

S vs Rebirth 641

Chapter 641 Yesterday And Tomorrow

"Isn't that right, Mentor?" Milfa glanced at the side, specifically at a certain tree. The shadow flickered because Milfa had recognized it.

"I guess I can't hide from you anymore." Dimitri's voice echoed from behind the tree.

"You are not planning to show yourself?" Milfa asked with a smile.

"Do you still need me to come out and wipe your tears?"

"..." Milfa chuckled and said, "I guess not. I was surprised when you suddenly retired without any apparent reason. So, I couldn't help but investigate you a little bit."

"Surprisingly, you ended up working for the Ardagan Family. After making some connections and shifting some conversations for a bit, I realized that this child was Noel Ardagan."

"There were two reasons why he managed to survive this whole time. First and foremost, it was his own ability. As for the second one, it should be your protection. It must be the reason why they could escape a Devil Bishop when investigating the Fagant Leaf."

"You are truly great for doing all that. I guess I have taught you too much. Despite having that kind of power and brain, you choose to remain hidden. Even your squad isn't among the top five and that brat Shale is taking the first spot as the strongest person among the captains..." Dimitri chuckled.

"Thanks to you. I am more comfortable protecting something from the shadow. As long as the higher-ups understand my strength and can rely on me, that is enough." She chuckled.

"Is that so? I'm pleased to hear that. Though, I don't think you are calling me just for this, right?"

"Of course. Though, I end up answering that question myself... I don't know what to do now." Milfa chuckled.

The question she mentioned was Noel's question. The reason why she did all this was because of Dimitri's training. Dimitri influenced the way she lived, and she ended up enjoying living in the darkness like this despite her strength and brain.

Dimitri chuckled and said, "Still, don't forget about this..."

"What is it? Are you going to lecture me again?"

"I'm just reminding you something." Dimitri's tone suddenly turned serious as he stated, "Don't forget that you are talking with my Young Master over there."

"!!!" Milfa widened her eyes and turned around, finding Noel staring intensely at her.

The stare was different from what she had experienced this whole time. This stare was filled with curiosity.

She had told him that Dimitri would answer the previous question, meaning that he would get to ask another question.

And it seemed he was planning to take advantage of it. He observed her first and formulated the question in his mind.

The stare felt like he was stripping her naked.

"Oh my. What an intense gaze. Are you that interested in this big sister?" Milfa tried to make Noel's concentration waver a bit.

But it was too late. Noel opened his mouth, startling Milfa. "I see. No wonder why the Demon Banner Army can be this sturdy. There is always a debate. Some people say that offense is the strongest defense. Some people say that defense is the strongest offense."

"However, the truth is that if you both have the strongest offense and defense at the same time, it's far better."

"In the Demon Banner Army, the Commander is acting as the spear that can pierce through anything. Meanwhile, there is someone like you who remains in the shadow and acts to protect the Demon Banner Army."

"If the enemies don't know about your existence, they would be crushed by you, resulting in their loss."

"Of course, it seems that despite being a shield, you are trying to expand yourself to the point you are about to become an armor..."

Milfa fell silent after hearing Noel's words. She understood what he was talking about. It was already hard to stop the commander alone, so if they wanted to stop the commander, they would have to use a lot of resources.

After stopping the commander, they would sneak attack and crush the inside of the Demon Banner Army.

However, they didn't realize that they were walking into traps. There was a sturdy shield that protected the Demon Banner Army.

With her personally making her move, the enemies would end up getting defeated. If she continued to launch a counterattack with the help of the commander, no one could stop them anymore.

This was the reason why the Demon Banner Army could stand tall recently. In fact, she was one of the reasons why the Demon Banner Army could restore their reputation after his uncle, Laufey Ardagan, incident.

Noel politely bowed to Milfa and said, "I'd like to offer my thanks and apology. The thanks are for taking care of my Ardagan Family's matter. The apology is because our family has harmed the Demon Banner Army."

"!!!" Milfa widened her eyes in shock. She had heard that Noel was pretty clueless about almost everything from Shale. Yet, the one standing before her looked so resourceful. It felt like they were two different people.

Meeting such a straightforward attitude from Noel, even Milfa was speechless for a moment. She waved her hand and said, "You don't have to apologize. I have met your father a few times and to be honest, Sir Luke has helped me a lot."

"In fact, I was one of the people Sir Luke helped. I was a criminal and was ready to be sent for labor. Or I might end up becoming a military lady. He paid the officers so that my crime was pardoned before I was sent to the Demon Banner Army."

"At that time, I asked him why he would save someone like me. It was true that I felt guilty for what I had done and wanted to atone for it, but I never had the chance to do it. He only asked me, 'If I'm busy protecting yesterday, will I be able to fight for tomorrow?'"

"I guess that question changed my life." Milfa made a genuine smile as if she had just recounted a wonderful memory.

Chapter 642 Recognition

"If I'm busy protecting yesterday, will I be able to fight for tomorrow?" Noel muttered in a low voice as he fell into deep thought.

The meaning was profound. Luke must want to tell her that if what she had done in the past kept plaguing her, there was no way she could shift her attention to the future... the better future that could come from her own hand.

But for Noel, there seemed to be another meaning. His family had been reduced to ruin. He always wanted to use his power to rebuild the Ardagan Family.

Yet, this question made him doubt whether it was the correct path or not. It seemed that he had missed something in his goal.

"Wait a minute..." Noel covered his mouth as if he had just realized something unbelievable.

He turned around and asked out loud, "Dimitri. I have a question."

"What is it, Young Master?"

"In your perspective, was the Ardagan Family prosperous?" Noel asked.

Dimitri fell silent for a moment. It wasn't that he was thinking about the answer but because he was shocked that Noel asked this question. He answered without hesitation, "Yes. The Ardagan Family was prosperous."

"In that case, do you think the prosperity can last for another thousand years? No, even a hundred years is fine..." Noel gasped. He suddenly recalled all the lessons his father had given him.

Those lessons just looked like a life lesson that his father had experienced. But as a noble, he should have imparted some knowledge about management and other things. Even if Noel refused to learn it, someone as smart as Luke could easily make an example about such a thing in his life lesson, causing Noel to learn some of them.

Yet, Luke didn't do it. Instead, he seemed to want Noel to learn only those basic lessons so that he didn't make a choice like his father. He wanted Noel's thoughts to be independent of any influence.

That was why Noel felt something was missing. It was connected to the question Luke threw to Milfa. It seemed Luke didn't want Noel to be fixated on the old Ardagan Family. Instead, he wanted him to focus on building the new Ardagan Family. He would then set the rules, the course, and of course, the goal of the family himself. This was what he meant by fighting for tomorrow.

When Dimitri heard this question, he suddenly came out of his hiding spot. He kneeled on one knee and answered Noel, "I am nothing but a servant. However, if you truly desire that answer, I shall bear this sin and tell you... The Ardagan Family will only last for thirty more years before we will begin our decline."

"!!!" Noel gasped. In that instant, he realized that his father had foreseen this situation. Instead of letting him bear the burden, he chose to destroy the family himself. The goal, which was to take care of all the problems Laufey Ardagan had made, was also aligned. So, Luke chose the weirdest and most extreme decision, which was to end the Ardagan Family.

This way, Noel would be able to build the new Ardagan Family. It might be related to the old family, but this time, they would create something new, stronger, and more suited to the current era.

The Ardagan Family was a noble family with a thousand years long history. However, in those one thousand years, the kingdom had changed. That was why to keep up with the current change, the old Ardagan Family had to be destroyed.

Noel asked, "In that case, do you think I am fit to be the head of the Ardagan Family... no, the new Ardagan Family?"

The moment Dimitri heard it, he immediately lowered his head and stated with a clear but longing tone.

"I, Dimitri, solemnly swear. I shall become your sharpest sword and kill all the enemies in your path. Whether it's the humans, the demons, or even the Gods... as long as this body has yet to fall to the ground, I shall fulfill my duty."

Noel's body trembled. He didn't know about the secret requirement that Luke had placed upon Dimitri. But he could feel that Dimitri had let go of the past and finally swore his loyalty to him.

Noel closed his eyes for a moment. It was an achievement, and he should be happy. But they did all this in front of Milfa.

He couldn't help but glance at Milfa and said, "I apologize, Captain Milfa, for showing all this to you."

Milfa shook her head helplessly. "You don't need to worry about me. Though, I am surprised to see my mentor acting that way. But I guess I should be happy for him since it seems that my mentor has already gotten a place to return."

Noel smiled while Dimitri looked away. He was swept away at the moment and forgot that he had shown something embarrassing to his protege. However, he didn't have any regret in his heart.

His loyalty had been in the Ardagan Family for decades. Now that Noel had recognized his true purpose, he could finally swear his loyalty once again.

Noel glanced at Milfa and asked, "I have changed my question."

Milfa's eyebrows twitched when she saw that smile. She immediately raised her hands and said, "No... Don't ask that question!"

Noel smiled. Despite her plea, Noel still asked as he had to do his job as the lord of the Ardagan Family. "Will you join the Ardagan Family?"

The veins on her forehead bulged a little bit. She had a hard time maintaining her smile since Noel had just asked the one question he shouldn't have asked her.

Even Noel had already known the answer to that question. After all, it was an obvious 'no' from her.

However, because they had the same personalities, both of them knew that Noel might make some schemes to somehow force her to join the Ardagan Family.

And with his brilliance, of course, he would make her join willingly.

She knew that fact so well that she had already envisioned such a situation.

It seemed that instead of Milfa annoying Noel, it was the other way around.

Both of them had a smile on their faces. But there was already a battle of wits between them.

Chapter 643 Agreement

'This guy is a crafty type. I guess like father, like son...' Milfa thought, feeling annoyed. She had realized that her arrival here was a mistake.

It ended up piquing Noel's interest. Now that the situation had turned around, she had to find a plan to escape from Noel's plan.

And it seemed that there was someone to save her. Though, it wasn't a person.

Roar!

A roar filled the area as Noel, Milfa, and Dimitri turned around, locating the source of the roar. That roar alarmed a few more demons as they marched toward their locations.

"Ah, there are some demons. I'm going to kill them for a bit." Milfa didn't hesitate to run, not wanting to have anything to do with Noel.

On the one hand, she could hit Noel right here and force him to stop. On the other hand, Noel was protected by Dimitri. There was no way she could harm Noel if Dimitri was standing next to him.

So, she had to escape first and try to find another plan to turn the situation around. Of course, there was also an option of threatening Noel to stop by showing that she could spread his real identity around.

However, there were only demerits from that plan. First of all, the other kingdoms who had benefited from Noel's rune books would immediately come to them. It might give them some boost in reputation, but once Noel used that reputation and separated himself from the Demon Banner Army, they would soon become a laughingstock again.

And this would be a different case from Laufey Ardagan's incident since the Demon Banner Army was the one causing this mess, not the Ardagan Family.

There were also a lot of things Noel could do if he wanted to harm the Demon Banner Army. Unless she had the confidence to kill Noel even with Dimitri protecting him, she wouldn't do something like that.

More importantly, she wouldn't do anything to harm the Demon Banner Army, so this plan was immediately erased from Milfa's head.

So, to buy time for her, Milfa used the demons as an excuse to get away from Noel.

She headed straight to the demons with her fastest speed, not allowing Noel to catch up to her.

Meanwhile, Noel saw this as another opportunity. He immediately asked Dimitri, "We have to catch up. Help me."

"Yes." Dimitri hurriedly grabbed his waist and poured the Spiritual Energy into his feet as he jumped at the same speed as Milfa. But the few seconds Noel used to ask the question had created a big gap between them.

And the moment he reached the destination, Milfa was about to finish the fight.

Milfa's opponents were seven demons with the strongest of them being an Advanced Level Demon.

However, Milfa simply waved her hand. "Judgment."

"!!!" The demon raised its head. The trees were quite thick and tall, so the woods were a bit dark. The sunlight that penetrated the gap between leaves suddenly became brighter as if they were being concentrated.

And a few gaps ended up aligned with the demon's body. The sunlight became more concentrated to the point the light became solid and penetrated the demon's body.

It looked like the demon was impaled by several rods of light and died without being able to do anything.

This was the strength of the strongest captain in the Demon Banner Army, Milfa. She managed to kill an Advanced Level Demon with just a single wave of her hand. If it was Noel, he would have to use at least two or three abilities to take down one.

'So... this is her strength...' Noel thought. He couldn't help but remember the power Dimitri showed back then. He could somehow see that Milfa and Dimitri had the same level of strength currently. 'It's interesting. Looking at her personality, once she becomes loyal, she will do everything to protect it.'

Noel smiled. This was truly an opportunity to see her strength. Even though it was only a portion of it, he became more and more interested in her.

"!!!" Milfa sensed his gaze and turned around, waving her hand with an awkward smile. "You have come..."

Now that Noel's eyes were locked on her, she couldn't help but remember the time when she suggested that Noel would be with her. If this continued, she might truly fall into Noel's traps.

'Can I change the plan right now? No, Shale and Clara will become suspicious. Then, should I stop him? How do I even do it? I can force him to stop, but it might cause a lot more problems in the future.'

'Can he even respect my words and stop here?' Milfa let out a long sigh and said, "I think we both know what each other wants, right?"

Noel nodded without hesitation. He wanted her to work for the Ardagan Family, so there was no need to hide his intention.

That was why Milfa raised two fingers. "Two years. You can do anything within two years. But I will do my best to stop you. If you still fail to make me one of your vassals, then you have to stop."

Noel thought for a moment. It was true that he desired her, but when she was this adamant, once she was forced into the family, she might do something to cause its downfall.

The Ardagan Family would be extremely brittle for a while after he rebuilt it, so this agreement might be a good case for him.

"Two years is too long. I'm planning to stay here for another one and a half years. If I fail to have you swear loyalty to me, I am going to give up and leave the Demon Banner Army." Noel stated with confidence.

"Huh? Leave the army..." Milfa suddenly became worried. This showed how much Noel desired her, not in a romantic way. Seeing such determination couldn't help but touch her heart a bit. She understood how serious Noel was.

Unbeknownst to her, Noel added inwardly, 'I already plan to leave around that time anyway since it's the perfect time to build the new Ardagan Family. So, even without her, it doesn't really matter. But still, it seems that the words are working... hehe...'

Chapter 644 Last Phase Of Exploration

Since they had reached an agreement, Noel and Milfa finally shook their hands, sealing the deal.

Milfa didn't realize that Noel had ended up taking the initiative in their conversation like what Milfa did with the other two captains.

There was one weapon Milfa could use previously, which was to show her loyalty to the Demon Banner Army. As long as she mentioned that her loyalty would remain in the Demon Banner Army, Noel would stop bothering her.

But it was already too late. Noel ended up taking the initiative and forced her to give that promise. There was no taking back after this.

Milfa soon realized that option once Noel fell silent, but she knew it was impossible to redo everything. She could only resign to her fate, swearing that she wouldn't be swayed by Noel.

Though, there was no telling whether she would become one of his vassals or not. After all, even if she wasn't there, Dimitri was still with him.

After that realization, Noel finally lessened the mood by explaining the situation around the facility. This was their original goal after all.

Milfa also saw how meticulous Noel was in his work. He had done a lot of research after his first investigation and even put up a few hypotheses regarding the current situation.

With all the details he provided, it seemed that the rest of the explorations would have an easier time.

After finishing their business outside, they finally returned to the fort. Milfa had to take her time to prepare for the exploration after all. Even with her strength, taking an exploration lightly would cost her dearly.

Though, it didn't change the fact that Milfa was stressed about the agreement with Noel.

She ended up coming to Clara with a frustrated expression.

"Clara. What's wrong with that knight of yours?" Milfa asked with a serious expression.

Clara tilted her head in confusion. "Huh? What do you mean?"

Milfa closed her eyes for a moment before letting out a sigh. She couldn't really talk about the agreement or Dimitri, so she ended up falling silent, not giving any answer to Clara.

Looking at her expression, Clara couldn't help but ask, "I'm sorry. I'm just making this sure... Have my knight brought you some displeasures? If that's the case, I will apologize on his behalf..."

"It's not displeasure... No, I can say it's a kind of displeasure, but that's not it." Milfa scratched the back of her head. "How do you say it... He is so smart that he is scary."

"Well..." Clara remembered all the times Noel showed his wits. It was true that Noel was scary at those times, but it didn't change the fact that his brilliance saved the squad repeatedly, so there was no repulsive feeling in her heart.

Though, there was one joyous moment that she had to celebrate.

The fact that Milfa became like this meant the showdown had ended. Milfa ended up getting annoyed by Noel, meaning she had won the bet. She was laughing inwardly, preparing to get something from Shale.

Though, she added, "I know he is smart. As long as it doesn't harm my squad, I don't really care. Besides, it doesn't change the fact that he has given us a lot of progress in the exploration. So, if you are trying to abuse your authority, even if you are stronger than me, I'm going to stop you."

"No... I'm not planning to do that." Milfa shook her head. "I wanted to complain previously, but there was really nothing I could complain about right now. Anyway, he's quite amazing, so I'm going to use this time to teach him a few things."

"Well, you are the best in the area. So, I'll leave him to you." Clara nodded without hesitation. It was beneficial for Noel to learn from Milfa, so she had no objection.

But little did she know, Milfa was actually smiling inwardly. She had an evil intention behind that 'teaching.'

She thought, 'Just wait, Noel Ardagan. I'm going to 'teach' you so many things.'

Of course, she knew that she was a 'bit' annoying when she taught people. She was smart and sensible enough to see it from others' expressions.

And she wanted to use this as a counterattack. As long as Noel found her presence annoying, he would give up.

As soon as she got the approval, Milfa left the tent, ready for the exploration.

They finished their preparation and recovery two days later. The exploration finally began once again.

Noel was coming with Milfa and got ordered around by Milfa. She left a lot of lectures to the point even a small mistake like moving a small debris and causing a sound that was hard to hear even for a demon would end up becoming a long lecture.

However, what Milfa didn't expect was that Noel took the lectures seriously. He even took note of all the important knowledge hidden in the lectures.

His determination and diligence couldn't help but move Milfa a bit. Despite having the power, connection, and brain to stop her from lecturing him, Noel didn't do it.

Instead, he apologized for all the mistakes he made, whether it was small or big, and continued to improve himself, leaving Milfa speechless.

Fortunately, the exploration had become safer after all those demons came out. There were not many demons left visible inside the facility and the Superior Demons hadn't made any ruckus.

Now that there was no one who sabotaged them anymore, the exploration made significant progress every single day.

And eventually, on the fifth day, they found a lead to the hidden nest underneath the building.

All the people ended up gathering in front of the entrance, which was a giant hole inside one of the rooms. It was on the opposite side of the entrance, so it took them this long to discover it.

Nonetheless, they finally found the nest. As long as they could kill all the demons in this nest, they could finally say that the exploration was completed.

Milfa glanced at Noel and asked, "So... what do you think we should do with this, Knight ladre?"

Noel was staring at the entrance with a serious expression, formulating a plan in his mind. This was the last phase of the exploration.

Chapter 645 Anna?

Roar!

Roar!

Roar!

The demons came out of the facility, only to be besieged by a lot of knights from the Demon Banner Army. Even the Stone Lord used his golem to smash a lot of them to show that he was cooperating with the Demon Banner Army.

Milfa didn't use all her strength in this fight since it wouldn't be good to show such strength to the Stone Lord.

Only a handful of individuals knew about her true strength after all.

Whether it was fortunate or unfortunate, two more Superior Demons came out of the hole and ultimately got killed by the three captains and Stone Lord.

The rest of the demons had been routed, and the nest was completely cleared.

It seemed that the nest had more than five Superior Demons due to them taking drugs from the facility. The demons didn't understand the worth of the drugs, but it was enough for the Demon Banner Army.

After all, the drugs would be useful for research. If they could somehow replicate some drugs that could enhance their strength without side effects, they might be able to grow their strength even further. Although they had to share it with the Tower Association and the Royal Family, they didn't mind since the growth of the kingdom would be better than their own.

Even Noel desired such a thing, considering his true enemies were the demons instead of anyone else. Though, he didn't forget the grudge he had with the Royal Family.

And Noel was planning to make a copy of the layout of the facility since he had explored everything. He planned to give this blueprint to the Third Prince.

With Noel's brain, it was easy to know that the Third Prince would be stealing some drugs from here. But he wouldn't steal many of them since it would just force the Royal Family to move. So, Noel didn't really mind if there were a few missing.

In fact, Noel had another hidden plan for this blueprint.

After taking care of the expedition, he finally had the chance to rest. Dimitri told him that someone wanted to meet him in the forest. So, he thought Milfa wanted to say something to him.

But to his surprise, the moment he went into the forest, he found a woman of his age waiting for him. She was none other than Anna.

"!!!" Noel widened his eyes in surprise. "Huh? Anna?"

Noel hadn't met Anna this whole time for two reasons. He couldn't leave the army easily and the one he met back then was her father. So, he didn't have any reason to visit her.

Surprisingly, Anna appeared this time with the help of Dimitri. Anna obviously didn't have the power to move Dimitri. So, he realized that her father was nearby.

With the relationship between the two family heads, it was no surprise that Kevin knew Dimitri.

Anna put on a gentle smile. "It's been a while, Noel."

"Yeah, it's been a while. However, I never thought you would visit me like this." Noel nodded with a calm expression. He observed her movement, but he hadn't used his Affection Medal this entire time.

For the time being, he had been cooperating with Anna without using it. Even Rose's Affection was an incident since she entered his line of sight before he could change his medal.

He had refrained himself from using the medal with his allies. After all, it would just cause friction in his heart. Of course, people related to his allies were a different case like Harley or Kevin Stargaze. He had to be wary of them.

When observing her, he realized that Anna had become a Spirit Master as well. He didn't know how Anna had reached this stage. In fact, he wanted to fight her once again to see whether he had become stronger than her or not with all the new abilities he had.

But his instinct seemed to be telling him that it wouldn't be an easy fight and that victory wouldn't be guaranteed.

Anna made breaking through to Spirit Master look easy, but she seemed to have extensive knowledge and a solid foundation to do it without any setbacks. There was a deeper secret Anna had.

Even though he was constantly thinking about it, he wouldn't go all the way to investigate Anna about it. He respected her that much at the very least.

Noel thought for a moment and asked, "It's not like you to visit me this way. So, I guess you have an important thing to tell me..."

"I guess I can't hide it from you." Anna smiled and raised two fingers. "I actually have two purposes. The first is the usual... Information Exchange."

"Ah." Noel nodded in understanding. Even though they were only separated for a month, a lot of things occurred, especially after the rune books were spread.

"Then, we will see who has more information. The usual bet." Noel nodded. He had exchanged some information with Anna before meeting Harley, but due to the situation, they didn't have time to make a bet. Since the exploration had finished, he should have had some time to make a small bet.

However, Anna shook her head. "That was what I wanted at first. But I don't have time for that... Instead, I'm just going to tell you about the situation the kingdom is facing... Though, the information mostly comes from my father."

"Well, thank you for the honesty." Noel never thought Anna refused to take credit since having a father like that was still within her ability.

"After the books are spread in all kingdoms, we have seen their intention. The Greenwood Kingdom is planning to see whether they can befriend you or not. But as you said, you should be careful with their princes and princesses."

"The other two kingdoms are waiting for the Greenwood Kingdom for the time being while trying to investigate the Ardagan Family. If you planned to rebuild your family, they would most likely come to your doorstep."

"Also, the Royal Family is chaotic right now because of this matter. I'm afraid they are going to dispatch people to learn about your situation. Once they investigate it properly, they might find out sooner or later that you are still alive."

"Yeah. I understand that. Thank you for the information." Noel nodded. "I will also share some information—"

Before Noel finished his words, she stopped him. "Let me tell you about my second purpose first. I want to have a bet with you..."

Chapter 646 What Is Happening?

"Huh? A bet?" Noel widened his eyes. She said she didn't have time for a bet, but he soon realized the bet wouldn't be small. "I see... Let me hear it first."

Anna smiled and pointed at him.

"I am sure that both of us have secrets. The Sword Saint has banned me from asking you about it, but it doesn't state that I can't know the secret."

"Hmm? Are you planning to make me tell you the secret voluntarily?" Noel frowned. On the one hand, Anna was a trusted person. On the other hand, their relationship wasn't at the level where he could openly share the secret about the system.

"Yeah. I know about that. That's why I want to make this little bet between us. We will see who will be the one to tell their secret to the others." Anna smiled.

"!!!" Noel widened his eyes in surprise. "Huh? This bet is weird. Are you saying that you want me to force you to reveal your secret?"

"Don't say it like you have won." Anna pouted before she continued, "But I don't think it's a bad deal, right?"

"I'm sure you have been curious about my secrets. Why can I know the future and have extensive knowledge..." Anna made a cheeky smile.

Noel couldn't deny it. If he understood Anna's secret and knew how much she knew, he might be able to plan for the future better than anyone else. In fact, he might become invisible. With her secret and his brain, they would truly be unbeatable.

However, if he lost this challenge, he had to let her know about Ardagan.

For Anna, the knowledge about the future was useful, but she might not be able to utilize it completely with her alone. And with how much the future had changed due to her actions, the past events might not be relevant anymore. So, she tried to take advantage of it by betting on it. Even if she lost, she planned to give this information to Noel since his brain might be able to find out something missing from his past life.

For Noel, his system was extremely useful. But it was useless for Anna. The only way to obtain this power was to marry him and let their child wield Ardagan. But their relationship wasn't at that level, so it would be useless. So, the only way to take advantage of it was to kill him, causing the Ardagan lineage to end him.

Anna never killed him in the past despite having so many chances, so the latter wouldn't happen. In that case, the knowledge would be useless for Anna.

That was why it might be a good thing to wager it. After all, Anna's secret was more useful.

After some consideration, Noel nodded his head. "Sure. Let's have a bet. Though, the method is not specified, right?"

"Of course. I have a big disadvantage, you know." Anna smirked. "But I'm not planning to lose. You're going to tell me your secret."

"Hahaha. You sure love talking big. In a mind battle, have you ever won against me?" Noel snorted while crossing his arms.

"This might be the first victory I will get."

"Alright then. I'm looking forward to it. Though, I don't have high hopes." Noel nodded. Now that he had sealed the deal, Ardagan appeared.

[Mission: Anna's Secret]

[Description: Make Anna tell you her secret by any means necessary.]

[Reward: Anna's Secret and ???]

[Penalty: None.]

'Hmm? Another '???' reward?' Noel was surprised that he would get another reward like this. The last time he got it, it was a very lucrative reward. So, he couldn't help but look forward to it.

Though, there was one thing he was confused about the sudden bet.

"Before I tell you about the information, do you mind if I ask you something?" Noel asked carefully. Anna looked weirdly calm this whole time as if she had prepared some traps for this bet, so he couldn't help but feel a bit suspicious.

Anna nodded without hesitation. "Sure."

"Why do you suddenly suggest something like this? I don't see any reasons for this bet to happen... to be honest."

"There are two reasons. The first reason is simple. Do you know I have been observing you for the past two weeks? Just say that the result of my observation has led me to this..."

Noel thought for a moment. A lot of things had happened. He even gained Dimitri's loyalty and Milfa's agreement. Although he didn't know what made her suggest this bet, he could somehow understand if this expedition had made her like this.

"Then, what about the second reason?" Noel asked while tilting his head.

"As for the second reason..." Anna walked closer to him with a gentle smile.

Noel felt a bit weird and took a step back, but Anna didn't mind since she also took another step forward.

They were only separated by a few centimeters.

"Anna?" Noel was confused. He didn't know why Anna acted like this.

"This is the second reason..." Anna suddenly made a swift movement as if she was trying to launch a sneak attack. Noel's instinct took over as he immediately raised both hands to push her away.

But his body suddenly froze when Anna took the most abrupt sneak attack.

"!!!" Noel widened his eyes in shock. He was too shocked to the point he couldn't react. After all, her face was right before his eyes and her lips were already planted on his cheek.

'Wha—' Noel wanted to think about what had just happened, but his brain couldn't come up with anything.

In fact, he still couldn't believe what was happening.

There were so many questions that couldn't be answered. But one thing was for sure, their relationship had just taken a weird turn.

It seemed that the battle between the system and the rebirth had yet to end. Could Anna use her knowledge and memory from her past life to make Noel willingly share the secret of his system? Or could Noel use the overwhelming from his system to force Anna to reveal the secret about her rebirth?

Though, there was only one question in Noel's head.

'What in the world is currently happening?'

Chapter 647 Utter Shock

'What in the world is currently happening?'

For just a moment, Noel's brain felt like it was struck by lightning. He couldn't think of anything. In fact, even the gentle kiss from Anna completely felt nothing.

He was completely confused to the point he could only ask what was happening. This was Anna he was talking about.

On the one hand, Noel thought Anna was his friend after all the things they had experienced together. On the other hand, he never thought of Anna more than that, considering he had sworn not to bother with any relationship first before rebuilding his family. After all, it would just cause more problems with his swordsmanship and family.

Yet, this one kiss took him completely by surprise.

Anna gently moved away from him. Looking at how shocked Noel was couldn't help but make her chuckle. This was the first time she saw Noel like this.

The calm and composed Noel was nowhere for a moment.

And before he recovered, Anna waved his hand and put on the best smile she had.

It might be due to the kiss, but Noel's eyes were fixated on her lips. It ended up making him more conscious about the words she was about to speak.

"I have told you everything. All I can say is that I will continue to follow your news. This time, I have found a new goal for myself and I will seriously aim for it. Thank you, Noel."

The words 'Thank You' had only one meaning. She wanted to thank him for everything he had done for her, including the fact that he considered her his friend and ignored the friction between them.

However, when it reached Noel's ears, the words 'Thank You' seemed deeper than he thought. It struck deep in his heart. It sounded nostalgic yet lonely; it sounded sweet yet afar.

He didn't know why, but he wanted to cry at this moment.

The image of Anna in his mind completely shattered after this. He couldn't help but wonder why Anna did all this. Why her words struck so deeply? It felt like they had been together for a long time... far more than the two years they had spent together here.

Noel didn't realize that Anna saw him like the Noel in her memory. Noel had a more mature look.

Despite his cold face, there was a gentle and caring gaze hidden underneath. Noel looked battered, and all of it was due to her. He was exhausted because he tried to change her.

And in this life, she had changed. So, she wanted to thank the past Noel for giving her this chance.

If not for Noel trying to change her in the past life, even with this second life, she wouldn't be able to do anything.

It was because they were separated between two timelines that her voice felt so far.

After saying those words, Anna gracefully nodded her head before she jumped to the side, leaving the shocked Noel alone.

It didn't take too long before she stopped because she could see two figures who were watching them from a distance.

They were Dimitri and Kevin Stargaze. Both of them were still staring at Noel with their jaws wide open.

They simply couldn't believe what Anna had done as well.

"A... Anna..." Kevin tried to call her name, trying to understand the situation. He couldn't help but remember what happened during the expedition.

They had been observing them from outside the demon's range, wanting to know the progress of the exploration.

Though, it was Anna's request that made him stay a bit longer.

Anna was staring intensely every time there was an action. It looked like she had felt something from the expedition.

Eventually, she saw Dimitri acknowledging Noel as his master. When that happened, Anna was standing still for a while.

Even when he called her name, she gave no reaction.

Once everything was over, Anna's expression became serious. She said, "Father... I think I have understood my purpose and my goal. No, should I say that I have found them?"

"Anna? What are you talking about?" Kevin tilted his head in confusion.

"I don't know how to describe it. However, it feels like I know what I should do..." Anna took a deep breath and turned to her father. "Can we wait for a while, at least until the expedition is over? There is something I wish to tell Noel."

Kevin couldn't help but furrow his eyebrows. They had gone for a while, so it might cause some problems later.

But this was the first time her daughter had requested with such serious yet sincere expression. It made her father's instinct to accept it. This might be the first time Anna asked something like this.

Kevin didn't care if there would be any problems due to this decision. Since his daughter had decided, he nodded in agreement. "I understand. If it's the past you, I would have been worried. But looking at your expression right now, I know that you are on the right path. So, I shall support you to the best of my ability. This is what I should do as a parent."

Anna smiled, thanking him.

Remembering that scene couldn't help but startle him. He didn't expect that Anna would do something like this with such a serious expression. He wanted to know what exactly had happened to her when observing the exploration. The change was so drastic that it was unbelievable.

However, Anna politely bowed to him and said, "I apologize for making you wait. I have finished my business. Let's go back, Father."

"Y-yeah?!" Kevin was still speechless, but seeing how his daughter had started to leave, he couldn't do anything other than return with her.

He glanced at Dimitri, who was as shocked as him. In the end, he could only pat his shoulder, indirectly telling him that he didn't know anything either.

After all, this kind of situation would be reported to Noel's parents, so he made his stance clear first.

Unfortunately for him, Dimitri still didn't know how to react. He could only see them off while scratching the back of his head, wondering what he should say to his young master since he was the one making this meeting possible.

Chapter 648 In His Head

"What's wrong with her..." Noel muttered in a low voice while clutching his head. He looked down, wondering what had happened.

He had returned to the fort and used the meeting tent to finish the blueprints. But he couldn't put his head into the work because of what had happened.

The scene where Anna kissed his cheek kept replaying in his mind.

'What's wrong with her? I did a lot of things, but I didn't think there was a single thing where it could lead to something like that. That was extremely weird.'

'And Anna looked different just now. She felt nostalgic but distant. It felt like I was watching the same and familiar Anna, yet, I couldn't help but think she wasn't the Anna I knew.'

'I didn't know why, but tears felt like they were about to fall from my eyes. Did she do anything to me? Still, there was nothing major happening where it could lead to such a drastic change from Anna.'

Noel couldn't help but recall all the memories he had with Anna.

At first, he was trying to kill her. Anna was so apologetic back then, even though she still showed her overwhelming power.

Not long after, Anna realized all the things she had done and wanted to atone for that mistake.

Before they graduated, they even found out about the true scheme behind the execution and realized that everything was just a misunderstanding.

And by that time, Anna, who seemed to have a deep hatred toward him to the point she wanted to execute him as well, had completely disappeared. In fact, his actions might have made her so frustrated that she couldn't help but explode. All the words she said to him back then couldn't help but flash in his mind.

Only by bickering that one could understand each other more. After all, they were striking each other's weaknesses, making them know what kind of sides were annoying to the other. This way, they could make changes for the better instead of tolerating each other's annoying side.

And eventually, their relationship progressed and they finally became friends. They even shared the same birthday.

He could still remember the little time they had when they celebrated their birthdays together and ultimately became an adult.

It was a simple but joyous event. Unfortunately, they had to be separated not long after that.

Although they were still cooperating with each other, they didn't meet every day like in the past.

They weren't missing each other because their relationship hadn't gone further and they had their respective goals.

Yet, this time, Anna felt more mature as if she had come to terms with something. The change was so drastic that it completely dumbstruck him.

He couldn't even react after Anna did it.

Now that he had calmed down a little bit, he couldn't help but think, "Does Anna like me or something? That kind of action is not something a friend will do, especially a noble... So, does she see me in a romantic way?"

Noel narrowed his eyes. On the one hand, Anna was the most talented woman in the kingdom and she was among the most beautiful as well. He would be lying if he said he wasn't happy that such a woman liked him.

On the other hand, he simply couldn't believe Anna saw him that way. It might look more believable if their relationship became closer.

Noel soon shifted his focus from her change to the reason for her change. As long as he could understand it, he might find out about her true motive.

Sadly, nothing came to his mind. It felt like Anna did it for a reason that he didn't know.

Though, Noel couldn't forget about the fact that he had to find a woman as well after rebuilding his family. After all, a noble had to continue their legacy if they didn't want their household to be retracted by the royal family.

And Anna was a perfect candidate. They had been together for a long time and knew each other's strengths and weaknesses. They even cooperated with each other.

However, by having a relationship with him, Anna would be thrown right into the vortex. She would face the Supreme Devil Organization, the Royal Family, and even the Third Prince.

And Marquis Stargaze and the entire Stargaze Family would be directly affected by it. There was no way she didn't think of it.

That was why that kiss was completely confusing.

"No, she might've done that just to confuse me... That's right. There is that bet. Don't tell me, she used that method to make me open up to her. By making me fall in love with her, can she crack me open... something like that?" Noel frowned.

He tried his best to deny all the possibilities for their relationship. Yet, a part of his heart knew that it wasn't the answer.

In the end, Noel couldn't get anything from his thoughts. Dimitri was also silent the whole time as he didn't want to intervene in Noel's matters.

Noel could only rely on himself to get to the bottom of this. And due to this thought, he ended up doing nothing for the rest of the day because the thought couldn't disappear from his head.

He could only continue his work the next morning. And there would be a last meeting between the Captains and the Stone Lord before they disbanded the expedition.

Noel gave some input to the meeting, but he looked distracted most of the time.

Although he managed to finish his job, he still couldn't brush off Anna's matter from his head.

Time passed by quickly. Before they realized it, a week had passed since the end of the exploration.

And there was a squad assembled for the research and reconstruction of the mysterious facility.

All of them stood in front of the fort. The one who took over the expedition was the Demon Barrier Squad and a few elite teams specialized in research. Two Elders from the Tower Association and a few research teams from the noble factions also came to get a piece of the pie.

Shale shook the Demon Barrier Squad Captain's hand as a sign of handing over the authority.

Finally, all three squads could finally return to their respective bases.

The expedition had been completed.

Chapter 649 Septa's Investigation

"This is..." Septa furrowed his eyebrows, looking at a few documents on the table.

There were a total of four documents that took his attention.

The first document stated, "Two people from the Demon Banner Army caused problems to the Fagant Leaf Cultivation. Their names are Noel Ardagan and Anna Stargaze. They are both in the special target list."

"A special target list? Whose list? The Supreme Devil Organization?" Septa frowned. "Why did they become the special target list? I can kind of understand why Anna Stargaze is on that list, considering she is the most talented person. Then, why does Noel Ardagan have his name on that list too?"

"I have heard some rumors, but I don't think it's true... it was said that a previous captain of the Demon Banner Army had defected to the Supreme Devil Organization. And that person was one of the Ardagans... I don't know much about it, but it seems I have to confirm this matter with the commander."

Septa let out a long sigh and took a look at the second document. This time, it was a letter. The letter didn't have the sender's name, but looking at the content alone was enough to tell who the sender was. After all, this letter was related to the sabotage of the exploration.

"You have to capture the special target list number 7, Noel Ardagan, during the expedition. The others can die, but Noel Ardagan has to be captured alive."

Septa immediately frowned because this matter wasn't small. With just this letter, he had enough evidence about the Plant Lord's betrayal.

His action wouldn't be blamed by the Tower Association. In fact, the Tower Association would be questioned by the Demon Banner Army and the public.

But he couldn't help but feel something was wrong with the special target list.

"Noel Ardagan is ranked 7th in the list. But there is no Noel Ardagan in the expedition... As expected, ladre is Noel Ardagan. And the Supreme Devil Organization has known about his identity. And the only person who can find ladre's real identity is someone who belongs to the same family... It means the traitor from the Ardagan Family.

"And I don't know how Noel can rank that high... Who are the six people above him? Well, I think Anna is one of them. The rest are probably important people like the king, the crown prince, the commander, and two others... But for now, this is just a conjecture."

After the letter, the next document was related to something beyond his imagination.

"This... is actually a research related to the ongoing investigation..." Septa gasped. "I truly like researcher... They usually keep everything instead of burning the trace away."

Septa had a hard time infiltrating this place. But after finding the small secret room hidden in the Plant Lord's office, he could easily find all the proof.

As a researcher, the Plant Lord always recorded everything so that it could be used for the later research. But it seemed to be backfired since he got all his dirt in one go.

From the title of the document alone, he knew what it was talking about.

"The Effect of Saxalia Grass to the Demon's Sense."

Septa immediately gritted his teeth. After all, there were a lot of problems coming from this research.

Septa muttered the conclusion of the research. "By combining the Saxalia Grass, Lei Tree Sap, and Green Tea Leaves, it can create a smell that will distract the demon's senses. It will appear that the humans who apply the solution will be considered objects instead of living beings by the demon."

"As expected, it's always weird that the demons and the humans are cooperating with each other. After all, from all the reports I've received this whole time, it's stated that people lock the demons."

"With this research, the Plant Lord can create a solution to camouflage one's presence from the demon. It must be extremely useful for the Low and Mid Level Demons who don't have enough intelligence and rely on their instinct to move. But Advanced Level Demons are trickier..."

"And I don't think it's possible to do anything to the Peak Level Demon, let alone the Superior Demon. For now, with this research, we can create a countermeasure even if the Supreme Devil Organization has this solution."

"We are lucky that we can find something like this before there are a lot of casualties." Septa let out a long sigh.

Last but not least, it was related to the noble that planned to create a Demon Farm. However, the research was started before the Supreme Devil Organization made contact with the demon.

The research was related to the plants that could be used to strengthen the demons.

There were some special plants that seemed to be able to increase the demon's strength.

"Hmm... Since the demons couldn't be tamed, the organization must want to grow the demons from the start before releasing them. It doesn't need to be controlled... since an army of demons will be useful to keep us at bay."

Septa pinched the bridge of his nose. All the research here was beyond his imagination. He never thought that the Plant Lord was involved with a lot of things.

If everything was known by the public, it would be a huge blow to the Supreme Devil Organization. But it would also create a lot of problems as the Demon Banner Army would be receiving the anger of the organization.

They were prepared for it, but the damage would be enormous. So, they might have to conceal some information.

Septa thought for a moment. "Well, I've got everything I want from this place. I should go back and report this matter to the commander."

Septa had expected a lot of problems by killing the Plant Lord since it wasn't an official mission. But it seemed that the Plant Lord was the source of the problems itself. So, all the regrets from killing the Plant Lord disappeared in his heart.

With this, he returned to the Demon Banner Army Headquarters in order to report this matter to the commanders.

Chapter 650 Anna's Letter

Noel and the others had returned to the headquarters as well. After a hard expedition, they had to take care of the members.

Clara did her best in order to let her squads recover. She even held a ceremony for the late comrades who fell in battle.

Still, she was thankful for Noel. Due to his assistance, Noel managed to find a way to keep the casualty minimum. In fact, she had expected that at least ten people would die in the expedition.

Yet, there were only four casualties, and most of them came from lower level squads. Even the other squads recognized Noel's abilities and had no more problems with his placement in the Zero Squad.

And the other members of the Zero Squad thanked him for his help. They might have some scars from the battle, but it wasn't to the point they had to retire.

Even Stella, whose fingers were severed during the chase, was still around. Clara managed to reattach the fingers, but she might not be able to fully utilize the strength of those fingers until the muscle and cells were reattached completely by natural regeneration.

Noel was happy that he was of help, considering he treated them as a family. But there was something that startled him.

Not long after his return, he received a letter from an unknown origin. He recognized the writing.

It turned out Anna was the one sending him the letter. All the matters regarding the kiss immediately resurfaced in his mind, making him think that the letter was related to it.

But it seemed he misunderstood it. The letter contained the information that she got from Count Leinberd and Marquis Walford.

Without hesitation, he examined the content of the letter.

"I have examined all the documents we've found from Count Leinberd and Marquis Walford."

"It seems that Count Leinberd is a third party, so they aren't that related to the Supreme Devil Organization."

"The real hand of the Supreme Devil Organization is Marquis Walford. There are four important matters regarding Marquis Walford."

"First and foremost, it's the reason why Marquis Walford was chosen as the extension of their hand. They want Marquis Walford to be infiltrating the nobility. I don't know much about their plans, but considering Marquis is only one rank below Duke, I think it's a reasonable plan.."

"However, I don't find anything related to the Royal Family. So, I can't prove whether the royal family is innocent or not. What I can say is that the dukes and duchesses don't seem to be in the eye of the Supreme Devil Organization."

"They might have higher ranks than Marquis, but their roots are the Royal Family. So, they just have to take the royal family. Meanwhile, the Marquis is there for a different purpose. He is an independent force that will infiltrate the rest of the nobility. With his rank, there are many things the Supreme Organization can do without being spotted by the royal family, unlike the relation with the dukes and duchesses."

When Noel read her thoughts about it, he couldn't help but agree with her statement. A Marquis was more convenient than a Duke for the Supreme Devil Organization. And if they wanted a Duke or Duchess, they would aim for someone with the same power as the Third Prince. Unfortunately, there was no one at that level currently. The throne war had weakened them after all.

"As for the second matter, it's related to the pawn that connects the organization and the marquis. She is known as a Serpent, a powerful Devil Bishop. I'm not sure about this yet, but from what I know, this Serpent is a direct subordinate of a Saint. I don't know which Saint, but since this matter has involved a Saint, I'm afraid going further without increasing our strength will be extremely dangerous. So, I suggest you stop investigating this matter for a moment."

Noel narrowed his eyes. "I have asked about the Supreme Devil Organization's ranks in the past. There are two more ranks above the Devil Bishop, which is equal to that of a Captain in the Demon Banner Army. They are the Devil Saint and the Supreme Devil."

"It's said that the Devil Saint has a strength beyond a captain, and they can fight the commander but not necessarily have the strength to defeat him."

"So, their strength is between the Devil Bishop and the commander... I guess their strength is like Shale, Milfa, or even Dimitri. The top captains in the Demon Banner Army."

"As for the Supreme Devil, it's the leader of the organization. But no one knows his strength. People say that the Supreme Devil is the brain of the organization, and some say that the Supreme Devil has the strength and brain to lead the organization."

"Nonetheless, it doesn't change the fact that a Devil Saint is involved. Dimitri might be able to stop a Devil Saint, but the Devil Saint will surely bring one or two Devil Saints... At this point, I don't have enough power to survive under their onslaught."

Noel could only let out a sigh, filled with disappointment. Sooner or later, they would realize that he was the culprit that caused the destruction of Marquis Walford. So, he had to become stronger as soon as possible.

"The third problem is that the Marquis is related to the distribution of Fagant Leaf. At the current stage, we don't know how many Fagant Leaf has been sent to the Supreme Devil Organization. So, we have to be careful since the organization might use it to strike us."

"And last but not least, it seems that we are one of their prioritized targets. I don't know the reason, but if I have to guess, it will be my talent. As for you, it should be related to your ancestry."

"Either way, it will be dangerous for us pretty soon. These are the four things I have found from Marquis Stargaze."

"So, I come here with the solution, as well as what I know about the expedition. I think this is more important than those four problems."

"Expedition..." Noel narrowed his eyes, remembering the kiss after the expedition. It seemed that her change was related to the expedition. So, he tried to figure out what caused her change.