

S vs Rebirth 91

Chapter 91 Protecting

A minute ago.

"Go, go away!" shouted a huge muscular man while looking at his subordinates leaving. This half-naked man had a cold expression as he muttered, "Another soldier again? They're going to die needlessly."

He didn't know why but his attention was focused on the axe on his bed as though someone strong was coming this time.

He then looked at the naked women all over the room. His fierce gaze made them shiver and look down, not daring to look at him in the eyes.

As if their instinct was incited, the demons started rampaging inside their cages.

The man looked at the cage next to him. The cage was made of an iron bar. The demon's size was only half the size of a human so that they could be trapped inside that cage.

"It seems this place is really my target." Noel's voice echoed inside the tunnel as Noel made his appearance slowly.

The only reason he didn't choose to ambush them was so that he could take a deep look at the room.

It seemed the miner had excavated a 30x30 room. It was spacious that made one forget they were inside a hill.

On the left side, he could see a few beds lining up to each other with naked woman shivering. It was clear as to what kind of treatment they had received this whole time. Still, he counted the women and confirmed their number was the same as what the bandit said earlier. There were only twenty of them. They killed elderly, kids, and men.

However, his focus was on the opposite direction. He could see many black cages containing a Low Level Demon. For him, they weren't that dangerous, but it would be a different case for normal bandits or villagers. These demons were enough to massacre them.

There were a few half-naked men on the sides who were sitting on the ground as if they were lazying around. It was clear that they had satisfied themselves just not long ago.

Noel's gaze was cold as he saw these atrocities. However, his attention soon shifted to the giant man across him.

His aura and fierceness were telling him that he was the leader.

"Who are you? How can you reach this place?" The leader shouted while raising his axe.

"Ah, are you talking about those puny bandits? They're all dead." Noel was lying without batting an eye. He was just showing a strong front to scare the bandits.

However, the bandit leader laughed out loud as if he was looking at a fool.

"You think you can pass them that easily? You must have a group that is luring my people away."

"You can believe whatever you want." Noel pulled out his sword. "Who taught you how to catch a demon and exploit them like this?"

"Do you think I'll tell you?" The bandit leader suddenly turned to his remaining four subordinates that still remained in this room. "Do it. We'll see whether he is that strong that he can protect those women from the demons."

"!!!" Noel widened his eyes as the bandits had no hesitation in opening the cage, allowing the demons to go straight to the woman as if they were going to eat them.

At first, Noel believed that his thought was already pretty extreme when he was thinking about multiple ways to kill Anna. However, he realized that he was still far too innocent compared to these bandits.

They killed innocent people not for revenge, but for their own amusement.

Noel hurriedly stood between the women and the demons while holding his sword. He strengthened his muscle with the Spirit Technique, looking at the incoming demons.

The seven Low Level Demons hurriedly charged at them. Some even pounced on him.

Noel clicked his tongue. Luckily, he only needed to handle four demons instead of seven as those guys still tried to open the other cages.

Roar!

The demons were scaring the women as a few of them started convulsing. They remembered how their people who died got thrown into the cage to feed the demons.

They always thought their fate would be the same sooner or later. Some of them became even hysterical as they started screaming, not wanting to die.

'It's impossible to say anything to these people right now.' Noel clicked his tongue and stepped forward, swinging his blade toward the demon that was about to reach him.

The demon waved its paw to overwhelm him, but Noel wasn't the weak him from the past. As soon as he struck the demon's claws, Noel stomped the ground and pulled the sword, releasing all his strength in that one swing.

"!!!" The demon looked at the sword before his body was spinning in the air due to being overwhelmed by Noel's power.

He then kicked the demon to the other one as they ended up crashing into each other. This way, he only needed to handle the remaining two demons that came from the opposite direction.

However, not everything went according to the plan as the remaining three demons had been released.

While glancing at the demons, Noel thought, 'With the demon's speed, I'm afraid I only have this one chance.'

Without a single hesitation in his blade, Noel used his Swift Strike.

The demon could see the attack coming, but the Swift Strike was already too fast for a Low Level Demon. In that one swing, two demons had their heads cut horizontally and dropped to the ground lifelessly.

Noel then proceeded to the three remaining demons that came to him. Luckily, the other two demons were struggling to get up, so he could focus on these three for the time being.

Mega Slash.

The Spiritual Energy covered his sword as he smashed the demon's body with his blade. The swing was too powerful that it cut everything on its path, allowing Noel to make a complete swing, slicing another demon's head in the process.

As for the last one, his sword couldn't make it, so he spun his body and kicked the demon away. "You're not going to eat anyone in my watch."

Unfortunately for him, the moment he uttered those words, Noel could see an overwhelming presence on his back. It was the bandit leader and he was already swinging his axe.

"Die!"

Chapter 92 Fighting The Bandits

"Die!"

"!!!" Noel turned around, but he was too late to swing his sword.

He could only raise his left hand, but it was useless against an axe. In addition, the bandit leader had a big muscular body, the power behind it was tremendous even without the Spiritual Energy.

There was only one outcome in this clash. Noel's head getting severed along with his hand.

However, Noel wasn't a normal person either. Right before the axe reached him, he used his Ice Control to form a thick ice to stop this attack.

Crack!

In the instant they clashed, Noel felt a force that almost snapped his hand, but he still hang on while glancing at the ice.

The ice thickness was 3 centimeters and the axe managed to crush two thirds of it.

"Kh." Noel's right eye closed as he experienced an intense pain on his hand. His body was pushed back as well, but he stomped the ground to stop the momentum.

This time, it was the bandit leader's turn to be surprised. He never expected that Noel managed to block his swing with his hand.

"What?" The bandit leader gasped before gritting his teeth, trying to push Noel to the ground.

Even the other bandits dropped their jaws, saying, "What? He stopped the leader's strike with his hand?"

"Look. There's an ice on his palm."

Everyone was confused, but Noel was even more confused when the demons suddenly charged at him again. Three demons were still alive, so they would hinder him so much if they attacked together.

'Why did they not get attacked by the demons?' Noel furrowed his eyebrows. 'Why only me?'

There was a big question in his head, but he was unable to find the answer because he was too occupied by the bandits.

"You guys attack him too!" The bandit leader shouted while trying to kick Noel.

However, Noel utilized his Four Points Circulation and gathered his Spiritual Energy into his left hand. The excessive amount of Spiritual Energy caused them to burst, creating a shock wave from his palm.

That shock wave sent enough force to push the bandit leader's axe as Noel skillfully used his sword to cut down the foot that was about to kick him.

However, the bandit leader seemed to be stronger than he thought. At the last second, he managed to stop his kick, albeit the sword still managed to leave a shallow cut on his foot.

"Argh!" The bandit leader gritted his teeth, enduring the pain.

It was at this time Noel returned his kick with another kick on his stomach, but the demons managed to catch up and bit him.

Noel's body was soon covered by the Spiritual Energy through the Spirit Aura Breathing, giving a small layer of protection. At the same time, ice also formed around the area, so that the demon could only bite ice.

"Aoo." The demon that bit him let out a shrill and retreated for a bit.

Meanwhile, the bandit leader took that chance to get away, giving the opportunity for the other two demons to kill Noel.

However, Noel's concern was the four guys behind those demons. He was sure that these people would kill him the moment the demons distracted him.

The only way to avoid his doom was to create an ice floor around him. The demons and the bandits slipped and slid on the smooth ice.

Noel saw the demons and struck them with his sword without taking a single step. Although he had trained fighting in an ice like this, he still didn't have any mastery. So, he would slip in the end. Rather than taking unnecessary risk, he remained in his position and struck them.

The demons had no way to escape and died.

Meanwhile, the other bandits managed to stop by planting their sword on the ice.

"Ice?"

"Is he a ian?"

"What kind of sorcery is this?"

Noel took a deep breath as he took a look around to check the situation. The four bandits seemed to be struggling to just stand while the bandit leader glared at him in anger.

When he turned to the women, he smiled and said, "Don't worry. I'll bring you out of this place safely. Just remain on the bed until I eliminate all these bandits."

Noel's assurance made the women felt relief for the first time. After showing his prowess, it was clear that Noel could fight against all these people, especially after he eliminated all the demons.

With this, he only needed to take care of another five people. Although they didn't have any more home to return, it was better than getting tortured in this place by these guys.

So, they didn't do anything despite wanting to run using this chance.

"You still haven't answered my question. How did you manage to capture the demons? You seem to be able to control them since they're only attacking me, not you." Noel asked with a cold expression, trying to get some information.

Unfortunately, the bandit leader shouted, "Do you think I'm afraid of you? Even if you could kill those demons, you are still not my match."

Even the other bandits raised their weapons with the intention to kill.

"Looking at your confidence, it seems the people here are the strong ones that can capture the demons." Noel narrowed his eyes.

"It seems that you're not that foolish." The bandit leader laughed. He didn't even think about hiding it after getting praised by Noel. Of course, it wasn't a praise. Though, it was a compliment for the bandits.

"What's the reason for you to capture demons and use them? Who taught you how to catch the demons?" Noel asked again while raising his sword as if he was threatening them. However, he would never expect what was coming.

"Fine. If you want to know..." the bandit leader smirked as he said, "Let's see if you can ask that again after this. Do it!"

Noel was confused for a second before he opened his eyes wide and his body moved to the front slightly. Behind him was a woman holding a dagger, stabbing Noel from the back.

Chapter 93 System

"Hahaha!" The bandit leader laughed, looking at Noel's pathetic self. Despite his overwhelming strength, he would never expect that the woman was actually one of the bandits.

And now that ignorance would cost him his life.

The leader immediately came to him while raising his axe, planning to cut him down. "Die!"

A smile suddenly appeared in Noel's face as the woman finally realized what happened.

"No!" She let out a cry while lowering her vision. Her dagger was actually stopped by a layer of ice like how Noel stopped the bandit leader's axe at first.

Unfortunately, she was too late. Noel swiftly swung his sword.

Swift Strike.

"Keuk!" The bandit leader gritted his teeth and tried to move away, but it was too late. Noel managed to cut his hand.

"Argh!" While screaming in pain, the bandit tried to move away, but not before another slash from Noel, cutting his other arm. This way, the bandit leader wouldn't be able to attack him anymore. As for his life, he was planning to let him live a little bit longer so that he could extract the information.

However, Noel couldn't forgive the backstabbing woman. She reminded him of Anna. Though, Anna was leaning to plotting instead of backstabbing.

He cut the hand that held the dagger, making the woman scream like the bandit leader. She dropped to the ground while clutching her arm.

"Arghhh!" The woman gritted her teeth, glaring at him. "How do you know?"

Noel looked down on her, recalling what happened earlier when he received the mission.

'This is... a mission!' Noel thought, reading the mission details.

[Mission: Save 19 hostages.]

[Description: There are nineteen women that got captured by the bandits and shall be saved.]

[Reward: Ardagan Swordsmanship+1]

[Penalty: A Nightmare.]

The reward was tempting, but he was more focused on the number of the hostages.

'There are twenty women inside according to the bandit, but now there are only nineteen?' Noel thought.

When he entered the room, he counted the woman and realized the bandit didn't lie.

'What's wrong? There are twenty women, but I only need to save nineteen of them? Then, does that mean there is a traitor among them? There is a woman who is affiliated with the bandits...' Noel thought this was the case. However, he encountered one problem. 'Still, I don't know who it is. Saving this person might lead to another problem, so I need to find that one suspicious woman. Then, there is only one way...'

His plan was to show a bit of overwhelming power and weakness, thinking it would be the time for her to step up and show herself. And his plan worked.

Not only he could see the traitor, but he could also defeat these bandits thoroughly.

He looked down on her and said, "As expected, there is a bandit hidden among you. In that case, there's no need for letting you live."

The woman's face became pale, staring at Noel in horror.

Because of the wretched nature of hers, Noel couldn't withstand his anger and slice her neck, sending her head flying without batting an eye.

His expression was cold as he turned to the remaining four bandits.

"Hiii!" The bandits were so scared at him that they ran away, trying to leave the cave as soon as possible.

But to everyone's surprise, Noel didn't even make a single move. Instead, he focused on the bandit leader as though he wanted to torture him for the information.

However, he also noticed the terrified women on his side. Seeing their helpless faces reminded him of his own feeling after he was brought to the Demon Banner Army.

He let out a long breath to regain his calm. A smile returned to his face as he tried to assure them with a gentle tone. "Don't worry. I have my teammate right outside. They won't be able to do anything."

As Noel said, they didn't know Noel was just bluffing earlier. Even though the bandit leader had told them it was a bluff, seeing Noel's overwhelming strength made them think otherwise.

Pant!

Pant!

The bandits started panting as they were running as fast as possible. As soon as they saw the exit, they thought they would be safe since they could simply disperse to avoid getting chased down by Noel.

But what met them was a horrifying scene. Before them lied tens of corpses. The ground was dyed red by the blood and the foul smell filled their nose when they came out.

Their bodies became stiff as they couldn't move even if they wanted to.

In front of them was a woman with a red sword. That redness didn't come from the metal's color, but it was dyed by the bandits' blood. It was clear that she was the one that annihilated their entire group.

Although they could see some arrows here and there, the woman was too terrifying to ignore.

Anna glanced at them and smirked, "It seems that there are a few rats who are trying to escape."

"Hiii..."

...

Meanwhile, Noel had stood in front of the bandit leader. His eyes were emitting killing intent as he stabbed the bandit leader's right thigh.

"Aaaaahhhhh!" He screamed in pain as his body started convulsing. Even if he wanted to clutch the stabbed area to lessen the pain, he couldn't.

"Who taught you how to catch the demon?" Noel asked with a cold tone.

"I don't know... I don't know..." The bandit leader started crying from the intense pain. "Please don't kill me."

Noel's eyebrows twitched as he twisted his sword, ripping apart the flesh in his thigh.

"Aaaaahhh!" The pain was several times higher that the bandit leader dropped his body to the ground.

"Who taught you how to catch a demon?" Noel asked the same question.

"I don't know... He was a hooded man. I couldn't see his face." The man answered while begging for his life. "Don't kill me. I'll tell you everything you want."

This was the first time Noel killed a human. However, he was surprisingly calm. In fact, he was even filled with anger.

Never in his wildest dream that the cruel bandit would beg for his life after killing these many people brutally.

"Unfortunately, you have answered my doubt. Now that I know you're useless, there's no need to keep you alive anymore." Noel pulled his sword as he cut down the bandit leader, thinking, 'I don't think this is enough for the hatred the women had to endure, but I can't waste too much time either.'

Chapter 94 Hope (1)

Now that he had finished eliminating the threat, he turned to the women. "Please wait here for a bit. There should be some clothes that you can use. I'll bring you to the nearby village."

Some of them were shaking in fear. The trauma of living in this hell almost made her collapse. Some even let out a shrill while crying.

However, he could see some of the strong ones. They gritted their teeth and even lowered their heads, thanking him.

'I have never thought about this, but commoners' lives are so easy to be destroyed. Bandits can even do this and even if I can save them here, they'll experience the trauma... The noble can experience the same thing, but they have the money and prestige to avoid most of the attempts. But it's different from commoners...'

Looking at their state, Noel wondered about one thing. 'Have I actually saved them? There bound to be someone who thinks death is mercy.'

His doubt was proven when one of them suddenly spoke, "Thank you for saving us, Sir Knight. But..."

She glanced at the women beside her and bit her lips. "We have lost everything. Even if we can continue to live, we have no more home. There's no one who wants us. That's why..."

Noel closed his eyes for a moment and turned around, walking to the bandit leader. He then brought the axe and placed it in front of the woman.

"Sometimes, life is worse than death. You've lost everything, so it's better to die. I understand it perfectly." Noel looked at them and finally introduced himself. "My name is Noel Ardagan."

"..." The women were surprised by the family name because only the noble had a family name.

Noel then continued, "Yes, as you were aware... I was a noble."

"Was?"

"I am just a fallen noble. I am no different than any of you. I've lost everything." Noel placed his hand on his chest as if he felt the pain in his heart. "It was painful. I fell into despair. But even so, I keep fighting. And now, I have become stronger and I can kill bandits to save all of you. So, please don't think it's over."

Some of them had brightened expressions, but they still said, "But... we are just weak women. We'll become a burden and after this, no one will want us anymore. In the end, we'll continue to live like this."

"That's where you are wrong." Noel put on a genuine smile. "Although I hate to admit it, my teammate is a woman like all of you. But she is far stronger than me. Whether you are a woman or a man, that doesn't matter."

"A woman... who is stronger as Sir Knight..."

Noel then handed the axe to the one who spoke the most. "Please hold this axe."

The woman followed his instruction and lifted the axe, but she was too weak. She could only raise it for one centimeter and her body was already shaking.

Noel then helped her again before glancing at the woman next to him. "You too... How about helping her hold the axe?"

The woman didn't understand what Noel was talking about, but still followed his instruction. To their surprise, they could raise it to the top of their heads.

"Eh?" They were shocked because it was supposed to be impossible.

Noel smiled and took back the axe. "You said you don't have anyone to take you in. That's fine. You have eighteen others who shares the same pain and understand you the most. If you can't do it alone, then do it together. Rely on the others and ask for their help."

"But in the end... we're only women. We can't do—" They wanted to deny it again, but Noel shook his head.

"No. That's not true." Noel looked at her and asked, "What did you do before?"

"I... I weaved sandals from straws."

"When you first tried to make one, can you do it?"

"No." The woman shook her head helplessly.

"Then, now, can you make a sandal?"

"Yes."

"See? You can do it." Noel smiled. "Everyone can't do it at first. But they continue to do it until they can. Just like you." He then turned to another woman. "How about you?"

"I... I made clothes... I also couldn't do it at first, but after a while, I managed to make my first clothes..."

"That's right. You can do it as long as you continue trying. What about men's job? Farming? Plowing the field? Then, just do it. I know that it will be hard for you at first, but the more you do it, the more skilled you are. Just like my teammate, she chose to swing her sword continuously.

"If it's too hard for you, ask someone next to you to lend you a hand. I know that you can do it... Just don't be afraid to try it because it's weird. They don't understand you... Only these nineteen people in this room can understand each other.

"If you hate the bandits? Then, hate them. Take up the sword and practice. It'll be painful, but I am sure that it'll be different after you do it for a long time. When you do, you can capture the bandits and throw them to jail or even kill them like what I did here. That's up to you... But please remember, the hope is there. Don't lose hope and please keep living on."

They looked at him with a dumbfounded look. Some of them even cried.

"Can... can we do it?"

"I don't know. Even I don't know if I'm suited to be a knight or not after becoming a fallen noble. But what I know is... You won't be able to do it if you don't try it." Noel smiled. "One month... Please continue to live for a month. If you still think you can't do it, then you can use this axe to kill yourself."

They ended up crying, finally dropping their guards. They cried until there was no tears left.

Unbeknownst to them, Anna was staring from the tunnel, leaning her back to the wall. She looked at the ceiling and sighed, thinking, 'I thought I recognized some of them, but those nineteen people formed a Blue Rose Mercenary in the past life. They did a variety of jobs from building a house to bandits subjugation. The women were independent that they could do everything. Their fame spread and they became a guild that helped people. I really can't win against him...'

Chapter 95 Hope (2)

"We're thankful for your help." The village chief lowered his head to Noel. Brad had confirmed the mine, so his words were more credible than both Noel and Anna.

That was the reason why he wanted to bring Brad to the mine. He saw how Anna fought against the bandits too, allowing him to know that lying was not a possible option.

"It's fine." Noel smiled. "Although it's hard for me to ask this, can I ask you to allow these people to stay with you for a while?"

The village chief immediately had a troubled expression. Their village was already full and they wouldn't have enough food to feed these many people. If it was only two or three people, he would agree without hesitation, but it was too hard for him to keep them.

Brad suddenly stepped forward and approached a muscular man among the villagers. They had gathered outside to greet the hero that eliminated the bandits, so all people from the village was here.

Brad lowered his head to this muscular man and asked, "Can you please make them a house? Just chopping the wood and make a big shelter for all of them is fine. There's no need to be that extravagant."

"Well... I can do that. If you just want a shelter to survive... I can make it within a month."

"Thank you so much, even if we need to sleep on the floor, we are grateful as long as we have a roof above our heads." The women thanked him.

Noel was thankful for Brad's help, but to his surprise, Anna also came to the village chief and took out a small pouch filled with coins.

"This should be enough for their living expense for a month. I'm sure that they can help the village after that." Anna smiled and handed the pouch to him.

"This..." The village chief was surprised for a moment before nodding. "I understand. I'll help as much as I can..."

To request the knight's assistance, he gathered the money they had, but to think the knight would even give some of them back to provide assistance for these women.

'One month?' Noel looked at her with his eyebrows twitching as if asking her, 'Eavesdropping?'

'You don't have money, right? I can help too.' Anna wanted to be like Noel, but she knew that no matter how hard she did it, there was no way to replicate what Noel did when he gave that hope to these people. The only way she could do was to use her wealth to help them. However, this was the second step Anna took to change from her past life.

Ultimately, they ended up bringing the women to the village chief house. Although they slept on the floor, none of them actually complained. At least, they felt more secure in this place and wasn't tortured like previously.

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The next morning.

Anna woke up from her bed, feeling a bit sluggish.

"Ugh." Anna clutched her head and said, "My head hurts. Did I hit something yesterday?"

She looked around her and realized she was looking upside down. In other words, her head fell to the ground when she slept and caused her to wake up.

"Seriously? I thought I didn't move much during my sleep... Was I trying to try sleeping on the floor unconsciously?" Anna asked herself before hearing some noises from the outside. "The sun hasn't risen yet, but they have started working?"

Anna left her room, only to find that there wasn't a single person left in the house. So, her only option was to come out.

The village chief and Noel were standing next to each other, looking at the distance.

In the outskirts of the village, they saw many people gathering.

The muscular man was cutting down the log to make a plank.

"Alright. The first one is done. Now..." The man rose from his shield, but when he was about to lift the plank, one woman approached him, asking, "Are you going to carry it somewhere?"

"Yeah. This will be used as the building's foundation, so I need to carry it to that spot." He nodded while pointing the direction.

"In that case, please let me help you." The woman tried to smile but ended up with an awkward smile due to the trauma. Still, she was eager to help and tried to lift the plank, only to find herself not being able to.

"Ah, you don't need to help me. I can do it by myself." The muscular man pitied her and was about to take the plank, but a few other women came, helping the woman carry the plank.

"Please let us help you too. We are already thankful that you want to build us a house, so we need to do as much as possible."

"O-oh?" Before he could even warn them about the heaviness of the plank, they had carried them to the spot he pointed at earlier. It was hard even for them as some of them walked staggeringly due to the weight, making him worry. But ultimately, they reached the spot and dropped it there.

"Is this the place?" One of them asked out loud.

The man couldn't help but smile and give a thumbs up. "It seems that I can work on the second log with this."

Just like them, the others also started to blend in.

There was even one person that was plowing the field by herself. Her body was shaking when she was near a man, but she was still strong enough to swing the hoe. Although she ended up working a bit farther away from the other farmers, she still helped them.

"She is really a strong woman. Even though she was scared of others, but she still tried to help." One of the farmers commented, praising her determination.

Of course, some women were still scared to the point they didn't want to work, but seeing the others work hard moved their bodies as well.

When Anna saw all this, she shook her head helplessly, impressed.

"Despite having that kind of trauma, they were working hard... When I was traveling in my young day, I saw many women who could only scream and become crazy after the bandits kidnapped them... This is my first time I see something like this."

"They're strong, just need a support," said Noel as these people reminded him of the kids that tried hard dancing to change their fate.

"You're the first noble to be able to achieve that." The village chief looked at him with a solemn expression. "Thank you very much, Sir Noble. I wish that I am someone from your territory... You would have become a great lord."

"Ahaha, I'm grateful for your words. Still, I can't do more than this. The rest depends on them. As such, I hope that you can help them for a while."

"As you said, they're strong. And I also have received the money to buy their necessities. I promise I'll take care of them." The village chief lowered his head.

"In that case, the job is done. It's time for me to leave."

"Y-yes." He handed a scroll as the proof. "I have written everything here. Please let me make a breakfast for you... This is the last thing I can do."

"Is that so?" Noel smiled.

They had a simple breakfast as Noel and Anna packed their luggage.

Even Noel didn't expect that all villagers ended up seeing them off.

The first one to drop to her knee was the strong woman that kept speaking when they were inside the mine. Her forehead touched the ground as she shouted, "Sir Knight. We're extremely grateful for giving us the second chance of our lives."

When the other women heard it, they also did the same.

Even Noel couldn't help but smile as he waved his hand and walked away, saying, "Live on."

Chapter 96 Going Separate Ways

While walking inside the forest to where they were going to go on their own separate ways, Anna asked, "What do you think about the bandits?"

"I think I told you last night. The mastermind is someone else, so the scenario will probably follow yours." Noel sighed.

"The method of capturing the demons to cause chaos, huh..." Anna raised her head, looking at the sky and recounting the past memory.

'In my past life, the cause of this incident was none other than the Supreme Devil Organization. The Demon Banner Army was suppressing them sooner or later until this method disappeared...' Anna suddenly remembered about Kirika and looked at Noel since he was the first one that encountered Kirika and the one who ended her life.

'Now that I think about it, Kirika managed to lure a thousand demons that crippled the Demon Banner Army, allowing the Supreme Devil Organization to attack the Demon Banner Army and gain their victory.'

'If I take another look at it, how did Kirika control them? Capturing the demons and releasing them...'
Anna's expression turned cold, realizing something. 'Don't tell me, they managed to do the same thing with a higher level demon? The Low Level Demon is just a trial.'

"It seems that you know about something." Noel glanced at her.

"Supreme Devil Organization. If I tell you they're the one causing this incident, will you believe me?"
Anna asked nonchalantly as if she was talking random things.

"..." Noel fell silent for a moment before coming up with another theory. "Assuming that's the case, is there any connection to the one that we captured in the fort?"

"Ah!" Anna remembered that one guy.

"To be honest, having a tattoo that signify their affiliation is foolish, considering you're supposed to live in the shadows, not like the nobles who live in the open. I know that it's to spread fear to show people that they're everywhere. But if it were me, I don't want a tattoo... Just a secret code is enough."

"Well, a high ranking member of the Supreme Devil Organization can easily hide that tattoo..." Anna added the missing piece of information.

"I see. That's more understandable then. That's easy for them to send their lower ranking member to make them a scapegoat. Meanwhile, the high ranking one is hiding among us." Noel smirked.

"!!!" Anna widened her eyes in shock as if everything had come together. She thought, 'What if Kirika was just a pure woman in the past, but this hidden member influenced her?'

"Anyway, I have asked the village chief to send a message to the fort while sending the proof of the mission completion. They should be aware of this method soon and my suspicion about it. As for the rest of the information, it's best to keep it a secret first because we don't know who is a traitor. It's best for us to inform the commander himself." Noel explained.

"That's true. There's no proof either, so I can't really say much." Anna sighed.

"Anyway, we have completed with this. I think it's time for us to go separate ways." Noel stretched his body as if he was preparing to run.

"The crossroads is still 20 km away though."

Noel's reply came in the form of action as he suddenly sped up, leaving her in the dust. Anna shook her head helplessly as she also started running, catching up to him.

As soon as they saw the crossroads, Noel went to the left without saying anything while Anna could only sigh that Noel had no sign of opening himself yet.

Noel's destination had been decided. It was the Sothbame Village, near the village where the master blacksmith resided.

Since it would still take a long time to reach there, Noel took this chance to look at his system, especially the rewards for saving the hostages.

[Mission: Save 19 hostages.]

[Description: There are nineteen women that got captured by the bandits and shall be saved.]

[Reward: Ardagan Swordsmanship+1]

[Penalty: A Nightmare.]

Now that he had finished this mission, he accepted the reward and immediately checked his Ardagan Swordsmanship."

Skill: Ardagan Swordsmanship (5/15)

Requirement: 11 SP

The knowledge about the Swordsmanship entered his mind. However, he felt something was wrong with this current knowledge.

"This is..." Noel squinted his eyes, sorting the information. However, his doubt was answered soon.

[Ardagan Swordsmanship has reached level 5. Transitioning to Intermediate Swordsmanship.]

[You've acquired Sword Aura.]

[You've acquired Sword Fall.]

"Really? I got two skills just from that..." Noel muttered while sorting the new acquired knowledge to see what was going on.

"As expected, this time, the knowledge I get revolves around the assimilation of Spiritual Energy into my Swordsmanship." Noel pulled out Ardagan and wanted to test the two skills. But he suddenly stopped for a moment before asking, "Can you change to the white sword?"

As if responding to his request, all the black color in Ardagan turned into white while the red turned into gold. Unlike the demonic like blade, this sword looked like it symbolized a true knight.

After that, Noel took out the masquerade from his bag and put it on. He poured his Spiritual Energy into the mask as his hair soon changed color to blond and his eyes turned blue. He wanted to match his appearance with the sword after all.

"Perfect." Noel smiled. "From now on, my name is ladre... call me Ia, I guess? I'm just a commoner that somehow becomes an Apprentice Knight. Also, I'm known for my Ice Control, so I won't be using this element. Instead, I'll focus on Sword Fire and Ignition Sword."

"How about Sword Aura and Sword Fall? Well, I'll use it for the time being. I can also use Rune because I'm planning to publish that Rune books. I don't know why Anna knows about Rune, but there isn't a single trace that such a book exists. According to Ardagan, my ancestor was the last person that could use Rune and the information had been lost."

Noel tried to figure out something about Anna, but she was too mysterious. Ultimately, he stopped thinking about it and shifted his focus back. "Anyway, let's try the new abilities."

Chapter 97 Lucky Or Unlucky?

Noel pointed the sword forward while closing his eyes. He followed the knowledge in his mind and started pouring the Spiritual Energy into his sword.

Normally, the aura would be leaving the sword, but he got the technique to make the Spiritual Energy stay and even clad the sword.

When Noel opened his eyes, he saw the sword was covered in blue light.

"So, this is Sword Aura..." Noel muttered and remembered the Ancient Spirit Technique he learned in the fort. "It's similar to Spirit Aura Breathing. The difference is in the target. The Spirit Aura Breathing is maintaining a thin layer of Spiritual Energy to protect our body while Sword Aura is used to strengthen our weapon.

"If it's a normal branch, I can use it like a real sword when I envelop it with my Sword Aura. Meanwhile, if I'm using Ardagan, it'll become sharper." Noel smirked, feeling excited with this power. The ability truly amplified his power even further.

"Then..." Noel took a deep breath as he circulated the energy around the sword and pushed it to the tip of the blade. He then threw the Spiritual Energy into the air.

p The ball of Spiritual Energy flew into the air for a moment before transforming into a giant sword.

"!!!" He abruptly stopped as the giant sword fell right before him.

Bam!

The power contained in the sword was too powerful that it pierced the ground.

"For real?" Noel sucked a cold breath as his heart skipped a beat because it almost hit him. "I need to practice my throw since the range depends on my Spiritual Energy and my way of throwing. But this big sword..."

Noel examined the sword and felt satisfied that it didn't resemble Ardagan. Instead of a black sword, this one was white. However, he could still see some red patterns, but no one would think it was Ardagan.

"The length is three times of my height and the wide is two times of my body. I see. If only I have this power, killing the Ancient Demon Tree would have been easy." Noel sighed, thinking that the Sword Fall could easily penetrate the top of the tree and pierced through the crystal.

"Anyway, I've got two powerful moves. With Sword Aura and Spirit Aura Breathing, I have an additional weapon and armor. And with this Sword Fall, I doubt anyone can stop it... I mean, someone at my current level.

"Let's practice while moving then." Noel smiled as he continued running.

...

A few days later.

In a long windy grass plain, a few caravans were lining up right in the middle of the road. More than twenty people were sitting down on the grass, eating their lunch.

Unbeknownst to them, they were observed from afar, not by trouble, but Noel.

After running for a few days, he was only two days away from his destination, so he was already quite close to Astar City, the city that governed the village that were requesting his assistance as well as the one where the Master Blacksmith resided.

So, encountering a merchant group this close to the city wasn't that rare.

'Oh. There's a group of people ahead. I don't think I'll get into trouble since I'm just passing them. And even if they want to ask my identity, I can simply show my identity as the Demon Banner Army's Apprentice Knight. It should solve the problem,' thought Noel as he was preparing to pass them.

As expected from the guards, they were still vigilance despite taking a rest. Before Noel could even reach their position, they already stopped talking and took out their sword, trying to figure out who he was.

Noel remembered when he was traveling with his parents, the people would often go to the side and passed them from a safe distance so as to not provoke them.

Hence, he gradually moved to the right, entering the grass field. He just ran there with a poker face as if he didn't want to have any trouble.

It seemed that the merchant group was aware of his intention as they slowly dropped their weapons, letting him pass as long as he didn't come closer.

'It's quite annoying to move to the side, but I guess those with status have the priority to use the road. From the royal family, noble family, merchant, and finally commoners.' Noel muttered while glancing at the group.

However, not everything went according to his plan.

Fwoosh!

Noel suddenly felt a killing intent from the side as he instinctively ducked. He heard a stabbing noise on the side and when he glanced to the ground, he saw an arrow.

"Huh?!" Noel was annoyed. He never meant any harm, but to think they would be the one to shoot him. He glared at them while taking out his sword. "What do you—"

Noel fell silent immediately for two reasons. First, the group didn't have any archer among them, considering all of them were holding a melee weapon. Second, the arrow came from the other side.

Noel turned around and saw tens of people wearing a rag, staring at them menacingly.

But to his surprise, he could see a few demons in a cage as the people were carrying them.

"Give us all your money or we will kill you all!" A huge fat man moved forward proudly while shouting.

"How unlucky I am... To think I would meet another bandit group on my way. And the bandit seems to know about it as well... No, should I say I'm pretty lucky because I can extract some information from them?" Noel suddenly remembered another mission. He had confirmed this when he was on the village, so he couldn't help but smile. 'Ah, yes. I'm pretty lucky.'

The mission in his mind was none other than helping the citizens. All people, whether they were commoners or nobles would be counted as citizens, so there was no need to hesitate anymore.

Medal: Extraordinary Citizen Merit

Requirement: Help 200 Townspeople (131/200)

Reward: Excellent Citizen Medal and 8 Honor Points

Chapter 98 New Mission

'Ugh, I'm not planning to get entangled into any problem, but to think I would meet a bandit group like this.' Noel thought while glancing at the demons inside the cage. 'Still, it seems that Anna is telling the truth. I want to suspect her for being connected to the Devil Supreme Organization, but I don't have any proof.'

'Still, the fact that the method of controlling the demons are spread to the bandits, I don't think this is something I can handle. The mastermind would most likely be far stronger than me, so I'll just handle only the bandits, not the investigation of this incident.' Noel thought while jumping back, trying to gain some distance from the bandits.

At the same time, Noel wanted to use this chance to approach this merchant group.

However, it seemed that their group couldn't contain their calms when they saw the demons raging in the cage.

"Demons?"

"How come there are demons?"

The fighters among them were panicking because they'd heard enough about the ferocity of the demons but never fought one themselves.

Suddenly, a middle-aged man stepped up while unsheathing his sword, saying, "Don't be afraid. You can fight the demons with a pair. All of you focus in stopping the demons, I'll handle the bandits."

"Lucas, what's wrong?" A female's voice echoed from the carriage at the very front of the group. The door was opened as two people came out. The female had an enchanted blue eyes paired with long blue hair that tied into a ponytail. Behind her was a slightly older male with a similar feature.

"Demons? Bandits?" The man frowned when they saw this.

"Please stay inside, young lord, young miss. We'll handle the bandits." The middle-aged man glanced at them before swinging his sword as an arrow flew toward the carriage.

"It seems that we're going to be rich after this, boss." The bandit suddenly interrupted them with a shout, looking at this group like that of a prey.

"Attack!" The bandit leader shouted while pointing at the merchant group.

In that instant, the bandits opened the cage. The demons came out and charged at the group as if they didn't know the bandits existed.

The tension rose as the guards were scared of these demons. They moved faster than a normal animal and their hide was harder, making them hard to kill by a normal soldier.

'Really? They're scared of these? Even the acceptance of the Demon Banner Army requires you to kill ten demons. And these guards are afraid of Low Level Demons?' Noel thought but he also had another absurd thought in this situation. 'Now that I think about it, it seems that everyone has forgotten about me despite almost being the first casualty.'

Noel had a mixed feeling. On the one hand, it was good that no one paid any attention to him. He could use this opportunity to leave them behind. On the other hand, he noticed something off from the bandits, so he needed to interrogate them a little bit.

'Well, since no one is looking at me...' Noel sneakily went behind the carriage so that no one would see him. He also made sure that the two people inside this carriage didn't see him. After that, he used his Increase Agility Rune as well as Strength Blessing Rune to amplify his power.

This was enough as a preparation to eliminate the bandits. And the first clicking metal resounded on the battlefield as the soldier tried to cut the demon only to be stopped by its sharp claws.

More and more demons reached the group, trampling over the soldiers. Because they were afraid, the soldiers had a hard time dealing with the demons despite banding together.

Seeing this, the middle-aged guard shouted, "I'm going to end this myself."

He jumped forth, approaching the bandits.

While they were clashing, Noel suddenly had a thought.

'Now that I think about it, I have the mission to kill demons and help citizens. And they'll keep repeating, allowing me to farm many Honor Points. But how about the bandits? Ardagan, do you have a mission to subjugate bandits? I mean, I've encountered two groups in a span of few days.'

Suddenly, the Spirit Seal became itchy again as he received the response from Ardagan. The moment he checked the system, a smile couldn't help but appear on his face.

Medal: Military Honor Merit

Requirement: Kill 10 Bandits (0/10)

Reward: Medal of Honor and 4 Honor Points

'That's my Ardagan.' Noel smirked, feeling excited. 'Alright. I've decided, let's kill all the demons and the bandits.'

...

While Noel was expecting the mission, the clash had become fierce. The middle-aged guard was trying to fight against 14 bandits, but he ended up getting overwhelmed due to the difference in number. Even the leader of the bandit who seemed to be stronger than all of them had yet to make his move.

At the same time, the demons were creating chaos in the group. The guards had a hard time dealing with the demon because they never faced a demon or had any knowledge on how to deal with the demons.

Of course, there were a few stronger guards among them, who managed to make the situation in a complete standstill.

Meanwhile, the two people inside the carriage were shaking while looking at the situation.

"What should we do now, Brother?" The female asked. Her face became pale and her voice was shaking. This was the first time she experienced a life threatening situation.

Meanwhile, her brother waved his hand down. Even though he was scared himself, he still tried to calm her down. "Don't worry. Let's believe in our guards."

"Y-yes." She nodded, but soon her relieved expression was replaced by a horrified one as the guard suddenly screamed in pain.

"Aaaaahhhhh!"

The demon bit his arm and ripped it apart, causing the guard to fall to the ground.

Even the brother became pale after witnessing this scene, thinking they would die if they continued to stay here.

However, a hope soon appeared as Noel, who had been ignored this whole time, made his appearance.

His appearance gave a strong impact as Noel slashed the demon's neck in a single slash. His sword was covered in blue light and his expression was cold and aloof.

He looked at the entire situation and muttered inwardly, 'Alright, let's gather some Honor Po—Ahem, I mean, let's save people and subjugate the bandits.'

Chapter 99 Overwhelming Strength

"Huh?" The guard was stunned by Noel's appearance. He forgot Noel was there because of the demons. Still, never in his wildest dream would he think Noel was strong enough to kill the demon in a single slash.

Noel ignored his reaction and looked at the demons that surrounded them.

'There are eight demons, one is down. That leaves seven more... I'll kill them all within two minutes.'
Noel calculated in his mind while circulating the Spiritual Energy, strengthening his muscle and wrapping his body.

He then moved toward the second demon and swung his sword.

The demon had an easier time against the guard, so it managed to break free and stop Noel's sword with its fang.

Unfortunately for the demon, Noel spun his body and swung it again this time. The demon thought it could stop him with its fangs again, but this time, Noel's sword was covered by Spiritual Energy.

Mega Slash.

Clang!

As expected from the demon, its fangs were too hard to break in a single slash. Even with Mega Slash, he only managed to crack it.

Still, Noel's aim was the powerful impact contained in that strike. The force knocked the head to the side, giving a huge opening to be used.

Swift Strike.

Without hesitation, Noel sliced the demon's neck with a swift and precise strike.

"That's two." Noel muttered in a low voice.

His action was witnessed by the guards as well as the siblings inside the carriage. They gasped when Noel easily killed two demons in succession.

But what shocked them more was the blue light coming out of his sword.

"Brother... That is..."

"Yes, that's Spiritual Energy. Someone who can utilize Spiritual Energy is hard to come by. It's especially true with a small merchant group like us. Who is this man?"

Noel wasn't aware of their conversation. There were only bandits and demons in his mind. So, as soon as he killed the second demon, he jumped to the third one and the other demons, killing them in a rapid succession.

In this clash, Noel only used Swift Strike and Mega Slash since it was enough to handle Low Level Demon.

The guards were cheering for Noel because his action saved all of them. But they soon remembered that their captain was still getting suppressed by the bandits.

"Attack the bandits."

"Help the captain!"

"Attack!"

The soldiers immediately ran toward the bandits, stunning everyone who thought that the guards couldn't deal with the demons.

However, Noel stood out the most as he was at the very front.

"What?! The outsider?!" The bandits were stunned because they never expected that the outsider was actually the one leading the guards. At the same time, he was the one that killed the demons. They never took into account that this outsider, who should be their bonus target, became the hunter.

To kill the bandits, Noel used his Sword Aura.

The Spiritual Energy gathered in his sword, creating a layer of Spiritual Energy that sharpened his blade.

'This is the first time I use it on battle.' Noel smirked. Still, before he attacked them, he abruptly stopped midway.

"Huh?" The guards were perplexed by his action, but they stopped, thinking Noel must have noticed something. Even the bandits were confused.

To everyone's surprise, Noel shouted, "Who taught you how to capture demons, bandits?"

"Just because you can kill the demons, you think you can kill me? Spiritual Energy? I can use it too!" The bandit leader shouted as it finally unsheathed his sword for the first time, circulating the Spiritual Energy. The blue light appeared again, allowing them to know that Noel and the bandit leader might be equal.

"I see. So, you're the guy who I should interrogate." Noel smirked. The only reason for his question was to see who had the most knowledge among the group. Now that he had determined his target, Noel approached the bandit group from the side, planning to kill the bandits one by one.

"!!!" The bandit leader's body shook as he didn't expect that Noel would attack them from the side first. He immediately rushed to Noel since he was the only one who could stop him.

Meanwhile, the guards also charged at the remaining bandits, trying to help their captain. With their superior number, the bandits wouldn't be able to handle them.

"As long as I kill you, I can kill the rest of them!" The bandit leader smirked and swung his sword.

Noel was supposed to engage in a combat against the leader for some time, giving them time to eliminate the bandits.

But what everyone didn't expect that when the bandit leader was about to hit him, Noel used his Four Points Circulation to cause a small burst of Spiritual Energy beneath his feet.

The shock wave caused a steep increase in his speed, allowing him to slip past the bandit leader.

"Wha—!" The bandit leader widened his eyes, glancing at Noel. It turned out Noel's real target was the remaining bandits.

The guards as well as the bandits were shocked by his appearance, but he was simply far faster compared to a normal person. The moment he reached their position, he ended them with a single swing on their neck. There was no way Noel planned to let go the opportunity to get Honor Points.

"..." The bandit leader stopped for a moment, thinking he should escape when Noel was occupied by his subordinates. Although he had some confidence in killing Noel, it would be a different case if those guards helped Noel.

He hurriedly turned around and tried to run away. But suddenly, a male's voice resounded across the battlefield. "Don't let the leader escape!"

"!!!" The guards turned their heads to the bandit leader and saw him running away. They exchanged looks at each other, thinking if Noel was eliminating the rest of the bandits, they should buy enough time so that Noel could finish his job and deal with this bandit leader.

After a few seconds, they nodded at each other as they started chasing after him. "Stop him!"

Chapter 100 Misunderstandings

Pant!

Pant!

The bandit leader was running inside the woods, leaping from one place to another to hide from the pursuers. After a while, he hid behind a tree, dropped to the ground, and tried to regain his breath.

'I should have lost them, right?' He took a peek while looking around, not finding any person. For that short time, he felt relief since he managed to keep his life.

However, he soon heard someone's voice echoing from the other side.

"So, who taught you how to catch the demon?"

"!!!" When the bandit was about to turn around, a sword came out of the opposite side of the tree and stopped right in front of his neck as if telling him that it would kill him if he didn't answer that question.

"I-I don't know!" The bandit leader shouted. "Don't kill me please!"

"Answer my question." The voice asked again as the sword slightly pressed the neck, making it bleed.

Feeling the pain made the bandit leader panicked as he kept begging for his life. In the end, he told him everything he knew. "I truly don't know anything. Suddenly, a mysterious person came to our hideout and told me about the method."

"Then, tell me more about the method."

"The method is not how to catch the demon or anything, it's just to make us invisible to the demons, allowing us to be safe when utilizing the demons." The bandit leader gulped down.

"Hoh? Spill everything you know about this method."

"We use—"

When the bandit leader was about to reveal the information, the blade suddenly moved to the side as they heard a clicking sound by two metals clashing each other.

"Hii—!" The bandit leader panicked while Noel emerged from behind the tree, glaring at the woods.

'An ambush?' Noel thought while trying to find the assailant. 'Is it someone from the Supreme Devil Organization? I should have realized it sooner and asked the bandit from the mine since there was no one who could kill the bandit leader previously.'

'Meanwhile, this time, the attacker must be connected to the Supreme Devil Organization. I don't know the other party's strength. Seeing that the cult is messing with powerful people across the country, it's

clear that their strength is extremely high. I don't think I have a chance to win against them. Should I retreat then?'

Suddenly, he felt killing intent from behind.

"Kh. I'm too late." Noel turned around and swung his sword, but he saw another arrow piercing the frightened bandit's head, killing him.

"No..." The bandit let out a shrill before dropping to the ground.

"!!!" Noel gritted his teeth while looking around, trying to find the killer. He needed to be extremely careful because they might kill him as well, considering he was prying for the information.

One minute became two minutes, two minutes became five, but not a single attack was launched after that.

'Are they not coming at me?' Noel thought. 'There should be two killers earlier, but they don't come at me?'

He was perplexed because the killers should have silenced him instead of letting him alive. But this way, he also didn't understand their aim.

'Why did they only kill the bandit, not me? What is their aim? Instead of focusing on this matter, I should have left the forest where I can regain my vision on my surrounding so that no one can sneak attack on me.' Noel thought.

He had been using Spirit Aura Breathing and Sword Aura to prepare for combat, so the moment he thought about retreating, he fled the scene with haste.

Of course, Noel didn't drop his guard down, expecting another ambush to be set up in another place. Yet, there wasn't a single attack coming toward him.

Eventually, he escaped from the woods without being attacked a single time.

'Huh?' Noel was confused but at the same time felt relieved because he managed to stay alive.

After coming out of the woods, he saw the merchant group earlier waiting for him.

The two siblings even came out of their carriage to meet him personally.

"We'd like to thank you for your assistance." The blue-haired man stepped forward and politely bowed his head.

"And we'd like to apologize for making you step aside when you were crossing the road earlier." The man's sister also apologized because Noel's strength should allow him to gain the priority over the road.

Just like how a commoner needed to cede the road when a noble crossed the road, they did too.

Noel still hadn't dropped his guard and said, "It's fine. I'm not that small of a person. And I've also received your thanks, so I'll be leaving."

This was just Noel's usual action when there was an assailant nearby. Staying with them was dangerous, so he tried to part with them as cold as possible so that the enemies didn't kill this merchant group.

However, the merchant group didn't know this. They feared that Noel bore a hatred to them for being so useless. Not a single guard managed to kill a bandit or a demon, so it looked like they were useless.

But the fact was that Noel was simply too strong compared to normal people. Utilizing the Spiritual Energy allowed him to swiftly deal with the bandits and the demons, so it wasn't their fault since given time, they could kill some bandits and demons by themselves.

Still, the blue-haired man said with an aghast face. "May I know where you are going? If possible, I'd like to thank you personally."

"No, it's fine. I just did what a normal person would do. So, you don't need to reward me for subjugating the bandits." Noel shook his head. "Since I've done my job, it's time for me to leave."

Noel nodded to them before running forward, leaving everyone behind to their disbelief. And just like that, Noel saved them and left them without getting the recognition he deserved.

"B-brother..." The blue-haired woman glanced at her brother. "Is he angry with us?"

"I don't think so. From what I can see, he seems to be rushing. I don't know the reason but he wants to leave as soon as possible. Either way, he's such a good man. With that kind of power, he is not arrogant and overbearing. It's such a shame that we can't invite such a man and make a connection with him." The man sighed.

"Still, don't you think his voice and hand look like he's a young guy? Like around my age?" She asked, remembering Noel's feature.

"I guess?" The man made a small smile.

The two siblings didn't realize they actually misunderstood Noel's action. Noel simply wanted to get away as fast as possible because of the killers. If there wasn't a killer, he would ask them to send a message to the Demon Banner Army to report about what he found as a reward. However, the siblings certainly remembered Noel's facial feature: blond hair, blue eyes as well as his age.