

S vs Rebirth 321

Chapter 321 World

Their group had two carriages to bring all their equipment, from tents to construction tools. The first carriage was handled by group A and the second one was given to group B.

In the front, Noel and Stella were sitting in the front, with Stella holding the helm.

Since Noel had nothing to do, he was staring at the map to see the path they took. "Ehm... If I'm not wrong, we're going through the Vines Mountain, right?"

"No, we're going the other way, through the Leimas Plain. It's a plain, so we should pick up some speed. If we go through the mountain, we'll need two weeks to go around it. I mean, that's not a problem if we're in our house and don't have to care about our carriage. But we're not..."

"But... Leimas Plain is..." Noel pointed at the Leimas Plain that had been marked red. This red mark only meant one thing.

"Yeah." Stella nodded. "It's past the border. In other words, we're going through the demon territory."

"..." Noel's eyebrows twitched. He had heard that the area across the border was very dangerous. The demons over there were more aggressive and stronger. Unless they were confident in fighting those demons, they shouldn't go near the border.

"Well, it must be scary if you learn it when you're training. But it's better to experience it yourself. There aren't many differences compared to this place, except for more demons." Stella paused for a moment before a smile appeared on her face. She looked at the sky and said, "Do you know about this story... In the past, humans once conquered the world. We ruled over all living beings in this world."

Noel fell silent, listening to this story. This was a story about ancient times.

"Suddenly, the demons started emerging in the world. We don't know what the cause was and where it started coming from. But the demons soon filled the world. They entered one thing after another. They turned our animals into demon beasts, trees into demon plants... They infected all living beings."

Noel paused for a moment and asked, "Now that I think about it, is there any record of a human being infected by the demon?"

"Mhm... I haven't heard about such a case. The demons were supposed to infect the living creatures with less intelligence than us. From what I've heard, the demons have the same intelligence as us, so they can only devour the consciousness lower than them, which is the animals and trees.

"It might be due to the mobility as well, but the plants are rarely infected. After all, the demons will have to live there for the rest of their lives." Stella explained.

"Mhm..." Noel thought for a moment. "I mean, if the world was once ruled by humans, shouldn't there be a record about a rare case like that? I mean, how big the world is compared to our kingdom's territory or maybe all of the human territory?"

"That's a good question. Even I don't know how big the world is... Though, I've heard that if you keep advancing toward the east, you'll find a place filled with water. The water expands to the horizon to the point you will be surrounded by water. This is what I heard from my past friend who once lived in Aikuvell Kingdom." Stella explained. "The more amazing thing is that this water is salty and if you evaporate the water, you can get salt."

"Salt..." Noel widened his eyes in surprise.

"Yes. Our kingdom uses the salt extracted from the ground called Rock Salt. Even the commoners there won't have any problems with salt. They even imported their rock salt to our kingdom."

"Mhm. That sounds like a good place to live..." Noel nodded.

"Well, we also have our own advantages. We might not be near that water land, but we have found several mines that we can use to strengthen our forces. Do you know there is another living area that is said to have a living being that is not human?"

"Yes." Noel nodded.

"It's said they're the product of a combination between human and animal. Humans might have good adaptability, but animals have superior strength. In the past, people wanted to combine them to create a strong soldier.

"They succeeded and they're thriving. However, there was a conflict between humans and this new race, causing all of us to weaken each other.

"Because their number can't be compared to the humans, they've been expelled and stayed there for generations. But at that time, human territory had been reduced to tenth percent of our original size.

"According to the record, it seems we have regained another ten percent, which means, all the combined human territory is similar to a fifth to what we had back then."

"Oh..." Noel was amused by the story. "Then, is there any record about the past civilization? I mean, we're reclaiming our territory, right? There should be some traces out there."

"There should be some. In fact, the reason why we know there's a mine or not is because of the previous map. However, only the royal family has the right to see that map, considering it has been controlled by the four great forces..."

"But if it's the royal family, won't they just be sending you to your death if they lie to you?"

"That's true. Though, unless they're a complete fool who wants to ruin the kingdom, they won't do that on a large scale. Besides, the commander should be one of the few people who were given the right by the royal family to see that map, allowing him to make another decision different from the royal family. You should know about the power balance in the kingdom, right?"

"Yes. There are three great forces in our kingdom. The Royal Family is the head that directs the kingdom. The Demon Banner Army is the sword that fights the demons and expands the territory. And lastly, the Tower Association... they're the ones developing the kingdom with their knowledge."

"Yes. They're keeping each other in check to make sure the kingdom can still run. If one of the leaders is a complete fool, the kingdom won't be destroyed because there are the other two. But it'll be a different case if two or even all of them are fools. I just hope it won't happen."

"Well..." Noel nodded in agreement.

Chapter 322 Demon Banner Army

"Though, that doesn't stop them from trying to eliminate us." Noel shrugged, speaking from experience.

Stella fell silent, understanding Noel's anger. Although the three of them were keeping each other in check, it didn't change the fact that those three would turn a blind eye if one of them targeted someone not important to them.

In this case, if the Royal Family wanted to eliminate Noel, the commander would turn blind eyes to this case since it didn't hurt the Demon Banner Army that much.

But it would be a different case if Noel had become a Vice Captain or even a Captain. The Commander would fight the Royal Family to the death if they dared to eliminate Noel.

This was the reason why Noel planned to hide his identity until he became a Vice Captain, allowing him to change his career from the Vice Captain to a Baron. He would immediately reclaim the empty Ardagan's territory without hesitation and the commander would help him in that matter.

At the same time, Stella didn't know that the commander was working with the Third Prince. The Royal Family should have heard about Noel's graduation, but they hadn't sent anyone to eliminate him. It should be due to the influence of the Third Prince.

As for the Tower Association, he didn't know anyone from that place, so they must remain Neutral, Noel thought.

Noel scratched the back of his head, apologizing. "Sorry. It seems my casual remarks make it awkward. Still, do you mind telling me more about the state of the world? This is the first time I've seen someone so knowledgeable."

"I read books before sleeping." Stella shrugged. "Alright. Let's go back to the previous topic. Where were we earlier...Ah, right. The map!"

"The map is where our current situation comes from. You should know the Demon Banner Army has fifteen squads, right?"

"Yes."

"Basically, the fifteen squads are divided into three categories: Sword, Shield, and Hammer. Sword means fighting on the frontline. They're people who fought the most since they're the ones expanding our territory. This year... Should be Captain Shale's time. His Demon Extermination Squad is one of the swords. There are also Demon Hunting Squad and so on.

"If you want to become rich, strong, or influential, you should go to the swords since it'll give you an opportunity to grow as fast as possible.

"As for the second category, the shield... It's basically the ones fortifying what the Swords have done. For example, they create bases and supply routes along with protecting the exhausted soldiers from the swords. The Demon Barrier Squad is among them and they're the ones who will hold next year's training.

"If you want a stable and safer path of advancement, this is a place to go. Though, sometimes, they've to bolster the other squads to make sure the expansion can keep going.

"Last but not least, the hammer. They're basically the ones handling the miscellaneous stuff. We are the Demon Relief Squad, which handles the living area near the border since it'll be affected by the demons. I mean, the kingdom keeps expanding, so it's clear that they'll send people to live near the border. That's where we come in.

"There is also Demon Observation Squad, whose captain is one of the most talented people the Demon Banner Army has received in years, Septa. And a squad like Demon Construction Squad is the one creating a fortified base that can be used as a temporary headquarters for the advance squad.

"Basically, the Sword, Shield, and Hammer cooperate with each other to expand," Stella explained.

"I see." Noel thought for a moment and asked, "Then, I heard there are five elite squads among those fifteen squads..."

"Ah, these five elite squads just mean they're the favorite. They're judged by the strength of their captain, the overall power of the group, their work, and so on.

"The current five elite squads from the first to the fifth are Demon Destroyer Squad, Demon Extermination Squad, Demon Shield Squad, Demon Assassination Squad, and our Demon Relief Squad."

"Huh? Our squad is that strong?" Noel widened his eyes in shock.

"You don't know about it?" Stella thought Noel came here because they were the top in the Hammer Category, but it seemed she was wrong. "Well, the strength of the captain matters a lot to the ranking.

"For example, thirty years ago, no one came close to the Demon Assassination Squad. It's like their golden age because of their Captain. He was known as Shadow. All kinds of enemies whether they were from normal people or even the Supreme Devil Organizations were scared if they knew the Shadow had invited them to the abyss. It was said that if Shadow kept working for at least another decade, he would be able to become the commander.

"But he chose another path and no one ever heard about him anymore. And right now, the Demon Assassination Squad could only reach the 4th spot.

"At the same time, our Captain, Clara, is the best after many generations. He might be a healer, but her spirit is a type of spider. Her threat can reattach the blood vessel and even the limbs. But you don't mess with her... As I said earlier, she is like a spider...

"Last year, Paul teased her too much and she ended up getting angry. She sewed his lips, eyes, and limbs and even attached poison that made his body in pain before hanging him on a wall upside down for a whole day."

"..." Noel blinked his eyes a few times as he couldn't believe it. "Seriously?"

"Yeah. That's why no one wants to provoke her anymore. Even on the battlefield, she once sewed a bird to a ball and compressed it to death."

"..." Noel pointed at himself. "Then, aren't our lives in danger?"

"Hahaha, not really. The punishment is severe and she is a sadist, but as long as you don't provoke her, she will be your best captain and comrade. Just remember not to mention anything about her sadistic nature and age. After all, she is our young and beautiful captain."

Noel sucked a cold breath, remembering why they suggested to call her by using 'captain' instead of other titles.

"I'll remember it."

Chapter 323 Fighting A Peak Level Demon (1)

"It's here." Stella smiled while pointing forward. "We've reached the border."

Even though Stella said so, Noel couldn't see any differences. They had been traveling on the plain for a while, so there wasn't any change in their surroundings.

Stella chuckled, seeing Noel's confusion. "I told you earlier, right? There aren't that many changes whether we're still in the human territory or not, except for more demons. We're barely crossing the border, so we won't find too many of them, but if we continue our way to that direction..."

Stella pointed at their left and continued, "You'll start finding more and more demons."

"Still, there would be many Low Level and Mid Level Demons, right?"

"Of course. Or how do you think they're found inside the kingdom? The border to the demon territory is vast, so it's impossible to block everything, especially since we're expanding continuously."

"And the stronger squads must have killed enough Low Level Demons for them to use and sell the rest for their pocket money. I mean, that's how you become rich in the first place." Stella smirked. "Even I have a quite amount of money."

"So, you have absorbed Low Level Crystals to the limit... How about the Mid Level Crystals?"

"Yeah. I've finished it as well. I'm working on the Advanced Level Crystals right now."

"I see." Noel nodded with a serious expression. "If that's the case, how do you usually split the crystals among all of you?"

"We usually gather the amount until everyone can get one each. So, if you have five crystals, you won't get the split for the time being until we get another crystal. If you have ten, everyone could get one and wait for another one after another two crystals."

"I see."

"And because there's an addition of both of you, we'll split every eight crystals."

"Huh? But..." Noel was confused for a moment. It was clear that they wouldn't be able to contribute as much as the others, but they actually planned to split it with them too.

Stella patted Noel's shoulder and said, "No need to think too much. You are one of us now, so there's no need to feel reserved. Just make sure you keep getting stronger, and who knows, in the near future, we might be the ones getting your kindness."

Noel couldn't help but smile, realizing there was a group like this. They still cared about their personal achievement, but it didn't stop them from functioning as a group. In fact, the group looked more solid.

"I understand." Noel nodded with a serious expression. When he was about to ask her something, Rose's voice suddenly resounded in their ears.

"On our left!"

"!!!" In that instant, all people were alarmed. Even Stella turned to the left to see what was going on, finding a gigantic cheetah running toward them. The demon was covering all his feet with purple-colored Spiritual Energy, and his bloodshot eyes were targeting them.

Paul jumped into the field, pulled out the warhammer on his back, and said, "It's a Peak Level Demon. Rose will keep watching our surroundings. Stella, Jonathan, and Zion will take care of it. Understood?"

Stella smiled while handing the reign to Noel. "Just keep it stable. It won't take long. Don't forget to watch how we fight... It might be an important lesson for you."

Noel nodded, staring at the three of them who were about to take a Peak Level Demon on.

When Noel saw this demon, he could feel chills down his body. There was a dense amount of killing intent fell on top of his body. In the demon's eyes, he was nothing but prey.

"This is..." Noel muttered in a low voice while looking at his shaking hands. "Not good. The demon's gaze alone is enough to make me trembling. And if I take another look at it, each time the demon takes a step, the ground underneath was compressed downward.

"This is only the step, what's the feeling of taking down a Peak Level Demon?" Noel furrowed his eyebrows, wondering the difference between an Advanced Level Demon and a Peak Level Demon.

He once fought against the Ancient Demon Tree, but that demon couldn't even muster a percentage of its original power. So, he never had seen the strength above Advanced Level.

Stella was smiling when Noel watched intensely. "Well, gotta show off a bit. Help me, will you?"

"Just don't be too reckless because he might catch your stupidity." Jonathan shrugged.

"Stupid? Noel has recognized me as a knowledgeable person, you know. So, just support this time."
Stella harrumphed. "Stop him for me."

"Tsk." Jonathan clicked his tongue but still walked forward. He looked at the cheetah with an annoyed expression.

The cheetah let out a roar filled with Spiritual Energy. The roar blasted everything on its way. Even the ground was swept by the sheer pressure. And this blast went straight to Jonathan.

"!!!" Noel was astonished. "A single roar can even shatter the earth? Then, Jonathan..."

He was worried about Jonathan, who had to take this roar, but it seemed his worry was unnecessary.

Jonathan simply waved his hand and the pressure was suddenly pushed by an unknown force, neutralizing it.

"Annoying. If you're a cat, then no need to become that fierce!" Jonathan waved his hand down.
"Kneel!"

"!!!" The demon suddenly felt tremendous pressure that fell on top of him.

Bam!

The ground suddenly cracked as the pressure continuously pushed down the demon.

Roar!

The demon tried to resist the pressure, but the more it exerted strength, the more the ground was destroyed.

"..." Noel was speechless. "This is... Telekinesis. It's so strong."

"Well, it's truly strong. Jonathan is a master of Spiritual Energy's manipulation. Normally, Telekinesis is used to wrap the target around it and then lift it. However, Jonathan has a different style. Instead of wrapping the tiger with his telekinesis, he is controlling the air to push downwards. The amount of control you need to even start influencing the air... Even I can't replicate it."

"Oh..." Noel nodded in agreement, understanding Jonathan's strength. However, he also glanced to Ben who had been standing next to the carriage this whole time. "I'm sorry, but since when you are here?"

"That's your question?"

Chapter 324 Fighting A Peak Level Demon (2)

Meanwhile, the fight still continued. The cheetah was struggling to resist the pressure. Its Spiritual Energy kept rising and eventually, the cheetah let out another roar, sending forth a blast to all directions.

Roar!

The shock wave from the blast hit the pressure on top of him, scattering it.

But when the cheetah was about to move to kill Jonathan, Zion suddenly appeared on top of him, falling down with his foot covered in Spiritual Energy.

"He said kneel, you idiot!" Zion dropped a kick at the cheetah's head and knocked it to the ground.

The loud crashing sound echoed in the field and the cheetah had his head planted on the ground.

This was the time Stella made her move. Since the cheetah had been restrained, she covered her sword with Spiritual Energy and struck the cheetah's head. The Spiritual Energy turned into wind and scattered upon hit.

The gale was so sharp that it cut the cheetah's skin, covering the cheetah head in hollow wounds.

Stella didn't stop here. She continued moving to the side of this demon and struck her sword again, scattering the wind and cutting the skin as well.

She struck the cheetah a few more times, completely covering his entire body with wounds.

The Spiritual Energy from the demon's body became even fiercer.

"Oh, this is not good." Stella muttered while leaping back to regain some distance. In that instant, the Spiritual Energy erupted, creating a shock wave that pushed all of them back.

The demon stood up again while releasing a roar. The roar's strength was similar to the first one that could destroy the ground, but this time, the roar spread in all directions, causing a massive destruction to the area.

"Is this the strength of the peak level demon?" Noel sucked a cold breath.

"There are two states of mind for the peak level demon: calm and berserk. In the calm state, the demon usually uses their brain to fight their enemies. They are skillful and annoying. However, their full strength will be unleashed if they're in berserk state. In that state, they're drawing all the potential in their body and fight like a beast. So, yeah... Choose your poison."

"Calm and skillful, insane but strong," Noel muttered while contemplating. "I see. Depending on the situation, you can make them berserk or keep them calm..."

"That's right. Well, they're unnecessarily making this demon berserk... Someone is probably wanting to show off. Yeah, this must be Stella." He pointed at Stella and said, "Her Spirit is a Wind Spirit. She scattered her wind to find a weak spot. Still, as expected of a Peak Level Demon, its skin is tough. Low Level and Mid Level demons would have died in a single hit."

"..." Noel narrowed his eyes, realizing the wounds truly covered the body. This way, she could see which wound was the deepest to concentrate their attacks on that spot.

Without anyone noticing, Stella had actually regrouped with the other two. She said, "The ears, the eyes, the tail, and the leg's joints. Zion, you kick the tiger's legs while I cut the rest. After that, we'll deliver the killing blow."

"Got it." Zion nodded and leaped to the demon.

The demon instinctively gathered its energy on its paw and stomped Zion. The latter smiled for a second before disappearing from that position.

Still, the paw actually shattered the ground around that area. If he took it head-on, Zion might probably get injured.

Fortunately, Zion's speed was enough to avoid this paw as he went straight to the other leg and kicked the joint.

Bam!

Roar! The demon screamed in pain as the shock wave from the kick cracked the ground. It turned out Zion's kick wasn't any weaker compared to the demon's. And that kick dislocated the bones, causing the demon to fall down.

It was at that time, Stella came in. Instead of dispersing her wind like earlier, Stella concentrated that wind to cut the demon's ears.

Roar!

Roar!

The demon became angry but he couldn't hear their movement anymore. He could only rely on the smell and vision to track them, but Jonathan didn't allow him to do that.

He concentrated the air with his Telekinesis and pushed it to the eyes.

The demons felt the fluctuation of the Spiritual Energy, but because it couldn't move due to Zion's attack, the demon could only close its eyes, hoping the eyelids were strong enough to protect his eyes. The demon even lowered down his head to avoid this attack.

Bam!

The telekinesis ended up hitting the demon's forehead, but this was enough for Stella because she had arrived in front of the eyes. She slashed her swords horizontally, cutting both of the eyes.

Roar!

The demon was truly helpless when fighting against these three. It tried to resist with its Spiritual Energy again, but Jonathan wrapped his body with Telekinesis, suppressing the Spiritual Energy for a few seconds.

After that, Jonathan raised his other hand and lifted a huge chunk of dirt.

Stella's eyes flashed as she cut down the dirt, turning it into a nail. With Jonathan's placing it right on top of the demon's head, Zion gave enough strength for the nail to impale the head with his kick.

Bam!

The demon couldn't do anything as it was already half dead the moment the dirt entered his head. And Stella delivered the killing blow by slicing its head through the hole from the nail.

"And this is how we fight. In the end, the demon couldn't use all its strength," said Ben as he watched how the three finished a Peak Level Demon. "Of course, there is only one demon this time. Normally, we have to take care of the other demons as well and if there are two Peak Level Demons, we'll have some trouble.

"Just imagine, we have to take care of two of that demon while holding off at least thirty to forty Advanced Level Demons, let alone the numerous Mid Level and Low Level Demons."

"I see. Still, it's amazing." Noel nodded in understanding. "Although I can't really handle a Peak Level Demon, I hope I can somehow lessen your burden."

"No need to rush. Besides, Rose will be the one giving you instructions."

Chapter 325 Ditch

Noel had learned so much during the fight. How Stella precisely aimed for a certain spot, how Jonathan controlled his Spiritual Energy or how Zion managed to restrain the demon. It was something he never tried, considering he only had one partner, Anna.

During the trip, Noel kept asking question after question to Stella to the point she was overwhelmed by his drive to improve.

On the other hand, the group also learned about Anna's cooking level.

There was a weaker guy who had the desire to improve and there was a strong girl who almost had everything. They looked like a complete opposite, but they truly filled each other's weaknesses.

Anna wanted to make sure Noel didn't surpass her while Noel had the desire to surpass her. This synergy allowed them to improve tremendously and broke the record of the Demon Banner Army.

They kept finding demons on their path, but they were lucky that the demons came by themselves, not bringing an entire pack, allowing them to eliminate them quickly and continue.

Whenever Peak Level Demons came, Stella and the others would take care of it. Meanwhile, Noel and Anna had the tasks of handling the Low Level Demons to Advanced Level Demons.

Stella also gave some advice about what he did during the battle, refining Noel's swordsmanship even further. Though, she still couldn't see through Noel's Everchanging Emotion Sword Style and she didn't ask about it because it was the same as asking for his strength and weakness. If she was a bad person, she would use that information to defeat him or get some benefit.

Eventually, they reached to their destination, the Lawrence Fort.

The fort was surrounded by a 15-meter tall wall. It was pretty high, considering no demons should be able to jump over it. However, they could see fresh bloodstains on the wall, meaning there was a fight recently.

"By the way, Rose. What's the information about this fort?" Paul furrowed his eyebrows, observing all the details from the outside.

"Lawrence Fort is the pride of the Lawrence Earl Family. They have been standing for fifteen years and keep stopping the demons. The Demon Banner Army and the Lawrence Fort have a mutual relationship.

"The fort can be used as a temporary base or a checkpoint for our supply route. Earl Lawrence has also been poaching our knights to join his family to handle this fort. And the Demon Crystals are their main source of income."

Paul narrowed his eyes and said, "Since the fort is quite famous and has been standing for over fifteen years, how in the world does this fort have no basic fortification like a ditch?"

"Mhm?" Rose didn't know how to answer it as well.

Stella used those words to give some more information to Noel. "Do you know the basic fortification like a ditch?"

Noel surprisingly nodded. "Yes. Normally, you want to dig a ditch before even building the wall. You stack the extra dirt behind the ditch and build the wall on top of it. So, if you dig five meters, the ground for the wall also increases by five meters. But because the two goes different ways, they will sum up, elevating the wall for ten meters.

"There are also many benefits for using a ditch. If another kingdom wants to attack you by using a siege tower, they'll have to fill the ditch first or the tower won't be able to go near the wall. And during that time, they'll be rained by our attacks. And if you fill the ditch with water, no one will know how deep it is.

"The same applies to the demons. So, having a ditch is a must to build a fort... That's why I also don't understand why the fort who has remained for so long in the frontline doesn't have a single ditch. Well, Sir Shale kept telling a story about his friend who always complained about ditches."

Stella chuckled. "Haha, if we're talking about Captain Shale's friend, it must be the captain of the Demon Protection Squad, Captain Boris. Captain Boris is what we known as ditch brain, not muscle brain. It can't be helped, he once defeated five hundred demons just by using ditches."

"That's... kinda amazing to be honest."

"True. If you put a great effort into it, even a joke is a serious job... That's how we have comedians." Stella pointed at the fort. "Then, why do you think there is no ditch?"

"I'm not sure." Noel shook his head helplessly while pointing at the wall itself. "From what I can see, although the blood has covered the wall, I still can see some Enchantment put in there. So, I believe the Enchantment can still be activated to protect against a powerful attack."

"This means the wall itself is the primary wall. There aren't any walls behind that one. So, only fools will allow the primary walls to not have a ditch. If I can assume things, then there are two possibilities. First, the one in charge of this fort is corrupt. Or the demons are smarter than we believe because they've filled the ditch."

"..." Stella fell silent while glancing at Rose, who seemed to agree with Noel's opinion.

"Well, we won't get involved with the government, so let's ignore the first one." Rose thought for a moment. "What's about the second one? Are there any demons with that ability?"

Paul couldn't help but say, "Even if there is one, this demon must be an Advanced Level Demon or even a Peak Level Demon. It seems that we will have some trouble this time. For now, let's enter the city and get some information. I'll give you another instruction after that."

"Understood." The group nodded.

The group immediately drove their carriage to the city on high alert. They were making sure no demons suddenly coming toward them.

Two soldiers suddenly shouted at them from the top of the wall. "State your identity!"

Paul took out his badge and poured Spiritual Energy, letting it shine. "Paul, Vice Captain of the Demon Relief Squad. I request you to open the gate."

Chapter 326 Bad News

As soon as the gate was opened, they were greeted by a man in full armor. He took off his helmet as a formality and greeted them. "I'm Captain Henderson, the one in charge of the south wall. It's an honor to meet the Demon Relief Squad here."

Paul nodded and shook his head. Although he didn't look like he was doing anything, he was actually observing Henderson's condition. Normally, people would have taken off their helmet before meeting someone, but Henderson seemed to be paranoid to the point he had to confirm the other party first before taking it off.

"Nice to meet you. We've heard the distress call from your fortress and shall help you. So, who is in charge of this fortress?" Paul asked.

"The one in charge of this fortress is the second son of Earl Lawrence, Hagen Lawrence." Henderson replied, but his smile seemed to be superficial. "Let me guide you to his mansion to discuss about the current situation."

"Understood. I appreciate it." Paul agreed and Henderson immediately asked someone to stand in for him as he had to bring the important guest.

As soon as they entered the fort, Noel couldn't help but furrow his eyebrows. He had seen the Demon Banner Army's fort, so it was clear how different the lives in these two forts.

The Demon Banner Army's fort was filled with life and hope. The people who lived there were smiling, and the fort was brimming with merchants.

Meanwhile, the Lawrence Fort had no lives in it. There were people here and there, but they had the look of a dead fish.

It seemed Stella could sense it as well and said, "Noel. Can you tell Jonathan and Zion to take over the reign? We'll go inside. Tell Rose and Anna to go inside the carriage as well. This fort is bad news."

"Got it." Noel nodded with a serious expression and jumped off the carriage to tell those people. Before long, everyone sneakily changed their positions, with Noel, Anna, Stella, and Rose hiding inside the carriage.

Noel wasn't supposed to be here, but because he was still new, Stella invited him to give him some more information.

"It seems you have noticed it as well." Stella looked at Noel with a grim expression.

"Yes. My senses might not be as sharp as yours, but I still can see it." Noel confirmed it without hesitation. The people were looking at them as if they were prey. They paid special attention to Stella, so Anna and Rose should receive the same treatment.

"Although in most places, the place near the wall are slums, I don't think it's a slum before, considering how that Henderson doesn't act differently toward these people. In other words, it becomes one only recently," Stella explained.

"The reasons for that are due to the demon's attack and the mismanagement," added Rose. "Even if you're attacked by demons, it won't be much of a problem if the upper management is good. They can raise people's morale and our group will come to help them. That's the normal case.

"However, there are times when there is no care from the lord of the fortress. Due to the demon invasion, the people will lose their jobs because they can't take care of their farms and the merchants can't help revolving the economy.

"At that time, the people will suffer. From the size of this fort, they should have enough food in their storage to feed people for at least a month. But the situation has become like this when the attack started only three weeks ago.

"This is a proof that the one in charge of this fort can't do his job properly. Well, I apologize if you feel insulted as a noble, but that's my honest criticism."

"No. That's understandable." Noel shook his head. "Then, the only thing we have to find is the condition of the lord himself. We'll be able to see how much the people have suffered."

"Yes." Anna nodded in agreement. In the past, she wouldn't care much about these lowly people, but meeting Noel had changed her perspective. She realized how evil she looked in the people's eyes and took this criticism head-on. In fact, she was thankful for Rose to point everything out.

"What do you usually do if you encounter this situation?"

"First of all, it's better to hide the women. Well, we all are strong enough to protect ourselves, but it's gonna be annoying, considering our fate can be much worse than dying. As for the men, they'll take care of everything. Although Paul looks like a muscle brain, his mind is calm and collected. And Ben will take care of the negotiation. Are you going with them too, Noel?" Stella asked.

"I'd like to, but Lawrence and Ardagan don't really have a good relationship. So, I might have to stay here with everyone to not make the discussion more problematic." Noel sighed.

"Hehe, just tell me that you want to stay with us, ladies." Anna teased him.

"Then, do you want to meet him? If I'm not wrong, Lawrence is one of the families that wants to marry their son to your house." Noel glared at her.

Anna looked away, not wanting to answer that question.

"Well, that's why we're in a group. We can rely on the others in this type of situation." Stella chuckled, de-escalating the situation. "Anyway, we're going to deal with the demons as soon as possible. I don't

care much about the noble stuff, but it's the people who suffer. By finishing this job, the merchants can come back and the economy will be revolving again."

"Understood." Noel nodded with a serious expression.

"By the way, it's better to use this." Rose, who had been searching for an item inside the carriage, brought them a few coats that could cover their entire bodies. "It's winter, so another layer of coat won't matter that much. Besides, there will be many people dying in this winter due to this attack, so as Stella said, it's better to finish this job before the snow starts falling."

"Got it."

Chapter 327 Bad Lord

Paul and Ben walked into the mansion while Jonathan and Zion were left to protect their carriages.

Under the guidance of Henderson, they met the butler of the mansion, who guided them directly to the guest room, who wanted to wait for their lord.

"What do you think, Ben?" Paul asked after making sure they were alone.

"It's not good. The mansion is guarded tightly but the people are suffering. It's as if he fears the people will get crazy and start a rebellion because of the government's own fault. And the fact that he is here without getting prepared to meet us means the lord is someone who isn't standing by... I mean, the time right now is like an hour before our lunchtime, so usually, the lord is working right now.

"The fact that they're making us wait this long during this day means the lord is doing something else... It doesn't seem to be sleeping due to overworking either." Ben explained while looking around the room. "As expected, we should finish this job as soon as possible. And I don't think it's a good option to live somewhere in this city..."

"So, we'll immediately head out and exterminate the demons. Well, scouting first, so I guess we'll camp outside."

"Yeah. That's probably the best option right now. Five days... No, four days should be enough."

"Sure. I'll also put some work into this mission. I don't want to put my people in this kind of situation as well." Paul nodded.

It took the lord twenty minutes before he entered the room with the butler.

"I apologize for making you wait too long." He said. The lord was a twenty years old young man who had spiky, short red hair. He dressed neatly like that a noble, but Paul and Ben noticed the faint odor of alcohol that the body was releasing. There was even a sweet perfume mixed into it.

They never thought that when the fort was facing its difficult time, the lord still had the time to get some women, ignoring the suffering of his people. It was no wonder why the fort had this terrible atmosphere.

Still, Paul and Ben couldn't show their dissatisfaction right now. Although the Demon Banner Army wasn't afraid of nobles, they didn't want to provoke them either. Unless the noble showed the sign of aggression, it was better not to show any dissatisfaction.

With a smile on his face, Paul extended his hand, shaking the guy's hand. "Thank you for welcoming us. I am Paul, the Vice Captain of Demon Relief Squad. We'll be helping you remove the demons. This way, the merchants can return here to help you restore the fort."

"Merchants?" He had a confused expression at first before he brushed it off as if he had just remembered. "Ah, right. Yes. I'll take care of my fort. You must be tired, I'll prepare rooms for your squad."

"That's not necessary, my lord. Our Demon Relief Squad's main mission is to restore the city, so we would like to eliminate the demons as soon as possible for the sake of this fort. We won't give you more problems since you must have a lot on your hands already." Paul politely refused. This was how he usually rejected a noble, and the latter usually was thankful because of his consideration.

However, this twenty years old lord had a sign of dissatisfaction on his face as if it was hurting his pride. This was when the butler stepped in and said, "We're thankful for your consideration, Sir Paul. But we don't like to mistreat you, who has gone all the way here to help us, either."

"There's no need to think about it. We exist for the sake of people, so as long as the people can smile, that's enough for us." Paul rejected him again.

But to his surprise, they seemed to be insisting that they stayed. The Lord asked, "I guess my humble mansion is nothing more than a shack to the people of the Demon Banner Army."

"..." Paul frowned. If he rejected it again, there would be a clash between the two factions. He glanced at Ben, who was contemplating the pros and cons of staying in the mansion and somehow gave the nod.

It seemed that staying in this mansion gave less trouble compared to clash with the Lawrences.

In the end, Paul said, "Since the Lord has given us the place to stay for the night, we shouldn't reject it."

"Good." The man made a smug smile while walking away. "Prepare the guest rooms."

"Understood." The butler nodded his head.

Paul and Ben furrowed their eyebrows while walking back to the entrance to talk with the rest of the group.

Since they were already near the mansion, there weren't many people around anymore, so Stella and Rose left the carriages while taking off their hoods.

"How is it?" Stella asked.

"It's not that good. We have to stay in this mansion tonight to avoid trouble. However, we're going to report to Captain Clara to file a formal complaint to the Demon Banner Army so that the commander can send it directly to the Lawrence Family. If Earl Lawrence doesn't have any intention to fix this problem, the Lawrence Fort is going to fall." Paul shook his head "For now, we've got to put up with it."

"I see. It seems the problems come from both external and internal." Stella nodded in understanding.
"Well, tell us about the situation about the lord later."

"Alright." Paul nodded. "I'm truly sorry for making this decision."

"No, it's fine. We trust your ability and it seems Ben has agreed to it as well, so it's better to do it like this to not create more problems." Rose nodded.

"Thanks." Paul smiled as he prepared to lead the group inside.

Rose maintained her poker face, but as someone with the most sensitive senses in the group, she felt an unpleasant gaze coming from the window on the second floor.

She used her illusion a bit to make her head keep looking forward while the real her glanced at the window, finding the lord licking his lips vulgarly.

"Tsk."

Chapter 328 Problem

Because of the team situation, Paul had insisted in separating them into three rooms. The beds a noble usually used were big anyway, so three people could easily fit into one bed.

Paul and Zion took one room while the other three boys took the other one. The three ladies also got into one room.

Anna was simply staring at Stella and Rose who had been getting restless.

"What are you two thinking?" Anna was still oblivious. In her past life, no one dared to disrespect her due to her strength and status. Besides, she often stayed in the inn instead of a mansion like this when traveling, so she didn't know what they were mulling over.

Stella sighed and explained it, "Well, do you know why most people dislike nobles, especially the second generations?"

"I'm sorry, I don't know." Anna shook her head.

"Well, those who are in power usually have greed, enough greed to get something more. And they love to do it with someone in power as well..."

"Do it with someone in power..." Anna mumbled it for a moment before realizing what she was talking about. "Ah!"

"Well, there are people who like it too, and they sometimes can marry the nobles or become their mistresses, living a life of riches. However, not everyone likes that. We're lucky that we're in the Zero Squad and our words matter to the captain, so they can't do much to us, but if it's the people from lower status... Yeah, you can imagine.

"And sometimes nobles are even worse to the point they dare to drug us. No one will remember what happens, and the army doesn't extend that much protection. That's why if possible, we usually stay away from the government.

"But the second generation is worse. They don't even know what their actions can cause to their family along with the politic behind them. They think they're at the top of the world and can do everything they want. When that happens, usually the main house will be handling that matter, but you can't undo what has happened..." Stella explained with a grim expression.

Rose couldn't help but add, "More importantly, Paul and Ben had to wait for a while to talk to the lord, who was supposed to be standing by in his office to do some work. And that guy released a smell that looked like he had been playing with alcohol and women. I'm sure you know what I mean..."

"Ah!" Anna widened her eyes in shock. This was the first time she had encountered this problem.

At the same time, Stella and Rose's words actually pierced her heart. She had changed now, but before meeting Noel, she was like that too. She killed and did horrible things to innocent people just like the second generation nobles. And the reason why she hadn't gotten into trouble must be because of her father, the marquis. Everyone was either silenced with death or money.

"..." Anna closed her eyes for a moment and sighed. "I see. So, that's how it is."

"Well, we've encountered this situation a few times in the past, so we'll handle this problem." Stella assured Anna that everything could be settled peacefully. "If I'm not wrong, he'll most likely to appear before—"

Before she finished her words, someone knocked on their door.

Knock!

Knock!

"..." No one could say anything because Stella predicted it right.

Stella and Rose glanced at each other as if asking who would go.

In the end, Stella decided to confront this guy. She opened the door gracefully and found the lord waiting outside.

"My lord." Stella politely bowed her head as a sign of respect to a noble. She made sure to block the view to the entire room. "Is there anything you need from us?"

As expected, the lord took a glance to the inside, but because almost all of it was blocked by Stella's body, he couldn't see anyone. He smiled and said, "I wonder if you like the room. If you feel it's too cramped, I can prepare another room for you."

"I'm thankful for your concern, but that won't be necessary. The bed is spacious enough for all of us."

"Is that so? If you need anything, don't hesitate to tell me."

"Yes." Stella nodded.

"And..." He paused for a moment and hesitated at the last second. He changed his words, "And I'll be preparing your lunch and dinner for today. I hope that all of you can join me. I want to hear your deeds because I admire the Demon Banner Army."

Stella nodded. "Certainly. We're thankful for your reception."

"If that's the case, I won't disturb you any longer." He politely nodded and walked away.

Stella's expression became cold while looking at his back. She could already predict what was going to happen.

As soon as she closed the door, she nodded to Rose and Anna. "Yeah. As expected... I'm sure you've heard the conversation, right?"

Anna nodded. "Well, I'm more troubled than ever, considering my face is known and Noel's family doesn't have a good relationship with this family. So..."

"Don't worry about Noel. Paul will make sure that no one from our squad is looked down. As for you, we'll just give you some details about what you should do and what you shouldn't do.

"Besides, looking at how he invited us for lunch and dinner showed how he wanted to ask the favor... According to our experiences, he is most likely planning to use us to boost his own reputation. You can say he has messed this fort up and use our efforts to make up for it or even boost his own prestige.

"And this is why the second generation is so clueless. To enter the Zero Squad, one needs the drive to learn, including politics, economy, and manners... So, yeah. The moment he tries to take advantage of us, the commander has all the excuses to pressure them. All we need to do right now is to protect ourselves and solve the problems."

Anna nodded in agreement and said, "I understand. I'll learn as much as possible from you. This is my first time looking at the noble life from another's perspective..."

Chapter 329 Leaving

As expected, the lunch was where the hell broke loose. Noel and the others had prepared themselves for this lunch. Although they were from the army, they still had some neat clothes to make them not look like a bunch of barbarians.

In fact, some of them even used their military uniform, which already looked elegant. Noel also used one since he didn't want to bother to look like a noble.

When they entered the dining room to meet this young lord, they were surprised that the lord's seat was still empty as if he had something to do.

It became even more surprising that he actually made them wait fifteen minutes as if trying to assert his dominance.

He entered the dining room with a smug expression as if he had done a good job.

The people remained silent as they didn't want to cause unnecessary problems. But it seemed that the other party wanted to make a problem with them.

The moment he entered, instead of sitting on his seat, he actually made a detour to Stella and Rose, who he had seen earlier.

"Well, I hope you ladies have a great time here." He politely placed his hand on his chest and bowed to greet them.

Their expressions already said they had been fed up with this situation. And Anna's appearance was the one that started the problem.

"This is..." He widened his eyes in shock, never expecting to meet Anna Stargaze in this group. "Miss... Anna. I... I don't know you are among them. If I knew you were with them, I would have prepared a bigger room for you."

"There is no need. I'm a part of the Demon Relief Squad, so I don't need special treatment." Anna was still polite to him after all this, but his action began to anger her.

When he realized Anna was among them, he took another look at the group again and realized he had missed one more person. It was Noel.

"Noel Ardagan!" He gasped before making a sly smile. "Well, well... I have never expected the young master of the fallen Ardagan Family to come here. Ah, are you so pitiful that you can only leech off your enemy to reach that position?"

That statement was like a blazing fire to everyone's ears. They understood what Noel meant by not wanting to show himself because it would just create more problems.

If the Earl was here, he would be wise enough to act as if Noel didn't exist. But the young lord before them was still immature and didn't know the depth of politics.

The moment he stated those words, all the people from the Zero Squad became cold. They could endure the lustful action and disgusting behavior from him because they were more experienced than Noel. But enough is enough. They stopped enduring the moment he insulted Noel, who had been sensible this whole time.

Suddenly, a cold voice echoed in everyone's ears, giving chills down their spines.

"It seems that the Lawrence Fort doesn't accept us. If the lord invited us here only to embarrass us, then we've received your kindness. If that's the case, my squad will leave this place at once. We're thankful for your hospitality."

Paul stood up and said, "We're leaving. NOW!"

The others didn't say anything and just stood up to follow him. Noel and Anna were shocked at first but since the others only followed instruction, they also did the same.

They were following Paul without saying anything.

"Wait, wait! What did you say? I have given you a place to stay and food to eat, and you dare to leave now?!"

Paul stopped, turned around, and gave him a cold gaze. "It seems that you misunderstand something. You're not giving us all these, you're forcing us into all these. If you think you can bully us just because of all these, then we'll file a formal complaint.

"However, we're from the Demon Relief Squad. Unlike the Lawrence Family, we know our job well and will complete it perfectly. After all, we exist to help the people, not the Lawrence Family. Then, please excuse us."

Paul didn't say anything after that and simply went back to their rooms to pick up their luggage. They hadn't unpacked their luggage as if expecting something like this to happen, so they could leave with ease.

But the lord hadn't finished his farce. The moment they stepped out of the mansion's door, they were stopped by twenty soldiers.

He was standing among the soldiers while shouting, "You can't leave!"

"Hoh?" Paul glared at the soldiers. "Are you planning to stop us?"

"If you want to leave, you have to accept my condition first."

When Paul was about to burst out, Anna grabbed his arm, stopping him. This time, she was the one to step up.

"Miss... Miss Anna..." His body trembled a bit.

"It seems that the Lawrence Family has gotten a big head now. Even the soldiers dare to point out their weapons to me, the successor of the Stargaze Marquis Family."

Anna walked toward the soldiers without fear and opened her arms wide. "Come here. Stab me if you want to stop me from leaving."

"That... hurry up and put your swords away. How dare you stop Miss Anna from leaving?!" He was trembling, but his eyes seemed to be pretty determined. He could let Anna leave but not the rest.

"So, you're planning to stop my people as well? Can I safely assume that the Lawrence Family is planning to go against our Stargaze Family?" Anna looked at the soldiers before a huge palm grabbed her head as if praising her for her action.

However, there was a time for the vice captain to step up. Paul smiled and said, "There's no need for you to do it like this. We're here as a Demon Relief Squad. Even if they have a hundred soldiers, they can't stop us."

Paul gathered his Spiritual Energy into his hammer and swung it down, creating a shock wave that dispersed on the ground.

Bam!

The shock wave wasn't enough to destroy the ground, but it was enough to create a loud sound for everyone to hear. Even the people around the mansion would be able to hear it.

Paul said with a smile. "Those who think they can defeat a Spirit Grandmaster can come forward. I shall be your opponent!"

Paul glared at the soldiers, who were trembling in fear the moment they heard 'Spirit Grandmaster.'

"Demon Relief Squad, let's leave." Paul snorted the moment the soldiers started dropping their swords. He then led the group to leave the mansion through the front gate.

Though, amidst the tension created by this conflict, Jonathan was actually enjoying himself when he was using his Telekinesis to carry the two carriages and the horses like holding a balloon.

Chapter 330 Suffer

The group didn't say anything as they left the city immediately.

They ended up creating a camp not far from the city to have their lunch before finishing their mission.

"Still, why do you stop me?" Anna furrowed her eyebrows, asking the reason for Paul's action. "I want to smash a few soldiers and that guy's head. Argh... I'm angry!"

Paul maintained his calm expression even though his heart was filled with anger as well. He took a deep breath and said, "Not everything can be solved by strength. I know that you are a noble lady, but this is the Demon Relief Squad. We're here to help the people, not harm them."

"But aren't you frustrated after all that?" Anna bit her lips.

"Well, calm down, Anna." Noel stopped her from causing more ruckus and bringing the mood down even further.

"This is involving you, Noel!"

"It's fine. I believe that our vice captain has a hidden intention with his action, right?" Noel winked at Paul as if he had understood the meaning behind the action.

"Huh? Hidden intention?" Anna frowned, staring at Paul.

"As expected of you, I guess my action can't escape your eyes." Paul smirked. He finally explained the reason why he held back this whole time. "As I said earlier, not everything could be settled with brawn.

"Sometimes, you have to take a step back and endure everything to get your revenge. I wanted to slam that table earlier, but I refrained myself. Our Demon Banner Army is fair and just, so if I destroyed the table earlier, it would also give a bad record to the Demon Banner Army, especially the Demon Relief Squad.

"The Earl could also use it as a way to lessen the damage he suffered. Then, if you made your move earlier, it would also give another way for the Earl to escape.

"Well, I was once in your position and smashed a lot of things and people to vent my anger. But that was where the reality struck me... I couldn't even file a formal complaint because the damage was too excessive. There couldn't even be a negotiation.

"And the worse was when that guy sent assassins to kill me... It was where I knew how to draw the line.

"By not harming them right now, the negotiation could be formed and punishment could be delivered.

"Judging from his behavior, the condition he wanted us to make is probably to let him take the credit by making reports about mercenaries. He could claim he hired a mercenary group to fix the situation and boosted his status as the successor of the house.

"But he looked like a fool, so I'm pretty sure that the moment we finish this mission without telling him or anything. He'll still claim our work as his. And that's where we can strike him.

"The Lawrence will be fighting the commander himself, who will demand compensation after the Lawrences tried to claim our work, treating us badly and even pointing their swords at us. You should be able to see the end result from here."

When everything was revealed, Anna gasped. This was the politics that her father had handled this whole time.

Noel understood it better than Anna as he said, "Let's see... The Demon Banner Army should be able to force the Lawrences to strip his position as their second son, reducing him to a commoner. With him being a spoiled guy like I was in the past, he wouldn't survive unless someone took care of him like how the Demon Banner Army took care of me.

"In the slum, he might get r*ped by frustrated guys, experience extreme pain from hunger, drink polluted water due to his thirst, and finally die without anyone knowing him. He'll probably think that death is salvation instead. It's a good punishment.

"Also, by acting like this, the action is still considered as Demon Relief Squad. It won't be Paul, who did it, but the Demon Relief Squad that did all this. This way, the Lawrences couldn't even try to lessen the damage they suffered, and the commander could extort him all the way."

The others were impressed by Noel's analysis while Paul smirked and gave a thumbs up as if he had found his comrade. "Hehe, you know it well."

"Of course. I know precisely that killing someone is the easiest escape for them. However, slowly dying is the hardest one, especially if you can drag the people around them. With this plan, that guy will die painfully, and the Lawrences even have to compensate us."

Anna dropped her jaw to the ground. She almost forgot how Noel tortured her with all his tricks. She didn't realize that Noel's actions and plan were still too soft this whole time. And it might be due to the influence of the Demon Relief Squad that taught him politics that he knew how to torture people.

'He is so bad. I know why I can't make him my enemy... On the other hand, he'll be extremely reliable if he is my ally...' Anna gulped down.

Paul cracked his fists and said, "Just you wait, you idiotic lord. The moment we finish this mission is your downfall. Hehe, prepare for trouble."

"That..." Anna raised her hand. "Do you think it's possible to add my name to the list?"

"What do you—Ah!" Paul paused for a moment. "You want me to record how the soldiers pointed out their swords at you? Well... your family could claim that as an attack and pressure the Lawrence Family, but those twenty knights would probably die. Just by looking at how they trembled easily, it was clear that they could only do it because they were forced by the lord. If we recorded this, they would die and their families would suffer after losing their income.

"They might have to go to the slum and sell themselves as slaves to pass this winter. If you don't mind about doing that, then I can add it."

"..." Anna's body shook for a moment as she looked away, taking her words back. "Never mind. Sorry."

"No, it's fine. I've said this repeatedly. We exist for the people, not the nobles. So, if the noble harm us, we try to harm only our enemies, not the innocent people." Paul stuck his tongue out.