

## The Witch 221

### Chapter 221: Vaan's Lifespan

Half an hour later, Vaan ended their heated session in the bathtub after Aeliana achieved her thirtieth orgasm.

Her stamina was even more fearsome than Edna's.

If Vaan had not willfully ended their dual-practice session, he strongly felt she could easily last another hundred or two hundred rounds.

Edna was already abnormal, but Aeliana was even more so.

'Is this the ability of one who has endured unbearable torment for three years or the ability of a dual-attribute witch?' Vaan mused.

Aeliana wasn't just a dual-attribute witch; she was a dual-attribute witch in the two strongest healing elements.

Lasting two hundred rounds might even be an understatement.

Nevertheless, as they dressed in new sets of fresh clothes while the lingering concentration of mana in the guestroom slowly scattered, he checked the system log.

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[System Log]

Ding!

<You have acquired a lump of light-attribute refined mana>

<You have acquired a lump of wood-attribute refined mana>

<You have acquired a Peak-stage Senior Witch's primal essence>

<You have made progress in your ongoing objective mission>

<Calculating rewards>

<...>

...

<Objective Mission 1: Collect 5 Senior Witch-level primal essences>

<Reward: A random Senior Witch-level Specialized Magic>

<Progress: 2/5 (↑) Senior Witch-level primal essences>

...

Ding!

<The rewards have been calculated>

<Based on the sum of light-attribute and wood-attribute refined mana from a Peak-stage Senior Witch, a list of suitable rewards is available>

<Please select one of the following rewards>

<Option 1: Infuse the light-attribute and wood-attribute refined mana into your body and increase your affinity to light and wood by 1-5%, and restore all fleshly wounds and mild disabilities>

<Note: There's a slight chance to awaken a recovery-related talent or upgrade an existing one>

<Option 2: Feed the light-attribute and wood-attribute refined mana to the Heaven-Swallowing Space and increase its subspace>

<Note: There may be some unexpected gain or nothing at all>

<Option 3: Infuse the light-attribute and wood-attribute refined mana into your five viscera and increase your upper lifespan by one day>

<Note: Not recommended>

<Option 4: Input your own improvement plan>

<Note: Risk is negligible>

...

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'Increase my lifespan by one day? Isn't that a bit too stingy?' Vaan thought.

If the two strongest elements for nurturing life could only increase his lifespan by one day, the future for men did not look too bright.

After all, normal witch descendants and Aura Warriors could only live up to a hundred and fifty years, two hundred years for Aura Masters, and three hundred years for Aura Grandmasters.

As for Aura Lords and Aura Kings, no one knew yet.

Nevertheless, Vaan suddenly thought of something before he willed, 'What's my estimated lifespan?'

Ding!

<Estimated Lifespan: 1000 – 1200 years>

After Vaan saw such a high number, his jaw almost dropped in shock.

He did faintly guess the Immortal Lycan Bloodline had significantly increased his lifespan. However, the number was still greater than he anticipated.

That said, he didn't find it exaggerated in the least after he recovered from his initial shock and gave it some thought.

'The blood of a Divine-level being shouldn't be underestimated,' Vaan inwardly sighed with emotion.

He did not need to worry about his lifespan any time soon.

Nevertheless, the topic of Immortal Lycan Bloodline reminded him of his unanswered questions regarding his origins.

The timing of the Third Great Expedition... The Rank 5 Demon Wolf King Fuhengir... And the Immortal Lycan Bloodline that belonged to Balmodon the Undying.

There was a high chance that his birth parents were people with some status if they were part of the Third Great Expedition.

Furthermore, they must have made it back alive from the expedition for the Etherstone with the system to be found in his possession when he reincarnated.

However, he was already an orphan for years, according to other people from the slums.

In other words, his birth parents had returned from the Third Great Expedition and had stayed somewhere in Blackmoon City for a period of time. But then something happened that caused him to become an orphan.

Connecting the dots, Vaan was led to believe the system was something Balmodon the Undying had gifted to Fuhengir.

Although Vaan didn't know what else the Rank 5 Demon Wolf King Fuhengir had in its possession, he felt like the Etherstone was its most valuable treasure.

Heck, it might have even been a tool used to help Fuhengir ascend to a higher rank.

'My only clue to finding my origin is that my birth parents belonged to a household specializing in the spatial attribute,' Vaan recalled.

Unfortunately, the spatial attribute wasn't all that rare.

Even so, it wasn't common either.

'Well, it's better than nothing,' Vaan thought.

Ding!

<You have selected the first option>

<Your body has been infused with light-attribute and wood-attribute mana>

<Your affinity to the light element has increased by 5%>

<Your affinity to the wood element has increased by 5%>

=====

«Elemental Affinity»

[Earth: 51%]

[Wind: 5%]

[Lightning: 10%]

[Light: 0 → 5%]

[Wood: 0 → 5%]

=====

<Your special ability, Regeneration, has been upgraded>

<Regeneration (High-rank) → Regeneration (Peak-rank)>

...

After Vaan and Aeliana finished dressing in new black outfits, they left the guestroom together—only to find Astoria waiting nearby in a plain blue dress with her hair down.

"You're out," Astoria greeted, quickly taking notice of Vaan and Aeliana.

"Sorry to keep you waiting, Headmaster Astoria," Vaan politely apologized before he turned to Aeliana and said, "You can leave now. Also, try not to stand out too much."

"Yes, my Lord," Aeliana obediently complied.

Nevertheless, as she walked past Astoria, she sashayed her hips and flashed a cheeky smile while she showcased her glow.

Astoria furrowed her brows at Aeliana's parting back before her gaze returned to Vaan.

"Did Teacher Raphna have fun playing in the water?" Astoria casually asked, seemingly unaffected by Aeliana's previous taunt.

However, Vaan sensed a little sourness in her tone.

He understood she knew about his dual-practice session with Aeliana and was even feeling a little jealous about it.

Nevertheless, he also noticed her faint glow and smell that had been overwhelmed by the scent of cherry blossom.

"I did," Vaan openly admitted with a nod before he glanced at her with a smile. "Did Headmaster Astoria also enjoy playing in the water by yourself?"

Astoria's cheeks turned a shade redder after the question was raised.

Chapter 222: Haste Only Makes Waste

After being called out by Vaan, Astoria was both embarrassed and angry at the same time. Unlike him, she had been quite discreet with her masturbation. And yet, she was still found out.

Evidently, he had quite the sharp sense.

However, it wasn't something he should say even if he found out; he had to avoid shaming witches. Otherwise, it would land him in hot water one day—if done to the wrong witch.

'There's no way that Teacher Raphna doesn't know this... He's teasing me because he knows he can get away with it,' Astoria thought.

Shortly after, she furrowed her brows and coolly said with a bit of admonishment, "Please respect my privacy and refrain from making personal remarks, Teacher Raphna."

"Oh?" Vaan's eyes flickered thoughtfully despite realizing his teasing had backfired. He replied shortly after, "I see... You're not very fond of this kind of talk. I'll keep that in mind in the future, Headmaster Astoria."

Considering the length Astoria went to protect him, even at the risk of costing her own life, he was confident that she was very fond of him.

However, Astoria herself doesn't seem to realize her own feelings for him—that, or she had yet to confirm them. Thus, she was still keeping him at arm's length.

He also had to consider that she was a reserved woman.

On top of that, Astoria had lived over three hundred years and remained single and pure, untouched by any man. Therefore, there must be a reason why she was still single despite having lived for over three hundred years.

'It seems normal flirting won't work on Astoria, so I have to change my tactic. Haste will only make waste,' Vaan mused.

"Let us go and see Lord Helia together. She should be waiting for us."

"Alright."

After receiving Astoria's agreement, they went to find Helia together—only to be redirected to the Great Hall by one of the maidservants.

Inside the Great Hall, Helia waited for them by the long table with dinner already prepared and arranged on it.

"Lord Aeliana isn't coming?" Helia asked after she saw Vaan and Astoria.

"Lord Aeliana left for Sunpeak Town to reunite with her mother. Unfortunately, she won't be back for another three days," Vaan informed her.

Helia immediately revealed her disappointment as she uttered, "I see... That is indeed unfortunate..."

Vaan could guess what she was thinking; she wanted Aeliana to treat her hands.

However, it was unlikely for Aeliana to agree to Helia's request of her own accord, not when she has a grudge against the whole Ashenborn Household and not just Fallen Witch Elvira.



At the same time, Helia's eyes subtly flickered as she faintly guessed why Vaan sent Aeliana away at this particular time.

Nevertheless, she eventually shook her head and gestured to the long dining table in front of her.

"Please take a seat and join me for dinner, Headmaster Astoria and Sir Vaan. There are quite a few things I would like to discuss with the both of you."

"Likewise, Lord Helia."

Shortly after Vaan and Astoria took their seats opposite of each other and adjacent to Helia, he quickly cut straight to the chase.

"What did you write in your report, Lord Helia?" Vaan inquired, knowing she had already written her report and sent it on its way to the ruler in Blackthorn City.

"Just a general report on the situation in the Red Goblin Mountains and the number of survivors from the punitive expedition," Helia calmly replied.

"I didn't mention anything about you, Sir Vaan, so you don't have to worry about that. I'm not so foolish that I would risk exposing your existence to the den of witch supremacists over there," she assured him shortly after.

"I would also be inconvenienced by it," she added.

After all, Vaan was the author of the Book of Solomon Raphna, not to mention Aeliana called him Lord. Falling out with Vaan didn't benefit her in any way.

On the other hand, there was much to gain from maintaining her good relationship with him. He was also her best chance at getting Aeliana to treat her hand.

"What do you plan to do from now, Sir Vaan?" Helia inquired.

Vaan glanced at Astoria before he openly replied to her, "I will settle all my unfinished business in Redpine City in the next three days. Afterward, I will head to the Thousand Fog Mountains to look for Wise Scholar Eniwse with Headmaster Astoria."

Thousand Fog Mountains!

After she heard Vaan talk about going to such a dangerous place, she wanted to persuade him against going there.

However, she refrained from doing so when she saw his firm look. He had already made his decision.

"Then, about Lord Aeliana... Is it possible for you—"

"I will put in a good word for you before we leave, Lord Helia. However, it's ultimately up to Aeliana whether she decides to treat you or not—not to mention, there's no guarantee that she can treat you."

"What's wrong with Lord Helia?" Astoria asked, glancing at Vaan, to which he reacted by turning to Helia.

Shortly after, Helia revealed her hands and explained the issue to Astoria, allowing her to get a general understanding of her situation.

"I see... To think the Curse of the Purple Umbala could advance to such a stage... That's rather tricky," Astoria uttered with surprise, feeling some pity for Helia.

However, some questions also rose in her mind.

"If Lord Helia let me borrow Lady Hester for my trip to Thousand Fog Mountains, I'll do everything I can to convince Lord Aeliana to treat your hands."

"You want Hester?" Helia was slightly surprised by Vaan's condition before she wondered, "Can you tell me why you specifically asked for her?"

"Well, let's just say I'm quite fond of Lady Hester after our last dual practice. Our bodies are rather compatible," Vaan replied with a slight smile.

"I see..." Helia thoughtfully uttered before she said, "I will inform her, but it will still be up to her to decide whether she will go with you, Sir Vaan. After all, the Thousand Fog Mountains is quite dangerous."

"That's fine with me," Vaan calmly acknowledged.

Even if Hester didn't want to follow him to Thousand Fog Mountains, he still had three days to change her mind...in bed.

Chapter 223: New Business Proposition

"By the way, Headmaster Astoria, what had become of my research notes?" Vaan changed the topic as he glanced at Astoria across the dining table.

"About that..."

Astoria suddenly felt awkward regarding what she should say.

After all, Vaan was assumed dead when she arbitrarily turned his notes into a book to spread his fame and nurture the future generations of witches.

After a brief pause of hesitation, Astoria explained everything to Vaan honestly. In any case, what has been done cannot be undone.

"I see... You turned those notes into a book. And even now, both Blackmoon and Redpine Academies are likely making more copies as we speak," Vaan muttered as he rubbed his chin with a thoughtful look.

"On top of that, Headmaster Astoria also took a copy to Her Majesty, and now I am being recommended for the Venerable Sage title... Interesting."

If it were before the expedition to the Red Goblin Mountains, such news would have troubled his mind.

But now, he wasn't as bothered by the discovery.

That said, it was still a bit problematic.

"Headmaster Astoria had good intentions, but alas, she has caused problems for you, Sir Vaan. It's even more important that your life status isn't made known," Helia stated.

"Right," Vaan nodded.

If he were dead, the trouble wouldn't find him.

However, if everyone learned that the author behind the Book of Solomon Raphna was still alive, witches would come flocking to recruit him, including the most troublesome group of witches from the capital—the witch supremacists.

"I'm sorry, Teacher Raphna. I have inconvenienced you," Astoria apologized with a guilty look.

"There's no need for apologies, Headmaster Astoria. As far as I am concerned, Vaan Raphna is still dead to the rest of the world," Vaan mentioned.

"Thus, if I continue with my alias Vahn Cadieux, there shouldn't be a problem. It's not like I plan to visit Blackmoon City any time soon."

"Actually, there is a teeny weeny bit of a problem," Astoria said wryly with a pinching gesture.  
"We've made portraits of you back in the academy."

"So, once your fame spreads through the Book of Solomon Raphna, witches may visit Blackmoon Academy to learn more about how you lived to acquire such knowledge."

"When that happens, they will come to learn about your appearance as well," Astoria said with a wry smile.

"I even have portraits now?" Vaan smiled back at her ruefully.

"Actually...I also thought about erecting a statue of you in the academy, but it would have caused serious issues," Astoria openly admitted, albeit with some awkwardness.

"A statue..." Vaan rubbed his scalp, feeling at a loss for words.

He didn't expect to reach such a level of worship with just the research notes. After all, it was only a small part of his knowledge.

"It's unheard of for a man to receive the Venerable Sage title or any academic title for that matter. There's no doubt that many witch supremacists would oppose the decision," Vaan continued.

"However, Her Majesty should be able to make it happen with her influence and power. But if everyone found out I am still alive, there's also a small chance that the stronger opposition will make Her Majesty revoke her decision."

"The witch supremacists wouldn't allow a living man to receive the Venerable Sage title," Vaan stated.

After all, Venerable Sages were treated on the same level of respect as High Witches and Marquis-rank noble witches.

That said, Vaan didn't care about the title.

Possessing the Venerable Sage title cannot be compared to having the personal backing of a High Witch.

The influence and authority of a Venerable Sage are useful, but only if the witches play by the books.

Otherwise, it is not as reliable as the personal backing and protection of Headmaster Astoria.

Of course, the most reliable would still be his own true strength.

"I should return to Blackmoon Academy to get rid of the portraits," Astoria decided.

However, Vaan shook his head and said, "There's no need for that, Headmaster Astoria. Even if you get rid of existing portraits, new ones can still be made at the requests of the visiting witches."

"I just need to lay low for a period of time while I settle my matters in Redpine City," Vaan added.

There was a chance that more people would learn about his appearance, but it didn't mean he would have to change his plan.

He still needed to prepare multiple things for his trip to the Thousand Fog Mountains over the next three days.

He glanced at Helia and asked, "I wonder if Lord Helia is willing to provide my accommodation for the next three days?"

"You can use the guestrooms for as long as you like, Sir Vaan," Helia said generously.

"Great," Vaan clapped his hand before he said, "In that case, may I intrigue you with a new business proposition?"

"Oh?" Helia's eyes brightened as she smiled and asked with interest, "What kind of business proposition do you have for me, Sir Vaan?"

"Right now, we have the Pore Stimulation Potion to target the low-end market. However, the high-end market is where the big money is made," Vaan calmly mentioned.

"Sir Vaan intends to...?" Helia's heart trembled with excitement as she had a faint guess of his intention.

"I have a new recipe for you to manufacture and dominate the high-end potion market," Vaan stated with a confident smile.

"Is it really possible for a single potion to dominate the high-end market?" Helia wondered.

While Senior Witches were considered the elites of the kingdom, True Witches made up most of the witch population.

That said, True Witches were also not as wealthy as Senior Witches unless they had a good background.

To dominate the high-end market, they required a potion that could be sold to both True Witches and Senior Witches at a high price.

It would be even better if it could also be sold to High Witches.

"What do you think is the most important aspect to a witch when considering to advance to a higher rank, Lord Helia?" Vaan casually quizzed.

Chapter 224: Two New Potion Recipes

"Mana... There is always a shortage of mana for witches. Without enough mana, witches can't advance nor use large spells that may potentially save their lives," Helia answered.

Without enough mana, witches would be forced to burn their life force, which everyone wouldn't want to do unless it was absolutely necessary.

However, Vaan shook his head.

"Mana is important, but it's not the most important to the witches in Redpine City," Vaan calmly stated.

"Most of them do not leave the city to hunt for resource in the wild, so the dangerous situations they encounter outside does not exist for them. They wouldn't need to fight for their lives in the city. If we are looking at potions that increase mana capacity or mana recovery, there would only be a portion of outgoing witches that actually need it. Mana itself isn't as important to city witches."

"After all, this world doesn't lack mana. As long as this world is still connected to Gehenna, mana will continue to pour into this world ceaselessly," Vaan stated.

"Right..." Helia completely agreed with Vaan. She had only looked at the problem and not the source.

"Mana is important, but what witches truly care about is their advancement rate. With enough mana, talented witches can grow at a much quicker rate..."

"However, innate talent alone can only carry a witch so far. It can help them reach the finish line first. Still, there's no point if they can't cross it," Helia mentioned as she thought about the large population of witches stuck at Peak-stage True Witch and the fewer that stagnated at Peak-stage Senior Witch like herself.

"In other words, the most important aspect to a witch is the ability to make the breakthrough to the next rank."

"Witches stumped by their bottlenecks are more likely to throw everything they have for a chance to advance... However, I don't believe a potion that could make witches achieve breakthroughs exists," Helia mentioned with furrowed brows before she suddenly thought of something. "No, wait.

Although a potion that could make a direct breakthrough doesn't exist, there are quite a few potions that can increase the chance of success."

"Bingo," Vaan nodded before he said, "Which brings us back to the main question – What is the most important aspect to a witch when it comes to making the breakthrough?"

"Willpower is the answer," Astoria suddenly broke her silence with a confident answer.

"Willpower?" Helia furrowed her brows with deep thoughts as she wondered, "Am I stuck at Peak-stage Senior Witch because I lack willpower?"

"But how is that possible for me?" Helia rejected the possibility.

"I've lived for more than three hundred years. I've also fought in the desperate Holy War and survived like everyone else that did. How can I possibly be lacking willpower?"

"I don't want to discredit your contribution, Lord Helia. However, having all those experiences doesn't necessarily guarantee your willpower is on the same level as mine and other High Witches," Headmaster Astoria broke the news to her.

They weren't on the same level.



"Being in desperate situations isn't enough. For instance, a person who burns their life force to escape a desperate situation will have a weaker mind than someone who could get out of the very same situation without relying on burning their life force. If you want to increase your willpower quickly, you have to face hopeless situations head-on and not give into despair.

You have to use every fiber of your being to overcome them without relying on easy solutions."

"Even when it seems like you can't go on, you have to convince yourself to keep going. Overcoming your limits is the quickest way to increase your willpower," Astoria added.

If she had to be honest, Aura Users most likely have more willpower than witches of the same rank.

"We might have diverged from the main topic, but Headmaster Astoria is right. Willpower is the most important aspect when it comes to advancing the rank," Vaan calmly stated.

"Thus, I will introduce two new potion recipes; one that temporarily increases mental strength and the other boosts mental energy."

Considering his Specialized Magic is powered by mental energy, having more of these types of potions on the market was beneficial to him.

"And these two potions will increase the chance of a successful breakthrough for witches? Won't taking both of them at once basically guarantee success then?" Helia guessed.

However, Astoria replied to her before Vaan could, "Unlikely. There shouldn't be any guaranteed success. After all, willpower isn't easy to measure."

"For some witches, the little push might just be what they need to form their new magic circle. For others, they might need an even bigger push to succeed."

"Thus, unless the potion rank is high enough, I doubt a potion that can guarantee breakthroughs will exist," Astoria concluded before glancing at Vaan. "Isn't that right, Teacher Raphna?"

"Exactly," Vaan confirmed with a nod.

Creating a new magic circle around the heart was like adding a new rubber band to a watermelon filled with stretched rubber bands. The watermelon would explode if it could not withstand the burden of the new rubber band.

At the same time, there's an opposing force that repels the addition of the magic circle like two magnets that do not attract. A lot of willpower was required to bring the two together.

However, that is also where the greatest danger in witch cultivation lies.

If the witch's willpower fell short after bringing the magic circles so close to each other, the repelling force would become so great that it would collapse all the existing magic circles upon release.

Nevertheless, after asking for a pen and paper, Vaan quickly wrote down the two recipes and concoction instructions before handing them back to Helia.

"Tenacious Soul Potion...and Furious Soul Potion?" Helia read the names before saying, "Judging by these ingredients and instructions, they will likely turn out to be Rank 2 or even Rank 3 potions. A normal Potioneering Master won't be able to make this..."

"More importantly, some of these ingredients are Gehenna plants that are hard to get," Helia added with knitted brows.

"Is it?" Vaan smiled unconcernedly and said, "As a recalled, there were quite a few buried under the Red Goblin Mountains."

"Fortunately, I've also collected a few before the collapse."

Chapter 225: Teaching Astoria

Shortly after claiming he had Gehenna plants, Vaan took out several stalks of purple grass from his Heaven-Swallowing Space.

However, he activated some aura on a new black ring on his finger and made it look like he was withdrawing the Gehenna plants from the interspatial ring.

The interspatial ring was one of several interspatial storage-type magic tools he had acquired from the slain wolf-men.

"This should be enough Weeping Soul Grass for several test runs. However, we'll need the rest of the Weeping Soul Grass buried deep under the Red Goblin Mountains if we want to save some expense. Otherwise, we can only import them from the north," Vaan mentioned.

The several stalks of Weeping Soul Grass were placed on a maidservant's tray before the maidservant brought it over to Helia.

"These stalks of Weeping Soul Grass are surprisingly still in good conditions," Helia inspected the goods with astonishment.

Shortly after, she quickly took out a special ice box from her Magic Domain and stored the Gehenna plants inside.

"However, whatever Gehenna plants we find under the Red Goblin Mountains, they won't be in the same condition as these. Would they still be usable?" Helia wondered with a contemplating look.

"As written on the potion recipe, both the Tenacious Soul Potion and Furious Soul Potion requires the Weeping Soul Grass in the form of dried powder, Lord Helia. We'll be lucky if we can find them whole, but even fragments of them wouldn't be a problem," Vaan casually mentioned.

Weeping Soul Grass is usually desolate like dry leaves. After a bit of refining, their dried powder form can easily dissolve in water.

It wasn't a coincidence that he just happened to have the core ingredient for making the Tenacious Soul Potion and Furious Soul Potion.

Many Gehenna plants were either toxic or had soul-related properties. And among the Gehenna plants in his possession, he had both.

Nevertheless, there was no need to reveal everything in front of Helia and Astoria. They were for his personal use and may even prove their usefulness in the Thousand Fog Mountains.

"That said, the pocket realm was destroyed, and the Gehenna plants were crushed. They won't stay in usable conditions forever. It would be best if you could mobilize a workforce to retrieve them as soon as possible, Lord Helia."

"On the off chance that some people still survived the collapse and are stuck down there, they could be saved by the excavation work," Vaan added.

"You're right, Sir Vaan. These Gehenna plants are very delicate and susceptible to change in the human world. I will do exactly that," Helia acknowledged with a nod.

"After so many witches and aura users died in the Red Goblin Mountains, people may be reluctant to sign up for an excavation job there," Astoria kindly reminded.

"That could indeed be a problem, but it won't be a big one, Headmaster Astoria," Helia replied, unconcerned by the matter Astoria raised. "Fallen Witch Elvira had fled, and all monsters are more likely to be dead. Thus, if the pay is good, people will still be willing to take up the job. This is the power of money."

"I see," Astoria noted.

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Sometime later, Vaan and Astoria finished dining with Helia before he asked Astoria to accompany him to Redpine Academy.

Naturally, Astoria agreed without a second thought.

But as they took their time strolling towards Redpine Academy together, she suddenly became curious about Vaan's reason for asking her to tag along.

Of course, she would have asked to follow him regardless. She believed that simply by being around him, she would learn something new.

After all, Vaan was a walking grand library of profound knowledge.

"Why did you ask me to come along, Teacher Raphna?" Astoria raised her question.

"You looked like you wanted to tag along, so I thought it was a gentlemanly thing for me to ask you first, Headmaster Astoria," Vaan casually replied.

However, Astoria didn't believe his excuse.

"Is that the only reason? Probably not, right? C'mon. What's the real reason, Teacher Raphna?" Astoria insisted on hearing the truth.

In response, Vaan slightly shook his head with a smile and said, "You'll find out when we arrive."

"More importantly, don't you have other questions to ask me, Headmaster Astoria? Considering a High Witch acknowledges me as her teacher, it won't do if I don't at least dispel some of her doubts."

"You can ask me anything."

After Vaan spoke frankly, Astoria's eyes brightened with excitement and anticipation. She had been looking forward to such a talk for a while.

"Since Teacher Raphna offered, I won't hold back," Astoria pleasantly smiled.

"It might be strange to ask you about cultivation for High Witches, but I feel like you are the best person to seek answers. Many High Witches have attempted to advance to the middle stage and paid the ultimate price for their failures."

"Do you know why Early-stage High Witches failed to advance to the middle stages and how to solve it, Teacher Raphna?"

"Oof, straight to the billion mana stone question, huh? Your appetite is not small, Headmaster Astoria," Vaan casually smiled after listening to Astoria.

Nevertheless, he didn't answer right away. Instead, he responded to her question with another question, "What are the known causes of death after the High Witches failed their advancement? What methods did they use?"

"The records stated that they all died by the eruption of mana caused by the collapse of their mana circles. They were mainly divided into two main methods: refining their third magic circle and forming their fourth magic circle," Astoria answered.

"There should be more than just these two methods attempted by High Witches in the past, but we don't have any official records of them. The High Witches either didn't record a journal of their attempts, or they were simply destroyed in the mana eruptions."

"I see," Vaan uttered thoughtfully.

"No doubt, it's another problem with insufficient mental strength and energy. However, the methods are also inefficient. Just because they worked for True Witches and Senior Witches doesn't mean they would also work for High Witches."

"Why didn't the High Witches try forming their magic circle inside their Magic Domain? It would save them so much effort," Vaan wondered aloud.

However, Astoria's eyes immediately lit up.

"As expected of Teacher Raphna, I've also thought about this method. However, this method also has its cons," Astoria mentioned.

Chapter 226: Teaching Astoria (2)

"Cons, huh? You're talking about the difficulty in controlling mana when it's inside the Magic Domain?"

"Yes, Teacher Raphna."

"That's indeed a problem, but it is only a problem of difficulty, like trying to move a new limb you never had before. When has raising the rank to become stronger ever been easy? Furthermore, compared to trying to form the new magic circle around the heart under the attractive and repulsive force of three other magic circles, it's relatively easier, no?"

It wasn't just any three magic circles either; they were three magic circles that had already been linked.

The power generated from their circulations of mana is exponentially stronger and faster than three separate magic circles.

Vaan had read multiple articles about the problems faced by witches, whether they were True Witches, Senior Witches, or even High Witches.

Each witch academy also had a bulletin board where witches commonly shared their problems and hoped for answers from more knowledgeable people.

Thus, he was pretty familiar with how the magic circles worked for witches.

"If you compare those two, I suppose forming a magic circle inside the Magic Domain is indeed easier than forming the fourth magic circle around the heart," Astoria acknowledged with a nod before adding, "However, there is also the problem of linking the fourth magic circle to the heart."

"If the magic circle is completely formed inside the Magic Domain, we can't link it to the other three magic circles around the heart without the mana veins getting in the way. So, even if the completed fourth magic circle is easier to ignore the repulsive force of the triple magic circles, there's no point in forming the fourth magic circle when it can't be linked due to obstruction."

"Furthermore, if we try to force the fourth magic circle through the major mana veins, we will run the risk of damaging the mana veins and losing our Specialized Magic—if not all of our magic," Astoria raised another issue shortly after.

"That is indeed an issue if you don't have perfect mana affinity and control," Vaan calmly admitted before he suggested, "But you can also use Spatial Magic to move the fourth magic circle into place directly."

"That said, it can't be done without both perfect control of Spatial Magic and high mental strength as well, since they are needed to hold the fourth magic circle in place."

"After all, you can't properly gauge the repulsive force of the triple magic circles acting on the fourth magic circle if it's been moved into place directly. The fourth magic circle could be strongly

flung away instantly and result in the same failure; death by mana eruption of the magic circles," Vaan stated.

"Then what can I do to advance my power, Teacher Raphna?" Astoria genuinely sought him for answers.

"Strictly speaking, there's no way to avoid the risks of the fourth magic circle linking; it's a risk everyone has to take in their pursuit of greater power," Vaan stated.

"You can only reduce the risk by mastering control and increasing your willpower. That said, this only applies if you continue to follow the basic magic cultivation method."

"It's not like adding mana rings to the heart is the only way to increase your magic power, right?" Vaan casually mentioned to Astoria with a smile before he added, "There are more ideal methods out there for you to try. You don't have to be fixated on a single path."

"If we don't innovate, we can't surpass ourselves, nor the past..." Astoria muttered thoughtfully before turning back to Vaan. "In that case, do you have an ideal cultivation method in mind, Teacher Raphna?"

"If I do have one in mind, would you be willing to try it, Headmaster Astoria?" Vaan gave her a serious look, making her feel as if it involved a big sacrifice.

"Do I have to abolish magic circles and start over?" Astoria furrowed her brows with concern.

Vaan cracked a smile and chuckled, "Haha, no, you don't. I was just trying to scare you."

"Is it amusing to tease me, Teacher Raphna?" Astoria coolly asked, giving him a side glance.

"Definitely," Vaan boldly admitted before he continued to reply, "Anyway, the standard cultivation method is only the foundation."

"If you want to progress further, you can consider using your Magic Domain as the new core of your magic. If you form new magic circles and link them there, they won't be obstructed by the heart and mana veins."



"Furthermore, linked magic circles around the heart could only circulate in a single direction. Whereas, inside the Magic Domain, they could freely revolve and circulate, which, in turn, maybe generate more magic power than the heart," Vaan mentioned.

However, Astoria frowned when she heard about his suggestion.

"Would it work?" Astoria doubted.

"There's no catalyst to keep the magic circles from stably revolving in the same spot like the heart."

"Thus, even if triple-linked magic circles in the Magic Domain generate more magic power than the heart, there's no point if they fall apart," Astoria thought.

"That's why for this method, you have to create a new catalyst in the Magic Domain for your magic circles," Vaan calmly explained with a slight smile before he asked, "Have you ever tried compressing mana to create a mana core, Headmaster Astoria?"

"Creating a mana core?" Astoria paused with a contemplating look before she replied, "I have, but is there something special about it?"

"Furthermore, trying to compress mana into a mana core in the Magic Domain... The difficulty would be even greater than forming the magic circles there."

"Well, I didn't say it would be easy," Vaan smiled wryly and said, "For this, you need to perfect your mana control in the Magic Domain."

"As for whether there's anything special about it, I would say none besides acting as a catalyst and additional mana bank."

"I haven't exactly tested it or have anyone to trial run it for me, you know? So, you will be my first test subject if you decide to try this method," Vaan stated.

Shortly after, Astoria pondered the matter carefully in silence.

"Of course, there's another possible solution to reaching Mid-stage High Witch through the standard method," Vaan suddenly added.

"However, I lack data. So, I can't be sure of its success chance unless I visit Gehenna."

"Why Gehenna?" Astoria glanced at him more attentively.

#### Chapter 227: Realm Differences

Shortly after Astoria asked him, Vaan glanced back at her without answering her question immediately.

"Have you ever been to Gehenna, Headmaster Astoria?" Vaan asked.

"Of course," Astoria nodded.

"I was there when we slaughtered the demons and pushed them back to Gehenna. I was also there when Her Majesty led the Great Expeditions to raid a number of demon strongholds in Gehenna."

"Why do you ask, Teacher Raphna?" Astoria asked shortly after.

"Did Gehenna give you any special impression of it when you were there? Anything you found strange or different about Gehenna compared to the human world?" Vaan casually inquired.

Astoria furrowed her brows.

She wasn't sure where Vaan was getting at with his questions in regards to the solution to advance to Mid-stage High Witch, but she did her best to answer.

"Naturally, there were many strange things in Gehenna, Teacher Raphna. Everything in that realm is fundamentally different compared to this world. Their denizen, environment, sky, and even laws are different."

"Did you feel empowered when you were in Gehenna, Headmaster Astoria?" Vaan continued to inquire.

"No, not really," Astoria shook her head.

"Our equipment, on the other hand, did feel stronger. Unfortunately, it didn't give us as much of an advantage as we had hoped. After all, the demons themselves were also stronger—much stronger by an entire rank at least."

"A normal Rank 2 Two-Horned Demon in the human world would be at least Low-level Rank 3 in Gehenna," Astoria stated.

After listening to that, Vaan became more certain of his suspicion.

"Considering all these factors, I think everyone would assume Gehenna is a..."

"Lower realm, right?" Vaan mentioned before Astoria could finish speaking.

Nevertheless, she quickly nodded in agreement, "That's right! A lower realm. But does that even make sense?"

"How can a realm with beings comparable to gods be lower than a realm without any?" Astoria wondered before she added, "Our world didn't have any mana until we learned the existence of Gehenna..."

"Hold on, is it possibly easier for witches to advance their rank in Gehenna than in our world? Is that why Teacher Raphna brought up Gehenna?" Astoria guessed after a sudden realization.

"As expected of Headmaster Astoria, you catch on quickly. That's right—or at the very least, that is what I suspect," Vaan nodded.

"My best bet is that Gehenna isn't just a lower realm but also on a different plane of existence. Because this world is much more stable, demons from Gehenna are suppressed like how we would feel if we were to enter a place with higher gravity. On the other hand, nothing happens to us when we go to Gehenna."

"That said, no one has ever tried to advance their magic in Gehenna?" Vaan asked shortly after.

"That's an interesting question, Teacher Raphna," Astoria wryly smiled and said, "Gehenna is thriving with demons. How can anyone have the luxury to cultivate there?"

"We've tried building outposts in Gehenna in the past, but they were easily overrun by demons when we least expected them," Astoria mentioned.

"I see..." Vaan rubbed his chin thoughtfully before he said, "So, there will be some risk involved, regardless of the method you choose to advance to Mid-stage High Witch."

"Which will you pick, Headmaster Astoria?" Vaan asked.

Astoria contemplated for a while before she made her choice, "I will find a chance to visit Gehenna and attempt to form the fourth magic circle around my heart."

"Even though we aren't sure whether it will be easier to cultivate in Gehenna yet?" Vaan raised an eyebrow.

"If it's coming from Teacher Raphna, it's likely to be true," Astoria calmly smiled.

"Of course, I will see if I can bring a few low-talented witches with me and check whether they can break through their bottlenecks first before I consider making my attempt."

"That said, this is something later in the future. For now, I still have to accompany you to the Thousand Fog Mountains and make sure you find Wise Scholar Eniwse safely, Teacher Raphna," Astoria mentioned.

"That's true," Vaan calmly nodded before he glanced at the academy entrance ahead and said, "Speaking of which, it looks like we've arrived."

As they strolled through the academy grounds, students made way for them—or rather, they made way for Astoria.

While Vaan had become popular recently, his fame and authority couldn't compare to a public figure like Astoria.

Nevertheless, they made a quick stop at the wasteyard for a few minutes before they went to the fifth tower's top floor.

"Lady Sacha, Headmaster Astoria and I have come to see you," Vaan announced their visit.

In the next moment, they heard several dropped items and hurried movements before the door was opened from the inside.

"Vahn! I've been looking forward to seeing you again!" Sacha welcomed him enthusiastically before she quickly turned to Astoria awkwardly, realizing she should have greeted her first. "To what I do owe the pleasure of receiving your visit, Headmaster Astoria?"

"To be honest, I don't know myself. I am just following Sir Vahn," Astoria replied with a calm yet wry smile as they entered the workshop.

After Sacha heard that, she turned her gaze back to Vaan with a questioning yet exciting look.

"I have a favor to ask of you, Lady Sacha. I was hoping you could help me create a new set of armor for Headmaster," Vaan requested before he added, "You see, her Rank 3 armor was broken recently, so..."

"You want to make a set of Rank 4 armor for her? Of course, I'll be willing to help," Sacha replied with excitement before her eyes suddenly dimmed the next moment.

"However, we won't have enough materials for a whole set of Rank 4 armor. I've already used up all the salvageable mineral to create these two Rank 4 purple metal ingots..." Sacha showed her work in Vaan's absence.

After Vaan glanced at the two purple ingots, he casually said, "That's alright. We'll just use different mineral compositions to create other types of Rank 4 metal."

Sacha's eyes quickly lit up with anticipation again.

At the same, Astoria was both stunned and pleasantly surprised by what she heard.

Ignoring whether Rank 4 metal could be casually made, she was slightly touched by Vaan's intention.

#### Chapter 228: Creating Rank 4 Black Metal

"So this is why you invited me along, Sir Vahn. I understand your good intentions, but you don't need to worry about my equipment," Astoria politely turned down Vaan's good intention and said, "I will find a replacement myself."

"Will the replacement be Rank 4 anti-magic quality or higher, Headmaster Astoria?" Vaan casually glanced at her.

His question quickly put her at a loss for words.

"Rank 4 equipment isn't easy to come by, Sir Vahn," Astoria wryly smiled and said, "And they are definitely not cheap. Furthermore, these two purple ingots are not..."

Astoria suddenly paused on the two Rank 4 purple metal ingots.

She did not remember such pure purple metal among the existing types of Rank 4 metal or alloys.

"Why do we need to consider costs when we are making the Rank 4 metal ourselves? Rank 3 equipment is too lacking," Vaan smiled before he asked Sacha, "Do you have some minerals to spare, Lady Sacha? I've brought some from the wasteyard, but it won't be enough for a full armor set."

"I do have a collection of minerals in my storage space, but I don't know if the quality is high enough to be part of the Rank 4 you are making, Vahn," Sacha replied.

"I will determine if they can be used or not. But generally, if there's enough variety of materials, then the rank quality will not matter too much," Vaan spoke confidently.

At the same time, Astoria became certain that Sacha was able to make the two Rank 4 purple metal ingots due to Vaan.

It also explained why Wise Scholar Sacha was excited to see Vaan.

A new formula for a Rank 4 metal is not a small matter in the world of Artificers. Anyone who could produce Rank 4 metal would be valued, even by Artificing Maestros.

Alas, Vaan could not enchant his own artificing products. Otherwise, it wouldn't be difficult for him to become a Rank 4 Artificing Maestro himself.

'No, with Teacher Raphna's terrifying learning ability, as long as magic technicalities did not hold him back, he could have even become a Rank 5 Artificing Doyen, the top of the field,' Astoria sighed with regret.

If the limitations of a man did not bind Teacher Raphna, he could be a great witch and Doyen in every field of study.

'Sir Vahn, you never cease to amaze me. Not only magic theory and potioneering but also artificing? Is there even anything that you don't know?'

'Voice transmission magic?' Vaan glanced back at Astoria with a smile before he replied without sound from his mouth, 'Of course, there are also things that I don't know.'

'Such as?'

'I don't know about things that I don't know.'

'...'

Astoria read Vaan's lips and fell speechless by his response.

'Am I wrong?' Vaan casually glanced back at Astoria with a teasing smile as he followed Sacha to her mineral storage area.

With all his accumulated knowledge, he could be considered a jack of all trades. The only way to do his learning talent justice was never to stop learning new knowledge.

Nevertheless, Sacha quickly brought him to a drawer and pulled out a spherical spatial-type magic tool.

After she activated it on the ground, a spatial door appeared, leading to a separate room as big as five workshops combined.

"This is quite the high-quality magic tool you have, Lady Sacha. It must have cost a fortune," Vaan casually commented.

"Hah, don't tease me, Vahn. This belongs to the academy," Sacha wryly explained before she said, "And these materials are all provided for the students' practical lessons in artificing."

"Expending academy resources for personal use isn't punishable?" Vaan asked.

"It is if I don't pay for the loss out of my pocket," Sacha admitted before she reassured him, "You don't have to worry about the fees, Vahn. I will cover all of it. Take it as my student fees for learning artificing from you."

"...But aren't you broke after buying the Atomic Visualizer?" Vaan raised an eyebrow.

Sacha was taken aback for a moment before she was completely gobsmacked by the reality of her situation.

"Oh, that's okay... I can go into debt," Sacha said.

Astoria's lips twitched when she heard that before she said, "That is totally not okay. How can we ask the person we seek favor from to go into debt for us?"

"Since the equipment is for me, I will pay for the cost of materials," Astoria decided in a non-negotiable manner.

She also understood that Vaan wouldn't change his mind about making Rank 4 equipment for her. Thus, she could only accept to respect his good intentions.

That said, even if she paid for materials, she felt like she would still be indebted to Vaan further.



"I won't need a full armor set; just enough for my chest, back, hands, and feet up to the shin will do. Too much armor affects my mobility," Astoria mentioned after Vaan acknowledged her decision and started browsing the mineral storage space.

"Got it," Vaan nodded.

Seeing quite the range of materials, including monster parts and minerals from Gehenna, Vaan thought about a few combinations to go about creating Rank 4 metal.

After he took Astoria's elemental attribute into account, he collected black iron, carbon, manganese, silicon, meteorite iron, tungsten, obsidian crystal, dark ores, black beetle demon shell fragments, and a single black demon horn.

"We'll repeat the same process as last time, Lady Sacha. I take care of the base production, and you handle the enchantments."

"Alright, Vahn. Leave it to me!"

After he received Sacha's enthusiastic reply, he started scraping some powder off the shell fragments, demon horn, and other minerals he only required extremely small portions of.

At the same time, he mentioned the exact weight of each material for Sacha to take note of.

Before long, he fired up the furnace and commenced the smelting process, mixing all the materials in a single large foundry ladle.

Even without a deep knowledge of artificing, Astoria could guess the final product's color.

"Won't the Rank 4 metal turn out black?" Astoria asked curiously, finding it strange for the Battle Maiden of Holy Light to wear black armor.

"Yes, black is good at absorbing light," Vaan calmly nodded.

"If the product turns out the way I want it, you should be able to further raise the defensive properties of the Rank 4 armor with your Specialized Magic, Light Solidification, Headmaster Astoria."

"I see," Astoria paused for a moment before her eyes slightly widened. "But doesn't that mean..."

Chapter 229: Creating Rank 4 Black Metal (2)

"Yes, the defensive properties of this black armor set in the making can be raised to Mid-level Rank 4 at the very least—if it turns out as we expect, of course," Vaan stated.

'Mid-level Rank 4!' Astoria inwardly exclaimed.

That was the same level of power that shattered her Rank 3 armor and sent her into critical conditions by Fallen Witch Elvira.

If she had such strong armor, even if she couldn't beat Fallen Witch Elvira in another fight, she wouldn't necessarily lose either.

At the very least, Fallen Witch Elvira wouldn't be able to penetrate her armor again.

At the same time, possessing a Mid-level Rank 4 defense implied that no one at Early-stage High Witch could harm her.

"Armor of this quality is hard to make even by the current Rank 4 Artificing Maestros. This is too valuable," Astoria said with a sigh before adding, "If requested something like this from the Maestros, it would have cost me an arm at least."

After all, the artificing business was big money. Equipment, weapons, and magic tools that could augment a witch's ability wouldn't be cheap.

And yet, here, Teacher Raphna was making her one for free.

"Is it really possible to make?" Astoria started to doubt, even though she wanted to believe in Vaan.

She watched Vaan go through the standard steps of a magic blacksmith to produce his Rank 4 black metal.

After the mixture of metals turned molten, Vaan took them out of the smelting furnace, added the mana solution, and stirred the big pot like he was brewing a potion.

Before long, the black mixture containing specks of other colors became uniform, being completely black.

Vaan took note of the time before he added the foundry bucket of molten black metal back into the smelting furnace for a second time.

The scorching-high temperature of the smelting furnace wasn't something a normal person could get close to nor endure, but Vaan did.

Nevertheless, his face was blackened by dirty fumes, and his skin glowed red from the heat.

Sacha didn't notice it the first time. But seeing him in action again, she realized his body was quite resilient to the heat.

It didn't pain him nor cause him difficulties. Instead, he seemed nonchalant to the heat.

Sometime later, Vaan took the foundry bucket back out of the smelting furnace and poured the molten metal into the empty molds.

"I will need you to perform the first round of enchantments while they are still in their molten states this time, Lady Sacha," Vaan stated.

"Alright," Sacha nodded, understanding what she had to do.

Although the order was slightly different, the overall process was mostly still the same. After she cast her magic on the molten metal in the two dozen molds to refine them.

Even then, Astoria did not see anything distinctively special about them.

However, after they slightly cooled down and started to solidify, she finally saw the beginning of their miraculous properties.

Her instincts told her the black metal ingots were very hard, even when they had yet to solidify fully.

"Alright, I will take it back from here, Lady Sacha," Vaan stated, immediately stunning Sacha.

Last time, she was in charge of everything that followed after the creation of the Rank 4 purple metal ingot.

And yet, this time, he wanted to do it?

"Are you sure about that? You must have a very specific design in mind, Vahn. If you can draw it up, I can handle it. These metal ingots have already become Rank 4 metal. The heat from the smelting furnace won't be able to turn them back into molten states," Sacha mentioned.

"I'm aware of that, Lady Sacha. However, you don't need to worry," Vaan calmly assured before he added, "As long as you haven't cast earth anti-magic enchantments on them, there won't be an issue."

Shortly after, he summoned Topaz, stunning Sacha in the same instant she appeared in front of him.

'Kyuuu!'

Topaz flapped her wings around Vaan happily and excitedly as she felt like Vaan had been giving her more freedom recently.

"This... is an Earth Spirit?" Sacha glanced at Topaz with astonishment, sensing the high earth affinity coming from her. Briefly after, she stared back at Vaan and exclaimed, "You're a Spirit Contractor, Vahn! That's incredibly rare!"

That said, she was most shocked that the innocent-looking little earth spirit fairy seemed to be even stronger than her!

'A High-ranked Earth Spirit?! Is that even possible?' Sacha was flabbergasted by the discovery, but she wasn't too sure.

Nevertheless, if Vaan received blessings from a High-rank Earth Spirit, it made sense why he could endure the heat.

After a few words, Sacha took several steps back and turned to Astoria.

"Did you know about this, Headmaster Astoria?"

"Yeah."

Meanwhile, Vaan used Earth Manipulation to shape the Rank 4 black metal ingots into his desired forms with Astoria's precious armor set as the template.

That said, he took her dress into consideration before he made some adjustments to the armor to match her three body sizes of 37-25-37 inches perfectly.

Before long, the black armor was assembled piece by piece.

Afterward, Vaan asked Sacha to perform the finishing touches, the magical enchantments with anti-magic properties, which would prevent the armor set from being damaged, transformed, or manipulated by the magic of other users.

Sometime later, a Rank 4 Black Greatsword was also made for Astoria before everything was laid before her.

Astoria stared at the finished products in awe.

Although she wasn't fond of black, she strangely found a rare beauty in them and felt attracted to them.

"Try it on," Vaan urged.

"If you channel some light-attribute mana into them, they should attach to your body like super glue," Sacha added.

"Alright," Astoria nodded.

Just as she reached out to grab the first piece of armor, the black chestplate, she noticed her hands were slightly shaking.

Unexpectedly, she was rather excited, which was rare and a little nostalgic.

Nevertheless, after Astoria put on the black armor and moved around a bit, she received more surprises.

"This..."

"Is there a problem?"

"No," Astoria shook her head and said, "I'm just a little surprised because it fits so well that it's also a little creepy..."

Chapter 230: Tabitha's Teasing

"Ah, yes. I did take your body sizes into account when I made them," Vaan replied without shame.

"Kyu, kyu, kyu!"

Topaz threw a fit in front of Vaan with her hands on her hips, complaining that she also contributed.

"I mean, we made them," he added with a wry smile.

Astoria's attention was quickly drawn to Topaz as her little tantrum amused her.

"She's so adorable. Does she have a name?" Astoria asked.

She reached out her hand and wanted to poke Topaz's tiny soft cheeks, but it startled the little earth spirit into hiding behind Vaan.

Despite being a High-rank Earth Spirit comparable to earth-attribute High Witches, she was rather timid around strangers.

As such, Vaan couldn't use her as one of his trump cards until she was trained in combat.

Nevertheless, after he heard Astoria's question, he contemplated for a moment.

Considering the effects tied to a True Name, he couldn't wantonly give it out to others. No one does.

Supposedly, some Curse Magic existed that could be used on people without their knowledge by simply knowing their True Names.

"Tia, short for Tatiana," Vaan gave Topaz both a nickname and real name after he contemplated.

"Tatiana? Well, she is indeed like a little princess," Astoria smiled at Topaz and said, "I am also something like a princess myself. Won't you become my friend?"

"Kyu," Topaz eyed her from behind Vaan's shoulders, not understanding a word she said.

Without telepathy, they wouldn't be able to communicate, no matter what they say.

Nevertheless, Vaan acted as the messenger and relayed the words between them before Topaz reluctantly came out of her hiding and sat on Astoria's hand.

"Kyu..."

However, she sat facing Vaan and gave him a sad look like she was a cattle that had just been sold off and was about to be butchered for her meat.

"C'mon, something like that is not going to happen. Stop being a drama queen, Tia," Vaan said wryly.

"What is she saying?" Astoria asked.

"She thinks I abandoned her and that you are going to eat her."

"Pfft, how cute," Astoria giggled.

Topaz's nervousness was slowly released after Astoria gently stroked her head with a finger. She found it quite nice and quickly became comfortable with Astoria.

"Kyu, kyu," Topaz said pompously, treating Astoria like a servant that had just been granted permission to touch her.

"She said you may continue to pat her head from now on," Vaan translated with a wry smile before he said, "Don't spoil her too much, or she will become rotten."

"Hahaha... It's fine, I think," Astoria softly laughed before she glanced back at Vaan and Sacha. "I am indebted to both of you. This black armor set and greatsword are priceless. Also, you both make a great team, great enough to be comparable to the Rank 4 Artificing Maestros."

"It's rare to see such a gentle side to Headmaster Astoria. I have been enlightened today," Sacha ruefully smiled before she shook her head. "You've overpraised me."

"Those enchantments are only temporary and will expire quickly the more you use them. Only Rank 4 Artificing Maestros can engrave Rune Magic on them and make the enchantments permanent."

"Even so, you have my gratitude, Wise Scholar Sacha," Astoria insisted on expressing her gratefulness. "And you too, Sir Vahn."

"It's nothing much, Headmaster Astoria. This quality of equipment is needed for our trip," Vaan calmly said. Before he added, "I plan to make myself some equipment too."

"Do you mind helping me out for a bit longer, Lady Sacha?"

"Not at all! I am learning a lot from you, Vahn. Why would I mind? I don't have any complaints!" Sacha quickly replied.



"That's great to hear," Vaan smiled.

Shortly after, Vaan resumed his work, firing up the smelting furnace to smelt more metal and make several more pieces of equipment for himself and others.

Sometime later, Vaan left the top floor workshop with Astoria, leaving behind Sacha, who quickly took out her notes to absorb what she had learned.

"Are we heading back now?" Astoria asked.

"Not yet," Vaan shook his head and said, "I still have a few people to meet. But you can head back first if you want, Headmaster Astoria."

"A few more people, huh?" Headmaster Astoria suddenly sour for some reason and said, "If you don't mind, I will continue to tag—"

"You came to my academy but didn't plan on meeting me, hm? Headmaster Astoria? Do I not deserve to be greeted during your visits anymore?" Headmaster Tabitha's voice transmitted to her, sounding a little upset.

"It looks like I have to see Headmaster Tabitha first," Astoria informed Vaan with a helpless look.

Vaan acknowledged her departure with a nod.

Shortly after Astoria headed up to the headmaster's office, Vaan made his way to the library to see Dahlia, then Cyrena after.

...

Meanwhile, Astoria barged into Headmaster Tabitha's office without knocking.

"What do you want?" Astoria coolly asked.

"My, quite the terrible attitude you have there, Headmaster Astoria," Tabitha expressed her surprise before she slyly smiled. "It seems like I interrupted something good."

"When did you get acquainted with Vahn Cadieux? Furthermore, you seemed quite close to him. Did you finally find someone you fancy?"

"Unfortunately, you can't have him. You see, I've also taken an interest in him," Tabitha licked her lips flirtatiously as if she couldn't wait to eat Vaan.

However, Astoria knew that Tabitha wasn't serious. It was clear that she was being teased. That said, there might be little truth in her words.

As such, she couldn't help but feel irritated when she heard Tabitha speak. It was as if the person was going to take something that belonged to her.

"Look, I know you are upset that I didn't come to see you first, and I apologize for that," Astoria said before she added, "But whether you like it or not, you weren't at the top of my priorities."

The corners of Tabitha's eyes twitched before she furrowed her brows.

"I'm not at the top of your priority when you visit my academy? My, it looks like you really like that Vahn Cadieux guy. Did he cast a spell on you or something? How did you fall so quickly? I thought you were too busy chasing..." Tabitha spouted before she suddenly paused to think.

But before she could think further, Astoria snorted and said, "Had it been too long since we last sparred, Headmaster Tabitha? Because it looks like you are seriously asking for one!"