

S vs Rebirth 431

Chapter 431 Problem

"We have reached here." Richard said while narrowing his eyes, staring at a cave. "This doesn't look good."

Noel took a peek from behind a tree, wondering what he meant. "Is there something wrong?"

Richard glanced at Noel. Even though he was reluctant, he pointed at the cave and said, "Look at the entrance of that cave and check the number of demons around."

"Hmm?" Noel narrowed his eyes for a moment, scanning the entire area. The demons around them were foxes, wolves, and even mice. "Ah?!"

"It seems you have noticed it. That's right. There are many demons that have the ability to see through the dark and the cave seems to be a limestone cave. The size should be long and big as well. There should be a few huge areas inside, so we'll be at a disadvantage to deal with a huge number of demons like them without visibility."

"True. You have to rely on your instinct to fight in the dark..." Noel narrowed his eyes. "What should we do then?"

"We're going to infiltrate the cave of course, but it seems scouting the cave is not possible."

"If I say I can see the dark, what will you do?"

"Hmm? You?" Richard narrowed his eyes, doubting Noel. But it didn't take too long for him to realize the ability to see in the dark. "Is it related to your Spirit or Moon Blessing?"

Noel shrugged, not planning to give away the information to other squads. However, it was enough for Richard.

"You don't have any experience in scouting a cave, so we're going to adjust it to match your level. For now, I want you to inform me of the number of demons as well as their locations. It'll be a big help for us. And since you're the only one who can see them, we'll make you the core of the formation. If there's any demon, we'll give it to you so that you can kill it.

"As for the rest, I'll give you an instruction based on the situation. Just keep me up to date with the situation."

Noel carefully listened to him before nodding his head. "Alright. I'll do my best."

"It'll take a lot from you, but... do your best." Richard patted Noel's shoulder while his other hand gave a signal to the other teammates.

Becky and Shawn saw the signal and explained the plan to their group.

The cave was under a short slope, so Becky led her group to loop around the area and climbed the slope from the opposite side, waiting right at the top. Meanwhile, Shawn prepared his group to be the bait.

As soon as he received permission from Richard, Shawn hurriedly came out from his hiding place and headed straight to the demons.

The demons were confused at first, but they hurriedly howled, informing the others. The howl also alarmed the demons inside the cave.

With the addition of fifteen demons coming out of the cave, they had a total of forty demons. And all of them immediately charged at Shawn.

Shawn didn't hesitate to jump into the crowd of demons as if he was used to dealing with them this way. Seeing his recklessness, Stella and Zion had to adjust their plan.

They had to help Shawn, but instead of going from two separate directions, Zion kicked a demon with all his strength, launching it straight at Shawn. The demon ended up crashing into multiple demons, giving Stella an opportunity to attack.

Stella released her wind and waved her sword, scattering the wind. The wind turned into a few wind blades that cut all the fallen demons.

This way, no one could stop Zion from using his top speed to go straight to Shawn.

But before he could jump, Becky had come out, running down the slope and smashing the ground with her metal hand.

"Ha!"

Bam!

The ground shattered and the demon that got hit by her was obliterated. Her appearance shocked the demons near her, but because they took action based on their instinct, the demons immediately pounced on her.

"Crystal Body!" Becky roared as her entire body turned into a crystal. The demons that tried to bite her ended up breaking their teeth. And Becky would use this opportunity to end their lives.

However, Jonathan and Ben were the ones helping her. When he jumped off the slope, he used his momentum to apply his Telekinesis in the same direction, causing the Spiritual Energy to push downward.

Bam!

The demons were shocked because the pressure was too much for them to handle. They were only Low Level and Mid Level Demons after all.

As soon as they fell down to the ground, Ben took out a few throwing knives and threw them straight at their heads. The knives had been covered by his Spiritual Energy, so when they touched the demon's head, it created a hole and ultimately killed the demon.

Becky clicked her tongue. She didn't need them, but she couldn't stop them since they had to cooperate this time.

She decided to smash the demons that had bitten her.

With these two groups rampaging around, the demons were completely in disarray. They had to kill them, but their instinct was telling them it was impossible to defeat them.

As if he had seen through their mental state, Richard jumped forth. He clapped his hands once before waving his right hand from right to left, causing the wind to sweep the demons.

Noel infused his Undying Fire into this wind, turning it into a flaming gale that burned the demons to death.

"!!!" Richard and the rest of the Demon Hunting Squad were surprised by the intensity of the flame. And the color was unusual.

Before they could put some thought about it, Noel had retracted his flame since he had confirmed their deaths through the system. After that, he unsheathed his sword as he planned to challenge the demons one by one.

"Ho?" Richard was quite impressed by Noel's performance but had no thought about comparing him with Shawn. Instead, he thought it would be better if Noel joined his squad as Shawn's partner.

"I want to observe him more, but I guess we have our priority here," Richard muttered and waved his hand, signaling Becky and Shawn to kill all the demons.

Chapter 432 Noel

"We're done here." Richard concluded the battle while looking at the corpses around him. "Becky. Do the usual!"

"Got it!" Becky nodded and told them not to follow her. After that, she entered the cave while covering herself with minerals.

"Huh? Why are you sending her inside? Aren't your plan—" Noel stopped because Richard gave him the reason.

"You're not the main plan here. I'm simply trying to use you to check their position and number. Becky will bait as many demons as possible, especially the Peak Level Demons so that we can thin their number before cleaning up the cave. That's the plan." Richard shook his head helplessly.

It looked reckless at first glance, but when he thought about it, Becky might have the best defense among them. With her speed and instinct, it wouldn't be that hard for her to bait numerous demons.

As expected, it didn't take too long for her to return due to the insane number of demons inside. Roars kept echoing inside the tunnel as they grew closer and closer.

Eventually, Noel could see the numerous demons inside the cave and Becky, who led all of them. He also understood why Richard asked Becky to do it.

There were three demons that bit her body, but Becky kept running as if she didn't feel anything. She just maintained her poker face and led the demons outside.

Even though Becky had looked down on them before, it didn't change the fact that she was a strong fighter. Noel acknowledged that fact after seeing this.

"They're coming!" Noel warned them.

"I'll hold them off. You two will ambush them from afar while Shawn will flank them!" Richard instantly commanded them. The two in his mouth were the ones in Becky's group.

Jonathan and Ben nodded and returned to the top of the slope. Ben hurriedly cut the trees down and skillfully turned them into a huge nail. Jonathan used his Telekinesis to control them, preparing to launch them straight at the demons.

Shawn led his team to the side while Richard remained in his position.

As soon as Becky came out, Richard stomped the ground and punched forward.

Roar!

Roar!

Roar!

A series of roars followed Becky as numerous demons came out of the cave. However, Richard's punch released a shock wave that hit the ground right in front of them.

Becky jumped to the side as if she had gotten used to this kind of strategy. She was in the opposite direction of Shawn since she was planning to act as a wall from this side.

After Richard stopped their initial charge, he fought them head-on. Becky also did the same as if trying to cram them in one place.

Jonathan saw the demons starting to loop around them by using the free path, but that was when Shawn made his appearance. He crashed into them while Zion and Stella stopped the demons more skillfully.

Seeing the battle coming to a standstill, Jonathan shot the wooden spikes, impaling as many demons as possible.

Ben also kept making the spikes for Jonathan to use.

Seeing everyone had begun fighting, Noel also joined the fray. But this time, Noel planned to do something special.

Using his Flame Conjuring, he enveloped his blade with black fire.

"Huu..." Noel took a deep breath. He remembered the lesson regarding Spiritual Energy Control.

'I don't need an explosion. I need a blazing flame that can engulf everything.' Noel muttered inwardly as he thrust forward.

Sword Fire.

This was one of Noel's Fire Skills. It used to be a skill to envelop his sword with fire, but after learning the control and upgrading the skill to its highest level, Noel could finally release the flame.

'Turn everything into ashes.' Noel released the fire forward. This crescent-shaped fire that ran through the ground burned everything. The heat melted the ground and all the demons getting hit by it ended up with their bodies sliced.

The heat completely melted their bodies, rendering them useless. Just by using a single skill, Noel managed to kill more than fifteen demons.

Although it didn't have a huge range like the Freezing Crystal, it still could deal with all demons in a straight line.

'Hu...' Noel took a deep breath. Both his Fire and Ice had their advantages and disadvantages.

The Ice Spirit didn't require a lot of Spiritual Energy, but its power was lacking. Meanwhile, Ardagan's flame had overwhelming strength, but it also drained a lot of Spiritual Energy.

That was why he didn't use it too much.

As soon as he killed those demons, he moved toward the gap, taking advantage of the confusion to kill more demons with his swordsmanship alone.

Unfortunately, he couldn't unleash all his strength right now since he didn't want to reveal his identity to the Demon Relief Squad yet.

Hence, Noel relied on his Ardagan Swordsmanship instead of the Everchanging Emotion Sword Style to kill a lot of demons.

When he was surrounded by demons, Noel could easily escape by using the Ignition Sword.

He used it once, and the explosion was so big that it engulfed thirty demons.

By taking advantage of that gap, Noel could catch some breath and continue fighting in that area.

It didn't take too long for them to finish all the demons. But because Richard suspected their number to be greater than they originally expected, Becky returned to the cave to bring more demons.

And as one would expect, their target had finally come out.

This time, there was a pair of white wolves that came out of the cave, followed by hundreds of demons.

These two demons were the Peak Level Demons they were searching for.

When he saw these two demons, Richard released his wind as if showing his presence in front of these two wolves. The wolves also recognized Richard as a formidable enemy.

"Hahaha, that's good." Richard smirked while raising his hand. "Let me see how strong you two are. I hope you're not disappointing, Peak Level Demons."

Richard didn't realize Noel had been observing him this whole time. Although there was a lot to learn, Noel was also greedy. He had been devising a strategy, so he could stand out.

And this was the time to do it.

Chapter 433 Stealing The Kill

The two wolves instantly charged at Richard, who was the most dangerous threat among them.

The wolves' size was similar to that of a regular wolf. But the Spiritual Energy contained inside their bodies was extremely abundant.

The right wolf suddenly stopped and howled, informing the other demons in the cave to come out to meet their opponents. The left wolf gathered its energy to the mouth before releasing a beam of white light at Richard.

"Heh." Richard had a small grin as he covered his hand with Spiritual Energy. He suddenly grabbed the small beam with his bare hand before twisting it around.

'You can do that?' Noel was surprised. He thought the beam would explode upon touch, yet Richard seemed to be able to control his strength.

It felt like he was grabbing the beam at the same intensity, making the beam think it was just an extension of it. This required a soft touch from Richard.

Despite his looks, it seemed Richard mastered control over his strength. His grip could become as soft as holding a baby and he could become as hard as smashing a boulder.

"Only this?" Richard laughed while directing the beam elsewhere. Meanwhile, the other wolf had gathered its Spiritual Energy on its paw.

It charged at Richard and was about to pounce on him. However, the wolf had a different approach than the left one.

Instead of attacking him with his paw, the wolf stopped and waved down the paw.

Suddenly, a bolt of lightning appeared on top of Richard's head, releasing a lightning strike that struck right at his body.

"Hmm?!" Richard widened his eyes in amusement before raising his hand. He gathered his wind around his lower arm and formed a shield to take the lightning strike head-on.

The wind spun like crazy. When the lightning hit it, the lightning dispersed in all directions.

"!!!" The two wolves noticed Richard's strength and jumped back as if feeling threatened by him.

Richard was oozing bloodlust and directing it at them. His grin became bigger and bigger. "Haha. This is good. Come!"

The wolves had their pride as Peak Level Demons as well. So, they released their Spiritual Energy completely, causing a small shock wave around them.

"Good, good." Richard became even more excited. He concentrated his Spiritual Energy around his arms. This time, he was the one charging at them.

The wolves knew they would be injured if they fought Richard head-on. Hence, they formed a barrier surrounding them while leaping to the side to gain some distance.

Unfortunately, they couldn't escape from Richard that easily. As soon as they gained some distance, Richard turned to the left wolf and punched forward, releasing the concentrated energy on his fist.

"Bam!" Richard shouted.

The shock wave flew straight at the wolf and hit the barrier. The latter dispersed most of the power, but the shock wave still cracked the barrier and the force from the shock wave launched the wolf into a boulder not far from it.

"Aooo!" The other wolf realized Richard wanted to take advantage of the situation to kill its partner. So, it released another bolt of lightning on top of Richard, preventing him from moving.

"Gh." Richard gritted his teeth as his movement had just been stopped. Since the other wolf had provoked him this way, Richard turned around to fight this lightning wolf first.

Lightning began to spark all over the wolf's body. Suddenly, the wolf disappeared.

"!!!" Richard widened his eyes in shock, realizing the lightning increased the wolf's speed. Suddenly, the wolf appeared on his right, hitting him with lightning and momentum.

Richard glanced to the side and smiled, facing this paw with his head covered.

Bam!

As expected, the wolf had the advantage. It knocked Richard down, but it noticed something else.

Even though his upper body had been knocked down, Richard's feet were still stuck on the ground.

It realized Richard hadn't lost its balance yet. Before it could attack again, Richard released the wind on his right foot and kicked the paw that had just knocked him.

Bam!

The kick was so strong that the wolf ended up getting lifted off the ground for a split second.

"Aooo!" The other wolf, who had recovered, gathered its light element in its mouth and shot it again.

Richard used his hands to stand on the ground before spinning his body so that he could gain momentum and kick the white beam to the side.

"!!!" The lightning wolf widened its eyes, realizing Richard used the white beam to attack.

The lightning wolf hurriedly jumped back to avoid it, but this was when it felt another presence from behind.

"!!!" The lightning wolf tried to turn around, but it was too late.

The white sword touched its fur as a huge explosion occurred, engulfing the wolf.

Boom!

"Aoooo!" The lightning wolf screamed in pain as it desperately tried to remove the fire from its body.

However, Noel didn't allow him to do it. Before he could do anything, Noel had used his Chain Bind Rune and captured the wolf's limbs with it. Since he only used one rune this whole time, they might think he was Rose's apprentice. This was the best outcome when he was learning from them.

Though, his action seemed to have displeased Richard.

"They are my prey!" Richard shouted in anger while punching the chained wolf in the stomach.

The lightning bolt formed on the wolf's stomach, deflecting most of the punch's force, but it still scraped its fur and skin, causing some internal bleeding.

Noel used this chance to create a bigger sword with his Ignition Sword. After that, he waved it straight at the wolf's neck.

The wolf obviously tried to protect itself by releasing the lightning to blast away Noel's sword.

But the moment the flame and the lightning made contact, the former burst out and burned the lightning itself as if it was devouring it.

After that, the flame melted the neck as it continued on its path, severing a Peak Level Demon's neck.

Then, Noel coolly said, "Sorry, I'm not your subordinate, so I don't know your custom."

Chapter 434 Overwhelming Flame

"Tsk. A smart-ass brat!" Richard clicked his tongue. Before he could berate Noel, the other wolf was thoroughly angered as it stormed at Noel, trying to kill him.

The wolf was going to take its revenge now.

Richard wanted to let Noel suffer, but he realized there would be a conflict with Paul later if he did this. The Demon Relief Squad might refuse to repair the bridge, which resulted in the suffering of his Demon Hunting Squad. So, he decided to step forward, stopping the wolf.

Even though he couldn't make him suffer, he should be able to lecture him later.

So, he wanted to deal with this as soon as possible.

With his power gathering in his fist, Richard punched the ground, turning it into a crater.

"!!!" The wolf wasn't prepared for a sudden change in terrain. It tried to balance its body due to the change of angle, but Richard had appeared in front of him, punching the wolf in the face.

"Ao—" The wolf was launched a few meters away.

"..." Richard narrowed his eyes, looking at his fist that somehow got reddened upon touching the wolf.

Unlike the lightning wolf who had extraordinary power, the light wolf had a unique defense. Even Noel couldn't steal his kill easily this time.

Richard might have been too focused that he forgot Noel was only a Spirit Wielder. Yet, he could kill a Peak Level Demon easily. Even with his help, it was still impossible unless he had extraordinary strength. Even their Shawn couldn't achieve this feat, so it was surprising that Noel could effortlessly do it.

Richard didn't realize it until later. He focused on the demon before him first.

The demon suddenly erected another barrier again as if it was trying to protect itself from Richard.

But there was a sudden change in fluctuation with this barrier. The Spiritual Energy kept increasing at a rapid rate.

"Not good!" The first one to feel it was Jonathan, who was the most adept in Spiritual Energy. "That kind of energy will explode!"

"!!!" Richard widened his eyes in surprise. He hurriedly formed two huge hands next to the wolf.

"Wind Palm!" Richard roared while clapping his hands. The two wind palms also moved toward each other as if trying to cover the wolf.

But since it was the wind, Noel had the ability to boost it.

He formed the Undying Fire on top of his palm before throwing it to the two wind palms.

In that instant, the wind palms were lit.

"What are you doi—" Richard couldn't stand Noel for ruining his fight, but he soon stopped. He noticed something weird on his wind palm.

These now fiery black palms surprisingly suppressed the wolf's Spiritual Energy.

"Huh?" Richard gasped. 'It's suppressing the Spiritual Energy? No, it's burning the Spiritual Energy, reducing it to nothing... What kind of flame does he possess? To think it has such intensity. The flame itself doesn't release so much heat, but it can burn everything, including the Spiritual Energy itself.'

Richard had realized why Noel managed to join the Zero Squad at his age. That ability was enough to even become the best in his generation.

If he could control his flame, he would become invincible.

With this fire, Richard continued pressing the wolf, making the palms burn the wolf alive.

"Aoooo!" The wolf screamed in pain as its fur was lit on fire. Its body was boiling and its blood was evaporating. The skin turned charred in mere seconds.

Eventually, the wolf died, unable to do anything.

Even Richard was shocked after witnessing all this. He realized they managed to kill two Peak Level Demons with such ease. The others hadn't even finished their fight, despite their opponents being only Low Level and Mid Level Demons.

'Is he for real?' Richard sucked a cold breath, glancing at Noel. 'This guy has perfect timing, extraordinary flame, good judgment, and confidence. Is he truly a mere Spirit Wielder? This kind of mastery can't be easily achieved even for a Spirit Master.'

What Richard didn't know was that Noel never had a need to learn his abilities since he had a system that would give him the knowledge and mastery. Noel also had a good natural talent along with Dimitri as his teacher. Dimitri had taught him all the basics, strengthening his foundation.

In addition to his overwhelming flame and three months of absorbing Demon Crystals, even though Noel hadn't reached the peak Spirit Wielder, his combat prowess had entered that realm.

Killing Peak Level Demons was possible with the help of a Spirit Grandmaster and perfect timing.

"Huu..." Noel let out a sigh of relief. He had slain three Peak Level Demons when he was with the Demon Relief Squad, but it took a lot of planning and effort.

'As expected of the Demon Hunting Squad, their strength is too overwhelming. I could easily kill both of them.' Noel thought as he saw Richard rushing toward him. His face was filled with anger, so Noel knew what he wanted to say.

"Hey, you brat! Do you know what you have done?" Richard gritted his teeth while cracking his fingers, planning to beat Noel up.

Noel maintained his poker face. He knew his teammates would help him, but Noel also didn't want unnecessary problems.

Hence, he skillfully dodged it by pointing at the cave.

"By the way, before you start, you might want to focus on that one..."

"Huh?" Richard was confused at first and turned around. If there was nothing coming out of the cave, he would blow up.

But this time, he saw a centipede and two bats leading a group of demons.

These centipede and bats were Peak Level Demons that the two wolves had called. If they came out before the two wolves died, it meant the group had to take down five Peak Level Demons together with a group of demons. It looked like Noel had a good reason to steal the kill.

Richard gritted his teeth and shouted, "I still haven't forgiven you for ruining my hunt! But that can wait... With three Peak Level Demons, even I might need your help. Come!"

"Yes, Sir."

Chapter 435 Noel's Brilliance

"Keep the other demons away. I'm going to face these three Peak Level Demons by myself! You guys can kill the demons in the other nest later!" Richard shouted.

"!!!" They were confused at first but seeing how Richard was already adamant about taking these three on. They could only agree.

A Spirit Master was able to fight against a Peak Level Demon, but killing them was hard. However, Richard was a Spirit Grandmaster. Three Peak Level Demons were enough handicaps for him.

He also had Noel helping him. With Noel's perfect timing and good judgment, they should be able to prevail.

Seeing Richard's fighting spirit, the centipede hurriedly moved forward. Instead of facing Richard head-on, the centipede suddenly entered the ground, digging a tunnel. No one would know where it would appear next.

Meanwhile, the two bats flapped their wings, creating a gust to blow Richard away.

"Heh!" Richard smirked and punched forth, releasing the Spiritual Energy to neutralize the gale.

As if knowing they had to buy time for the centipede, the bats flew in opposite directions, surrounding Richard from two sides.

Richard smiled, ready to take on everything they threw at him. He was actually worried about Noel, considering he should be near him. He didn't want Noel to get taken out that easily.

But when he scanned the area, he couldn't find Noel anywhere as if he already knew what was going to happen and hid himself to deliver a killing blow.

'That guy is truly amazing.' Richard smirked.

The two bats opened their mouths, releasing a sound wave.

"Hmm?" Richard suddenly felt his eardrums going to burst. Although he couldn't comprehend it, he knew it came from the bats.

"Haaaa!" Richard roared while smashing the ground with his fist. The ground cracked and turned into a small crater, allowing Richard to have a different elevation from the bats. The cracked ground and the rocks that stuck out blocked a portion of the sound wave, allowing Richard to regain his focus.

As if not letting Richard recover, the centipede emerged behind him. Its sharp mouth was about to crush Richard's body.

This was a perfect time for Noel to appear, helping him to recover by fending off the centipede.

Unfortunately for him, Noel didn't help him.

"!!!" Richard also felt no one was coming. Noel should know this was a perfect time to stop the centipede, but he was nowhere to be seen.

"Kh!" Richard gritted his teeth and turned around, concentrating his Spiritual Energy on his arms. He stopped the centipede's jaws. "Arghhh!"

He thought he had overestimated Noel. No matter how good his judgment was, he was still a newbie. Missing an opportunity like this was normal.

He should have taken this into account.

But when he was about to curse and completely erase Noel from his battle plan. Noel appeared, albeit not on the centipede.

"!!!" Richard widened his eyes and glanced to the right as Noel appeared with his fire blade, striking the bat.

Because the bat released the sound wave in Richard's direction, it reacted too late for Noel's attack.

The bat tried to fly away, but Noel managed to complete his swing, reaching the bat's right wing.

"Ciii..." The bat screamed in pain while flying away from Noel. Although it was a Peak Level Demon, it had to regain its bearing first before it could do anything to Noel.

"Tsk." Noel clicked his tongue. Even though he had good timing, it was still hard to kill a Peak Level Demon when it wasn't fully occupied by Richard.

Although disappointing, Noel had prepared some escape plans.

He turned around and ran toward the others. His movement was quick and precise as he made himself invisible among those demons and people. This way, the bat would have a hard time finding him, and he would get another shot at killing the Peak Level Demon.

But the most shocked one among them was actually Richard.

'Are you kidding me? Did that brat just use me as bait?' Richard thought while making a weird smirk. This was the first time someone dared to use him this way. But he also noticed something from Noel's movement. 'Still, it feels like he knows I still have the ability to stop the centipede even if he doesn't help me. And he uses it to his advantage to kill the one that everyone is not focused on. It's a great tactic, but his strength is still lacking.'

Richard was a bit disappointed, not with Noel's judgment, but with his strength. If Noel was a Spirit Master, he would have killed that demon bat.

"Huuu..." Richard took a deep breath before kicking the centipede, blowing it away. After he freed himself, Richard took another look at his surroundings.

Seeing the injured bat that wanted to chase after Noel, Richard released a shock wave that hit the bat, grabbing its attention.

"That's right. Just focus on me. I'm your opponent!" Richard smirked. 'Even if he failed, he still injured the bat. It might take a few hits to kill these demons, but it's better than if I do this myself.'

Richard knew his role. He didn't realize that instead of him being the leader that ordered the people, he actually became Noel's support, acting for his cause.

"Hahaha, come!" Richard smirked and jumped to the other bat, planning to cause an injury so that he didn't lose to Noel.

But the bat flew back while the other one released another cry to disturb Richard's mind.

"Kh." Richard gritted his teeth, enduring the pain. He kept moving toward the uninjured bat, but the centipede used this opportunity to attack Richard from the side.

This time, Noel made his appearance again. Richard wondered which demon Noel would attack this time.

But to his surprise, Noel didn't attack any demon. Instead, he threw a huge spike made of wood toward Richard.

"Huh?" Richard was confused at first, but he realized what Noel wanted to do.

He pointed his palm at the spike and used his shock wave to direct the spike to the bat.

"Kiii?" The bat was surprised and tried to dodge it, but with Richard's control over his strength, he skillfully directed in a way that the bat had no way of dodging.

"Kiii!"

Chapter 436 Realization

"Kiii!" The bat got its wing impaled by the spike. It was the same spike Jonathan used to attack the demons. Noel simply threw it in his direction, and with the help of Hardening Rune, the spike was strong enough to injure a Peak Level Demon.

'What? How could he do that?' Richard was shocked that a mere wood could injure a Peak Level Demon. Even though the bat didn't seem to have tough skin, it was still a Peak Level Demon. Without applying some Spiritual Energy, it would only leave a scratch at best.

Yet, this one could impale it.

He was curious, but the other two demons had attacked him as if giving time for the bat to free itself.

The bat endured the pain and flew to the air, albeit its form had lost its stability. Due to its wing getting impaled, the bat's flying path leaned slightly to the left.

There was no way Richard won't take advantage of this advantage. He gathered a huge amount of power above him and formed a palm.

After that, he shot the palm forth, aiming slightly to the left of the bat. And when the bat tried to escape, it ended up flying straight to the palm.

"Kii?!" The bat gritted its teeth before covering its body with both wings, stopping the shock wave. However, the shock wave contained a raging wind. When it touched the bat's wings, it tried to rip it apart.

This time, the bat ended up with two half-destroyed wings.

It didn't expect that Richard could do something like this in a short amount of time.

However, the demons didn't know Richard was surprised as well.

'Tsk. That brat is a monster. Usually, I would have been the one leading the team and teaching them how to fight the enemies. This time, I have someone that supports me... Though, the worst part is that he's so overwhelming that I end up moving at his pace.' Richard clicked his tongue. He had realized that their roles had been reversed.

Despite being only a Spirit Wielder, Richard considered him an equal.

With that thought in mind, he changed his stance.

"In that case, let's make this a blast!" Richard smiled and spun his body while releasing the shock wave continuously.

It ended up turning into a tornado that tried to suck everything in.

The two injured bats tried to fly away while the centipede returned to the ground. The centipede could escape, but the two injured bats had a hard time moving away due to their broken wings.

Noel took that opportunity to send his Undying Fire straight to the tornado. The wind absorbed the fire and turned into a fire tornado.

The bats immediately felt the heat and wanted to escape. They didn't want to get burned alive.

But it was impossible to do anything in this scenario, especially when Noel released his chains. The targets were their wings.

As soon as their wings were restricted, the bats couldn't fly away anymore.

As a result, they got sucked into the tornado and the black flame soon spread all over their bodies.

Still, as one would expect from Peak Level Demons, they released all their strength for one last moment and let out a loud cry.

Their voices contained a vast amount of Spiritual Energy, releasing a powerful shock wave that neutralized the tornado and blew out the fire on their bodies.

Unfortunately for them, this opening was all Noel needed.

As soon as he got that opportunity, Noel went straight at the left bat and swung his sword.

"!!!" The bat noticed Noel and wanted to escape but was powerless to do it.

However, the centipede seemed to have understood Noel's attack patterns. When Noel was about to reach the bat, the centipede came out of the ground and attacked him from the side.

Surprisingly, Noel didn't even bother to look at the centipede. It looked like he couldn't react to him, but the centipede realized it wasn't the case when Richard appeared next to its head and struck its mouth.

"Chiii!" The centipede fell down.

At the same time, Noel reached the bat and waved his blade with his Ignition Sword, devouring the bat with his black fire.

"Kiiii!" The bat was screaming in pain. The voice gradually weakened, showing the state of the bat.

Knowing its partner was about to die, the other bat endured all the injuries and flew straight at Noel. Even if it had to ram its body without using its power, the bat would do it as long as it could save its partner.

Noel had prepared for this and moved behind the fire. This way, the bat would have to loop around first if he wanted to attack him.

"!!!" The bat was infuriated by Noel's action. It released its sound wave to stop Noel.

Noel felt the pain Richard had experienced earlier. Instead of taking it head-on, Noel actually ran away, trying to escape from the sound wave.

The bat was relieved at first and tried to check its partner's condition. It gathered its power to blow away the fire.

But that was when another spike fell on top of the bat, impaling its body.

"Kiii!" The burned bat let out its last shrill before it died.

Noel completely overwhelmed it by taking advantage of the messy battlefield.

Richard was shocked by Noel's ability, but there was one more person who had been observing Noel, and from a better position.

He was Jonathan.

Jonathan couldn't help but furrow his eyebrows when he saw Noel's movement.

'Huh... That kind of judgment, his shrewdness, and his timing... Why does it feel familiar?' Jonathan thought for a moment before coming to a big realization.

"!!!" Jonathan gasped. He answered inwardly, 'Don't tell me. ladre is Noel? That's right. Even though the masquerade can cover his face, he can't change the condition of his skin, his movement, his height... His build is slightly buffed, but the rest is similar to him.'

'Now that I think about it, Rose seems to have gradually overcome her sadness after he appeared... As expected, ladre is Noel.'

Chapter 437 Difference

"Hahaha!" Richard laughed after seeing how another Peak Level Demon had just died. Even he was surprised to see a Spirit Wielder, more so in the Demon Relief Squad, to be able to kill a Peak Level Demon so easily.

He became even more excited. Looking at this centipede, Richard released all his Spiritual Energy.

"Haaa!" Richard let out a roar.

The centipede realized the increase in Spiritual Energy and immediately backed away. It would be bad if he was struck by what Richard planned to do.

Richard, on the other hand, concentrated that Spiritual Energy around his fists. Suddenly, the Spiritual Energy became calmer and covered his fists as if they were gloves.

However, the centipede could see spikes around the gloves. Even its carapace would be penetrated by those spikes.

Hence, the centipede hurriedly dug to avoid a frontal confrontation.

"Why are you running away?" Richard smirked and punched the ground. This time, he didn't turn it into a crater.

But there were a few huge cracks in the soil. Richard took advantage of that gap to send his Spiritual Energy inside.

"Chiiii!" The centipede screamed before its entire body was blown out of the hole it entered earlier.

Seeing how the centipede had no way to protect itself in the air, the bat looped around, forgetting about its fallen partner and focusing on helping the centipede.

"I have seen through your ability." Richard smirked and released a portion of his Spiritual Energy to create a wind shield that deflected the sound wave.

Unbeknownst to him, Noel had simply killed the bat so fast that the latter hadn't utilized its full power.

Since the bat knew they would die if they didn't kill Richard, the bat decided to release all its Spiritual Energy in this attack.

The sound wave suddenly punctured the barrier.

"Huh?!" Richard widened his eyes in surprise as he hurriedly ducked down.

The sound wave flew like a spear, piercing through everything in its way. Because Richard managed to dodge it, the sound wave hit the ground, pulverizing the soil and creating a hole as big as the centipede.

"Ho?" Richard narrowed his eyes. The Demon Hunting Squad's motto was to kill the demons as quickly as possible. There was a huge reason behind it.

According to the statistics they had gathered, the demons always looked down on the human when they first encountered them. There would be exceptions for demons who had encountered strong humans before and won the battle or escaped from them.

But inexperienced demons would look down on them and didn't release their full strength. Noel had actually learned about this from the Demon Relief Squad.

It was the berserk state. For the Demon Relief Squad, the demon's full strength was the berserk state. But for the Demon Hunting Squad, the demon simply had just released the power they hid.

There was a big difference between their approach. And Richard was about to show that difference.

"Battle Energy!" Richard covered his entire body with his Spiritual Energy. Instead of gloves, he chose full-body armor.

After that, Richard went straight to the falling centipede as he had to crush it before the centipede reached the ground.

The bat gathered its energy again before releasing another sound wave.

The sound was sharp like the previous one, penetrating everything in its way. But Richard didn't have any intention of avoiding it this time.

As for the reason, it was shown right after the sound wave hit his body.

Bam!

The sound wave caused a small explosion due to its momentum, but Richard actually emerged from the smoke without any injury.

"!!!" The bat widened its eyes in shock. The barrier that coated Richard's entire body actually managed to absorb the sound wave.

And with this, Richard managed to reach the centipede and struck its body with all his strength.

"Explosive Punch!"

Bam!

The Spiritual Energy around Richard's fist turned violent as it pulverized the hard carapace and created a hole in the centipede's body.

The centipede let out a cry, but it couldn't do anything as it fell to the ground. Its body had become weak due to that injury.

When Richard was about to kill the centipede, the bat tried to stop him. It realized Richard's power could neutralize its attack, so it tried to ram him, thinking its body should be able to push Richard away.

Richard grinned and pointed his palm at the bat.

"Kiii?!" The bat soon widened its eyes when it suddenly stopped. It felt its organs move due to the sudden stop as though it had just hit a wall.

When it looked down, it realized Richard actually stopped its momentum with just one hand.

"You are—!" Richard smirked, wanting to say one last thing before he crushed the bat's body. But before he could finish it, Noel had appeared next to the bat, wielding his fire sword.

By taking advantage of the bat's confusion and Richard's strength, Noel sliced the bat's neck and ultimately killed it.

"You bast—!" Richard wanted to curse Noel, but once again, he stopped because Noel delivered a killing blow to the centipede.

In just one movement, Noel actually killed both of them.

"And with this, our job is done." Noel let out a sigh of relief. He looked at the centipede and remembered what had happened earlier. He thought, 'The Demon Hunting Squad is crazy. When the demon went berserk, he actually allowed the bat to attack him.'

'More importantly, he used that information to measure the bat's strength. That information was enough for him to know the bat wouldn't be able to hurt him when he used that strange ability that covered his body. Instead of being careful, he actually used the berserk state to measure the demon's attack to change his hunting style. No wonder it's called the Demon Hunting Squad. I have learned a lot.'

While Noel was thinking, Richard had gone to him and told him why he shouldn't steal someone's prey.

Of course, all those words just entered his right ear and came out of the other ear. What Noel and the Demon Relief Squad cared about was the result. As long as the demons died, no one cared who killed them.

Chapter 438 Weird Movement

After a while, they managed to kill the rest of the demons.

Of course, the group immediately entered the cave after that. They could clean up the battlefield after making sure there were no more demons around.

Since Noel was the only one who had the Moon Blessing, he became their guide. Aside from the Moon Blessing, Noel also took advantage of the Demon Hunter Medal, trying to find demons that hid behind the wall or underground.

The others didn't seem to have a problem walking in the dark either. They relied on their Spiritual Energy to measure the size of the cave and used their instinct to predict each other's movement. This was useful in a fight as well.

During that time, Jonathan kept observing Noel to confirm his suspicion.

He could somehow understand why Noel had to disguise himself as ladre. Anna might be the royal family's spy that planned to kill Noel this whole time. It explained why Clara said Noel wanted to use this squad as a stepping stone in order to become a noble.

Still, there must be a reason why Noel kept it a secret. So, he didn't plan to talk about it for the time being. At least, they had to be alone before he confronted him.

In the end, the group continued moving around the tunnel with ease, finding one demon after another.

Since there were a lot of demons that came out earlier, the cave became pretty empty. According to their count, they only encountered a total of 149 demons inside the cave with one of them being another Peak Level Demon.

This Peak Level Demon died in an instant after being surrounded by the entire group.

It took them three hours to clean up the entire nest. And of course, the Demon Relief Squad hurriedly took out the Demon Crystals, planning to split it up later with the Demon Hunting Squad.

Unbeknownst to them, Anna had begun to move. They didn't realize Noel had been buying some time for Anna by checking the cave thoroughly and informing them about hidden demons.

On top of the bridge, Paul was carrying two boulders to the other side, where he could start shaping them into blocks used to patch all their holes.

Rose used her ability to create a fake stone so that Paul could follow its size, shape, and angle.

The two people from the Demon Hunting Squad couldn't help but become curious about their works.

This was the first time they saw the Demon Relief Squad work. Any artisans they had encountered this whole time would carefully measure the hole and create something with their tools.

But the Demon Relief Squad actually used their Spirit Abilities to speed up the progress. This was the reason why the Demon Relief Squad was called to help with construction. They simply wanted a cheap but quick worker.

Still, the fact they could repair the bridge was good news to the Demon Hunting Squad.

They couldn't help but approach Paul and ask, "Hey, do you have a task for us? One of us should be enough to be on the lookout, so we can help you. But remember, we're doing this not for you, we just want the supply route to be fixed so that our camp can get more supplies."

Paul was stunned at first before chuckling inside. It turned out the people from the Demon Hunting Squad were cute. They just acted tough this whole time while, deep down, they still cared about others.

However, Paul had to reject them. "Sorry. I'm grateful for your gesture, but I don't think there are a lot of things you can do. It's better to leave it to us than have you mess around."

"..." The two were quite pissed by Paul's words, but they didn't give up. One of them couldn't help but suggest, "Then, how about the stone or tree? We can get them for you."

"Well, you need a specific tree and stone for them... Can you find the right one?"

"We are fast. Even if we bring the wrong one, we can go back and get another one."

Paul thought for a moment and nodded. "That's alright for me. Just make sure they're not in the way. Though, one of you still needs to look around."

"Got it." The two nodded and exchanged looks as if deciding who would go.

While those two worked, Rose suddenly stopped and raised her head as if she sensed something.

She closed her eyes to concentrate everything on her ears. Suddenly, she picked a small roar from far away.

'Hmm? A roar from the opposite direction where the group went? Does it come from another nest?' Rose narrowed her eyes, thinking. On the one hand, she wanted to send one of the Demon Hunting Squad's members to check the situation. On the other hand, their main priority was the bridge.

After some consideration, Rose decided not to inform them, believing there was nothing wrong with the other nest.

But the more time passed, the more ruckus came from the other nest.

"This..." Rose pinched the bridge of her nose.

"Is there something wrong, Rose?" Paul asked with a confused expression.

"I'm not sure, but the other nest is quite lively." Rose pointed in the other nest's direction. "Though, our main priority here is the bridge. I think we should stay here and wait until the vanguard returns."

"I see. We just have to inform them about it so that they can be more careful."

"Yes." Rose nodded in agreement. The other two actually gave another suggestion.

"If that's the case, I'm going to stop helping and create two layers of defense. I'll focus on that direction while my partner will handle the rest. This way, we can react if those demons actually come at us."

Paul thought for a moment before glancing at Rose, who nodded.

"Sounds good. I'll leave it to you."

"Great." Both of them nodded and immediately dropped their work as they fulfilled their next task.

They didn't know at that time they would be facing an empty nest next.

Chapter 439 Unexpected Find

Roar!

Roar!

Roar!

There were a series of roars echoing through the area. However, the sound was still quite far from the bridge.

During that period, the two from the Demon Hunting Squad continued watching the surrounding, making sure there were no demons that strayed from the trouble and ended up reaching this place.

In the meantime, Rose focused on her ears, trying to find a way to locate the enemies.

But to her surprise, the sound actually moved farther and farther as if they were not planning to attack them.

"This is weird..." Rose narrowed her eyes.

"Is there something wrong, Rose?" Paul asked, feeling concerned. He had to stop his activity because of the possibility of a huge outbreak.

"No. I might've overthought everything... I don't know why but the demons are moving away from us."

"Isn't that good news?"

"Yeah." Rose nodded and pointed in their direction. "It seems they're going that way."

Paul frowned and recalled the maps. According to her direction, they should be going to an empty field where there was no civilization for at least one or two days. So, they were safe for the time being.

Even if the demons went toward another city in that direction, there was enough time to inform the other city, considering they could use the pigeon to send the news.

"If that's the case, we're pretty safe for the time being." Paul let out a sigh of relief. "Just in case, we're going to stay here until the rest is back. After that, we'll send them to check the situation. They can handle the nest together with what is happening right now."

"Yes. That's the plan." Rose agreed with the suggestion since she had thought the same thing. Although they could ask the two from the Demon Hunting Squad to find out what happened, the situation was a bit unstable.

So, Rose chose not to risk the entire progress.

The other team went back after four hours.

All of them seemed to be pretty energetic, despite fighting against many demons and a few Peak Level Demons.

The only one who felt a bit worn out was Richard since he took on all the Peak Level Demons.

"You guys are finally back!" Paul waved his hand, putting down his tools to check his team.

"Is there something wrong?" Noel asked Rose, who had a worried expression.

In that instant, all eyes were on Rose. Seeing how uncomfortable she was, Paul explained. "She has heard the movement of demons, but it seems they're moving away. We haven't checked it since the situation was unstable before."

Richard thought for a moment and asked, "So, you want us to check the situation there?"

"Yes. You're going to clean the nest, so you might as well do it." Paul nodded.

Richard nodded in agreement. There was nothing wrong with doing it since they were planning to go there.

"By the way, do you want to get some rest first? It seems you have fought a lot of demons there. So, you might want to take a breather. In the meantime, I'll prepare some light food to replenish your stamina," Paul asked Richard while examining the team's condition.

"No. It's better if we settle this as soon as possible. After that, it won't be too late to get something to eat." Richard rejected it. Although they had exhausted some of their stamina, they still had enough to crush the other nest.

Since there was an unstable situation before, it was better to confirm it as soon as possible.

"Alright then." Paul stepped back and tossed some water bottles. "At least, get something to drink."

Richard ended up allowing the group to rest for five minutes while they discussed the next plan.

Unlike before, Richard proposed they went to the nest a bit more carefully, not wanting to get ambushed because of the uncertainty.

There was no objection, even from Noel. After the break was over, they immediately rushed to the other nest.

Five minutes soon passed. But to their surprise, there wasn't a single demon in the area.

Richard became even more cautious in this situation, thinking the demons from this nest were aware of their existence and planned to intercept them somewhere. They even spread their team to check their surroundings.

Unfortunately, they didn't find anything. There was no demon, only some footprints that ran toward the direction Rose told them.

It was weird because they thought there was something big in this direction. In the end, the team followed the footprints while adjusting their course to match the nest's location.

The closer they were to the nest, the more they thought this was a trap. All the trails led in the same direction as if they were moving because of a call from a certain demon.

And the most absurd thing they found was when they arrived at the nest location.

The nest was located in the middle of the woods. They tore down the woods and put the trunks around it to block the wind. Meanwhile, there was a huge empty space inside with nothing but some branches that seemed to be used as a mattress.

But they noticed something weird inside this nest.

The nest might be big, but its shape was similar to a circle. And there was actually a big mattress made of branches in the middle of this nest as if it was implying the status of their leader.

The entire group shuddered when they saw this spot because there were supposed to be a few Peak Level Demons inside this nest. And the only one who could be their leader was a higher rank demon. In other words, a Superior Demon.

They couldn't believe there was a Superior Demon in this nest. Even Richard had no confidence in taking a Superior Demon. Only his captain would be able to do it.

Because Richard couldn't decide what they should do, the group gathered to discuss their next plan.

Meanwhile, the most distracted person out of them was actually Noel. After all, he was aware that Anna was the one the demons chased. And if she was chased by a Superior Demon, it would be over.

Chapter 440 Dire

"So, what should we do now?" Richard asked while looking at the Demon Relief Squad. They could consider this movement as a threat to the bridge, so he had to ask about their opinions.

Noel had piqued his interest earlier, so Richard observed Noel more than anyone else. And at this time, Noel showed a restless expression as if he was thinking about something bad.

"What's wrong?" Richard came to Noel while furrowing his eyebrows.

All of them soon turned to Noel. The Demon Relief Squad never saw Noel acting this way, so they were curious about what he was thinking.

Noel glanced around as if scanning the area again before explaining the reason for his panic. "This..."

"Explain it to us. We can't understand you if you don't talk." Richard demanded the answer with a strict tone. The last thing they should do was get worked up.

Noel gritted his teeth and explained, "I believe all of you have thought the same thing. The nest should have multiple Peak Level Demons, but the position of this mattress is kind to that of a leader. So, there might have been a Superior Demon in this nest previously.

"No one can defeat the Superior Demon right now. But I'm more worried about the direction where they're going..." Noel paused for a moment and said, "Looking at the trail on the way, it looks like they're going to the plain. But this will change with a Superior Demon. You should know about their intelligence, right?"

Richard nodded. "Continue."

"There is a Demon Hunting Squad's base at the border. And there's no way a Superior Demon can pass them unless there's a big battle where the Demon Hunting Squad's captain is occupied. Hence..."

Richard frowned, thinking Noel was looking down on them. However, what he said made some sense. So, Richard asked to confirm his doubt. "So, you're telling us the Demon Hunting Squad fails to keep the demons at bay?"

"Yes, specifically this Superior Demon. Its existence is a great threat to the kingdom since there won't be anyone to stop it."

"Yeah. It's indeed a threat, but I don't understand the reason for your panic."

"The Superior Demon is extremely intelligent. With how the demons move in the same direction, it's clear they have a leader who can order all the demons in this area. And such a demon is capable of using a strategy... What if they're not moving toward an empty plain?!"

"!!!" In that instant, everyone widened their eyes. They realized the real meaning behind Noel's explanation.

He was implying that the demons might change their direction. And they could go to the tattered Demon Hunting Squad's base or the Baron's city. It would lead to a catastrophe if the demon ever reached them.

"What's the reason? There's no way the demons know about our movements and go further away just to lower our guard, right?" Stella asked.

Jonathan thought for a moment and said, "The reason is not important right now. What we need to do is to split the team into two. The first team will follow the trail and see if there's any change of direction. The team has to tail them and wait until the second team informs Paul and the others and catches up.

"This way, we can strike them from behind. At the very least, this should be enough to buy some time from the Superior Demon. We have to act fast."

When everyone heard Jonathan's suggestion, they looked at each other as if wondering how they would split the team.

Since he was the superior among them, Richard instantly divided the team. "This time, my Demon Hunting Squad will follow the trail. No matter what, we're superior in tailing the demons. And considering the enemies, this time can't be underestimated, it's better to have a superior team doing it.

"It's not like there's any threat to the bridge now since they have left this place. Meanwhile, your Demon Relief Squad will inform those four and catch up to us. According to them, it's been one hour since the ruckus, so they might have gone far. We can't waste any more time.

"If you understand, then let's go!" Richard gave an order. This time, no one objected to his decision.

Richard led Becky and Shawn to follow the trail while Noel and the rest returned to the bridge to inform them what they had found.

They were shocked to hear what happened. Paul even ordered them to drop everything they were doing and immediately chased after the demons.

It would be bad if a Superior Demon attacked a normal city since they were only meant to hold back Peak Level Demons.

It didn't take too long for them to be out of the nest area and headed straight to the plain. But to their surprise, the trail had begun to change its direction.

And the current trail was heading straight to the Baron's city.

"This..." Paul sucked a cold breath and shouted, "We have to hurry. The city might be under siege. No, if it's a Superior Demon, it might have destroyed the city."

The group nodded and increased their pace. While running, Rose couldn't help but move to Noel, wanting to know more about the situation.

"What's going on here? Do you know anything?"

"I'm not sure." Noel shook his head helplessly. Even he wanted to know about the situation since he didn't expect there to be a Superior Demon. He was even more worried about Anna.

Anna was supposed to lead them to the Count's city. But he thought Anna would be heavily injured because of the Superior Demon.

Whether it was fortunate or unfortunate, Noel didn't find any trace of fighting. Anna either died without a fight or managed to escape unscathed.

He hoped it was the latter.

"Rose. I have something I want you to do." Noel looked at Rose with a serious expression.

Rose was surprised at first, but it seemed Noel had a plan in mind. When he became like this, it meant the situation was dire.

"Alright. Tell me."