

S vs Rebirth 501

Chapter 501 Found

Rose led Noel to a river that flowed not far away from the village. This was the source of water that provided life to the village.

However, what Rose wanted to show Noel wasn't the river but a tree next to the river.

The tree seemed to be the same as the ones around it, but its location was a bit unique. There were more than ten meters to the nearest trees as if the tree was being separated from the rest of the colony.

"This should be the place." Rose looked at the tree and touched the trunk, reminiscing the memory between her and her father.

"Father! Look, I managed to climb it!" Rose puffed her chest proudly as she was standing on top of a branch. She was only six years old at this time, but she somehow managed to climb this tree with that tiny body of hers.

"Rose. Please climb down. It's not safe!" A middle-aged man shouted gently, trying to coax her so that she would safely climb down.

But the small Rose was still cheeky as she proudly declared, "I won't go down. You can also climb the tree and catch me. I'm going to prevent dad from—ooowh?!"

When she was making a declaration, she puffed her chest, causing her balance to shift. She ended up slipping and falling to the ground.

Her father's heart skipped a beat. If he had been a normal father, he would have missed Rose because there was still some distance between them.

Rose could only look at the sky as her back would be the one hitting the ground first.

But to her surprise, she landed on her father's hands as the latter caught her gently, making her feel like she fell on top of a pillow.

"Huh?" Rose's body froze and her expression was terrified. She wanted to say something, but she panicked and her mouth refused to open.

In the end, she could only cry. "Waaa..."

Her father tried his best to make a comforting smile while gently holding her in his hands. "Are you alright, my sweetheart?"

"U...U..." Rose felt calmer a bit when she heard her father's voice and looked up, realizing that her father had managed to catch her. "I..."

She wanted to say something, but her father lowered her down gently before hugging her. "It's alright. It's alright. As long as you're safe..."

These comforting words gradually calmed Rose down.

"Sowwy..." Rose tried to apologize with all the tears on her cheeks and snot on her nose.

"It's fine. But with this, Daddy manages to catch you." Her father tried to make a light-hearted joke to lessen the mood.

Rose gasped in realization, but her father had circled around her and held her from behind.

"Hehe, Daddy won't let you go this time." He gently sat down with his back leaning on the tree. This way, he could let Rose rest while making sure she was alright.

Rose couldn't say anything at that time because she was still in shock, but she remembered what her father had said.

"Rose. Do you know there is something special about this tree?" Her father raised his hand as if trying to grasp the tree. "This tree is called Manloon Tree. It's a common tree that you can find anywhere, but you will see a tree separated from the rest here and there.

"It's a natural occurrence as if the tree is trying to tell everyone that it is different from the rest. The tree is screaming, 'I am special!' like that."

"Is... dad... special?" Rose asked with a shaking tone while rubbing her eyes to stop her tears.

"Hmm...What do you think?"

"I don't know. But Rose wants to be like daddy!"

"Then, daddy will be someone special, so Rose can become someone special!"

"Really?!"

"Yep." Her father smiled.

Those words made her forget about what had just happened earlier and stopped the tears from flowing out.

Now that she remembered that scene, Rose felt something was wrong. Her father wasn't supposed to be able to catch her back then. So, the fact that he managed to do it must be because he had been hiding his strength.

In other words, her father was special. And he might be the reason why the Supreme Devil Organization came to her.

Rose kept her eyes closed while remembering that scene. She gently placed her head on the trunk and muttered, "The Manloon Tree might be a common tree, but it's also one of the most resilient. And this tree that is separated from the rest has a different meaning.

"It's a special tree... one that holds a special meaning." Rose slowly turned around, looking at Noel. "I think if my father wants to hide something, he will hide it in this place. I believe we have to dig this area, Noel."

Noel furrowed his eyebrows. Although he was still confused about this tree, he still believed in Rose's judgment.

Instead of using his hand or sword to dig the ground, Noel cut a tree nearby and made two wooden shovels from the trunk.

The shovels would break if they used them like this, but Noel had applied the Hardening Rune to make sure that they didn't break.

He handed one to Rose and started digging. "You don't mind me digging around here, right?"

"Yeah. Though, I hope that you can be a bit gentle since this tree holds a special memory for me."

"Sure."

Noel nodded.

They tried to dig around the tree to see if Rose's father had hidden something underneath the tree.

As predicted, he indeed left something there.

When Noel stabbed the ground with the shovel, he seemed to have hit something hard.

Clack!

"Hmm?" Noel furrowed his eyebrows and tried to dig the ground near it to confirm his suspicion.

When the soil above it crumbled, Noel could finally find the thing that Rose's father hid.

"This is..." Noel frowned and called Rose since she was more familiar with her father. "Rose. Come here for a second. I think I've found it."

Chapter 502 Blueprints

"Hmm?" Rose turned around, hurriedly approaching Noel since she was curious about what kind of thing her father left behind.

It was actually a wooden box. The exterior was badly damaged due to the weathering, but there was no hole in it, so the contents should be safe.

"What is this box..." Noel muttered while looking at this old box. Rose was 25 years old, and with her living here as long as she could remember, it was clear that this box was older than her age.

In other words, this box was around thirty years old. So, they had to be careful when opening it.

"Let's open it." Noel put the box down, allowing Rose to open it. This was the item that her father left behind for her, so she had all the right to open it.

Rose gently wiped off the soil so that she could grab the lock. It might be due to the passing of time, but when she tried to open the lock, it fell apart.

The box ended up opening by itself. Rose was startled at first, but she still lifted the lid, wanting to see what was inside.

"This is..." Rose was confused. Noel took a peek inside and found one book and a few pieces of paper.

"What is this?" Noel frowned, wondering what these papers contained. After all, it was already so old that the content inside it might not be relevant anymore.

Rose grabbed the book first as she recognized the words in this book.

"This handwriting... It's my father's handwriting." Rose gasped. Normal villagers might not have enough knowledge to write, but most of the village chiefs could do it. So, it wasn't that abnormal to see her father write something.

However, the words that were written in that book were what shocked her the most.

"If anyone can find this book, it will be my daughter. If you end up finding this notebook, it means I have died.

"I don't know what kind of event will unfold in the future, but I'm writing this note to tell you about three important things.

"The first thing is my name. My name is not Billy. My real name is Emmanuel, and I am the knight captain of the Rumbledane Family.

"The Rumbledane Family is a baron family that is located in the west of the kingdom. But it has been destroyed by a raid by the Supreme Devil Organization.

"The reason for that raid is all these things I've left behind. This is the second thing I want to tell you.

"These papers contain information about a certain item. I found them during an exploration with the knights of the barony in a ruin. That ruin seems to be holding some knowledge about past civilizations.

"Although we didn't understand a single thing about their language, we'd got some information regarding their use.

"According to the people who had read them, these papers were actually blueprints for two items. The first would be the iron spring and the second one was an item that had elastic characteristics, but it seemed to be durable enough to endure many harsh environments.

"These blueprints must be the reasons why the barony was raided. At that time, there were many jealous people that wanted to get these two blueprints. So, there was also a chance that they were working with the Supreme Devil Organization.

"There were three influences that might get involved in this. They were Baron Alpenflaw, Baroness Litheart, and Count Serpentswift.

"And this is related to the last thing I want to tell you. I got this from the baron I served so that I could pass it to someone worthy enough to get it.

"According to the baron, these two blueprints are worth more than a barony. Their potential was limitless and it could become the specialty of a territory and make it prosper.

"So, I'm going to give these two blueprints to you. I can only give you these two like this because, by the time you find these blueprints, not many should still remember them.

"If you want to sell them, make sure you find a good merchant or a good noble. But be careful as they might kill you and steal these blueprints from you.

"If you want to become a noble by marrying into their family, these blueprints shall be the dowry. I hope that they can take good care of my daughter.

"Still, I believe that you are smart enough to handle this matter. If you don't want anything to do with it, then burn these blueprints. Humanity might lose important blueprints, but the only humans I care about at this point are your mother and you. So, please... do what you want with them.

"I'll be watching over you from here. I love you, sweetheart. Please lead a happy life."

"..." Rose closed her eyes, trying hard to not cry. She never thought that her father would leave behind something this important.

Although she didn't know whether the blueprints were really worth that much or not, if they did, she would gain a lot of things in this life with them.

Noel didn't read the books. He was examining the blueprints, only to find them confusing. As expected, he wasn't a blacksmith, so he didn't understand what they were trying to do.

Looking at his confused look, Rose couldn't help but say, "Noel. These two are ancient blueprints from past civilizations. I think it's better to measure it from a trustworthy blacksmith. I want to give these two blueprints to you to thank you for avenging my family..."

"Huh?" Noel was confused because he didn't understand the blueprints and didn't read the explanation.

Meanwhile, Rose was only smiling at him as if she didn't plan to explain much about it. She only said, "Well, these two blueprints are highly sought and it will be dangerous just to carry them around. So, it's better to let a blacksmith see it and decide what to do after that."

"..." Noel remained silent, not knowing what to say.

On the other hand, Rose added inwardly, 'Sorry, Dad. I think I've found another option that is different from the ones you gave. I'll be giving this to Noel because I know that he will take care of the blueprints well. And as an expert of the Demon Relief Squad, I don't need money since my strength is enough to let me live leisurely for the rest of my life. So, I'm going to dedicate them to Noel.'

Chapter 503 Bad News

Noel was overwhelmed by the gift to the point he couldn't accept it easily.

"I'm sorry, Rose. I don't think I can accept this." Noel shook his head helplessly. "These are yours."

"But..." Rose frowned.

"Do you think I don't know their worth? I might not understand the information written on the blueprints, but I know it's worth a lot.

"After connecting some parts, I can see why the Supreme Devil Organization wants these blueprints... no, should I say that the Supreme Devil Organizations want these blueprints because they know their worth?

"You have told me that it's dangerous to possess these blueprints as well, so I can kind of measure their worth. So, you should be the one holding them, not me. These are the gifts from your parents."

Rose's body shook. She wanted to repay Noel for everything she had done. She also had deemed Noel to be a good lord if he ever rebuilt his family.

And with his current character, the people would know him as a wise and just lord. He might want his subordinates' stuff, but everything was for the territory's development.

Even if he had to retrieve it, he would give enough compensation. That was why she gave them to Noel.

She could say she had expected this, but she also wished she could say otherwise. After all, she wanted Noel to receive them.

"I know that you are a bit skeptical of receiving this, but trust me. You need these blueprints." Rose indirectly implied that the blueprints were more important than the dangers.

But Noel wasn't concerned about the danger. He was more skeptical about the worth of the blueprints. He couldn't repay Rose for these. He believed what he had done for her still wasn't worth more than these two blueprints.

"It's not about the danger, Rose. If you give me these two blueprints, I'm afraid that I will owe you so much that it will make me feel guilty."

"Huh? Guilty?" Rose was confused. There was no need to feel guilty since she was the one that wanted him to accept, not the other way around.

"You can understand why I feel that way after following me a bit more. Instead of giving me these two, how about you hold it first for me?"

"If you find someone suitable for it, you should give them or hand them to this person. But if you still haven't found anyone, then when I have enough riches, I'll buy them for you." Noel smiled as if asking Rose not to reject this proposal.

"..." Rose bit her lips when she saw her expression. She still wanted to give him, but she ended up respecting Noel's stance. "Alright. But I won't give it to anyone. You are the only ones who can possess them, all right?"

"Thank you."

The atmosphere became awkward after that, but Rose ended up safekeeping the blueprints for Noel.

Rose didn't tell Noel the content of the blueprints. There were two reasons.

Firstly, Rose wished Noel to accept it so that she could repay his kindness. Secondly, Rose wanted Noel to appraise it personally so that there wouldn't be any lies about it.

Even if she told him about the previous appraisal, they might not be correct. After all, civilization had developed further in the past thirty years. So, the answer might be different this time.

In the end, they decided to stop talking about the blueprints and continued on their journey.

Their next destination was none other than the Demon Banner Army's Headquarters, where they planned to meet up with Dimitri.

He was also curious about the development of those kids. They had talent and a unique path. Now that they hadn't met for six months, he wanted to see how far the kids had gone.

Noel couldn't help but tell the story about the kids to Rose, showing how proud he was of them.

After all, they were kids from slums that sought to change and reach a higher stage. They didn't complain about the training and kept making an effort toward their goal.

The story piqued Rose's interest since Septa was talented at his own level while Shale was one of the most powerful people in the Demon Banner Army.

With them agreeing to the assessment, the kids should be good. She wanted to see what kind of sword dance the kids would show her.

It took them three weeks to reach the Demon Banner Army's headquarters due to how far Rose's village was. And their pace was quite high all this time to avoid getting late.

The horses were tired, but Noel and Rose kept pushing them forward just for a little bit until they met the kids.

When Noel and Rose reached their destination, they didn't hesitate to go toward the house where the kids lived.

But to their surprise, the hut was empty and there was dust here and there, showing that the kids had left the hut for a while.

So, Noel had no choice but to go to the barrack to find anyone that was supposed to have seen the kids.

He knew that Shale had stopped teaching and the next instructor was the captain of the Demon Barrier Squad. However, he should know something about them.

Even Shale should know about the kids' talents and tell the Demon Barrier Squad's captain about them.

The Demon Barrier Squad's captain was a middle-aged man whose body wasn't losing against Igor. But according to Rose, this person was more muscle-brain than Igor as they could still tell Igor something and he would follow the advice.

As for this captain, he only thought about muscle and body. All the Demon Barrier Squad members had a similar body to him as if they were trying to become a meat shield. It was no wonder Shale and Septa called this person a gorilla. After all, he only taught the new recruits how to strengthen their bodies.

And the moment they reached the barrack and found the captain, they received an answer that shocked them to the core.

"The kids? They're gone."

Chapter 504 The Kids

"Ha..."

"Ha..."

Noel was panting as he stormed inside a small wooden house and saw a simple backyard where a few kids clashed their swords.

The loud 'bang' from the door alarmed the kids as they immediately raised their weapons to stop whoever dared to trespass on their house.

But to their surprise, the one that stood in front of their gate was Noel.

"Eh?"

"Big Brother Noel?"

"You're back?"

The kids were confused and shocked at the same time. They were happy they could see Noel again, but they still couldn't believe Noel would visit them again, especially with his busy schedule.

Meanwhile, Noel was actually angry. His anger wasn't directed at the kids but at the Demon Barrier Squad's captain.

...

A few minutes ago.

"They're gone," said the captain with a poker face as if it wasn't his problem.

"What? They're gone? Have they left the city?" Noel was desperate to know about their situation. If they truly died, he wanted to avenge them.

It turned out he misunderstood him.

"No. The commander has taken them away and given them another place to live. So, they're gone from this barrack since they're training there." The captain answered while furrowing his eyebrows. "By the way, who are you? Why are you asking about the kids?"

"I..." Noel stopped. He wanted to say he was the one taking care of them, but it was better to not say it to avoid leaking some information. Instead, he told him, "I am Iadre, a knight from the Demon Relief Squad."

"Before the previous caretaker, Noel Ardagan, fell on a mission, he asked Rose, a colleague in the Demon Relief Squad, to take care of them. So, we were here to check on their conditions."

Noel had one concern that made him hesitate with this guy. The fact that he answered the question before asking about their identities already made him look easy to fool. So, it wasn't good to tell him about a secret.

"Oh, I have heard about Noel Ardagan from the commander and Shale. He indeed went to the Demon Relief Squad." The guy nodded in understanding.

It seemed that he didn't care much about the kids or Noel and just wanted to confirm their relationship.

In the end, Rose apologized for all the commotion and immediately left with Noel to ask about the kids' house from the commander.

As expected, they had to go through the normal administration office and get the information not long after. The wait made Noel a bit anxious.

When he finally knew where they were staying, he rushed toward them and slammed open the door.

There was a lot of confusion on their faces since they didn't recognize him. But the moment he opened his masks after closing the door, the kids were dumbfounded.

"Big Brother Noel!"

The kids couldn't help but drop their weapons and rush to Noel.

"Wo—" Noel wanted to stop them, but their physical ability was already much greater than he remembered, so they ended up tackling him to the ground.

"Why are you making a commotion?" There was a female's voice coming from the back.

Although the voice had a higher pitch, Noel still remembered the familiar tone and way of speaking.

And when that female finally turned around the corner, their gazes met.

Yes, it was Erica.

She was holding a knife full of blood as if she had just murdered someone. And with her darkened expression and anger, it truly felt like it was the case.

However, her expression completely changed when she saw Noel. "Big Brother..."

She froze for a moment and checked her appearance. She tried to take off her apron, but the first thing she realized was the fake that her knife was already missing.

"Eh?" Erica turned her head around to find her knife, only to see a tall woman next to her.

"You shouldn't move around with a knife in hand." It was Rose. She didn't forget to remind her.

Erica suddenly took a few steps back as if she was trying to gain some distance, measure the enemy's strength, and plan a counterattack.

"Hmm?" Rose noticed her footwork, but what shocked her the most was how smooth it was. Her movement felt light and connected as if she was flowing water.

It was simple yet elegant. This might be the first time she had seen something like this. Then again, she remembered Noel told her about the Sword Dance. In essence, it was a dance, so this movement was to be expected.

"Who are you?" Erica became vigilant, not feeling her presence this whole time.

"Hello, I am Rose. I am Noel's teammate in the Demon Relief Squad."

"You are his teammate?" Erica frowned. "But isn't Big Brother's teammate that noble lady?"

"I think Noel should be the one to explain the situation to you. For now, you just have to understand that I'm Noel's senior in the squad and I don't plan any harm. I simply follow him here."

"..." Erica looked hesitant but still dropped her guard while glancing at Noel as if trying to get his confirmation.

Noel made a wry smile as he tried to stand up after these kids dragged him to the ground. After noticing Erica's gaze, he nodded to her.

"Alright, let's stop this for a while, shall we? Let's gather in another place so that we can have a peaceful talk." Noel gently pushed the kids away.

In the end, Erica told the kids to move away while she returned to the kitchen. She was cooking with a few other kids earlier, and it seemed she had become more fired up as if she wanted to make a feast for Noel.

She didn't tell the others about Noel yet since she didn't want someone to get injured while cooking. Meanwhile, her twin brother, Eric, ended up leading the rest of the kids and guiding Noel to their living room.

This was their new house, so he wanted to see whether they were living well or not.

Chapter 505 Devastated

A few months ago.

The kids were practicing in the barrack with Shale. Because most people had graduated, the barracks were empty most of the time.

So, Shale couldn't help but watch these kids here. He was impressed by the kids' talents.

He could say that they were as talented as their knights, but what piqued his interest was the twins that led the group.

Their talents were something else and they took care of the group while practicing. In other words, despite not having much time, they managed to reach that level.

If he allowed them to grow even stronger, he believed that their achievement would be extraordinary.

'Hmm... Those two kids have the potential to become either a Captain or a Vice Captain in the Demon Banner Army. As for the rest of the kids, I think they will be able to reach the Zero Squad after some time.

'It's truly surprising that these kids come from the slums... Though, I don't know if I should be more surprised about this or the fact that Noel managed to find them.'

Shale ended up giving some pieces of advice every now and then even though they weren't part of the Demon Banner Army. It was just a professional courtesy that didn't wish for these kids' talents to be buried away.

While watching the kids, he felt a presence coming to his back. He hurriedly stood up and turned around to see who it was.

"Huh? Commander?!" Shale was surprised to find the commander coming out personally. He had taken care of them and the commander didn't seem to mind about it.

After all, it was also a good promotion for their Demon Banner Army.

So, this was the first time the commander came out so that he could observe the kids personally.

"What brings you here?" Shale asked with a curious expression.

The commander narrowed his eyes as he took action before answering his question. He looked at the kids for a moment before shouting, "Stop!"

"!!!" Shale immediately used his Spiritual Energy to resist the sound wave, but the kids didn't know what was going on.

Their bodies suddenly refused to move as if they had become frozen. They were trying to see what was going on, but because of their body's position, only some of them managed to find out about what happened.

"The—"

Unfortunately, before they could say anything, the commander had told them. "Silent!"

At that moment, their mouths also released no sound, making the kids panic.

The commander walked toward them while Shale hurriedly asked, "Commander. What is going on here? I believe I have told you about them and we are free to bring them in since they sincerely wish to get stronger. And Noel has entrusted them to me. They are still kids, so if you don't like them, I'll chase them away."

The commander didn't answer him. Instead, he kept walking until he gave another order. "Fix your posture and line up in front of me."

The kids' bodies moved on their own, confusing them. They tried to resist but to no avail.

Shale gritted his teeth. This was the commander's power. His Spirit was related to Sound and he could simply order everything from other people to Spiritual Energy. It was a powerful ability that allowed him to reach this position.

Still, Shale couldn't bear to see the kids getting punished or killed for no reason, especially when the other party never minded them.

Before he could stand in his way, the commander said, "You kids have been staying here for a few months. I have to commend you for not wasting any resources of this army. You don't eat, use weapons, or even waste people's time here.

"You eat outside with your own money, use your own weapon, and ask or use the field when no one is there. So, I have to commend you for your effort.

"However, the time has come to an end. You can't come to this place anymore."

"What? Commander..." Shale wanted to explain, but the latter shook his head as if he understood his concern.

"I am giving you two choices. You can join my Demon Banner Army through the same route as anybody else if you still want to train here..."

This was the worst choice for the kids. After all, they had sworn that they would be building their own group to show the world about the sword dance, a unique path that came from both them and Noel. They wanted to help Noel's ambition with this new power.

So, joining the Demon Banner Army would be the last thing they wanted to do. In the first place, there was no way they could be together anymore if they joined the Demon Banner Army according to Noel's story.

All of them seemed to be resisting this power as if they didn't like the answer.

The commander obviously felt their resistance, but the gap in their strength was simply too big that his control wouldn't be disturbed.

Shale wanted to say something this whole time, but his order was also affecting him, so he had a hard time uttering the words.

So, the commander continued with the second choice.

"I give you two options because you all have a close relationship with Noel Ardagan. Unfortunately for you, Noel Ardagan has died."

"!!!" The kids were dumbstruck. They couldn't believe what they had heard.

"He was killed by his own teammate called Anna Stargaze. I believe you knew her."

This statement completely enraged the kids. They couldn't help but remember the first time they saw Anna. Noel had given up a lot for them to the point he had to obey Anna. And to think he would end up dying in Anna's hands. They were completely shocked.

Their eyes seemed to be telling him that they wanted to kill Anna Stargaze as soon as he released them from this.

And this was when the commander told them, "So, I give you this second choice. I have a small house for you that contains a small backyard where you can get stronger by yourself. His death involves the noble and the Demon Banner Army, so we can't train you to kill her.

"If you want to avenge him, you might want to take this option and get stronger by yourself. Wait until you are strong enough and do it."

Chapter 506 Reason

"Commander." Shale was finally released from the commander's ability. He kept glancing at the entrance where the kids had left.

They had taken the second option, so they had to get stronger as quickly as possible to avenge Noel.

Meanwhile, Shale didn't understand why the commander did this and demanded an explanation.

The commander shook his head. "That's the only way for them to get stronger. Noel hasn't died."

"But..." Shale suddenly fell silent. The news about Noel's death had reached his ears, so it confused him to hear those words from the commander. It seemed that there was another conspiracy in this matter, which was something he didn't want to get involved in.

"I know your concern, but this is for the best. The kids have a lot of motivation, but that's not enough.

"There are only some ways for those kids to survive in this harsh world. I'm sure you know it too, Shale."

Shale looked down, understanding those words. He couldn't help but recount his past.

If there was only one kid, their survival chance would be higher. But there were a lot of kids in that group. If they wanted to survive as a group, they had to get stronger fast so that they wouldn't be taken advantage of by others and end up getting killed in a plot. They might even get enslaved.

So, the commander fueled them with hatred so that they could get stronger as quickly as possible.

But what he didn't understand was the fact that the commander forbade them from entering the barrack. After all, it was the best place to train.

"It seems that you don't understand why I give them the second option." The commander made a small smile as if understanding his confusion. "There are three reasons for it. First of all, they don't belong here.

"The moment the new apprentice knights come, there is bound to be a conflict of interest between them. No matter how talented the kids are, I am still the commander of the Demon Banner Army.

"I have to put the interest of the army as a priority. So, I have to chase them away.

"The second reason is about their instructor. Don't forget that you are going to return to your squad soon, Shale."

"Ah!" Shale widened his eyes in surprise, forgetting about this important matter. He didn't forget about going to his squad. Instead, he actually forgot who would be taking over as an instructor. "That gorilla..."

"Yeah. He will be coming as the instructor. The kids' sword... dance? Yeah, that. They are not compatible with his rough training. His training focuses solely on the body, while the kids emphasize their footwork and swordsmanship, so letting him oversee the kids will only give the opposite effect."

The second reason alone was enough to convince Shale what his commander did was correct.

But he still had one reason left.

The commander raised his finger. "The third reason is the most important. What do you think is the most expensive thing in the world?"

"Hmm?" Shale tilted his head for a moment before answering, "Strength? Or maybe treasure?"

"No. With enough money, you can still buy them. The most expensive thing in this world is freedom. You can't buy it no matter how much money you have.

"The freedom to do anything you want, the freedom to gain happiness, the freedom to be with your loved one...

"In this cruel world, there are various forces that will restrict your freedom. Even your in-law can easily restrict your freedom to be with their son or daughter.

"Yeah. Those kids are free. I don't want them to get entangled in this situation...at least not now. So, it's better to let them stay there."

"I see." Shale nodded in understanding. He never thought that the commander would put so much effort into that kid.

But he didn't forget to add in a low voice, "Of course, everything is paid by Noel's contribution points. He has told me to take care of them anyway."

"..." Shale's eyebrows twitched. More than half of the respect he had just given to the commander was gone.

...

"That's what happened..." Erica told him the story until the kids left.

But from the story alone, Noel could somehow understand why the commander chased them away.

Though, he didn't explain it to them since it wasn't important.

Erica was wiping off the tears while saying with a shaking voice. "I thought that... big brother... hmmh... *sob*..."

Erica couldn't continue as she was crying because she couldn't imagine what they would do if Noel truly died.

She remembered how much they cried after that day. They were completely devastated.

They never cried as much as they did that day. Even when they were bullied in the slum, they were never that sad.

Noel was their savior, the one that pulled them from the darkness. So, his death hit them hard.

The kids couldn't help but come to Noel, hugging him and refusing to let go. They didn't want to lose him anymore.

Rose, who was watching the entire situation unfold, smiled. She had heard the story about them, but it seemed that Noel still underestimated the bond between them.

She remained silent in the distance because she didn't want to disturb their reunion.

The kids were crying all the time while Noel tried to calm them down.

They were also telling the story of how they overcame his death. Eric, as the leader, had fulfilled his role.

He was the first one to hide his sadness and became stronger for the group. He tried to calm them down, but the hardest one was Erica.

Erica had a similar ability to Noel in terms of leadership, so Noel had taught her the most. They could say their relationship was the best in the group.

So, she was the last one to overcome her sadness and finally had the will to get stronger to avenge Noel.

Now that they found out Noel was still alive, they had to figure out what they were going to do after this.

Chapter 507 Request

"Mhm..." Noel gently moaned while opening his eyes. It was still in the middle of the night.

It might be due to them getting pretty excited to know he was still alive, they ended up waking up this late.

Noel closed his eyes to imitate how they were sleeping so that the rest of the kids would follow his action.

He gently rose from the floor, looking at the kids. They had pushed away their beds and used their sheets to create a thin mattress so that they could sleep together.

So, Noel didn't carry them to their individual bed.

Instead, he made sure that none of them had trouble sleeping before walking out of the room as quietly as possible.

When he reached the backyard to get some air, he found Rose sitting under the moonlight, staring at the sky.

There was a smile on her face as if she had made a fun memory in this place.

"You're still awake?" Rose smiled at Noel.

"Of course. If I don't try to sleep, the kids will continue until dawn. They are still growing up, so they should get some sleep." Noel shook his head helplessly. "Though, I'm wondering the same about you."

"Hmm..." Rose's smile became even bigger as she gently glanced at the house as if looking at the kids behind the wall. "This place is peaceful and filled with happiness. I can clearly see how attached they are to you."

"Well, I never thought I would be that attached either."

"Yeah. Though, You seem to have a lot of fun with them."

"I can't deny that." Noel walked to her and asked if he could join her.

Rose nodded while saying, "Though, I wonder what you will do for the kids? They look so ready to avenge you..."

"Just like you..."

Rose couldn't deny it. She, too, wanted to kill Anna before, but when everything came to light, she stopped thinking about it.

Although she didn't like Anna, it didn't change the fact that Anna had contributed a lot to Noel's plan. And there didn't seem to be any conflict between Noel and Anna. So, she dropped the idea of revenge.

"I think you should worry about their motivation. Revenge usually drives people to a great length... That should be the reason why their strength has improved drastically in the past few months."

Noel didn't reply to her statement for a while. It was clear that he knew about their motivation, but looking from his eyes, he seemed to be concerned about something else.

Noel asked, "Do you think Revenge is the best drive to power? I don't think it is. It's true that you can grow stronger exponentially... After all, that is what makes me this strong in the beginning."

Noel remembered how the revenge thought forced him to keep training. However, the moment he got confused by his desire to get revenge due to his father's note, he felt he had lost something important.

He was lucky to find a new goal or he would have suffered a huge backlash. He might fall from grace and couldn't get stronger for a while.

So, Noel had another worry and this was what he actually wished for the kids. "Actually, I wish that the kids could grow up without any thoughts of revenge. I want them to do everything they want, not be driven by any person.

"When they first danced in front of me, they were completely awkward and had no idea. The confusion completely overwhelmed their smiles.

"But after learning a lot about the Sword Dance, it felt like they were smiling a lot. They enjoyed it.

"As long as we lived in this era and kept getting stronger, we are bound to kill a demon or a person. To endure such a cruel thing, we have to at least enjoy what we are doing or using.

"I simply wish for them to not lose their smiles." Noel made a sad smile, showing how concerned he was.

"I see." Rose nodded. She could understand his concern before turning around, saying, "I think you should say it to them. Eric and Erica, right? The leader and the manager of the group."

Noel's heart skipped a beat as he turned his head around, finding the two peeking from the corner. They were only curious, so there was no intent sent through their gazes.

Noel would certainly feel them eventually, but Rose had beaten him and informed him about these two kids.

"!!!" Eric and Erica panicked, wondering what they should do now that they had been found out.

"Ehehe..." Eric and Erica came out while scratching the back of their heads, embarrassed.

"We didn't mean to eavesdrop..." Erica tried to explain. She noticed Noel leaving, so she tried to follow him. Eric noticed Erica's movement, so they ended up going together.

Noel looked at them and waved his hand, calling them.

The twins ended up going to Noel. They wanted to apologize, but Noel had already said, "I guess you have heard everything. So, what are you planning to do after this?"

"That's..." Eric and Erica exchanged looks. They hadn't thought about it. Their only thought was to get stronger before avenging Noel.

It wasn't something that a kid could easily come up with, so they ultimately shook their heads.

"I see." Noel smiled. "It's something that you have to choose eventually. But I have to warn you that your goal and destination should come from you, not anyone else. Don't let anyone convince you, understand?"

"Yes, Big Brother." Eric and Erica nodded furiously.

"Good."

Eric couldn't help but raise his hand. "Big Brother. There is something that I need to ask you... that is, if you don't mind."

As if knowing what Eric wanted, Erica tried to stop him. "Eric!"

However, he had already piqued Noel's interest, so Eric had to say it. "I have been wondering how far we have gone. It's true that we have gone beyond 'children in the slums', but we don't know much about the world, especially how strong we are."

"Can you... fight us?"

Chapter 508 Advice

The next morning.

Noel was standing in front of the kids. He had agreed to the duel Eric wanted. But Noel had made a condition.

They had to attack him at the same time.

All eleven kids were standing side by side while holding a wooden sword.

"I think you have learned about this from the Demon Banner Army, but I'm going to repeat it. There are three things you need if you want to become stronger and fight bandits and demons. They are Swordsmanship, connections, and resources.

"Connection can be made in the future when you eventually venture out of the city. Resources are the same. You have to make your own money and buy your own things, especially the Demon Crystals. You need them to get stronger.

"I won't be explaining a lot of things about Spiritual Energy and Spirits right now. Instead, I will be leaving you with books so that you can learn together. Erica is the only one who has made a clear effort to learn how to read and write, so ask her to teach you or you can learn how to read and write from her.

"There are a lot of resources from humans to items. I have a principle that I will settle everything fair and square unless the other party is not... But I'm not going to impose this ideal on you.

"Just keep asking the question of what, when, where, who, why, and how every time you do something and decide whether that's the right thing to do or not.

"Last but not least, the Swordsmanship. You have your own path to pursue, which is the Sword Dance. But in essence, they are similar to normal Swordsmanship.

"You need technique, abilities, and footwork if you want to polish your strength.

"However, you have something different from normal people. It's the bond you have together. From the very start, you have been dancing together with the others. So, I want you to remember that and fight together.

"This is your biggest advantage and the reason why I ask you to fight me together.

"Each of you has your own build, elasticity, and rhythm. I believe that you can show me some coordination..."

Noel stopped his speech since he had talked too much. The rest could be explained after they had shown him.

So, he paused for a moment while taking a deep breath. After that, he looked at the kids and raised his wooden sword.

"I will only fight you with my swordsmanship this time to show you the gap between us. I won't use my Spirit, Spiritual Energy, or any abilities." Noel looked at them with a serious expression. "Let's begin."

The kids instantly became nervous since this might be the first time they saw Noel this serious in a fight. It felt like they would be swallowed alive by him.

However, Noel had yet to release his killing intent to avoid harming the kids. He simply focused his attention on the kids and the swords.

The fact that the kids could feel it meant they had considered Noel as an enemy to beat. In other words, they were ready to fight him with all they got.

Eric clutched his chest while taking a few deep breaths. "Amazing. So, this is a real fight. It's different from those thugs in the slum... This is the best chance to get a hang of a 'real' fight. Let's enjoy it, everyone."

Eric's words stunned everyone and dissipated their nervousness.

He was right. They would be disrespecting Noel if they didn't do this seriously.

As a leader, Eric was the first to rush forth. His footwork consisted of small steps, allowing him to change his direction quickly.

He charged at Noel before eventually spinning his body at the right time so that his sword would reach him with all that momentum.

Noel could sense his intention easily and took a step forward to disrupt his rhythm.

"!!!" Eric widened his eyes. His motion was meant to attack Noel in his position. The fact that Noel took a step forward, his sword would end up being too close to his own body.

Clack!

Their wooden swords ended up clashing with Noel standing right in front of Eric, stopping his wooden sword completely. With this, his dance stopped. Eric needed to work with his rhythm again.

'Kh.' Eric gritted his teeth and leaped back while thinking, 'That slash was supposed to hit his sword, making him use a bit of his strength to block it. During that time, I would be able to deliver the second strike...'

Noel smiled. "Your movement is good, but it's a bit too predictable. I know that it will give you an advantage once the attack connects, but what will you do when your rhythm gets interrupted? Don't forget that the terrain might not be a flatland like this but a jungle where trees, branches or roots might end up tripping you."

"Yes!" Eric answered out loud, understanding Noel's advice. It was the weakness of his Sword Dance.

Since Eric had been stopped, the one that came after him was Erica.

Noel could see her movement had become so fluid like a flowing water. With her intelligence, Erica should know where to go and what to do.

So, stopping her rhythm would be hard.

However, there was a fatal flaw in Erica's ability.

When Erica attacked him, Noel simply waved his sword stronger.

Bam!

Their swords clashed, but Erica ended up getting thrown back and almost lost her sword.

"!!!" Erica widened her eyes and fell to the ground.

"It seems you have good coordination with your work, Erica. Though, you still need strength to support your attack. With that kind of weak attack, you can be stopped pretty easily. There are various ways to boost your strength. I don't know which one you like..."

Erica nodded as she already understood what she needed to work on. "I know. I think about using Spiritual Energy to raise my strength since I don't wish to build more muscle on my body..."

"You can also try using speed, momentum, or Spiritual Energy control. Increasing your options might be time consuming but not necessarily a bad thing." Noel smiled before turning to the other kids who hadn't come to him. "Come."

Chapter 509 Goodbye

"We shall end it here today." Noel stabbed the ground with his wooden sword while looking at the kids who had laid down because they had no energy left to move.

They had been fighting for two hours as Noel kept giving them advice. Although he couldn't be called a master of the sword, it didn't change the fact that he got his basic right. So, his advice only focused on the basics as the kids would take that advice and incorporate it into their Sword Dance.

The kids didn't have any visible injuries even though Noel had hit them a few times. It seemed Noel had controlled his power carefully.

"I am impressed that you have reached this level. This is a new path that no one has walked on, so it's quite impressive for all of you to build it from scratch. You even have made the foundation for your Sword Dance.

"I'm sure you will do just fine in the future." Noel nodded, satisfied. It was quite impressive for the kids who had no experience in battle or even learned any form of Swordsmanship to learn something like this.

He didn't know how much Shale had helped them, but it was clear that most of their foundation came from their dance.

"What did you find, Rose?" Noel turned to Rose and explained, "This big sister here has sharp eyes. She should be able to notice any missing details, so make sure to listen to her."

"I'm not that great and I haven't learned any swordsmanship, so I will just tell you what I got from the sparring." Rose shook her head. "The Sword Dance is great and unique. I believe there are four advantages you can get from using the Sword Dance.

"Firstly, the Sword Dance is a new path, so people will be confused about how to fight it. Of course, you have to at least reach a basic Swordsmanship level for the Sword Dance to confuse them. Basically, make sure the Sword Dance is usable.

"Secondly, the Sword Dance relies a lot on rhythm. This is extremely unique because your dance will change a lot depending on the rhythm. I don't know much about music since I rarely find bards in towns.

But just by clapping hands with different patterns, you can find your own rhythm. So, I think you should find some basic patterns.

"Just like swordsmanship, these basic patterns will make you move easier because everything is programmed. It's true that others can find out your patterns, but they need a lot of understanding about the Sword Dance, so it will only go back to the first point.

"Thirdly, this is basically a dance. The more you dance, the more you spread your influence. It's true that the goal is good and realistic, but you should know that the dance might allow your enemies to learn your Sword Dance. So, I suggest you have a separate dance pattern if you want to perform.

"Last but not least, the Spiritual Energy and the Spirits themselves. I don't know how much you have learned about them, but I have to warn you that sometimes your Spirits might not be compatible with your Sword Dance.

"The swordsmanship has been generalized, so it can match everything, including the spirits. But I don't know how you're going to develop the Sword Dance. That's why I have to warn you about the direction you go. Make sure you think about the future as well. It will become awkward if one of you ends up becoming incompatible after all."

Rose stepped back after explaining what she had learned from her perspective. They were good opinions since they hit the essence of the Sword Dance.

Eric led the group by bowing his head. "Thank you very much. We are grateful to know about all this."

"Thank you very much." The other kids lowered their heads.

Noel smiled. He knew that everything would be alright. They were talented enough to overcome the problem.

After thanking Rose, Eric went to Noel and said, "Big Brother. We have been thinking that we want to spend one year polishing our Sword Dance and start going around to hunt the demons. We are not going to be affiliated with the Demon Banner Army..."

Noel thought for a moment and wondered what he should say to these kids. On the one hand, he felt one year wasn't enough. On the other hand, they had numbers and unity, which should help them a lot against demons.

"Hmm..." Noel glanced at Rose. "What do you think about their plan?"

"I do think one year is not enough. However, I won't stop them. As you said previously, you couldn't decide what they did. In that case, it's better to support them while giving some warnings."

"I see..." Noel pinched the bridge of his nose. "I will be giving you some basic knowledge about Spiritual Energy and the Spirits. Also, you have to learn teamwork and traps since that's basically the first thing you need to kill the demons. Don't forget you have to buy your own equipment."

Noel paused for a moment. He was wondering if he should teach the kids runes or not, considering the kids would only leave this place one year later.

By that time, the knowledge about the runes should have spread.

However, it was better for the kids to focus on their Sword Dance first, so Noel decided not to give them the knowledge. Instead, he was planning to give them a parting gift.

"Alright. Since we are done here, let's have breakfast." Noel smiled.

Noel spent another day with the kids before leaving. Rose also had some fun with the kids since they were optimistic and wanted to learn a lot of things.

Although they had finished their business with the kids, they hadn't left the fort yet. After all, they still needed to meet one more person, who had been waiting for them.

Noel and Rose gathered in one room as a shadow emerged from the floor, turning into Dimitri.

Chapter 510 Report

"Let's hear the report," said Noel with a serious expression.

"Understood." Dimitri nodded before starting to retell what had happened.

...

One week earlier.

Noel's grandfather, Raincart Ezenholm, was sitting in the library, reading a book. This book was none other than Noel's notebook.

He had been learning a lot from this notebook and didn't expect that Noel had this kind of knowledge.

However, he noticed that the knowledge was still incomplete.

"To think the Spirit Enhancement is the downgrade version of the runes. This is surprising since we all know how Spirit Enhancement can give so much prestige to a blacksmith.

"But if the knowledge about the runes has spread, I'm afraid that there will be a completely new job. The Blacksmiths will change from the Spirit Enhancements to Rune Enhancements.

"Basically, this book is a priceless treasure. Not only will it change the whole landscape of Blacksmith, but it will also allow normal people to get stronger without the use of Spirits. We will become more and more independent from the Spirits.

"Though, it doesn't mean people don't want Spirits anymore. After all, no one is rejecting an extra power up."

Raincart shook his head helplessly. He felt he had already lost against Noel, a young man who had just turned sixteen not long ago.

In ten years, Noel would surely become a monster that no one could ignore.

"I want to protect him, but I can't make any move right now. It's basically impossible to send experts to Noel without the help of the royal family.

"And by looking at the family tree, we can somehow convince the royal family to move as long as we present this book. But I don't want Noel to get entangled into another throne war..."

Raincart closed his eyes with a pained look. The throne war in the Muivell Kingdom had cost him his parents. If there was another throne war in the Greenwood Kingdom, Noel might get into a lot of trouble.

"..." Raincart fell silent for a moment before saying, "The one who hides in the corner over there. You better come out before I get angry."

"..." There was no sound or reply coming from the corner. But a shadow soon approached him as Dimitri came out.

"It's a pleasure to meet you, Sir Raincart. I'm surprised that you can find my presence."

"I simply realize your Spiritual Energy fluctuation. So, who are you?" Raincart narrowed his eyes, trying to observe Dimitri. The only reason why he hadn't done anything yet was because there was no killing intent from Dimitri.

The latter had the skill to not leak the killing intent, but Raincart also had enough affinity with the Spiritual Energy to realize it.

So, Raincart didn't attack him yet.

"I am Dimitri, a former Demon Assassination Squad's captain. But right now, I am here as Dimitri, the butler of the Ardagan Family. I currently serve the Young Master."

"Former captain... Ah, the rumored best assassin in the Muivell Kingdom, the Shadow. I have heard a lot about you." Raincart nodded. "I see. So, why do you come to me?"

The two looked at each other as if measuring each other's strength. Raincart, as the former chief of Spirit ian, had enough strength to fight against Dimitri.

In fact, Dimitri felt like he would be losing if he fought against Raincart right now. His instincts were telling him that the moment he gave the wrong answer, he would die.

Dimitri didn't realize yet that Raincart had reinforced the entire library with his Spiritual Energy and created some traps in it. So, the moment he confirmed Dimitri was an enemy, he would use all of them to hunt him down.

Dimitri slowly moved his hand so that Raincart didn't think he was reaching for his weapon.

To Raincart's surprise, Dimitri actually took out a book and presented it to Raincart. "According to the Young Master, this book is the other half. It will complete the book he gave a few months ago."

"!!!" The only ones who knew about the books were Ilzen, Elsa, and him. So, Raincart knew that Dimitri was truly affiliated with Noel.

Raincart checked the title of the book and noticed the similarity. Both were the introduction of the runes.

As soon as Raincart took the book, Dimitri gave Noel's message. "The Young Master said he would like you to publish this book six months from now."

"Huh? Publish this book?" Raincart narrowed his eyes. "Are you sure he said that?"

"Yes."

"Do you know what will happen when I publish this book?" Raincart gritted his teeth. "The royal family will recognize him and there will be a high possibility of him getting involved in the throne war. And who will be the author of this book?"

"The Young Master leaves it at your discretion."

"..." Raincart closed his eyes while raising his head. He felt a headache just thinking about this matter.

He wanted to understand why Noel did all this.

"Monopoly..."

When he heard Raincart mentioning the monopoly, he actually confirmed it. "Actually, the Young Master also said that it was better to spread the knowledge to the whole world. The runes are too big for someone to monopolize."

"As expected..." Raincart sighed. "He knows the influence I have. He believes that I will be using my influence to spread this knowledge so that no one can monopolize it. Whether they can advance it to the next stage is another matter."

"It seems that the situation has forced him to take this action..." Raincart sighed. "I've failed as a grandfather for not being able to help him directly in this situation."

Raincart bit his lips, wondering why they weren't in the same kingdom. If he, the former chief of the Spirit ians of the Greenwood Kingdom, meddled with the Muivell Kingdom, it would be seen as a declaration of war.

So, many people would be implicated in this matter. And the only way to bypass that situation was for Noel to abandon the Muivell Kingdom.

Unfortunately, it wasn't going to happen.

Raincart thought for a moment and said, "Alright. I'll publish this book. However, I'm not going to steal my grandson's glory. The author of this book shall be him, I won't take it otherwise!"