

S vs Rebirth 81

Chapter 81 Rewards

"Yeah, yeah. We only have thirty minutes, so I'd rather get what I need first before looking around." Noel shrugged and walked to the shelves where they stored Ancient Books.

"Well..." Anna had an awkward smile but still stopped looking around and followed him to the book section.

"Hmm..." Anna narrowed her eyes while saying, "The Ancient Books are for those who have high conversion rate since most people are like that in the past... So, the intensity and power are different. Even so, the Ancient Books are divided into a few ranks as well.

"They are Beginner, Intermediate and Advanced Level. What kind of books are you planning to get? The Advanced Level Books?" Anna asked.

"Do you even need to ask?" Noel sighed, feeling a bit annoyed that there was a need for her to ask this question. He thought Anna had been underestimating his intelligence.

"If you get the Adv—"

"It's obviously Beginner Book." Noel shook his head helplessly while pinching the bridge of his nose. "Do you think I'm a fool? I know that my current level is not enough to use those powerful stuff. I should choose something that suits me. There is still a chance to exchange for something better later."

"Oh..." Anna scratched the back of her head, feeling embarrassed. However, this was the perfect time she tested it. She opened her mouth and spoke in a low voice. "I'm sorry..."

There was no response from Noel as the latter ignored her and started searching for the books.

"..." Anna was speechless and ended up sighing. Ultimately, she looked around to find a book that suited her too.

After ten minutes, Anna had picked her two Ancient Techniques.

'Lightning Z-Bird Step.'

'Four Points Circulation.'

Noel still had a hard time picking on his second book. Seeing his struggle, Anna thought she could give some advice to him. "Are you still searching for one?"

Noel tilted his head in confusion and took a glimpse of the title of the two techniques.

Noticing his gaze, Anna smiled and showed the two techniques to him. "Ah, I got these two. Well, the one who knew about the appearance of the Ancient Demon Tree was you, so I wanted to share this Four Points Circulation Technique with you."

'In the past, Noel could kill the Ancient Demon Tree by himself. So, he would have done the job without my appearance here. If he wanted to, he could leave me behind by hiding the truth about the tree's emergence. In other words, I've taken something from Noel's future and got benefited by it.

'I've decided to change, so I don't want to monopolize everything. If we share this technique, it means I get 1.5 books while he gets 2.5 of books,' thought Anna, planning to fix all her mistakes.

However, Noel misunderstood her intention once again. After all, he had no memory about his past life.

He looked at Anna with a weird expression and thought, 'What is she doing right now... Is she planning to make me feel indebted to her again by sharing this technique?'

The scene of her apologizing couldn't help but flash in his mind.

'As expected, she's changed somehow. It seems that this is her trick right now. She's planning to make me owe her to humiliate me even further for feeling indebted to the enemies that killed my parents. No, I won't let her do so.' Noel gritted his teeth.

He hurriedly returned the book he had earlier and grabbed two books that he had seen earlier.

'Bouncing Spiritual Slash.'

'Spirit Aura Breathing.'

He then showed the Spirit Aura Breathing to her and said, "If you try to share it with me, then I'll share one book with you too."

"Noel..." Anna widened her eyes, feeling moved. Noel's action looked like a proof to her realization earlier. She thought, 'That's right. If you're not sincere to others, others won't do the same to you. That's why I'll be sincere to him. In the future, I hope that we can become a good friend.'

Unbeknownst to her, that thought was completely her own misunderstanding.

Noel simply didn't want to feel indebted to her due to his character. There was no other meaning behind it.

"That's right. Let's share then. Together, we can be even stronger." Anna made a big smile.

Even Noel didn't expect this smile from her. It somehow felt different from her usual smile, but he didn't understand it.

So, he ignored it and said, "Now that we've chosen the books, we still have some time to explore this place..."

"Ah, right! Let's go around." Anna nodded furiously. She even took the initiative to be his guide, introducing the items in this treasury.

While they were looking around, she asked, "By the way, what are we going to do after this?"

"I am planning to train for the rest of the month. After that, I'm going for a journey."

"For Individual Mission?" Anna tilted her head, thinking Noel was a bit too rushed.

"Yeah. We shouldn't go too far... At least a month worth of trip before meeting at a certain location to do a Group Mission." Noel sighed. "I need to match the timing for the promise with you... 8 months from now, huh."

"Ah!" It turned out Noel was calculating the promise as well. It was her who hadn't put that much thought into the planning. In the end, she decided to trust Noel and follow his schedule together. "I see. Let's do that then. I'll match your schedule."

"Match my schedule?" Noel looked at her with a weird face. "I don't need your compassion."

"No, no." Anna waved her hand while chuckling. "Let's just say that I'm dumber than you. Since you've put that much thought into the planning, it's better to cooperate."

"So, you're dumber."

"Is there a need to emphasize that?"

"Yeah. Absolutely. If only other people can hear that too, that would be perfect." Noel admitted without hesitation.

"..." Anna had the urge to hit him, but refrained herself. "Well, whatever. Just tell me about your plan and we'll match it, alright?"

"Well, since you're dumber, then we can do it."

Anna's eyebrows twitched.. She even took a deep breath to calm herself and said, "Anyway, let's go back."

Noel also thought this was the time for them to go back.

As if expecting their return, the soldiers opened the gate again.

"Well, it seems that you've got what you want..." Oscar was a bit speechless when he saw both of them bringing two Ancient Techniques at the same time. It was clear that someone influenced the other to take it. However, he didn't want to talk about it right now.

"Alright. Since you've got your rewards, you can go back."

"Yes. Thank you, Commander." Both Anna and Noel bowed their heads politely.

Before they left, Oscar grabbed Noel's shoulder and said, "You need to follow me after this."

Noel was confused for a second before remembering the extra rewards for his second identity. He agreed without hesitation. "I understand."

Chapter 82 Second Identity

"Take this mask and identity token." Oscar handed him a masquerade and the same token as the one he possessed right now.

Noel received the items, but he had a big question in his head. "Won't this only cover a part of my head? It'll be easy for the others to find out my identity."

"No. This is a al mask. It can also dye your hair and eyes to a different color. As long as you don't take off this mask, it will stay that way. With those two in different colors, do you think there is still anyone who will recognize you after covering a part of your face with that masquerade?"

Noel imagined himself having a different hair color and understood his concern. "I see. As long as the mask is not taken off, I'll be fine."

"Yes. Though, there's no telling what will happen in a battle. Just be careful that the mask doesn't fall off."

"I understand." Noel nodded and inspected the token this time.

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"So, my name is ladre?"

"Yes. That's your new name. So, here is the plan. Every individual mission from now will be completed with your second identity. As for the group mission, you'll continue as Noel Ardagan.

"At first, I wanted you to do something big before giving "Noel Ardagan" a deadly mission, so that we could show that you've died. But it'll be hard to hide your identity due to your current achievement, considering you hunt together with Anna Stargaze and has been discovered by some soldiers.

"Hence, we'll build up your second reputation over the year before I send you to a deadly mission after graduation. And that's when Noel Ardagan loses his life. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Sir." Noel agreed without hesitation. After Noel Ardagan died, he could go anywhere he wanted and even begin his investigation about his household.

For now, he should endure the inconvenience first.

"Although I already know the answer, do you mind if I ask..." Noel paused while looking down, hesitant to talk about it.

"What is it?" Oscar furrowed his eyebrows.

"Do you think you can investigate my family?"

The commander saw his expression and sighed. "Unfortunately no. Although I am the supporter of the Third Prince, I need to stay neutral for most of the time. If I start investigating your family, the royal family might see me as a threat and send their subjugation force. So, there's nothing much I can do."

"I understand." Noel had expected this answer, but he still felt a bit disappointed. With the commander's help, he could get more information faster.

"Although I don't know much about your family, there is certainly a place that you might want to visit." Oscar thought for a moment and raised his finger. "Lienston City. There is a temple in that place and your father often visited that place every year. I'm sure you're aware of that, right?"

"Yes. I only followed him once in a while, but the last time I visited that place was 3 years ago." Noel thought for a moment. "Still, I don't think I can go there right now. After all, that city is in..."

"In our neighboring country, Aclain Kingdom. From this place, you need one month of travel just to reach that place. Still, I believe you need to visit that place as soon as possible."

"I understand. I'll think about it."

"That's right. Do you know how to ride a horse? Traveling with a horse is faster than a foot."

"No, I think I'll travel by foot." Noel rejected it for two reasons. He added inwardly, 'I was too lazy to learn how to ride a horse, so I can't ride one right now. And there is a training for running. It'll be better if I can train during my travel just by running. So, there's no reason for riding a horse. Time problem can be solved with proper schedule anyway.'

Oscar furrowed his eyebrows. It was clear that traveling by horse was the fastest way of transport, so Noel's thought was kind of absurd to him. Still, since the person in question had rejected the idea, he didn't plan to pursue it further.

"Since you don't want to, then it's alright. That's all I have to say. The rest of the journey will entirely depend on you."

"I understand. I'll certainly not betray your expectation." Noel nodded with a solemn face.

"Good. Take these two items home along with this and prepare your next journey." Oscar took out two envelopes and put it next to the mask.

"This is..." Noel furrowed his eyebrows.

"A letter of introduction as well as the location of the Master Blacksmith. Be sure to use it carefully."

"Thank you. Then, please excuse me." Noel turned around and left the room.

He didn't waste his time in the training ground since there was no obligation for him to train today.

Of course, Noel had no intention to rest today since he had already plenty of rest when Anna was unconscious.

So, the moment he reached his room, he took out the envelope and read the details about the blacksmith.

"The blacksmith's name is Harvard, located in the small village northeast Astar Town. He'll build you everything for free, but if he thinks you're worthy of his best effort, he might ask you to do something for him first before making the armor.

"Give the letter of introduction to him, so he knows that I'm the one sending you there. That's all."

"Astar Town, huh..." Noel contemplated for a moment. "I should get a mission near that place then. The sooner I finish my armor, the safer I'll be."

Now that he had confirmed his path, he immediately opened his system to check the reward he got from defeating the Ancient Demon Tree.

Medal: Demon Hunter

Effect: The user is able to detect demons in 50 meter radius.

"Seriously? It's quite big. As expected from a Demon Hunter, it really wants me to continue hunting demons." Noel chuckled before looking at the 7 Skill Points he received earlier. Without hesitation, he put everything to upgrade the Ardagan Swordsmanship.

The information soon entered his mind as Noel could see a few of his flaws get solved by the knowledge he received.

"Swordsmanship, Ancient Techniques, New Spirit Abilities from Ardagan, and helping the citizens... I need to do all of them within the next two weeks." Noel clenched his fists, getting fired up.

Chapter 83 Progress

The next day.

"Ha..."

"Ha..."

A series of panted filled the cool morning as Anna and Noel stared at each other.

"Nice fight, I guess." Anna tried to calm her breath while thinking, 'What's wrong with him? Why does his Swordsmanship suddenly become so good in one night? Has he gotten enlightened? Now that I think about it, he also experienced the same thing a few weeks ago.'

Noel panted a few times before saying, "Since we've ended the fight. It's better to start the meditation training, considering we have something more important to learn."

"That's true." Anna and Noel nodded. Even for Anna, this was the first time she learned an Ancient Spirit Technique from this fort, so she wouldn't succeed immediately.

Noel and Anna took out a book they decided to share as they sat next to each other.

Since it would be better if they could discuss a topic for brainstorming, they agreed to read the Four Points Circulation first.

The Four Points Circulation Technique revolved around the two palms and two soles. According to the book, they could circulate the Spiritual Energy from these four points and discharge it at one of the four points.

In other words, the moment it exploded, the Spiritual Energy would release four times of the power.

The circulation technique used the heart as the main point to connect these four main points.

"This is a quite good technique, don't you think?" Anna asked. "I mean, you can punch or kick someone higher."

"That's true. But I am a swordsman, so my focus is on the sword. I'm wondering if we can pour that kind of energy into our sword to give a burst of power." Noel contemplated for a moment.

"I think it depends on your control. For example, you can place the point in your sword instead of your palm. It'll give your sword a significant amount of boost, but maintaining it will be a huge problem since your Spiritual Energy will be drained," Anna explained with her past knowledge.

"That's understandable. But it might also create an unbalance between the points, right?"

"That's true..." Anna looked down, realizing that she hadn't thought this through.

"Still, it's a good technique. Due to our high conversion rate... Or in this technique, I think they're emphasizing the flow rate of the Spiritual Energy. After all, it's not just the conversion rate from the demon crystal to our body, but also the flow from the heart to every part in the body."

"That's true. But we don't know the name used in the past. So, let's just say Conversion Rate for now." Anna paused before pointing at her heart. "So, you gather the Spiritual Energy to this place before channeling it to one of the four points. The higher your conversion rate, the more energy you can release."

"Fair enough." Noel nodded and took out his book. "And this book might also prove to be useful."

Spirit Aura Breathing.

"By using the breathing, we circulate the energy to cover our body with a thin layer of Spiritual Energy. This will allow us an extra protection. It doesn't require a huge amount of Spiritual Energy that people can use this technique for a whole day without problem. And this technique can smoothen the flow of Spiritual Energy in your body." Noel explained what he found yesterday when reading the book.

"Let me read it first." Anna asked for the book and started flipping it, understanding what Noel said earlier.

Noel also took Anna book to read it again to understand it better. Instead of meditating, they thought this was more productive.

Noel also didn't mind that Anna got stronger for now since he needed to surpass her and even the royal family if he wanted to take his revenge. There was no way the royal family would care about the current her.

While they were reading books, Noel also noticed that many junior knights didn't participate in the training anymore. Some had their individual trainings while some went on a mission.

However, that didn't matter since it meant Noel had a more peaceful time to learn.

After a few hours, Noel began his meditation as well as physical training. During that time, he tried to follow the instruction in the books.

As expected, learning Spirit Aura Breathing and Four Points Circulation method wasn't easy. Even Anna had some problems in controlling her Spiritual Energy, let alone him who could only do a basic muscle strengthening with Spiritual Energy.

Of course, Noel never forgot about the spar as well as helping people since they increased his power as well as Honor Points.

Two weeks later.

Anna managed to learn Four Points Circulation, Spirit Aura Breathing, and the book she got only for her, Lightning Z-Bird Step. Even Noel thought Anna's talent was much higher than him if he overlooked the Conversion Rate as well as the advantage of having two spirits.

On the other hand, Noel managed to get some more Honor Points and immediately upgraded his two new skills he got after getting Ardagan's recognition: Ignition Sword and Sword Fire.

Since people had known him to be having Ice Spirit, he could fool everyone by using flame this time. With the addition of the mask, no one should know it was him.

He realized that with how hard it took him to get Honor Points, he wouldn't be able to upgrade all his skills to the max, so he focused on the most useful skills, the Swordsmanship, Rune Mastery as well as other Skills that didn't require too many Skill Points like Runes.

Unfortunately, Ardagan didn't have a perfect system as well. All he could give was the technique that had been stored inside of him. Other techniques like the Ancient Spirit Techniques he learned right now couldn't be mastered through Skill Points.

Although it was a bit disappointing, Noel knew that it would be wise to not spend the Skill Points to all the techniques if he could learn them manually.

In the end, Noel managed to learn Spirit Aura Breathing and the Four Points Circulation, but not the Bouncing Spiritual Slash, the other Ancient Spirit Technique he took for himself.

Still, his foundation was now solid and he believed he could take a more dangerous missions this time. Even a few Mid Level Demons could be killed with some preparations.

Finally, Noel and Anna met again to pick up the mission. And Shale presented them with the mission catalog, saying, "You can choose the mission."

Chapter 84 Choosing Missions

Anna took a look at the mission while Noel asked Shale, "I have a question. How do we inform you that we've finished the mission? I mean, there are missions that requires three months from traveling to the mission itself. Won't it be too much if we can't pick another mission in the meantime simply because the time limit has gone due?"

"The system doesn't work that way. Our request is usually connected to either paranormal activity or demons. So, the request itself is not from an average person. Hence, there is one big requirement to request our assistance." Shale raised two fingers before continuing.

"You're required to agree to write a proof of completion as well as a report to us. This way, we'll know that the request has been completed and you can turn in the proof of completion later."

Noel glanced at the catalog and realized that according to Shale, the report would allow the fort to take down the mission. And the proof of completion was the record of the person that completed the mission.

Now that he saw this, the places that were a bit far from the fort would have the instruction to meet a certain person. It seemed this person was the one responsible to the mission.

"Of course, to send the report as well as write the proof requires them to be someone wealthy. So, I'd like to ask you to not receive any money from them because the fort has received the compensation. If it's found that you're misusing your ability to extort them, the fort will send someone to punish you."

"I know that." Noel nodded with a serious face. He'd never do something like that.

"Lastly, they usually give you a place to stay and something to eat. Though, you may want to bring some money. It's easy for you to get your money. Just kill a demon in the forest and sell the crystal."

"Still, we can choose not to stay in the place they reserve for us, right?" Noel narrowed his eyes.

"There are many cases like that. So, you don't need to be worry about it. It's just they won't provide a free stay and meal." Shale confirmed. It seemed Noel had a trust issue. He had even thought the possibility of the sudden betrayal of the provider.

"That's enough." Noel thanked him for the explanation.

As if she was waiting for their talk to be over, Anna immediately handed the catalog and pointed at a mission. "I think this mission is good."

Noel furrowed his eyebrows while looking at the map provided in the book.

Mission: Bandit and Demon Suspicion.

Description: There is an indication that a bandit group is using the demon to destroy a village. Go to Sheikzel Village and meet the village chief to understand the situation.

Reward: 800 Contribution Points

Time Limit: 10 Days.

"This is a group mission." Noel furrowed his eyebrows. "With a rough calculation, we need around five days to reach that village..."

"Yes. So, how about doing the group mission first before the individual one?" Anna asked while adding inwardly, 'I can't let this bandit group go. It must be the Iron Bar Bandit. They were catching demons and releasing it to attack the villages so that they could raid the village without getting blamed for the attack.'

'In the past, this method is passed down to other bandit groups, causing many devastation to villages. Well, I'm not sure about the details, but the fact that this mission is here means that the difficulty is not that high. I don't think the enemy is stronger than an Advanced Level Demon.'

Noel contemplated before agreeing to this mission. "Sure. I don't mind."

"Great." Anna smiled before choosing her own individual mission.

Noel picked a mission near the Master Blacksmith's location since he wanted to create an armor. Although it was three days away from the location, they were still within his expectation.

"I choose this mission then." Noel showed Shale the mission.

"Alright."

Mission: Demon Extermination

Description: A group of demons are spotted near the river and stopping the people from fishing. Please meet the village chief of Sothbame Village to get more information.

Reward: 200 Contribution Points

Time Limit: 30 Days

Shale recorded it first and said, "Alright. When are you planning to leave? You can go to the stable and get a horse. As long as the horse doesn't have any disability or die, you don't need to compensate. Although it's only for a while, I do have taught you horse riding. It shouldn't be a problem for you to ride a horse, right?"

"Yes, but I prefer to run to that place. Do you mind?" Noel asked.

"Huh?" The statement stunned both Anna and Shale as they looked at Noel dumbfoundedly.

Noel glanced at Anna and said, "If we're going on a mission, I want to run to reach there. I don't mind if you are riding the horse or even reach there earlier than me. I'm simply going to train while traveling."

"..." Anna was speechless. On one hand, she praised Noel for his dedication to get stronger. On the other hand, he looked like a fool who only had training in his mind.

Little did she know, Noel only thought about completing his training so that he got more bonus strength from the system.

"Well, that will put me in an awkward situation." Anna shook her head helplessly while pinching the bridge of her nose, troubled. "I should have expected something like this. Well, I don't mind running since I can focus on training too..."

"Are you sure? You don't need to do it with me. In fact, this is why I want the group mission to be the last."

"So I can just ride back home?"

"Yes."

"No. It's fine. I'll run together with you. If I need a ride, I can buy a horse in a nearby city."

"Are you sure about this? It will cost you a lot of money, no?"

"Do you think I'm a person with money trouble?"

"..." Noel shook his head.

"That's it. So, if I want to ride a horse, I can simply buy one on the way."

"Well, thank you for putting up with my stubbornness."

"Mhm." Anna nodded, not realizing that this was the first time Noel thanked her. She later regretted for getting too occupied with Noel's weirdness and forgot to tease him that time. Nonetheless, Anna agreed with the condition and asked Shale to record their missions.

Chapter 85 Journey

"Since we're running instead of riding a horse, the journey will take at least a day longer. I guess we need to focus on our speed as well as the time limit," said Anna while stretching her body.

"Yeah. And we've this luggage." Noel glanced back. Since they were going to have a journey on their own later, they brought their own tent and tools. So, their luggage weighed the same.

"Indeed. Let's go then." Anna smirked, looking at the horizon.

Noel nodded as the two started running to their destination.

This was the first time Noel and Anna ran for such a long journey. Even in the past life, Anna rode a horse or carriage when traveling this far.

So, it was quite surprising to see Noel pushing himself this far.

'No wonder he could grow stronger that fast in the past life. His dedication toward training is something to be praised of. The more I am with him, the more I learn how he behaved in the past.' Anna thought while running.

Noel ignored her gaze and continued running, following the road. They had no way to pinpoint their exact location when traveling, so they followed the dirt road and turned to another direction when they met the crossroads.

It was true that they could arrive earlier by going straight one way, but they would end up getting lost because they couldn't pinpoint their exact location.

Even so, Noel didn't complain. How could he complain? This was a perfect opportunity to continue his running training.

During the day, they just kept running. There wasn't even much talking between them. During the night, Noel would train himself by making himself aware of the surroundings even if he fell asleep.

It was tiring, but if he could do this, he could travel alone without getting ambushed by monsters or people.

Meanwhile, Anna hunted a wild animal that hadn't been turned into a demon for their food.

Although the atmosphere was awkward most of the time, Noel never showed his hostility openly anymore. If Anna talked to him, he would listen and reply to her. For Anna, this was a huge progress.

On the second day, Noel found another set of training that could be done while running. It was Spirit Aura Breathing.

This would increase his proficiency by the time they arrived. Even Anna copied him.

After a long seven days, they had finally reached the outskirts of the village.

The village had no wall to keep them safe. They probably had not enough money to build one.

From a single glance, most of the houses were made of wood instead of bricks. The difference of quality of living was clear to see.

There was no way he would find something like this when he was a noble. The most he would do was going to another city, never a village.

"That's the village." Anna was pretty excited to experience this kind of life again. She had sworn to herself that she wouldn't mistreat people again, so this was the first step to achieve it.

"Look." Noel pointed at the people that were moving around the village. Some of them held a weapon, some held their farming tools. However, all of them seemed to be vigilance. They were probably afraid of the incoming attack.

When one of the villagers spotted them, they informed the others. Women and children hurriedly ran back to their houses and closed every window and door. The men gathered in front of the village while holding their weapons and tools to fend off the invaders.

They were quite hesitant because they could only see Anna and Noel. If it was a bandit group, they would come with many people.

Seeing their hesitation, Noel took out his knight token and shouted to calm them down. "My name is Noel Ardagan, an Apprentice Knight of the Demon Banner Army. We're here because the request for bandits subjugation. Please lower your weapons!"

"?!" The people became a bit confused after listening to Noel's words. They looked at each other, wondering what to do.

Suddenly, they moved back, giving a way for an elderly man. His aged face was filled with wrinkles that he had a trouble to even open his eyes.

Still, he slowly approached both of them and asked, "I apologize for our behavior. However, I have a request that I hope Sir Noble can comply. Would you mind showing me the token so that I can confirm your identity?"

Noel thought about using his family name to make them think he was a noble to stop them from attacking them, but it seemed he made unnecessary fear.

'Yeah. I shouldn't use my family name when introducing myself. People won't know that I'm a fallen noble without knowing me personally.' Noel had gotten used to the prejudice in the Demon Banner Army, so he didn't put too much thought in his introduction.

Still, it was useless to cry over spilled milk. Instead of fixing the misunderstanding, Noel put a gentle smile to assure them that he wasn't a hostile noble. He then handed the token to the village chief. "Here you go. Don't worry. I can understand your unrest."

"Thank you so much." The village chief respectfully received the token before inspecting it. After he made sure Noel was real, he returned the token and dropped to his knees. "I apologize for my rudeness before."

When the people saw the village chief kneeling, they also dropped to the ground since Noble like him would have a good reason to eliminate this village. Pointing their weapon at a noble could be punished to death after all.

Noel hurriedly bent down his knees and helped the elderly up while saying, "There is no need to kneel. I understand your action. The bandits have terrorized you so much that you're scared of anything. That's why I'm here to solve your problem. Instead of kneeling here, why don't you get up and talk about the bandits?"

"Oh." The village chief was surprised by Noel's gentleness and kindness. Even though he had stood up, he still lowered his head, pleading. "Please save this village."

"Yes, that's what I'm planning to do. Let's talk somewhere else?"

"Y-yes." The village chief nodded furiously. "Let me invite you to my house. I shall tell you everything I know about the bandits."

Behind Noel, Anna was taking notes of Noel's action on how he deescalated the situation and even made them feel assured.

Chapter 86 Hideout

Noel and Anna were invited to the village chief's house to discuss the problem.

"The incident started a month ago. There were 5 villages next to this village previously, but now, there is only one left. The first village was destroyed a month ago. At that time, we didn't think much about it. We only asked for the help from the kingdom to subjugate this bandit.

"Unfortunately, the kingdom didn't move fast enough and the second village was destroyed ten days later. At that time, we started fearing about the potential raid.

"Whether it was fortunate or unfortunate, the soldiers did come to kill the bandits. However, they couldn't do anything because they were attacked by the demons. The soldiers retreated and even escaped.

"We were blamed for not reporting this matter. So, we asked for the assistance of the Demon Banner Army to subjugate the demons while paying attention to the bandits.

"It was at that time we learned that the demons attacked the third village before the bandits came just to loot the now empty houses. They kidnapped women and children who managed to survive from the demon attack.

"A few days ago, we heard that the bandits had attacked again. If we're looking at the position, this village is going to be the next target."

Noel contemplated for a moment and said, "Thus the time limit. It seems that the bandits are attacking you every week. From the look of it, the situation is more complicated than we originally expected..."

"Are you going to..." The village chief's face became pale. It was clear that he was afraid of Noel and Anna rejecting this request.

"I think we should have some power to handle the bandits as well as the demons." Noel glanced at Anna who nodded in agreement. After that, he looked at the elderly and said, "Still, we need your cooperation to end this problem."

"I understand. Please tell us anything you want us to do." Out of fear, the chief accepted the condition without hesitation.

"Thank you." Noel smiled, assuring him that they wouldn't leave until the situation was solved. "It's hard to pinpoint the bandit's location, even for us. So, is there someone who knows about the bandit hideout?"

"There is a man who once spotted the bandit nearby. We believe it's around that area."

"Good. Can you ask that man to guide us there? We'll do some surveillance first to understand their situation. Only after that can we subjugate them." Noel paused for a moment.

"Yes, absolutely. He surely won't reject the chance to show you their location since he's a hunter." He nodded.

"Since the bandits have attacked a nearby village a few days ago, we still have around three to four days before they attack this village." Noel thought for a moment and asked, "Should we observe them for two days and attack them on the third day?"

"I'll leave the planning to your hands." Anna raised her hands. Noel was more adept than her even with her past memory, so it was better to let Noel do whatever he saw fit.

When he talked to Anna, he also said the remaining days they could live in peace while assuring them that they would subjugate the bandits before that happened. After listening to his statement, the village chief felt a bit relieved.

He didn't want to let Noel and Anna do everything, so the village chief said, "In that case, please let me prepare your meal and your rooms. This is the least I can do for you, Sir Noble."

"Thank you. But we've eaten earlier, so we're going to confirm the bandit hideout first. We'll be back around dinner." Noel didn't reject the offer to show that he wasn't angry of their rude behavior from before.

"If that's the case, let me call him first." The village chief rose from his seat, preparing to call the man to this house.

However, Noel did the same while saying, "Let's go together."

"Thank you very much." The elderly smiled for the first time, feeling gratified of Noel's kind gesture.

Anna remained silent and just simply observed Noel, learning on how to act from him.

As soon as they left, the village chief walked toward the house in the outskirts of the village.

He knocked the door a few times until a muscular middle-aged man opened the door.

"Chief?" He was surprised at first but when he saw Noel and Anna, he wanted to kneel, only to be stopped by Noel.

"This..." The muscular man was confused for a moment until the village chief said, "He is Brad. He is a hunter."

"What's going on, Chief?"

"Sir Noble hopes that you can guide him to the bandit hideout."

The man scratched the back of his head and said, "Although I've spotted them nearby, I can't really say that I know their exact location."

"It's fine." Noel nodded. "At the very least, you can give us some clues so that we can find them. Our goal is to defeat the bandits in their hideout since we don't want the village to be razed down by them first before eliminating the bandits. That's why I need your help. Will you do it?"

When he heard Noel's explanation, he immediately nodded his head. "I will do it. Please let me do it."

From his expression alone, Noel knew that Brad didn't want this village, his home, to be destroyed by the bandits. And the people in the village would become a casualty too, so he cooperated with Noel and Anna without hesitation.

"Great." Noel smiled.

"Thank you for your hard work, Brad." The village chief patted his shoulder with a smile.

"No, no. This is my job as a villager." Brad nodded with a solemn face.

"In that case, let's not waste anymore time." Noel turned around while asking Brad to lead the way.

Brad bowed to the village chief. Although he was surprised that these two people would do their job as soon as they reached this village, he was more than happy to comply.

The village chief bowed to Noel and Anna as if asking them to solve this problem.

After a wave of his hand, Noel turned to Brad and asked, "Then, please."

"I understand. Please follow me."

Chapter 87 Small Talk

"This is the place I spotted them," said Brad after leading them into the forest.

"Hmm... We've been heading north this whole time... Now that I think about it, where are the locations of the other villages? Are they north of your village?" Noel asked.

"Yes. Is there something wrong with it?" Brad tilted his head in confusion.

"I see. In other words, the bandits have been attacking you from the north, eliminating one village after another."

"Ah. So, that's how the village chief knows we will be targeted soon." Brad gasped.

The literacy skill for a commoner was very low, so it was understandable that he wasn't aware of this.

However, for Noel, this was just a common sense. This was the discrepancy between nobles and commoners, especially the ones from the village.

"Anyway, is there something in the north? I mean, like an important and huge place that can be used to host the bandits?" Noel asked again, inciting his train of thought.

'He really does ask for the cooperation of everyone. Just by asking this question, the hunter will feel that he's become a part of the group. This way, he will feel great if we manage to eliminate the bandits. I see, this is how Noel becomes a part of them and treats them sincerely..

'If Noel just asked for the data and where they came from, he would be able to figure this out easily. Yet, he asked the hunter's cooperation.' thought Anna, assessing Noel's every single action.

"I think there is one important place." Brad nodded in agreement while pointing at the north. "If I'm not wrong, there used to be a mine in that area. It stopped a decade ago."

"Then, this place might be the bandit's hideout. Can you lead me to the farthest village? We'll advance carefully so that we don't get spotted by bandits too. At least, she can tell." Noel grinned, pointing at Anna.

"Oi. What do you think I am?"

Noel shrugged. "Anyway, let's not waste time."

The group continued their way to the north. On the way, Noel learned that the village handled the mine not long ago. So, there was a chance that they could find the map of the mine, allowing them to locate the bandits.

Hence, Noel decided to investigate the village, hoping that not everything had been burned down.

Whether it was fortunate or unfortunate, they arrived at the village. Half of the houses seemed to have been burned down to the ground. But due to the distance from one house to another, half of the building in the village managed to escape the fire.

The village itself had a slightly bigger area than the village that requested for the army's assistance.

But this village was filled with skeletons lying on the ground. It was clear that they were what remained from this village, mostly men.

The blood had been washed away by a rain that fell two weeks ago, so there was no foul smell entering their nose.

"How is it?" Noel asked Anna in a low voice while hiding behind the tree.

"I am not very sure. But let me go around to check. You shouldn't leave this place until I come back." Anna looked around, trying to find people in the area.

"Alright." Noel agreed. As soon as Anna left, he looked at Brad who was resting behind the tree. He asked, "Are you afraid?"

"Y-yes. I used to hunt animals, but I couldn't do it anymore ever since the bandits roamed around. They would kill without batting an eye, so..." Because of Noel's gentleness every time he spoke, Brad forgot the fact that the village chief referred Noel as a nobleman. He just spoke casually.

"If you have the opportunity, will you kill the bandits? It's a bandit that will harm your village if left alive..."

"I... I don't know... I've never killed a human in my entire life." Brad shook his head helplessly.

"I see." Noel smiled. "Though, I still need your help to eliminate the bandits. Just like the other villagers who raise their arms when they saw us in the distance, you need to kill the bandits as well. It's my job to eliminate them, but it's also your duty to protect your village, don't you think so?"

"Y...yes..." Brad nodded in agreement.

"Well, just keep in mind. If the enemies are too many, I might need your help. Just shoot them with your bow like how you kill the animals." Noel shrugged.

The wait lasted for an hour to the point Noel was confused, wondering if Anna was captured or not. But considering Anna's prowess, even if she couldn't defeat them, she had the ability to escape. So, he just trusted her.

Fortunately, she soon came back while bringing good news "It seems that the enemy is indeed hiding inside the mine. I can see a few bandits coming in and out the mine. Though, I can't calculate their number."

"As expected... I guess we need to go to the village to check the houses. Maybe there is a map of the mine. We can use it to locate them inside the mine." Noel glanced at Brad and said, "You're free to go back right now."

Remembering what Noel said earlier, Brad hurriedly said, "Let me help you."

Noel patted his shoulder and said, "No. This time, we'll do our work alone. In the meantime, you should think about what I said earlier. Before attacking the bandits, I'm going to ask you again. Give me your answer at that time."

"I... I understand." It seemed Noel saw through his hesitation, so he could only believe in Noel.

Noel didn't want to leave until he made sure Brad went back, so the latter had no choice to excuse himself first.

After that, Noel and Anna turned to the village.

"I hope that you can stay around the village to make sure there's no enemy coming. I'll check the village house one by one."

"Sure." Anna agreed without hesitation but she still glanced at him with a poker face. "Though, what did you talk about earlier?"

"Secret." Noel stuck his tongue out while walking to the village.

Anna's eyebrows twitched, annoyed by him. He always did this.

Chapter 88 Shocked

Creak!

Creak!

A sound of the bending wood echoed in the silent house. Although the house was still intact, there were numerous items scattered on the ground. It was clear that the house had been ransacked.

Noel, searching for the clues about the map, entered this house with precaution. Despite this house being the seventh house he investigated, he didn't lower his guard, thinking the potential of a small demon left behind by the bandits.

'Still, this is a quite full house. Looking at the papers that are scattered around, it's clear that this person knows how to read and write. But because of the mine operation, there are a few records about the mine, making this village have a better literacy skill than the rest.' Noel thought while roaming around the house.

Suddenly, he stumbled upon a small box on the ground. It was already half opened, so he approached the box and opened it.

The inside was only a two sheets of paper, overlapping each other. Due to the position of the box and the paper, Noel knew this box had a quite amount of jewelries before. But now, there were only these two rolled paper left.

Still, the fact they were in this box meant the paper was quite important.

He took out the paper and opened it before gasping. "Got it."

As expected, the paper was related to the mine. The first paper was a map of the mine while the second one was the deed of the mine.

Unfortunately, before he could look at the map thoroughly, Anna entered the house while saying in a low voice. "Noel. Follow me."

"What's wrong?" Noel glanced at her while rolling the paper again, putting it in his bag.

Anna didn't say anything. She simply left the house, leading Noel to the outside of the village.

After five minutes, she lowered her body to hide behind the bushes while pointing forward. "Look at that."

Noel furrowed his eyebrows and didn't believe what he witnessed.

It turned out Anna had found the mine. There was a huge entrance to the small hill, but that was the last thing Noel noticed.

What shocked him was the cage that trapped a dying woman and a demon.

"That's..." Noel sucked a cold breath. After bonding more with the commoner in the fort, he could see people equally now. That was why seeing a person devoured by the demon angered him.

He had the urge to take out his sword and slice the demon. But what infuriated him the most were ten people surrounding the cage. They were laughing as if everything was an entertainment.

The dying woman didn't let out a single sound, but from the bruises on her body and her ragged appearance, it was clear that she had been treated cruelly. And she soon died after getting bit by the demons.

Anna said in a low voice that only they could hear. "This is disgusting. The woman was played by them until they were half-dead before they used the body to feed the demons."

At the same time, Anna couldn't say more than that. In her past life, she once treated people like that too. That was why she became so angry.

"A few days to a week." Noel narrowed his eyes, glaring at them coldly. Anna suddenly covered his eyes when she felt a bit of killing intent leaking from his gaze. She didn't want them to be exposed, so she pulled him back while saying, "Calm down."

Noel's body trembled as he took a deep breath.

"Sorry." Noel shook his head helplessly. "I lost my calm."

"Anyway, what did you say earlier? A few days to a week?"

"Yes. That's the time they broke the people they kidnapped and fed the demons. In other words, the moment they raided the village, they had no more humans to play with and feed the demon." Noel nodded.

"That's..." Anna also felt disturbed by those words.

"Still, it's not safe to charge right now." Noel glanced at Anna and said, "I'm going to move up our schedule a bit. If possible, I'm planning to save whoever manages to stay alive until now."

Anna nodded. This was the first time Noel didn't bother to say something about her death. It would be amusing to him if she experienced that kind of torture before her death, but Noel seemed to have forgotten about the grudge when there was innocent party involved.

'Not only in this occasion, but also when we saved the kids, he could put down his grudge to me... I don't know what to say other than it's amazing.' Anna thought for a moment before noticing something different. 'Wait a minute. In my past life, this method was spread around. But who came up with that kind of method?

'Now that I think about it, this incident caused a bit of trouble to the Demon Banner Army. And there was going to be an invasion of the demons that caused a great blow to the army... Noel rose from that, but it was clear that the Demon Banner Army was targeted. Don't tell me, there's someone who spread this method?' Anna sucked a cold breath.

"Noel."

Noel didn't answer her but still glanced at her.

"I just have a wild speculation. There's no way the bandits can come up with this kind of method."

"So, you're telling me someone is pulling something from behind?"

"That's just a speculation. I'm not sure of it yet, but if it ends up true. This method will be spread to other bandits."

Noel found the idea to be ridiculous since he had no memory about the past life, but he couldn't dismiss the potential either. With how low the literacy skill in the village was, it was clear that the bandits shouldn't be able to come up with this method, much less capturing the demon.

"Then, ask them about it." Noel decided to take the precaution.

"Yes. But we need to be careful about it because we don't know their number."

"That's true." Noel thought for a moment. "Instead of three days from now on, we'll attack them tomorrow night. During the day, we'll observe them."

"Got it."

Chapter 89 Information

Due to the change of their schedule, as soon as they returned to the village, Noel headed to Brad's house to talk about his choice.

Meanwhile, Anna went to the village chief's house since there was no inn in the village.

Before sleeping, Noel went to talk with Anna about his plan. He even brought the map with him, showing it to her.

"Let's see. There are a few places potentially holding the hostages. It'll be hard if they're using the hostages as their shields." Noel pointed at three large spaces according to the map.

"That's true. So, what should we do? Should we go with the intention to kill everyone, including the hostages? Although I'm sorry to say this, but they're mostly women. And after what the bandits have done to them, I don't know if they can still live normally again." Anna explained with a disappointed expression.

"First of all, we're going to capture the bandits outside the mine and interrogate them. After learning about the location as well as the number of the hostages, we shall go to ambush them. No, more like..." Noel paused for a moment and asked, "I am afraid I need you to do the hardest task."

"The hardest task?"

"A bait."

"So, you want me to storm inside alone?"

Noel nodded with a solemn face. Even Anna looked at him for a while to see how serious he was in proposing this idea.

Ultimately, Anna nodded. "Fine. I'll do it. But how much confident are you in this plan?"

"Eighty percent success rate. And I believe we can rescue the hostages with this plan."

"Alright. Let me hear the details."

Noel took an hour to explain his plan. It was quite surprising for Anna to know this elaborate plan. She finally understood the reason why she had always been tricked into his scheme in her previous life.

The next morning, Noel and Anna left the village. To her surprise, Brad also followed them, begging them to let him tag along.

Although it was true that Brad's bow mastery as a hunter was quite good, she never expected that Noel would ask the people to fight.

As soon as they reached the mine, they waited and continued observing them. Still, no matter how hard they tried, it would be impossible for them to calculate the enemy's exact number.

However, Noel predicted that there were around seventy bandits. He calculated based on the fact that he had seen thirty different faces during their observation and believed the number inside would be twice to thrice the number what they could see.

Raiding such a stronghold was definitely a challenge even for them. Luckily, Noel had prepared a plan for this.

The moment the night came, Noel and Anna moved out, leaving Brad behind. Of course, Brad was preparing his bow, planning to kill a few people even though this was the first time he hunted something other than animals.

Anna led Noel to go to the mine's entrance secretly. There were four people who stayed in the lookout and according to Noel, they always changed people every two hours. And this time, there were only ten minutes left before the changing shift.

Anna and Noel climbed the hill, specifically the tree around the entrance.

Now that their position was right above them, the two exchanged looks to confirm each other was ready.

Then, Noel raised his left hand as the signal. Both of them then jumped behind the bandits.

Anna had prepared wet rolled clothes. As soon as she landed on the ground, she skillfully wrapped the bandit's mouth with the clothes, preventing him from talking.

"Wha—" The other wanted to react, but Noel appeared next to them.

Swift Strike.

He waved his sword swiftly and precisely, cutting all their necks. Thanks to his Increase Agility Rune, Muscle Strengthening Technique, and Swift Strike, a normal bandit couldn't even react to his strike. This was similar to how helpless he was against Anna at the first time they met.

Meanwhile, Anna immediately dragged the man into the woods while placing her sword on his neck.

After they reached a hundred meters away from the mine, Anna dropped the guy and released her killing intent to scare him.

"Who—Aaaahhhh!" The bandit wanted to talk, but Anna stomped his leg, bending his knee in a weird way. This was the reason why she brought him far from the mine. Even if he screamed, no one would realize it.

"Shut up. I ask, you answer. Say another word other than the answer, I'm going to crush your bone like this one."

The bandit's body trembled. He was still screeching in pain, but he didn't dare to talk anymore because of the first stomp. He was truly scared of what was going to happen to him.

"How many people do you have?" Anna asked the first question.

"Fif... Fifty..." The guy answered immediately.

In that instant, Anna stomped his other knee, bending it to another way.

"Aaaahhhh!" The bandit screamed in pain while holding his other knee.

However, Anna kicked his face and put him back in his place, not allowing him to do something to ease the pain.

"I ask, you answer. Give me a wrong information, you're going to experience this much longer."

"Don't do something that dangerous." Noel had finally arrived after dragging the three bodies elsewhere.

The bandit looked at Noel and remembered how he killed the other three bandits.

Noel squatted and said, "Well, I'll let you go if you answer my question honestly."

"Wait, what did you say? You'll let him go?" Anna was the first to question his decision.

But Noel nonchalantly shrugged. "What's wrong with that? However, that depends on him. If he doesn't answer me honestly, then..."

The bandit panicked and realized that Noel was his chance. Unlike Anna, there was a chance to escape with Noel's condition.

"How many people are in your group?"

The bandit immediately used this chance and said with a scared tone. "82... 82 people."

"Good." Noel smiled, satisfied. "Are there any people beside your group? Like women, kids or elderly?"

"There... There are... 20 of them."

"In one room?"

"Y-yes."

"Then, where is your leader?"

"He... he is with them."

"How many demons do you have?" Noel asked another question.

"We have seven Low Level Demons."

"Where?"

"In the same place."

"Alright. Two last questions." Noel felt he had gotten enough information, so he just proceeded with the extra information. "What's the route to your leader?"

"That's..." The bandit didn't know how to say this. He looked around, panicked. Noel's expression darkened during that time, making him scared. So, he blurted, "Every junction you meet, go right!"

"Alright. The last question is... who taught you to capture demons?"

"The leader... The leader suddenly defeated our previous leader and..."

"Taught you a lot of things, huh." Noel narrowed his eyes and saw the bandit nodding furiously.

After receiving the answer he needed, Noel rose from the ground.

"Then..." The bandit looked at them with a brightened expression, thinking he was spared.

However, Noel and Anna were acting this whole time. The moment Noel finished the interrogation, Anna waved her sword, slicing the bandit's neck. "He lets you go, but I don't."

Noel smirked and glanced at Anna, "Now, let's take down the bandits, shall we?"

Chapter 90 A Surprise

"Where are they?"

"Knowing those guys, they're the one who would go back and urge us to change shift."

"Are they being diligent today?"

A few bandits walked out of the mine while looking around. However, they couldn't find a single person in the area.

There was only Brad in the area, and he was hiding behind the bushes.

'They haven't returned?' Brad thought while peeking through the gaps between bushes.

The bandits became restless as they couldn't find those people.

"Where are they?"

"I'm having a bad feeling right now."

The people suspected that something happened to them. Brad, who witnessed all this, clenched his bow and pulled out an arrow from the quiver.

'Should I shoot them right now?' Brad wondered what to do. His heartbeat sped up as the cold wind brushed his skin, making him shiver. He remembered Noel's instruction earlier. "Don't do anything until there's no more bandit coming out of the mine."

Noel must be talking about the time after Anna lured them out. So, he was hesitating to make a decision.

Still, the bandits started moving around with one of them going back to the mine as if he was going to inform the rest of the bandits. This sudden movement forced Brad to pull his bow, aiming at them.

When he was about to shoot, Noel and Anna suddenly landed on the ground. Because the bandits started walking away from the entrance, they didn't see Noel and Anna until they heard a cracking sound between them.

"!!!" The bandits turned around and saw Anna entering the cave while Noel appearing before them.

Without hesitation, Noel waved his sword and skillfully sent the bandit's head flying. After that, he moved toward the other two.

"Wha—" The second bandit raised his sword and tried to shout, but Noel had reached him and struck his sword. With the help of the Muscle Strengthening, Noel pushed him back and spun his body before slicing the bandit's neck.

"We're under attack!" The last bandit managed to shout, trying to alarm everyone near the entrance.

Some might hear it, but the one that just entered the mine had been killed by Anna as she made her way inside. Meanwhile, Noel approached the third bandit.

"Your attack is not a surprise anym—" While talking, he stepped forward as his preparation to fight against Noel. However, the latter used his Ice Control and created a thin layer of ice on the ground.

Without the friction of the ground, the bandit slipped and his body fell to the ground. Noel took that opportunity to slice his neck, killing the last bandit outside.

Unfortunately, he had no time to check them. As soon as he finished with them, Noel entered the mine without even glancing at Brad.

The mine tunnel was two meters wide and three meters high. Around him was the hardened soil and reinforced by the wooden planks, supporting the tunnel so it didn't collapse.

On the ground, he could see a rail for a mining cart, so he positioned himself slightly to the wall so that he didn't stumble.

At the same time, he could hear series of shouts echoing from the inside. And soon, he found the corpse of the fourth bandit that came out earlier.

It was clear that Anna was fighting against several bandits.

Due to the fight, he managed to catch up soon, finding Anna stopped by three bandits.

"There is o—" The bandits were about to inform the rest about his appearance, but Noel didn't allow him. He used the Increase Agility Rune to himself as well as to Anna.

Feeling the surge of strength all over her body, Anna sliced their throats in rapid succession, preventing them from telling the position.

Noel also managed to cut the last one as he pointed forward. Their voice would echo, so it wouldn't be a good idea to talk in this mine.

Anna agreed and immediately ran forward. There were two junctions before they could reach the room where they hid. And in just ten seconds, they could see the first crossroads.

Noel shook his head, showing her that he was planning to hide in the second junction. It would be dangerous, but he would be closer to the last room. Hence, she agreed.

They immediately sped up. Anna released her lightning power and took off, trying to kill as many bandits as possible.

They killed thirty in the process and some of them managed to alert the people of the incoming attacks.

Luckily, the main force had yet to arrive, they managed to find the second junction. Noel then nodded to Anna as he took the left path instead of the right one.

Anna hurriedly rushed to the right one as the bait to lure most of the bandits out.

In the meantime, Noel hid behind a giant wooden pillar while taking a peek of the bandits. Of course, he also maintained his vigilance from the people coming from the opposite direction.

It only took one minute before Anna suddenly returned to the junction. She was running away from what appeared to be thirty people.

'We have killed eight people before the operation started. Then, we killed another thirty people. I can't count those people since they're moving too quickly, but I think there will only be a few bandits left protecting their base.

'Still, I can't underestimate them because their leader must haven't made his move. And I need to take care of the demons as well. Luckily, it's only a Low Level Demon. I should have no problem in dealing them.'

Noel took a deep breath, waiting for all the people to pass.

However, he suddenly felt a stingy sensation from the back of his palm. He raised his hand and saw Ardagan's Spirit Seal.

Yes, the stingy sensation came from Ardagan. It seemed he could let him know about something when he did it. Ardagan was indeed special, unlike Heisk who couldn't do something like this.

'Eh? This is...' Noel widened his eyes in shock when he opened the system. Ardagan had sent him a notice that pumped up his spirit. 'A mission...'