

The Witch 201

Chapter 201: The Fallen Witch's Location

The sheer amount of time needed to train the goblins into a disciplined military force was enough to rule Lady Aeliana out of being the Fallen Witch.

Furthermore, Vaan had not heard about an Abomination recovering their intelligence after turning. Not a single one.

'Lady Aeliana isn't the Fallen Witch, but she is very likely to be somewhere inside that rock mountain lair. The Fallen Witch is using her antimagic spores to collect mana for her research...'

Vaan quickly understood the situation.

Shortly after, he moved toward the goblin city for a closer look.

After spending some time investigating the perimeters of the goblin city quietly, he found less than forty enhanced goblins on patrol.

The number was far too small for a city that could accommodate several ten thousand goblins. Even the field cages had slightly more goblin patrols.

Nevertheless, while they guarded the vicinity of the rock mountain lair, it wouldn't be easy for him to sneak past them.

Thus, he needed to create some diversion to draw them away.

Furthermore, his time was limited. It was just a matter of time before the other hundreds of goblins would return from the headless goblin champion's location.

...

Suddenly, he heard distant movements from the southern direction. It came from a group of wolf-men from the Assembly of Silent Night.

They did very well in making their presence known as they did not hold back in expressing their surprise after they entered the second stratum and discovered the pocket realm.

"This is incredible...! I can't believe there was a whole nother world lying just beyond the goblin caves! I almost thought we stepped into Gehenna!" a Peak B-rank hunter exclaimed.

"That's not what we should worry about right now, Black Fang!" Silver Hawk reprimanded before he mentioned, "Don't you realize we are in deep shit?"

When the wolf-men arrived, they attracted a horde of goblins.

However, the horde of goblins wasn't the same as the ones they were given the reins to command on the surface.

The horde of goblins were all enhanced through body transmutation and showed characteristics of other monsters on their bodies.

At the same time, they weren't as obedient. Instead, they looked like they could attack the wolf-men group at any time if the Fallen Witch granted permission.

"These goblins have all undergone body transmutation... The Cave Master is a Fallen Witch!" Dark Blade mentioned with shock before he agreed, "We are in deep trouble indeed!"

They would have preferred dealing with an intelligent Goblin King over a Fallen Witch.

"There was no telling what Fallen Witches are thinking or what they would do. They could smile at us one moment and stab us in the back the next moment," Dark Blade added in a much softer tone.

"Remember what happened with Blood Knife. Don't talk shit about the Cave Master, or else we will be in deep shit for sure!" Silver Hawk solemnly warned the group.

"Right now, the Cave Master is our only chance of surviving. I believe most of us can agree that we would rather live than die. If I have to join hands with a demon to survive, I would gladly do so."

As Silver Hawk spoke, he made his way toward the goblin city as instructed by the Fallen Witch.

"Sssi... Remember, this is your last chance to prove yourself useful. There won't be another," the Fallen Witch's ghastly voice echoed through the region.

Silver Hawk and the others quickly trembled with fear as if the Fallen Witch had seen through all their thoughts.

There was just something about her voice that invoked fear in them.

...

Meanwhile, Vaan also overheard the ghastly voice from his location.

'Was that the Fallen Witch's voice?' Vaan's eyes narrowed as he failed to determine the direction of the source.

The voice had seemingly echoed from every direction.

'Noise distortion, echo amplification, and... a sound mimicry spell?' Vaan guessed the spells used to make the Fallen Witch's location unknown.

Using all three magic spells simultaneously would produce an omnidirectional sound to that effect and mask the caster's original position.

However, the Fallen Witch spoke to the wolf-men group as if she knew their location and situation from the start.

In other words, the Fallen Witch was in a position where she could monitor the wolf-men.

Vaan suspected that the Fallen Witch had long detected him. But at the same time, the lack of response also suggested otherwise.

After some contemplation, he figured the Fallen Witch had known about his disturbances.

However, the Fallen Witch didn't consider the disturbances to be of great importance to invest too much in their investigation—not while her mind was preoccupied with the punitive expedition.

'It seems like the Fallen Witch still doesn't know about me after all. She never imagined someone to have infiltrated her territory through a different entrance,' Vaan rubbed his chin thoughtfully.

But it was just a matter of time before the goblins reported the goblin champion's death to her.

At that point, the Fallen Witch would be alerted of an intruder.

'That means... the Fallen Witch is in a position where she can see the wolf-men, but she can't see the goblin champion's area?'

Vaan's eyes scanned the surroundings.

The rock mountain lair was big but not big enough to provide a good vantage of the southern region. At the same time, it also implied the Fallen Witch was not in her lair.

'Where could she be, I wonder?'

Although Vaan used Magic Vision to observe the surrounding regions, the large amount of mana moving towards the rock mountain lair could easily make him overlook some things.

Nevertheless, he focused on places that provided good vantage before his gaze suddenly locked onto one of the enormous supporting pillars that held up the pocket realm's ceiling.

He had noticed the movements of mana being a bit different from the rest in the area.

'I see. The Fallen Witch is hidden in that pillar. Is that her magic tower? And if it's that pillar, then the western pillar would have obstructed her view of the goblin champion's location!'

Vaan's eyes flickered.

There was a fair bit of luck on his end, but he was able to confirm that the Fallen Witch still didn't know about his infiltration.

'Shall I make things interesting?' Vaan smiled thoughtfully.

Chapter 202: Creating Chaos

After rechecking the position of the wolf-men group, Vaan took out his bait, which was precisely the wolf-men meat he had previously chopped up and cooked.

He quickly stuffed them with Hungry Rage Flowers, a type of red-colored Gehenna plant known to produce feelings of hunger and anger in those that consume them. Then, he hurled them into several locations, including the goblin city and a few areas just outside of it.

He also hurled some of the wolf-men equipment and clothes to add some extra assurance.

Shortly after, he quickly left the area.

He headed for a group of large boulders found three hundred yards north of the goblin city, which was also quite close to the field of monster cages, and hid behind them.

Kreuk!

A few moments later, a commotion was stirred inside the goblin city after the strong scent of cooked meat spread into its surrounding.

The smell attracted the nearby goblin patrols.

Even the goblins and hobgoblins with sharper senses of smell further inside the goblin city were also attracted to the scent of food outside.

As the goblins picked up the scattered cooked meat along the way, they were lured outside the goblin city.

Their numbers quickly increased to two hundred, and within moments, they started fighting over the limited amount of cooked meat.

However, their short scramble for food quickly ended when the bigger hobgoblins joined the fray.

Roar!

The small goblins trembled with fear and made way for the hobgoblins.

Shortly after the hobgoblins reached the center, they snatched the food from the goblins, tossed whole pieces into their mouths, and chewed with great relish.

At the same time, Silver Hawk and the others gradually arrived with a horde of goblins not far behind them. Upon arrival, they quickly noticed the goblin activity in the area.

They didn't think much of it at first, but then some leftover bones, including a human skull, were tossed to their feet, causing them to glance down and check.

"These aren't goblin or monster bones... They're human bones!" a Peak B-rank hunter exclaimed.

"And not just any human bones! Take a look at these scattered clothes and equipment! They belong to our people!" Silver Hawk mentioned as he stared at the group of goblins ahead with an ugly expression.

"Fuck these sons of bitches! Our weaker members had become food for these goblin freaks!" Dark Blade gritted his teeth furiously and barked, "I knew a Fallen Witch wasn't good news!"

"No wonder the Fallen Witch told us to come here! She wanted us to become food for her goblin experiments! She wanted to strengthen them with the Rank 5 Demon Wolf Blood in our bodies!"

"We better fight our way out before we become their next meal!" another Peak B-rank hunter quickly suggested.

However, they were surrounded by goblins.

Not only was there a group of roughly two hundred goblins ahead, but they also brought a horde of three thousand goblins behind him.

Furthermore, there were most likely even more goblins in the goblin city!

"Wait! Don't act hastily!" Silver Hawk quickly stopped the group from acting rashly and said, "Even for us, we can't take on so many goblins at once!"

"What do you suggest then?! Just wait for them to eat us?! Fuck that shit! I ain't waiting for that to happen!" one of the Peak B-rank hunters stated. "We need to get the hell out of here right now!"

Most of the wolf-men already felt unsettled when the goblin horde they gathered looked like they wanted to eat them.

Now that the wolf-men saw hobgoblins eating their people, there's no way that they could ignore it.

"Dammit, just wait a minute! This could be a mistake! We should check with the Cave Master first!" Silver Hawk demanded some time before he quickly shouted, "What is the meaning of this, Cave Master?!"

"What's with that tone? Do you have a problem with me?"

The Fallen Witch's ghastly voice was heard shortly after Silver Hawk's loud voice caught the Fallen Witch's attention.

"Do I have a problem?!" Silver Hawk almost lost his temper on the spot. Still, another Peak B-rank hunter immediately exploded, "Fuck yeah, we have a problem!"

After hearing that, the Fallen Witch had no choice but to shift her attention from the front and see what was going on in the back of her territory.

"What is going—"

Roar!

Suddenly, the hobgoblins roared uncontrollably before they stared at the wolf-men group with an insatiable hunger.

In the next instance, the hobgoblins immediately charged at Silver Hawk and the other wolf-men.

"Fuck! We'll fight our way out!" Silver Hawk shouted.

The Peak B-rank hunters all drew their weapons and fought off the enhanced hobgoblins with Peak-level Rank 2 combat prowess.

Nevertheless, the Peak B-rank hunters had the advantage in strength and skills.

The enhanced hobgoblins never stood a chance, not even in their enraged states. They were quickly killed in a short instance.

At the same time, the other goblins did not know what was going on, but they quickly became furious after seeing the wolf-men killing their kind.

Kreuk! Kreuk!

The goblins voiced their rage.

In a short instance, the brief fight between the wolf-men and the hobgoblins evolved into an all-out war between them and all the goblins in the area.

"What the hell are you all doing!? Stop this instance!" the Fallen Witch screeched furiously at the unbelievable scene. "Sssi... I command you all to stop fighting at once! Listen to me!"

The Fallen Witch sounded more infuriated by the moment.

After all, they had a bigger threat knocking on their front door. And yet, they were stuck fighting among themselves.

Kreuk! Kreuk!

Silver Hawk and his group killed dozens of goblins in a few breaths, but they were still surrounded by thousands.

At the same time, the sound of their battle attracted more goblins from the goblin city. Even goblins from the field of monster cages were drawn over to the commotion.

The Fallen Witch's ghastly and furious shrieks continued to resound throughout the pocket realm.

However, Vaan washed his hand of the chaos he created as if it had nothing to do with him and secretly made his way to the rock mountain lair.

Chapter 203: Evil Lair's Core Area

After the goblin guards were drawn away from the field of monster cages, Vaan easily made his way to the rock mountain lair undetected.

He passed various caged creatures along the way, including kobolds, lizardmen, wyrms, and basilisks.

While the cages were only made of rank two black iron, stronger creatures like Rank 3 Earth Wyrms and Rank 3 Lightning Basilisks could easily break free from their cages.

However, like other creatures locked in their cages, they were all injected with sedatives, keeping them weakened or asleep.

Shortly after reaching the lair's entrance, Vaan scanned the path ahead with Omni-Sense before he proceeded with caution.

Although he had never personally explored a Fallen Witch's evil lair, he had read about them; they were riddled with traps.

It wasn't easy for intruders to reach the lair's core area.

Vaan was prepared to deal with the hidden traps and dangers within the evil lair. But as he advanced, the lack of obstacles made him doubtful.

'Unexpectedly, the security of the lair itself is non-existent,' Vaan thought with surprise.

Before he knew it, he had arrived in the core area of the lair.

Nevertheless, he could roughly guess the reason. After all, the Fallen Witch had the entire pocket realm to herself.

If the Fallen Witch had installed any traps at all, they would all be in the first stratum to keep others from reaching the second stratum and discovering the existence of the pocket realm.

Besides the terrible rotting stench of flesh and blood that made the already heavy air suffocating, the core area was filled with treasures in Vaan's eyes.

Tables and shelves filled with hundreds of potions and various solutions distilled from the Gehenna plants could be seen.

'Don't mind if I...'

After rechecking the core area of the lair for hidden traps with his Omni-Sense, Vaan immediately started pocketing all the flasks and potion bottles into his Heaven-Swallowing Space.

In a short time, he cleaned out the entire area, looting everything he deemed of value to him, including jars of monster organs and special flesh.

They were all usable ingredients in potioneering.

Afterward, he made his way to the next area, which was the place where the Fallen Witch conducted her live experiments.

It was also where all the mana-filled antimagic spores were flowing towards.

Vaan had found out the lair was divided into four main areas: the Fallen Witch's sleeping quarters, dining area, research and ingredient storage space, and the experimental area.

However, he ignored the other two areas for the time being.

Rumble...!

The rock mountain lair suddenly shook from a powerful impact in the area, causing Vaan to pause his steps briefly.

'That impact just now was...'

Rumble...!

The area suddenly shook again before Vaan became certain of his doubt.

'It must be Headmaster Astoria producing those impactful attacks. The Fallen Witch's screeches must have helped the punitive expedition group find their way to the second stratum,' Vaan figured.

The region continued to shake more frequently as the battle outside reached an all-time high between the punitive expedition group, the wolf-men, and the goblin horde.

Given the situation had reached such a stage, it was unlikely for the Fallen Witch to remain on the sidelines and watch Headmaster Astoria and the others do as they please in her territory.

'The Fallen Witch should be making her move soon. That said, the punitive expedition group arrived quicker than I anticipated. Therefore, I will also need to hurry up with my objective,' Vaan thought.

Time was of the essence.

He quickly entered the Fallen Witch's experimental area, which was visibly larger than the other main area.

'Found her!'

Vaan's eyes quickly locked onto the Plant-type Abomination in the experimental area's center, trapped within a cylindrical cage.

The Plant-type Abomination had the appearance of a human who failed to transform into a forest dryad completely, causing all of her skin, flesh, and muscles to be ripped and stretched apart.

'So this is what Lady Aeliana looks like as a Plant-type Abomination...' Vaan inspected her body.

All her half-wood, half-fleshy limbs and tree roots were all impaled and bound by black iron spikes, completely sealing all her movements.

At the same time, a large vacuum device was installed right above her, sucking in all the mana-filled antimagic spores before they could return to her body.

The mana-filled antimagic spores were transferred to water tanks via a tube, where the mana was then extracted from the antimagic spores and used to power various instruments and formations.

Roar!

The tremors from the big battle outside even reached the experimental area, causing Lady Aeliana to growl in pain and anger.

If Lady Solana hadn't been softhearted and let her daughter run free, Lady Aeliana wouldn't have suffered so much pain and misery over the years.

Vaan used Magic Vision on Lady Aeliana's half-wooden body and saw the complex bundle of knots that had become of her magic circuit.

Even he found it hard to imagine the extent of soul-tearing pain she endured over the years in such a gloomy place.

Anyone would have long lost their sanity.

Vaan wasn't confident he could bring Lady Aeliana's mind and body back. However, he had to try—No, he had to succeed.

Her success would determine if he could also save Eniwse.

As Vaan approached the cylindrical cage in the center, the Plant-type Abomination locked on him with its vengeful eyes filled with destruction and wrath.

Even his light footsteps caused it to be visibly infuriated and hostile towards him.

Nevertheless, he continued to approach it before he placed his hand on the black iron cage and reduced it to black sand with Earth Transmutation.

Grrr!

The Plant-type Abomination simply growled at him despite their proximity.

It didn't want to attack as forcefully moving against its restraints would inflict greater pain upon itself.

"Don't worry. You won't have to suffer for much longer," Vaan calmly assured, despite not knowing whether his words could reach Lady Aeliana.

Shortly after, he took out his Rank 4 Purple Sword and sterilized it with heating by using Kinetic Energy Manipulation.

Chapter 204: Surgical Treatment

The greatest issue with Abominations was their heavily-twisted magic circuits.

As long as their magic circuits remained in such twisted forms, they would continue to experience indescribable pain that only they would know.

'To treat an Abomination, I have to unravel their twisted magic circuit and end the pain it inflicts on them. Only then would they recover the ability to think,' Vaan recalled.

Physical appearance could be slowly recovered through magic, but the mind cannot—not without eliminating the root cause of their mind's ailment first.

Shortly after Vaan's Rank 4 Purple Sword was cleansed and sterilized, he immediately slashed open the Plant-type Abomination's chest, revealing its inner organs and heavily-twisted magic circuit.

At the same time, the Plant-type Abomination cried in agony and resisted strongly. However, it failed to move due to the black iron spikes restraining all of its movements.

"Fortunately, Lady Aeliana is restrained. Otherwise, it wouldn't be possible to proceed with the surgical treatment," Vaan softly muttered.

He used Magic Vision to see a better picture of her twisted magic circuit.

Surprisingly, Lady Aeliana's interior was mostly still human; it was only her exterior appearance that had been altered greatly.

That being said, Lady Aeliana's mana veins were twice as thick as the average witch's. Furthermore, it had an elastic strength that normal mana veins did not have.

Even so, it was like a ball of rubber that had been stretched to the limit. Thus, the pain produced by it was no surprise.

Nevertheless, Vaan gradually grasped the complete layout of Lady Aeliana's magic circuit before he simulated its unraveling in his mind.

But after multiple simulations, he immediately encountered a major problem; the twisted magic circuit could not be unraveled through normal methods.

It wasn't just twisted into numerous knots; it had grown extra mana veins that didn't previously exist. And it was these new mana veins that sealed the knots, making them impossible to untangle—not without cutting a few mana veins apart.

However, a healthy magic circuit was closely related to the witch's ability to use magic. Therefore, damaging its mana veins was the same as cutting off the witch's future.

In extreme cases, witches even consider it as taking their life.

Nevertheless, Vaan couldn't imagine Lady Aeliana viewing him as her mortal enemy if he managed to end her pain and help her recover, even if it meant depriving her of her magic.

Even so, there was still a good chance he could perfectly restore her mana veins after cutting them.

'This elasticity, plant-like attributes, and my high-rank regenerative power. This can work—No, this will work,' Vaan assured himself.

Shortly after cleansing his hands, he immediately commenced his work.

The Plant-type Abomination painfully flailed when he touched the bundle of tangled-up mana veins that made up its magic circuit.

Roar!

It cried hysterically.

Even though it was heavily restrained, the minor movements from its strong resistance still impacted his work to some degree.

Considering he was performing surgery on its mana veins without any anesthetics, he was inflicting even greater pain on it.

Vaan furrowed his brows in contemplation for a moment.

Shortly after, he used one of his hands to pleasure it while his other hand worked on its mana veins.

He didn't hold back and struck every recognizable pleasure point consecutively, administering what would have exceeded the fifth level of pleasure on a normal person.

However, the influx of pleasure was visibly effective as the Plant-type Abomination did not resist as much, allowing Vaan to proceed with his surgical treatment more smoothly.

After untangling the easy parts, he entered Lycan Transformation and used his sharpened nails to cut his first mana vein.

Roar!

The pain exceeded a level that even Vaan's pleasuring skills failed to neutralize. The Plant-type Abomination resisted violently.

He immediately used both hands to untangle what he needed to untangle before he reconnected the severed mana vein with the high-rank regenerative power in his blood, which had been raised by a level after he entered Lycan Transformation.

The severed mana vein quickly absorbed his blood before the cut line disappeared, restoring the mana vein to its original state.

Afterward, Vaan untied the remaining twisted knots and severed a few more mana veins before reattaching them.

Each time a knot or tangled part was unraveled, the tension on the mana veins was reduced along with the pain.

Eventually, it reached a level where the Plant-type Abomination stopped flailing from the pain—not because the pain disappeared entirely but because it dropped to a level it could be tolerated.

That said, the pain level wasn't something a normal person could endure either.

It showed how high the Plant-type Abomination's pain tolerance was raised during its three years of suffering.

Gradually, Vaan sensed some life returning to the Plant-type Abomination's eyes; there was even a spark of intelligence.

Nevertheless, he continued to proceed with his surgical treatment.

Not long after he untied the last knot, a magical scene happened.

The entire magic circuit lit up, generating a powerful force of attraction that pulled in all the mana in the area.

Even the mana-filled antimagic spores seemingly resisted the suction force of the vacuuming device, wanting to return to the Plant-type Abomination's body.

Vaan quickly used his Rank 4 Purple Sword to destroy it.

Shortly after, he retreated a few steps from the Plant-type Abomination and watched it gather a huge amount of mana into its magic circuit.

'Mana is gathering into her magic circuit?' Vaan's eyes narrowed.

After untangling all the knotted mana veins, the two magic circles around the heart could be seen, seemingly lacking in some mana.

Despite that, mana was gathering inside the magic circuit instead.

As Vaan observed the changes taking place, he noticed the Plant-type Abomination's body was changing—No, it was reverting.

However, the black iron spikes hindered the transformation.

Vaan's eyes flickered before he decisively destroyed all the restraints, reducing all the black iron spikes into black powder with Earth Transmutation.

Shortly after, he swung his Rank 4 Purple Sword and destroyed all the equipment and formations in the experimental area.

With nothing left to hinder her body's transformation, Lady Aeliana's former appearance was gradually restored on its own.

Lady Aeliana regained her former beauty without a single blemish on her bare body, and her smooth skin glowed like a baby.

Even the big wound on her chest had been healed.

It was as if Lady Aeliana had achieved nirvana and been reborn like the ancient phoenix of legends.

Chapter 205: Aeliana's Subservience

Nevertheless, after recovering her human appearance, Lady Aeliana was also weak and vulnerable like a newborn baby.

As if she hadn't exercised her limbs in a long time, she had almost forgotten how to use them.

She remained slumped on the ground

"Congratulations on returning from hell, Lady Aeliana."

Vaan approached Lady Aeliana with a black cloak he had prepared beforehand and draped it over her shoulders.

At the same time, he carefully observed her facial expressions and body language to grasp her mental state and thoughts.

Even if Lady Aeliana returned, she was likely to develop some mental disorder.

Furthermore, he also wondered if she could still remember who she was or, at the very least, be capable of holding a conversation.

Nevertheless, after he spoke, Lady Aeliana weakly held the hems of the black cloak close to her body with one hand and glanced at her other hand. Then, she felt her face.

She appeared slightly disorientated and out of touch with the world. But as she continued to study herself and her surroundings, she gradually adapted to the present circumstances and collected her thoughts.

At the same time, memories of the past three years came flooding into her mind like a neverending nightmare.

Her expression alternated between anger and despair before gradually settling for calmness—no, impassiveness; she hid all her emotions.

"Were you the one who brought me back?" Aeliana asked as she glanced up at Vaan, seemingly emotionless.

However, Vaan had observed her from the start and understood her aloofness was just a strong front to hide her weakness, an act of self-defense to protect herself.

Nevertheless, he had to applaud her for being to endure hell and making it back without a broken mind.

Something must have kept her from losing the very last piece of her sanity.

"It's been hard on you, Lady Aeliana. You did very well making it back," Vaan said softly.

At the same time, he glanced at her sympathetically yet warmly as if he completely understood how much she had suffered and how hard she had endured in the past three years, even though he hadn't experienced it personally.

That said, his words easily shot straight through her heart and touched her heartstrings. The deep-rooted emotions she tried to keep to herself immediately welled up in her eyes and overflowed.

Tears unknowingly dripped down Aeliana's cheeks before she swiped them with surprise, startled by her tears.

Even so, the tears continued to pour down her cheeks uncontrollably.

She revealed her anger and frustration as she tried to get rid of them, but the tears wouldn't stop coming out of her eyes.

"Just let it all out. You'll feel better afterward. There isn't anyone else here besides me," Vaan stated.

Shortly after, Aeliana couldn't help herself and poured out all her emotions as she cried.

The pain that wreaked havoc inside her body and threatened to consume her mind... The suffering that she endured while being all alone... The questions that she pondered as to why it only happened to her...

Aeliana recalled the despair she felt at her lowest like she was trapped at the bottom of a sealed well without even a glimmer of hope of getting out for all eternity.

But then she suddenly received a vague recollection of a voice whispering to her, "Don't worry. You won't have to suffer for much longer."

Shortly after, light shined into the bottom of the well as someone unsealed it and pulled her out from the depths of despair.

The person did not have a face, only a voice.

But as Aeliana glanced at Vaan's masked face, the image of the two slowly overlapped and became one person.

Even so, she felt some discrepancies, as Vaan's voice did not match his face.

After calming down, Aeliana's eyes flickered. She understood that her savior was using a fake face. It was so well made she would have overlooked it—if not for his voice.

She mustered all her strength to get up as she wanted to rip the fake mask off and confirm Vaan's real face.

However, her strength failed her.

As she dropped back to the ground, Vaan outstretched one of his arms to support her. But when their hands made contact, Aeliana's remaining strength was seemingly sapped from her body.

Plump!

Aeliana sat on her knees, deprived of her strength.

"Hm? Are you alright, Lady Aeliana?" Vaan asked after he noticed her abnormal reaction to his touch.

He tried to retract his hand.

But in that instance, Aeliana suddenly burst with strength as she grabbed his hand with both of hers and pulled it towards her cheeks.

She rested her right cheek on the palm of his left hand and closed her eyes with a serene expression as if the warmth from his left hand had some soothing effects on her soul.

In that instance, she also changed her mind as she did not want to forcefully reveal Vaan's true appearance. Instead, she would only see his real face if he permitted it.

He must have a reason for hiding it.

At the same time, Vaan also noticed the strange turn of events taking place as he continued to observe Aeliana's emotions and body language.

As the first successful subject of his surgical abomination treatment, Aeliana's post-treatment actions held a lot of research value.

They would determine whether he needed to come up with a post-treatment plan.

From what he could see, Aeliana was mentally unstable, even defensive. But after coming into contact with his hand, she appeared soothed and calm, even submissive to him.

"May I ask for my Lord's name?" Aeliana subserviently requested while rubbing her cheeks against the palm of his hand intimately.

"I currently go by the name Van Helsing," Vaan calmly replied.

However, his pupils shrank at Aeliana's subservient manner and words. Then, he quickly checked his Heaven-Swallowing Space with his consciousness and noticed a slight difference in the size.

Although it couldn't be compared to the time he gave Topaz her a True Name, there was no doubt that the size of the Heaven-Swallowing Space had been reduced.

The reduction was so insignificant that he nearly missed it.

Chapter 206: Extreme Emotions

Dozens of thoughts immediately went through Vaan's mind after his discovery.

The only current known cause for a size reduction in the Heaven-Swallowing Space is if he had granted a True Name with [Name Bestowal].

However, Aeliana wasn't an unnamed spirit like Topaz; she was already given a True Name at birth. Thus, it shouldn't have been possible for [Name Bestowal] to activate.

'I've only called her Lady Aeliana...' Vaan recalled before his eyes suddenly flickered.

Based on his understanding, a True Name was closely tied to a being's soul; it could even be regarded as a part of the being's soul.

'If the soul was damaged, is it possible to overwrite an existing True Name with a new True Name?' Vaan pondered.

He suspected that it couldn't just be any part of the soul either; it had to be the True Name section of the soul that was damaged or corrupted.

Only then could [Name Bestowal] be used to overwrite the True Name.

'It seems that after [Name Bestowal] is used to overwrite the True Name, it also mended the damage on the soul? The consumption is also very little,' Vaan guessed as his eyes flickered.

Everything made sense.

Unless Aeliana had an unbreakable will, it was hard to believe how well she adapted after surgical treatment otherwise.

After all, it wouldn't have been a surprise if all the suffering had long driven her insane.

Nevertheless, Vaan's thoughts only flashed for a brief moment while Aeliana mulled over his name thoughtfully.

"Van Helsing... Van Helsing..." Aeliana quietly muttered before she looked up at him. "I see. My Lord's name is Van Helsing. Please allow me to continue addressing you as my Lord. Lord Van will also do."

"That's not appropriate, is it?" Vaan casually mentioned.

"No, it is very appropriate, my Lord!" Aeliana firmly asserted.

"The grace you bestowed upon me transcends every regulation and tradition of this kingdom. They can't restrict me from offering my deepest gratitude and respect to you, my Lord. You pulled me out of the darkness when no one else lent a hand and granted me a new lease on life."

"As such, I wish to dedicate this new life to you. My heart, body, and soul, everything that I am belongs to you from now and forever," Aeliana solemnly vowed with her head lowered.

"Do you fully understand the implications of your words, Lady Aeliana? You are accepting a man as your Lord. From a witch's point of view, I don't see how this will benefit you."

Vaan casually pried to see the extent of loyalty granted by the effects of [Name Bestowal].

"I fully understand what I am saying, my Lord. You do not need to doubt my sincerity," Aeliana affirmed before she requested, "And please call me Aeliana, my Lord. I do not deserve to be called Lady Aeliana."

"I see. Then between us, I will just call you Aeliana," Vaan acknowledged.

"Thank you, my Lord! Also, I am not seeking any benefits by following you," Aeliana shortly added before she became fidgety, shy, and nervous while averting her eyes. "However, if my Lord permits me to be a little greedy, I do wish for some of your affection."

"By affection, do you mean..."

Vaan suddenly lifted Aeliana's chin and boldly stole her soft lips with a kiss, which she wholeheartedly accepted without resistance.

"Like this?" Vaan added after their lips parted.

Aeliana nodded shyly with a flushed face while she was overjoyed in her heart—almost to the point that she could not contain her happiness.

"My Lord, if I may be even more greedy, I wish for more..."

Aeliana wanted to offer her body to him on the spot, but Vaan knew what she wanted to say from the look in her eyes. He shook his head before she could finish speaking.

"Perhaps, another time. You need to focus on recovering your strength," Vaan calmly stated before he added, "Furthermore, this isn't the time and place for it. You should know where we are, right? We'll be in trouble if the Fallen Witch discovers us."

When Vaan mentioned that, Aeliana's happy expression changed like the switch of a button as her eyes flashed with overflowing killing intent and madness.

However, it only lasted for an instant before she revealed her happy smile in front of Vaan again.

"I understand, my Lord. Aeliana will patiently wait until we leave this place safely before receiving your affection," Aeliana said.

Shortly after, she expressed her regret, "It's unfortunate that I am currently weak. Otherwise, I will definitely butcher that wench if you ask me to, my Lord."

"Oh? Do you know how strong the Fallen Witch is?" Vaan glanced at her.

"I apologize for being unable to give you a definite answer, my Lord. However, I believe the Fallen Witch is around Early-stage to Mid-stage High Witch," Aeliana stated.

"That strong?" Vaan immediately furrowed his brows before he paused for a moment and looked up at Aeliana. "Are you saying you can defeat the Fallen Witch if you are fully recovered?"

"Not by myself. But if I join forces with those other two High Witches outside, I have 80% confidence that we will defeat the Fallen Witch."

"Oh, so you are also aware that two High Witches are fighting outside... But that's not all, is it? When did you realize you could 'see' what's happening outside," Vaan asked.

He quickly realized Aeliana still had control over the antimagic spores spread throughout the pocket realm and the Red Goblin Mountains.

Nevertheless, when he raised the question, Aeliana held her cheeks with an embarrassed look.

"It's a bit embarrassing to say, but I've only just realized my ability after you mentioned the Fallen Witch, my Lord. I was too engrossed in my Lord's presence to notice other things.."

"I see," Vaan smiled wryly.

For better or worse, it was clear to him that Aeliana wasn't completely freed from the side effects of suffering in her Abomination form for three years. She had displayed two sides of extreme emotions.

That said, he was assured that she would never direct her hostility toward him, only affection and reverence.

Vaan gradually shifted his attention to the system notifications that went off during their exchange.

====

[System Log]

Ding!

<You have completed an unassigned Domination-type Witch Hunt>

Chapter 207: True Servant

<You have acquired your first True Servant>

<[Overview]: A True Servant is a soul-bound being. They become your most devoted follower, completely faithful, and exist solely for your benefit. Your word is their law, and your affection is their greatest reward>

<[Effect]: You can channel mana into your True Servant to empower them directly through your soul link. Likewise, you can also draw mana from your True Servant to empower yourself>

<The True Servant tab has been added to your status>

...

=====

«True Servant/s»

First Servant: Aeliana Leclair

Witch Rank: Peak-stage Senior Witch (Mutated)

First Specialized Magic: Sword of Light

Second Specialized Magic: Dryad Transformation

Elemental Affinity: Light, Wood

Status: Weakened

=====

[Sword of Light]: The magical application of Light Manipulation to summon swords of light. The number and strength of swords of light are determined by the user's will and mana output.

[Dryad Transformation]: The magical ability to transform into a dryad and use its abilities. The user can also draw power from the forest.

=====

It was astounding to discover that Aeliana awakened a second Specialized Magic, thanks to the berserk transformation.

It was a groundbreaking discovery in magic.

That said, even if witches were to learn that becoming an Abomination was the secret to inducing a reawakening and acquiring a second Specialized Magic, no one would still willingly turn themselves into an Abomination.

After all, besides Vaan, no one else had successfully reverted an Abomination to their former self.

And even if the other witches learned that they could return from their Abomination state, very few would still go through with it.

Nevertheless, Vaan didn't find it too surprising that Aeliana acquired a second Specialized Magic.

After all, Specialized Magic was directly tied to a witch's magic circuit, and the mana veins of her magic circuit were twice the size of a normal witch.

She was bound to develop some extraordinary ability as a result of it.

Furthermore, Aeliana had been through hell and back. Thus, even if she became a little crazy due to all the pain and suffering, her mental fortitude should be very high.

That in and of itself was another talent that would help her advance her magic—if he wasn't wrong.

"Let us quickly get out of here and return to Sunpeak Town. I'm sure your mother misses you dearly," Vaan mentioned.

However, the moment he mentioned her mother, Aeliana's eyes glinted with hatred and madness.

After Vaan noticed the look in her eyes, he paused before asking shortly after, "Do you blame your mother for everything you've been through?"

"I can't deny that I hate her from the bottom of my heart for letting me live. I wouldn't have to suffer through hell if she had just killed me when she had the chance," Aeliana said honestly with a vengeful look.

However, she quickly turned to Vaan with a happy smile and added, "But of course, I would not have met my Lord if she had killed me back then."

"No matter what, Lady Solana is still your mother, and she couldn't bear to kill you because she loves you," Vaan said.

Nevertheless, it was a subjective topic.

What mothers do for love could be argued. It could spare their daughters out of love, but they could equally kill their daughters out of love.

Aeliana definitely thought about the latter, but she didn't want to argue with her Lord.

"Do you intend to leave those people outside to die, my Lord?" Aeliana asked as she was getting picked up and carried on Vaan's back.

"You mentioned that there's a good chance of defeating the Fallen Witch if you join forces with the other two High Witches in your peak state. However, the fact is that you are not in your peak state. That means the two High Witches alone aren't enough to deal with the Fallen Witch," Vaan stated.

After the surgical treatment, he had long exited Lycan Transformation to minimize the duration of the weakened state.

The period of weakness had just ended at that moment.

"But my Lord can also defeat the Fallen Witch if you join forces with the other two High Witches fighting outside, right?" Aeliana guessed, to which Vaan replied with a slight smile.

She quickly understood her Lord did not want to reveal his abilities to the others.

As Vaan carried Aeliana through the empty research area, heading towards the lair's exit, he felt her body suddenly move with alarm.

"Watch out, my Lord! The Fallen Witch is coming our way—!"

Boom!

The lair's entrance blew apart as the Fallen Witch came crashing in like a meteor.

"Which rat dares to sneak into my lair and sabotage my sacred research?!" the Fallen Witch roared as she scanned the area with her furious and fierce gaze.

She quickly locked onto Vaan and Aeliana's figure before her pupils shrank with hostility and disbelief.

At the same time, Headmaster Astoria and Marquis Ember came chasing right after her. They did not let her get away.

"Where do you think you're going, Elvira?! Do you think you can get away from us?!" Ember shouted as she flew in like a blazing comet.

"Hmph, do you think I am afraid of you?!" Elvira Ashenborn roared.

She quickly ignored Vaan and Aeliana and turned out to receive Ember and Astoria's attacks. Her body was surrounded by black water lances that spun at high speed.

Swoosh! Swoosh!

Elvira fired her black water lances at Ember's flaming phoenix and Astoria.

Boom!

The collision of Elvira and Ember's attacks generated a massive explosion of steam that quickly covered the entire area.

Ember's figure was shot out from the steam cloud shortly after.

At the same time, Astoria's light barrier was also struck by several black water lances before she was blasted away. The powerful impacts also caused cracks to form on her light barrier.

Evidently, Elvira's attacks were stronger.

Nevertheless, Vaan didn't wait to get hit by the scorching-hot black water vapor explosion.

When the Fallen Witch Elvira turned around to deal with Ember and Astoria, Vaan immediately fled through the wall with Aeliana using Earth Manipulation.

His decisive choice saved him from the steam explosion in the nick of time.

Chapter 208: Astoria's Request

It was only for a brief moment, but Vaan had seen the Fallen Witch's appearance. Elvira was truly the ugliest witch he had ever seen.

At the same time, he had confirmed his suspicions regarding the Fallen Witch.

Elvira Ashenborn had performed body transmutation on herself and merged with a goblin. She had the green skin and long curly nose of a goblin, not to mention the hunchback and shriveled limbs.

Nevertheless, after fleeing through the earthen wall and leaving the rock mountain lair through his own exit, Vaan saw the outside situation with his own eyes.

While Astoria and Ember dealt with the Fallen Witch, Lord Helia commanded the remaining aura users and witches to deal with the wolf-men and goblin hordes.

'It looks like the misunderstanding between the wolf-men and goblins was cleared up. Or is it just a temporary truce in the face of a greater enemy?' Vaan mused.

Nevertheless, the situation was not looking good on Lord Helia's side.

Without Headmaster Astoria and Marquis Ember to assist them, they were being outnumbered and overpowered by the wolf-men and goblin horde.

It would be a pity if Lord Helia died as it would put an end to their business cooperation, but it would also cut off loose ends.

At the very least, the Delarosa Household would never find out he borrowed their name to make a deal to earn mana stones with Lord Helia.

As for the life and death of everyone else, they were unrelated to him; his life was more important.

"Wait!"

Astoria's distant shout was heard.

Boom!

Astoria's greatsword flew over with incredible speed before it crashed into the ground in front of Vaan, forcing him to pause his steps.

At the same time, Astoria quickly flew over to retrieve her greatsword while obstructing Vaan's path.

"It's great to see you are still around, even one step ahead of us. You were the one who instigated the wolf-men and goblins to fight each other, right? Thanks to you, we found our way here," Astoria mentioned.

"However, the situation is not good, as you can see. You must be very capable in order to sneak into the pocket realm and enter the Fallen Witch's lair on your own."

"I won't question your agenda for doing so, so please help us. Your strength is needed," Astoria formally requested before she added, "Lord Helia and the others will die without your help."

"Step aside, High Witch. Who are you to block my—"

"Aeliana, enough."

Vaan silenced Aeliana before she could call him Lord in front of Headmaster Astoria, which would create complications later if they made it out alive.

Nevertheless, Astoria heard Aeliana's name and stared at her with shock.

"You're Solana's child? The Lord of Sunpeak Town that went—"

"Hurry up, Headmaster Astoria! I can't handle Elvira on my own!"

Ember's distant cry quickly snapped Astoria out of her shock and disbelief before she shook her head and shoved aside all of her distracting thoughts.

"Hold on a little longer, Marquis Ember! I'll be over shortly!" Astoria shouted into the distance before turning back to Vaan.

"Please! I can tell from the look in your eyes—That's the eyes of a strong person. You have the ability to make a difference! I'm ashamed to ask for your help when I still don't know your name. However, you signed up for this expedition, so please follow it through to the end."

"Your contribution will not go unrewarded!"

"Dammit, Headmaster Astoria! What are you doing over there?! I can't hold on anymore! Elvira's power is no joke! She is definitely a Mid-stage High Witch!" Ember cried as she defended herself from a barrage of black water lances.

"I'm coming!"

Shortly after throwing out those words, Astoria quickly left and returned to Ember's side, helping her shoulder some of the burdens of facing Elvira.

She didn't bother persuading Vaan further. She did not have the luxury of time to spare when Ember desperately needed her help.

The Fallen Witch was far stronger than they expected.

"What will you do, my Lord?" Aeliana softly asked while she was being carried on Vaan's back with her arms wrapped around his neck.

"I suppose we can stick around for a bit and ensure the expedition group isn't wiped out by the wolf-men and goblins. However, we'll immediately leave if the situation takes a turn for the worse," Vaan said after some thought.

He saw the hint of threat in Headmaster Astoria's eyes as she was leaving.

Although he wasn't afraid of trouble, it would still be troublesome if he earned the vengeful grudge of someone powerful like Headmaster Astoria.

Furthermore, as Astoria mentioned, he could make a difference.

That said, helping the expedition group win against wolf-men and goblins would only save a few lives, including Lord Helia's.

However, it wouldn't make much difference if the Fallen Witch could not be defeated.

"Why do you hide your abilities, my Lord? With your strength, you would be respected anywhere you go," Aeliana quietly asked, vaguely sensing Vaan's strength through their soul-link.

"That's a strange thing to ask, Aeliana. As a witch, you should understand how men are treated in the witch kingdoms," Vaan calmly replied.

"Superficial respect does not benefit me. Witches value strong men—but only if they can be used. Undoubtedly, rows of notable witches will line up to recruit me, including those supremacists. And if they can't have me, they will find ways to destroy me."

"After all, the nail that stands out gets hammered down. Although recent years have improved in the treatment of men, those supremacist witches from the capital are still a big headache. Currently, my foundation and backings are still lacking to deal with them."

"Now is not the right time to reveal all my cards," Vaan calmly stated.

As he spoke, he made his way toward the expedition group's battlefield with his Rank 2 Unicorn Horn Spear withdrawn from the Heaven-Swallowing Space.

"Focus on recollecting your spores and recover your strength. Your power might be needed later, Aeliana," Vaan instructed.

"I understand, my Lord," Aeliana nodded before expressing her guilt apologetically, "I am deeply sorry for weighing you down, my Lord."

"Don't mind it."

While everyone in the expedition was busy fending for themselves and trying to stay alive, Vaan dived into the battle while keeping Aeliana on his back.

Chapter 209: Joining the Battle

With the Rank 2 Unicorn Horn Spear in hand, Vaan quickly felled a few dozen goblins in a quick burst of stabs that formed afterimages.

<Your spear proficiency has increased>

The Rank 2 Unicorn Horn Spear did not seem impressive when he used it during the day. But inside the pocket realm, which was much darker without a speck of sunlight, the spear's special trait was revealed as its spearhead glowed with a soft white light.

Although it didn't have much effect on the entire goblin horde, the Rank 2 Unicorn Horn slightly suppressed the Rank 1 enhanced goblins in his vicinity.

It invoked their fear of white and light-attribute objects.

Nevertheless, the goblin's natural fear of white and light-attribute objects was common knowledge. It could be seen from the equipment of the Aura Grandmasters, multiple Aura Masters, and Senior Witches.

They had all worn some white clothing or used white steel weapons.

Even so, their equipment had little effect on the stronger Rank 2 enhanced goblins and above.

Evidently, the goblins' body transmutation with other creatures had helped them build resistance and overcome their natural fear of white light.

That said, Vaan quickly made himself known with his terrifying killing speed and the fact that he carried a person on his back.

Rank 2 enhanced goblins and below were just cannon fodders. The wolf-men and Rank 3 enhanced goblins posed the biggest threat to Lord Helia and the others.

"That person is... Van Helsing! I recognize him. He made quite the entrance in the competition for placements. To think that he was still alive."

"Truly a surprise. However, one extra person doesn't make much difference! We are lacking in both strength and numbers."

The Rank 3 Aura Grandmasters spoke while fending off the attacks of other Rank 3 enhanced hobgoblins and covering for the other members of the expedition group at the same time.

"What about that person on his back? She looks a little familiar.... Woah!" one of the Rank 3 Aura Grandmasters was distracted and nearly lost his life as the price.

"Focus on the battle! Now is not the time to be distracted!"

"You bet!"

Shortly after, the Rank 3 Aura Grandmasters no longer dared to divide their attention.

Meanwhile, Lord Helia had the greatest burden of dealing with multiple Peak B-rank hunters from the Assembly of Silent Night.

She was being suppressed under their barrage of attacks and could fall at any moment.

However, as a Peak-stage Senior Witch specializing in Water Magic, she was doing very well to last as long as she did against multiple opponents around her level of strength, especially when she was already at a disadvantage due to her hands.

Vaan quickly killed his way over to Helia's side.

Even with Aeliana on his back, he moved unhindered as if she was as light as a feather. He swung the Rank 2 Unicorn Horn Spear around and slew the weaker goblins before they could get close to him.

With a strong kick, he sent a big hobgoblin flying and knocked over dozens of smaller goblins, some with broken bones.

The unluckier goblins at the forefront died from the impact. Some at the back also got crushed to death under all the accumulated weight.

But as Vaan made his way to Helia, she also moved away from him. She was constantly on the move, chased by Silver Hawk and three other Peak B-rank hunters.

She fired water bullets at them, but Silver Hawk and the others quickly blocked them with their weapons.

Although Helia failed to kill her opponents, she succeeded in slowing them down and drawing her distance.

Even so, her mana dwindled by the moment.

The other Senior Witches weren't doing much better as they handled the rest of the wolf-men with their Specialized Magic.

"How much have you recovered, Aeliana? Have your spores been cleared from the area?" Vaan quietly checked on Aeliana's progress as he fought.

"Not yet, my Lord. The sporadic battle is blasting my spores everywhere, making it difficult for me to retrieve them. But, if you settle me somewhere high, I should be able to retrieve my spores and recover faster," Aeliana quietly replied.

"I see."

Vaan scanned the area before locking onto a nearby supporting pillar.

Shortly after, he killed his way towards the towering pillar located over two hundred yards away, stepping on several goblin heads with enough force to crush them in the process.

Upon reaching the towering support pillar, he scaled it like an agile monkey, easily reaching two hundred and forty feet high, before he carved out a spot to place Aeliana down.

While it looked like he was hacking away the rocks, he was actually using Earth Manipulation to create a spot for Aeliana to rest on the support pillar.

Direct impacts would only cause cracks to form on it.

Considering the constant battle below was intense and caused frequent tremors in the area, it would only make the cracks bigger and destabilize the support pillar.

It was hard to say how many would survive if the entire ceiling collapsed on everyone.

But, looking at it from another perspective, if he could control the collapse of the pocket realm's ceiling, he could easily wipe out the goblin horde and turn the tides of battle.

However, it was impossible to avoid friendly casualties completely, not to mention the persecution that would follow him after the end of the battle.

Humans were like that; they would look for something to blame, whether to vent their misfortune or seek to gain benefits from the dispute.

"Stay here and focus on your recovery."

"Yes, my Lord!"

Aeliana complied after he instructed her.

After leaving a few recovery potions and mana stones to aid her recovery, Vaan launched himself off the towering support pillar and dived back into the big battle below.

Vaan descended rapidly, but the goblins were too busy facing the others to notice him.

Just when it looked like he would crash into the ground and severely injure himself, he stabbed his spear into the back of a tall Rank 3 enhanced hobgoblin and relied on the spear shaft's flexibility to quickly break his fall.

Roar!

The hobgoblin painfully cried as Vaan used the rebound force to launch himself back into the air.

Chapter 210: Astoria's Carelessness

After reaching the highest point in the air that the rebound force could bring him, Vaan twisted his body and fired needles at multiple strong targets to ease the struggling Senior Witches and Aura Grandmasters.

His targets were all wolf-men.

Some saw his attack coming, and some didn't. But, regardless of whether his attacks struck them, he still attracted all of their hostilities.

"Arghh, bastard! I'll kill you!" a Peak B-rank hunter furiously roared after being struck in the neck, which briefly paralyzed him long enough to lose an arm to a Rank 3 Aura Grandmaster.

After finding an opportunity to kick the Rank 3 Aura Grandmaster away, the Peak B-rank hunter directed his hatred at Vaan and rushed towards him along with several other wolf-men.

"Careful! They are all close to Peak-level Rank 3 in strength!" one of the Rank 3 Grandmasters quickly warned while feeling grateful for Vaan's assistance.

Nevertheless, the Rank 3 Grandmasters and Senior Witches all felt like Vaan was asking for death by attracting so many powerful opponents towards himself.

They weren't exactly wrong.

Without relying on his magical abilities or undergoing Lycan Transformation, his physical abilities were only roughly around Low-level Rank 3.

On the other hand, they were all Peak-level Rank 3.

However, he had seen most of their abilities while they knew little about him. At the same time, the name Van Helsing was still relatively unknown among the people in the punitive expedition.

Thus, while they do not know what physique he possessed as a witch descendant, it was fine for the alias Van Helsing to have a special ability.

'Among the known special physiques, the Lightning Sparrow Physique is supreme for its speed talent.'

Kinetic Energy Manipulation!

Swoosh!

As Vaan increased the kinetic energy in his movements, his speed was raised to a whole new level.

Coupled with his High-rank movement skill, which included Earth Acceleration, he easily evaded the Peak B-rank hunters' attacks and escaped their encirclement.

"Fast!"

Several Peak B-rank hunters were immediately shocked by Vaan's burst speed.

However, it wasn't just the wolf-men pursuing him that were stunned. Even the other aura users and witches also got distracted by the exclamation and glanced over—only to be shocked by Vaan's speed as well.

"A speed-talent special physique! No, a speed-talent special physique and a high-rank movement skill!"

Many aura users quickly guessed with amazement as they ruled out other possibilities due to their limited knowledge.

"Don't waste this chance I gave you!" Vaan shouted in his veteran voice.

The Rank 3 Aura Grandmasters' eyes flickered before they quickly regrouped with the others, reorganizing their ranks to fight with better coordination.

As they tried to break out of the goblin horde's encirclement, the Peak B-rank hunters chasing Vaan realized they were being lured away from the others.

At the same time, there was no point in pursuing someone they could not catch.

"Dammit! Give up on this bastard! Don't give the others a chance to make a comeback!" shouted Lethal Dagger, one of the Peak B-rank hunters.

"Fuck! Just you wait, bastard! I'll catch you next time!" one of the Peak B-rank hunters at the forefront of the chase quickly cursed before turning around with the others.

However, the moment they gave their backs to Vaan, he immediately dashed toward them in the same instance.

Earth Manipulation!

Puchi!

A sneaky earthen spike stabbed through the sole of a Peak B-rank hunter's feet, prompting the person to look down at what hurt him immediately.

However, that temporary moment of distraction was all it took for Vaan to close the distance and cut off the person's head with his spear.

By the time the Peak B-rank hunter registered the pain in his neck, the world was already rotating in his eyes. His head flew off his body, following Vaan's spear slash.

"Arghh, sneaky bastard! He got Fleeting Wind! Be careful of his sneak attacks!" Lethal Dagger furiously roared, alerting the others.

The death of Fleeting Wind made them unsure of what to do.

If they went after the others, Vaan would attack them from behind. But if they went after him, he would continue running away.

Nevertheless, their hesitation only lasted a moment.

"I'll go after this bastard! The rest of you focus on the others!" Lethal Dagger ordered as he chased after Vaan.

At the same time, the Rank 3 Aura Grandmasters briefly witnessed what happened before one of them roared with laughter.

"Well done, Van Helsing! Kill those dog-men, hahaha!" the Rank 3 Aura Grandmaster's laughter resounded.

...

...

...

Meanwhile, Astoria and Ember continued to fight Fallen Witch Elvira together.

Everywhere they fought, destruction was left in their wake. Even the caged creatures in the fields were caught in the crossfire of their battle.

Fallen Witch Elvira was too strong for Ember alone. But with Astoria added to the picture, they worked well to exhaust Fallen Witch Elvira's mana.

"I can't believe a Mid-stage High Witch can be so much stronger... The Fallen Witch must have absorbed a huge Realm Fragment! Still, how did she reach Mid-stage High Witch with just that?"

"Kekeke, wouldn't you like to know? If you willingly become a Fallen Witch, I might tell you."

As Ember wondered out loud, Fallen Witch Elvira responded with a sinister chuckle.

Nevertheless, Ember shot another blast of scorching-hot flames in Fallen Witch Elvira's direction with a cold and serious look.

"And become hunted by the kingdom like you? No, thanks!" Ember replied coldly.

"Kekeke, you can only say that now because you still have a long life ahead of you. But the day your lifespan runs out, even you will do anything to prolong it," Fallen Witch Elvira snickered.

She casually dispelled Ember's flame magic with her black water spell and conjured a water shield to block Astoria's greatsword.

Boom!

Fallen Witch Elvira was forced to retreat a few steps even though Astoria's sword strike failed to break her water shield spell.

"Kekeke, as expected of the Battle Maiden. Your brute strength is truly something else. Of everyone here, only you pose the greatest threat to me," Fallen Witch Elvira mentioned without the slightest concern.

"I'll deal with you first!"

"Watch out, Headmaster Astoria!"

For a moment, Astoria was distracted when she overheard the name Van Helsing mentioned on the other distant battlefield, forcing her to suffer a hit from Fallen Witch Elvira.

Puchi!

A black water lance broke through her light barrier and penetrated her shoulder.