

S vs Rebirth 401

Chapter 401 Coming Back To The Zero Squad

Noel didn't expect Rose would become like this after that revenge. Of course, he didn't really mind, considering he managed to get the best person to be his secretary.

In fact, getting Rose's loyalty was beyond any reward that the system could give him in his current state.

Though, he had a concern with this reward.

While they were walking to their camp, Noel couldn't help but ask Ardagan. 'What's with the reward earlier? Why can you give Rose's loyalty as a reward? Do you use your power or something to take over her mind?'

He wanted Rose's loyalty, but he didn't want it to come at the expense of mind control. Rose had the right to make a decision for herself, so Noel had to confirm this.

Fortunately, what he feared didn't come, as Ardagan replied.

[No. I didn't do anything.]

'If you didn't do anything, how do you explain her loyalty? Is it purely coincidence that she becomes like this? And how is it related to the unknown reward?'

'You're not telling me that the unknown reward is simply because you aren't sure of the reward, right? You aren't sure by how Rose acts, so you put that unknown reward and if she doesn't give me her loyalty or a reward that is equal to the mission, you're going to compensate me or something...'

Noel just expressed his thoughts, but surprisingly, Ardagan agreed.

[Yes. I could give you missions like what you've seen before, but even I can't predict human action.]

'Even though you can predict the future?'

[Fate is predestined, but your action is not.]

'What do you mean by that? Shouldn't my action have been destined?'

[Fate is a kind of numerous possibilities. Those possibilities have been set like that, thus calling it Fate. But your action is not, you can stop walking right now and end up in different possibilities or you can walk here while opening your mask, getting into another possibility.]

[In other words, you choose your action, but what happens next has been destined.]

'Ah, so that's what your words mean. I'm the one choosing which possibility I enter... And those people from the Supreme Devil Organization had chosen to attack the valley while I chose to interfere. So, they're destined to die...'

[You're not entirely correct. You could choose to interfere but give up halfway, moving into another possibility.]

'I see. So, all people have their own fates. When our Fates are interlinked at one point, that becomes a reality. In other words, all of the coincidences come from many people's fates intertwined with each other. Something like that?'

[More or less. Fate or Destiny is hard to describe.]

'I don't really want to know to that extent, but I certainly love to learn some basics. After all, I can now understand why you're able to predict those missions. Also, it seems that the missions can change if there is another variable...'

[Yes.]

'I see. That's enough.' Noel understood Ardagan a bit more. Ardagan could explain everything to him, but it seemed he wanted him to learn more before explaining it.

If he didn't grow up, Ardagan wouldn't give him the information. Sometimes, being ignorant could save someone from a lot of trouble. As a noble, he certainly understood it better than anyone else.

At the very least, he finally understood that Rose's loyalty came from her directly, not from the interference of others.

This was enough for him.

After a while, Noel could finally see the camp they were staying at and say, "From this point onward, it's better if I go alone. Although it would be nice to have you accompany me, they'll get suspicious, considering you're still hurt..."

"I hope that you can act that way for a while." Noel glanced at Rose, asking her to act along with him.

After understanding Noel's circumstances, Rose knew why she had to keep her acting.

She was disappointed she couldn't do more, but she supported his decision.

"I understand. I'll stay here for thirty to sixty minutes before going back."

"Thanks." Noel nodded and finally walked to the camp, meeting the Zero Squad once again.

As if feeling his presence, the entire squad came out to meet this new guy, who was supposed to replace Noel and Anna.

"!!!" Noel widened his eyes. They seemed to fare better than Rose. At the very least, they didn't break down from the incident.

They observed each other. From their perspectives, they could only see a similar figure from Noel but other than that, the rest were completely different.

"Is this the Zero Squad of the Demon Relief Squad?" Noel asked with a more casual tone. If he was Noel, he would ask more politely, but because ladre wasn't a noble, he had to use a more casual tone with them.

Hearing his question, Paul nodded and stated, "This is the Zero Squad of the Demon Relief Squad. I am the Vice Captain of the Demon Relief Squad, Paul."

Noel straightened his back and put his right hand on his chest, declaring his name. "Reporting. My name is ladre. I'm a swordsman and a fire spirit user!"

Seeing no similarities in his conduct, Paul dropped his suspicion and smiled, "We've heard about you from the reports. You would have become the best if Noel and Anna didn't exist in your generation."

"I don't need to compare with those monsters. I'll simply do my tasks and take one step at a time. I don't care about the reputation as long as I get the last laugh."

"..." Paul nodded in understanding. As he said, he didn't need any recognition as long as he got the last laugh. That was the reason why he bothered to use a disguise.

So, Paul explained, "Well, you'll be with us most of the time. There is one more person who has some matters to take care of. Also, I don't know if you have heard about it, but Anna and Noel were supposed to be with us if not for a certain accident. So, if possible, don't ask more about it."

"Understood."

Chapter 402 Sparring

Paul glanced at his group before saying, "You'll be with me for the time being. Follow me and learn about what we're doing. If you don't understand anything, don't hesitate to ask. We'll do our best to explain it to you."

"Understood." Noel nodded with a serious expression.

"Since you've known about it, I welcome you to the Zero Squad, ladre." Paul extended his hand. The reception was slightly different than previously, but considering what happened during the last mission, he could understand why they wanted to get some distance from him.

They didn't want to be hurt in case an accident happened again. Just like Noel, ladre was also targeted by people.

So, Noel could feel they were treating him as a teammate, not a friend or family.

Although he deserved it, Noel still felt a bit sad and angry at himself for even using that plan.

Noel shook Paul's hand with a smile. "Yes. Thank you for welcoming me. I hope I can learn a lot from you."

"Since we're done, we would like to know about your abilities first so that we don't give any instruction to do tasks beyond your levels to avoid incidents. And let's do it as quickly as possible..." Paul thought for a moment and glanced at Noel. "Do you think you're up for a spar?"

"A spar?"

"Yes. I know you're pretty tired after your trip, but we can help you more after learning about your strength."

"I don't really mind to be honest. I'd like to know about the strength of the Zero Squad as well." Noel nodded with a serious expression. Although he knew their power after fighting together, he never fought against them. This would be a perfect chance for him to understand how far he had gotten after consolidating his power.

Paul glanced at the other members and asked, "So, who would want to test him? Since he is also a swordsman... Do you want to do it, Stella?"

Stella had some prejudice against new members, thinking there was no one who was as good as Noel. But since she was the only one who used swords, except for Ben who could use anything but wasn't good at any of them as well, she believed she should fight Noel to understand his ability.

"I don't mind." Stella agreed. "The battle limit will be fifteen minutes. You should use all your strength within those fifteen minutes so that we can measure your abilities."

"I understand. Please take care of me." Noel nodded and gently pulled his sword out.

"..." Paul felt a bit nostalgic when seeing that white sword with a blue stripe. It reminded him of Noel's ice. In fact, this sword would look better if Noel was the one wielding it.

However, Noel released a black flame in his left hand after that. The contrast between the white sword and the black flame was so glaring that it hurt to watch.

Seeing Noel had finished his preparation, Stella pulled out her sword and asked, "You should know about the Spirit Levels, right? I'm a Spirit Master, so you don't need to hold back your strength."

"If that's the case..." Noel nodded and summoned two runes: Increase Agility Rune and Strength Blessing Rune.

"Hmm?" All of them instantly furrowed their eyebrows when seeing these runes. They looked similar to the Spirit Enchantment but even more complex and completed.

Because they were too focused on Noel's runes, they didn't realize Rose was watching from afar with her extraordinary senses.

"What are those? They're like Spirit Enchantment, but a bit different. He also has black fire instead of ice... Does that mean he has a spirit with two elements? It's not unprecedented, but it's still extremely rare. I can see why he's being targeted by a lot of big shots.

"Having two elements, using something similar to Spirit Enchantment, creating unique swordsmanship, and reaching Spirit Wielder at a young age... They have enough reasons to kill Noel. No wonder he's

hiding his identity." Rose sighed, not expecting Noel to be hiding all these abilities. She wanted to see what kind of battle he would show them.

Noel and Stella exerted their Spiritual Energy as if trying to tell each other they were ready.

The tension began to rise as Noel made his first move.

He jumped forward with his fastest speed, showing speed far faster than Noel.

"!!!" Stella widened her eyes in surprise. This would take everyone by surprise and a Spirit Wielder would have a hard time reacting to it. However, Stella was a Spirit Grandmaster.

Clink!

Their swords collided with each other, stopping each other's movement.

"You're fast..." Stella smirked as the adrenaline kicked in.

"Thank you for the compliments." Noel smiled. He tried to use his strength to overwhelm her, but the sword didn't budge the slightest. So, he jumped back to gain some distance.

"You're not going anywhere!" Stella followed Noel to pressure him. The more Noel was under pressure, the more he would make a mistake after all. And that was where she would finish this sparring.

'Yeah, yeah. You're trying to force me to make a mistake. I know you.' Noel obviously knew her intention, so he would strike her with something she didn't expect.

Noel pointed her left hand toward her as if planning to release the flame.

"The flame? No, you can't hurt me with your flame!" Stella smirked and waved her blade, releasing a small gale to disperse the fire.

But before the gale could hit Noel's arm, Noel summoned the Spiritual Energy Dispersion Rune.

Fwoosh!

The wind suddenly scattered in all directions.

"Hah?!" Stella was surprised, but the one who got shocked the most was Jonathan.

"Impossible. What is that? It looks like a Spirit Enchantment, but that thing can disperse the wind... No, the Spiritual Energy itself?" Jonathan, who understood Spiritual Energy the most, commented while gasping.

"What? The Spiritual Energy itself?" The rest couldn't believe what they heard. Noel's sword might be able to cut through elements, but ladre was able to disperse the Spiritual Energy. They didn't know how all these talented people seemed to gather in one generation.

Chapter 403 Fighting Stella (1)

"..." Stella was shocked as well, but the battle was still going on. So, she had to focus on the opponent before her. "You have something unique, you know. However, if you think that's enough, then you're wrong."

Stella suddenly jumped forth while swinging her blade. "Let's see how good your swordsmanship is."

Noel narrowed his eyes. On the one hand, he could block all Stella's strikes, but if he did it the usual way, Stella might notice it.

Hence, Noel jumped to the side. Instead of engaging her, Noel left behind a small fire that would touch her sword.

Flame Conjuring.

"Hmm?" Stella frowned, not understanding why Noel escaped instead of fighting her. She hurriedly used her wind to suppress this flame, but to her surprise, the moment the two mixed, the flame suddenly burst up, devouring the wind.

"!!!" Stella was dumbstruck while using her wind to throw her to the side. "Kh."

"What? Stella is pushed back?" Paul narrowed his eyes in surprise. Although Stella looked like she underestimated him a bit, it didn't change the fact that there was a huge gap between Noel and Stella.

'Normally, a flame that small would be suppressed by the wind. Just like blowing a candle. However, that flame actually devours the wind...' Jonathan analyzed the situation with his extensive knowledge of Spiritual Energy. 'Don't tell me, the fire is so superior that the wind ends up getting devoured?'

'Although the wind is weaker than water in case of extinguishing the fire, it still can't explain how a fire that small can win unless that fire surpasses the elemental advantage itself.'

'If this is true, then I don't know what will happen if the fire engulfs a person. There is a chance that the flame can't be extinguished.'

Jonathan contemplated for a moment and shouted, "Can both of you stop the spar for a second? I must confirm something since this is related to your safety."

"Huh?" Stella was taken aback. She had just gotten excited by the challenge, but Jonathan destroyed her excitement.

On the other hand, Noel followed Jonathan's words, wanting to see what Jonathan had discovered.

Jonathan looked at Noel and asked, "How strong is your fire? Can you extinguish it in case of an emergency? I can see that your fire is so strong that it can devour the wind, so I have to confirm this before anything big happens."

Noel thought for a moment and explained, "I can extinguish my fire, yes. Though, you don't have to worry that much because I'm using my fire at a level where I can stop it before it leaves a scar for the rest of your life."

"So, that means you have a stronger fire? No, it's more like you aren't utilizing your fire completely to avoid an accident?"

"Yes."

"It seems that you're underestimating me." Stella smirked, pretty frustrated by how Noel looked down on her. Noel must think she couldn't handle that kind of flame, so he held back.

But Paul actually agreed with Jonathan this time. He said, "Shut up for a little bit, Stella."

"What? Me?" Stella pointed at herself, confused.

Jonathan asked again, "How much force do I need to use to extinguish your fire? If I don't know the limit, I'm afraid I can't let this spar continue."

"If I use my fire at its full strength, a joint effort from Spirit Masters shouldn't have any problem in extinguishing my power. Or if possible, you can bring a Spirit Grandmaster here to suppress it. I have tested it on an Advanced Level Demon and it... couldn't be extinguished."

"Oh!" Paul and the others were impressed by his statement. It didn't look like he was lying, so this was worthy of consideration.

Jonathan, on the other hand, had made a decision. "In that case, you can use the current output for your flame. More than that, I have to stop the spar. Understood?"

"Yes." Noel nodded.

"Hmph. If that's the case, I'll hold back as well." Stella harrumphed, not wanting to lose.

Noel shrugged as if he didn't care. He tried to make a different impression from the Noel in their head, so he had to be as indifferent as possible.

As soon as the match restarted, Noel took the initiative to attack Stella. He waved his sword to show his raw strength.

Clink!

The two swords clicked as Stella stopped the sword without budging. No matter how hard Noel pushed it, he couldn't push her back.

"Hehe. You—" Stella wanted to show off her strength, but suddenly, Noel's Spiritual Energy gathered in the tip of his sword. "!!!"

Boom!

An explosion occurred, blowing Stella away and kicking the dust up so that no one could see her.

This was Noel's Ignition Sword. It was still useful against Stella as the latter had to form a concentrated wind barrier in front of her to disperse the explosion.

Stella gritted her teeth. Although the wind barrier managed to absorb most of the damage, her hand still felt numb after that explosion.

"..." Stella realized the man before her might be stronger than she expected. In fact, he might be stronger than the Noel she knew.

She didn't realize that Noel had been holding back to a great extent, considering he only used pure Swordsmanship and Ice Ability. Meanwhile, the current him could use the superior spirit, Ardagan, as well as the main supporting ability, his runes.

Noel took a deep breath and pointed his sword at her.

Stella narrowed her eyes. It was a clear provocation from Noel's side, but instead of getting angry again, she took a deep breath and calmed her heart.

This was the Stella he knew. Although Stella looked rash, the moment she was at a disadvantage, that rash personality of hers suddenly disappeared.

"I've underestimated you. I'm sorry for that. You might have just graduated, but I promise you that I'll be serious this time. Be prepared." Stella stated with a calm expression.

Noel released his Spiritual Energy again as if acknowledging her words and preparing for her attack.

Stella clenched her sword tighter, planning to charge ahead. But the one who made the first move was Noel.

He turned around and ran away.

"Wha—!"

Chapter 404 Fighting Stella (2)

"Wha—!" Stella was dumbfounded as she became hot-headed again. "What are you doing?"

She hurriedly chased after him while gritting her teeth.

It might look like he was running away, but Noel knew Stella's personality. So, instead of letting her become comfortable with her serious mode, he would prefer to fight her in this state since she was easier to manipulate.

Noel looped around a tree to use it as a shield.

"Do you think I will fall for this trick? I know you're going to use this tree as your shield to launch a sneak attack. All I have to do is to slice it through!" Stella smirked and waved her sword, striking the tree.

Clink!

"!!!" Stella widened her eyes when she heard the clicking sound. She looked at the tree and realized it was only half-cut. In other words, she couldn't penetrate the tree with that swing.

"What? Although Stella hasn't used her full power, she shouldn't have any problem cutting a tree!" Zion gasped.

"Take a look behind that tree!" Jonathan pointed at the rune behind the tree.

It was Noel's Hardening Rune. This was the rune he got after completing the previous mission in the valley.

Yes, he had opened the Spirit Enchantment System, so he could boost everything around him, including the tree.

Now that Stella's sword was stuck in the tree, Noel looped around and struck her from the opposite side.

Stella clicked her tongue and formed a wind barrier to block this swing. But as expected, Noel used his Ignition Sword again, blasting the wind barrier.

'Got her.' Noel smirked, believing he had hit her with this. It seemed his strategy of riling her up worked.

"Or so you thought..." To his surprise, Stella answered with a light-hearted tone as the wind blew away the smoke from the explosion, revealing Stella's condition.

Unexpectedly, Stella was standing next to the tree with her sword fully pulled out from the tree.

"Hmm?" Noel frowned, never expecting this from Stella. He looked back for a second and realized Stella directed the explosion to the sword so that it knocked off the tree. Stella shouldn't be capable of this feat.

Stella answered his doubt by saying, "You would have got me if it was a month ago. Thanks to a certain accident, I realized my weakness. If I were not so hot-headed that I ended up overlooking things, I wouldn't have had to experience all that stuff. That's why no matter how hot-headed I will be, I'll keep my mind as cool as possible."

That was right. Noel wasn't the only one who had gotten stronger. Stella and all the people in the Zero Squad had tried to fix their mistakes so an accident like Noel's death wouldn't happen anymore.

Rose might be the only one who didn't have time to get stronger due to not being able to overcome her grief.

Noel couldn't help but feel gratified that these people still tried to do their best to improve.

He took a deep breath and pointed his sword at her neck again, challenging her.

"Let's start again, shall we?" Stella smirked and jumped forward, trying to catch Noel off guard by moving before he could run away.

However, Noel had prepared for this since he used his Sword Fire to block Stella's sword.

The wind on Stella's sword started rampaging as if trying to overwhelm Noel's fire, not wanting to lose again like earlier.

Unfortunately for her, the result was still disappointing as she could see her sword reddened as if it was heated up. If this continued, her sword would become soft and eventually become molten lava, so she had to jump back, avoiding the worst thing.

Noel took advantage of the situation to run away, looping around the tree again.

"Heh. Do you think the same trick will work on me twice?!" Stella smirked, moving toward the tree. When she was about to strike it, she stopped and looped around to fool Noel.

At that time, he heard Noel's voice.

"Yeah."

"!!!" Stella's body trembled as she instinctively ducked down. Suddenly, Noel's sword cut through the tree, almost slicing her neck.

'He faked it this time?' Stella started sweating, never thinking someone who had just graduated could be this clever.

Sadly, Noel hadn't stopped there. Noel had waited for a bit before slicing down the tree because he had prepared another trap for her.

The ground she stopped earlier had been embedded with a Softening Rune.

When Stella tried to get up, the ground wobbled, destabilizing her form.

"What?!" Stella stomped the ground to get more force to stabilize her form, but Noel took this chance to form another rune.

Chain Bind Rune.

"A chain this time?" Stella narrowed her eyes and released her wind to deflect the chain. She thought the chains would be packed with a lot of power, but surprisingly, the wind easily carried them away. "Huh?! The chains aren't that powerful?"

Stella was confused for a moment, but she didn't know the chains ended up hitting two trees behind her. Noel had planted a Softening Rune on those two trees, so when the chains hit them, it would crush the trunks and the trees would end up falling in her direction.

"!!!" Stella turned around and created a wind barrier to blow away the trees, thinking, 'This new guy is amazing. He is utilizing that weird power that looks like a Spirit Enchantment to confuse me. Because I don't know the meaning behind them, I end up like this.

'If he combines with the extraordinary flame, he won't be an easy opponent. As long as he gets more experience and more Spiritual Energy to advance to a Spirit Master, I'm afraid I won't be his opponent.

'Though, the battle is not over. I have to get up and chase him aga—' She suddenly stopped her thought when she realized Noel had raised his hand as if giving up.

"I have done everything to show my strength. I believe this is enough, so... let's end it here."

Veins bulged on Stella's forehead. Noel had excited her this much with her power, yet, he left right after. If she could hit him right now, she wouldn't hesitate to do so.

"You bastard!"

Chapter 405 Count Swirzel

Zeletz Town.

Anna was sitting on her bed while looking at the paper in her hand. "Hmm, the mission this time is about the embezzlement. Well, it shouldn't be that hard, I guess."

It had been a month since he joined the organization. So, he had gotten used to living in this kind of environment.

"What should I worry about is this."

Requirement: Three Bronze Inquisitors.

"I have been getting a lot of missions in the past month, so I will rank up after this mission. After becoming a Silver Inquisitor, I will have an easier time meeting Noel two months later," Anna muttered while sighing as if she was a bit tired after accomplishing many missions in a short time.

"I guess I'll see who will be my teammates this time." Anna smirked. "I bet they're going to target me again. Considering the mission this time to demand the money back from Count Swirzel.

"He has done a lot of dirty business with a neighboring kingdom, so the kingdom has lost a lot of money in taxes.

"But if I were the Royal Family, I would promise him a tax write-off as long as he could corner me. In other words, the two inquisitors beside me would probably be the people they sent to either help me or help the Count.

"Well, to think I would be able to see all this pretty easily... Maybe I should thank Noel since he always told me to ask 'why' in every situation and every answer." Anna smirked. "Alright. Let's make them think I'm clueless."

While Anna was preparing her plan, the Count received the letter Anna sent on behalf of the organization.

The Count frowned after seeing the letter since he also received another letter with the royal seal.

Anna's letter was simple as she only demanded some compensation for the embezzlement. On the other hand, the letter with the royal seal asked him to use any means necessary to put Anna in a bad situation.

He had to become a bad guy that would be defeated by the inquisitor. Everything would be done secretly, so his reputation wouldn't be tarnished and any real damage wouldn't be done. In addition, the Count would receive a pardon for all the embezzlement.

The Royal Family truly paid a lot to make Anna bow down to them.

The Count thought for a moment before smiling. "Although the opposite party is the daughter of Marquis Stargaze, a figure that I couldn't touch no matter what, the one asking me this time is the royal family.

"They have promised that Marquis Stargaze won't be able to do anything to me. There is no demerit in this plan. I just have to use my influence to arrange a few experts... normal thugs can't be used since Anna Stargaze has become a Spirit Wielder. So..."

The Count narrowed his eyes and stood up, walking toward the barrack. This was his personal army, but the Count knew it was impossible to mobilize them, especially against a Spirit Wielder like Anna.

However, there was one person that should be able to fight against Anna. He walked toward a middle-aged man who supervised the training.

"Sir." The middle-aged man bowed to him, greeting the Count.

Count Swirzel nodded and asked, "I have a task for you."

"What is it, Sir? For you to personally ask me..."

"The opponent this time is a Spirit Wielder. You are a peak Spirit Wielder, only one step away from Spirit Master. So, you should be able to defeat a Spirit Wielder, right? Especially a brat who doesn't have too much experience."

"A brat?"

"Yes. There will be three Inquisitors coming here. Two of them are our allies, but one of them is Anna Stargaze."

"Stargaze as in Stargaze Family?" The middle-aged man frowned.

"Yeah. That Stargaze Family. I know you're afraid of offending them, but this is an order from an even higher position." The Count nodded. "That's why I want you to work together with two of them to corner Anna Stargaze and get defeated. Don't worry. You might get some superficial injuries, but I'll make sure to compensate you properly."

"But Sir..."

"One thousand gold coins and five women you like."

The middle-aged man suddenly fell silent before saying, "Consider it done."

"Wait until the other party makes contact with you." The Count patted the man's shoulder a few times before walking away.

A Count would have a hard time employing a Spirit Master. So, a peak Spirit Wielder like him was a great catch. That was why he had given him a lot of things to keep the man here.

Their relationship was purely transactional. The Count gave him a lot of money and women for him to accomplish a difficult task.

But the result was usually satisfying.

Anna might be a Spirit Wielder, but in his eyes, there was no way a 16 years old girl would be able to do many things. Her lack of experience would prove to be fatal since the man had done a lot of dirty work during his stay with the Count Family.

The two Inquisitors even came to help the Count, so he believed the mission was nothing but assured.

The Count only needed to sit down and relax while watching how his subordinate reported the completion of the mission. After that, the royal family would forget about the embezzlement.

"Still, an inquisitor, huh." The Count frowned. "An inquisitor is the kingdom watchdog. They're dealing with smuggling, embezzlement or even uprising. All the kingdom's tasks that couldn't be done in a normal way would be done by them.

"That's why the Royal Family didn't care about the people inside the organizations. Even if they were thugs, as long as they were competent, they would become good inquisitors.

"To think the most talented person in the kingdom would be thrown to a place filled with that kind of people...

"I guess the brighter the flower, the more people want to pluck it." The Count closed his eyes, pitying Anna.

Chapter 406 Newbie

On the other hand, Anna received information that her companions had arrived in the city.

She instantly walked toward the side alley of the inn while crossing her arms, waiting for those two.

Suddenly, two people wearing a coat that covered their bodies and faces approached her.

At a glance, Anna could see one of them was a man while the other was female. The male stepped forward and said, "Dog licking a diamond."

"Can't understand its value," Anna replied. This was the code for them to recognize each other.

As soon as they confirmed the code, the two raised their covers, revealing their appearance.

The man seemed to be in his early thirties. He had short curly hair and energetic eyes. His thin body didn't seem to pack a lot of power, but there was a knife on his waist. If not for Anna's sharp eye, no one could see that knife.

The woman, on the other hand, had short bob hair. Unlike the man, her eyes looked like a dead fish, not interested in doing anything other than completing the mission. She held a sword on her back, covered with thick purple cloth.

The man smiled and introduced himself. "Hello. You must be Anna Stargaze. I have heard a lot of you when visiting the headquarters. My name is Myzik, a Spirit Practitioner, a Bronze Inquisitor.

"And with me here is Risha, also a Spirit Practitioner and a Bronze Inquisitor. We're requested by the headquarters to assist you in dealing with the Count's embezzlement case."

"I'm looking forward to working with you." Anna nodded with a serious expression. Although she was polite, her eyes were filled with contempt. Yes, the people could see she didn't like them and thought they weren't on the same level.

They had a lot of information about Anna's behavior, so they confirmed Anna was still the same.

They didn't know Anna was thinking something else, 'Spirit Practitioner? Who are you kidding? Both of you are Spirit Wielders... close to Spirit Master. If I'm not wrong, the Count also has a knight captain of the same level. So, they're planning to suppress me with these three Spirit Wielders. It seems they're underestimating me a bit.

'They should have brought Spirit Master if they plan to stop me.' Anna took a deep breath before asking, "So, who is the leader of this operation?"

"Since you are a Spirit Wielder, you shall be the leader," Myzik answered without hesitation. "So, I'd like to ask what the plan is. I'm sorry, but I don't think I can talk formally since I'm just a commoner who hasn't learned much about manners."

Anna glanced at him for a while before harrumphing. She said, "We're going to meet the Count tomorrow to give him an ultimatum. We'll give him two days to meet our demand. If he can't meet our demand, we'll wreak havoc on the Count's mansion and capture his family."

"Understood." Myzik nodded in agreement. He glanced at Risha and exchanged nods. They seemed to have confirmed something.

'Going to the Count to give an ultimatum, if she still has the backing of Marquis Stargaze, the Count will be afraid of her. But she has lost that protection, so the Count won't care about the ultimatum,' Myzik thought.

'Straight to the family? It's predictable. As expected, she is an amateur. There is no need for us to fear her.' Risha had a similar thought, confirming she was still a newbie. She hadn't known anything about the darkness of the organization.

It seemed Anna completed her missions because the other party was afraid of her reputation and backers. But since the Royal Family had made its move personally, this would be the end of her.

"If that's the case, we shall rest in a nearby inn. Unlike your esteemed self, we don't have enough money to get a room in the best inn." Myzik explained and politely bowed to him.

"Go!" Anna snorted, looking down on them like filths.

Myzik and Risha bowed again and walked away. Risha had an annoyed face, hating Anna's guts. Myzik, on the other hand, didn't care much about it since this would be the last time they met her.

After they were far away from Anna, Myzik said, "The situation is as we expected. She is clearly an amateur. If that's the case, we'll do it the usual way."

"Alright. I'll be contacting the Count then." Risha nodded.

"Yeah. I'll keep a watch on her to make sure she doesn't do anything." Myzik confirmed the plan.

Unbeknownst to them, Anna was actually smiling after returning to her room.

"I am a newbie who doesn't know the darkness of the organization... You two must think that way." Anna made an evil grin. "As expected, this is how Noel operates. He doesn't know other people's thoughts."

"What he knows is that when they arrive in a certain situation, they only have some options to choose from.

"So, I have to create a situation where those options are predictable even for someone like me.

"By making them think I'm a newbie, they'll lower their guard and create a low-level plan that will work on a newbie. They don't know they have been playing in my hand this whole time."

Anna smirked, feeling a joy that she had never experienced before. She felt like she wanted to shout as loud as possible, releasing the pent-up happiness in her heart just to avoid smiling in front of them.

"Ah... This must be how Noel felt whenever he tricked me. He was truly built different. To think he could hide his emotion perfectly."

Anna laid down on her bed while staring at the ceiling. She raised her hand as if trying to grasp the sky.

"Just wait, Noel. Two months later, I'm going to surprise you when we meet. You won't be able to trick me anymore. No, wait. I like to work with him... Instead of being tricked, shouldn't it be... working together as if we understand each other?"

Anna smiled, expecting a lot of things for the next two months.

Chapter 407 Scheme

Count Swirzel's Mansion.

There were three people standing in front of each other. They were Count Swirzel himself, the knight captain, and Risha.

"So, how are you planning to deal with this Anna?" Count Swirzel asked with a serious expression.

"Before telling you how to deal with her, I'll tell you about her plan first." Risha shook her head.

The Count thought for a moment and shrugged. "Well, it's not bad to know what she's planning to do first."

"She is going to give you an ultimatum tomorrow before kidnapping your family after the ultimatum ends."

"Hoh? An ultimatum, it's a rather straightforward way." Count Swirzel narrowed his eyes. "I thought the organization wouldn't use an ultimatum to warn me and simply do everything to fulfill your mission even if it means assassinating my family members without any warning."

"It's not your place to speak anything about the organization." Risha glared at the Count.

"Oi..." The knight captain tried to stop her rude remark, but the Count simply waved his hand, stopping him to avoid any trouble. Seeing the Count so passive this time, he could only let this matter go.

"So, what are you planning to do? I'll cooperate with you."

"It's simple. We'll let that young miss give you an ultimatum. After that, we're going to set up an ambush where I'll stab her in the back. After that, my partner will try to defeat you before bringing her away from the mansion."

"With that condition, she wouldn't be able to do anything and the rest would be up to the royal family to handle," Risha explained a simple plan.

Since Anna's plan was simple, there was no need for any wicked plans such as poison, assassin, or something along the line.

The Count contemplated for a moment before noticing the same thing. "Still, isn't this plan too straightforward?"

"It's enough for a newbie like her." Risha shook her head. "Even if this plan doesn't work, we have three peak Spirit Wielders. If something goes wrong and she notices our plan, we'll surround her and defeat her."

"At that time, you can play as a bad man and capture her. After that, the royal family will take over the matters."

The Count didn't really have any objection to this scheme. Although it was straight, they indeed had the strength to overwhelm Anna.

Although Anna was also a Spirit Wielder, there was still a gap between a normal Spirit Wielder and a peak Spirit Wielder. All organizations around the world recognized it.

That was why the Demon Banner Army usually put a peak Spirit Grandmaster in the captain position instead of a normal Spirit Grandmaster like Paul. The same applied to the Supreme Devil Organization, which put the Devil Bishop at the same level as the Demon Banner Army captains.

They had prepared for the worst, so the plan didn't need to be extremely complicated. They might even guarantee their success if they used drugs or something, but the royal family had personally tasked them to make sure Anna didn't suffer a long-lasting injury. After all, she had to marry the prince.

"If that's the case, you can move from the barrack where the soldiers are staying. I'll have them standby there." The Count suggested.

"Why do we have to go there? It is too obvious."

"I'll act as a paranoid noble and increase the security of my mansion, fearing her attempts. But there is a link between my mansion to the barrack, which is on the west side of this mansion. I'll put fewer guards there, thinking the enemy won't go through a barrack full of soldiers."

"Since the attempt will go during the night, it's easy to believe they're sleeping. So, you can go through there by giving her the information about the place alone. I don't think she will go all the way to scout the area." The Count explained.

Risha frowned, considering the Count's suggestions carefully. As he said, there shouldn't be any problem with tricking a newbie like this. If Anna was more experienced, she wouldn't accept this suggestion. But since Anna had been straightforward this whole time, it didn't seem to be a bad plan. Even if things went wrong, they could simply overwhelm her.

"Yeah. I think I can accept that suggestion. For now, we'll go with that. I'll update the situation if there's any change and inform you about the date of our attempt."

"Good." The Count nodded with a serious expression, feeling happy that Anna was ignorant of the world. It would be easy to trick her.

Unlike the organization, the Demon Banner Army was also a straightforward organization. As long as they had a talent, they would be recognized by them. The rest would be taught after they graduated.

But Anna left the army after just one month. There wasn't much for her to learn, especially since the demons didn't use any kind of schemes most of the time.

After reaching an agreement, Risha walked away to inform her partner.

Meanwhile, the Count looked through the window while asking, "What do you think?"

"She is strong. I can say that she is truly a peak Spirit Wielder. If her companion is at the same level, then we can suppress a normal Spirit Wielder no matter how talented she is."

"Since you have said that, I guess I can rest assured now. All we need to do is to confirm her strength tomorrow. So, you're going to accompany me."

"Understood."

After that discussion, they all went to make their own preparation to receive Anna.

...

The next day.

Anna, accompanied by Myzik and Risha, sat in front of the Count.

She didn't bother with the Count's knight, who stood there to protect him as if she had confidence in scaring him.

The Count was also sweating as if he was scared of her. With a shaking tone, the Count asked, "May I know for what pleasure Miss Anna Stargaze came here?"

Anna lifted her head, looking down at him. She said with an arrogant tone while handing a piece of paper. "I want you to compensate the kingdom for the embezzlement you've done. The total is here."

Chapter 408 Seeing Through The Plan

"I want you to compensate the kingdom for the embezzlement you've done. The total is here."

"This..." The Count gulped down while making a weird smile. "Miss Anna. I don't know what you're talking about..."

"Embezzlement of Kingdom's funds, smuggling goods to another kingdom, and tax evasion. We have the evidence. If you don't pay..." Anna narrowed her eyes.

"This..." The Count scratched the back of his head before looking at the paper. The figure written on the paper was bigger than he originally thought.

Yes, this was the organization's job. If the royal family took action personally, they might be able to receive a full reward. However, they used the organization to take care of this situation so that they could extort the target.

For example, the figure written on the paper was actually 1.5 times the amount he had to pay legally.

Of course, any sane person would try to pay legally instead of getting extorted like this. However, paying this legally would mean they had revealed their own crimes.

Many people would know about it and they had no choice but to get prosecuted. That was why for the Count's crime, there was no other way. He had to accept the punishment and pay more.

Though, if the Royal Family was always this just, they would be hated by a lot of nobles. Even though the organization existed and got all sorts of information for them, they simply stored them and allowed the corrupt nobles to exist.

It was easier to control them this way. At the very least, they would focus on their corruption instead of thinking about a rebellion. And if they went out of line, the Royal Family would use all the information they had stored to weaken them or even take them out.

Even the other nobles wouldn't help them since they knew the royal family had put a blind eye to their corruption for a while.

No matter how corrupt it was, it didn't change the fact that the Royal Family had maintained their reign for a thousand years with this system. So, there was no need to make an abrupt change filled with risks.

The Count also knew about this system, and that was why he had been visited by inquisitors. But this time, the Royal Family didn't plan to destroy him. Instead, they gave him an opportunity to be pardoned as long as they carried out a task for the royal family.

Obviously, there was no need to think. It was obvious what he chose.

After seeing the figure, he made an awkward smile and asked, "Are you sure the amount is correct?"

"That is correct... Unless you're planning to reveal all your crimes in front of everyone and get prosecuted for it." Anna snorted. "I don't have too much time to deal with you. I'll give you two days. Gather the money."

"This..." The Count glanced to the side. The knight captain nodded and brought a chest, presenting it to Anna. He opened the chest, revealing gold coins.

"There are one thousand gold coins inside. Do you think you can let this pass, Miss Anna?"

"How bold! You dare to bribe an inquisitor?" Anna roared and kicked the chest.

The Count was trembling in fear as he gulped down. "This..."

Anna gritted her teeth and declared, "You have two days. If you don't bring me the money, then hehehe... who knows what will happen to your family. Remember, the organization will be watching you."

The Count was left speechless as Anna abruptly took her leave. Risha and Myzik had no choice but to follow her. However, Risha and Myzik raised a thumbs up on their back to show the Count that everything was going according to their plan, and they had confirmed Anna's lack of experience.

It would be an easy plan this time.

When they left, the Count had a big smile. All the fear on his expression earlier disappeared without a trace. He nodded to his knight, confirming the plan. Even the knight could see how inexperienced Anna was and had no problem with the plan.

...

As expected, after two days, there was no news about the Count.

Anna called Risha and Myzik to discuss what they were planning to do.

"So, what's the situation?" Anna asked. He had asked them to watch the mansion in the past two days, so she needed their information.

Risha calmly explained the situation. "The Count seems to be tightening the security around the mansion. However, there is no sight about the money, so we can safely assume that the Count is trying to fight this time."

"If that's the case, we need to find a way to kidnap the Count's family." Anna thought for a moment. "Is there any weak spot?"

"There is a weak spot. The barrack is connected to the mansion. It seems the Count won't expect us to come from this place, considering there are a bunch of soldiers in the barrack. Well, that should be the reason why he doesn't put many soldiers there."

"Hence, we can go through there after midnight since most of the soldiers have gone to sleep. Then, we'll enter the mansion and kidnap the first son of Count Swirzel before leaving in the same way."

"With that son of his, it'll be easy to negotiate with the Count, considering he needs a successor for his household," Risha explained everything, suggesting the plan.

Anna narrowed her eyes as if wondering whether this plan would work or not.

If Anna hadn't met Noel and learned a lot about him, she would have gone through this plan without any suspicion. And without her past life, she couldn't see through Risha and Myzik's strengths.

With all the information presented like this, Anna smiled and agreed to the plan. "Alright. We'll do it tonight. Tomorrow, we'll meet the Count again and pressure him to give the money."

"Understood." Risha and Myzik nodded, accepting the instruction from Anna.

"Gather here again at midnight." Anna stated before dismissing them.

Risha and Myzik left the room, thinking they would succeed in their missions without any problems.

Unbeknownst to them, as soon as they left, Anna was smiling as she had seen through their plans.

Chapter 409 Sneak Attack

Anna fixed the black mask that covered her face. She had a tight body suit that wouldn't hinder her movement during the mission.

Only her eyes and hair were visible from the outside. She took a look at herself in the mirror for one last time before coming out.

She walked toward the meeting spot, where she found Risha and Myzik wearing similar outfits. They were going to infiltrate the Count's Mansion, so they had to wear black suits to match the darkness.

Now that they had gathered, Anna nodded to them and said, "Let's go."

They nodded without hesitation as they followed Anna's lead toward the barrack.

Before entering through the barrack, Anna pointed at Risha and said, "Go in first and check the situation."

Risha accepted the task and leaped over the wall to check the situation around. After two minutes, Risha came back and gave a thumbs up to them, signaling them to come in.

After coming into the barrack, they instantly walked toward the building, using it as a cover. Meanwhile, Risha briefed them about what she had seen earlier. "There are two guys in the front and one guy in the back. It's better if we go through the back and knock out that guy before continuing."

Anna harrumphed. "I can handle both of those soldiers..."

Risha's body trembled for a moment. She never expected Anna would become this arrogant when it came to a battle. But luckily, Anna added, "Still, it's better to go to the back this time."

Anna waved her hand, asking them to move.

They felt relieved and followed Anna's instructions. She even gave them the opportunity to go first, meaning they would be able to lead them like they wanted to.

Without hesitation, Risha and Myzik moved toward the back. The Count had given permission to kill some guards, so Risha didn't hesitate to appear behind a soldier and slit his throat, killing it.

After that, she waved her hand, asking them to continue.

Under Risha's lead, the group advanced pretty quickly. The barrack was one hundred meters long, considering it hosted around a thousand soldiers. So, they had to make sure to cross this one hundred meters without being spotted.

They were moving outside the barrack, so it was fine as long as they didn't make any noise and move near the window.

But Risha soon stopped when they reached the other end of the barrack. She pointed at the path leading to the mansion.

"There are only four guards leading to the mansion. Myzik and I can take care of one each... Does Miss have the confidence to take the other two on?"

"Who do you think you're talking to? I'm Anna Stargaze. I can do that easily." Anna snorted.

Risha nodded, ignoring her remark.

Anna took another look at the guards before releasing her lightning around her shoes to increase her speed.

As soon as she was ready, Anna took a huge leap toward the furthest guard.

"!!!" Myzik and Risha were surprised by her speed as Anna covered thirty meters in just a single leap. However, they didn't know Anna was still holding back since she hadn't used Rune or even the basic reinforcement.

Although they wanted to assess Anna a bit more, they couldn't drag her down for now or their plan would go to ruin. They followed Anna's lead and took down a soldier each before finding Anna already dragging two bodies to the side.

Anna glanced at those two in contempt, feeling relieved they weren't a burden.

Since they had finished their task, Anna looked into the distance where the mansion was. Since they had taken care of the four guards here, they only needed to cover another fifty meters distance and one more guard to be able to reach the mansion.

Because there was only one person left, Anna didn't hesitate to charge at this last guy with her blade.

The guy wasn't looking at her, but he was actually smiling when he felt her presence.

'This is the last.' Anna thought while waving her blade.

But before she could send his head flying, the guy suddenly turned around and unsheathed his blade, blocking Anna's attack.

Clink!

"!!!" Anna widened her eyes and tried to use her strength to push this guy but to no avail. The man didn't budge at all.

"It seems that our little inquisitor is confused here." The guy smirked while shouting, "Come out!"

Suddenly, numerous soldiers gathered in an organized manner as if they had practiced this a few times.

The soldiers raised their shields while pointing their swords at Anna, planning to stop her.

"It seems that you're confused, Miss Inquisitor." The guy smirked and took out his helmet, showing his real appearance.

"You..." Anna's body trembled because this guy was the one she saw protecting the Count.

"I know that you're a Spirit Wielder, but there is a big difference between a normal Spirit Wielder like you and a peak Spirit Wielder like me. I'll show it to you." The guy raised his sword, planning to take Anna head-on.

On the other hand, Anna was shaking because her plan was seen through. There was no way they would know her plan. So, she couldn't understand what had truly happened.

"It seems that you haven't realized it yet. O' arrogant woman. We already know everything about your plan. After all..." The guy smirked, looking at her... No, the person behind her.

"!!!" Anna gasped as she heard Risha's voice echoing in her ears. "I've been telling them about the plans."

Anna tried to turn her body around and block Risha who was charging with her dagger. Unfortunately for Anna, she was one step too late as the dagger pierced her waist, barely missing her vitals.

The blood splattered on the ground, but because it missed the vital, Anna wouldn't die. However, this should be enough to render her useless.

With this wound, Anna would drop to her knees and get captured... That was what was supposed to happen, but...

Chapter 410 Crushing The Scheme

They thought this would be the end of Anna.

However, the moment she heard Risha's voice, Anna's lightning sparked. Even her Spiritual Energy flared up, giving her a boost in her speed for a split second.

Before the dagger hit her, Anna took a step to the side while saying, "He said an overconfident enemy would lower their guard when they're going for a sure-hit attack. And you've just proven his words."

"Huh?" Risha was dumbstruck as she saw her missing. She glanced at Anna before lowering her vision and finding Anna's blade flying toward her body.

Whether it was fortunate or unfortunate, the blade didn't hit her stomach and kill her instantly. Instead, the blade sliced her legs and made her stumble to the ground.

"Eh?" Risha was still stunned, processing what had happened. But soon, the sharp pain jolted her mind, showing her the reality.

"Aaaaaaahhhhhh!" Risha screamed in pain while holding her legs.

Since she was loud, Anna kicked her in the face, knocking her out.

"Shut up." Anna snorted. "A mere ant dares to sneak on me."

"What?!" Myzik and the knight captain dropped their jaws. This plan should have been perfect and Anna would have been finished by Risha. Yet, the reality was different. Not only did Anna avoid the dagger, but she also defeated Risha, a peak Spirit Wielder.

"Three peak Spirit Wielders and a bunch of normal soldiers." Anna's cold voice suddenly echoed in everyone's ears. She looked at them as if she was looking at filth. "It seems that you're underestimating me too much. Do you think you can defeat me with only three peak Spirit Wielders?"

They were still shocked, but Myzik had to regain his calm as soon as possible because Anna suddenly appeared before him.

"So fast?" Myzik gritted his teeth and raised his sword, trying to block Anna's sword. His Spiritual Energy gathered around his sword and limbs to strengthen his power against this sword strike, albeit he underestimated Anna.

She might swing her blade with her right hand, but her left hand actually moved toward his stomach.

Myzik instantly used his Spiritual Energy to form a shield around his hand to block Anna's attack. No matter how poor his talent was, he was still a peak Spirit Wielder. Stopping Anna's attack shouldn't be that hard for him.

Anna knew about this too. And that was why he planned to strike down Myzik during this exchange, considering the knight captain would help him after that.

Hence, Anna formed a lightning dragon on her arm, releasing it before she hit Myzik.

Myzik tried to take the full brunt of the dragon, but surprisingly, the dragon flew out of her arm and looped around his body.

"What? She can do that?" Myzik was shocked. No matter how talented Anna was, it was impossible for a 16 years old girl to be able to control the Spiritual Energy that well. Even he couldn't control his Spiritual Energy as if it was alive.

However, Anna actually managed to do it. The dragon avoided him as if it knew it couldn't do any damage if it hit that spot. It looped around and struck him from behind, electrocuting him.

"Aaaaahhhhh!" Myzik screamed in pain as his body went numb. He thought they would be able to suppress Anna with three peak Spirit Wielders, but he never expected Anna to outsmart them and take them out by surprise.

As soon as Myzik was electrocuted, Anna waved her sword two times, cutting both his arms.

"Aaa—!" Myzik wanted to scream too, but Anna knocked him out as well.

"What?" The knight captain gasped, not believing what he had just seen. Anna actually defeated two peak Spirit Wielders in an instant. Although it was due to the sneak attack, it was still an impossible feat unless they had underestimated her.

What the knight captain didn't know, Anna's past memory was enough to boost her martial prowess to Spirit Master. Even Stella couldn't defeat her easily.

And this Anna was staring at him and the rest of the soldiers like they were her next prey.

'I might have provoked someone I shouldn't have...' This was the last thought of the knight captain as five minutes later, he was on his knees with Anna's sword on his neck.

As for the soldiers, all of them had died, creating a pool of blood.

Anna looked at the knight captain's confused and shocked face.

"It seems you're confused, Mr. Knight." Anna smiled, throwing all his words back at him. "There is indeed a difference between normal and peak Spirit Wielders. However, that gap can be overcome by something.

"Yeah, yeah. I'm just a newbie in your eyes. That's why I know you weren't going to make a complicated plan to deal with me because I'm inexperienced.

"I would be in trouble if I had to consider all kinds of possibilities of your schemes such as poison, drugs, or even assassinations.

"That's why I acted like someone ignorant. That way, you were going to act this way. No matter how strong a peak Spirit Wielder is, they'll be dead if you cut their neck, don't you think?" Anna smirked.

The knight captain felt chills down his spine. It turned out Anna wasn't that ignorant this whole time. She was actually limiting their options by making them underestimate her.

They had truly been played by Anna this time.

"I have a lot to ask about this betrayal along with the Count's scheme..." Anna added while glancing at the unconscious Myzik and Risha.

"I... I can tell you about his plans. Please spare my life. The Count forced me to do this." The guy shamelessly begged for his life.

Unfortunately for him, it was at that moment Anna sent his head flying.

"Among the people I want to ask, you're not one of them. So, die." Anna snorted, coldly walking away.

She didn't care about him at all as she had reached Myzik and Risha.

"Well, well. These two must know something about the royal family's intentions. Though, I don't think they'll talk... I guess I'll torture them a bit together with the Count." Anna smiled coldly as if her brutal side from her past life had resurfaced.