

S vs Rebirth 891

Chapter 891 System vs Rebirth

Anna and Noel continued with their exploration. As expected, there were a lot of demon remains inside the tunnel, but all their Demon Crystals had been extracted.

It proved the fact that the demons once used this place as a nest, but the Demon Banner Army had exterminated them.

Since they couldn't utilize these remains anymore, Noel decided to burn them into nothing with his Undying Fire.

After that, they continued the explorations, finding a lot of gemstones sticking out of the walls. But they didn't extract it immediately and just inspected the safety of the tunnel.

It didn't take too long for them to find the main chamber that was connected directly to the surface.

Now that they had confirmed that there were no more demons hidden inside the mountain, Noel carried Anna with his wings and flew through the main vent to come out.

Of course, Noel continued toward the post as well as the river to check the entire region. He found a lot of demons in the plain, which would be dangerous, so he marked all the spots for Anna to subjugate.

As he expected, the post where he built an outpost for a subjugation team ended up as nothing special. Sadly, Noel couldn't see through the thought of himself from the previous life.

Although it was a shame, he still continued to the next destination, which was the river.

From a single glance, it was a perfect place to create a dam and direct the water toward the city. However, the safety of the dam was extremely important, so unless his territory matured a bit more, he wouldn't even think of creating a dam.

In the end, Noel and Anna returned to the city with disappointment.

They were lucky to confirm the mine, but the other two were not so great.

As expected from a butler, Dimitri had actually been waiting for them in front of the city.

"It's great that both of you have returned..." Dimitri's expression looked troubled, causing Noel and Anna to think something was wrong.

"Did something happen?"

"Yes." Dimitri nodded with a grim expression. "Actually... we have secured the land for the mansion. But are you sure you want to build the mansion toward the north?"

"Is there something wrong with it?"

"According to Douglas, if the mansion is there, it will become the primary target of the enemy. After all, the lord of the city will require a vast amount of land to uphold their honor. Such a thing is easy to spot, so the enemies will attack the mansion first." Dimitri explained.

"That's what I have in mind. It's fine to proceed like that. In fact, if we know that the mansion will be attacked first, we can bait them and exterminate them, no?"

"You're correct, but for the lord to risk his life is..." Dimitri scratched the back of his head. He didn't mind getting attacked, but if the lord of the Ardagan Family became the bait, people would think that his subordinates were a waste. It was their job to protect their lord after all.

"I know what you're thinking, Dimitri. However, I'm making this decision with the future in my mind. Since we've received this territory, it won't be weird if we expand it toward the border. In the future, there will be another fort that will withstand the enemy's attack."

"I..." Dimitri had a hard time accepting it, but when he looked at how adamant Noel was, it seemed that he couldn't change his mind. "I understand. I'll tell Douglas to proceed."

"Alright." Noel nodded while waving his hand, signaling Dimitri to continue with the work.

Meanwhile, Noel and Anna returned to their house. The sun was about to set, so it was time for Noel to reveal his secret.

...

Two hours later.

After finishing their bath and tidying up themselves, Noel invited Anna to the dining table where they could talk about the important matter.

Anna's expression was solemn because this was the first time she ever heard about Noel's secret. Even in the past life, she had no clue about it.

She was curious, but she was also afraid of knowing the truth.

As if knowing what was in her mind, Noel chuckled and made a gentle smile to soothe the tension.

"Why are you more tense than me?"

"I'm curious, but sometimes, I'm afraid because knowing this might cause friction between our relationship." Anna clutched her head.

"Then, I just want to confirm one thing." Noel raised one finger. "You are not the previous Anna. Instead, you are someone from the 'future' or more like the 'past,' and regress to this point in time. Using that memory, you've learned that you're wrong and I've been involved in that process, correct?"

"Yes. You could say I'm a regressor." Anna confirmed it without hesitation.

"I see."

[Mission: Anna's Secret]

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

[Reward: Anna's Secret and a wife]

[Penalty: None.]

Noel's heart sank. He tried to confirm Anna's secret for this mission because he was curious about the reward. But he surely didn't expect that the reward was actually Anna herself.

'Ardagan. You tricked me...' Noel wanted to berate Ardagan for this kind of reward, but Ardagan had a perfect reply for him.

[Why do you think she is not worthy to be your wife?]

Noel truly couldn't refute it. After all, it was also his decision to accept Anna. However, he was a bit frustrated because this mission was actually Ardagan's way of matchmaking.

He received this mission when Anna proposed the little bet to reveal each other's secret. But when he thought about it, the direction of their relationship had been set ever since that bet. Ardagan simply put a mission to tease him.

Still, Noel said inwardly, 'Why do you use my wife as a reward? She is not an object, you know. Even you... I never treat you as an object.'

It was Ardagan's turn to be silent before correcting the reward.

[Mission: Anna's Secret]

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

[Reward: Anna's Secret and Couple Medal]

[Penalty: None.]

Medal: Couple Medal

Effect: While fighting together with your couple, the user's Spiritual Energy increases by 10% and the pain the user's receives is reduced by 10%

"..." Noel was completely surprised by the new reward. The medal was overpowered as long as Anna was with him. Ardagan sealed Noel's fate by giving him another mission.

[Mission: Wife]

[Description: Marry your fiancée.]

[Reward: Husband Medal]

[Penalty: None.]

Noel wanted to laugh because he didn't think Ardagan would play this way. But he didn't specify the name so that he didn't look like he was forcing Noel to marry Anna.

"Is there something wrong?" Anna asked. Even if Noel had trained his poker face, Ardagan had completely obliterated him with these two missions, so he ended up with a change of expression.

"Well..." Noel rubbed his cheek embarrassedly. He took out Ardagan and put it on the table. "This is Ardagan, the heirloom of the Ardagan Family as well as my second spirit."

"Huh?!" Anna's eyes were wide open. She knew that Noel had two spirits from the start. But she had never thought that the spirit could actually come forth of his body. In fact, she knew that this was the heirloom of the Ardagan Family. She just didn't expect that the heirloom turned out to be a spirit.

"I won't talk much about Ardagan right now. After all, it's a secret that only the Ardagan Family can know." Noel reminded her that she was still his fiancée, not his wife. So, even if he wanted to tell her, he couldn't.

Anna could understand the situation. Since she was eventually going to be his wife, it didn't matter to wait for that long.

Noel smiled, thankful for her consideration. He continued, "What I want to talk about is the power I receive from Ardagan. You surely notice how I can master a lot of things in an instant, right?"

Obviously, Anna noticed that instantaneous progress. But because she had promised the Sword Saint that she wouldn't pry Noel's secret, she never questioned it.

But now, it is different. Noel was the one openly revealing the secret, so she could boldly admit it. "Yes. I've noticed it. I assume the spirit has given you that flame power and the rune."

"A part of it, yes. But the main power that Ardagan gave me is a system."

"A system?"

"Yes. By doing a mission, I can receive a reward. By spending some reward points, I can receive knowledge about a certain ability... The abilities are directly transferred into my head. While it's true that I can learn that ability in an instant, mastering it is a different case."

"I see... So that's how it is... That's the reason for your rapid progress. It's because Ardagan is a living spirit that he is actually developing things to match your desire. And your desire is directly linked to my progress. That's why your progress is actually far faster than your previous life."

"You can say it that way. I feel a bit relieved that I can actually tell you about this... There is one thing that I always want to say, but I have never trusted you enough to say it."

"What is that?" Anna was a bit surprised. Noel seemed to have held himself back this whole time.

"In your previous life, you wouldn't be able to achieve your goal."

"Eh?" Anna's expression turned grim. "What do you mean?"

"Because I would be there. Just like now, I don't plan on stopping racking achievements. That's why I'm sure that people will talk about me. It sounds arrogant, but what I want to say is that... if this truly happens, people will only remember you as my wife. There is no more Anna... There is only Noel's wife."

Anna fell silent, realizing the severity of this matter. If Noel continued outshining her in the future, her name would gradually disappear from people's minds. Only Noel's name would be resounded across the world.

However, this was the exact reason why Noel acknowledged Anna's contribution earlier. "Wait. Don't tell me, you..."

"Yes. There is one way for your name to reach your goal. You have to outshine me continuously. Even if you change your name to Anna Ardagan, people will know your name if you contribute so much that my achievement is nothing compared to yours. In other words, you can easily become the figurehead of this family, replacing me."

"Still, there is no way you're going to let me do it, right?"

"Of course. I'm saying that in the previous life, you wouldn't be able to do it. I have a system that allows me to gain things easily while you don't have anything."

Anna agreed with Noel's words. She had never defeated him in the past. Noel was just toying with her the whole time.

But Noel continued, "But right now, it's different. You have regressed and gotten all the knowledge, experience, and information about the future. I think you know what I want to say..."

Anna turned solemn. "This is just like us, I guess..."

"Indeed." Noel made a small smile while pointing at Anna. "Try to overcome me with everything you bring in your regression. However, I don't plan to lose. If you walk two steps, my system will push me for one more step. If you take four steps, Ardagan will carry me for the remaining steps."

Noel's smile became bigger as he confidently said, "My system or your rebirth... Shall we see who comes at the top?"

Chapter 892 Me Too

"My system or your rebirth... Shall we see who comes at the top?"

Anna was astounded. Her mind suddenly went blank, causing her to be unable to say anything.

Instead, there was an image that flashed in her mind.

"Can you tell me... why did you want to kill me?"

"My... name..."

Yes, the image was none other than the time they were about to die. At that time, Noel had completely lost all his energy and his eyes were already blank. He uttered the two words that kept haunting her.

It turned out the one who had wanted to kill her was Noel. But she had actually gone through a lot of ordeals where she could easily die but never actually failed to survive.

At first, she thought she was a genius who had gone through numerous challenges. But she had almost forgotten this memory after realizing that Noel had never wanted to kill her.

In that case, that memory itself was not valid. No, it was her question that wasn't valid.

In the previous life, Noel never wanted to kill her. He even used Old Ru to allow her to turn back time. Why?

That question rang in her head. Why? Why would Noel go this far for her? Was there any other reason? Was it related to their current relationship?

Without all those memories, Anna would continue to find a way to kill Noel. Did Noel do all that just so that Anna would actually switch sides?

That was never a question. If Noel had all that memory and experience, no one could actually stop him.

What did Noel see in her to make that decision? She couldn't find it.

But in this current life, Noel asked her, "My system or your rebirth... Shall we see who comes at the top?"

Anna couldn't help but fall into deep thought before asking, "Noel... Can't I truly know what your goal is?"

"Goal..." Noel had repeatedly told her that he couldn't say it. Noel shook his head heavily while muttering, 'How can I tell you my goal... After all, you're going to be the one standing in my way...'

Anna couldn't find her answer. She felt that there was a link to why Noel chose her to regress. In fact, Noel might actually ask her to guide the current him.

However, it would mean that she had lost if she actually filled that role. There was a reason for her rebirth. Noel had predicted it, so Anna knew that she had to surpass that imagination if she wanted to beat Noel.

At the same time, the current Noel had challenged her.

She was perplexed. On the one hand, she wanted to achieve her goal. On the other hand, what if her achieving her goal was actually someone's arrangement? Would she still be considered to have achieved her goal?

'Wait... no... that's not it.' Anna suddenly noticed something wrong with Noel's words.

The current Noel had told her that he wouldn't allow her to succeed that easily. So, if she achieved her goal, wouldn't that mean she achieved it with her own power? It was true that the previous Noel had arranged all this, but what if the arrangement was actually a frontal clash?

There was no scheme in a head-on clash. It was just a fight between their technique, skills, and strength. This way, it didn't really destroy the purpose of her goal as long as she achieved it through this method.

Anna took a deep breath as though she had made a decision. She raised a finger, "Since you're going to do it this way, we'll have our biggest bet in our entire life. The winner is allowed to order anything from the loser."

Noel smiled. There was no hesitation in his words. "I agree."

"I have to warn you that it's also included with an order to tell me your goal..." Anna warned him. Since telling her his goal would cause him to fail to achieve his goal, it was truly the biggest bet in their life.

"I know." Noel nodded. "I accept this bet, fully knowing the consequences. However, I should ask you too... Are you aware that you won't be able to achieve your goal if I defeat you?"

"Of course. Let's do this." Anna smirked.

"Alright." Noel's expression turned serious as he said, "In that case, you have to hear things about my system. First of all, the system is more unique than you originally thought. And the most unique things are..."

Noel opened the system and changed the two medals to Elite Medal and Couple Medal.

In that instant, he got a surge of fifteen percent of his current Spiritual Energy, causing it to create a small gale.

Even Anna noticed the difference and gasped. "This is..."

Noel didn't circulate his energy whatsoever. In fact, he didn't do anything that could cause his energy to rise. It didn't seem to be a technique to boost his energy either.

"This is one of its powers. Medal System. I can equip two different medals that can amplify my power. There is a medal that can increase my Spiritual Energy, sword mastery, or even rune mastery."

"Isn't this too overpowered? I mean, the more Spiritual Energy you have in your body, the more it increases, right? What if you are a Spirit Transcendence or even a Spirit King?" Anna sucked a cold breath.

"Yes. The second ability is to learn all kinds of techniques in an instant as I've said earlier. I don't think I have to explain much regarding this ability."

"Indeed. It's simple but powerful." Anna nodded in confirmation.

"The third ability would be this..." Noel bought a water bottle from the system and let it appear before her.

"Huh? Is this a space element? How do you make it appear out of nowhere?"

"I don't know the reason as well, but the system allows me to buy basic things. For example, I can buy this stuff to help people and something along the lines. I can even buy some runes and master them. Of course, I have the knowledge about runes in my head, but learning and mastering it takes time. So, I usually use this function to learn a new one."

"That's understandable. In my previous life, I have learned some runes, and it really takes a long time just to create a perfect rune." Anna agreed, recalling all the time she holed up in her room just to learn them.

"Last but not least, the missions. The missions can be related to the future or even information that I don't know. So, I've been using it to act as a clairvoyance in one way or another." Noel explained.

"That makes sense. That's how you know about a lot of things without the memory of the future like me." Anna nodded. "Does that mean you have a mission right now?"

"Yes. Well, the most recent mission is to have a wife..." Noel teased her a bit.

"Mhmm?" Anna was startled, her face slightly reddened.

This reaction was the reason why Noel added, "Though, it didn't specify who it is."

"Wha—" Anna hurriedly slammed the table while raising her voice. "You're mine. I'll fight whoever dares to snatch you from me."

"How brutal... you sure love to fight, aren't you? No, should I be careful of interacting with women from now on because I'm afraid that you will kill them or something..."

Anna's body trembled. She corrected her words, "Ehm, I mean, I'm just going to change my way to the point where you fall so deep that you can't think of anyone else."

Noel only smiled while watching her reaction. It was at this time that Anna knew he teased her.

"You..." Anna gritted her teeth. "Then, what about you? If I win, it means that I will be known as the figurehead, right? I can actually get a lot of husbands..."

"That won't happen," Noel said with a gentle smile as though he was sure about it.

"Huh? Why are you so sure?"

"Because you'll be so occupied with me that you won't have the time to think about anyone else."

"..." Anna wanted to refute him, but she ended up looking away, embarrassed. She never thought Noel was so bold that he could say those words straight to her. "So... what do you like about me? I have to make sure that you like me and not think of anyone else besides me."

"It's fine. You're perfect the way you are." Noel chuckled.

"That's..." Anna felt happy hearing it, but she didn't really like the answer. There was no way a person would like everything from another person, especially their mistakes. "That's a rather vague answer."

"Then, tell me about what I should change to make you like me more?"

"Ehm..." Anna rubbed her cheeks embarrassedly while looking away. "I like the way you are."

"See?"

Anna crossed her arms, unsatisfied. "No. There must be something. You might not know it since you don't know me enough. Alright, let's sleep together from now on. This way, we can share a lot of things before we go to sleep."

"I don't think that's necessary. I mean, it will cause trouble for your reputation because of the kingdom's norms. It's not about two soldiers sharing a living space anymore. It's between two nobles."

"Have you forgotten that Dimitri has been doing it this whole time? I'm pretty sure that he must be thinking of a way to make us sleep together."

"Well..." Noel couldn't deny it, especially after Dimitri nailed their beds together in Old Ru's place.

Anna finally launched a counterattack by asking, "Or don't tell me that the famous Noel Ardagan can't resist my beauty and become a beast that can't control himself? I guess you're just like any other man."

Noel's eyebrows twitched as he couldn't help but pinch both of her cheeks. "Hoho? I should be the one asking you... you must be so thirsty to suggest something like that."

"Well, that would mean that you can't find any other wife beside me, so that's fine." Anna stuck her tongue out.

"You really..."

The two continued to bicker while heading to the bedroom. But because the mansion hadn't been constructed, the room was small. In fact, the bed was only for one person.

So, they ended up being so close that their shoulders were touching each other.

After a while, Noel couldn't help but reach her hand and hold it firmly.

"What's wrong? You can't resist anymore?" Anna smirked, teasing him again.

However, Noel kept his calm expression, his gaze remained on the ceiling. He said with a genuine tone. "No. I'm just glad... glad that you are here with me, Anna."

Anna opened her mouth, but the words stuck in her throat. She couldn't help but tilt her body toward him while burying her face in his arm. "Me...too."

Chapter 893 Bizarre Ideas

The next morning.

Dimitri opened a door, which turned out to be Noel's bedroom.

"Master? Are you still asleep? You're already more than an hour late..." Dimitri wanted to wake Noel up, but he soon stopped when he noticed there were two people on the small bed.

He was even more shocked when he saw the other person turned out to be Anna.

He thought about leaving them alone, but it seemed that he had made enough commotion for them to wake up.

"Mhmm?" Noel almost forgot about the schedule and hurried up, responding to Dimitri. "I'm sorry. I was late."

"It's already bright?" Anna yawned while rising from the bed. She was still discerning the situation with her fuzzy eyes.

Noel noticed that Dimitri had seen something he shouldn't have. After all, Anna was supposed to sleep in the room next door.

When he widened his eyes and was about to explain things to Dimitri, the latter had actually bowed his head.

"Please continue, Master. It will be troublesome if we hold the wedding when she is pregnant, but considering it's still one month away. You have less than three months, or you will have to wait for one more year. Ah, don't worry. I'll fix the bed later so that you two don't need to sleep in that small bed."

Noel's eyebrows twitched as if this was just a misunderstanding. He obviously understood what would happen if such a scenario were to occur. "Dimitri, stand there right now! We're going to have a talk."

"Since you've woken up, I'm going to let the others know. Please excuse me." Dimitri skillfully used his ability to escape, leaving Noel no chance to say another word.

"You..." Noel was completely speechless. He turned to Anna while opening his mouth, but the words actually stuck in his throat.

"So, that's your plan." Anna shook her head helplessly as if she was disappointed in Noel.

"Of course not. Even after marrying you, I don't plan to have a kid yet. You should know that your progress will be hindered that way. But because of our age, it won't be that long either. Anyway, I have to catch up to Dimitri!" Noel rushed to the outside.

Anna made a wry smile. On the one hand, she knew that giving birth to a kid would cause her to be unable to do much. On the other hand, she was kind of expecting it.

"A kid, huh..." Anna closed her eyes. As Noel said, they were already a bit too old compared to other nobles. In fact, other nobles would have married at seventeen or eighteen years old.

Meanwhile, both of them will be twenty years old this winter. "Well, it seems that we have to speed up our battle."

Anna rose from the bed while clenching her fists, becoming more determined than ever.

Surprisingly, Noel was actually right outside the room. He looked troubled and embarrassed at the same time. In fact, he might escape the room just to cover his embarrassment.

"Well, isn't this Noel? What are you doing here? Don't tell me you're embarrassed?"

"Not at all." Noel's expression turned to normal in an instant while saying, "I'm just thinking about the future, one year, two years, or even three years from now."

"Ahaha..." Anna wanted to tease him, but this time, it was different. They had talked about a lot of things yesterday, and it was the reason why they woke up late. So, she changed the topic. "Are you going to inspect the river this time?"

"Yeah. I'm going to inspect the river and the post today."

"Actually, after talking to you yesterday, I couldn't help but wonder..." Anna raised two fingers. "Do you even need the river when you can supply the water through your system? I mean, you can get the currency to exchange items by helping the people, right?"

"What if you don't build the dam and cause the enemy to attack? By using those points to get water, you help the citizens, and by helping the citizens, you get the currency again. Won't it generate an endless amount of points?"

Noel shook his head. Of course, he had thought about it, so he asked, "Are you saying you are going to let the citizens suffer again and again? While it's true that I will help them, living in suffering is not something you want to experience, you know."

"No." Anna waved her hand while correcting him. "I'm not talking about living in suffering. I'm talking about the unnecessary dam... Why would you build a dam when you can do all that? Is there actually another purpose for that dam? I have thought about it, but I couldn't find the answer."

"Huh?" Noel widened his eyes in shock. "Now that I think about it..."

Noel suddenly dropped to the ground while continuously looking down as if there was a map on the floor. "If the dam has another purpose, it means the post and the mine also have one... If it's not to help the citizens and not generating the points, then..."

Noel dropped his jaw to the ground as if he couldn't believe what he had just thought.

"Anna... are you a genius?"

"What? I'm talented, but I'm not smart enough to figure it out." Anna tilted her head in confusion.

"No." Noel smirked as he hugged Anna and raised her up. "Hahaha. That's it. I can finally see another way to utilize the system!"

"W-what?!" Anna's heart skipped a beat, but looking at Noel becoming so happy warmed her heart. Still, she was a bit curious. "What are you talking about?"

"I mean, there are three other ways to utilize the dam." Noel smirked. "First of all, the dam itself might help the citizens, but it's not necessary. Then, why would I create an important asset when I have a hard time defending it?"

"A... diversion?!" Anna seemed to have got the answer.

"Yes. I can divert their attention to the dam, allowing them to attack the dam instead of the territory. That water gate is used to prevent any harm to the city."

"Ooh?!" Anna didn't see it coming. The enemies shouldn't have seen it either. "Then... the other two reasons?"

"The second reason is a weapon!"

"A dam as a weapon? No. Are you trying to protect the side of our territory by using that dam?"

"Yes. If we create a dam, we can destroy it as well. This way, the enemies who cross the shallow river will be swept away by the water in the dam. And even if they destroy the dam, it will greatly impact the western side of the territory and prevent them from coming through it."

"I see. A dam as a weapon, huh. But I still can't see the third way."

"The third way is actually the system itself. As you said earlier, I could generate an endless amount of points, but this time, I don't plan on letting the citizens suffer." Noel grinned. "Since the dam is a weapon, it might be reconstructed a few times. By doing that, I can create a task for citizens to build the dam."

"Ah! Helping people will generate points. So, giving people wages will be similar to saving them. Of course, that only happens for the normal citizens who are living on their wages, not the wealthy. But it will still generate a large amount of points."

"I see. So, by creating a lot of projects, you can get points..." Anna asked, "What about the current progress of the city? You're building a lot of things, right?"

"Yes. However, I have to discuss it with Ardagan. I want to give them wages on a daily basis, allowing me to harvest more points, but Ardagan might make a fuss about it, so I'll find the perfect time to give them wages. With this amount of points, I can buy more items and even completely learn all the runes."

"I see. Then the post is like that as well?"

"Yes. How about creating that post as your base to hunt the demons? And creating that small post will require people as well. In addition, I want you to dig out a tunnel linking this place to that post. You should remember the mission in the Heirden's territory, right?"

"Ah. The emergency escape path that is hidden underneath the mountain."

"That's it. Not only can we use it to escape, but we can also bring soldiers to launch a sneak attack from behind. After all, the enemies can only attack us from the north or south."

"I see. That means the mine has the same function as the dam?"

"Indeed. Since the mine is more important than the vein, we can even use the Rune Array to create a small natural fortress to hinder or even eliminate the enemies. By taking advantage of the natural advantages, we can generate points and protect the territory. I'm going to Douglas to discuss this plan."

"Alright. I will go to the soldier camp then. I have to discuss our exploration that will start two days from now." Anna nodded. "Still, you are truly a genius. To think you would use the terrain advantage like this..."

"No, no. You've given me hints of what I did in my previous life. And you had given that last straw leading to this conclusion. I wouldn't be able to come up with this in one or two months without you. Thank you, Anna."

Anna smiled. "We've agreed to build this place together. I think there is no need to thank each other from now on... After all, it's only natural to help each other, right?"

"Right? In that case, I will be cooking tonight! Then..." Noel waved his hand as he rushed out, wanting to discuss his plan.

"I told him there is no need to thank each other..." Anna shook her head helplessly, knowing the gesture was meant to thank her. But she still felt happy that she could help a lot.

Chapter 894 Challenge

"So, what do you think, Douglas?" Noel asked.

"I don't have any problems. But if we're going to build it and destroy it over and over again, then I have to take into consideration the materials as well as the effect it will cause on the downstream area." Douglas explained.

"I can provide with funds, and I believe this is going to take priority. It's going to be our weapon against the first attack."

"If that's the case, you might have to consult with Dimitri regarding the workers. As long as we have enough workers, creating a broken dam should be easy." Douglas thought for a moment. "What I'm interested in is this outpost. Are you sure you want to build an outpost in that area?"

"Yes. For the territory's defense."

"Interesting." Douglas raised two fingers. "In that case, I believe it's better to make it a bit grand if you want to make the enemies believe that it's a fort while it's not. There is also a chance that the enemies will attack that place instead."

"I have considered it." Noel nodded, assuring Douglas.

"In that case, I can create the blueprints for you within three days. Dimitri has to get the workers, though."

"Alright. I'll leave it to you." Noel waved his hand and finally went to Dimitri to discuss the workers.

...

While Noel was discussing a lot of projects with other pillars, Anna finally arrived at the barrack where Howard trained the soldiers.

Clink!

Clink!

Clink!

A clicking sound could be heard from a hundred meters away as Anna was sure that there was a sparring between two soldiers.

When she arrived at the soldier camp, she found that there were two soldiers surrounded by others. One of them was sitting on the ground with a sword on his neck while the other was raising his hand as if showing that he had won.

Howard was supervising the entire process and nodded his head as if approving the match. Soon, he noticed that a person was coming in their direction. A few other soldiers seemed to have noticed her as well and turned their heads around, finding Anna.

"Well, well, well..." Howard squinted his eyes. "Who do we have here? Isn't this Mistress Anna?"

Anna could feel from his voice that Howard looked down upon her. As expected, Howard was one of the people that was against Noel's marriage, so she could understand the prejudice he had.

And it was her job to dispel that prejudice by showing that she was the only one for him.

Anna asked, "Are you training right now?"

"Of course, Madam!" Howard answered while smirking. The other soldiers were whispering to each other. If they had Howard's position, they might do the same thing. However, they didn't dare to do it because they were still seeking the points to get runes on their bodies.

"I see. It seems that I have to interrupt your training session." Anna smiled.

"For what reason?" Howard asked while furrowing his eyebrows.

Anna actually brought a big scroll with her. She walked past the soldiers skillfully and reached the center.

The two soldiers stepped back, not knowing what to do in this situation. In the end, Howard waved his hand, signaling them to return to the rank while he took care of Anna.

Anna placed down the scroll and rolled it, showing everyone the map of the territory.

"Hoh?" Howard was amused. It seemed that the interruption was bigger than he originally thought. "It will require a lot of time."

"I'm aware. That's why I just wanted to tell you about the plans for now."

Howard walked toward Anna with a sharp gaze. It seemed that he wanted to tear Anna down so that his master didn't need to marry her. And this was the opportunity.

He sat down in front of the map while saying, "I'm all ears."

Anna raised her hand and circulated her energy, forming a stick in front of her.

'She has good control...' Howard sensed the high-level control that Anna had and confirmed the rumors. It seemed that Anna truly defeated Count Heirden. Her achievement was truly based on strength instead of a hidden trade in the royal court.

Anna pointed at three locations with the stick. "I want to mobilize the soldiers and clear up these three areas."

Howard noticed the river and the mountain, so he immediately asked, "Do you want to utilize the river and mountain?"

"Yes. Noel is planning to build a dam in this area, so I want to clear up all the demons that are scattered so that the workers can come in. As for this mountain, we've verified the existence of a mine here. We're not sure about what kind of vein is buried underneath it, but it's something we can utilize. The mine itself doesn't have any demons, and all their remains have been destroyed, so we're only clearing up the perimeter."

Howard fell into deep thought. "The mountain should be fine. But the river is trickier. The river is about fifteen meters wide. Looking at this map, we have to go around and cross this section of the river. But doing so will take a lot of time."

"I know your concern. That's why we'll create two groups."

"And are you planning to lead the second group?"

"Indeed." Anna nodded with a serious expression.

Howard squinted his eyes. He didn't like that idea, but this was the perfect opportunity to see Anna's ability. Although she had proven her strength, it didn't mean she had the commanding ability.

But before agreeing to her, Howard changed the topic slightly. "How about this mountain?"

"Since we'll clear the river first, the two groups should have been established. So, we'll sweep the mountain with two groups as well and further investigate the mine."

Howard noticed a bit of unrest coming from his subordinates. Anna was too young and had never gone through anything with them, so they doubted Anna could make a good command.

Hence, Howard came forward with the last trial. "In that case, can you tell me about the plan for this area? I don't see anything special."

"This area... is his direct order. No questions are allowed." Anna stated with a solemn tone.

"!!!" Even though Howard wanted to rebuke that word, the fact that Noel had given the direct order for this area meant the information was classified. Since the soldiers were still watching, it wouldn't be best to talk about it.

After looking at the three locations that Anna had pointed at, Howard explained, "We've scouted the area before gathering in the city. There are numerous Peak Level Demons, so it's going to be dangerous. We've noticed at least seven Peak Level Demons around the river and thirteen of them in the northern part. The mountain is trickier, but we believe the number is even higher than the other two."

Anna also noticed the tricky part of the mountain. Even her instinct picked up several dangers, so she asked, "How many men do you have, and how is their strength?"

"I am a Spirit Grandmaster. There are four Spirit Masters under me, followed by ten Spirit Wielders and thirty Spirit Practitioners. The rest are Spirit Apprentices. In total, we have ninety people."

"Hmm..." Anna looked down as if falling into deep thought. "It's going to be dangerous for the Spirit Apprentices... But the runes..."

Howard was worried about it as well. However, they worked for Noel and were ready to throw their lives for the sake of this territory. So, Howard assured her, "We're men of the battlefield. We're not afraid of anything."

"No. I'm not worried about your resolve. Right now, the territory doesn't have any new batch of soldiers, especially to protect a big city and those soon-to-be walls. So, we can't afford to lose soldiers." Anna shook her head.

Howard's expression turned serious, realizing that Anna might not be a sheltered girl and understand a bit about the management of soldiers.

As Anna said, if they lost too many soldiers, they would have a hard time finding their replacement. Those soldiers could also help with the training of newer soldiers that the territory would recruit in the future.

"What do you think, Howard?" Anna raised her head, asking for Howard.

This question took him by surprise. Anna's status as Noel's fiancée toppled even him, so the fact that she lowered her pride and asked for his opinion meant that she was serious about protecting this territory.

Because of that, Howard decided to give her an honest opinion. "The safest will be to clear one side first. However, it'll take too much time. Hence, we'll divide the soldiers into two groups."

"Won't it be too dangerous?"

"We've received some equipment from Sir Roel, so we'll arm them with those equipment. Besides, this will be a big opportunity for the soldiers to earn points and learn a lot from the battle."

"So, I will still get the command of the second group?"

"Because you're the only Spirit Grandmaster here, then yes. However, I will send two Spirit Masters who are adept at commanding the soldiers. They'll take over once you encounter a problem."

"I don't mind." Anna agreed without hesitation.

"In that case, I can feel assured. Please don't look down on these soldiers. They might not be as strong as you, but they won't go down without a fight."

"Alright then." Anna looked left and right, observing the soldiers' expressions. She couldn't help but say, "I know that you are unsatisfied with me. However, I won't use my authority to make you acknowledge me. That's why you're free to express those arguments in the way you did earlier..."

"Hmmm? Are you..." Howard was quite surprised that Anna decided to do it this way.

"Who do you think has drawn runes on Noel's body?" Anna paused for a moment so the others could think of the answer. But even without saying it, they could clearly see that person. Anna pointed at herself. "I was the one who drew them. If you have an objection, fight me."

"Any Spirit Masters who can hit me once will be considered to win, any Spirit Wielders who can push me back will win, any Spirit Practitioners who can force me to use my abilities will win..."

Anna smirked as her words managed to pique the soldiers' interest. Anna asked out loud, "So, who will be the first?"

Chapter 895 Respect

"We could get a rune on our body as long as we defeat her?"

"We don't need to defeat her. As long as we can just push her back, we will win."

The soldiers were whispering to each other. Anna's offer was actually beyond their imagination and had sparked a lot of interest.

Even Howard couldn't help but ask, "Are you sure about this?"

"Yes," Anna confirmed without hesitation.

Although he hated Anna, his opinion changed during the conversation. Instead of thinking about how to harm her, he considered the fact that Anna might have to take care of these men. It would definitely look bad for her reputation.

"But..." Howard wanted to stop her, albeit Anna had made her decision. "It's fine. I've consulted with Noel as well. Besides, they have to win against me first."

Howard was still worried since it wouldn't be only her reputation that would be damaged. Noel's reputation as the one who married her would be questioned. But the fact that she had received Noel's permission meant that their master had agreed to it.

One of the Spirit Masters raised from the ground and volunteered, "Captain. Please allow me to fight her."

Howard's face looked troubled, but after seeing Anna's determined face, he could only agree. "Alright."

"Oh?!"

"Grandel is the one going to fight first!"

"Grandel is a Spirit Master, the strongest among us."

"This is a perfect opportunity to measure our opponent's strength."

The people became excited as Grandel reached the arena and stood two meters away from Anna. He politely bowed to her and said, "Please forgive my aggression."

"If you can hit me, that is." Anna nodded with a smile.

Howard sighed before announcing, "You can use your ability, but not the big one and destroy this area. No killing blow is allowed, and I will have the authority to stop the fight at any time. If you don't have any objections, the match can start now!"

Both Anna and Grandel nodded their heads as if signaling to each other that they had no objection. Grandel took out his spear while Anna pulled out her sword.

There was a silence filling the battlefield for a few seconds before Grandel rushed forth.

In just an instant, Grandel reached Anna and thrust his spear. Anna didn't have any change of expression from Grandel's speed.

She only raised her right foot as if trying to take a step back.

'Going away? You can't!' Grandel sped up, but this was the time Anna showed her true intention.

Instead of taking a step back, she actually rotated her body slightly, causing the backstep to become a sidestep and ultimately avoiding the spear.

'!!!' Grandel widened his eyes in surprise. He hurriedly swung his spear to match Anna's movement, but the latter had struck his spear from below, knocking it up.

Grandel still held his spear, but the force actually forced his arms so high that he could lose his grip at any moment. In addition, Anna took this chance to push his body back.

"Kh!" Grandel coughed a few times as though a boulder had just hit him. He never thought that a gentle push from Anna would be that strong.

Among the people who watched the battle, only Howard could actually see through Anna's move.

'What? Grandel used his Spiritual Energy to make a leap toward her and cover his whole body. But she didn't use her Spiritual Energy to avoid him... she only utilized it to strike him.'

Howard was completely surprised. Anna could actually change the flow of her Spiritual Energy and cause the difference between Spiritual Energy. Just like the training with Old Ru, where they knocked each other out when there was a different level of Spiritual Energy, she utilized that power to knock him back.

And she released a high amount of Spiritual Energy in an instant to generate that much pressure.

Her control was simply unbelievable.

However, the more he observed Anna, the more terrifying she became. Anna actually took advantage of Grandel's confidence.

By making that back step, she made Grandel increase his speed, causing him to be late to react to the change in her movement.

Anna looked at Grandel and said, "You have a good speed, but to utilize that speed, you either need a sharp instinct that can take over your fight or a fast mind to create logical attack patterns at that speed."

"I know that." Grandel gritted his teeth and charged at her again. But this time, he stopped right at the edge of his spear's range and kept thrusting his spear so that one of them could hit Anna.

Sadly for him, Anna parried every single thrust. "Good judgment. To fight an unknown opponent, it's best to learn their ability first by maintaining your distance. I guess the basics have been ingrained into you."

"Don't talk as if you know everything!" Grandel roared and increased his speed, trying to overwhelm Anna.

But there was a big difference in their strength. Anna was already a Spirit Grandmaster after all. Her lightning not only increased her power but also her speed. And the instinct that his spirit gave her told her where the spear would be coming next.

"I actually want to show everyone here about runes. After all, you're going to be the elite soldiers of our Ardagan Family." Anna raised her other hand, pointing it at Grandel.

"!!!" Grandel instinctively stopped attacking and jumped away.

"Good reaction." Anna nodded in satisfaction while forming the Increase Agility Rune on her hand. The target was Grandel.

"Hmm?!" Grandel felt a surge of power coming into his body. He felt his body get slightly faster.

"This is the Increased Agility Rune. It's a basic rune, but it can increase your speed slightly. Come at me again!"

Grandel paused for a moment, never expecting Anna to give something like this. He took a deep breath first to calm himself and erase that prejudice. His eyes were now clear and refined, very different from the first time he stepped into the arena.

"I like your eyes now." Anna smiled.

"Grandel, coming." Grandel lowered his center of gravity before using the Spiritual Energy to kick the bottom of his feet, launching him straight to Anna.

The speed was faster than the previous one. Even Anna couldn't make any fake and had to stop him with her blade.

A clicking sound echoed on the battlefield, shocking everyone.

"Isn't that... quite fast?"

"I think it's faster."

"The difference might be small, but it's noticeable."

"But it's only a basic rune..."

"Even if it's only a basic one, it's still quite huge for us..." A Spirit Practitioner soldier claimed.

Howard made a wry smile. He fully understood the power of runes, considering Noel had drawn it for him to showcase its power. And to think Anna was also a master of runes who had been helping Noel this whole time. It seemed that he had been completely mistaken about Anna.

Anna and Grandel clashed a few times. The latter had refined his movement a bit further, but Anna started to get serious and poured more Spiritual Energy into her strike, gradually overpowering Grandel.

Once Grandel lost his speed, Anna got a complete advantage and struck his spear down, knocking it to the ground.

The last clicking sound was the bell that signaled the end of the match.

To their surprise, Grandel was actually defeated without being able to do anything special. No, it could be said that Anna directed his focus on the rune, causing him to be unable to perform as he usually did.

"This is..."

"She defeated Grandel so easily."

"No. Grandel didn't perform well this time."

The soldiers had mixed feelings. On the contrary, Grandel actually bowed his head to Anna.

"I've lost completely. That Increase Agility Rune..." Grandel looked at Anna but was hesitant to ask for it.

"It's nothing secretive. Our Ardagan Family will have elite soldiers who are adept in running. There will be soldiers who can incorporate runes or even use runes directly. That's why I'm introducing you to the runes right now. It can boost your strength, create unimaginable force, or even protect your comrades."

When Anna started explaining about runes, the soldiers fell silent as they were curious about it.

And in this silence, Anna actually delivered the real message. "I know that you hate me for what I've done in the past. There is nothing I can do to change it.

"Yes. I was your enemy... I was Noel's enemy." Anna emphasized the fact that it was in the past as she continued, "That's why I'm going to show you that I have changed. I will show you that I will be your strongest ally and build this territory together with him.

"I will earn your respect with my effort. That's why I only request all of you... to give me one chance. Just the river, please trust me with your life. If you deem me unfit, then you will never see me again among the soldiers."

The soldiers were astounded. Anna's tone was sincere and her determination was genuine. They had scrapped all the possibilities because of what they knew about her in the past.

As she said, she needed a chance... a chance to show them that she was different from the past. They only needed to respect her if they deemed she was worthy.

She had also introduced runes, and Noel seemed to have trusted her with a lot of things.

This plea somehow made Anna look cool in their eyes. Even Grandel broke the silence by asking Howard, "Captain... I volunteered to be under her in the exploration. I am the fastest, so I can move around to help other soldiers in case of emergency."

Grandel's request had changed the direction of the soldiers' thoughts.

Although it was only a little bit, that day, Anna earned the respect of the soldiers.

Chapter 896 Sword Arbiter

Marquis Stargaze Mansion.

There were two men sitting in front of each other. One of them was obviously the owner of the house, Kevin Stargaze. But the other one was surprisingly the Duke of the kingdom, Sword Arbiter Lorelei.

"Hahahaha. Did you hear the news, Kevin?!" Duke Lorelei laughed out loud while slamming the table. It looked like he was too excited for the news he had just heard.

"I'm not sure what you're talking about." Kevin furrowed his eyebrows while maintaining his calm.

"Don't play dumb. I'm sure you've heard about it. The Royal Family has heard about it first, but it has become a huge rumor in the capital city, you know." Duke Lorelei smirked while pointing at Kevin. "It's about your daughter's engagement with the famous Noel Ardagan."

"..." Kevin closed his eyes, knowing what he wanted to talk about. "It's my daughter's choice. I try to respect my own children's choices. That's all."

"You're basically admitting that your and her actions in the royal court were fake, you know." Duke Lorelei was seriously amused by how the whole kingdom was tricked by their fights.

At first, it was clear that Anna had been making it difficult for Kevin. She had gone all the way to put Noel in dangerous territory.

Everything was going according to the plan until they announced the engagement.

"It's hilarious that no one can actually believe it. It started with how she asked for the Ardagan Family's execution and ended with an engagement. The supposedly mortal enemy ends up as a partner for life. How can anyone expect that?"

"I'm not sure what you're talking about."

"Oh, are you trying to play fool here? I've connected most of the dots anyway." Duke Lorelei thought for a moment. "If this is their entire plan, what do you think they expect from Lounstein? In the end, it's a dangerous territory."

"I don't know. It can be anything related to the future like resources and other things." Kevin shrugged. "Are you alright for doing this? Don't forget that you're a duke as well as an arbiter."

"It's fine. My grandfather was the one who married royalty and became a duke, I only retained this position because of my strength. So, this old man will be impartial most of the time." Duke Lorelei shrugged. "Instead, let's talk about something even more interesting."

"Hmm?" Kevin narrowed his eyes.

"So, when did it start? Don't tell me you're going to say that it's from the beginning, right? What next? Are you going to tell me that the executed Ardagan Family was fake and the real people have been hiding somewhere?"

"If only I could meet my best friend, I would have done so." Kevin sighed as if he was sad that he couldn't meet him anymore because the other party was already beyond this world.

Duke Lorelei paused for a moment, observing Kevin's face. He said playfully, "Well, even if they're still alive, it's not like they can show themselves. Faking your own execution, escaping your punishment, and lying to the masses about your own death, I'm afraid that even if they reveal themselves, they won't be treated lightly."

"Yeah. I would be the first to hit him in the face." Kevin nodded. "But at the very least, I should take care of his son. He had helped me that much in the past."

"Fair enough. So, the engagement was your idea?"

"Not at all. From the very start, I had declared that I left her marriage in her hands, right?"

"That's true. In the end, that kid grew so independent that no one could marry her. And hearing about Noel's achievement, I could only think of him as the only partner who can stand by her side."

"You seem to have free time, Sir Lorelei."

"Of course. While I still retain my position as an Arbiter, I have stepped down as the family head." Duke Lorelei shrugged. "I'm just spending my life to either hone my swords or experience interesting things."

"In that case, there is something interesting... It's said that the Third Prince and the Royal Family's relationship is not as one knows. Instead, they are friendly. One of them controls the kingdom in the dark while the other is governing it openly."

Duke Lorelei stared at Kevin for a moment without a change of expression before saying, "That's an interesting opinion. You are lucky that I'm not on duty, or I might have to detain you for that blasphemy."

"Indeed. I apologize." Kevin closed his eyes with a smile as though he had gotten his answer.

"Then, as an apology, you should answer this question. How do you think they spread the information? I'm pretty sure that the Royal Family has caught wind of it right away, but calculating the time they need to reach Lounstein, it should only be around two or three days since they met, right?"

"If you take it into the equation, you will realize that the message can only be sent through birds. And surprisingly, in a single night, the rumor has spread to the entire capital. People listen to it from the market, red-light districts, and even the slums.

"You should know the power of information. If they can spread the news so easily, it's clear that they want everyone to know about it for a reason. I don't care about the reason since I don't have anything against them, but I'm quite curious about the method."

Kevin shrugged. "I don't know. I only knew about their close relationship not long ago, so I just played along. As for their method, it eludes me."

"Is that so? I guess I should say as expected of the Ardagan Family. Even with their current condition, they still have all this influence." Duke Lorelei chuckled. "There are a lot of people panicking."

"They sure do."

"At first, there are two groups: those who support Noel and the people who support Anna. Now that the people they support join hands, they're wondering what they should do. Should they merge? Should they continue clashing?"

"The people are confused, considering their original purpose is to either get benefit or join the same side as the royal family."

"It will still take a while for them to calm down, but even I want to laugh about the current condition. Before, the nobles were split into two groups, but because of this engagement, it has become at least five groups."

"Indeed, especially with the fact that Noel is the teacher of the Greenwood Kingdom's second princess." Duke Lorelei's face turned solemn as if this matter weighed heavily in his heart.

"I don't know how it became that way, but don't forget his mother."

"I know. She is also an extremely talented Spirit ian like her father." Duke Lorelei raised a finger. "I don't care much, but I think it's a bit disadvantageous for him to choose Lounstein. He should have chosen a place near all four kingdoms since even the Zaecuria Kingdom is trying to take a bite of his runes. If he gets the support from all kingdoms, he might be able to establish a neutral territory, not belonging to any kingdoms."

"Well, he is the child of that Luke, I'm sure his aim is something else." Kevin shook his head helplessly. "Even I can't say I understand my best friend completely."

"Fair enough. Then, I have one last question." Duke Lorelei raised a finger and his expression turned even more solemn. "I don't have any problems with the situation to be honest. But how far is he planning to go? I don't like raising my blade to crush the future of the kingdom."

"I'm glad that you think that way, but I think you don't have to worry about it. Let me give you one truth that you would happily hear. The grudge between him and my daughter was real."

"!!!" Duke Lorelei was astounded. This information could be interpreted in a lot of ways. If this was the truth, it meant that even if Noel had a grudge against Anna, it could be resolved in one way or another.

This meant a lot to the conflicts within the kingdom. But it also proved that there was a possibility that Noel didn't intend to destroy the kingdom, which would force him to raise arms to subjugate him.

This was the most important. He couldn't help but chuckle as if he felt relieved. "Haha. I guess that's his charm. Since they're still engaged, maybe I should throw some of my granddaughters at him?"

"Hoho, I might have to stop you here. My daughter is a little selfish, you see. Besides, don't forget that in the Ardagan Family, most of their direct lineage only has one wife."

"Now that I think about it..." Duke Lorelei nodded while recalling the history. "Well, think of it as me not saying anything. Thank you for answering this old man's questions. So, as thanks... I hope that you don't mind me having a vacation in your house."

"!!!" Kevin was surprised. Although he worded it that way, it was clear that Duke Lorelei didn't have any intention to go against Noel. But if he returned to his house, the royal family would force him. Hence, he stayed here so that Kevin could keep him in check personally. Kevin couldn't help but smile, "As long as you don't grow tired of my humble home."

Chapter 897 Hidden Danger?

Somewhere in the Muivell Kingdom, a couple got a report of interesting news that had been spreading wildly in the kingdom.

"Hmm? Are you telling the truth?" The guy asked with a grim tone while the woman covered her mouth in complete shock. They were clearly shaken by the news.

"Yes, Sir. That's the rumor. And I believe Harley was the one spreading that rumor... and Harley wouldn't do something like that unless..." The one who reported to them didn't finish his words, but it was clear what the continuation was.

The guy closed his eyes for a moment before waving his hand. "Alright, thank you."

"Congratulations, Master, Madam. The young master has finally got someone." He smiled before turning around, leaving the couple alone.

The couple was dumbstruck, having a hard time believing the news. But if that was the truth, it completely blew their minds.

"Dear... Noel..." The woman's voice was shaken and tears couldn't help but flow out of her eyes.

"Y-yeah." The guy nodded his head. "I have never thought that it would end up like this."

Yes, this couple was none other than Noel's parents, Luke Ardagan and Leysha Ezenholm.

After getting that confirmation, Leysha turned around as if she was trying to leave. "I am going!"

"Wait! Do you know what will happen if we leave right now?" Luke gritted his teeth. He was as eager as Leysha, but he had to restrain himself.

"Are you saying I should continue to hide here when it's a big day for my son? I have been following you this whole time, agreeing to all those arrangements because I know that it's the best for Noel. But—" Leysha abruptly stopped when Luke looked at her with a sorrowful face.

He also wanted to go out, but the implications he brought might affect Noel directly. That was why he couldn't move. There was only one word coming out of his mouth. "Please."

Leysha clenched her fists. If she were any stronger physically, her palms might have bled from her nails. She said, "Is this also your plan?"

"No. While it's true that I've got an inspiration from the ancestor, I have never done anything that will alter the course of his life." Luke shook his head. "In fact, I originally thought that he would never have

one in his life due to what happened... Or he might just choose one random woman just to push away anyone. Having Anna, especially with that nasty personality, is beyond my imagination."

Leysha frowned. "I heard that in the court, she was the one who suggested a dangerous place for Noel's territory."

"No. If they worked together, it meant that she had changed. That place must have been important and will become even more prosperous in the future." Luke shook his head before asking, "Have we made any contact with Kevin?"

"No. But the Royal Family seems to be unable to send forth all their Arbiters."

"The Sword Arbiter?"

"Included."

"That means Kevin is stalling that old man." Luke looked at the map on the table. "The Royal Family and the Supreme Devil Organization are going to move."

"I'm more concerned about the Third Prince. He has been extremely mysterious in the past two years." Leysha asked, "Should we send reinforcement? It doesn't need to be soldiers. We can send some money to help him."

"No. We can't help him directly or our movement will be known." Luke shook his head while pointing at the northern part of the Loustein. "If I'm not wrong, this place has had a high activity recently, right?"

"The northern part of his territory? But this is already outside the border. If we're going to help him, we should go to the territory!"

Luke ignored her words and continued with his explanation. "If I know my son very well, there should be a reinforcement stationed here. And due to its position... it must be from the Greenwood Kingdom."

"Greenwood Kingdom? My father?" Leysha seemed to be a bit startled.

"Most likely or we might still underestimate the scale. Either way, if we're going to send help, we'll give it to them."

"W-what? Why? You would rather help strangers than your own son?" Leysha protested.

"You have known me for so long, but can't you understand that I'm always acting for him?" Luke sighed.

"The pillars..." Leysha fell silent for a moment. As he said, there were ten pillars in the Ardagan Family, but out of ten, five had either followed them, defected, or completely disappeared.

However, Luke had actually prepared the remaining five for Noel. For example, Dimitri was the head butler, who also took care of the family problems. Douglas and Balott were perfect pillars for Noel if he wanted to build his new territory. Food supply would be a problem, so he left Jasmine. And finally, he asked Charlotte to take care of all the internal problems Noel would face.

These five pillars were the main strength for building a territory. But to his surprise, Howard and Harley ended up in the equation.

He brought the captain of the family's army, but the captain actually left behind the vice captain in charge of training, believing it would help Noel in the future. The same applied to Harley. He was the assistant of the information pillar, but he, by no means, was weaker than the head. Their way of gathering information was simply different.

It could be said that Noel received seven out of ten pillars. Of course, they were shocked to find Noel managed to invite a Master Blacksmith, teach runes, and even had a second princess of the Greenwood Kingdom as his student.

But this was also Noel taking his step to create his own pillars.

After understanding the situation, Leysha calmed down a bit. "So, is there a particular reason for you sending the reinforcement to these guys? They won't be able to enter the country, you know."

"Yes. If they enter the kingdom, the royal family could use it as an excuse." Luke pointed at Lounstein.
"But if you look at the map, there is only one place to attack him."

"Hmm?" Leysha seemed to notice something from the map. "The east side is the Greenwood Kingdom's territory, which means if they attack through this area, they will face the Greenwood Kingdom's wrath. And there is also a mountain... instead of pouring a lot of money to defend it, he can actually use the natural terrain as a fortress."

"Indeed." Luke nodded in agreement. "On the opposite side is a river. While the demons have to cross it first to attack the territory, the river can become a weapon as well. In other words, there are only two ways to attack the city."

"The north and the south. However, the Supreme Devil Organization couldn't come from the South while bringing a lot of demons since the other nobles would be forced to raise their army. The royal family would just shoot themselves in the foot if they ordered them not to do anything. In other words, the only way for the organization to attack him will probably..." Leysha pointed at the north where the Greenwood Kingdom's soldiers were stationed.

It was finally clear why Luke wanted to send reinforcement to the Greenwood Kingdom's forces instead. They would be the main wall that stopped the demons from the north, which would reduce their number before reaching Noel's city.

"Yes. Only elites from the organization and royal family can actually strike him from the south."

Leysha fell silent, understanding the whole picture. It wasn't that Luke didn't want to help Noel directly, he simply couldn't. While his option was limited, he still chose the option where he could maximize his help.

There was still a gap that the enemies could exploit, but ultimately, their number would be reduced greatly before arriving at Noel's territory.

"Alright. I'll remain here." Leysha sighed. "Still, if she is going to be my daughter-in-law, I have to give her something, right?"

"I guess I can't keep you here." Luke scratched the back of his head. "But you can't release your Spiritual Energy no matter what."

"I know." Leysha nodded enthusiastically. She seemed to be eager to come out.

But before she could reach the door, Luke added, "Also... since it has been a while, I think you won't be able to go out anytime soon in the future. Hence, I think it's the best time to warn him about that."

"That?" Leysha seemed shocked, causing her to subconsciously utter, "Demon King Resurrection."

Luke took out a book and showed it to her. "According to the ancestor, the Ardagan Family is the mortal enemy of the demons. When I think about it, there is only one thing that has never changed in the Ardagan Family."

"Are you saying it's the sword?"

"Yes. The fact that the slumbering sword has awakened means that the mortal enemy has returned. There is also an increase in the activity of the demons. And I don't know if the Supreme Devil Organization, the Third Prince, or the Royal Family would take advantage of this. The longer he takes to get stronger, the more dangerous the situation will be... that includes the girl. Warn them about it."

"Should I inform my father about this as well? He will surely help us."

"No. We can't help directly to avoid suspicion. If you want to do it, it's better to spread the runes." Luke's face turned grim. "Three years... No, two years or even faster... We don't have a lot of time left."

"Alright." Leysha nodded with a serious expression.

Chapter 898 Intermediate Rune

"Ready?" Anna asked.

"Yes, Miss." The soldiers shouted in unison.

"Amazing, you've disciplined them in two days." Howard chuckled.

Anna had truly worked hard in the past two days. On the first day, she challenged them and measured their abilities. On the second day, she practiced together with them, but with much higher intensity than the rest. Not wanting to lose, the soldiers tried to copy her, only to fail miserably.

Even then, they realized that Anna was not a simple young lady; she was also a warrior. At the very least, she had earned enough respect to lead them.

"How about you? Your expression has mellowed a bit." Anna smiled, recalling how Howard was so adamant about not acknowledging her previously.

"I still hold onto my opinion though."

"It will change sooner or later." Anna pointed at the river. "Then, we'll be over there."

"Yes. The enemies might be stronger over there since it's a bit farther from the city. But you should be fine since the average ability of your group is higher than this one. If needed, I would stop the exploration and help you."

"If needed, that is." Anna nodded and crossed the bridge together with the rest of the group. The river was calm, but the flow rate was a bit high. If they fell into the river, they would be dragged until they could reach the side. Even then, it would be a challenge to go up.

Anna carefully scanned the entire area, wondering if there was something special.

'I don't feel any dangerous existences. There are several demons not far from here, but the soldiers wouldn't have any problems in dealing with them.' Anna observed the area and noticed that Howard had begun to march.

"Miss, what should we do?" Grandel asked.

Anna turned to him, finding another person next to him. This person was the other Spirit Master who was tasked to follow her. "Grandel and Aerton will divide the group into two and move side by side. Grandel will take the left, and Aerton will take the right. I'll remain in the center."

"You're not going to fight, Miss?" Grandel asked, confused. Anna was so strong, so he thought Anna would lead the group at the front.

"I have earned their respect, but you two are more trusted by them. So, I will leave the commands to both of you. This is also an opportunity to measure everyone's individual strengths. I'll support all of you first before moving to the front."

"Understood."

Aerton and Grandel immediately assembled the group. While marching, Aerton couldn't help but ask, "She actually asked us to lead the group..."

"Interesting, isn't it?"

"Not really. I wish that the lord personally led the troops. Unlike her, who doesn't have much experience in the army, I'm more curious about the lord's ability."

"This is just a rumor though. But I heard that the mistress is stronger than our lord."

"It's only at the individual level, right? As a lord, you need to have a commanding ability." Aerton shrugged.

"Well, we can see her performance here."

"Fair enough. We'll maintain our position near the river and open up the path for you."

"My group will take the enemies coming from the left."

Grandel nodded and started moving to the left while saying, "Good luck to you, Aerton."

"You too."

After taking their position, the group moved to the north. The area near the river was filled with vegetation, but it wasn't big enough to call it a forest.

Hence, Aerton advanced through the forest while Grandel maintained his position outside.

Anna couldn't help but move forward and ask Aerton, "Why are you advancing in the woods? Won't it take considerable stamina to cross uneven terrain like this?"

"Yes, Miss. It's just that the woods are basically the demon's hiding spot. We have to search every nook and corner to make sure that there are no more demons hiding in this place. Besides, Grandel's job is not easy either since he has to cover a bigger area compared to us." Aerton explained.

"I see." Anna wanted to reveal her instinct, telling him that she could find all those demons. But she refrained herself since she wouldn't always go with the soldiers every time. "I understand. I'll return to my position."

Aerton was a bit curious. Anna had all that talent and status, but she didn't seem to be arrogant. She took people's opinions carefully and didn't hesitate to lower her pride to ensure the people's safety.

But he was disturbed when the scouts alarmed him. "Sir Aerton. We've spotted several demons ahead. There should be less than ten."

"Got it. Get into position and lure them here. Warn Grandel on our left as well."

"Yes, Sir." The scouts immediately followed the order. One of them asked the soldiers to get into their position, the other moved ahead to lure the demons while the last one moved to the left.

"This is..." Anna furrowed her eyebrows. The shield-bearers moved to the front while raising their spears. There were seven of them, followed by five archers. The rest seemed to be using swords.

This was the first time Anna saw how the soldiers fought. It was different from the Demon Banner Army.

Since the Demon Banner Army had multiple groups and squads, they were a kind of specialist in their own field. So, they didn't need to gather their strength like this and just overpower their enemies.

But if Noel employed such a system in the family, it would take a long time for it to be effective. After all, normal soldiers were not as trained and smart as the people in the Demon Banner Army.

"Interesting." Anna was satisfied with their movements. While they were not strong individually, if they worked together in an orderly manner, it wouldn't be strange if they killed a stronger demon.

However, Anna abruptly turned around and looked at the horizon as if she noticed something beyond the woods.

At the same time, the scout that Aerton sent earlier had returned and reported in a hurry, "Sir... it seems that Sir Grandel has found the enemies as well and is going to engage the enemies."

Realizing that they were fighting at the same time, Aerton realized that he couldn't use the normal tactic.

'I thought I could stop the enemies here and let Grandel flank them from the left, but...' Aerton raised his hand. "Spread our rank and contain the enemies here."

The soldiers began to spread even further, not letting any demons out of their reach and striking Grandel's group from behind.

Roar!

Roar!

Roar!

A series of roars resounded across the woods. There were a total of eight beasts leaping from one place to another, closing in.

Anna, on the other hand, had changed her position. She was now located between Aerton and Grandell, allowing her to see both groups at the same time.

Just like Aerton, Grandell had spread his rank, preventing any demon from entering the woods.

'I want to see their original ability, but I guess I shouldn't risk it too much during the first battle.' Anna muttered before clapping her hands as Spiritual Energy began to gather around her hands. They seemed to be drawing a pattern.

'In the previous life, all the basic runes have been revealed, and a lot of intermediate-level runes have become public knowledge. While there are only a few Advanced Level Runes, I think it shouldn't be much of a problem to use an intermediate-level rune here, right?

'Noel has revealed the runes and is recognized as its creator. And people have known that I've been working with him the whole time, so it shouldn't be that weird to see me using a bit more complex runes, right?'

Anna just tried to confirm it with herself before drawing the runes.

It looked similar to the Strength Blessing Rune, but the complexity was on a whole different level. The size was twice as big, and there were a lot of multiple patterns that changed from the Strength Blessing Rune.

As soon as it was ready, Anna poured more Spiritual Energy to the point where she could feel it. 'Oh yeah. As expected of an intermediate rune...the effect is amazing. This is the variation of the Strength Blessing Rune... Well, it's more like the Empowerment Rune is the advanced version, while this one is the version to share with others. Its effect is less, but fifteen people can get it at the same time.'

"Intermediate Rune, Enhanced Strength Rune." The moment Anna clapped her hands, the rune began to shine and release multiple lights into the sky.

"!!!" Aerton and Grandel were the first to notice and couldn't help but check it. However, the light was so fast that it flew to the ground and hit the shield-bearers and the sword users.

"This is..." All of them couldn't help but notice the surge of strength coming into their bodies. In fact, they felt so strong that they could destroy the trees next to them right away.

"I feel like I can crush those demons by myself."

"Wow. I'm twice as strong?"

The people were impressed, but they soon heard Anna's voice. "Don't let your guard down. I've boosted your strength, but follow the orders!"

The people were startled, but they soon turned serious as if knowing their duty. Their mistress had gone all the way to boost their power, so it was their job to take care of the demons.

'Much obliged.'

'Thank you very much.'

Aerton and Grandel nodded to Anna before shouting the same thing. "Warrior of the Ardagan Family. Turn this land red with the blood of our enemies."

Chapter 899 Meeting

The demons charged toward the shield-bearers, trying to overwhelm them. However, the archers released their arrows to the back area of the enemy's rank, causing a few demons to avoid those arrows and creating a gap between each demon.

With this, the number of demons was reduced, and the shield bearers could easily handle one demon after another.

They stopped the demons with their shields before piercing them with their spears.

The demons seemed to be hurt, but they ended up rampaging and trying to break apart the formation by struggling.

It was the time for the others to come in and slice the demons one by one, sweeping all the enemies.

Seeing how their kin had fallen, the remaining demons tried to chase after their killers, only to be rained by arrows. Some were blinded by their hatred and continued charging, only to succumb to the arrows. The rest obeyed their feelings and stopped, turning back toward the shield-bearers.

Sadly for them, the result was the same. They were stopped by the shield-bearers and died by the sweeping team.

Whether it was Aerton's team or Grandel's group, they did the exact thing and killed all the incoming demons.

Anna was amazed. 'Divide and conquer, huh... They have good training and know what to do. Fortunately, there are no big or strong demons that will change the outcome. But I guess Aerton and Grandel would give a different order...'

Of course, Anna could produce the same result, but it would take her a bit longer and more energy. So, having soldiers handling this type of stuff wasn't that big of a deal.

The problem was the loot. In the Demon Banner Army, the group usually divided their loot according to their contribution. But since the Demon Crystals were important, she wondered if Noel would just let them take everything. In fact, she forgot to ask about it.

"Clean up! Don't forget about their crystals." Aerton ordered before reporting to Anna, "We've finished the battle."

"Good work." Anna nodded. "By the way, how do you distribute the Demon Crystals?"

"Fifty percent would be brought back for the lord."

"Fifty percent? Isn't that kind of big?"

"No, the lord only asks for twenty percent. The other thirty percent comes from the exchange for contribution points. The remaining fifty percent can be distributed among us. After all, the soldiers also need demon crystals to improve their strength."

Anna nodded in understanding. "The points can be exchanged for demon crystals and other stuff. I can understand."

"Yeah. That's how it is. In fact, the soldiers can exchange their parts for more points. We'll leave the choice to each individual."

"I get the gist of the system." Anna wanted to say something, but she couldn't help but hear the soldiers' conversation.

"The fight is too easy."

"You should have thanked the lady. The strength I received from that weird ability actually allowed me to block the demons easily. Controlling their movement and placing them in a perfect location for our executioners to do their work."

"That's right. Normally, I would be pushed back by the demons, but earlier, it's not that much of a problem."

"To think runes would change the battle drastically..."

"What if we have a Spirit ian as well?"

Aerton had a wry smile when listening to their conversation. "Sorry about them."

"No. It's something that I have to consider as well. What if we have two more categories for the soldiers like Rune ian and Spirit ian? Spirit ian is known for their firepower, while Rune ian is versatile. As you can see earlier, they can boost a lot of people or focus their power on one of them. There are also some utility, defensive, and offensive runes..."

Anna looked down, contemplating. "It will take a while to create Rune ian, but I guess I can find some Spirit ian. I will suggest them to Noel later."

Aerton nodded. He silently acknowledged Anna for caring about the soldiers and sought more improvement. This way, the soldiers of the Ardagan Family would only get stronger. "Then, we'll continue moving after the soldiers gather the crystals."

"By the way, what do you do with the demon's meat?"

"We'd like to bring them back to the city, but because of our position, that task is left to Captain Howard." Aerton was talking about the fact that they had to cross the bridge. It would be troublesome for them to bring the demons across the river, so they would probably dispose of these bodies. Besides, Noel also didn't have a chance to learn about the secret recipe of the Atracaeca Kingdom to preserve food for a long time.

"I understand. Let's cont—" Anna abruptly stopped her speech, confusing Aerton.

"Miss?" Aerton frowned. It was as if Anna felt an immense danger.

"Maintain our position! There is a place I have to go." Anna ordered and rushed toward the north. She continued checking the distance with her instinct as well as the target power. 'There is a strong presence coming. But it doesn't seem to be big... is it a small demon... no, it might be a human. Supreme Devil Organization?'

Anna thought there was supposed to be no one in this place other than them. Even if the nobles wanted to get close to Noel, they wouldn't do something like this. Hence, whoever dared to come to their

territory must be from an enemy faction. She didn't care about their affiliation, she only had to remove the threat and interrogate this person.

Roar!

Roar!

Several demons noticed Anna and tried to attack her, but Anna simply stomped the ground, scattering the lightning and hitting each of them.

The demons were either heavily injured or died before reaching her.

Anna continued with her speed and would make contact with the enemy in just a few seconds.

Because of the danger she sensed, Anna activated the Empowerment Rune. 'I might have to use my Awakening to fight this enemy... Whoever this is, it's clear that he is stronger than Count Heirden.'

All of a sudden, Anna turned to the side, sensing the presence changing the direction. It seemed that the other party had sensed her and tried to avoid her. But Anna wasn't that easy to be fooled and followed the movement, finally finding her target.

The target, this time, covered his entire body with a robe. Even she couldn't see anything other than the person's small lips.

"There he is!" Anna leaped toward this person at full speed while waving her sword. "Who are you? What business do you have in this territory?"

The person stopped for a second. Despite being face-to-face, Anna couldn't actually see the person's face. In fact, the person also had a masquerade to cover most of his face.

But that didn't stop Anna from attacking him.

The enemy actually smiled at her as if he were impressed by the fact that she managed to locate him.

Anna was bewildered for a split second, but that was what the other party had been waiting for. Two giant ice blocks appeared next to Anna and sandwiched her.

Anna waved her blade horizontally, cutting the two blocks. The lightning contained in that slash shattered the remaining ice blocks so that the enemy couldn't use them anymore.

To her surprise, her blade suddenly became extremely heavy.

"Huh?" The weight pulled her to the ground, and when she lowered her vision, she found a block of ice covering her blade. It was no wonder why she ended up falling. But there was a question in her mind, 'When? Did he actually create this ice block when I slashed those two?'

This time, the enemy was the one taking the initiative by charging at her.

Anna used her other hand to shatter the ice block on her sword while stomping the ground, sending her lightning in a fan-shaped area.

Chilling air began to permeate the air as the surrounding soil around the enemy began to freeze. When the lightning was about to reach him, they were frozen.

'What? It could actually freeze my lightning? This enemy... Is he truly from the Supreme Devil Organization? He should be at the peak of Devil Inspector if not a Devil Saint... but we don't have information about this person...' Anna frowned.

Seeing that her ability didn't work, Anna had no choice but to escalate the battle to a bigger one. She tried not to use too much ability since it would cause the other soldiers to come and put her at a disadvantage since she had to protect them.

But normal means wouldn't work against this person.

As soon as she reached that conclusion, Anna poured her energy into the sword and swung downwards.

The lightning formed a crescent-shape strike flying straight to the enemy.

The guy only smiled and avoided it, but that slash was never Anna's aim. The moment she completed her swing, her sword actually struck the ground.

Yes, the attack earlier was just bait. The real attack was the lightning that spread all over the ground and shattered the ground.

It created a giant crater on the ground, causing the enemy to lose his foothold. The enemy noticed that Anna had charged her attack again and released it toward him.

'You can't escape this way.' Anna smirked and shot another crescent-shaped lightning strike toward the enemy.

But surprisingly, her opponent caught the strike with bare hands, freezing the front part before using that solid surface to propel himself into the air.

'Seriously?' Anna never thought that the other party would be this strong. She felt she was being toyed by him.

But more importantly, the enemy revealed something even more concerning. Due to the movement, the wind ended up blowing the coat, revealing the attacker's body.

'A woman?' Anna never thought that the enemy this time was actually a woman and a very skilled one on top of that.

Chapter 900 Hello

'A woman?'

Anna became even more shocked. In the first place, there were not many women who had exceptional strength. It wasn't because they were less talented, but it was due to the nobility system, burying those talents with the so-called political marriage.

That was why if the opponent was a woman, it was easier to identify them, considering the woman's strength was exceptional.

'Who is—!'

It seemed that the opponent had sensed her hesitation and immediately released the next attack.

A huge ice pillar suddenly emerged from the ground, isolating Anna and dragging her to the sky.

She was completely frozen solid inside the ice, unable to fight back.

However, a lightning spark covered the pillar before eventually shattering the ice and breaking Anna free.

It took more than that to defeat Anna. The woman might have known this as she actually approached Anna during her time inside the ice.

As a result, she was already right before her eyes when Anna shattered the ice.

"Kh." Anna tried to swing her sword, but she was too late.

The woman grabbed her wrist, spun her body, and used the centrifugal force to launch Anna far away.

At the same time, four ice walls emerged from the ground, isolating a space with nothing inside.

Anna didn't understand what the woman was trying to do by expending all that spiritual energy, but one thing was clear. If she didn't get serious, she might be defeated by this mysterious woman.

Anna forcefully stopped her momentum by using the Enhance Forward Rune on her body and took the woman by surprise.

"!!!" The enemy hurriedly waved her hands down, but Anna was one step forward and slashed her.

A cracking sound echoed, and Anna couldn't help but click her tongue as the thing she slashed earlier was none other than ice.

When she turned around, she saw a thick layer of ice covering the woman's entire body.

Since it would be troublesome if the enemy gained a foothold, Anna hurriedly utilized the Enhance Forward Rune and struck the woman again, launching her back into the air.

But the ice soon cracked and the woman waved both hands.

Ice began to form like a wave from both sides, surrounding Anna.

Since she originally wanted to launch this woman back into the air, Anna had to go below her. However, it seemed the strategy had backfired.

Even if she used Enhance Forward, she couldn't pass this ice wave. The only way for her to avoid it was to fall to the ground.

"No." Anna pointed her palm to the side. She utilized the Rune Blast, causing her body to be launched to the side due to the force coming out of that rune. In other words, she didn't use the Rune Blast to destroy things before her. Instead, she just used it to avoid the ice wave.

As a result, the ice wave reached the ground at full force and spread its freezing power, covering an area of thirty meters radius in a thick layer of ice.

Anna realized how dangerous this woman would become once she reached the city. The growing city would be frozen in ice, and they had no choice but to rebuild it.

That was why she had made a decision.

Instead of facing the woman in the air, Anna chose to land on the ground. Her blond hair gradually turned white as lightning sparked in all directions.

"Awakening!"

"Hoh?" The woman looked impressed by the sudden spike in Anna's power. She was surprised once again by Anna, who suddenly disappeared from her vision.

In just a split second, she felt an impact hitting her from behind, knocking her down. Anna turned out to have looped around her, but she failed to deliver a killing blow as an ice pillar had protected the woman's back.

"You're strong. I guess I can get a bit more serious." The woman smiled and took out a pendant from her pocket.

"!!!" Anna used her fastest speed to gain some distance, feeling something dangerous. She thought, 'Everyone needs a weapon. Not only does the weapon channel spiritual energy or even boost one's power with a certain material, but it also can function physically.'

'But the fact that she is using a pendant as her weapon, she must be a Spirit ian. That pendant should be able to amplify her ice to a great degree. To think she hasn't even gone all out yet...' Anna frowned. 'I think I have to use it.'

Anna took a deep breath before pointing her palm at the woman. The lightning gathered around her arm and formed a dragon.

The lightning dragon was extremely powerful. The rampaging spiritual energy and lightning shattered the ground underneath it.

The woman looked like she was about to do something, but Anna took the initiative to appear in front of her own ability. A Multiplication Rune formed in front of her, allowing the lightning dragon to enter it.

The Multiplication Rune then shot forth a total of eight lightning dragons in all directions, startling the opponent.

Anna couldn't help but remember the time she used this rune to multiply Noel's attack. Back then, she could only support him and not use the rune herself.

'I can't use my ability when using the Multiplication Rune. I could launch my ability first and form this rune next, but I can't outrun my own lightning, so this was impossible back then. But because of the awakening, I can finally use this combination. Try to defend it if you can!' Anna smirked, challenging the enemy.

Unexpectedly, the woman didn't flinch despite finding herself in a pinch. Instead, she raised her hand and let the pendant hang in front of her palm.

Both of her hands soon joined together with the pendant between them as if she was praying. A terrifying amount of spiritual energy suddenly fluctuated as the air temperature dropped drastically.

A few giant roses tore the ground apart and bloomed, expanding in all directions. The lightning ended up hitting the roses and shattering them, but they couldn't penetrate them and reach the woman.

At the same time, the rose had thorns all over the stems. All those thorns extended themselves and curved toward Anna.

Anna jumped back to avoid all this, but the thorns kept expanding as if they had no limit.

But Anna didn't jump back to run away. Instead, she wanted to lower the enemy's guard and let these thorns pursue her. Once they were long enough, Anna stomped the ground and jumped toward the enemy.

With her speed, closing the distance only took a mere split second. Her sword had been sheathed before anyone realized it, and she was ready to pull it out to draw the blood of her enemy.

"Raging Lightning Descend!"

This was the same technique she used against Count Heirden. The lightning disappeared for a second as all the energy stored inside the blade was unleashed.

It seemed that her opponent had sensed its power and clapped her hands. A few roses bloomed again while the thorns created a net.

However, it was useless, Anna released all her might in this slash.

The lightning rampaged and destroyed all the ice in its way and continued forward. It didn't seem to lose its momentum even after destroying more than five roses.

"Haaaa!" Anna gritted her teeth. The temperature between these roses was extremely low. Because she concentrated all her energy on the slash, she didn't have enough energy to cover her body, which caused her to shiver.

She endured the cold and continued destroying everything on her way. Eventually, her strike reached the woman and all Anna needed to do was to complete her swing.

It was at this moment that she heard what the woman was saying.

"As expected, my daughter-in-law is amazing."

"!!!" Those words caused hesitation in her heart, allowing the woman to form another ice layer to block the attack completely.

If Anna didn't know that Noel's parents were not dead, she wouldn't fall for such a trick. But it was precisely the reason why Anna stopped at the last second.

If his parents were not dead, they would have definitely watched him from the shadows and would eventually reveal themselves at one point.

And it appeared the opportunity had shone upon her.

"What did you say?" Anna turned around in complete shock. She thought she had misheard it, but the other party actually took off her hood, revealing her long brown hair. Her smile showed a warm and energetic feeling.

Her face was a bit different from Noel's, but Anna definitely recognized her. After all, she had studied Luke, Leysha, and Noel when she was still brainwashed.

Her appearance hadn't changed in the slightest. In other words, the one she fought this whole time was actually Noel's mother.

She said, "It seems that you're already aware of the circumstances, so I can safely assume that the child's also known as well."

"Are you really..." Anna started breathing heavily as if she couldn't believe what she saw. "...Leysha Ezenholm?"

"Since both of you are already engaged, shouldn't you suppose to call me mom? Nonetheless..." Leysha waved her hand. "...hello. I'm Noel's mother."