

S vs Rebirth 651

Chapter 651 More Information

Noel frowned. "Expedition, huh..."

The expedition was truly important since the drug could be researched and used to increase everyone's strength level. This way, the expansion of humanity would become faster and the humans might have the chance to reclaim all the lands the demons had taken over.

With this thought in mind, Noel continued reading the next part.

"The expedition must be related to a drug store. I can't completely explain it, but there should be many new drugs appearing sooner or later."

"However, you have to remember one thing about the drug. It seems that there will be some drugs that get stolen from this place. The Supreme Devil Organization will get it as well, improving the strength of its leaders."

"I don't want to let that happen, but it's not possible to prevent it. After all, everyone wants to get a piece of the pie. The Third Prince, the Royal Family, the Tower Association, and even the Demon Banner Army... To satisfy that condition, they are going to let them steal some of it... though as a result, the Supreme Devil Organization will end up receiving some drugs as well."

"Since I am not a part of the Demon Relief Squad anymore, I have to say this to you... The Demon Relief Zero Squad was supposed to be eliminated in the past. I wouldn't say the details, but you could say that we were supposed to join the current First Squad."

"And due to that, the Demon Relief Squad got involved in this expedition. So, I think your squad will receive a reward... probably some of the drugs. I know some good alchemists who work in this kind of job, so can I ask you a favor? I want you to bring a pink-colored pill to me. The shape is a circle and there is a slight gap in the middle. I'm sure you can easily find it if it's presented to you."

"If you can do it, I will do my best to repay you. I can't say a lot of things about this pill, but it will surely help us in the future."

"Last but not least, I'm talking about the solution to the current situation. Since we have been targeted by the Supreme Devil Organization, it's better if we can take advantage of that situation."

"If possible, we have to speed up our progress a bit more... Within eighteen months, we have to reach the Spirit Grandmaster. And you shall become a noble. That's the only way for us to survive the current problem."

"That's all I can say. I'm sorry that I can't go a bit more specific. But you should know about our bet. If you want to know more about the details, you have to beat me."

After reading the letter, Noel couldn't help but furrow his eyebrows. There was a lot of information he had to sort out.

On the one hand, the problems about the marquis had been solved even though there were some additional problems that lingered around him. On the other hand, whether it was the marquis or this expedition, everything was linked to the Supreme Devil Organization.

"One and a half years to become a Spirit Grandmaster, huh... Well, it's already within my plan. Though, I don't know if I can succeed or not since I have to maintain a good foundation while absorbing the Demon Crystals."

"At the same time, there are already a lot of details Anna's written here. It's clear that she knows more than I do, but I don't know how she possesses all this information. I guess she has a clairvoyance or something."

"But the fact that she can't see the outcome after the change, it seems that the clairvoyance is not that omnipotent."

"Still, becoming a noble is easier said than done. I have finished the first step, but if I want to become a noble, I have to reveal that I'm Noel Ardagan."

"The Ardagan Family is hated by the Royal Family and after that execution, it's hard to believe in me. That's why the Royal Family is going to be more chaotic. And even though there are a few people that

will vouch for me, it's still not enough. Even I don't want to swear my loyalty to the Royal Family after all that..."

Noel narrowed his eyes, wondering what he should do about rebuilding the Ardagan Family.

"Well, I will think about this matter later. Right now, I have to focus on the task..." Noel thought for a moment. "Still, I have been receiving a lot of things from her. All these pieces of information might be able to save me one day."

"I don't know about the pill, but I'll do my best. Then again, I can't let her make me owe her for all this information. I wonder what I can do for her so that she ends up owing me instead of the other way around."

Noel pinched the bridge of his nose. The pill actually piqued his interest. He didn't know how Anna knew about it, but the fact that she requested him meant the pill would be extremely useful in the future.

They would surely use it together, so he wasn't really bothered with the request.

"Hmm... What have I got or encountered ever since I became a Knight in the Demon Banner Army?" Noel recounted all the past events. "The kids, the mercenary group of the independent women, the twin merchants, their father... Wait a minute, their father?"

Noel just remembered that he had managed to make a Master Blacksmith to become his vassal. In exchange, he could become the first Rune Blacksmith.

"I guess this is the only way..." Noel took a deep breath. He finally had some goals in mind.

He started assigning tasks to the people under him. He had to make sure that he took care of his security as well.

After all, there was one thing that bothered him from the letter. Noel took another glance at that sentence.

"That's the only way for us to survive the current problem."

Chapter 652 Tasks

"That's the only way for us to survive the current problem, huh..." Noel frowned. "From the way she phrases it, there might be a huge disaster that strikes the kingdom."

"It will be so chaotic that we can't guarantee our own lives. That's why we have to become stronger..."

Noel didn't know what kind of disaster Anna was talking about, considering he didn't know anything about the future.

But since Anna had a hard time looking at the future because of many changes that occurred along the line, it was clear that Anna only guessed most of them.

"I see..." Noel took a deep breath. "Well, I'm planning to rebuild my family, so becoming a noble is a part of my plan. But if I become one, she might have to become an Arbiter if she wants to stay equal to me..."

Noel smirked. He knew what he had to do in the next one and a half years. Although the time was a bit too tight, he should be able to do it.

Without wasting any more time, Noel immediately used his fire to reduce the letter into ashes so that no one could see the content. He then came out of the headquarters.

They'd got some time off from Clara after the expedition, so he used it to go to a remote place where he could meet Dimitri.

As expected, now that Dimitri had sworn his loyalty to Noel, Dimitri appeared before Noel called him.

"Master." Dimitri bowed his head politely. Instead of 'young master,' he called him Master, indicating his current status.

Noel nodded. "There are a lot of things I have to do... But I need to inform you of one thing. In one and a half years, I'm going to become a Spirit Grandmaster. It might look reckless, but I'm not going to neglect

my foundation. At the very least, I have to be able to defeat an opponent stronger than me even with this speed."

As expected, Dimitri was shocked to hear about his plan.

"Master. It's not that I don't believe in you. In fact, becoming a Spirit Grandmaster is easy. As long as you can absorb enough Demon Crystals and train your body to the point it can adapt to that level of Spiritual Energy, you can become a Spirit Grandmaster."

"But without practice and abilities, you would be extremely weak. Becoming a Spirit Master at this speed has shown Master's talent, but Spirit Grandmaster is on a whole different level, considering most people are stuck in this stage. That's why..." Dimitri became worried.

Noel shook his head. "I have thought about it. Besides, there is another reason why I wish to advance this way. By making it look reckless, the Royal Family will think that I'm just desperate and not as strong as the other Spirit Grandmasters. This way, the probability of them conferring the family name is higher."

"Ah!" Dimitri understood the conflict between the Ardagan Family and the Royal Family. They obviously wouldn't give Noel a chance to rebuild the family if they knew Noel would harm them. But it didn't apply to a fool. As long as Noel looked like a fool, they wouldn't think Noel was a huge threat.

That was why Noel had to keep up with his act.

After understanding Noel's intention, he was less worried but still couldn't approve of such a decision.

Noel added, "I will do it even if you tell me otherwise. Instead, I will show you that I'm a man of my word. If you still think it's not enough, then you can stop me once again."

"Anyway, I have a few tasks for you." Noel raised three fingers. "First, I want you to go to the Master Blacksmith and create a Rune Armor. I want to create an armor that is suitable for a woman since you will send that armor to Anna. It seems that I owe her a bit too much, so I want to turn the situation around, you see."

"Of course, wait until I have received the reward from the squad before leaving this place."

"Secondly, I want you to check the situation around me. I'm sure that the other kingdoms have begun their move, especially the Greenwood Kingdom."

"It seems that this is the time I make some contact with them. At the very least, I can understand their kingdom's specialty. Just meeting them alone is enough to cause some misunderstanding. It's risky, but the reward should be worth it."

"Last but not least, I want you to gather the resources and research that the Ardagan Family has. I'm going to become a lord soon, so I have to prepare myself."

Dimitri thought for a moment. He could understand the orders since everything was necessary for the development. Though, he was a bit skeptical about giving a Rune Armor to Anna, considering it would be the first Rune Armor that would be worn by a person.

Even if he wanted to repay her, that was a bit too much. He looked at Noel's expression before asking, "I apologize if I'm being presumptuous, but I have to inquire about your relationship with Miss Anna Stargaze, Master. What do you think of her?"

"Huh?" Noel widened his eyes, stunned. He never thought Dimitri would ask something like this. He even used honorifics for Anna.

"There is nothing between us. We are simply a partner in crime, trying to escape from the grand scheme of things." Noel shook his head helplessly. He already had a headache thinking about the kiss, so he didn't want to talk about it.

But Noel's reaction was enough to tell that he had considered it carefully.

"Well, I don't have any reason to stop you. Though, you have to remember that you have become an adult. Once you rebuild the Ardagan Family, you should know about the first problem a noble family will face..." Dimitri paused for a moment. "Anyway, I have received your orders. I shall complete it as soon as possible."

Noel nodded. Since he had finished his business with Dimitri, he had to give another task to Harley since he needed a lot of information.

But before that, he was summoned by Clara to receive the reward from the expedition.

Chapter 653 Reward

Noel stood in front of Clara. He was summoned to her office, but it seemed that the others didn't receive the same treatment.

So, there must be something more important that the rest of the people didn't have to know.

Noel couldn't help but ask, "May I know why you summoned me here, Captain?"

Clara looked at him with a solemn expression. However, she couldn't hide the tiredness from her gaze. She let out a long sigh and said, "I'm talking about your achievement in the previous expedition. Thanks to you, we manage to preserve our core fighters. Even our casualties are far lower than our original expectations.

"Your achievement has to be rewarded. That's why is there anything you want to request from me? I'll try to accommodate your request as much as possible. Even the other captains have agreed to it."

Noel thought for a moment. This was the time for his reward. On the one hand, he had a request from Anna. On the other hand, this might be a huge opportunity for him to become stronger.

He had thought about this before, but as expected, once he was presented with this question, he had to rethink his decision.

'Should I get a pill for Anna? Seeing how important it is to the expedition, it must be hard to get some pills. And it will be suspicious as well... And I will also lose a huge opportunity if I request this reward.'

Noel closed his eyes for a moment. If he chose the pill, he might benefit from Anna in the future. If he chose something else, he might get the benefit here and polish it even more in the future.

Still, the former would allow him to deepen his relationship with Anna even further. It seemed that it was more beneficial in the future to have Anna as an ally, considering her clairvoyant is extremely overpowered.

However, Noel faced one problem. Even though he could request the pink pill, Clara would be suspicious since Anna had taken an interest in him. So, he couldn't be obvious when asking for the reward.

After some thought, Noel finally gave his answer. "Do you think it is possible to request the drugs from the expedition? I don't need a lot of them, just one of them for each type..."

"Huh?" Clara dropped her jaw, confused. She never thought Noel would request the drug, which was the reason for the expedition.

However, she had seen a lot of medicine from the facility. Judging from its quantity, losing one of each type shouldn't be a big deal if it was to reward the person with the highest achievement during the expedition.

But it would surely create some suspicion and problems. Clara considered the pros and cons before accepting Noel's request.

"I can do that for you, but I can't guarantee the quantity and quality."

"It's fine. I want as many types as you can grant me." Noel smiled, feeling a bit relieved.

Clara looked at Noel for a moment, thinking, 'Why did he request the medicine? Is he able to understand the medicine? No, I don't think he has that ability. Then, does that mean he has people with that kind of ability?'

'Now that I think about it, the Ardagan Family was a big family with a deep background. Even though it had been ruined, Noel should still preserve some of its strength. It should be related to Noel's progress.'

'That makes sense. In that case, Noel is planning to research it by himself so that it will be beneficial to his family.'

Clara misunderstood Noel's reason. But this was probably the best reason she could think of without accounting for Anna.

Clara nodded her head. "I will do my best, but I can't guarantee it. Since I have to ask for the commander's approval, it will take at least two weeks to get the reward in case it's approved."

"I understand." Noel nodded. "We are free for one month after the expedition, so we still have some time..."

"Yeah. For now, you should rest and think about what you should do in order to get stronger. If we are not careful, the next expedition might wipe us out."

"Yes, Captain." Noel bumped his chest before leaving the room. He managed to get the pills without raising any suspicion. Although it wasn't guaranteed that he could get that pill, he had done his best.

So, he just left the rest to fate.

'Now that I have solved the problem with the pill... what should I do next?' Noel walked out of the building while thinking. He had been bothered by a few things in the past month.'

'Well, something is not right. I have done a lot of things to try to invoke some missions during the expedition. But surprisingly, there is only one mission...'

Noel opened the mission again to recall the information.

[Mission: Complete the Third Prince's task according to the Host's best possible outcome.]

[Description: The Third Prince will issue you a task soon, so you have to finish it. But because the Host doesn't know whether the Third Prince is good or bad, the Host has to consider everything first.]

[Reward: Second Slot Medal.]

'This mission is leaning to the Third Prince instead of the Expedition. So, I should receive at least one more mission that is related to the success of the expedition...'

Noel furrowed his eyebrows. 'Still, Ardagan is concerned about my Spiritual Energy Reserve even though I have become a Spirit Master... Is the Second Slot Medal taking that much reserve?'

'Or is there something I don't know? I have asked Ardagan a few times, but he hasn't given me any reply. Heisk has been the one talking to me this whole time.'

'As for the last mission, it's about Anna's secret. Does that mean the expedition is not important?'

Noel couldn't help but wonder if he had made a wrong calculation in predicting the mission.

Ardagan had never banned him from learning about how the system worked, so he had been trying to find a loophole to exploit. But it felt like the previous loophole that he found suddenly disappeared.

'Hmm... Is there a change from Ardagan?'

Chapter 654 Ardagan's Sacrifice

Once he thought about it, a reply suddenly came. From the way it talked, it seemed Ardagan finally responded to him again.

[Please take me out.]

'Huh?' Noel was stunned for a moment. He hurriedly went to an open area so that he could take out Ardagan without a problem.

It was there he finally found the change from Ardagan.

"This is..." Noel gasped after finding a small circle on Ardagan's blade. "What is this?"

[Do you remember the time I talked about the fact that our senses are shared?]

'Yes.' Noel almost forgot that he was in an open area where he could be observed. So, he immediately stopped talking out loud and returned to using his inner voice.

[We have been sharing our senses this whole time, but the way we sense the world is different, so you might haven't noticed it. So, I will be telling you directly.]

[The circle on my body is the second slot medal.]

'The second slot medal? I'm sorry, but I don't think I understand what you're talking about. Isn't the medal related to the amount of my Spiritual Energy Reserve?'

[Yes and no.]

[Even though I am considered a Spirit, I am still nothing but a sword. My sense as an object is different from yours. The way I sense everything around me is reflected in the medal you have.]

[For example, if you're using the Newbie Medal, which grants you a boost in Sword Mastery, Spiritual Energy, and Rune Mastery. I have to block my sense and focus my power so that I can lend it to you.]

[In other words, the Spiritual Energy increase is basically me absorbing the Spiritual Energy around and creating an additional reserve for you. It, by no means, increases your original reserve. The same applies to the Sword Mastery and Rune Mastery.]

[With that, the second slot medal is basically me growing stronger. You can say that I have gotten stronger and can accommodate more power.]

[If you use the Newbie Medal and the Demon Hunter Medal at the same time. A portion of me will boost you while the other half is there to sense the energy from the demons and share it with you.]

'...' Noel fell silent for a moment. He had never thought about this. After the Spirit Link, his senses and sensitivity to the Spiritual Energy drastically increased. He understood that it was how Heisk perceived this world.

However, he might have been blinded by this small achievement that he forgot that he had never thought about Ardagan's senses.

When he was being confronted like this, he could see the grave mistake he had made.

Noel couldn't help but look at Ardagan with a solemn expression. 'It seems that I have wronged you...'

Noel noticed how he had neglected his spirits. He immediately lowered his head and said inwardly, 'Ardagan, Heisk. I'd like to apologize for being neglectful. Even though I have been trying to find out about both of you, I have realized that I haven't put any effort into it.'

[You have done nothing wrong. The stronger the power, the more it will blind its owner. Even your ancestor only realized it after wielding me for ten years. Just from how you realize it in just two years has shown your talent.]

[Don't forget that before I'm a Spirit, I'm just a tool. I'm a tool to kill people. Those people might be your enemies, they might be your allies, or they might be just innocent people.]

[Nonetheless, realizing it, making a change, and putting in an effort is something I appreciate. That's why I'm ready to support you with all my strength. Just like you, we are going to get stronger so that we can give you more power.]

Noel closed his eyes for a moment. As Ardagan said, he was a tool. Whether it was his blade form or the system, it didn't change his fundamentals. That was why he had been ignoring the fact he was a Spirit, a living being.

He was his partner, not his tool that he could take advantage of as much as he wanted.

There might be a reason why Ardagan didn't talk to him. He might be busy making changes or he might not be able to tell the secret. But one thing was for sure, Ardagan was doing his best to support him.

Once he understood it, he looked at the circle on the blade once again and said, 'Ardagan. I have been thinking about this, but what about my daily training? All those missions still give a permanent boost to my body, right?'

He wanted to know about this because this might be another sacrifice Ardagan had paid.

[You are half correct.]

[If you keep running, you are training your muscles and stamina. That's the reason why there is an increase in stamina. Of course, I'm also using my own Spiritual Energy to refine your muscle and enhance your stamina. But you can consider it as your body's true performance.]

[But in the case of the Spiritual Energy from the mission of sparring with your rival, the Spiritual Energy comes from your ancestor.]

[I can't tell you much about your ancestor because of a promise. But I still retain some of his power.]

[The Ardagan Swordsmanship I have imparted to you is the Swordsmanship that your ancestor created when wielding me. The Fire Spirit Abilities from me come from the two wielders before you.]

[In other words, I am the accumulation of experience of your ancestors. As for the increase of Spiritual Energy, it's basically you using my reserve.]

[You can say that the mission will stop once you have reached one hundred percent. At that time, we'll have a perfect assimilation. And that's the level of the first generation's wielder.]

"!!!" Noel widened his eyes in shock. He thought the system was already a great help to him and it was a mystical power that couldn't be described by someone like him.

But it turned out there was a logic behind each reward from the system. It was mystical, yet, it felt so down to earth.

It might look like the system was disappointing since it wasn't as mystical as one would think. But on the other hand, it showed the sacrifice Ardagan had paid in order to support his wielder.

Noel, who had neglected all this, felt like he wanted to cry. He wanted to apologize to Ardagan.

Chapter 655 Missions

After listening to Ardagan's explanation, he could finally see some secret from the system.

'I see. There is a Training Section where Ardagan helps me improve my body as well as the current state of our assimilation. All that energy comes from Ardagan, not my Reserve. In other words, it feels like we are fighting two people at once because of Ardagan.'

'As for the Medal, it's basically Ardagan's existence. Depending on the medal, Ardagan is matching his needs.'

'I don't know much about the Career. On the one hand, the skills listed on the Career are those from the previous owners or everyone that Ardagan has seen and copied. That's why there are a lot of abilities I can use. However, I don't know much about the Career Path.'

'At first, I chose the Swordsman Path and finally evolved to Rune Swordsman... I guess this is more like Ardagan allowing me to choose what kind of skill I want next. If I had chosen a Noble or Commander Path, I would have gotten skills related to that path.'

'And there is the Status Panel. I think there isn't much into it other than summing everything up about me.'

'Last but not least, the Shop Panel. This is the weirdest among them. Some items are related to the system itself. But the rest are something that ally appears...'

'Is there something I don't know about Ardagan? Maybe he has a Space Ability or something...' Noel thought for a moment before shaking his head. He couldn't really find out about it in his current state.

But this might be the only mystery Ardagan had left to him.

After some time, Noel asked Ardagan. 'There is something else... which is not related to system panels. It's about the missions. All your missions seem to be able to see through the future. Does that mean you have a clairvoyant ability?'

'Now that I think about it, you have provided me with Noble and Commander Path. As a Noble, you should have eyes that can see far ahead in the future. On the other hand, having a Space Element that can store a lot of things inside is extremely valuable as a commander since it can create many wonderful situations on the battlefield.'

'Did I have any record about my ancestor using all this ability? He was supposed to be a commander, right? If that was the case, shouldn't he be able to wield this space ability?'

Unfortunately, Ardagan didn't answer that question. Instead, he pushed Noel outside, returning him to reality.

On the one hand, Noel thought his guess was accurate. On the other hand, Ardagan wouldn't act like that if everything was true. It seemed that there were a few things he speculated wrong. And it wasn't the time for him to learn about it yet.

"Well..." Noel let out a long sigh. "At least, I understand Ardagan a bit more. It's true that I have been relying on him without learning about him... the only thing I have learned is how to take advantage of the loophole."

Noel planned to reflect on his action and form a better relationship with both Heisk and Ardagan from this point onward.

After some consideration, Noel chose four medals to be his main medal that would get revolved depending on the situation.

Those four medals were the Charm Medal, Demon Hunter Medal, the Newbie Medal, Rivalry Medal.

The Charm Medal was useful for understanding the opposite party's thoughts since everything was reflected in their affection for him. The Demon Hunter Medal was the medal he had been using a lot since it would prevent any demon from sneaking up on him.

The Newbie Medal offered a lot of utilities, while the Rivalry Medal was perfect for training.

These four were his main medals, while the others might be used in the future, but only in an extreme case.

It seemed that the upgrade took everything from Ardagan. Now that he had finished, Ardagan could finally give him a few more missions.

[Mission: Peerless (2)]

[Description: To prove your might, one has to fight a few enemies of the same level. Defeat five Peak Level Demons by yourself in a single battle.]

[Reward: Union of Sword, Spiritual Step, and Elite Medal.]

Noel was surprised by this mission because this was the continuation of the Peerless Mission that gave him the Newbie Medal. But at that time, Ardagan only wanted him to kill three Advanced Level Demons in a single battle.

It seemed that Ardagan knew that he still couldn't defeat the previous five Peak Level Demons in the expedition. That was why he wanted him to get stronger and defeat five of them in a single battle.

As for the reward, he didn't know anything about the Union of Sword or Spiritual Step. But he could imagine what they were used for.

What piqued his interest was the Elite Medal. Considering the previous mission gave him a Newbie Medal, this Elite Medal must mean that he had passed the newbie level and finally reached the next level.

'There might even be a continuation to this mission... Maybe I'll get a medal like Veteran or something along the lines...' Noel nodded in understanding.

He was already interested in this mission, but Ardagan generously gave him another two missions.

'This is becoming more interesting.' Noel couldn't help but think after reading the other two missions.

[Mission: Repaying One's Kindness.]

[Description: Anna has helped you a lot, it's time to repay her. A Rune Swordsman has always been clear with debt and gratitude. Help her finish her advancement mission in Creek Village six months from now.]

[Reward: Force Control.]

[Mission: Meeting the Representative from the Greenwood Kingdom.]

[Description: You have become the center of attention of the four kingdoms. The Greenwood Kingdom has sent their representative to observe you. Determine the best outcome that you want from them.]

[Reward: ???]

Noel couldn't help but smile, looking at these two missions. After all, he had come to another realization from these two missions.

Chapter 656 A Deal

Noel muttered inwardly, 'Another '???' reward. This is the fourth mission I have encountered such a reward. It seems that every time I have this kind of reward, the reward will always be related to the result of the mission completion.'

'In other words, it feels like Ardagan is withholding the reward and giving the reward depending on my circumstances. Like Rose's Revenge, if I don't make such a ruckus, I don't think Rose's affection will

become that deep. The same applies to the Sword Saint. If I end up having an unruly personality, he might not impart me the technique.'

Noel looked down, falling into deep thought. His guesses didn't seem to be that far from the actual answer. He might be able to use this information to receive something that suited his needs in the future. Then again, he would rarely do this since Ardagan had been supporting him to the best of his ability.

Meanwhile, the other mission piqued his interest for another reason.

Even though their relationship had gone better compared to the past, Noel still had the desire to make her owe him. This way, he would have the advantage whenever they were trying to reach an agreement.

However, Ardagan seemed to have taken Anna's kiss and their bet into consideration. By helping Anna so suddenly like this, Anna would feel a bit indebted to him. There was a chance that he would get some clues about her secret.

In addition, he would also receive a reward from Ardagan. He didn't know what this Force Control was all about, but the former reward was already enough for him to take it.

Though, there was another problem. Since Anna was having a mission in Creek Village, he didn't know how to go there.

Luckily, he remembered the possibility of Ardagan having a clairvoyant ability. It seemed that Ardagan had taken a peek into the future and knew that he would be nearby.

'Well, I can dispatch some people from the brothel to find out about this Creek Village. This way, I will have some more information before the mission starts...' Noel thought.

There were a lot of things he could do after understanding Ardagan's power.

Now that he had discovered everything, he was going to make preparations for the next step.

...

Just like Noel, Anna had also begun her preparation.

Instead of returning with her father, she took a detour to visit a certain house.

In the city called Draeam, there was a small alchemy store within a narrow and dark alley.

A person covered with a black robe entered this alley and opened the store's door. Surprisingly, even though the door looked run down, and the alley was giving an eerie feeling, the interior of the store completely gave a different feeling.

The orange light warmed the store and the neat decoration made one feel like they had returned home.

The floor was clean and there didn't seem to be any speck of dust on all shelves.

Because of the location, the store was pretty much deserted. No one seemed to be looking around the store.

There was only a middle-aged man sitting on the counter, who seemed to be sleeping.

If they looked at his face, they would find a huge black bag under his eyes. His complexion was also pale. He looked like he hadn't slept for a few days.

Yet, when Anna stood in front of him, she said, "I know you are awake. Why bother pretending to be asleep?"

"..." The middle-aged man didn't give any response as if he was completely asleep.

"Spirit Awakening." But the moment she called out a name, the middle-aged man suddenly opened his eyes.

He suddenly rose from his position and looked at her. There was no drowsiness on his face.

Anna may have covered her body and head, but she didn't cover her face, allowing him to find out about her identity.

"Well, well... never in my wildest dream will the famous Anna Stargaze appear in my store..." The middle-aged man frowned.

Anna smirked. "It's an honor for the former Royal Alchemist of the Zaecuria Kingdom, Sir Khalid, to know my name."

"As expected, you already know my identity. I thought I had erased all my traces completely. I simply want to live the rest of my life peacefully, you see... So, what should I do with you..." The middle-aged man narrowed his eyes. The atmosphere in the room suddenly became cold.

Anna remained calm. She raised her hand as if asking him to stop while saying, "I'm sure you know about my purpose here..."

The middle-aged man remembered what Anna said to wake him up, but he didn't say anything as if he was allowing Anna to elaborate on her words.

Anna continued, "I know that you are researching a drug that can awaken one's Spirit forcefully. I have a clue that might interest you."

"Hoh?" Anna seemed to have figured out about him, so Khalid didn't even bother to hide it anymore. "There is nothing such as a free meal in this world... I'm assuming you want something from me, right?"

"Yeah." Anna closed her eyes for a moment, recalling all the past events where she took someone's future possession.

She muttered inwardly, 'Alchemist Khalid. The name that will shake the world in the future. In my past life, he managed to create a drug that could awaken the spirit forcefully. But this drug didn't awaken the Spirit for those who hadn't discovered them.'

'Instead, his drug stimulated the Spirit's potential and gave a lot of benefits to its users. It was similar to the benefit of the Spirit Link. At that time, he wasn't affiliated with anyone else. He found the drug in the mysterious facility through his own strength.'

'In other words, he was a free man in the past life. But to solve the problem that would occur in the near future, he has to complete his research sooner than in his past life.'

"I want to propose a deal." Anna smiled. She also remembered that Noel was the one supplying the drug and she was there only to be the third party that connected them. So, she didn't plan to take all the credits. Hence, she added, "In exchange for providing you a huge lead to your research, I want you to be my... no, our allies."

Chapter 657 Ocean Pearl Necklace

Inside a small bedroom, Noel politely bowed. There was a man in front of him, who his father once served, the Third Prince.

As expected, since the expedition was over, the Third Prince would come to him to get the blueprint.

Noel didn't hesitate to present the map of the facility to the Third Prince.

While he was lowering his head, the Third Prince looked at the map carefully. After a few minutes, he finally said, "Good work, Noel Ardagan. As expected of the son of Luke Ardagan, you didn't fail me this time again."

"I'm honored by your words," Noel answered with a calm tone.

"Where are you going next?" The Third Prince asked.

"!!!" Noel widened his eyes in surprise. The question confused him, but thankfully, he was lowering his head, so the Third Prince didn't notice his change of expression.

Normally, the Third Prince would have known about his next course. Though, it seemed like he was able to adjust his course to a certain level.

It might be due to the Plant Lord and the Supreme Devil Organization that the commander didn't seem to accept any more requests from outside the army. That was why the Third Prince didn't know about his next destination, let alone change its course.

Noel shook his head helplessly. "I apologize, Your Highness. However, I still haven't received any mission from Captain Clara."

"I see." The Third Prince looked down, contemplating. He explained, "Normally, the mission would have gone to your Captain one week before the departure. Due to the current situation, they might be trying to be more careful. We can't let the Demon Relief Squad, especially you, die because of someone's interference after all."

"Well, I will be busy for some time, so I guess you can move independently for the time being."

"Still, you have worked hard for me. Giving me this map alone is putting you in a hard position. That's why I won't be stingy." The Third Prince took out a small necklace and handed it to him.

"This is..." Noel looked at the necklace innocently. The string that made the necklace didn't seem to be anything special, but his eyes were taken by the blue gem on it.

"This is called Ocean Pearl. You should know that there is a country that has a border where there is only endless water, right?"

"Or so I heard." Noel nodded in agreement.

"I got this pearl when I was visiting that kingdom. According to the legend, this pearl came from the bottom of the ocean."

"Ocean?" Noel tilted his head in confusion. He didn't know this word after all.

"It's the endless water. People over there called it Ocean or Sea."

"I see."

"This pearl came from the bottom of the ocean... Even I don't know about the sea that much, but from the legend, it's said that no light can reach the bottom of the ocean, no normal humans can withstand the pressure in that place, and the temperature there is extremely cold."

"Due to that condition, this gem called Ocean Pearl has a unique attribute. It allows you to increase the weight of water to a certain degree."

"You should know that ice is made by freezing the water, right? This should be useful for you." The Third Prince explained the reason why he gave such a necklace.

Noel never expected that the Third Prince would give him something so valuable. At the same time, he couldn't help but realize how cunning the Third Prince was.

There were at least three hidden reasons for giving him this necklace. First of all, the necklace only affected his Ice Element, which he had to seal due to his current identity. That was why even if he gave him this necklace, Noel wouldn't be able to use it.

Secondly, by giving this necklace, he would give the impression that he was a good and benevolent lord to follow, even though the necklace was useless to the current him.

Last but not least, the Third Prince knew that Noel had to seal his Ice Ability for the time being. But in the near future, he would surely reveal it to the world. And this necklace would give a huge boost to his strength.

Noel would be grateful once he saw how useful it was.

Because of these three reasons, Noel became even more skeptical of this Third Prince. He even wondered if his father had told him about the grand scheme or not.

The Third Prince might not know about his father's condition. And that was a huge advantage for him and his father.

It also seemed that his father didn't trust him completely despite supporting him with all his might.

In other words, the Third Prince was also suspicious.

The Third Prince thought for a moment and said, "If you manage to complete the next mission, I'm thinking about inviting you to a gathering with some of my allies. I'm sure that it will be beneficial for you. However, you have to remember that you are ladre, not Noel Ardagan."

"Yes, Your Highness. I'm grateful for the opportunity you've given me." Noel politely thanked him.

The Third Prince felt a bit weird about how polite Noel was. But considering Noel's past self, he could understand why Noel was awkward. In fact, if he suddenly changed, he would realize there was something wrong with the Ardagan Family.

But since he had completed his objective, he grabbed the map and headed to the door. Before leaving the room, the Third Prince added, "Don't forget that you have to keep getting stronger. The Royal Family seems to be planning to get Anna Stargaze, who has become a Spirit Master."

"I'm not planning to lose to them. So, I want you to keep getting stronger so that by the time you reveal your identity, I can gain more benefits. Understand?"

"I've received your order." Noel nodded with a serious expression.

After confirming Noel's expression, the Third Prince left the room. He didn't realize that just like him judging Noel, the latter was also observing him. And it seemed that Noel managed to confirm some suspicions.

Though, now that the Third Prince had left, he was planning to meet a few more people.

Chapter 658 Three Options

The next person he met was a middle-aged man. His age seemed to be similar to Dimitri's. Luckily, Dimitri managed to find him hiding among the people to observe him.

And there was only one more influence that would find out about his real identity. He was none other than the Greenwood Kingdom's representative. His grandfather should have figured out that Noel was ladre due to the few clues he had left.

He would tell the king and finally cause this meeting to happen. There was no way his grandfather would allow such a danger to befall his grandson, so he persuaded the king to have a peaceful approach.

That was why he chose to meet this person. Though, Dimitri was a bit skeptical since this person's strength was similar to his.

Ultimately, Dimitri had to accompany Noel in the meeting since he couldn't allow Noel being kidnapped or getting killed during the negotiation.

Noel sat in front of the middle-aged man with a calm expression. The middle-aged man had long blue hair that was tied neatly on his back. Noel could tell by the cross scar on his left cheek and from the smaller scars visible on his arms that this man had gone to at least hundreds of battles.

His calm demeanor was like the calm before the storm. However, his eyes gave him a feeling that he was able to see through his character.

In addition to his strength, he could understand why this person was the representative of the Greenwood Kingdom.

"I am Noel Ardagan. It's a pleasure to meet the representative of the Greenwood Kingdom." Noel stated with a calm expression.

That introduction couldn't help but slightly change the middle-aged man's expression. He said, "I never thought you would give away your identity that easily, considering there were only a few people who knew about it."

"If I didn't plan to introduce myself like that, there was no need for me to meet you." Noel shook his head helplessly.

The man fell silent for a moment before glancing at Dimitri. It seemed that he had seen through Dimitri's strength.

'I see. With a bodyguard of that level, there's no way the Ardagan Family would fall without a fight. It seems that there is a deeper scheme playing in it. Though, that's not my mission.'

The man paused before introducing himself. "I am Damian Fletcher, the vice commander of the Royal Family. It's my pleasure to meet you."

"..." Noel didn't show it on his face, but he was a bit startled when he learned that the man in front of him was that important. "The pleasure is mine."

The corner of his lips slightly curved as if he was amused by Noel's reaction. He said, "I don't think we both like to deal with pleasantries, so I'll cut to the chase."

Noel nodded in agreement, giving him the time to tell him the request.

"His Majesty expresses his intention to become your friend. He has recognized your talent and achievements."

"Hence, His Majesty has given you three options. First, he would like you to become one of the royalties. He is aware that your ancestry is linked to the royal family, but due to being separated by a few generations, your royal blood has become extremely thin."

"So, if you want, he is planning to marry you with the second princess. She is extremely smart and I can list a few of her achievements, including the fact that she has become a team leader in the Royal ian. According to your grandfather, you are not someone who considers a woman as an accessory to make you shine brighter, so he is planning to give you the most talented unmarried princess. Of course, she is still one of the most beautiful women in the kingdom."

Noel didn't have any change of expression, but he could understand how far the king could go. And if he became royalty, the king could easily reinstate the Ardagan Family, but in the Greenwood Kingdom.

When that happened, he would surely dedicate the Rune Book to the Greenwood Royal Family. The benefits were a lot, but the price to pay was also heavy.

Seeing Noel's poker face, the man continued, "The second option is to become your friend. He is aware that the first option might get rejected since if you are someone that desires power, you would have gone to the Greenwood Kingdom and presented your achievement through the Ezenholm Family."

"By becoming a friend, His Majesty can exert some of his power to protect you. It also means that you are not going to be a threat to us. However, there is no such thing as a free meal. I'm sure you can imagine the price you have to pay..."

Noel closed his eyes for a moment. Of course, he understood it. In fact, that was the reason why the king placed such importance on Noel.

He wanted Noel to develop the Rune and present it to them. He could add some conditions, but it would still restrain him since the priority should be in the Greenwood Kingdom.

That was why he added the last condition. Though, judging from its content, the one who suggested it must be his grandfather.

"As for the third option, considering you are from a Merchant Family, his majesty is planning to have a business with you."

"In exchange for the Rune Development, he will help you on some occasions. This will give you the most freedom."

Noel knew that for a country, a threat was something that had to be eliminated. That was why there should be the fourth condition, but there was no way this man would tell him.

Of course, Noel could see some benefits by engaging in a business relationship with him. With the Greenwood Kingdom getting priority over the rune development from the developer itself, it was clear that the Greenwood Kingdom would become the most developed country. It was enough to gain prestige, influence, and money. They would benefit the most from this deal.

"These are the three options His Majesty has given you. I hope that you can make the right choice."

Noel's expression remained calm as if he had already chosen the option before the negotiation even began.

Chapter 659 Agreement

A smile suddenly appeared on Noel's face. He looked at the middle-aged man and gave the answer he had prepared before.

"Even though the Ardagan Family was a noble family, my father was more of a merchant than a noble. As his son, of course, I have been taught as a merchant. That's why there is only one answer from me. I will choose the third option."

The middle-aged man looked at Noel's expression. Because he hailed from the Greenwood Kingdom, from his perspective, this was the least desirable outcome.

After all, they couldn't get Noel entirely and only acted for a matter of interest. In fact, if Noel was someone who came from the Greenwood Kingdom, marrying the second princess would do him good.

As someone that smart, the princess lived far away from the throne war. Although she might still end up getting involved in it, if they worked together, it was possible to escape from the throne war. This way, he wouldn't repeat what happened to the Ardagan Family when supporting the Third Prince.

However, he could understand if that matter had given him trauma, which stopped him from choosing the first option.

That was why the second option existed. As a friend of the royal family, specifically their king, Noel would be able to get a lot of resources and stand away from the throne war, considering the king would hide him until it was over.

And with his protection, the Muivell Kingdom wouldn't be able to do anything to him. Once it was over, he might be granted a fief and a family name due to his achievement in runes.

Yet, Noel actually chose the third option. He had even pressured him to choose the best option, but he refused to become one of them and wanted to take a risk by living in this kingdom.

When he was about to feel disappointed by Noel's choice, the latter added, "I'm sure that His Majesty sends you here to observe me. If not, then you won't be sticking around me for a long time without making an appearance.

"I don't know the time limit for that observation, but I think it's more beneficial for both of us if we do this."

Noel smirked while pointing at him. "Why don't you continue observing me until the time limit? During the time you are around, I'll call you when I need your help. Depending on the matter, we can negotiate the terms.

"For example, I have thought about two more ways of utilizing the runes. It's true that the only 'known' way to utilize it, is to use it as a Spirit Enchantment, but..."

Noel raised his finger, forming a small rune. He used the Strength Blessing Rune to grant a temporary boost to this man called Damian Fletcher.

Damian was startled by the sudden burst of strength. Although the rune wasn't that effective with his current level, it should be useful for the lower level people. And if the runes could still be improved, there might be a rune strong enough that would give enough strength where it truly mattered for him.

"This is..." Damian looked at his hands, startled. But Noel's surprise didn't end there.

He lifted up the cup and embedded the Enhance Forward Rune to add a motion to the cup. Suddenly, the cup flew toward Damian.

At that speed, it would strike him and splash all the content in it, but Damian skillfully caught the cup. He even used Spiritual Energy to stop the fluid from leaving the cup.

Still, Damian couldn't help but gasp, realizing what Noel had just shown him.

"This is just the prototype though. I still have to experiment more to understand the extent of this power."

"That's why I am offering you this deal. You should know that my current path is full of thorns. So, I'm sure that there will come a time when I need your power."

"Every time I ask for your help, we can negotiate the reward. I still have a few more ideas where I can explore the usage of the runes. But if I'm too greedy, I won't be able to offer you a good piece. So, I'm going to focus on these two applications first. I think it's enough, right?"

Damian narrowed his eyes. He never thought that the situation had changed. If Noel wanted to propose a deal, he would need time to gather the reward. This way, he could somehow force Noel to take the second option.

Yet, Noel dumbfounded him by the two applications of runes. In that instant, he realized that the creator understood the rune more than anyone else. And if they wanted to advance far faster than any kingdom, he would have to agree to this condition.

He could easily report it to the kingdom and have Noel eliminated. But the king had told him to make a friendly approach first. And if he returned to the Greenwood Kingdom, the man behind Noel would find out about it. That way, he would lose Noel's trust since there was a possibility that he came for the sake of eliminating the future threat.

In other words, he had to make the decision here.

He couldn't help but remember what he said to him after presenting the three options.

"I hope you can make the right choice."

And somehow, the situation had been turned around and these words were imposed on him instead.

Damian raised his head, looking at Dimitri behind Noel. He realized that this man's strength was similar to him. If they fought here, they would create a huge disturbance. And the Muivell Kingdom would use that as an excuse to demand compensation for infiltrating their kingdom.

That was why even though the situation had been turned around and Noel seemed to give him a few options to choose from, he actually only had one path.

Damian took a deep breath, feeling defeated. He said, "It's a pleasure to work with you."

Chapter 660 A Surprise?

"I have been here for two months, while the time limit is one year. But considering the situation, I shall push back the schedule. Instead of one year after my arrival, it will be one year after this agreement."

"In other words, I shall stick around you for one year." Damian thought for a moment and took out a small badge.

The badge had an 'X' shape with a red-colored jade in the middle. Damian took out a similar badge and pointed at the jade in the center.

"This badge has been embedded with Link Enchantment. Since you know about the better version of the Spirit Enchantment, you should be aware of its effect, right?"

Noel nodded. "It's to link two objects. But the length depends on its size."

"Yes. This badge here can transmit your energy within fifty meters. Once you pour your energy here, I will try to find you within an hour since I can't easily enter the fort in your expedition."

"If I don't come within an hour, you should pour the energy once more. There is a case where I'm out of range. Though, since you have understood the completed version of this enchantment, it might be better if you can fix it and increase its effect."

Noel's eyebrows twitched. As expected of the vice commander of the royal guard, even if he could somehow defeat him in the mind battle, he wouldn't go down without a fight.

By asking Noel to fix it, he would be able to assess Noel's ability in runes. Though, Noel did his best to remain calm and ignored that statement. He only nodded his head and said, "Alright. I understand. I'll contact you when I'm in a safe area..."

Damian nodded, acting as if he never said the last part.

He stood up and politely extended his hand.

Noel shook his hand with a smile. He had finally gotten another protector.

Damian didn't realize at that time, Noel's deal was there to protect himself from him.

He was planning to become a Spirit Grandmaster within one and a half years. By that time, he wouldn't be able to kill him anymore.

And with this deal, he was forced to protect Noel until he grew strong enough. Damian simply didn't believe that Noel could reach the Spirit Grandmaster level anytime soon. After all, Spirit Master and Spirit Grandmaster were different.

When they reached the Spirit Master, they usually maxed out their Low Level and Mid Level Demon Crystal quota. Even the High Level Demon Crystals might not have that much space left.

If they wanted to advance further, they had to kill Peak Level Demons if not Superior Demons. And it was impossible to gather the Demon Crystals from those Peak Level Demons and Superior Demons easily.

What he didn't know was that Noel's limit was twice that of normal people. He might need to max out his Low, Mid, and High Level Demon Crystals, but he would still have a lot of space for the Peak Level Demons.

By the time he realized it, Noel had become strong enough to protect himself from him.

"Since we have reached an agreement, it's better for me to go into hiding again. After all, we don't want to make others feel suspicious by meeting here." Damian smiled before walking away.

Though, as he moved away, his eyes were focused on Noel instead of Dimitri. He couldn't help but feel something was weird from Noel, but he couldn't really describe it.

After that agreement, Noel couldn't help but return to his seat while leaning back. He let out a sigh of relief while saying with a tired tone. "That man is too strong."

Damian might have restrained his aura, but because of Dimitri, a bit of his aura ended up leaking as if it was his instinct to protect himself from Dimitri.

Dimitri didn't know about it since he was an assassin, not a fighter. He knew how to hide his power, but in this case, that action ended up making Damian even more restless.

Since he also felt Damian's strength, Dimitri said with a smile. "I am impressed, Master. To think you would be able to remain that calm when facing that aura. You should feel that it was like there was a lion standing in front of you, right?"

"Yeah. It felt like it was about to bite me if I just let my guard down for a second." Noel sighed. "Do people of your level have that kind of strength?"

"I can't say for those who have just reached this stage, but once you train for a long time, you will have something like that naturally... You should be able to differentiate between people who have killed and those who haven't, right?"

"Ah. It is similar to killing intent." Noel nodded in understanding.

"In a way... yes." Dimitri agreed. "So, what should we do next? There should be no more people you want to meet in this place, right?"

"Yeah." Noel took out a pink pill and handed it to Dimitri. "I want you to take this pill to Anna. You shouldn't be that worried since I now have another protector, right?"

παῖδα nova | com Dimitri made an awkward smile. As a butler, he surely wanted to protect Noel. But as his right hand man, he knew that this task was more important.

Although he couldn't approve of Damian yet, he knew that Damian wouldn't do anything foolish for a while. It should be enough for him to finish all the tasks Noel gave him.

So, Dimitri grabbed the pill and asked, "Do you want to pass any message to her?"

Noel thought for a moment and said, "Tell her that I will give her a surprise six months from now."

Dimitri's eyebrows twitched. "Master. The way you phrase it sounds like you are going to propose to her or something, you know."

"..." Noel looked away. He wasn't that oblivious since a noble would already have been engaged or married at his age. But he still remembered the kiss that took him by surprise. He wanted to pay her back a little bit, so he said, "Just say it as it is. I don't care."

"Well..." Dimitri sighed helplessly. Since Noel had given the order, he only had to execute it.