

S vs Rebirth 901

Chapter 901 Reasons

"Is this where it is?"

"It is thick."

"Can you cut it?"

Aerton's group managed to reach the four ice walls that Leysha left behind. Of course, it took them a while since they had to kill the remaining demons standing in their way.

Aerton couldn't help but realize that the enemies were so strong that Anna had to go all out.

"I think it's better if we call Captain Howard here and let him make a decision. Even if we help Miss Anna, we won't be strong enough to fend off the enemy's attack. We might even become a burden to her." Aerton shook his head and ordered, "The rest of you will maintain the position and inform Grandel to take the command. I'll inform Captain Howard."

"Yes, Sir!"

Aerton hurriedly crossed the river since the problem was truly beyond his ability.

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In the meantime, Anna and Leysha were staring at each other.

"..." There was an awkward silence after that introduction. Anna simply had a hard time processing what was happening in her mind.

Noel's mother was presumed dead. Even though they knew that she was still alive somewhere, Noel and Anna thought that they would never reveal themselves until something big happened.

But it seemed they were wrong.

The woman before her was truly Leysha.

Anna wanted to ask a lot of things, such as why she faked her death, why didn't she meet Noel, and so on. But the words that came out of her mouth were so ridiculous that she didn't even think she would actually say it.

"Can I punch you on behalf of Noel?"

Leysha was surprised by the question, but she actually looked up to think for a bit before saying, "Sure. Noel will surely not punch me, so I think you're more suited to do that. I know that I deserve that punch... Though, if you want to do it on behalf of Noel, you should wait until you are married. Your status is not enough to represent him."

"..." Anna was even more shocked by her reply. Leysha was actually answering her question seriously.

Leysha was already aware of how much suffering Noel had. While it was true that Noel managed to grow up to be a fine man because of that hardship, it didn't change the fact that she had failed her duty as a mother.

Seeing that Leysha was aware of the problem, Anna let out a sigh, knowing that she must not have come not for all this.

"I understand. When that time comes, I will definitely hit you. But..." Anna's expression turned solemn. "Why do you come here? And even went all the way to attack me."

"I have three reasons." Leysha raised three fingers before Anna stopped her. "Wait. If you're going to explain your situation or whatever. You should go to Noel instead of me. You should know how much he misses you!"

"I want to do that if it's possible, but unfortunately, the circumstances don't allow me to do it. In fact, I don't have much time either since I don't want the soldiers to notice as well." Leysha shook her head helplessly.

"But..." Anna looked down, not liking her decision. She should have gone to Noel even for a little.

Although Leysha wanted to continue explaining, she knew that she had to hurry. Ignoring her reaction, Leysha stated the first one. "First of all, you don't have to worry about the north. There won't be any enemies coming from the north border, but there would be a lot coming through the gap between the terrains. So, beware of that area."

It was a simple reason, which Noel should have known. But considering she gave that assurance, it meant that she was actually actively protecting the border, which would give Noel some leeway in defending the city.

"Secondly, I simply want to see my daughter-in-law. It seems that there is no more trace of darkness in your eyes now..." Leysha looked at Anna's eyes carefully. "When I saw you in the past, it was clear that you were not in the right mind. Your eyes were pretty hollow, but it seemed that you had changed."

"That's..." Anna scratched the back of her head, feeling embarrassed. She was brainwashed after all. "I'm sorry for everything I've done in the past."

"It's fine. I don't hold a grudge or anything. And since you've resolved that problem with Noel, then the matter is settled. You are pretty strong too, so I know that you can work together with Noel." Leysha lowered her head. "Noel might be lacking, but please take care of him."

"Please raise your head..." Anna panicked when Leysha lowered her head. To think she would plead like that all of a sudden, especially despite the fact that she harmed their family in the past.

But after she told the second reason, her face turned grim all of a sudden.

"And this is the third reason... I don't know if I should say this, but I think you have the right to know... the reason why we chose to disappear."

"!!!" Anna didn't know anything about Noel's parents in the previous life. Even back then, they didn't reveal themselves in the open. So, it was most likely they continued to be separated.

She didn't know if Noel knew about their circumstances or not, but she should learn about it as well. After all, Noel wasn't aware of it in this life.

"Do you know why the ancestor of the Ardagan Family became the greatest general in the world at that time? Was it because of him creating this kingdom? Was it because of his strength? Or was it because of his impact on the world?"

Anna shook her head. She didn't know much about the Ardagan Family. Even Noel only had that book and Ardagan.

"The main reason for his title is because he personally slaughtered a Demon King. The deeds he'd done that day laid the foundation of not only the Muivell Kingdom but also the other kingdoms.

"One thousand years ago, the moment the first user of Ardagan passed away, the world was plunged into chaos. A gate connected to another world appeared and filled this world with demons. Spiritual Energy changed all living beings. The animals became stronger, the plants became mutated, and human beings evolved.

"The demons took possession of humans and animals. But due to the different levels of consciousness, the demons preferred to use animals or plants as their hosts. Still, it doesn't change the fact that demons can infect humans. And that's the beginning of the calamity."

Anna noticed something important and couldn't help but ask, "Wait... a human? There are no humans possessed by the demons!"

"Indeed. But that's because their bodies have evolved due to the Spiritual Energy as well as the spirits living inside them. In the past, they didn't have any of that." Leysha explained.

"..." Anna's expression darkened. It seemed that the situation back then was more chaotic than she imagined. The previous civilization was amazing, but they never thought that they were also that fragile.

"They possessed human leaders and gathered a lot of humans in one place before slaughtering them. That calamity is the darkest period of this world.

"As the successor of that sword, he led the remaining people to flee to this land and eventually created a new home in this place.

"During that escape, there were three influential families that followed him. They were Lenfenth, Greenwood, and Sorxesia."

"Lenfenth, Greenwood, Sorxesia?!" Anna gasped.

"Very familiar names, right? The Lenfeth created the Muivell Kingdom, the Greenwood became the neighbor, and Sorxesia was actually the most influential family back then, thus the reason why they were situated behind the Muivell Kingdom and the Greenwood Kingdom."

"Huh? Behind? Are you saying..."

"Yes." Leysha pointed at the north. "They were fleeing, but most people didn't know that they were fleeing from the north. So, if you actually explored the north for a bit more, you would find a lot of things. Don't forget that there is another kingdom in the north... not ruled by humans though."

Anna was dumbstruck. This was the first time she listened to the record that happened in the dark period.

"Anyway, those who were opposed to the creation of these kingdoms ended up banding together and creating a new place for themselves."

"The Atracaeca Kingdom."

"Indeed." Leysha nodded.

"Wait a minute. You said fleeing earlier... but if the ancestor of the Ardagan Family was that strong, shouldn't be..." Anna fell silent, noticing the first part that Leysha talked about earlier. "The Demon King?!"

"Yes. They were running away from the Demon King. While he was the successor, his strength was still too low. During the time they fled, the ancestor met a pair of brother and sister."

"The Sword Saint and the War Maiden," Anna revealed those two identities after knowing it when they infiltrated the Ardagan Family's mansion in the past.

"That's right." Leysha couldn't help but close her eyes as if she was recalling the record. "Back then..."

Chapter 902 One Thousand Years Ago

A thousand years ago.

On a bright sunny day, a young man was placing down a wooden box containing food in front of his group. "Everyone, it's time to eat."

The young man had short black hair and a stern face. His body was full of wounds, but he didn't let out an aura that of an expert.

While opening the box, the young man gave his best smile and said, "Come on, everyone!"

"Oh!" The group started approaching him, getting their own share.

"Thank you, Sam!"

"Why do you keep calling me Sam? My name is Alexander Simeon! Simeon! Not Samuel!"

"It's fine, isn't it? Sam is easier to call."

Yes. This person was none other than the ancestor who built the Ardagan Family, Alexander Simeon.

"Tsk." Alexander clicked his tongue, unable to refute it. "Anyway, just eat! Replenish your energy, and we'll fight again!"

"Fine, fine!"

As they were about to eat, they heard a rustling sound coming from the side. In that instant, all the people placed their hands on their weapons, preparing to defend themselves.

Alexander furrowed his eyebrows and started revolving his Spiritual Energy.

But before they could check what was going on, a pair of brother and sister came out of the bushes.

The woman had long brown hair that was tied into twin tails. She wore a plain white shirt with a skirt, but because they were moving around in the woods carelessly, part of her clothes were torn.

On the other hand, the boy had short black hair, covering even his eyes. He looked timid and lacked confidence. His clothes were in the same state, but he seemed more apologetic for reaching that point.

"Who are you?" Alexander asked while frowning.

"Hehehe! Be honored to know my name!" The woman confidently placed her hand over her chest while proudly introducing herself. "I am Margaretha Greenwood. You should be grateful that this proud me came here. Hurry up and serve some food!"

"..." Alexander looked at this woman dumbfoundedly, wondering if he had heard everything wrong or if this woman was just a bit dumb. He ignored the woman and glanced at the other one.

"Ray Greenwood. I'm sorry..." Ray, who later be known as the Sword Saint, apologetically bowed his head.

"The Greenwood Family should be on the other side. The fact that you are here and without food... I see." Alexander sighed. "So, it's just two runaway brats!"

"Two runaway brats, you say? We look like the same age!" Margaretha harrumphed. "You—!"

Before she finished her words, Alexander suddenly jumped toward her as if he were trying to hit her. But all of a sudden, a rune appeared on her side as a light beam hit it, causing a small explosion.

The shock wave completely startled the group as they hurriedly raised their weapons, thinking there was another raid by the demons.

"I..." Margaretha opened her mouth as if she was shocked, but she ended up clicking her teeth. "Tsk. I don't need you to protect me."

As she said that, a demon emerged from the bush and charged at them. It pounced on the rune, trying to shatter it with its fangs.

But Alexander skillfully slashed through the rune before reaching the demon's body.

"That's..." Margaretha was shocked. She never thought that Alexander would cut through his own shield to create an unexpected attack. As a result, the demon was split in half without a fight.

Ray, on the other hand, was staring at Alexander in admiration as if something had just clicked in him. He thought it would be cool if he could do what Alexander did earlier.

Instead of saying anything, Alexander just grabbed two canned foods from the box earlier and gave them one each. "There you go."

"This... this is not enough!" Margaretha complained as if she had been starving for more than one day.

"I don't care. This is your ration. I won't give more to a damned runaway brat! If you want more, then work. Whatever your identity is, I won't treat you differently from anyone here!"

Margaretha gritted her teeth while Ray politely bowed to him. "Thank you very much."

"Oh!" Alexander seemed impressed by Ray's action and nodded in approval. "Ray, was it? I like you. I will be butchering this demon, so come to me later. I'll grill you some more meat!"

"Didn't you just say that you won't treat us differently?" Margaretha became even more frustrated, especially since Alexander only stuck out his tongue to respond.

Surprisingly, Margaretha didn't actually do anything other than that. Even though she was still hungry, she didn't complain anymore as if her pride didn't allow her to go as low as Alexander.

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A few hours later.

While warming themselves in front of a fire, Alexander was grilling some meat next to it, causing the pair to become hungrier.

He took a stick and handed it to Ray. "Oi! Here is the promised meat. Get your fill today!"

"That's..." Ray looked at Margaretha, unsure whether to take it or not. It would be unfair if he was the only one to eat. That was why Ray changed the topic by requesting a different thing. "Alexander... Can you... teach me how to wield a sword?"

"You?" Alexander looked skeptical, considering how timid Ray was. But Ray's eyes were glimmering with determination and resolve. There seemed to be a reason why he wanted to be stronger.

"Alright then. But you have to eat this one since you won't have any energy to move tomorrow if you don't. As for her, she can just be hungry since the famous young lady doesn't want to work." Alexander snorted.

"What did you say?!" Margaretha clenched her fists before leaving the place. "Hmph. I'm tired, so I'm going to sleep!"

Ray could only apologize to Alexander for her behavior.

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The next day.

Ray was helping the group move the equipment around while they were traveling to the north. They were holding the rear after all, so they didn't need to move too much and just waited for the main party to gather their strength and leave.

Once the sun was set, Ray and Alexander moved to a secluded area.

"Alright. I'll be training you. I have to warn you first though... it won't be easy. Once you give up, I'm not going to train you anymore!"

Ray nodded with a serious expression. "I understand."

"Alright. First..." Alexander began to teach him about swordsmanship. Ray didn't understand at that time why Alex taught him a bit louder than he normally spoke. He thought it was just Alex trying to be a bit stricter during the training.

Ray was training every morning and night to avoid hindering the group. Before long, Ray's thin body began to grow some muscle and his movement became sharper and sharper.

Alexander even praised Ray for his talent in swordsmanship. It was to the point that his progress surpassed Alex's in his early days.

Still, Ray wasn't satisfied and continued training tirelessly.

Six months after their training began, Ray finally had a bit more energy after their daily training during the night. So, he took this opportunity to find another place to train.

"Mhmm... Mhmm... Which form should I train for today?" Ray was humming happily as he walked down the path.

"Hyaa! Hyaa!"

There was a faint voice coming from deep within the woods, causing Ray to raise his guard.

'Hmm? This sounds... it doesn't seem to be a demon.' Ray sneakily approached the origin of the voice, only to find his sister training with her sword. The form was exactly the same as the one he trained. In other words, his sister had actually learned Ardagan Swordsmanship.

"Sister?!" Ray couldn't help but call her while coming out of the tree.

"Huh?! Ray, huh?" Margaretha was startled but soon felt relieved when the person coming turned out to be her own brother.

"Sister... Are you..."

"What? I can't practice? I need to know how to protect myself in this kind of world."

Now that he thought about it, Margaretha seemed to be tired every day. She tried her best to hide it, but since he was her brother, she showed a bit of that sign only to him.

"So, you're practicing all this time..." Ray scratched the back of his head. "Well, I have to apologize to Brother Alex since you ended up learning about it. After all, it's a special swordsmanship that no one in the group learns..."

"Can you... not tell him about this?" Margaretha grabbed his hand, looking troubled.

Ray couldn't help but recall what she had been doing in the past few months. Margaretha had been challenging Alex to a lot of things, only to get obliterated by him.

Every time they fought for real, Alexander never held back. She ultimately returned with a lot of bruises and a panda eye.

They never looked like a comrade or a friend. But they couldn't be said to be a rival or an enemy either. While their relationship looked complex, it was clear that they trusted each other and focused on what they could do for the group.

That was why it must be hard for her to acknowledge it and apologize to Alex.

"Alright. I will apologize to him a bit later, but when that happens, you're going with me together."

"I know." She agreed with a sad smile. "And thank you, Ray... For always supporting me."

"Eh? What are you talking about? I mean, I don't do anything special..."

"Eh? You were not the one giving me more food so that I have the energy to..." Margaretha couldn't complete her words as she came to a realization.

For the past few months, she had been receiving another batch of food in the morning, allowing her to save most of her food for the night training.

At the same time, Ray finally understood why Alex actually taught him a bit louder than usual. He must have known that his sister had been eavesdropping on them the whole time, so he taught both of them together. But since she never revealed herself, she just watched Alexander fixing his form and followed it.

In other words, the one who had been taking care of them was actually Alexander. Both of them just never realized how much Alexander had done for them.

Upon that realization, there was an awkward silence that shrouded them.

On the one hand, Margaretha looked apologetic as if she felt horrible after everything she had done. On the other hand, Alexander also did it sneakily in a way that she thought it was Ray the whole time. It looked like he never wanted to reveal himself.

Despite being so cold outside, he was actually very gentle on the inside.

Ray sighed. "It seems that I have to apologize a lot to Brother Alex."

Margaretha grabbed him one more time and said with a hesitant tone. "Ray... can you let me handle this by myself? Please."

It was extremely rare for the word 'please' to come out of her mouth. After getting taken aback by that surprise, Ray could only agree to her request. "I understand."

Chapter 903 Feelings

"Like I said, you can't. You have to think about our supplies first. If we go help them, we will be left with only two days of supplies. Unless we can procure more during those two days, it will hinder our group's movement!" Margaretha complained while slamming the table.

"There are still two days, right? Isn't that fine? It's not like we need that much since it's easier to hunt!" Alexander shrugged.

"Have you forgotten where there is no demon for a whole seven days? If not for me rationing the supply, it would be bad for the group!"

"You're always thinking too hard." Alexander harrumphed.

"You are the one who should think first before taking action!"

Their bickering alerted the entire group as more and more people gathered just to watch them.

"What's wrong? Are they arguing again?" A middle-aged man asked Ray, who was also one of the spectators.

"Yeah." Ray nodded with a sigh.

"What's going on today?"

"Brother Alex wants to send some supplies to the main group due to the food shortage on the front. But our current supply is limited, so it might cause some trouble." Ray explained.

"Those Lenfeth guys again? As expected of Sam, he is doing it again. Well, I have been helped through that kindness of his too, so I guess I'm supporting him this time."

"What Sam?! It's Simeon, you freaking old man!" Alex suddenly stopped and berated the middle-aged man.

"He heard us?" The middle-aged man was surprised before chuckling. In the end, he shouted back, "Instead of thinking about the supply, why don't you two get a room first and deal with the problem later?!"

"What? Do you think I want to marry this bossy and spoiled woman? Who actually gave her this position?!" Alex looked very annoyed.

"What did you say? Do you think you are so great? You are just someone who thinks with your muscles, not your brain! All the nutrients you get from the food goes to your muscles. Why don't you try to develop your brain a little bit?!" She also didn't want to lose, and the two ended up glaring at each other.

All of them only rolled their eyes as the answers to all those questions were actually much simpler.

The one who gave her the position was Alexander. Meanwhile, Margaretha also knew that Alex not only had the strength but also great leadership that made people want to follow him.

Ray could only shake his head helplessly. It had been another three months after that night. His sister had indeed changed after that conversation.

She was more reliant on Alex and even helped him much more. She took care of all the logistics, which everyone had a hard time doing and became the brain of the group. In fact, everyone could see her admiration for Alex along with her desire to improve her strength to his level.

It was just the two kept bickering over all small things. And whenever that happened, they would always do the same thing.

"Fine. We'll just give half of our supplies. That should be fine, right?" Alex sighed while looking away. "I'm too tired to argue with you."

"We will be reaching a river soon, so it's fine. With that, we still have another seven days worth of supply, which allows us to be more flexible. Besides, I'm also too busy to argue with you." She harrumphed.

"See? This always happens. They just don't want to admit to each other." Ray didn't know what to do with these two anymore. They trusted each other, but their pride didn't allow them to acknowledge each other.

"What Ray? We'll be hunting today. Prepare yourself!" Alexander heard Ray's voice and immediately gave an order.

"Fine, fine." Ray shrugged. Ray had also changed. The timidness he had in the past completely disappeared. Instead, his eyes were brimming with confidence.

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The group continued moving northward and eventually reached their original destination to settle down. Of course, they were setting up multiple things in the main group while Alex and the others remained in their position, protecting the main group from the demons.

Margaretha was standing on top of the hill, looking at the beautiful land, which they might be able to call home soon. They had been on the run for so long, so reaching their destination finally allowed her to feel relaxed for a bit.

"The darkness has spread on this land. However, the holy light has yet to disappear and illuminate a new promised land. Once hit rock bottom, humanity holds hands in the name of survival, love, and unity.

"Through this land, humanity will once again rule the entire world. It will be a long journey... not even a millennium will be enough to recover. Yet, with persistence, I strongly believe that the day will come.

"I hope that at that time, I will be able to see my descendants taking part in the world's revolution, etching their names into the canal of time." Margaretha closed her eyes for a moment as if trying to imagine the beautiful land that would once again be reclaimed by humanity.

"Are you here alone, Sister?" Ray's voice suddenly echoed from behind.

"Ray?"

"Yeah. Sorry, I overheard what you said earlier. But as you said, we don't have a lot of people... we are too weak and unable to protect ourselves." Ray made a sad smile.

"Indeed." She nodded in agreement. "I can remember everything like it just happened yesterday. But to think we've been running for more than a year..."

"I think it's time for you to be a bit relaxed, Sister. I know that you've been working tirelessly this whole time."

"No way. I still haven't even gotten my spirit yet. I'm not going to stop right now... at least, not until I beat that guy."

"Haha. I know you'll say that. Actually, I'm here to tell you that Brother Alex is calling you."

"Huh? Why would he search for me? I guess he can't do anything without me." A smug smile appeared on her face as if she was proud of her own ability.

"Is that so?" Ray only smiled and didn't follow her.

Meanwhile, she was moving across a lot of people. Unlike the first time they became a part of this group, the people had recognized her. From the spoiled little princess to a reliable superior, Margaretha had overcome all the challenges and earned the people's trust.

She ultimately reached a workshop where Alex had been isolating himself for the past two weeks.

"What's wrong? I guess you can't help but need me again." She smirked, teasing Alex right from the get-go. However, she abruptly stopped when she saw Alex concentrating his energy on a sword.

The sword looked beautiful. It had multiple runes on it, painting the dull white metal blade. The handle was a bit thinner as if it had been adjusted to someone's hand.

Alex, looking so focused like this, couldn't help but mesmerize her. In fact, Alex was handsome and the gallant figure made one feel they could rely on him. It was just that his mouth was a bit foul and his action sometimes was questionable. But when he just focused on his work like this, even Margaretha stopped talking and just watched him.

After a few minutes, Alex gradually opened his eyes and found her right in front of him.

He actually grabbed the blade and handed it to her. "Here you go."

"Eh?" She was dumbfounded, not knowing what trick Alex was playing at.

"I am merely granting you a reward for everything you've done so far." Alex snorted.

Another blacksmith who worked with him actually explained with a playful tone. "Just accept it. He has been working hard to produce that weapon. In fact, you are the first person to get a weapon. There must be some meaning... hehehehe."

"What are you talking about? I'm merely measuring everyone's contribution and she just happens to be the second. The second, you hear it? Her contribution is still far lower than mine!"

"Right?"

"What are you doing? Hurry up and complete those weapons!" Alex raised his voice before clicking his tongue.

"Alex..." This time, it was Margaretha that called him.

"What? If you're going to start an argument, then—" Alex stopped when he turned back to her and saw her face.

There was a smile on her face. This smile was like none other. It was filled with genuine emotion, sincere feelings, and just pure happiness.

From that mouth of hers, Alex finally heard something that he thought he would never hear.

"...Thank you."

Alex could feel that it didn't only express her gratitude for receiving the sword. It was also the culmination of their experience and everything she had received from him.

At that time, Alex simply froze, unable to do or say anything. This was the most beautiful smile he had ever seen and to think he would see it from her.

The workers inside were also astonished because this was the first time Alex couldn't fight back.

That sword might also be the trigger for her. After all, in just one month after wielding that sword, they received yet another good news.

Alex was walking through the crowd as they were surrounding Margaretha.

"What's wrong?" Alex asked as he eventually found her. And he was surprised because there was a pair of butterfly wings on her back. "You..."

Without hesitation, she jumped toward him and gave him a big hug. "Alex. I finally have my own spirit!"

Alex didn't know what to do. He couldn't say anything bad after seeing how happy she was.

"Kiss her. Kiss her!" One of the guys chanted and the others soon followed suit.

"Kiss her!"

"Kiss her!"

"What are you saying, you old geezers!" Alex gritted her teeth, glaring at them.

"What? Are you saying you don't like her?"

"I..." Alex looked away and said, "...don't hate her."

"Then, isn't it fine? You just can't be honest with yourself. You are fit to be a leader but not a lover, I guess. This is why the youngsters these days are... haa..."

Alex wanted to argue with them, but this time, Margaretha was the one who spoke. "Alex. Just like you said, the spirit would awaken when I find my goal. It turns out I already have that goal... I just never had been honest with myself. That goal is to build this land with you just like the one in your dream. That's

why... I'll make you fall in love with me... fall so hard that you can't think of anyone else but me. Even if you push me away, I'm not going to give up."

Alex was speechless. If he hated it, he would have pushed her away. But after all the things they experienced together, Alex knew that she was also the reason why he had reached this far. The bud of that feeling had grown in his heart whether he realized it or not.

He just looked at the smile on her face, feeling it would be good if that smile lasted forever.

"I'm telling you that these geezers are the ones forcing me to do it. It's time for you to push me away!"

"Right? I guess I should add one more goal... I will make you be honest with me. I will make you tell me how much you love me in the future." She made a cheeky grin before lifting her head and moving her lips closer.

The moment they kissed, the entire group cheered as if they had been waiting for this moment for a long time.

Chapter 904 The Tragedy

After the people started to settle down, Alexander was recalled to the main group to discuss the next course.

At that time, he met a brown-haired middle-aged guy. He looked at Alexander, saying, "Thank you for your service, Alexander. Without you, we wouldn't have reached this far."

"You don't have to thank me." Alexander chuckled. He was accompanied by Ray and Margaretha this time since it was an important discussion.

"Is that so?" The guy smiled before continuing, "So, the reason I ask you to come here is to form a new place we can call home. I want to create a country, but if we create a republic country, there won't be any order. It will be hard to make a decision and we won't have any speed to work with the tasks at hand. So, I'm thinking about creating a country under the monarchy."

"Do you want to become a king?"

"I actually wanted to nominate you. Thanks to you, the others learned a lot about Spiritual Energy and your help was the most important. So, I thought about you becoming a king."

Alexander looked annoyed while scratching the back of his head. "Don't say that. I'm unfit to be a king. I can't even govern my group well, so you should just do those complicated stuff."

"But..."

"I know that you're going to say that..." The guy shook his head helplessly. "In that case, at least, I want you to be a Duke. You don't have to do a lot of things. Just take care of a small territory and repel any demons... Basically, it's a home for your group. I won't become a king if you refuse, Alex."

"Well..." Alexander glanced at Margaretha, who actually nodded her head as if telling him that she could take care of it.

"Alright then. I'll take it."

"Then, there is one more problem that I want you to solve right now. Since it's going to be a monarchy, there is a need for a family name. As you know, that family name is rather unimportant during our time period, but in this current world, it will be a household name. Hearing it alone can bolster people's morale and other things."

"Can't you just use Simeon or something?" Alex asked.

"I don't mind if you want to use it."

"Well..." Alex suddenly fell silent and looked at Margaretha, thinking about her name. She already had 'Greenwood' in her name, so it would be weird to change it to Simeon. His father or grandmother also didn't bother with the surname either.

So, he wondered if he should use Simeon or something else. He suddenly remembered something... something that united all of them. Yes, it was his sword.

With a single glimpse of his sword, Alex actually smiled, saying, "In that case, I will use Ardagan as my family name. People always tease me with 'Samuel' even though Simeon is the correct one, so let's just replace it with Ardagan."

"What?!" Ray and Margaretha dropped their jaws in disbelief. To think that he would change his name this easily. But considering no one would bother to see his real name, it shouldn't be a problem.

The middle-aged man chuckled. "Hahaha. That sounds just like you. In that case, we shall proceed with that. My name will be Andrew De Lenfeth, and you shall be Alexander Ardagan. In this land, I hope that you will assist me in building this new home, Alex."

"Of course. Ah, should I call you Your Majesty or something? It's starting to become a roleplay."

"Haha. There might be a need to do so, but it's just for formal occasions. I'm extremely grateful to you, so let's just call each other's name when we're alone."

"Got it."

"Then, I will take my leave since I have to take care of the creation of the kingdom." Andrew waved his hand while walking away. Alex also waved his hand but abruptly stopped when Andrew looked back, saying, "Also, congratulations on your engagement. Please invite me when you're married."

"O-oh!" Alex was startled while Margaretha looked away, embarrassed.

...

It took a moment, but the kingdom was finally built and Alex once again called into the capital. He was kneeling in the grand hall for the coronation of the first noble in their new country, Muivell Kingdom.

"I appoint you, Alexander Ardagan, as the Duke of the Kingdom."

"I accept." Alex lowered his head while smiling.

Ray was cheering for him while Margaretha watched him in silence. She was proud of him and felt very blissful with the current situation.

They were rewarded with a territory and finally settled down. Most of the people from Alex's group ended up joining his new family and became the pillar of the family.

It was such a peaceful time as everyone was working hard to build the territory. As expected of Margaretha, she stepped up her game and commanded the people.

With her at the helm, the progress was far faster than any other nobles. Alex and Ray also raised their intensity.

They swept the entire territory, protecting them from any demons.

Gradually but surely, Ray's reputation started to grow. Before long, people knew him as someone whose strength was equal to Alex, and he truly became the second-in-command.

In fact, he was the one who trained all the new people in the territory. Meanwhile, Alex often left for subjugation and reclaimed a bit more territory.

Of course, there were a lot of things happening during that peaceful period, including the rise of the demihumans.

However, as a duke, Alex had a lot of authority. His strength was also unparalleled, and he assisted the demihumans in creating another home for them.

At first, the territory of the demihumans wasn't that far from the Ardagan Family since Alex could also take care of them that way.

Finally, five years after Alex became a noble, a blessing smiled upon the Ardagan Family.

The sound of a baby crying echoed inside the room as Alex was holding a small, frail baby in his hand. It might be the first time that he ever cried.

Yes, this was the child of Alex and Margaretha.

The entire territory celebrated the birth of Ernest Ardagan. Ray was protecting the territory non-stop just so that the two could spend more time with the new baby.

But that peaceful time was cut short due to a certain tragedy.

Twelve years after Alex became a noble, the family had gotten bad information.

"Alex." Margaretha frowned while looking at the map.

"What's wrong? You should stop working and just let me do this." Alex made a wry smile.

"Hehe. How can I? It's still exciting even after a decade has passed. Just thinking about it gives me energy. This is the home that we build with our hands, so of course, I'm going to take care of it." Margaretha smiled.

"Fine, fine. You can do whatever you want, but let me and Ray take care of the outside problems." Alex sighed, not able to fight his wife.

"We heard from our scout that there is a large number of demons approaching the demihumans. The number is in the tens of thousands."

"Tens of thousands?" Alex widened his eyes in shock. "Don't tell me..."

"Yes. This is not the size of what an Ancient Demon can handle. I'm afraid that guy is back."

"I see. That motherfucker Demon King." Alex nodded. "Why are they attacking them? The demihumans might be pretty strong, but it's not enough to resist the demon kings. Also, are they picking more demons on the way?"

"Most likely. So, I have two points that I want both of you to take care of." Margaretha pointed at two areas on the map. "It's possible that they are only trying to lure you, so we'll launch an ambush in these two spots and thin their number before giving the rest to the demihumans. After that, you are to return and see the progress of the battle."

"I will take the left then." Ray took his spot while Alex nodded in agreement and took the remaining spot. "We'll finish this fast. Even if we can't stop the demon king, he won't be foolish enough to continue attacking us with a small number."

"Indeed."

"In that case, we'll leave immediately."

Alex and Ray gave fist bumps as both of them immediately left the room. Just looking at their synergy made Margaretha smile. Even now, she couldn't imagine that she would end up as his wife and have all this joy.

Alex and Ray departed from the city in just a few hours, planning to ambush the demon king.

It was probably because of her instinct, but Margaretha actually felt something was wrong. She looked at the map once again.

"Why would they come to us right now? He has been haunting the group for a long time, so I can understand that he is going to attack sooner or later. But why now? Are they targeting Ray and Alex? Alex is already a Spirit King, so he should be able to fight on equal terms against the demon king. Then, is it Brother?"

Margaretha frowned, feeling something weird. "Should I warn my brother about the potential ambush? My brother should be able to sense it and make adjustments. Alex is not as flexible as Brother, so should I tell him about it? But there is no other indication. I guess I will have to ask him to be extra careful."

At that time, she only sent forth a fast horse to inform both Alex and Ray about her suspicions.

As expected, numerous demons approached the territory. Alex and Ray skillfully eliminated more than fifty thousand demons in just a single day. It was a bloody battle, but with a Spirit King leading them, the soldiers had no fear when charging against the enemies.

However, due to the battle, the information came to Alex a bit later.

While he was cleaning up the battlefield, the messenger arrived and reported, "Sir... Madam has sent you this letter."

"Hmm?" Alex was confused and read the letter on the spot.

'Their movement is rather suspicious. I'm not sure about it, but the demon king should be trying to achieve something with all these demons. If you find anything suspicious, immediately retreat with Ray.'

"Suspicious, huh? Well, the Demon King hasn't made his appearance, so I will wait for a bit to see the battle progression." Alex nodded, thanking the messenger.

But before the messenger could return, another one reached Alex. This time, the messenger had wounds all over his body, clearly that he passed through all demons without worrying about his body's condition, unlike the first one who used the safest route.

In fact, he looked like he was about to die. It was enough to show the level of the emergency.

"Sir..." The messenger dropped from his horse, crawling to Alex.

"What's wrong?" Alex was confused and hurriedly grabbed him.

All the color on the messenger's face had vanished as he delivered the message during his last breath.
"The territory... is attacked..."

"Huh?" Alex widened his eyes in disbelief. In that instant, something clicked in his mind, especially with the first message.

"The Demon King is aiming for something... Ray could easily escape from him, and I'm the only one who can fight toe-to-toe with him. Then..." Alex gasped in the realization. Yes, the attack on the demihumans was just an attempt to lure them out.

In fact, Alex had severely underestimated the number of demons this time. Due to that number, he wouldn't realize that several thousand of them were missing from their sight.

And the Demon King was the one personally leading this army. There was only one place where he could deal a severe blow to Alex.

"Kh! The territory is his target the whole time!" Without hesitation, Alex left the battlefield by himself.

All his officers at that time were confused, but when they heard about the territory being attacked, everything was clear. They actually fell for such a simple ploy.

In the territory, there might be several thousand soldiers as well as Margaretha, but they were not enough to resist the Demon King. In other words, the Demon King's goal was to kill Margaretha and their son, Ernest.

The Demon King actually knew how much Alex loved his wife and kid and that he sacrificed all those demons just to lure him out.

And it was at that time Alex witnessed something that he would never forget.

The soldiers were fighting the demons tenaciously, the city was in flames, and the walls had been destroyed.

However, there was something that was much more important to Alex.

When he reached that position, he could see his wife holding her sword. Her body was fully injured. In fact, she was standing on top of a pool of blood... her own blood. Flying above her was a human with four pairs of bone wings. His ominous aura was so strong that many humans died just from experiencing it.

The reason she could fight this long was probably due to her willpower.

"Margaret..." Alex's terrified voice echoed in her ears.

Margaretha couldn't help but smile, very exhausted. She turned around with a blank stare, but it felt like she was able to see Alex in front of her.

The tension that had pent up in her body was finally gone as she started to fall to the ground.

Alex hurriedly caught her, not letting his beloved wife touch the ground. Just by moving toward her, Ardagan's Flame had spread and burned all the demons near them. Like the demon king, Alex also had the ability to kill low-level demons near him.

However, all that didn't matter as Alexander looked at the lifeless body in his arms.

Margaretha smiled at him while saying, "Ernest is fine. I always told you that I didn't need your protection, but I guess I shouldn't have said that."

Alex couldn't help but recall the memories of when they were together. From the first time they met, Margaretha had always told him that she didn't need his protection.

She worked hard alone and studied swordsmanship sneakily. She was truly independent and diligent. If not for the fact she needed to take care of the territory, she might even be stronger than Ray.

More importantly, this woman was the reason he could reach this far. The one who had witnessed all his growth.

As the memories flashed in his mind, he couldn't help but recall one thing that would probably lead him to this situation.

It was when he requested to send food to the main group during their run. Back then, Margaretha said, "What did you say? Do you think you are so great? You are just someone who thinks with your muscles, not your brain! All the nutrients you get from the food go to your muscles. Why don't you try to develop your brain a little bit?!"

Those words never struck him as deeply as it is right now. If he was smart enough to figure this out before it was too late, he should have been able to save her and the territory long before this point.

Margaretha used her last bit of energy to place her hand on his cheek, knowing that her husband was suffering. If this continued, Alex might go insane. That was why she tried to do one last thing for her husband, which was to change his thoughts. "Dear... I leave the rest... to you..."

Tears were streaming down Alex's cheeks. He was unable to speak a single word. Even if he did, there was nothing he could say to change the outcome.

Despair began to fill his heart when her hand fell and her eyes began to close.

"This is it... This is what I want to see..." The demon king finally spoke a word. The demon could feel the despair in Alex's heart. With a face filled with pleasure, he said, "I can finally see that face from you."

"Shut... up..." Alex gritted his teeth. His body was trembling not from fear but hatred. He raised his head and roared, "SHUT UP!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!"

A burst of flame erupted in all directions, reducing all the demons nearby into ashes. His roar resounded across his territory, just like the rumbling thunder that reflected the anger of Heaven.

Chapter 905 Inheritance

Ray, who was already too late to realize what was going on and only returned after receiving the message from Alex, reached the battlefield that had been completely destroyed.

The city was completely razed to the ground. The soldiers were fighting against the demons bravely, but they were pushed back.

These buildings that remained as rubbles carried a lot of memories for him, Alex, and Margaretha. When he saw this scene, he could only close his eyes. The anger started to build up, wanting to kill all the demons.

However, what happened to the terrain was completely beyond something he could imagine.

There was supposed to be a mountain range in this place, but that area had turned into something completely different. One of them was cut straight in the middle, turning it into a canyon. The other one had been flattened to the ground.

But the biggest mountain among them was destroyed right in the middle, turning the top into that of a crater.

The vegetation had been reduced to ashes, and the ground was charred black.

The fight seemed to have stopped as there was no Demon King insight, so Ray tried to find his sister and Alex.

It didn't take too long for them to reunite, but the sight was simply unforgettable.

Alex's body was full of wounds that a single touch might be able to knock him down. Yet, he firmly stood and carried the woman he loved so much. It felt like he used all the remaining he had to ensure that she wouldn't feel anything.

However, Margaretha wasn't moving. Her legs were hanging lifelessly and her arms were resting over her stomach. Her head leaned on Alex's shoulder, but there was no sign of movement.

Ray's heart sank as if realizing what had happened.

He rushed to them and confirmed her sister's condition, which caused him to fall to her knees. The only thing Alex said at that time was, "I should have been smarter," and those words struck his heart far deeper than anything he could imagine.

There were a lot of words Ray wanted to say, but he knew that Alex didn't make any mistakes. He wanted to say to his brother-in-law that everything was going to be alright, but he was unable to do it. All the words stuck in his throat because his beloved sister had just died.

That tragedy didn't end there. Due to this incident, the demons went on a rampage. Now that he lost the reason to fight, Alex succumbed to his depression, unable to wield his sword anymore.

The demons continued forward and pushed the kingdoms back, eventually splitting the four Kingdoms with the demihuman city.

If Noel was here, he would be able to see the future of the mountain range. Yes, the valley he crossed to reach Old Ru's house was actually the canyon Alex created with his sword. The dome where Old Ru built his house was the mountain that Alex crushed with his fire, and the path leading to it was where the original Ardagan Family resided.

Unfortunately, there was no record. And Alex was never the same again after losing his wife.

Humanity was pushed back and got separated from the demihuman city.

The Sword Saint tried his best to fight for the sake of his sister and brother-in-law, but losing Alex was too much. He was a great leader as well as humanity's strongest fighter.

Ray continued to grow after a lot of battles and finally halted the demon invasions. But the history had been lost, and no one remembered it.

When watching Alex losing hope in his life, Ray only had one thought that he poured into a book.

He used the remaining lifespan to create his own journal from the time the pair of brother and sister met Alex to the end of the greatest general in history.

In the last part of his journal, Ray wrote, "I have four requests that I wish that all Ardagan's descendants would have. First, don't restrain the Ardagan because with the restraints, the talent of the Ardagans will be buried.

"Secondly, this journal is made to honor Alexander Ardagan and Margaretha Ardagan. The Ardagan Family has lost its ancestral land, but it never lost its inheritance. Ardagan is made to protect the world. Once it wakes up from its slumber, it's the sign that the calamity is approaching.

"Thirdly, the descendants of Ardagan can only bear a single child for their entire life. That's why to choose the person you love and treat them far better than yourself, just like your ancestor treasured his wife. Sacrifice yourself for your wife, and that's why you should choose the person you won't regret.

"Last but not least, teach the descendants of Ardagan that they have to be strong and smart. In the future, I hope that the descendants don't fall for anyone's tricks but instead, using their brain to trick them. I sincerely wish that this tragedy won't ever happen again."

"Signed: Ray Greenwood."

The book was closed, but the person who read it was none other than Luke Ardagan. He couldn't help but let out a long sigh as if this story had not only connected all the history but also the reason for his responsibility.

After knowing that the Ardagan had woken up, it was clear that his son would be the one who brought salvation.

If he didn't disappear from his life, Noel wouldn't be able to grow. And the tragedy might happen again. There was one thing for sure. The awakening of Ardagan wasn't the mark of the incoming demon king. Instead, it was due to the presence of the demon king that Ardagan woke up from his slumber.

...

Leysha had finished the story, which included the warning about the presence of the demon king.

"That's all I can tell you and I hope that you pass this story to him. As much as I want to meet both of you, I have to leave." Leysha ended the story with a sigh.

Anna couldn't help but gasp, never thinking that the story had this kind of meaning.

"So, the inheritance of the Ardagan Family..." I think you should take a look at

"Yes. It's only the sword as well as the three journals from our ancestors." Leysha confirmed it without hesitation. "Noel's uncle, Laufey, had stolen the journal created by the War Maiden. What we have is the journal of the Sword Saint. And Noel had the sword as well as the direct journal from Alexander Ardagan."

Hiss!

Anna realized that this story was much more important than anything else. It was clear that the reason why the Greenwood Kingdom had runes or the downgraded version of them was the present Alexander gave for Margaretha's hands in marriage.

It also showed the creation of the four kingdoms as well as the world's situation.

She never thought that everything was related if not for that journal. In that dark period, there was another tragedy that erased most of the records.

"I understand. I will definitely pass your message to Noel." Anna nodded with a solemn expression.

"In that case, it's time for me to leave." Leysha took a glance to the side for a moment as if she were staring at the city that Noel had built. There was a trace of sadness and longing reflected in her eyes.

It wasn't that she didn't want to meet him. She simply couldn't.

Anna could only remain silent and watch Leysha leave the area.

It didn't take too long for Howard and a few others to come to this area, finding Anna standing in the middle of the field.

After seeing the destruction in the area, it was clear that Anna had used a lot of her power, but because there was no corpse around, the enemies must have gone away.

Howard was a bit curious as to why Anna's expression was serene or even a bit sad.

"Miss... The enemies..."

"I have driven them away. Unfortunately, we have to stop the exploration for today since I'm afraid that they are still roaming elsewhere. We'll have to scout the area again to ensure that no enemies are hiding nearby." Anna explained.

"That's... understandable." Howard nodded in agreement. "But are you alright?"

"Yeah. I'm not injured, but the enemies are tougher than I originally thought. I'm afraid that we have to get even stronger than we are now if we want to repel their next attack. Let's go back, we don't have a lot of time to waste."

"Y-yes." Howard hurriedly turned around, commanding his subordinates. He also returned to the group to handle the problem personally.

Meanwhile, Anna stood there for a moment and couldn't help but recall the story.

Margaretha looked a lot like her. However, Margaretha learned everything by herself and could do anything from the start. On the other hand, Anna could only mess around in her previous life.

Only when she gained this rebirth did she actually manage to stand up on her own. She had the skill like Margaretha, but she might be lacking in everything other than fighting.

"Love her more than anything else in the world, huh..." Anna muttered, remembering the scene where Noel swore in front of Ardagan. She finally understood the depth of that promise.

Anna suddenly fell silent as if coming to a realization.

"Hmm... Did Noel know all this and that was why he chose to let me regress in our previous life? Was he trying to create something similar or was it because it could never be a single person?" Anna fell into deep thought.

If Noel was already aware of the real inheritance and the story, wouldn't it mean that he borrowed Old Ru's ability to make that prophecy true? Then again, it still didn't change the fact that he should use it on himself.

With that kind of brain and power, Noel would be able to reach the Spirit King Level in no time. In fact, he should have become a Spirit Transcendence by now.

Yet, he dropped that chance and just gave it to her. It made her unable to discern his true reason.

Even if he knew about the truth of what truly happened, Noel wouldn't even think of falling in love with her. After all, she was that awful in the past. So, love wasn't an answer.

'Why did he give me all this?' Anna was bothered by the fact that Noel was still mysterious to her. Even the current Noel couldn't understand his behavior.

'If I think about it, we were only a Spirit Grandmaster in the past... And it was a few years from now. With our current pace, we should be able to reach Spirit Transcendence in one year and possibly the Spirit King sooner or later.

'Is it because we didn't have enough time back then? But if that was the answer, he should have persuaded me and told me everything instead of calling me naive or ignorant.'

Anna shook her head helplessly. 'In any case, I should tell Noel about this story. I don't know what Alexander Ardagan poured into that book, but the Sword Saint's book contained his journey. So, the other book... if she was like what I thought she was, then she must have written her training logs. It's probably the reason why Laufey was targeting Noel. He must think that Noel had the secret to become a Spirit King.'

If they planned it carefully, they might be able to lure the Supreme Devil Organization. However, Anna couldn't help but wonder if the Supreme Devil Organization was tied to the demon king.

Still, if the demon king had been here, the kingdom would have been destroyed. So, the demon king shouldn't be here yet or something happened to the demon king, Anna thought.

"It will be too much for me to think about. I guess I should ask Noel a few questions regarding this information." Anna made her decision.

She assembled the group and left the remaining tasks to Howard while she returned to Noel so that they could think about it together.

Chapter 906 Next Course

"I see... So, my mother was..." Noel pinched the bridge of his nose, never thinking it would be the case. He had expected that the demon king might be involved because this was the only reason why he had to restart the time.

However, he never thought that the reason why he got acknowledged by Ardagan, as well as the fact he had to endure all the hardship, was because of it.

It was truly an amazing story to know what happened to his ancestors, but more importantly, this story allowed Noel to change the way he thought.

"What do you think we should do now?" Anna asked.

"After listening to the story, I have a few questions for you." Noel paused for a moment, reorganizing his words. It was clear that he was shaken by the story and felt a connection with it.

"I will do my best to answer." Anna nodded with a solemn expression.

"First of all, Livia and Tristan are not ready yet, so it's not possible to speed up the progress on the Rune Body. However, with the story you told me earlier, what if we change our strategy? Instead of letting them do it, we would supply the soldiers with some runes ourselves."

"Huh? You're not talking about Rune Body, right?"

"I'm talking about Rune Spell."

Anna contemplated. It seemed that Noel wanted to change his plan from Rune Body to Rune Spell. It was a good method to train his students and also cost less since they gathered the rest of the materials by themselves. Only after both of them were ready for Rune Body would they begin. "I don't think there is a problem. In fact, in the previous life, you've utilized everything. I don't know which one came out first though."

Anna was implying that he actually used the equipment that had been embedded with runes, utilized the Rune Engineering to change the movement, created Rune Spell for convenience and painted the Rune Body for improvement.

After getting the confirmation, Noel said, "Rune Enhancement will still be Roel's specialty, so I'll let him handle it. Rune Spell and Rune Body will be prepared by Tristan and Livia. The problem would be Rune Engineering... I'm wondering if there is someone revolutionary that could research these ideas."

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

"I mean, how about using Enhance Forward Rune in a carriage? Won't it make the carriage move forward without a horse? What if we apply that concept to other items? It can improve various aspects, including the military."

"!!!" Anna suddenly fell silent, imagining the Rune Engineering. What if they used the Enhance Forward on a big boulder? Wouldn't they be able to create a mobile catapult without even the tower itself?

"What do you think?" Noel asked for confirmation.

"I think that is good. I have seen multiple of them. Should I list them all?"

"You can do it later." Noel nodded. "So, who is that person?"

"Actually, I don't think there is a person for that. I've known Howard and the others in the past, but I don't think I've seen anyone working behind the scenes."

"I see." It seemed that getting the clue about this person was harder than he originally thought. Considering the impact of that work, it was normal if Noel actually protected the secret.

However, Anna had a different opinion. "How about I take part in that research? Since I know about runes and have a memory of my past life, I think I will be suitable... at least for the first step. Once the replacement comes, I will leave that spot."

"That's not a bad idea." Noel agreed, but there was one problem. "How about the soldiers?"

"I will be going with them during the day and take care of the other one during the night. It should be fine, right?"

"But what about your own improvement?"

"It's fine for the time being. I don't have any problem until I reach the peak Grandmaster or even Transcendence since I have the memory and experience. All I need is the Demon Crystals to speed up the progress." Anna assured him.

Noel was slightly concerned about it, but there weren't many options he could choose at the moment. Anna would be extremely exhausted after all this while he only handled all this paperwork. He promised in his heart that he would at least take care of her later.

"Alright. Then, move on to the second question. With that story, do you think that I only have the river, the outpost, and the mine as trump cards?"

"Well, you actually had a lot of trump cards, but it was after you developed the territory a bit more since they were located south of this place. As for the ones around this city..." Anna looked down for a moment before saying, "Can you come up with an idea after listening to the story? I mean, what would the War Maiden do in this case?"

"The War Maiden..." Noel fell silent. In the past, they had been defeated because of a simple trick, so he should prepare something to counter it. "I will think about it later. But I believe..."

Noel abruptly pointed at her, specifically her finger.

"What? Is there something wrong with my hand?" When Anna looked at her fingers, she suddenly noticed the blinking light coming from the ring. "Ah?! You're going to use this to send a message?"

"Yes. But I will think about the details later. This is just one of them... And I have to check the rune knowledge again to see if I can utilize it to communicate or something."

"Understandable."

"Then, the third question is that... What do you think about Old Ru?"

"Huh?" Anna didn't know why Noel mentioned him all of a sudden.

"I'm talking about the fact that he is willing to teach me, not us. Why would he do so?"

"Why would he do so? But we're talking about... wait, the story?" Anna seemed to come to a realization. "Now that I think about it, the Ardagan Family's territory should be far north, close to the demihuman kingdom. The mountain was split and turned into a canyon... Don't tell me..."

"Yes. I'm thinking about that." Noel nodded. "When we came to him in this life, he already understood everything from the past life, right? But what about the previous life? How did I convince him?"

"It's not that you convinced him, but he already knew the truth!" Anna gasped.

"Exactly! He knew that I was an Ardagan and understood the story as well as the relationship between the Ardagan and the demihuman kingdom. In that tragedy, my ancestor fell for that trick because he was trying to reinforce the demihuman kingdom, right?"

Anna's face became solemn. "It seems that we need to visit the demihuman kingdom... No, Old Ru first."

"That's how it is. At the very least, we will have to defeat the first attack before being able to leave this territory." Noel nodded in agreement.

She never thought about this detail after listening to the story. As expected, it would be good to talk about it with Noel.

"Last question. I know that you are going to be tired after all these tasks, but I think I need to push you a bit further. In the past, my ancestor lost his wife due to the fact that there was only one brain in the family, right? While you were not a fool, you were still lacking compared to me. So, I wanted to ask you... are you willing to train with me? I will be imparting all my thoughts and my ways of strategy."

Anna almost forgot that she was similar to Alex Ardagan. She had overwhelming strength, but her brain wasn't enough to rival Noel. The latter was like Margaretha, slightly weaker than her, but had the ability to see through schemes.

If this continued, history would just repeat itself. That was why Noel wanted them to be equal so that they didn't need to tell each other about the strategy, and they already knew what to do. They were going to surpass their ancestors.

"Fine by me. Don't you dare to collapse from exhaustion before me." Anna smirked.

"Of course." Noel nodded before looking at Ardagan, asking inwardly, 'I know that I can't ask you much about my ancestor. However, I think it should be fine if I ask this, right... Can you compare me to my ancestor? I want to see the gap between me and him.'

Ardagan surprisingly replied with a few missions.

[Mission: Everchanging Emotion Sword Style.]

[Description: You have long past the basics, so it's time to begin mastering everything, taking it to a whole different level.]

[Reward: One with the Sword Medal and 50 SP.]

[Mission: Rune Master.]

[Description: Become a proper Rune Knight and master the combat with runes.]

[Reward: Rune Master Medal and 10 Random Intermediate Runes.]

[Mission: One With Spirit.]

[Description: Incorporate the elements in everything (Sword, Technique, and Rune)]

[Reward: Elemental Medal and 2 Elemental Abilities.]

[Mission: ???]

[Description: ???]

[Reward: Third Slot Medal.]

"!!!" Noel couldn't help but gasp when he received these four missions. While Ardagan didn't say anything about the ancestor or compare it, the missions had indirectly shown him the gap.

"What's wrong? You're doing something with your system again?"

"Yeah. I've just got a few missions." Noel shared the four missions with her, wanting to know her thoughts.

"Now that I think about it, you haven't mastered your Everlasting Sword... You might have been so distracted with spirit abilities and runes that you haven't pursued this path." Anna nodded in agreement. Ardagan was absolutely correct.

"I think I have a perfect person for that." Noel smirked.

"Me? No, wait... Are you insane, Noel?" Anna's eyebrows twitched. "You're not going to involve the Sword Arbiter, right?"

"Haha. Of course. The situation is pretty heated right now, but if we wait for a bit, I can actually invite the Sword Arbiter in one way or another."

"While the Sword Arbiter is not bothered with the politics, he might cut you down in case something goes wrong, you know."

"So, you're going to let yourself become a widow?"

"As expected, you want me to go with you." Anna sighed.

"You don't want to? It's rare to fight the number one sword user, you know."

"Well, I also want to test my ability against him, so I guess it's fine. But we're going to train even harder since we can't lose without a proper fight."

"Obviously."

Anna then took a look at the other missions. "What about this Rune Knight?"

"I have the mission way back, but I have almost forgotten about it. I guess it's time to become a Rune Knight and continue the path through this mission. Though, I might need to farm some honor points to buy everything."

"I don't have any problems with that. Runes are going to dominate the entire world... that's what I know." Anna then pointed at the elemental ability. "Now that I think about it, the element can also be imbued with runes. While it doesn't necessarily make it stronger, it can change its purpose. What if the rune arrow is infused by the element? It will create a blaze instead of an explosion upon impact. But it takes skill to do it. In the past, I didn't learn it since it took too much time."

"We would train together with this."

"As for the last mission, I don't know much about it. You should be the one thinking about it." Anna shrugged. "In that case, let's prepare for the mission... I think we need a map. Although this territory is near the border, there are a few villages and even one city in the south, so you should go there. Let me grab the map first."

While Anna was searching for the map, Noel's face turned solemn. The gap between him and his ancestor was extremely big, and he was running out of time.

But after all that seriousness, Noel actually asked in an innocent tone. "By the way, Anna..."

"Mhmm? What's wrong?" Anna asked while searching for the map.

"Should we get married now?"

Rumble!

Rumble!

Rumble!

After that question, Anna dropped a few papers and scrolls from her hand while looking at Noel in complete shock. "Ma—what?!"

Chapter 907 Becoming A Rune Knight

"Ma—what?!" Anna was completely taken aback by the sudden question. She never thought that Noel would just forget about everything they discussed prior and talk about marriage.

"I'm just teasing you." Noel chuckled while looking away.

"Teasing me?" Anna squinted her eyes, noticing that Noel was lying. After they got together, Noel seemed to have a hard time lying to her. It must be that he didn't want to have any lie between them, but it was just hard to completely change one's character. So, this looking away action became Noel's method.

She approached Noel while glaring at him as if demanding an explanation.

"I'm just teasing you, alright? Just leave it at that." Noel scratched the back of his head, albeit Anna didn't like it.

"Have you forgotten that if there is any problem, we will be dealing with it together?" Anna sighed, slightly feeling disappointed. However, she didn't pursue this matter.

But that was the exact reason why Noel felt bad. He ended up resigning to his fate and apologized, "Sorry. The marriage part was just a foolish idea. I mean, if my mother visited you when we just got engaged, what would happen if I married you?"

"Ah!" Anna finally understood Noel's thought. The answer was clear. Noel had been chasing after his parents this whole time, so now that he had gotten a clue about it, he wanted to try to catch them and finally reunite with them.

However, Noel instantly realized how rude that plan was. Just for the sake of his parents, he actually wanted to sacrifice Anna and even married her for that cause. It was the rudest thing to their commitment. That was why Noel wanted to brush it off.

Surprisingly, Anna chuckled and said, "You know what? I like it when you show me how strong you are and how perfect you can become. But when you are making mistakes like this... you know, I love you even more."

"Mhmm?!" Noel was dumbfounded as if he couldn't believe what he had just heard.

To Anna, Noel was a special existence that was capable of dealing with everything. But seeing him making a mistake like this somehow made him appear down to earth. She could relate to him a bit more and that was probably why she actually liked him more.

They were not perfect and might make mistakes. But the point was that they shouldn't make a mistake, but to actually solve their mistake and become better next time.

Though, Noel was tongue-tied, noticing that Anna got all the momentum in their conversation. Still, he did feel happy when she said it.

"Thanks."

Anna smiled and changed the topic or it would just become even more awkward while bringing the map to him. "In any case, we should get back to work. This is the map."

From the looks of it, there seemed to be about seven villages and one city at the edge of his territory. It would be hard to get the number of people living in his territory, but he estimated there were at least three to four thousand people living in those places.

And with the additional ten thousand people who were going to live here, they should have enough people to gather a huge amount of points over time.

"By the way, what's the condition of the territory next to us?" Anna asked.

"You want me to help the other territories?"

"Why not? I don't see a problem as long as they are not hostile."

"It's not much of a problem, but a lord leaving his territory easily is a bit... problematic." Noel thought for a moment. "Well, if I want, I can probably do that. But it will take time."

"Alright. We can figure that out after solving the problem within our territory." Anna nodded in agreement.

"I'll take care of the details later. For now, I think about making a breakthrough in rune." Noel opened his system.

Honor Point: 487 Pts

Skill Point: 10 Pts

'Hmm... The points should be enough to advance all the runes required to become a Rune Knight. However, it's barely enough. If I'm attacked like last time and require more Honor Points or Skill Points to buy or upgrade my ability, I won't be able to do it.'

Noel contemplated for a moment, carefully measuring the pros and cons before deciding to do it.

"Ardagan. Level up these runes..." Noel listed all the runes from all five systems to be considered as mastering them.

The influx of information was something Noel had grown accustomed to, but this time, he also completed the mission.

[Career: Rune Knight]

[Description: There are a total of five categories of a rune: Support Rune, Attack Rune, Defensive Rune, Utility Rune, and Movement Rune. Master 5 Runes of each category]

[Requirement: Support Rune (5/5), Attack Rune (5/5), Defensive Rune (5/5), Utility Rune (3/5), Movement Rune (5/5)]

[Upgrading the job from Rune Swordsman to Rune Knight.]

Name: Noel Ardagan

Job: Rune Knight

Weapon: Ardagan Sword

Main Medal: Demon Hunter Medal, Elite Medal, Couple Medal

Honor Point: 23 Pts

Skill Point: 0 Pts

There was another wave of information flowing into him. This information was far different from what he had seen before.

In reality, Noel suddenly raised his hand and formed a rune in front of him. I think you should take a look at

"!!!" Anna stepped back but soon dropped her guard, knowing that Noel wouldn't hurt her. She believed in him.

However, there was something weird about this rune. She squinted her eyes and examined the new rune. 'What is this? I don't think I have seen this rune before. The complexity... doesn't seem to be an intermediate rune. Is it an Advanced Rune?'

'There are not many records regarding the Advanced Rune. In fact, Noel only publicized a few of them in the previous life.'

However, the rune soon shrunk before moving toward Noel's chest, where Heisk's Spirit Seal resided. It actually integrated itself with Heisk's Spirit Seal.

After that, Noel gradually opened his eyes. "Did something happen?"

Anna was still gasping in shock because this was the first time she saw a rune being integrated into the Spirit Seal. "You didn't know what you'd just done?"

"Did I do something weird?" Noel frowned. "All I can remember is that I'm drawing a rune according to the information flowing into my mind. If I'm not wrong, that rune can reinforce the Spirit Seal. The effect is pretty simple, it's just increasing the conversion rate."

"Did you just say increasing the conversion rate?! And you said it's simple?!" Anna was dumbstruck. She slammed the table and shouted, "Do you know what kind of ridiculous thing you've just said?"

"Of course I know. But If I keep quiet about it, no one will know. And my conversion rate is already one hundred percent, so it's not a big deal."

"I mean..." Anna was a bit hesitant to say that he should do it to her and anyone else. That rune would definitely become something that everyone would want. And she could understand why Noel wanted to hide it. Even his disciple might not know about this rune. After all, it could be something that destroyed the Ardagan Family.

"Ardagan implanted that rune by using my own blood as well as his power, so it can be done perfectly. Of course, I will also implant it on you later since I have to understand that rune a bit more. But I don't think a lot of people will receive this kind of rune, considering it's using the user's blood and conversion rate to boost other people."

"Ah!" Anna scratched the back of her head and hurriedly replied, "You don't have to do mine. I'm fine."

"You don't have to worry about that. Ardagan boosts my conversion rate to one hundred percent. The only reason for him to forge it by sacrificing his eternal one hundred percent conversion rate is that if, in the future, I want my child to inherit the Ardagan, my conversion rate with Heisk won't go down." Noel explained.

"That's... Does that mean you are the only person who can do that?"

"I and all my descendants." Noel nodded. "Well, the one with Ardagan. And since Ardagan won't activate without the blood of the Ardagan Family, so yeah... it turns that way."

"I see..." Anna finally saw the gravity of this ability. On the one hand, it looked like the others could do the same, but it sacrificed their own power to boost their successor's ability. And that level of power would depend on their own conversion rate and their successor.

So, if someone knew that the Ardagan users could do it infinitely, they would be enslaved and controlled. That was something even she didn't want to see.

"I won't tell anyone or even make a record about it. In fact, I can finally understand why you never drank alcohol in the previous life."

"It's as simple as clouding my judgment." Noel nodded. "Nonetheless, I have become a Rune Knight."

Noel opened the system again, checking the reward he got from becoming one.

Enhanced Strength Rune (1/3)

Rain of Light Rune (1/3)

Spiritual Barrier Rune (1/3)

Energy Concentration Rune (1/3)

Platform Rune (1/3)

It seemed that he had received one rune from each category. The Enhanced Strength Rune was the one Anna used during the exploration. The Rain of Light Rune was a versatile attack rune, while the Spiritual Barrier Rune was what Alexander Ardagan used to protect Margaretha for the first time. The Energy Concentration Rune was an enhanced version of the Energy Gathering Rune with a bit of tweak, while the Platform Rune functioned as the name implied.

More importantly, all of them were considered to be intermediate runes.

"It seems that I have a few more runes... Although I can replace a few runes on our Rune Body, I guess we can put it aside for a while, right?"

"Yeah. Right now, not a lot of them know about the Rune Body. If we use it to surprise our enemy and upgrade it after that, we can surprise our enemy again." Anna agreed. "But to think that you can advance just like that... I'm kind of envious."

Noel shrugged. "You also have a quality, not inferior to mine. So, it's fine."

"Since you're done, let's get some sleep. Tomorrow is going to be exhausting."

"Yeah. Training in the morning, taking care of the business at noon, and handling the paperwork during the evening before having another training session until we sleep."

"Besides, you'll be going on a trip soon, right?"

"Indeed." Noel nodded while rising from his seat. "There are also plenty of things I want to implement with the story you told me earlier, but I haven't thought about the concrete details."

"Take your time. We still have plenty of time before the incoming attack."

"Yep."

"By the way, to answer the previous question, I don't mind."

"Which question again?"

"The one where we should marry immediately."

"..."

It's just another daily life of the Ardagan Family.

Chapter 908 Training

The next morning.

"I think you are wrong on this part." Tristan pointed at the rune Livia drew before correcting his words right after. "Ah, I apologize. There is nothing wrong."

Livia couldn't help but furrow her eyebrows. When she checked the rune and confirmed it with the book Noel gave them, it was clear that she had made some mistakes.

So, Tristan's action wasn't wrong. That was why Tristan's action piqued Livia's interest as there were several reasons for it.

Livia observed Tristan's face, who looked extremely uncomfortable. She asked, "Tristan. You don't need to answer this, but are you still considering yourself a slave? Or is it because you are uncomfortable that I'm a princess?"

Tristan looked away, not daring to answer that question. But there was a glimpse of his lack of confidence, which was enough for Livia to understand what was happening to him.

"I see. So, you're still considering yourself as a slave." Livia sighed. "I guess everything that has been ingrained into you is hard to change. Even Sandra is still like this. However, I'm going to tell you this. Owning a slave in the Muivell Kingdom is forbidden in this kingdom. Are you trying to get your teacher in trouble?"

"That's..." Tristan looked down. If Tristan continued considering himself as a slave, that meant the enemies could use it as a reason to strip Noel's power. And Noel had told them from the start that they were not their slaves. Tristan was the student of Noel Ardagan and Sandra was the maid of the Ardagan Family. "I'm sorry."

"It's not something you need to be sorry about. However, you have to let go of the past and live as a proud member of the Ardagan Family. If you can't do that, then everything he has done will be useless. Of course, you don't have to change right away. Just make sure you know about this and keep improving until you overcome all your troubles."

"Yes, I know." Tristan nodded with a serious expression before hearing a clicking sound echoing from the garden. The two of them became curious since they had never heard anything like this in the past few days.

When they checked on it, they saw Noel and Anna sparring.

They hadn't used their ability or Spiritual Energy. It was just pure swordsmanship.

However, everything soon changed when Anna said, "I think that's enough. Let's step up our game for a bit and test the rune."

"Indeed." Noel sheathed his sword and started raising his stance. On both hands appeared a different rune.

"That's the Rune Blast?" Livia frowned, observing the rune on his right hand.

"If I'm not mistaken, the other rune is a Rune Strike. It's not as powerful as the Rune Blast, but its purpose is to penetrate the enemy's defense."

Anna shouted, "Let's go!"

"I'm coming." Noel nodded and leaped forth. He punched forward with the Rune Blast.

Seeing the Rune Blast was about to be activated, Anna covered her body with Spiritual Energy before waving her sword downward.

Boom!

The Spiritual Energy erupted, creating a shock wave that would launch Anna, albeit the latter actually cut through the shock wave and split it into two. The Rune Blast ended up getting redirected to both sides while Anna remained in her position.

After that, Anna formed a Rune Sword, shooting the sword toward Noel.

Noel calculated the trajectory of the Rune Sword and shot a stream of light through the Rune Strike, knocking the Rune Sword away.

"Is it something like this?" Noel asked.

"I don't think so. Though, I won't tell you anything about it since I want to see if you have come to another conclusion." Anna shrugged her shoulders.

"I know." Noel fell silent. "Instead of focusing on one, should we just explore all the potential? For example, we can just focus on a normal swordsman where the person only uses runes to boost their physical ability. It's different, like when you fight with a sword and summon a rune at the same time."

"Yeah. There is also a close combat rune like what you did earlier." Anna nodded in agreement.

"Oh. How about this..." Noel pulled out his sword again, but this time, he put his left hand on the front as a Spiritual Barrier Rune formed, acting as a shield.

"I think that's the same as what I'm doing. Besides, it's better to use equipment that has been enchanted with Rune Enhancement, don't you think?"

"Fair enough. But can we categorize the Rune into to be the same as what I did earlier? I mean, both fight with only runes."

"That's rather confusing." Anna shook her head helplessly. "Anyway, we're only testing the runes for a bit. So, let's test a few other runes."

"Alright." Noel raised his hand and a big rune appeared in the sky. After that, the rune shot out numerous streams of light and rained down on Anna with it. However, the latter only jumped back to avoid it.

The impact of each stream was massive as it created a small hole in the ground. If one tried to guard it, they would either be knocked down or just get crushed by the Rain of Light Rune.

"Then, let's check the Energy Concentration Rune." Noel formed another rune on his back. All of a sudden, the spiritual energy began to flow toward Noel as if it was being sucked into the rune.

Noel then controlled the rune to gather the energy right in front of him.

"That's... probably terrifying if you use your element, no?" Anna asked.

"Let me test." Noel chose to pour his ice element into this instead of the undying flame since it was dangerous.

Afterward, the concentrated energy started to blow out white mists and shrouded the area.

Anna shot out her lightning dragon just to push away the mist, only to find that the mist froze even her power. "That's quite powerful. It's kind of enhancing one's power."

"Yeah. There are several runes that can enhance the power of an attack. They might be called an Enchanter since their job is only to boost everyone's attack power in a party."

"Their support would definitely level up the entire party. And there would be a lot of requests to those who master these runes, right?"

"I can see that happening in the future. So, we have five combat types for now? Rune Master, Rune Enchanter, Rune ian, Rune Fighter, and Rune Physique?"

"Yeah. That's probably five of them for now... until we get a new detailed version later." Noel nodded.

"In that case, let's continue with the sword. I've gotten a good grasp of your sword, so..."

Before Anna finished, Noel waved his hand and said, "Wait."

Noel suddenly jumped into the air and landed right in front of Tristan and Livia, who were watching them from the second floor. Yes, Noel was actually standing in the air. There was a rune beneath his foot, but it wasn't possible for him to stand on the rune unless it was designed for that.

"T-Teacher!" Both of them panicked and hurriedly greeted him. Livia explained, "We didn't mean to spy on you. We were just curious about the sound coming from the garden."

Considering they were living in a two-story house building that was considered a temporary mansion for Noel and all people related to him like Anna, Livia, Tristan and Sandra, he should have expected them to be able to hear it.

So, Noel said, "I don't mind if you're going to watch, but don't tell anyone about what you saw, alright? It's still a secret."

"Y-yes!" Tristan didn't think much about it. It was his duty to protect his teacher's secret after all.

Meanwhile, Livia realized that Noel could easily come up with a few runes. If he had time to think more about it, there would be more and more amazing runes appearing in the future. It wasn't wrong for her to become his student.

And with the power of the Rain of Light Rune and the Energy Concentration Rune alone, she could see that the rune would definitely revolutionize the entire power system that had been established for hundreds of years.

She would be the first to witness it as his student.

After warning them, Noel jumped back, but this time, instead of one big jump, Noel used the Platform Rune to do multiple small leaps.

He just got another idea and asked, "Say. Won't it be good to have our scout learn this Platform Rune? They can reach a point where no one would realize and just observe everything."

"You have to consider their range of vision though."

"Fair enough."

Seeing how hardworking their teacher was, Livia and Tristan felt a bit ashamed for not pushing themselves a bit further. Though, Tristan felt a bit more confident because he could proudly say that Noel was his teacher. If he was going to overcome his past status, he would have to work hard for it.

With that determination in his mind, Tristan said to Livia. "I think we should go back."

"Y-yeah." Livia was a bit surprised by the sudden change in Tristan's expression, but it seemed that Noel had intended to use that opportunity to teach Tristan this.

...

Meanwhile, Anna continued with her observation. "Alright. There are two problems with your current swordsmanship. First of all, people have their own swordsmanship to create a foundation for them, right?"

"Indeed."

"I could say that your foundation is already solid. It's just... you don't know what to do after that."

"Hmm?" Noel frowned. "Is it a special ability from swordsmanship? Incorporating one's Spiritual Energy with the sword or something?"

"No. You have the Ardagan Swordsmanship, but don't forget that you also have a specialized one, which is the Everchanging Emotion Sword Style. What's the basis of that Everchanging Emotion?"

"That's..." Noel fell silent for a moment, realizing that a few emotions had changed or disappeared. The anger toward Anna had vanished and there was only the feeling of joy and interest in her. "Do you mean that the Everchanging Emotion Sword Style is flawed?"

"Yes. But it can be solved with a simple solution. You simply have to define that emotion and direct it to yourself. For example, why do you get angry to create that sharpest swing? It was because of me in the past, but how about changing it? Like... You got angry because you didn't like the person or whatever. The deeper the meaning, the better it is."

"I see." Noel nodded in understanding since he had done the same with his Undying Fire. It wouldn't be much of a problem to define that meaning for him. "I can fix that, so I want you to take a look at it every day."

"I'm looking forward to it." Anna paused. "As for the second one, what is a sword to you?"

"Hmm? I don't think I follow you there."

"I mean, for me, my sword is a tool that will allow me to achieve that goal. It's because it's a tool that I can easily utilize to conjure my spiritual energy, lightning, and anything else. But yours is different, right? Do you want to treat it as a spirit? Can it channel your emotions? Or can you boost your fire because it grants you that power? I need you to define that sword."

"..." Noel couldn't say anything to that question. Ardagan was a Spirit indeed. However, was that all?

The moment that question entered his mind, Noel fell into deep thought.

Ardagan had been accompanying him since the beginning of his journey. He had shared what he felt and saw with Ardagan, meaning that Ardagan might be the person who understood him the most. And more importantly, he achieved all this because of Ardagan.

So, there was no way he could consider Ardagan as a mere sword. But that also begged the question: was Ardagan a good sword?

A spirit and a sword were two completely different things. So, what did Noel actually see in Ardagan? What if Ardagan was just a normal sword that didn't give him Undying Fire, Rune, or a System?

Noel couldn't help but close his eyes, contemplating his answer.

Chapter 909 Free

'A sword, a partner, and a spirit, huh...' Noel muttered inwardly, contemplating his reply.

Ardagan had been supporting him as a spirit and accompanied him like a partner. At the same time, Noel had been wielding him as a sword.

The question itself confused Noel a bit. While he could define Ardagan with three of those, was there a reason to actually define him with only a single one?

'Was it because I have never seen Ardagan purely as a sword that it has been hindering my progress? I learned Ardagan Swordsmanship thanks to Ardagan. Not long after, I created the Everchanging Emotion Sword Style.'

'So, Ardagan has been the foundation of my sword. In that case, can I say that this achievement is mine?'

Noel had realized that while he could actually define Ardagan with all those three, he couldn't say that his current expertise came from himself.

'No. It's not about that.' Noel suddenly remembered the conversation with the Sword Saint when he visited his tomb.

Back then, the Sword Saint said, "If not for Ardagan, I could beat your ancestor."

His ancestor had been using Ardagan, so how would he define him? And the fact that Ardagan was the one helping the ancestor becomes stronger than the Sword Saint made it clear that there was something fundamentally different.

The Sword Saint also told him that the Ardagan Swordsmanship would be different for each person. Ardagan would adjust its own form in order to match the contractor.

In other words, he could pursue his own swordsmanship and that Imaginary Battlefield would be his first step.

'That's right. I was asked about my goal regarding my swordsmanship by the Sword Saint. And that goal...' Noel turned silent as if he was on the verge of a realization.

'Yeah. I told him that I wanted my sword to be free. I want to be free from hatred, from revenge... I want the freedom to choose whatever I want.'

However, Noel also knew that to be free from everything was close to impossible. It was such an arduous path that no one dared to walk on.

Yet, the Sword Saint supported him and even told him that he could do it. He only warned him not to ever waver and see it through, no matter how painful the path was.

'Yes. Why do I have to be fixated on everything? If my sword can be free, why am I not free to consider Ardagan as my sword, partner, and spirit at the same time? Why am I not free of my emotions? No, it's not that I'm not free... It's just that I'm involuntarily restraining myself.'

'Emotions are bound to come to my heart, so instead of letting my heart free from emotion, I should control which emotion's coming out. I'm free to release my anger, I'm free to be surprised... I'm free to release that emotion.'

Noel took a deep breath before gradually opening his eyes. Anna had been waiting for him this whole time and smiled after seeing the change in his expression. It appeared that Noel had found his answer.

"Anna. There is something I'd like to try. Do you mind helping me for a bit?"

"Of course. You're going to teach me about other things like strategy and stuff later."

"I will." Noel nodded with a serious expression. He raised his sword as the Spiritual Energy enveloped every corner of his sword.

Anna could sense there was something different from the flow of the Spiritual Energy. In fact, this was similar to one of Noel's abilities.

That was right. Noel was actually using the Spirit Weaponry. It was the ability that he got from the Sword Saint.

The concept of Spirit Weaponry was to assimilate the Spiritual Energy into the sword and allow the latter to actually cut the Spiritual Energy itself. In other words, the sword could match the Spiritual Energy, which was the most versatile form.

If there was something that could match the freedom that Noel desired, it would be the Spiritual Energy, not the sword.

'I'm free to release my emotions. And that emotion will be anger. This anger shall be directed to the world for trying to chain me down.' Noel thought before jumping toward Anna, swinging his sword downward.

The Spiritual Energy on his sword began to erupt, creating a malicious intent. There was anger and resentment contained in the Spiritual Energy, causing her to be alarmed.

She hurriedly released all her Spiritual Energy and struck Noel's sword.

The instant their swords collided, Noel's Spiritual Energy exploded, not only giving a boost to the sword but also sharpening it.

"!!!" Anna hurriedly used both hands to stop this strike, which actually caused the ground underneath her to begin to crack.

It seemed like the energy was about to release another eruption, but the flow of the energy became so disrupted that it ended up dispersing into the air.

"Ha..." Noel exhaled all the air in his lungs. The process took a toll on his mind since he never controlled his emotions like earlier.

Anna, on the other hand, felt a bit terrified by what he showed earlier. She looked at the ground and thought, 'If Noel had actually mastered this ability, this area would have turned into a crater. In the future, his blade might be able to cut even a mountain like his ancestor... no, this time, we're going to do it... Both of us.'

"It seems that you're on the verge of understanding this new perception. Then, I'll push you further!" Anna smirked and stepped forward, counterattacking.

Seeing the incoming blade from the left, Noel waved the sword again. But this time, the Spiritual Energy kicked in first and formed a barrier. Anna managed to break it apart, but it still reduced her power and even bought enough time for Noel's sword to block her.

Cling!

"Blocking with Spiritual Energy first before containing the impact with your sword?" Anna smiled, believing it was the 'Surprise.'

After that, Noel rotated his sword and released another strike, far faster than anything he had done so far. This time, he used the 'Fear' to enhance his speed.

Even Anna had to release her lightning to match Noel's speed, barely blocking it.

The two continued clashing as Noel kept changing his emotions. All the emotions were still incomplete, but Anna could see the latent potential that this swordsmanship had.

However... It didn't last long. Just after ten minutes, Noel had dropped to the ground, gasping for air.

"Time out. I can't do it anymore." Noel had a hard time even opening his eyes. Even with his good control of his energy, it was still impossible for Noel to easily manipulate that emotion.

For the others, they would only feel the change in his sword. But for Noel, that emotion would fill his heart and keep changing, causing him to be mentally unstable.

"I think you've got a good grasp of your path. All that's left is just to get accustomed to it."

"Yeah. It won't be easy though." Noel nodded.

.com "I know you can do it. Anyway, it's time for me to leave."

"By the way, how did I do?" Noel tried to glance at the balcony again and realized that the two were still there.

Anna understood what he was trying to ask, so she bent her knees and moved closer to his ears. "I'm not going to tell you. Just forge your own path without caring about that... because I know that you will always be the coolest."

Anna gave a little peck on his cheek before walking away.

"Ahaha... I still can't handle her, I guess." Noel chuckled before waving to Livia and Tristan. "We're done here. Go back and continue with your training. I'll be leaving this place in two days, so I'm going to intensify your training later."

...

Anna continued the exploration during the day. But because she couldn't say anything regarding Noel's mother, they had to thread the exploration far more carefully, watching for the 'imaginary' Supreme Devil Organization.

Meanwhile, Noel had to make a couple of arrangements, considering he had to leave this city.

"So, what do you think?" Noel asked Dimitri and Charlotte.

"I don't really have any problem with you going out, but don't you think it's a bit too dangerous? The enemies aren't attacking us because they know that there are four Spirit Grandmasters in this place. And three of which can handle multiple Grandmasters at once. But once you're out, you will be isolated." Dimitri raised his concern.

"I don't have any problem internally. I can handle the rest of the problems, but you will definitely need to complete a lot of paperwork once you return. But I believe Dimitri's concern is justified. At least, you have to bring someone else with you and Dimitri won't be the person." Charlotte explained.

"Then, who should I bring? I mean, I can understand Dimitri since he is taking care of the migration. Howard and Anna are still busy with their exploration." Noel sighed, explaining the problem.

Dimitri knew that Anna was with the soldiers to get their trust. This was extremely important for the future.

"Still, you have to bring her if you wish to go. In the past, Madam and I always accompanied Master Luke during expeditions like this. The people seem to like it, considering the lord and his wife are going personally. If you are worried about the soldiers, how about bringing a couple of soldiers with you?"

"If that's the case, the progress of the exploration will be reduced significantly."

"It's going to be two days from now, right? They should be able to clear the river by that time, so it shouldn't be that bad. I will also help Howard now and then." Dimitri suggested.

"Hmm..." Noel fell into deep thought. The progress in this city was the most important, considering it would be the first line of defense. But he needed a lot of honor points to progress. If he didn't go on an expedition, he might not be strong enough when the enemies came.

"Master. Do you remember the idiom saying the most dangerous place is actually the safest one?"

"Huh?" Noel frowned. Even though there was a possibility that the enemies would come to attack them, they wouldn't be enough to cause the worst case scenario as long as Anna was with him.

But he suddenly understood what Dimitri wanted. He actually wanted to cause a conflict that was big enough to make it dangerous, not only to him, but also to his enemies.

In other words, he should find a method to bring that danger to his destination so that he could repel his enemies without fighting them.

"I think there is one way..." Noel smirked. "I'm going to send a letter first. I hope that no one is going to tell me that I'm crazy."

Chapter 910 A New Storm

"Look at this... Can't you believe what he actually sent me? Oi, Kevin! Do you know anything about this?" The Sword Arbiter showed him the letter he had secretly received.

Kevin was also curious about it since his daughter hadn't told him anything. When he read the letter as well as the date, he was surprised.

The letter arrived in just one day, meaning that they had been brought by pigeons. However, Noel's city wasn't established yet, so mailing service had yet to be available for him.

In other words, Noel actually utilized another way to send the letter. But considering it ultimately arrived by using the mailing service, it was clear that Noel had this mysterious way to deliver information, which would prove significant in battle.

And the content of the letter was bolder than he could imagine.

"Dear Duke Lorelei,

"This might be sudden, but I'm inviting you to visit my territory. I don't know if there will be another opportunity like this, so I hope that you will accept my invitation."

The Sword Arbiter gritted his teeth while asking, "Did he know that you were the one stopping me from beating him? If not for you, I would go there personally to beat him under the royal family's order!"

"Ahahaha." Kevin scratched the back of his head, not having any explanation. "Or he might actually want you to go there and beat him up... Just saying."

"Huh? He doesn't swing that way, right?" Duke Lorelei's eyebrows twitched. He suddenly fell silent, as if sensing the hidden intention of that invitation.

If he visited Noel, others wouldn't dare to make a move in case they angered him. Even the Supreme Devil Organization wouldn't go all the way to antagonize him for no reason.

That was why Noel's hidden intention must be to repel those people away. But he didn't know what kind of activity Noel was planning to do that would require him to avoid all that danger.

After all, his city had four Spirit Grandmasters. It would be an extremely safe city, unless he had to be separated from all of them. And that separation could only happen... The moment Duke Lorelei realized Noel's true intention, he smirked evilly. "This damn kid is actually trying to use me."

"Sir. Are you angry?" Kevin made a wry smile, trying to calm him down.

"Yeah. I'm pretty pissed right now." The Sword Arbiter rose from his seat and said, "I think I'm going to beat this kid up for a bit... Hmm, maybe forcing him to lay on his bed for a couple of months."

"That would be a problem, Sir." Kevin tried to stop him, but the Sword Arbiter warned him. "Kevin. This is that lad's invitation. If you're going to stop me, I don't mind blasting everyone here, including you."

"..." Kevin stopped for a moment. Duke Lorelei even emphasized Noel's invitation to show him that he shouldn't stop him. Noel must have a plan for inviting Duke Lorelei.

Although there were a lot of questions in his mind, he knew that Noel wouldn't be that foolish. Even his daughter was with him.

Kevin sighed before agreeing to let the duke go. "I understand. But I hope that the duke will be a bit lenient with him."

"You don't have to worry about that. I don't kill kids, women, or elders." Duke Lorelei snorted and grabbed the sword by his side. He rushed outside while shouting, "But that kid is already an adult, so it doesn't apply to him!"

Kevin widened his eyes in surprise, but before he chased after him, Duke Lorelei added, "Just kidding."

Kevin almost stumbled. Even after all of this, Duke Lorelei's simple joke still managed to trick him. He sighed, "Sly old fox. Time to spread the news, I guess."

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The next day.

As expected of Kevin, he spread the news in the capital city that Duke Lorelei was visiting the new Earl, Noel Ardagan.

It was a huge shock to all parties. While the duke was following most of the orders from the Royal Family, he was still a just man. So, no one could predict what was exactly in his head when he decided to fulfill that order.

Obviously, the Royal Family was happy. Even if the duke didn't kill Noel, he should be able to injure him to the point where he couldn't train or progress for a couple of months.

The other nobles would be panicking because they couldn't see the outcome. Those who supported Anna and Noel would find this situation troublesome.

However, there were three parties that actually handled this differently compared to the others.

The spies from the Supreme Devil Organization couldn't help but gather after receiving this information.

"Have you sent the information to the headquarters?"

"Yeah. But can you believe it?"

"I have confirmed that Duke Lorelei is no longer in the Stargaze Family's mansion. It seems that the Fleeting Arbiter is planning to return to his territory soon."

"But what is going on? If Duke Lorelei is going there, we won't be able to attack Noel Ardagan. No, does something big happen in Lounstein?"

"No idea. We have to wait for orders from the headquarters. Most likely, Noel Ardagan has left his territory. They are going to take advantage of the situation to assassinate him."

The spies from the organization seemed to have reached the same conclusion. This might be an opportunity for them.

Before, they couldn't mobilize their strength fully due to Noel hiding in another country. This time was different. Without the need to care about international law, they could wreak havoc and mobilize at least a few Saints at once.

However, Duke Lorelei wouldn't like it if they showed up when he was fighting Noel. So, there was a high possibility that they would have to wait until Noel was injured and the Duke returned.

The second party that took this matter seriously was the man who had been laying low for some time, the Third Prince.

He was looking at the map while contemplating. The map before him was Lounstein and its surrounding area. It was clear what he was thinking.

However, all of a sudden, the third party in this matter finally appeared. With a single slash of her scythe, she tore apart space and emerged from the portal where the Third Prince was staying.

Two of the Spirit Grandmasters next to the prince hurriedly unsheathed their weapons, ready to fight. Yes, the visitor this time was actually the Void Arbiter, Josephine.

But before a conflict arose, the Third Prince opened his mouth. "Sheathe your weapon; I know her."

The Grandmasters looked doubtful, but since the Third Prince had given the order, they had no choice but to comply.

Josephine, who was supposed to be on the Royal Family's side, was actually visiting the Third Prince and the latter even confirmed their relationship. They didn't know what was going on.

Smiling, Josephine whispered to him.

"!!!" The Third Prince widened his eyes in shock before an evil grin appeared in his mind. "If that's the case, it makes the situation easier."

He looked at the Grandmasters and waved his hands as if telling them they were dismissed. They ultimately had to leave the room, and Josephine could finally speak freely.

"I have just gone to their territory. They are truly leaving the city. But Duke Lorelei will surely not like this." Josephine explained.

"You have gone there?"

"Yeah. Thanks to it, I don't have a lot of Spiritual Energy left, so you don't mind me resting here, right?"

"Of course. To think they have left that city on their own accord. Saving me trouble to come up with a plan." The Third Prince contemplated. "Who remains in the city?"

"Howard and Dimitri among the Grandmasters."

"So, he is only going with your student."

"Don't call her my student anymore. That lowly sl*t dares to fool me for so long." Josephine gnashed her teeth as if she were still bothered by the fact that Anna faked the fact that she was brainwashed.

"Either way, they are leaving the city. I don't need to lure them out anymore."

"But how will you take care of the duke?"

"I don't need to do anything to him. If we want to deal with Noel and Anna, we just have to wait for them to finish or kill them before the duke arrives. The latter is close to impossible, so I'll just extend the duration of their trip, long enough until the duke's gone and the Supreme Devil Organization can assemble."

"Heh? You're not worried that this is a trap?"

"Even if this is a trap, we still have to continue. The longer we wait, the stronger he will become. Unlike Luke, who is not good at fighting, he will become uncontrollable soon."

"Alright then. I will leave everything to you. I've done my job in delivering the message." Josephine nodded with a smile.

The Third Prince's expression darkened as if he were thinking hard about a plan that could fulfill the new objective.

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While the people in the dark were preparing for a plan, Noel actually went out according to the schedule as if he wasn't bothered by them.

Noel, Anna, and a few soldiers were standing in front of the city with their horses.

"Master. Please be careful out there." Dimitri handed a bag to Noel.

.com "Alright. Just make sure the territory is safe. At least I hope we don't need to rebuild anything." Noel nodded, thanking Dimitri for the bag.

"I'll also ask Damian to tighten the security. At the minimum, they won't come from the north." Livia assured him.

"I'm counting on you." Noel smiled before turning to Grandell and the other soldiers. "Thank you for coming with us."

"Please don't mind us. We are honored to have the chance to escort you." Grandell politely replied. He was one of the soldiers that had shown the most loyalty to Anna, so when Howard presented the idea, he was the first to volunteer.

Noel then waved his hand to Dimitri and the others. "Then brewing, we'll be off!"

The storm had started brewing and which one would be damaged? No one would know until the storm arrived.