

The Witch 19

Chapter 19: Earth Salamander

After Vaan expressed his gratitude to the younger witch, Lady Lillias, the escort group was gathered, ready to set out.

With a wave of Lady Linette's hand, the high-quality tent in the distance flew over and folded into a small box before she passed it to her younger sister to store it away in their silk bag.

"Come forth, Samahadlir."

Shortly after Lady Linette spoke, a large magic circle appeared on an empty patch of land ahead before the earth shook, and a huge earth salamander emerged from it.

'A familiar!' Vaan's eyes flickered with interest.

Not all witches could form a contract with other living entities and use them as their familiars, but the witches that can, their statuses weren't ordinary.

Vaan pondered silently, but he failed to recall any information on a True Witch with an earth salamander familiar within the nearby regions.

'Seems like she isn't a local,' Vaan concluded.

Lady Lillias mounted the earth salamander after her older sister before Lady Linette swept a glance at Vaan's thin build.

"You can join us," Lady Linette stated.

'I'm completely taken for a weak flower boy, huh? No matter.' Vaan smiled and accepted the True Witch's offer as he hopped on the back of the earth salamander after Lillias.

He wouldn't refuse the opportunity to stay in close contact with witches.

Witches had a higher affinity to mana and enjoyed a faster natural absorption of mana. Simply being near them also benefited Vaan, no matter how small the benefits were.

Suddenly, Vaan dagger-like stares on his back before he glanced back and saw the envious young warriors glaring at him.

'It is what it is,' Vaan conveyed the silent message with a nonchalant shrug, sparking greater feelings of envy.

The skies quickly darkened with the sun's disappearance over the eastern cliff's edges, and several howls began to echo in the wind.

"On your guards, warriors. The Hellhounds are out to hunt!" Captain Rhys warned.

The escort group positioned themselves around the earth salamander and traveled by foot with vigilant expressions and drawn swords. Only two warriors were delegated to push the wagons of supplies at the rear.

Within several minutes of their trip, a Rank 1 Dark Hellhound was spotted a few dozen yards away before it picked up speed and lunged straight at their group.

Vaan felt the earth salamander tremble before he understood why the witches needed an escort.

'The familiar is big and very useful as a mount, but it's quite afraid of the Dark Hellhounds, huh?' Vaan mused.

Two young warriors broke away from the formation a few moments later and attacked the Rank 1 Dark Hellhound together under Captain Rhys' command.

The Dark Hellhound could not withstand the flurry of sword strikes from two Rank 1 Aura Masters for a few breaths before being killed.

Its carcass was quickly drained of blood and taken back to the group before the young warriors added it to one of the wagons, where five other carcasses were spotted in their collection.

"Trained and efficient, but... you guys don't plan on erasing the smell of blood? The strong scent will attract larger groups of Hellhounds, you know?" Vaan casually remarked.

Captain Rhys furrowed his brows and replied, "It doesn't matter. The Steelguard Escort Group doesn't need a little flower boy like you commenting on how we do things."

"With our current pace, the blood is left behind only serves as bait to lure the Dark Hellhounds away from our group. This is how we avoid most of the Hellhounds," a young warrior added with a proud look, "After all, we're an established group with a leading record of 80% successful escorts."

As they traveled and encountered more lone stragglers, the escort group began to add slight changes to their method by putting the Hellhound's blood in bags and throwing them in opposite directions of their route.

"..." Vaan was a bit speechless.

Although he understood the logic behind Steelguard Escort Group's method, such an outdated method was flawed in his opinion.

Nevertheless, he felt like it was useless to reason with monkeys with muscle brains. With their current impression of him, they wouldn't listen to what he had to say.

'Whatever. I'm only sticking around for a night,' Vaan shrugged nonchalantly.

However, his small movements piqued Young Lady Lillias' interest as she asked, "It seems you disapprove of their misdirection methods. Can you explain why?"

"Please?" Lillias added shortly after seeing Vaan's silent contemplation.

Towards someone who showed him goodwill, there was no reason to reject such a simple request. As long as someone was willing to listen, he didn't mind explaining.

"I don't mind, but I'm afraid some people won't be happy to hear what I say," Vaan stated.

Lillias hesitated before she glanced at her older sister for help. She quickly gained confidence after Linette gave her a nod.

"Don't worry about them. They won't dare to touch you with my sister around," Lillias assured confidently yet naively.

'What about when she isn't around?' Vaan thought with amusement.

"Then I'll thank Lady Linette for allowing me to speak without worries," Vaan spoke politely before he proceeded to explain his differing opinion.

"Dark Hellhounds are beasts, but they are still living creatures instead of puppets. Therefore, they are capable of thoughts and evolving. The Steelguard Escort Group's misdirection method only works on fast trips."

"If they decide to slow down to train, for example, the Dark Hellhounds will eventually catch onto their trails and ambush them with overwhelming numbers before they can exit the region. So it wouldn't be surprising if you find an alpha leading the pack at that stage."

"In the end, this is why the Steelguard Escort Group only has an 80% successful escort record at best and not higher. They don't account for the variables and make improvements. They're too rigid in their time-and-tested misdirection method," Vaan shrugged.

Captain Rhys and the young warriors were full of frowns after eavesdropping on Vaan's conversation. Each of his words stabbed at their pride.

"Well..." Vaan didn't want to be too harsh and added, "I can understand their mentality. There are naturally better methods for safe travels through this region, but it would increase their expenditure."

"Still, to skimp out of necessary expenses and lose your life doesn't sound worth it to me," Vaan shrugged.

The escort group was immediately silenced before they could speak up. They were unable to refute Vaan's words.