronger than you."

"You love twisting my words, don't you?"

"I don't know what you're talking about."

Noel maintained his poker face the whole time while Anna tried to tease him from time to time, trying to crack that stone face of his.

Ultimately, the two of them met a total of eight Low Level Demon on their way to the Inner Region.

They stopped in the middle of the dense forest. It was pretty hard to even measure their exact position at this point.

Anna asked, "So, how are you gonna navigate in this forest?"

Noel raised his head and looked at the sun's position before pointing at the west. "That direction. We should be able to find a small lake that way."

"You have a map? Even me couldn't get a map from the instructor even though I asked him."

Noel closed his eyes, remembering the reason he knew this. When he was helping in the town, one of them was actually a senior soldier that had retired.

While helping him, the senior soldier started talking about his experience and knowledge. And when he knew about Noel's status as a trainee, the senior soldier gave him some tips and tricks.

Of course, he wouldn't tell Anna about it.

,m "Just follow me. If you don't trust me, then you can go somewhere else," said Noel as he started running, not waiting for Anna.

"I trust you, though." Anna smirked and followed him.