

S vs Rebirth 721

Chapter 721 Real Threat

"Go!" Faust shouted while releasing his arrow toward the enemies.

However, two people suddenly stepped forward and struck this arrow with their blades.

Their clash shook the underground passage, and the arrow ultimately exploded after the two people slashed it into pieces. After that, a lot of demons suddenly charged forward, hunting the people from the Demon Banner Army.

Knowing that they would be hunted if they remained here, Igor hurriedly led the team.

"Demon Hunting Squad. Onward! We'll open the path. The rest shall follow us!" Igor commanded while rushing toward the exit.

He immediately saw a lot of demons waiting in their path. There were even some Spirit Wielders, Spirit Masters and Spirit Grandmasters in the mix. It seemed that the Supreme Devil Organization planned to annihilate them here.

Igor gathered his power in his fist before punching forward. The tremendous energy created a powerful shock wave that blew the demons and people away. However, Peak Level Demons and Spirit Masters in the mix managed to stop the shock wave, allowing the rest to run toward them.

"Ohhhh!"

"Attack!"

"Kill them all!"

The passage was quite spacious. At least five people would be able to fight at the same time. However, their movement would be extremely limited due to the size of the passage.

This time, Igor and two members of the Demon Hunting Squad came at their enemies while the rest provided firepower from behind.

Even Noel only used his Undying Fire to reach the depths of the enemy's ranks.

The situation became extremely chaotic because the area was so small.

Igor used all his strength to push the enemies back. However, most of the people still remained in the big hole area. If this continued, they would be completely surrounded by enemies.

"Kill them!" Igor shouted at the top of his lungs. The Devil Bishops were doing their best to stop him. In addition, the demons kept annoying him, causing his movement to become extremely restricted.

"!!!" All of a sudden, Igor felt tremendous pressure. His instinct was telling him there was an extremely dangerous existence that approached him.

The presence moved extremely fast, to the point where a figure appeared before him out of nowhere.

"Who—" Igor widened his eyes in shock, blocking the guy's punch with both arms. However, the punch was so strong that he felt the bone of his lower right arm crack just from a single attack.

The force and momentum this mysterious guy carried ended up blowing him away. Due to Igor's size, the people behind him ended up getting dragged away.

"Cap—" The people from the Demon Hunting Squad were surprised. But the enemies took that chance to sneak attack them, killing three people from the Demon Hunting Squad.

"Aaaahhhh!"

"Aaaahhhh!"

The situation instantly tipped in the enemy's favor.

Even Noel couldn't understand what was happening. The man who stood in their way seemed to be in his fifties. Even though he looked old, his muscular body still exuded tenacity and fighting intent.

In fact, this guy looked like Igor and Faust, albeit older.

"Hmm? Who is he?" Noel tried to check on the opponent's affection, finding out his name.

Name: Alexander Brighthammer

Affection: Hostile (100/100)

Description: Someone who will definitely kill you if you meet him.

"Alexander Brighthammer?" Noel couldn't help but utter that name. He was completely oblivious to that name.

However, Paul, who stood next to him, gasped and asked out loud, "What did you say? Alexander Brighthammer?"

"Did you know him?" Noel asked with a confused expression.

"I should be the one asking you. You know his name after seeing his appearance..." Paul wanted to comment, but the situation didn't allow him to. He explained the identity of that man. "He is the strongest Devil Saint, who is known to be the strongest man in the world. He is the one who is said to have reached the Spirit Transcendence Stage, just like our commander!"

"!!!" Noel widened his eyes in shock, never expecting to meet someone like him here. But the fact that he appeared here meant the Supreme Devil Organization was seriously going to annihilate them in this place.

"I thought that after that little miss managed to escape, our plans would be a failure. But to think they would still walk into traps... Maybe that little miss had died on the way. Hahahaha!" Alexander smirked and looked at these people before saying, "I will kill the captains and vice captains."

"Yes, Sir!" The Devil Bishops acknowledged the orders and began instructing the Devil Inspector and the demons to march forward. They were going to overwhelm their enemies.

Noel clenched his teeth and began thinking, 'What should we do? I didn't expect someone of this level.'

He realized why Anna didn't want him to go. She must've managed to escape from his grasp. But because she passed out, they ended up walking into this trap.

The fact that Anna could escape meant a lot, but Anna shouldn't be in an enclosed space like this. So, their chance of survival was extremely small, even with all these people. After all, the enemies also brought a lot of people and demons.

'Should we go in the opposite direction? No, it's too far. And the Count and the First Arbiter might end up helping him in the mansion, so we will die. Then, does that mean we can only climb the hole? It's far and only a few people can go up at the same time.'

Noel realized that it was impossible to save everyone. In fact, someone from his team might die because of this blunder.

However, Igor shouted while returning to the front. "The Demon Relief Squad had predicted the trap, but we were too stubborn to stop the mission. All of you are to bring all the people from the Demon Relief Squad and the rest you could bring up. Those who stayed behind would buy time from these people for as long as possible. Tell the headquarters that the Supreme Devil Organization is seriously aiming for our throat!"

Chapter 722 Dimitri

"!!!" Igor's declaration obviously raised a lot of objections. After all, they wanted to bring their own people to escape.

Paul stepped forward and said, "Let me assist you in stopping the enemies. I'm also a Spirit Grandmaster! Jonathan. You should have enough power to bring everyone up, right?"

"Yes, Sir." Jonathan nodded without hesitation. It looked cold, but Jonathan had called Paul with 'Sir' to show his respect. He knew that Paul planned to sacrifice his life for the group.

Paul said, "Stella will take my position. You have to escape as far as you can."

Stella clenched her fists. She obviously wanted to fight as well, but even if she fought here, she would end up dying without any contribution. She would be more useful if she could lead the group to safety.

Noel obviously didn't like this decision. Paul had been accommodating him this whole time. Even in the last defeat, he was the first to forgive him. That was why he didn't want him to die.

"Noo—!" Noel shouted, but Stella suddenly grabbed his hand, and Zion locked his arms so that Noel couldn't resist. "Jonathan!"

Jonathan nodded. He targeted all the people from the Demon Relief Squad and started activating his Telekinesis.

Right before their bodies left the ground, Igor was punched again and blown in their direction. Paul caught him and tried to stop his momentum while saying, "Go!"

"Do you think I'll let you go?" You must be the Demon Relief Squad that little brat Laufey talked about so much. The rest of you have to die, but that little dwarf will have to go back with me!" Alexander jumped toward them, ready to stop them.

Paul was planning to sacrifice his life in order to stop him for a few seconds. But suddenly, a few huge shadow blades fell on top of Alexander.

They were so strong that they managed to force Alexander to stop and use his other arm and entire body to stop it.

"Huh? This power..." Alexander raised his eyes, seeing a familiar figure.

He descended to the ground while striking Alexander with his sword. Alexander blocked the sword with his arm, but the black-colored energy started messing with his body and eventually allowed it to penetrate his impenetrable skin.

"!!!" This attack shocked everyone who witnessed it, including the Demon Relief Squad.

"This level of attack power even though it's still in Spirit Grandmaster Realm... So, it's you." Alexander smirked, looking at this new person. "The man who was known as the Shadow of the Demon Banner Army, the former commander candidate, Dimitri!"

"Dimitri?!" Noel was just about to call them, but he didn't expect Dimitri to appear here on his own accord.

"!!!" Igor and Faust were completely shocked when they heard Dimitri's identity. But the person in question only said, "What are you saying? I'm nothing but the butler of the Ardagan Family."

Dimitri glanced at Noel and said with a smile, "Master. Please go up and leave the rest to me. I'll do my best to minimize the loss, and I can assure you I can come back just fine."

"What are you—" Noel wanted to say something, but Jonathan had begun to use his Telekinesis to climb up.

"Do you think I'll let them get away?!" Alexander jumped toward Noel, trying to drag them down.

"Master. I shall show you the power you need to acquire if you want to stand at the top!" Soon, Dimitri's own shadow engulfed his body. The shadow formed a black suit that covered his entire body, including his head. There were a pair of red eyes that shone behind this black energy. "True Spirit Body, Endless Shadow Body."

In an instant, Dimitri's Spiritual Energy erupted and even shook the entire hall. With a single wave of his hand, multiple shadows emerged from the darkness and extended like a whip, circling around Alexander's body.

"!!!" Alexander widened his eyes, realizing that he couldn't move. He glanced back and saw Dimitri's new form. He couldn't help but laugh. "Another True Spirit Body?! Hahaha, I guess I should expect something like that from a former commander's candidate."

Dimitri suddenly disappeared.

Alexander's eyes flashed as his body began to move. He was exerting so much power that even the entire wall couldn't stop him.

Rumble!

The stones crumbled, and the shadow ended up falling along with the wall. Alexander raised his hand and caught the black blade that came from above.

It was Dimitri. He used all his strength and knocked Alexander back to the ground, not allowing him to chase after Noel.

As soon as he fell to the ground, Igor rushed toward him and tried to punch his face. But surprisingly, Alexander was so agile that his fist also reached Igor's face, even though his body was still unstable.

"A good punch." Alexander smirked as blood flowed out of the corner of his mouth. But his punch hit Igor's face, cracking his jaw and breaking a few teeth.

But before he did further damage, there was a lightning arrow that flew straight to his head.

Alexander used his teeth to catch it before throwing it away.

"!!!" Faust was shocked, never expecting to see his arrow get stopped so easily.

"I see. So, I will be fighting you three." Alexander smirked and shouted to the people, "Chase after those people! Leave the people down here to the demons!"

The people from the Supreme Devil Organization hurriedly broke through their formation and started climbing the hole.

Dimitri clenched his blade tightly as he was about to cut them down. But before he could move, his body shook. He raised his head, seeing Alexander glaring at him.

His instinct was telling him that if he chased after them, Alexander would surely heavily injure him.

"Kh." Dimitri couldn't do anything other than let those people climb into the hole. He could only hope that Damian would stop all of them for Noel. It wasn't that Noel wasn't smart enough to overcome this situation. It was simply that the Supreme Devil Organization had finally launched an all-out attack.

"You guys did a number on us, especially the Plant Lord. So, the organization has decided to pay back the humiliation by sending me here!" Alexander smirked.

As soon as they heard it, they realized that there would soon be a huge war between the Supreme Devil Organization and the Demon Banner Army.

"If that's the case, I would like to experience the strength of the strongest Demon Saint, who is known to have limitless strength." Dimitri's tone became extremely cold.

Chapter 723 Running Away

As soon as Noel and the others reached the surface, they found the rest of the people who were thinking about their next move.

"What should we do?"

"The bridge has been destroyed, right?"

"We have to use the Wind Element Spirit Users to carry us!"

However, Jonathan suddenly shouted, contrasting his gloomy appearance. "Go to the bridge, a bit further away from the one you know. Our Demon Relief Squad has built another bridge for an emergency!"

"!!!" The moment they heard it, they looked at Jonathan for a moment.

Stella took the initiative to rush forward as she had to lead the rest of the group. "Follow me."

These people nodded their heads. Since there was an alternative, they immediately followed her. Ben was carrying Noel on his shoulder, knowing that he would return to the hole if he didn't carry him like this.

Noel could only look at the hole while gritting his teeth.

'What improvement? Have I even improved? No, the result is far worse than the previous defeat. I...'

Noel wanted to keep regretting his choice, but he saw multiple Devil Bishops emerge from the hole. It seemed that they had prepared for this as some of them had the ability to carry people to the surface.

All of a sudden, a huge ice wall was erected, separating the Demon Banner Army and the Supreme Devil Organization. They seemed to have brought several Devil Bishops with them. Without their captains or vice captains stopping them, they wouldn't even last for a few minutes fighting against them.

If they truly chased after them, they would definitely die sooner or later.

That was why this ice wall was like a blessing for them. They wanted to question it, but they had to hasten their pace if they didn't want to die.

Noel gritted his teeth, 'It's impossible for us to fight against multiple Spirit Grandmasters. Even six of us can't win against them... If this continues...'

Even though he was filled with anger and helplessness, Noel knew that if he continued to be like this, he would just put others in danger.

So, he tried his best to calm down before saying, "Ben. Let me down."

"What are you talkin—" Ben didn't allow it, but when Noel actually said, "Please."

The tone was far different from the rash Noel, so Ben ended up releasing him.

Noel continued running with them and said, "There are a lot of Spirit Grandmasters. Our group can't even hold a candle against one of them, so it's better if we remain together."

Stella glanced at Noel while furrowing her eyebrows. "What do you mean? If we split up, some of us will be able to survive, right?"

"I don't mind if other groups split up, but the Demon Relief Squad has to remain together." Noel shook his head as though he had come up with something.

Since she was the one who took the commander of the group, she had to make a decision. After some thought, she said, "Alright. The Demon Relief Squad will remain together."

"Thanks." Noel nodded with a sigh of relief. They had arrived at the second bridge. It seemed that the Count and the Fist Arbiter didn't destroy it. Or they might not be aware of the situation.

There were already a lot of people who crossed the bridge. They also crossed it without hesitation. As long as everyone had crossed the river, they could destroy the bridge.

But when the Demon Relief Squad was about to reach the other side, a few attacks were flying in their direction.

"Incoming!" Ben warned them.

Jonathan clicked his tongue and said, "I'll remain here and stop them for as long as I can. You guys can—"

Jonathan wanted to sacrifice his life to stop the enemies. However, he failed to even complete his words as a lightning strike came from the left, hitting all these attacks.

As a result, all the spirit abilities exploded in the air.

They were shocked and tried to see who it was. Surprisingly, Anna was sitting under the tree, not far away from the bridge. She was waving her hand as though she was saying 'hi' to them.

Noel hurriedly used his Phoenix Wings to come to her. "What are you doing here?"

"Before you say anything else, do you mind carrying me out of here? That ice guy is somewhere around here, so it's better if we leave first."

"..." Noel wanted to say something, but he ended up lifting her body and began carrying her on his back. He then ran with the others.

As soon as they left the mountain, all the people from the Demon Banner Army scattered in all directions. It wasn't that they were deserting the mission. They had to scatter in order to increase the chance of them surviving the onslaught of multiple Spirit Grandmasters.

However, only the Demon Relief Squad remained together.

Obviously, their group became the main target, considering Noel was there and the Supreme Devil Organization could kill a lot of people just by going in one direction.

Three Spirit Grandmasters decided to pursue them with the help of a few Spirit Masters.

Noel saw this from afar. His expression turned grim as this was the first time he ran away just to survive.

Anna, who was on his back, could feel his emotions. Anna said, "You must be angry right now. You must feel disappointed in yourself. If only you were stronger, if only you knew what was going to happen, you would definitely choose something different.

"I know it's not what you want to hear, but you need to hear this. Right now, you are weak; we are extremely weak."

"It seems that you have been beaten by the enemies before this mission. You have become even more careful since the last time we met. And I'm sure that makes it all the more frustrating."

"That's why, are you listening, Noel? Remember this feeling. There will surely be times in your life when you will feel this way again. There will come a time when there won't be anything you can do. Whenever that happens, pay attention and etch it into your mind."

"You now can see that there are walls that you can't overcome with just being careful and extra preparation. When that time comes, what you need is knowledge and strength. This is real life. There is no such thing that everyone can be happy. You have to overcome strife and carnage. Never turn your head away from the sacrifice that you have to pay and get even stronger!"

As she said those words, Damian suddenly appeared behind them, standing between the group and the Supreme Devil Organization. It seemed he was planning to kill all of them here.

Chapter 724 Invitation

Two hours later.

They had reached a forest far away from Creek Village. After reaching this far, the enemies shouldn't be able to track them anymore.

Stella and the others gathered in one place, discussing their next move. They never expected there would be such a huge ambush, especially one involving more than ten Devil Bishops and the strongest Devil Saint.

They had to inform their captain and the headquarters about this as there would soon be a huge war between the two organizations.

Meanwhile, Noel was sitting a bit far away from them. Anna was sitting next to him, and her wounds had been treated again.

Noel sat while raising his knees to cover his face. He took this matter far more seriously. It wasn't that he acted recklessly or anything. The opponents were simply too overwhelming.

When looking at Noel this way, Anna couldn't help but recall her previous life.

'In the previous life, I have never seen Noel this weak. He has always put up such a tough front, irritating me. I have never thought about what Noel has experienced. But looking back, there were a lot of sacrifices in the past too...' Anna's expression mellowed a bit, realizing that Noel was human too. He could lose, he could become weak, and he would overcome it.

Anna couldn't help but lean on Noel's as she rested her head on his shoulder.

Noel was startled, but he didn't move his body away.

"You see... There's something I want to talk about." Anna closed her eyes as a small smile appeared on her face.

But before she said anything, Noel asked, "Before that, do you mind telling me what happened to you?"

"Ah. It's true that most of my injuries were inflicted by that Saint, but I'm this weakened because of something else. Have you heard of this... True Spirit Body?"

"!!!" Noel's body shook.

"It seems you've heard of it, but you don't know much about it."

Instead of her, Damian was the one explaining it to him. He had been hiding this whole time and decided to make his appearance the moment she mentioned the True Spirit Body.

"True Spirit Body, the secret technique that allows you to borrow one hundred percent of the Spirit's power. Its power will be beyond everyone's imagination."

"In exchange for this power, you will feel your connection with the spirit weakened for a while due to the burden of that power. And that's what she is experiencing right now."

"From what I can feel, it seems that Dimitri has used the same thing. Unless that Demon Saint is releasing the same ability, he should be able to bring the captains and vice captains away. After all, it will become a big matter if we know the strongest Demon Saint is weakened. Your commander will spare no effort in annihilating all the enemy bases."

"Nonetheless, the more important thing is that... I don't think there will be someone in the Greenwood Kingdom that can match the genius Anna Stargaze. On top of being a Spirit Master at that age, she can even utilize the True Spirit Body."

"Even in this kingdom, I don't think there are more than ten people who can use this power. So, I will give up convincing someone to marry you. Instead, you should rejoice as there is someone who would use that power for you. If I didn't stop her, she would use that power for the second time and suffer unimaginable consequences." Damian looked at Anna, observing her expression.

It seemed she was slightly embarrassed as she hurriedly corrected him, "You are wrong. I did it because I deemed it necessary to stop the enemies. The Demon Banner Army was the front line for fighting the Supreme Devil Organization after all."

"Well, whatever. I have told you everything I need. I will give you time and space to discuss whatever you want." Damian shrugged as he was about to leave.

However, Anna suddenly stopped him. "Sir, I think you have been following Noel for a certain purpose. Considering you are from another kingdom, I'd like to strike a deal with you."

"Hoh?" Damian furrowed his eyebrows.

"I can't tell you about it right now since the reward hasn't been completed yet. But the moment I come to you, you will surely agree to have a deal with me." Anna smirked.

"I'll be looking forward to it." Damian nodded and left them alone.

Noel looked at Anna in silence. He never thought Anna would do something like that for him. In the past, he hated Anna to the very core. All he wanted was just to kill her.

Even after all that, Anna still supported him like this. He didn't know why, but he felt happy about it.

Noel looked up for a minute before saying, "I have two Spirits; one is an Ice Spirit, and the other is a Sword Spirit. Yes, it's Ardagan. The reason why I can become strong is because Ardagan is a living spirit. He has elevated the level of my Ice Spirit, and you can say that right now, I have two spirits with conversion rates above you. That's why I can catch up to you."

Noel only told a part of the truth about Ardagan. He hadn't told her about the deepest secret that Ardagan held, which was the system.

Anna opened her mouth, surprised. She thought and said, "My clairvoyance is not impotent. What I can see is..." Anna paused for a moment. "...the scene of my other life. In that life, I couldn't even describe how bad I was. And you were the one who changed my life. Despite all the hatred you held for me, you didn't stop."

She changed her previous life to an alternate world.

"In the end, we both died in front of each other. When I saw such a thing, I couldn't help but feel the need to change. I thought, if I ended up dying because I kept fighting you, what if I changed myself and became your ally? When I thought about it, I felt like there was a new world opened to me. I felt like I could grasp anything with you."

"That's why I did all this. Noel... Since you told me your secret first, it meant I won, right?" Anna chuckled. "In that case, do you want to go somewhere with me? Just both of us. It's going to be dangerous, but I believe we can overcome the challenge. If we succeed, we will be able to gain enough strength to change our current situation."

Chapter 725 Handling The Problem

"What? Our force was defeated? What was the casualty?" Oscar slammed the table while shouting in anger.

Milfa remained calm, but her expression was dark. She was also disturbed by the news she reported to Oscar.

Milfa took a deep breath before explaining the situation. "Captain Igor has lost his entire right arm. Captain Faust was covered in injuries, and right now, he is in a coma. We don't know when he will wake up. Vice Captain Eizen has passed away, while Vice Captain Paul's condition is similar to Captain Faust's. It seems that he is protected by the others, so he should wake up in a few days."

Oscar gritted his teeth. This was the first time they had received this level of casualty. If he didn't contain himself, his Spiritual Energy would have cracked the entire room and destroyed the windows. He asked, "What happened that day?"

"According to our report, all captains and vice captains were supposed to die back then. However, they received help from the one who was known as Shadow from our Demon Banner Army."

"Shadow? Dimitri?!"

"Yes." Milfa nodded. "He had helped them stop the Demon Saint."

"Where is Dimitri?"

"He has returned to his Master's side. And even if we call him here, he wouldn't be able to help us anymore. After all, he has left the Demon Banner Army. And currently, the link that connects him with the spirit is weakened."

"Weakened? You mean..."

"Yeah. The ultimate power of the Spirit, the True Spirit Body." Milfa nodded without hesitation.

"I see." Oscar covered his face with both hands, wondering what he should do. "It seems that the Supreme Devil Organization has run out of patience. Did we get any proof about their connection with the First Arbiter?"

"Not yet. Should we send Septa to lead the investigation?"

"No. The Supreme Devil Organization is hunting us. So, it won't be wise to do that." Oscar looked down, falling into deep thought.

Milfa was staring at him, a bit dissatisfied with the passive reaction. She couldn't help but ask, "Are you sure you will let them do all this without suffering any consequences?"

However, the answer came in the form of a gaze. The gaze was filled with anger and killing intent. The commander was telling her that wasn't the case.

"Our captains are strong. However, it will be different if the Demon Saints have begun to move. If we send our captains carelessly, the Supreme Devil Organization is going to hunt them down one by one, weakening our power.

"For now, tell the Royal Family about this situation. They will surely send a few people to help us deal with the enemies. As for the Tower Association... they have been away for so long, but it doesn't change

the fact that the Plant Lord's death is the trigger of this ambush. We'll be involving them too, so you should think of a way to make them pay for this!"

"Understood." Milfa nodded with a serious expression. It seemed that she was ready to make the Tower Association a run for their money. Though, the main problem remained. "What should we do about our current situation?"

"There are a total of fifteen Squads in our Demon Banner Army. Since the enemies are targeting us, I want them to always move in a group of three. There should be at least one top 5 squad every time they move. It will be better if there are two of them.

"If they don't have any major movement, then they are to remain in their position. I'm afraid that you won't have a lot of time to play from the sidelines anymore, Milfa."

Milfa sighed. "Should I join hands with Captain Septa to investigate the entire Demon Banner Army? The Arbiters and the Elders from the two influences have been corrupted by them, so there is a chance that they have infiltrated us as well."

"Yeah. Septa is good at investigating things like this, but he is a bit too weak to face this situation. I want you to accompany him. Septa is a great asset to us, so we can't let him die. If something goes wrong, then immediately pull back."

"Got it." Milfa thought for a moment before asking, "What about Noel and the Demon Relief Squad?"

Milfa mentioned him because of Dimitri and the hidden expert from the Greenwood Kingdom.

The commander shook his head. "We will leave him be for the time being as long as he doesn't harm the Demon Banner Army. As for the squad, Clara should be able to take care of it."

"But Noel is currently being targeted by the Supreme Devil Organization."

"I know. And you're probably thinking about the people connected to him as well, since the organization can kidnap them and force Noel to do something against his will. That's why we'll monitor the people he

is close with, especially the kids. I know it's ruthless for me to say it, but we don't have enough manpower to help them. So, if they are being kidnapped to be used against Noel, kill them! We'll tell him that they died because of the organization. If he does find out, then I will shoulder the responsibility."

Milfa fell silent. Oscar's decision was indeed cold and ruthless. But if they took a look at the situation objectively, his decision was the correct one since it would cause the least damage to the Demon Banner Army.

"Right now, the ones who have the True Spirit Body are you, Shale, and me. Well, we can't count Dimitri now. In any case, the three of us are the foundation of the Demon Banner Army, so I hope nothing happens to us."

"Us, huh? I haven't asked you, commander. What are you planning to do?"

"What am I planning to do?" Oscar gritted his teeth as his killing intent began to fill the entire room. "Of course, I'm going to kill them. I will destroy a few bases."

"But this plan might be there to lure you away. Are you sure about this?"

"I'm aware that it might be a trap. But don't worry. I'm not planning to go alone." Oscar paused for a moment. "Don't worry. I have a plan for this."

"Understood."

Chapter 726 Connected?

"You are allowed to rest and remain inside the base for six months. That's all. You're dismissed." Clara waved her hand, telling the Zero Squad to leave. Even she didn't expect this kind of attack. She was concerned about Paul's condition. In fact, if she were in the operation, the Vice Captain of the Demon Beholder Squad wouldn't die, and Captain Igor would still have two arms.

Noel and the others politely nodded and returned to their cabins. Their expressions were dark. This defeat was not because of Noel or whatever. They were simply not strong enough to handle the enemies. In fact, without Damian's help, they would've been wiped out when three Spirit Grandmasters chased after them.

Noel was walking back to his room with his head hanging low. He also kept checking the mission.

[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.]

Noel couldn't help but shut his eyes. This might be the first time he had failed a mission. He failed to assist Anna in her advancement mission. In fact, this setback might cause her to fail to become an Arbiter within the allocated time.

However, he finished a different mission.

[Mission: Anna's Secret]

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

[Reward: Anna's Secret and Hermit's Location.]

[Penalty: None.]

'Hermit's location?' This completely perplexed Noel, making him wonder what kind of hermit he was. The location was also deep outside the border. There was a high chance that they would die the moment they chose to come. So, he didn't know why they would go to this place.

Noel furrowed his eyebrows while going back. He also had to consider everything, especially the defeat. He never thought that the Supreme Devil Organization would do something like this.

But when he returned to his room, he saw Anna eating noodles. She crossed her legs, not showing anything that reflected her status as a noble. Though, it seemed that she still finished everything in her mouth first and put down the fork before waving to Noel. "It seems you're done."

Anna came with them for a lot of reasons. She was injured heavily and had done a lot of things for them. So, Noel brought her to the city so that Clara could take care of her. It seemed that most of her injuries had gone, thanks to Clara.

More importantly, Noel was still considering what Anna wanted to do. He still remembered the time when Anna asked him out.

"Do you want to go somewhere with me? Just both of us. It's going to be dangerous, but I believe we can overcome the challenge. If we succeed, we will be able to gain enough strength to change our current situation."

Noel thought for a moment and said, "Yeah. I'm done. I have been thinking about this, but I think it's better to understand what kind of journey you're planning to have first."

Anna nodded without hesitation. "Well, I'm planning to leave the border."

"Huh? Why?"

"To find the Sword Saint's disciple."

"..." Noel was completely speechless. There were a lot of things he wanted to say, but her expression was telling him that she was serious.

"Is it related to what happened in that other life?"

"Yeah." Anna pointed at him. "In fact, he was related to you. I don't really know the details, but I fought you at that time and I somehow managed to push you back for once. The battle was near the border and you somehow disappeared from the world for a year before reappearing before me."

"I didn't know what happened, but back then, you brought back a man to help you. That person was using a Sword and the way he moved was similar to yours. I'm sure he is not your disciple, so he must be Sword Saint's disciple."

"I mean, I can kind of understand it. But why do you want us to leave the border to find him? Yeah, you said it's going to be a dangerous trip. Leaving the border alone is already extremely dangerous. But I still haven't found any reason why we have to find him right now." Noel furrowed his eyebrows, thinking this was a bad idea.

"No, there is a good reason for this. Actually, that kid is not a human!"

"Huh?" Noel widened his eyes in shock. "Not a human?"

Anna nodded. "That kid is from the legend... the race that is said to be inferior to humans because their blood is mixed with animals in order to create a stronger species."

"Wait. Don't tell me, you're planning..."

"Yeah. I'm planning to visit the kingdom that hosts them. It's far from us, so the trip will take a long time and it'll be extremely dangerous. However, there is something special about them."

"Their races are utilizing their Spirit Power in a different way!" Anna lifted up her shirt a little bit, exposing the Spirit Seal on her waist. "Look at this. I try to replicate the way they use their power."

Suddenly, a few lines emerged from the Spirit Seal like that of tree roots.

"Every time they use their power, the Spirit Seal will look like this. And in that instant, they will receive a surge of strength. I never saw you using something like this, but I had seen you doing something similar. So, I believe this trip is necessary if we want to gain a huge boost in our strength."

"Wait a minute!" Noel suddenly thought of something. "When did I receive him?"

"When you were a Spirit Master."

"Then, their kingdom is located..."

"Northeast to our kingdom. Though, I don't know the exact location since a lot of information has been lost."

"Mhm..." Noel made an awkward smile. "I think I didn't visit their kingdom. Instead..."

Noel brought a map from the shelf and opened it, pointing at the Hermit's location. "I might go to this place and meet someone from their kingdom."

Chapter 727 Agreement

"Master. I don't think this is a good idea." Dimitri furrowed his eyebrows. He had listened to Noel and Anna about their plan to meet the hermit.

The plan was still very basic, considering they didn't know much about the situation. But after looking at it, the risk was simply too great.

Even Damian joined the discussion, considering he had to follow Noel for a while.

After considering a lot of things, Damian expressed his concern. "This is a reckless plan. First of all, you don't know much about everything outside the border. Of course, as a part of the Zero Squad, you should have gotten enough experience outside, but your mission doesn't stray too far from the border."

"Meanwhile, this time, you're planning to cross various unknown terrains to reach this place. I can't really accept this plan, fully knowing the risk." Damian shook his head helplessly.

"Yes, Master. I agree with him. This is extremely risky." Dimitri sighed as though he had a bad memory about it. "When you ventured into that area, there would be a lot of extremely powerful demons. Without supplies or manpower, you wouldn't last long."

Noel nodded in understanding while Anna raised her hand. "To be honest, we don't need supply. We can get something to eat by hunting the demons. If you're worried about water, Noel can purify water. I'm also an expert in hiding and locating the enemies thanks to my Spirit, so I can find a perfect place to hide during the night."

"Alright. We can consider it done, but what about the manpower? You wouldn't last long if you fought a lot of demons continuously."

Noel thought for a moment and asked, "What if you followed us, Dimitri?"

"I, of course, will follow you if that's your decision. However, you have to be aware of how reckless you are!" Dimitri clenched his teeth. "You have been targeted by the Supreme Devil Organization, so—"

Before Dimitri finished, Noel interjected him. "That's exactly the reason, Dimitri. The Supreme Devil Organization is currently targeting us. The Demon Banner Army is trying to match their movements and make a counterattack."

"This is the perfect opportunity for us to cross the border and leave the kingdom. Since they are going to target us, if we can't improve our strength drastically, we'll die sooner or later. I can't really rely on you all the time. Since we have a small group, we can kill and absorb a lot of demons, allowing us to raise our Spiritual Energy Reserve. And fighting in the frontline like this will hone our skills, consolidating our foundation."

"I am aware that it looks reckless. However, if I am not reckless, I'm afraid that I won't be able to do anything." Noel sighed. His face was filled with disappointment. He must be thinking about the recent failure where he couldn't even do anything.

Dimitri glared at Anna and said, "You must be the one poisoning my master's mind. How are you going to bear the responsibility?"

Anna was aware of his worries. But she didn't plan to back down. Noel once managed to overcome the journey and become stronger when he was only a Spirit Master. And with her helping him, they should be able to reach that place.

Hence, Anna declared with a serious expression. "If anything were to happen to Noel, I would follow him to the underworld. You can even kill me in the most brutal way possible."

"..." Dimitri was startled, never expecting this kind of determination to come from Anna. It seemed that no matter what he said, they weren't planning to back down.

Noel thought for a moment and asked Damian. "Do you think it's possible for you to follow us?"

"No, you should be asking whether it's possible for me not to stop you from going on this reckless trip!" Damian coldly stared at Noel. Noel was the source of the runes, so obviously, he wanted him alive. He wanted him to keep getting stronger and give him more information about it.

Noel took a deep breath and added, "Does that include the fact that this trip can actually teach me about the new way to utilize the runes?"

"Hmm?" Damian furrowed his eyebrows. "What do you mean?"

"This trip is a bit special. If I succeed, it can become the foundation of a new type of rune. If you were to help us, I would definitely share it with you."

"..." Damian suddenly fell silent when Noel mentioned the new type of rune. If it was only a new rune, he would surely reject it. But a new type meant an entire category. There would be a huge potential for a new type like the Rune Engineering and Rune Spell.

Still, this was extremely risky. No one in their sane mind would agree to such a trip, considering even a Spirit Grandmaster like him might die if he wasn't careful.

"Of course, I will add ten more runes as a down payment. If you still think the trip is too dangerous, you can quit halfway. With your strength, it shouldn't be that hard to go back and return to your kingdom, right? You have taken the concept of Rune Engineering and a few runes from the Rune Spell as well. So, the choice is yours."

Damian furrowed his eyebrows. This was a hard matter. If he left and somehow died, it would be a great blow to the Greenwood Kingdom. If he didn't follow Noel and he somehow succeeded, he would lose a huge opportunity.

Damian thought for a moment and said, "This is not a matter where I can decide by myself. Even my kingdom carries a risk when I die. Hence, I have to inform the royal family about this first. If possible, I would like you to wait for two weeks."

"That's impossible." Noel shook his head. "We'll be leaving in one week. How about this, meet us outside the border between the two countries. If you haven't appeared for three days after the promised time, we'll consider you not joining us."

Damian considered the plans and agreement for a bit before nodding his head. "Alright. We have a deal. Even if I don't join you, I'll surely come to inform you about it. We have to set a location to meet, though."

"Yeah. That's what we're going to do."

Chapter 728 Warning

After reaching an agreement, Damian finally left. He rushed back to the Greenwood Kingdom to discuss this matter with his king.

Meanwhile, Dimitri looked at Noel and raised a finger. "Master. It doesn't seem that you're planning to back down from this. So, I'm thinking about bringing another person."

"Who is it? Rose?" Noel tilted his head in confusion.

Anna glanced at them. She might have told Noel about the plan and given some suggestions, but Noel and Dimitri were far more useful compared to her. In other words, Anna didn't have any real contribution once they went on a trip.

So, Anna opened her mouth, asking, "Is the person you are planning to recruit a scout?"

"Yeah." Dimitri nodded. "This mission carries a lot of risks, especially from the demons. So, it's better to have a good scout in order to avoid a lot of problems."

Anna asked, "In that case, can you leave it to me? I can use my connection to recruit a person for us. This person has a Spirit that can heal with Light Element and she is also good at scouting."

"Hmm? That person..." He furrowed his eyebrows. "You're not planning to invite that person, right?"

"Yeah." Anna nodded. "Don't you think she is perfect for this trip? Besides, I will be the only woman on this trip. So, it's better to have another one."

"Who is that person?" Noel asked, not knowing who they were talking about.

Dimitri pointed at Anna and said, "She is related to her father. In fact, that person is Marquis Stargaze's disciple. She is known as Healer Maniac. She is good at fighting, healing, and scouting. Her name is Nicole. If I remember correctly, she has become a Spirit Grandmaster and become one of the highest-ranked inquisitors."

"Yes. Your information is correct. My father had told me I could rely on her when I became an inquisitor, but I never talked to her previously. This time, it seems that I have to rely on my father's connection to ask this ridiculous request. That's the least I can do so that I don't look like I'm leeching off you. Besides, having a scout and a healer is good for this party."

Noel thought for a moment. "In that case, doesn't that mean we'll have three Spirit Grandmasters with us?"

"You're so sure that Damian will go with us, huh?" Anna chuckled. "Well, you're not wrong. Although a big group will carry a risk of being spotted, we're a group of elites. So, the risk is reduced exponentially."

"As for both of us, who are only a Spirit Master, I think it'll be a good experience for us." Anna pointed at herself. "I mean, I can at least learn from these people."

Noel looked down. "Well, I don't really have a problem about having three Spirit Grandmasters with us. But I prefer to be on the frontline instead of being protected the whole time. This is a far better option to stimulate my growth."

Noel remembered a few missions from the system and added inwardly, 'Well, I want to finish some of them.'

When he thought about the mission, he received another mission from Ardagan.

[Mission: Meeting the Hermit]

[Description: Meeting the Hermit and finding a way to learn from him.]

[Reward: Fighter Medal and three random runes of Rune Body.]

[Penalty: ???]

Noel furrowed his eyebrows. He could see the penalty being hidden. If there was no penalty, he would be sure that he wouldn't die. But with the '???' becoming the penalty, there was no telling anymore. Even Ardagan didn't know what kind of fate I would receive if he ever failed this mission.

Dimitri, on the other hand, thought that frown was for something else. Dimitri couldn't help but ask, "I'm not sure about this, but if possible, I want you to be honest with me. Is this hermit... someone not from our kingdom, no... I don't think the other kingdoms have this kind of hermit. In that case..."

Noel glanced at Anna, who nodded her head.

"Yes. The hermit is not a human." Anna confirmed it without hesitation.

"..." Dimitri was completely stunned, not knowing what to say. There were rarely any records of meeting another race besides humans. So, Dimitri didn't know whether they were hostiles or not.

However, there was some history about those races' creation. So, Dimitri asked, "Are you sure they won't be hostile to us?"

Anna shook her head helplessly. "I'm not sure about it yet. But this person is not related to their kingdom as well. I mean, his location is still too far from their kingdom. So, I think he is more rational with humans."

"Do you know about his strength?" Dimitri asked.

Anna shook her head. "All I know is that this person is strong. I don't have any details about that person's strength."

Only the previous life Noel would know the details. However, Anna knew that Noel wouldn't have learned from them if the other party was not strong. He even brought the Sword Saint's successor back with him even though he wasn't a human.

So, she concluded that this hermit was extremely strong.

After a while, Dimitri let out a long sigh and said, "Since you've made your decision, I'll follow you even if it means risking my life. However, you should remember that I'm ready to sacrifice my life anytime. If you're doing something reckless, you can consider me dead."

This was a threat and a warning from Dimitri. He wanted to let Noel know that if this reckless decision endangered his life, Dimitri would be the one to help him, even if it meant exchanging Noel's life for his. In other words, Noel might kill Dimitri because of this decision.

Then, Dimitri turned to Anna and said, "I have to tell you this. If I have to choose whether I should save my master or you, I won't hesitate to save him even if he asks me otherwise."

Anna nodded without hesitation. "Don't worry. I'm aware of it. I'm prepared to die as well."

Chapter 729 Decision

"What do you think?" Damian's voice echoed in the grand hall.

He was kneeling on one knee, facing the middle-aged man who sat on the throne. He was none other than the Greenwood Kingdom's king, Theodore El Greenwood.

Because this matter was extremely important and related to Noel, Raincart was also summoned to the palace.

Theodore looked down for a moment before glancing to the side, finding Raincart looking away. His face was a bit distorted, not because he was concerned about Noel's situation but because he found this plan amusing.

"What do you think, Raincart? You don't have to hold back your laughter," he said while shaking his head helplessly.

"Are you sure about it? Well..." Raincart let out a loud laugh as if he had gone insane. There was no way Raincart would be happy to see his grandson send himself to his own grave. However, Raincart added, "That plan is so ridiculous that I actually support it."

Theodore and Damian raised their eyebrows, not expecting this kind of answer.

"Apologize for interrupting." Damian furrowed his eyebrows. "But this is an extremely reckless plan. There is a high chance that we will die."

"Yeah, I know." Raincart nodded with a serious expression. "However, if you take another look at it, they've become desperate to think that this path is the only way to go forward."

"Desperate? They have been cornered so much by the Supreme Devil Organization that they have to do it if they want to survive. Is that what you mean?" Theodore asked while stroking his chin as though he were still thinking about it.

"Exactly. If you look at it optimistically, you can see at least four benefits. First of all, the trip will be dangerous, but the reward is so great that they won't be cornered anymore. If we can go with them and somehow succeed, that one thing might be worth a single expedition or even more."

"Secondly, you can actually get more runes from him, including the new type of rune. As much as I don't like to see you extorting my grandson, he is the one offering it. So, it's better to accept it."

"As for the third benefit, they said nothing about the hermit, right? But I don't think there is anyone in the Greenwood Kingdom or the Muivell Kingdom that could be considered one. And if that hermit was that strong, then I'm afraid the identity of that hermit is far more special."

"Hmm?" Theodore picked up the hidden message from his statement as he couldn't help but interject, "Special and not from the kingdoms... Are you telling me..."

"Yeah, Your Majesty. I believe that this hermit comes from a distant kingdom, which is said to be ruled by non-humans. I can't say much about the details, especially how they can find this information, but making a connection with such a person will be extremely beneficial for us."

"I mean, according to the legend, their kingdom is within the area of future expansion of this kingdom. By making an early connection, we have the chance to learn about their territory. Who knows, we might be able to establish a trade with them before our expansion reaches their place."

Theodore couldn't rule out such a thing as it was truly extremely beneficial for them. It might be something that his descendants would reap, but it would surely pave the way for their kingdom.

Theodore asked, "What about the last benefit?"

"Currently, Damian is in a close relationship with Noel. By accepting this request, that bond will become stronger. Even if he doesn't become our ally, I'm sure that he won't be our enemy thanks to the bond with Damian. And on this trip, Damian will be able to learn about his growth."

"I mean, they are planning to get stronger rapidly, right? Although Damian has begun teaching Noel, he hasn't seen a lot of results. And since the progress is a secret due to the nature of the ability, it's better if we set another test on this trip to figure out his potential."

Theodore could understand what Raincart was thinking. On the one hand, he seemed to be trying to exploit his grandson. On the other hand, everything he said showed his full support for his grandson. In fact, he was trying to make Damian join so that Noel's safety would increase tremendously.

Even though he didn't look like it during the conversation, Raincart was extremely protective of his grandson. He just couldn't do it on the court.

Theodore looked at Damian, asking, "How about you, Damian? This is an extremely risky mission. So, I want to hear whether you want to do it or not. There is no need to say you will accept my decision or something. I want to hear your thoughts."

Damian didn't answer immediately. He made sure he worded his answer correctly.

"If I speak clearly, then this mission is extremely risky. I don't really want to do it. The risk is simply that big. However, I can't deny that the benefits are extremely tempting. It feels like my patriotism is getting fired up."

Theodore smirked. "Alright. I have received your thoughts."

He rose from his throne and declared, "Damian, as the king of the Greenwood Kingdom, I order you to accept the agreement and help Noel reach his desired place. Do anything necessary to get the most benefit while avoiding unnecessary problems in the future."

"If you can complete this mission and bring back all the rewards to the kingdom, depending on your contribution, you might be able to become a Marquis. And I'll surely reward you properly."

"Ha!" Damian lowered his head. "I shall accept this mission for the prosperity of the Greenwood Kingdom."

The king walked to Damian and patted his shoulder two times, saying in a gentle tone. "This is going to be extremely dangerous. Make sure you return to this place alive, understand?"

Damian smiled. "Yes, Your Majesty."

Theodore glanced at Raincart and said, "You are not going to get angry if Damian returns after deeming the mission unsuccessful, right? We can't hurt national stability."

"Hmph." Raincart harrumphed and looked away. On the one hand, he didn't like that idea since he wanted his grandson to be safe. On the other hand, it didn't change the fact that Noel suggested a reckless plan. So, he didn't say anything.

Damian politely bowed to them before leaving the room.

Chapter 730 Nicole

"So, we are meeting them here." Anna looked around. They were in the middle of a grass field. She had a hard time looking around because the grass was tall.

Though, they were surrounded by a small hill. It wouldn't be hard for Damian to find them if he ever reached this place. They had even set up a tent and a campfire to give the signal.

"Yeah. We have to prepare as well. Because of the danger that awaits us, we can't bring any horses, so we have to go on foot. It will increase the travel time drastically."

"Since we only have less than six months, we are going to take one and a half months for the trip alone and use the rest to discuss everything with the hermit. Is that alright?" Noel asked, confirming their schedule.

"Yes." Anna nodded without hesitation. Dimitri remained by their side openly. Considering this was a mission in which Dimitri would be directly involved, he didn't hide himself when it wasn't needed.

"Still, we've been waiting for one day. I wonder if they are going to come..." Anna sighed. 'They' in her mouth were Damian and her father's disciple. She added, "Who would come first?"

Anna's doubts were answered a few hours later.

When they had just finished their lunch, they felt a presence coming toward them. It moved fast to the point where the trio were being alerted.

However, Anna soon smiled and said, "To think you would arrive first!"

"Oh! I rushed to this place as soon as I saw your message. What are you thinking, making me cover a trip that was supposed to last for two weeks in just one week? I had to use my power to reach this place." A female's voice echoed from behind the grass.

Noel and Dimitri lowered their weapons when Anna recognized her.

They stared at her figure. Dimitri had known about her, but he never saw her.

The woman had long, flowing brown hair resting on her back. Her attire was a reflection of her roles as a scout and a healer. She wore a flowing robe made of fabric to make it easy to move.

Around her waist, she wore a belt with small pouches containing a few medicines that would help her heal the injured.

Her temperament was gentle, yet energetic and easygoing. She raised her hand on top of her head as though she were greeting them.

"Hello, my name is Nicole. It's a pleasure to meet you. I am Marquis Stargaze's disciple. You can consider me Anna's elder sister as well, since we have been together a lot in the past. No need for formality or

anything since I'm not good at it." Nicole introduced herself while extending her hand to Noel and Dimitri.

Both of them shook her hand in succession. It seemed that Nicole was already aware of Dimitri's presence since she wasn't shocked by the power within him.

Anna looked at Nicole and said, "I'm sorry for calling you here. I've told you everything, so if you think it's too dangerous, you can back away."

"To be fair, I came here so that I could drag you back. Your father will surely not like it, you know." Nicole scratched the back of her head. "Well, even if I planned to do so, I wouldn't be able to do it as long as this gentleman is here."

Dimitri looked away. Since Anna was the one suggesting this idea, she had to take part in it. After all, she had to be responsible for influencing Noel with her idea.

"So, only four of us will be going this time?" Nicole asked.

"Not yet. There is supposed to be the fifth one, if he actually agreed." Anna sighed. "Sorry that I involved you in this."

"No. It's fine to be honest. Since you've told me about it, I can help you directly avoid most dangers. I will probably get slapped a few times if Master learns about this, so I hope that you can help me with that." Nicole winked playfully.

Even Anna shook her head helplessly. She knew that Nicole was always this playful, but it also made her feel bad for involving her.

"Besides..." As a scout, she could see the slight change in Anna's expression. So, she added, "...If I join you, I can witness your personal growth. Anna, you've been too extreme in the past and a bit cold. I've heard from Master that you have changed for the better, so I can't help but want to see you."

"In fact, I've been waiting for you to come to me so that I can watch your change. I guess you never need my help. Anyway, I'm just glad that you invited me."

Anna couldn't help but smile. There was an 'elder sister' that cared about her the whole time, but because of the brainwashing, she never cared about it in her previous life.

But before she could say anything, Nicole had already turned around and examined Noel.

"Ehm? What?" Noel felt a bit uncomfortable with her stare, especially with how she moved closer and looked upside down.

"No. I'm wondering what kind of man can change Anna and even make her put her life on the line. I see, so it's you. Well, I don't know who you are, but I don't think you are that bad. So, are you planning to marry her?"

"Huh?" Noel's eyebrows twitched. "We're not that close, to begin with. We are..."

Noel tilted his head in confusion, asking Anna. "What are we? Are we friends, accomplices, or what? I feel like we're as close as best friends but as distant as accomplices."

"I don't know." Anna shrugged her shoulders, looking a bit annoyed.

Nicole had a weird grin, as if she had found their interaction amusing. But she soon took a step back and turned around, saying, "Well, whatever. It seems that the fifth person is coming."

"!!!" Dimitri slightly furrowed his eyebrows as he hadn't even felt Damian's presence. To think she could sense Dimitri from that far, it seemed that she was the real deal.