

## The Witch 261

### Chapter 261: Getting in is Easy, Getting Out is Hard

"Poison?"

After hearing Vaan's answer, everyone was immediately taken aback.

"Poison can indeed be used to counteract poison, but you can't just use any poison to counteract poison; it has to be suitable," Astoria mentioned with furrowed brows before asking, "Why do you have such a poison on you, Teacher Raphna?"

"Why, you ask?" Vaan smiled before openly admitting, "That's because I looted Fallen Witch Elvira's lair."

"Fallen Witch Elvira's lair?" Aeliana's gaze sharpened before she asked, "Does that mean there's a high chance that Fallen Witch Elvira is the other witch accompanying the spatial-attribute witch, Lord Vahn?"

"I won't deny that probability exists," Vaan said before speaking more seriously, "But if Fallen With Elvira is here, she will likely target both Eniwse and the dragons. She wouldn't be satisfied with one and not the other."

"If she succeeds in her body transmutation, it's hard to imagine how much stronger she'll become from assimilating the power of dragons," Vaan added.

"We can't let that happen," Astoria stated assertively. "Fallen Witch Elvira is already a Mid-stage High Witch after assimilating the power of a Wood Spirit, and she also has the physical prowess of a Rank 4 being through body transmutation."

"If she also assimilates the power of dragons, no one will be able to stop her beside Her Majesty, Henrietta, and the other Transcendent Witches," Astoria added.

"Yes, that's quite a problem," Vaan nodded and said, "We'll have to pick up the pace from here. That said, the spatial-attribute High Witch is more likely to have nothing to do with the Great House of Caelestis."

"The person must have purposely left behind survivors in Misty Leaf Town and revealed such a large spatial spell to mislead people into thinking the Great House of Caelestis was involved," Vaan stated.

"Then why didn't they at least kill all the witnesses that overheard the person exclaiming Fallen Witches, Lord Vahn?" Aeliana asked.

"That was also part of the Fallen Witches' scheme to mislead people," Vaan answered.

"The Great House of Caelestis wouldn't be so stupid as to expose their distinct ability on such a grand scale. But it's a different story if there were witnesses calling it the work of Fallen Witches."

"In other words, the Fallen Witches tried to make it seem like the Great House of Caelestis left clues to pin the blame on the Fallen Witches for their work when in truth, it was the Fallen Witches' work all along?" Hester summarized.

"Something like that," Vaan nodded.

After Astoria used a purification spell on the water stream, the group continued to follow the water stream to the middle regions.

"Awr, awr, awrooo!" the Volcan Wolf barked.

It quickly caught up to the group and circled around them before growling at a random tree and half-heartedly attacking it to convey its message.

"You want to continue following us, and you can contribute to the battle if there's one?" Vaan uttered.

The Volcan Wolf wagged its tail in response.

"You can go back. The beasts in the middle regions are too strong for you. You'll only throw away your life trying to help."

"Awrooo!" the Volcan Wolf howled.

It was determined to follow them.

"I've never seen a wild beast become so loyal after a single meeting," Astoria commented.

"More precisely, it was after being saved once," Aeliana corrected before adding, "But I do have to agree with you, Headmaster Astoria. It's also my first time seeing it. Wolves know how to return favors, but I didn't expect it to go so far to repay it."

"I suppose it's also partly following its pack leader's orders," Astoria guessed.

"Since it's so adamant in following, why don't we just let it?" Hester suggested before adding, "In any case, we have Lord Aeliana and Headmaster Astoria with us. We shouldn't have any problem reaching the upper regions, even with it tagging along."

"If you insist, it'll be your responsibility, Lady Hester," Vaan calmly stated.

"Alright," Hester agreed.

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Thousand Fog Mountains, Upper Regions

Somewhere on the upper half of the ninth inner mountain, two witches in black-hooded cloaks fled down the slope and through the thick fog as if they were being chased by something.

A few dozen yards away from their location, a colossal shadow moved through the fog, gradually closing the distance on them.

"Dammit!" One of the two Fallen Witches cursed as she fled with haste. "Didn't you say you had a way to deal with the Thousand Fog Illusion Dragon, Claudette?!"

"I thought I did! How the hell am I supposed to know the Thousand Fog Illusion Dragon wasn't a Fog Beast when the information stated that it was?!" Claudette cursed back.

"If it's not a Fog Beast, then what the hell is it!" the other Fallen Witch cursed.

Both of them were High Witches, and yet they were rendered completely helpless against the Thousand Fog Illusion Dragon.

It was as if their opponent was a transcendental being!

"It's a fricken illusion, Levana!" Claudette cried.

"An illusion?! Bullshit! Did it look like an illusion when it gobbled up my familiar, a Rank 4 Mutant Serpent?! It looked pretty damn real to me!" Levana shouted.

"There are all kinds of illusion spells! This isn't just an ordinary illusion spell; it's a hybrid attack-illusion spell! Furthermore, it's a very high-rank one!" Claudette quickly explained while gasping for air.

As a spatial-attribute High Witch who could travel anywhere with a single spatial portal, it was clear that her physical fitness was inadequate.

Nevertheless, Claudette continued to speak, "That's why we can't harm the Thousand Fog Illusion Dragon, but it can harm us! If we want to defeat it, we have to break the spell!"

"Fuck breaking the spell and get us out of here, Claudette! None of us specialized or even studied illusion spells, not to mention a hybrid attack-illusion spell! We need Opalina for that!" Levana stated.

"Trust me; I very much want to get us out of here, Levana!" Claudette desperately revealed.

"However, something is interfering with my Spatial Magic. I can't open a portal! A stronger magic spell locked down the entire space around the upper regions! We need to get back to the middle regions to get out!"

"But didn't we get in with a spatial portal just fine?!"

"Getting in is easy, but getting out is hard!"

Chapter 262: Witch Mother

Shortly after Claudette spoke, her instincts screamed danger. At that moment, the Thousand Fog Illusion Dragon was hot on her tail.

She felt like she could feel its hot breath on the back of her neck, causing her to shiver with terror.

"Levana, a little help, please!" Claudette quickly cried.

Levana quickly conjured a huge fireball and shot it at the shadow moving through the thick white fog in their rear.

Pshhh!

The fog and shadow of the Thousand Fog Illusion Dragon scattered under the hot flames passing through them.

However, a short moment later, the dragon shadow reformed itself and resumed its pursuit of the two Fallen Witches.

Even so, Levana successfully increased their distance by a couple of dozen yards.

"We're almost out of the upper regions. Hold on a little longer, Claudette," Levana urged.

Nevertheless, she saw Claudette losing speed due to exhaustion. Thus, she quickly carried her by the waist and thrust herself forward with Fire Magic.

Swoosh~!

Levana covered a large distance in a short moment. Before long, they finally passed the halfway point and made it out of the upper regions.

In that instant, the dragon shadow in their rear faded, disappearing into the depths of the thick fog and ending its pursuit.

"We're out!" Levana rejoiced.

At the same time, while still being carried by the waist, Claudette raised her hand and summoned the black spatial portal ahead of them.

Without hesitation, Levana dashed through the spatial portal with Claudette.

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On the other side of the spatial portal was the headquarters of their Black Witch Society.

Nevertheless, everyone in the area immediately noticed their sorry states when they dropped to the ground upon exiting the spatial portal.

"Levana? Claudette? What on earth happened to you girls? You both look like a mess," a nearby Fallen Witch in black robes inquired with surprise written all over her face. "Was the mission that difficult?"

The two Fallen Witches before her were powerful High Witches and were considered seniors in the Black Witch Society, both wielding a lot of authority.

Thus, it was rare to see them fall to such pitiful states.

"Bluebell, huh? You bet the mission was difficult. We barely escaped with our lives!" Levana spoke.

"Anyway, which bitch was in charge of ranking the mission? How could the Thousand Fog Mountains be a Mid-level 4-Star mission? It should be a Low-level 5-Star mission, at least!"

"L-Low-level 5-Star mission?" Bluebell exclaimed before she suddenly paused. "Wait, hold on a minute. Wasn't your mission to investigate the rumor of the dragons? Did you girls actually run into a dragon or something?"

"Not a real dragon, but a really powerful attack-illusion spell in the shape of one!" Levana solemnly said.

"We need Opalina's specialty to crack the spell. Otherwise, we cannot proceed further. We jumped straight into the upper regions and nearly died. That entire place is under a spatial lock. Thus, we can't freely explore the Thousand Fog Mountains with Claudette's magic either."

"And although we didn't get to see any real dragon, we heard dragon roars. So, coupled with the ancient grand spells set up around the Thousand Fog Mountains, we can conclude that there are True Dragons in that place," Levana stated.

"Aren't you ashamed, Levana?" someone else suddenly spoke from a distance.

Levana, Claudette, and Bluebell turned their gazes in the direction of the Mission Hall before they spotted the speaker, another Fallen Witch in a black robe, leaning over the wooden fence and staring back at them.

Like most witches, the Fallen Witch also had a beautiful face with flawless skin. However, she also carried the bitchy vibe that would immediately make people dislike her.

"Kareena," Levana narrowed her eyes.

"What's with that look? Not only did you fail to complete your mission, but you are spewing excuses for your failure. Do you think I will stamp your mission with success just because you heard dragon roars and assumed a True Dragon was behind it?" Kareena glanced at Levana condescendingly.

"If you want to clear the mission, either see the True Dragon with your own eyes or bring back actual proof of its existence. Your assumptions don't mean anything."

"Bitch, I wasn't even talking to you!" Levana cursed with anger before Claudette and Bluebell quickly held her back, preventing her from attacking Kareena outright.

Naturally, she was hoping to clear the mission with her assumption.

She was only sharing her thoughts about the mission with a fellow Fallen Witch in the Black Witch Society.

"Calm down, Levana. Attacking a fellow member isn't worth it," Claudette kindly reminded her.

"How can you be so calm, Claudette?" Levana asked before accusing Kareena, "It must be her! She must have been the one who recorded and ranked the mission! We almost died thanks to her inaccurate information about the Thousand Fog Illusion Dragon!"

"Who knows if the information about the Wyvern-type Abomination was also true or not?!" Levana added.

"Don't blame me for your incompetence, Levana. Since it's an investigation mission, you should have researched this additional information on your own." Kareena coolly said, "If you die, you only have yourself to blame."

Right after she finished speaking, she suddenly felt the presence of a higher-rank witch behind her. The person's aura pressured her.

She quickly turned around to see who it was before her eyes widened with alarm.

"W-Witch Mother!" Kareena uttered fearfully when she stared into the person's stern eyes. "When did you return? Did you hear everything?"

"What do you think?" the person called Witch Mother coldly stated before her gaze sharpened.

"With the whole world against us, who else do we have if we turn on each other? Not only did you reflect on the mistake of providing inadequate and inaccurate information about a mission to a fellow member, but you patronized her. I will not tolerate such behaviors in our society."



"You are temporarily relieved of your duties in the Mission Hall. Go to Sector 3 and serve the frontlines for six months as penance, then you may return to your original post," the Witch Mother instructed.

"Yes, Witch Mother!" Kareena complied without a complaint. She didn't dare to object.

Shortly after Kareena left, the Witch Mother turned her attention to Levana and Claudette and said, "You two, follow me. We'll talk in my room."

"Yes, Witch Mother!"

"Yes, My Queen!"

The two answered.

#### Chapter 263: Reaching the Ninth Mountain

A short while later, Levana and Claudette reached the Witch Mother's room, which was found within one among many small caves running along the walls of the pocket realm.

Although it didn't look impressive outside, the interior was clean and polished without a speck of dust. Apart from the ordinary sandalwood furniture in the room, the cave walls were coated in a layer of thin and smooth ice.

It was very suitable for human dwelling, albeit being a little cold.

However, the room's low temperature was just how the Witch Mother, who founded the Black Witch Society, enjoyed it.

Shortly after the Witch Mother took her seat by the round stone marble table, she heated the teapot with magic before she poured herself some tea.

She offered some to Levana and Claudette, but they politely refused it. Thus, they quickly moved on to the main topic.

"Tell me what happened during your missions," the Witch Mother demanded. "I want to hear the detail."

"Yes, My Queen," Claudette obeyed.

She quickly recounted everything to the Witch Mother. She did not leave out a single detail from when they arrived in Misty Leaf Town to when they left the Thousand Fog Mountains.

"I see. Understand the situation now," the Witch Mother uttered after listening to everything.

"It was unfortunate that you ran into a person gifted with a soul-attribute ocular talent and had your identities exposed. We could have used such a person to help us find more sisters."

"My sincerest apologies, My Queen. I didn't think that far," Claudette apologized.

However, the Witch Mother shook her head.

"I am not condemning your actions. On the contrary, you made the best choice anyone could have thought of during that moment. Even so, your plan isn't foolproof," the Witch Mother mentioned.

"What you did only direct suspicions toward the Great House of Caelestis; it doesn't completely erase the possibility of Fallen Witches appearing in Misty Leaf Town. Furthermore, you also expose your spatial ability to the people."

"Thus, if anyone saw through your scheme, the entire Black Rose Kingdom would soon know that a spatial-attribute High Witch exists among the Fallen Witches," the Witch Mother added.

"Forgive me for being incompetent, My Queen," Claudette lowered her head, prompting Levana to do the same.

"No need to devalue yourself. Everyone knows best what you are capable of," the Witch Mother calmly assured her before mentioning, "I'm only telling you this to let you know that time is limited."

"If you wish to complete the missions in that region, you need to act swiftly. Given what happened there, security around the region will tighten once the news spreads," the Witch Mother stated.

"Yes, My Queen. I am aware of that." Claudette nodded and said, "However, we know what we are dealing with now. Thus, Levana and I are prepared to ask for help from Opalina and a few more High Witches to increase the chance of completing our missions there."

"We should be able to succeed in capturing a dragon, or at the very least, some samples if we have five High Witches and Opalina on the team," Levana mentioned.

"Talk to the new member about it. I'm sure she'll be interested in joining you two on the mission," the Witch Mother permitted them to re-enter the Thousand Fog Mountains again to complete their objective.

However, she reminded them, "But remember; the mission is important, but not as important as your lives. If your lives are threatened, abandon your missions and quickly return. Especially you, Claudette."

"The lives of potential new members all depend on your Spatial Magic and my Foresight. Without your ability, we wouldn't have what we have today," the Witch Mother stressed.

"I understand, My Queen. I'll take extra precautions on the mission to not lose my life," Claudette promised.

The Witch Mother nodded with approval.

"Alright. That's all I wanted to say. May the fortunes of Evangeline bless you on your mission."

"Thank you, My Queen."

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Shortly after Levana and Claudette left the Witch Mother's cave room, they immediately went to find Opalina, Elvira, and another two High Witches to assist them on their missions.

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Meanwhile, Vaan's group continued to follow the water stream through the middle regions with a Volcan Wolf accompanying them.

With the strength of their party, the beasts and other wildlife they encountered along the way did not pose a threat or problem.

Vaan equipped himself with the gunblades to deal with the pests hindering their journey. He easily drilled holes in his foes and recalled the bullets with Earth Manipulation.

While Astoria was fascinated with his weapon, she understood its general mechanic and how it could produce so much power.

Ultimately, the bullet power was mainly determined by Vaan's Earth Magic.

Nevertheless, Astoria was more interested in seeing Topaz.

"Won't let Tia out to play, Teacher Raphna?" Astoria suggested.

"Alright," Vaan quickly agreed after he contemplated.

In any case, everyone in the party already knew or at least heard about him being the Spirit Contractor of an Earth Spirit.

"Kyuuu!"

The little fairy flew out of Vaan's chest and circled a few laps around the group with joy and curiosity in regard to the unfamiliar and new scenery.

Awroo!

The Volcan Wolf barked when Topaz drew too close to study it, and it startled her into retreating back to Vaan's head.

Shortly after feeling safe on Vaan's head, Topaz glared back at the Volcan Wolf with a sulky expression.

Nevertheless, Astoria and Hester couldn't help but find her very adorable.

However, Vaan quickly interrupted their thoughts when they were passing through the ninth mountain to reach the seventh mountain.

"The air around here feels different," Vaan mentioned before shifting his gaze to where the top of the ninth mountain should be, which was hidden by the fog. "There's a burnt smell coming down from there."

"Could it have been caused by a dragon or one of the two Fallen Witches? Should we ascend this mountain and investigate it?" Astoria suggested.

"Can we take a break before we do?" Hester requested before mentioning, "We've been traveling for three days straight."

#### Chapter 264: Resting Underground

After three days of traveling through the Thousand Fog Mountains, they finally reached one of the nine inner mountains at the center.

All that was left to do was to scale the mountains to reach the upper regions of the Thousand Fog Mountains.

If they could reach the top, they'll definitely have a better idea of where to look for Eniwse in such a vast region.

"Although finding Eniwse and stopping the Fallen Witches are both important, I think we should consider Hester's request, Teacher Raphna," Astoria voiced her opinion.

"We have been traveling non-stop for the past three days. Rest is required to recover our strength. Considering the Thousand Fog Illusion Dragon guards the upper regions, I believe it's in our best interest to be in our peak states once we reach it."

"I think rest is good, Lord Vahn," Aeliana also inputted her opinion, but her eyes revealed other plans than just simply resting.

Vaan naturally knew what she was thinking, but he wasn't against it.

Allowing the body to be nourished by mana through dual practice was even better than regular rest. But only if it was done in moderation.

Furthermore, the mana at the center of the Thousand Fog Mountains was especially rich and abundant, whether it was in the air or underground.

Mana was overflowing with purity and richness.

"Let us stop here and rest then," Vaan agreed with a nod.

"However, a camp in the open will only attract the attention of nearby wandering beasts. So we'll move underground."

"Tia, make a cave for us," Vaan asked shortly after.

"Kyuuu!"

Topaz did a cute little salute as if she had received and understood the instruction like a soldier in the military.

Thanks to their shared spiritual connection, she knew how Vaan wanted the cave's layout to be.

Shortly after she commanded the earth to follow her will, a main cave with three additional smaller caves connected to it was created.

With a bit of decoration with additional magic, the underground cave quickly became a suitable dwelling place.

After the group moved in, Topaz sealed the entrance but also left enough gaps for air to enter and fill the cave.

"Hm?" Astoria noticed the number of rooms and asked, "Why are there only three rooms, Teacher Raphna?"

"What do you mean why? I don't need my own room, Headmaster Astoria," Vaan casually said.

"You mean you're going to share someone's room? Would Lady Hester or Lord Aeliana be willing, though?" Astoria wondered aloud with furrowed brows despite faintly already knowing the answer.

"Definitely."

"Definitely."

Hester and Aeliana replied simultaneously.

"Hm?" Aeliana stared at Hester with a frown and couldn't help but cuss, "Skank! You already had Lord Vahn to yourself for two days straight. How do you expect to fight if you can't even walk properly?"

"So it's my turn, alright?!" Aeliana asserted.

She looked like she was ready to fight to the death with Hester over Vaan's affection. She had been waiting for this moment since she returned from Sunpeak Town.

The corners of Hester's eyes slightly twitched before she wryly smiled and said, "Lord Aeliana has a point. I won't fight with you. I do need some proper rest."

"Oh?" Aeliana uttered with surprise after seeing Hester back down before casually saying, "I see. So we all good then."

"Behave yourself, Lord Aeliana."

"Yes, Lord Vahn."

After Vaan reprimanded Aeliana on her attitude toward Hester, he made his way over to one of the three small caves.

"Everyone fine with me taking the leftmost cave with Lord Aeliana?" Vaan inquired.

After Hester and Astoria consented, their eyes bulged the next moment when they saw Vaan taking out a whole bed from his storage space.

"Y-You've brought a bed?! Since when did you get one, Teacher Raphna?" Astoria asked with astonishment.

"Why, since we stopped by Misty Leaf Town for supplies, of course," Vaan nonchalantly replied before smiling. "Why do you ask, Headmaster Astoria?"

Astoria's lips quickly twitched after hearing Vaan's response.

When one talked about supplies for the trip to the Thousand Fog Mountains, one would think about spices, food, potions, water, and other necessities.

Who would have thought that Vaan would bring a whole damn bedframe, mattress, and all?

Nevertheless, when Astoria thought about it, she regretted not bringing her own bed. A high-quality bed would provide a much more comfortable rest than some thick and rough blankets.

"N-Never mind, Teacher Raphna," Astoria was unwilling to continue the topic.

Evidently, Vaan came prepared.

Sometime later, the group gathered around the campfire in the main cave to have a meal.

Astoria used the meat of Mountain Bull that was hunted on their way and cooked it in the black metal pot hanging over the fire.



The meat was diced into small pieces with a clean knife before it was added with some light seasoning of salt and pepper. Some chopped carrots and potatoes were also added to the pot.

Besides the high-quality Rank 3 meat used in the beef stew, the rest of the ingredients were of ordinary quality.

Thus, the overall quality of the beef stew was also ordinary.

Even so, the smell of beef stew quickly lifted everyone's mood and appetite once it was ready. After all, it was their first meal in three days.

Topaz also got a share of the beef stew, while the Volcan Wolf preferred the raw bull meat—or so it expressed.

However, it kept stealing glances at the pot of beef stew and wondered whether it had made the right choice.

Compared to the food in the pot, the large chunk of raw meat it received didn't look all that special and delicious.

"Awr..." the Volcan Wolf silently whimpered.

Meanwhile, Vaan fed some of his portion of the beef stew to Topaz with a wooden spoon. Due to her size, she could only sip a little of the stew at a time.

Even so, each sip made her gasp heartily with joy, as if she was sipping the most delicious drink she ever had.

"Kyuuu!" Topaz exclaimed.

Astoria was so fascinated watching the little fairy that she couldn't help but forget to eat her own meal.

Little did everyone know, Topaz was converted into a foodie after trying the beef stew.

Elemental spirits didn't need to eat since they got all their sustenance from the elements they were attuned to.

However, humanoid spirits like Topaz still had a sense of taste and could enjoy human food.

Chapter 265: Talk by the Campfire

Astoria felt a little envious of Vaan. She hoped that one day, she could also make a contract with a cute spirit like his little fairy.

However, she wasn't sure if she had the same luck. After all, finding the spirits was one thing, but entering a contract with them was another.

They had to be willing.

Nevertheless, it wasn't just about having a contracted spirit; she also envied the relationship between Vaan and his Earth Spirit.

Vaan was like the sun; get too close, and his hot flames would only hurt her. After all, he wielded a vast amount of information and knowledge—something she couldn't begin to understand.

However, she had enough self-awareness to understand that a normal human could only store so much information and knowledge in their brain.

It was impossible to have no side effects at Vaan's level; he must have lost something in return for his knowledge. And that something was his humanity.

He seemed emotionless and only capable of rational choices for self-growth and self-preservation.

If Astoria had lived in Vaan's old world, most people would call someone like him a robot—or at the very least, close to being one.

However, it was only during these rare interactions with his Earth Spirit that she could feel his warm and gentle light.

His human emotions weren't lost but hidden or repressed.

"What do you think of Tia, Teacher Raphna?" Astoria suddenly asked.

"Hm? Where's that coming from?" Vaan casually glanced at her with a smile before seeing her patient but firm look.

Evidently, she was expecting him to answer her question.

"Well, Tia is family," Vaan stated.

At the same time, he continued to feed Topaz beef stew with his wooden spoon and watched her rejoice with each mouthful of goodness.

Her precious smile made him smile.

"Family?" Hester glanced over from her seat on the adjacent side to the campfire in the middle and said, "Their source of power aside, having a contracted spirit is not much different from owning a pet."

"Of course, I heard there are some Spirit Contractors that outright treat their contracted spirits as tools," Hester added.

Although she sounded like a villain, the topic piqued her curiosity. Thus, she also wanted to hear Vaan's thoughts on the matter.

"A pet, huh? That's one way of looking at it," Vaan calmly faced Hester's question before saying, "However, let me ask you a question, Lady Hester."

"If you were to adopt a dog, would you consider it your pet? Or would consider yourself its mother?" Vaan asked.

"Isn't it the same thing?" Hester furrowed her brows and said, "It would be my pet, and I would be its mother. There's no need to separate the two."

"Actually, there is," Astoria corrected.

"It's the difference between seeing a 'pet' as a 'pet' and seeing a 'pet' as 'family.' There's a huge difference between a pet and a family. It tells us how much you care for it and how you would treat it."

"That said, I didn't think Teacher Raphna could be so compassionate. I thought you only knew how to use people," Astoria redirected the topic back to Vaan.

She was aware that Vaan was using her influence and power for his own benefit. However, that's also because she was willing to be used by him.

After all, humanity needed his wisdom.

That said, there was still a limit to how much she was willing to let him use her; she wouldn't give everything to him.

At the very least, she wasn't willing to give her body to him unless he opened his heart to her.

Nevertheless, Vaan's subtly flickered when he heard Astoria's words.

He was starting to understand why Astoria wasn't willing to give herself to him despite having feelings for him.

After Vaan responded with a slight smile, he quizzed them, "What do you think happens to a spirit if its Spirit Contractor dies?"

"I would say the spirit becomes free, but I don't think you would ask such a simple question... Don't tell me the spirit dies with the Spirit Contractor?" Astoria suddenly asked with surprise at the realization.

"That's right," Vaan confirmed with a nod.

Thanks to the spiritual connection with Topaz, he could also vaguely sense the consequence of breaking the spiritual connection.

"If a contracted spirit dies, the Spirit Contractor only loses spirit power. But if the Spirit Contractor dies, the spirit dies with them. That's why spirit contracts are sacred to spirits. They are entrusting their lives to their Spirit Contractors."

"Now, under such conditions, where my mistake could result in both our deaths, why wouldn't I treat Tia as my family? I'm not that inhumane. At the very least, I wouldn't treat someone who has entrusted their life to me coldly," Vaan stated.

Sensing Vaan's gaze, Topaz gave him a foolish and innocent giggling smile while some remnants of the beef stew stuck to her cheeks.

He took out a white cloth and wiped her face clean.

But at the same time, Topaz thought the white cloth was food and tried biting into it—only to 'un-bite' it with a disappointed look.

"Kyuu..." she uttered.

The white cloth wasn't tasty.

Everyone softly chuckled at her adorable but dissatisfied face. Even Aeliana couldn't help but smile slightly.

Nevertheless, Astoria thought about Vaan's words before she asked, "What about Wise Scholar Eniwse, Teacher Raphna? What is Wise Scholar Eniwse to you? Do you love her?"

"Love..." Vaan wryly smiled before calmly saying, "Love is a luxury that I cannot afford to have. I try not to think about it."

"Why not?" Astoria asked.

"What's the use of love if you cannot defend it? What's the use of love if you or your partner cannot live to savor its sweetness?" Vaan responded.

"This world has given humanity longer lifespans, yet more people die every day before reaching a ripe age, and much less get to live fulfilling lives. Even now, humanity is threatened by more powerful beings of another dimension—beings we know little to nothing about. The Seven Great Devils? They are certainly a source of concern, but they aren't the only threats in this world."

"Who knows how many other beings are on their level, or even above them? Our lives are insignificant to them and can easily be snuffed out with a flick of their hands. Anyone can love, but not me."

"There are too many unanswered questions in this world. Why is the world the way it is? What is Gehenna? Why did it appear? There is so much knowledge in this world that I have yet to learn. I cannot fall until I comprehend everything."

"That is the only way I can do my ability justice," Vaan coolly stated.

Since he was born with such a powerful growth-type innate learning ability, it would be a waste if he did not make full use of it.

Procrastination was the death of progress.

While his words seemed like a bucket of cold splashing on the grim fate of humanity, they also revealed his grand aspiration and ambition.

Hester and Astoria couldn't help but feel drawn to Vaan; he was a driven man. And a driven man was deadly attractive.

At the same time, Aeliana also smiled.

She felt proud to have such a person as her Lord. She looked forward to seeing the future he could bring her.

Although Astoria was happy to learn that Vaan was someone who would make full use of his gift, which would ultimately benefit humanity, she also felt a little sad for him.

He would have to lead a rather lonely life to shoulder the burden of knowledge.

Who could share it with him?

"I feel sad for you and everyone who would fall for your charms, Teacher Raphna. You will not love, and they will not be loved. It's a rather lonely life despite having women by your side," Astoria commented with a self-deprecating smile.

She felt like she was pitying herself since she also seemed to be one of the women who had fallen for his charms.

Nevertheless, Vaan raised an eyebrow after listening to her.

"What are you talking about, Headmaster Astoria?" Vaan wryly smiled before he said, "I don't remember saying I will never love in this life. It's only something I would consider once I establish a firm foothold in this world."

"Huh? Is that so?" Astoria uttered with surprise, feeling relieved in her heart before she furrowed her brows. "But what is a firm foothold according to you?"

"To be strong enough to stand up against anyone threatening my interests and not be a moth that perishes in the flame," Vaan calmly stated.

He had seen men snatched away from their women by other, more powerful women simply because they were handsome or because their public display of affection aroused others' envy.

Of course, some more ruthless witches also destroyed lives simply because lovey-dovey relationships were eyesores to them.

Simply said, doing anything could potential displease someone, and that someone could ruin his life just because they can.

Thus, he had to be stronger than anyone even to consider love.

When Astoria heard Vaan's answer, she couldn't help but lament in her heart. It was the same as saying he wouldn't love until he becomes stronger than Transcendent Witches.

Perhaps, Teacher Raphna could become the next Rank 5 Aura King, but how long would it take him?

Actually, it might not take that long at all.

After all, his strength had grown at an exponential rate, far, far quicker than any other man she knew.

Given his depth of knowledge, anything seemed possible for him.

Chapter 266: Sneaky Wolf

"To be strong enough to stand up against those threatening your interests in this world... That means you must be as strong as people like Her Majesty, Henrietta, and Aura King Varan. How long do you think it would take to achieve your goal?" Astoria asked.

Vaan contemplated for a moment before he calmly replied, "Within a year."

"Within a year..." Astoria and Hester's eyes turned solemn after they heard Vaan's answer.

His words sounded like the nonsense of a foolish dreamer out of touch with reality. However, Vaan possessed a certain charm that made them believe it was possible.

After all, even Astoria, who has lived for more than three hundred years, was only an Early-stage High Witch. But that was also mainly because her growth had stagnated for far too long.

If her bottlenecks didn't exist, it would have been hard to tell how much stronger she could have grown.

Although Vaan was a man, his bottlenecks were unlikely to make him stagnate for long, given his inhuman learning ability and depth of knowledge.

Nevertheless, one year was just a safe estimate for Vaan.

After all, he had already reached the strength of a Rank 4 Extraordinary Human in under a month of activating the system.



The only thing stopping his fast growth would be a lack of opportunities, which was also something he didn't lack since the system was bound to him.

It was as if the system itself had rewritten his destiny and changed his luck.

Vaan felt the system was shrouded in a deeper mystery and had a greater origin than he could fathom due to his humble background.

The answer he sought lies somewhere in Gehenna.

"Alright, that's enough about me. Since we've finished our meals, we should rest," Vaan objectively stated before adding, "We can't keep Eniwse waiting."

"Teacher Raphna has a point. Let's call it a night," Astoria agreed.

Hester had no complaint, and even more so for Aeliana. She was looking forward to 'resting' with her Lord.

Astoria kidnapped Topaz and retired to the rightmost room, the furthest from Vaan's chosen cave.

She did not want to be mentally disturbed by his night activities, nor did she want the innocent little fairy to be corrupted by his carnal practice.

"You don't have any complaints about me taking Tia with me, right? Teacher Raphna?" Astoria sought Vaan's approval.

She quickly disappeared into her cave room after she saw Vaan shake his head.

"Kyuuu—!" Topaz cried.

Nevertheless, Astoria quickly placated it without Vaan's help and convinced her to stay with her for the night. She told her it was better than staying cooped up in Vaan's body, not knowing when she'll be let out again.

When Topaz heard such reasons, she reluctantly agreed.

"Kyu, Kyuu," Topaz uttered with an attitude.

She was trying to convey to Astoria that just because she agreed to stay with her, it didn't mean she liked her.

Although Astoria didn't understand what she was saying, she had a vague idea.

"You don't like me, Tia? I thought we were friends. Boohoo... I'm so sad," Astoria replied with a pitiful yet playful look.

Nevertheless, she succeeded in making Topaz feel guilty.

As such, Topaz flew onto Astoria's shoulders with her wings drooping down. Then, she tried to console her by patting her shoulder.

"Oh my, you're so precious!" Astoria tried to rub Topaz's cheeks with her own, but not without Topaz resisting desperately.

She pushed back Astoria's cheeks with her two small hands, and she was helpless to resist with her meager strength.

She could only succumb to her fate of being showered in Astoria's affection.

...

Meanwhile, shortly after the entrance to Astoria's cave room was closed, Hester glanced at Vaan and said, "Then, I will also retire to my room, Sir Vahn."

"I hope you will be considerate of your poor neighbor and keep the noise down," she added.

"I'll try, but it's not up to me," Vaan slightly chuckled before turning his attention to Aeliana. "Do you know sound-cancellation or noise-reduction magic?"

"I do, Lord Vahn," Aeliana admitted with a nod.

Nevertheless, she thought it was a pity that she wouldn't be able to torment Hester with her pleasant cries of joy.

Hester silently lamented when she saw Aeliana's slight disappointment. She wasn't trying to steal Vaan from her, but she didn't have the energy to explain.

She was truly tired due to the lack of rest.

As such, she was prepared to cast a sound-insulation spell on her room for insurance.

After Hester retired to her middle room, Vaan and Aeliana were left in the main cave with the Volcan Wolf.

Aeliana quickly looked at Vaan with anticipation and almost seemed like she was about to pounce on him.

When he saw her eagerness, Vaan softly sighed.

"Alright, let us retire to our room."

"Yes, My Lord!"

...

Shortly after Vaan and Aeliana also disappeared into their cave room, the Volcan Wolf resting by the campfire suddenly came to life as it shot to its feet.

After checking each of the three closed caves, the Volcan Wolf glanced back at the pot with leftover beef stew and licked its lips.

It carefully lowered the pot from the campfire before it took its bite.

Awrooo!

The Volcan Wolf immediately howled with joy after tasting the goodness of the beef stew.

However, its heart quickly skipped a beat the next moment as it was startled by its actions; it quickly shot its gaze towards the three cave doors again.

Only after watching the three cave doors for some time did it feel some relief.

Shortly after, the Volcan Wolf continued to dig into the remaining beef stew in silence and licked the pot clean.

...

Meanwhile, Aeliana quickly wrapped her arms around Vaan's neck after entering their cave room and soundproofing it.

She looked into his eyes with a gentle gaze, ready to receive all of his affection.

Without a word, Vaan wrapped one of his hands behind her to support her back and head before he sealed her lips with his own and gently laid her down on the soft white bed.

At the same time, Aeliana immediately closed her eyes with fluttering long eyelashes to savor the taste of his kiss.

"Mmm..."

Chapter 267: High-Intensity Dual Practice

After laying Aeliana down on the bed, Vaan continued his gentle yet passionate kiss.

At the same time, his other hand untied the knotted silky straps on her green dress. Under his dexterous fingers, the dress was quickly loosened and removed from her body without a hint of discomfort.

Her pristine body was completely revealed and became a feast for his eyes.

Nevertheless, his gaze wasn't fixated on her body for too long, nor did he ogle like a creep. He only had a calm and simple appreciation of beauty.

As such, his stare didn't stir any restlessness or discomfort in his dual-practice partner.

It was one of the first things he learned to avoid when he had to deal with inexperienced partners or first-timers.

Although it was no longer Aeliana's first time, she could feel the warmth of Vaan's tender care, which made her feel at ease.

Without control over his emotions, he could easily make his partners uneasy.

It was like watering a flower; it had to be done with care and in the right amount. Too much water would simply drown it.

But while Aeliana appreciated her Lord's calmness, she was also disappointed in not being able to see him lusting over her body.

It made her feel as if she wasn't attractive enough.

"A beautiful rose doesn't fear being called ugly. Don't doubt your own charms," Vaan casually whispered into her ears after separating their lips.

Afterward, he moved his lips down and kissed her neck, causing an electrifying shock to run through her body, stimulating it and waking it up.

"Ahh..." a soft cry escaped her lips as her gaze softened further.

"Thank you for your kind words, my Lord. However, your humble servant is greedy for your affection. If it's not too much to ask, I beseech you to ravage me like a beast."

"If that's what you want, who am I to deny such a request?" Vaan responded.

Shortly after Vaan removed his clothes and revealed his rising rod that soon turned into a raging dragon, Aeliana's gaze fell on it before she gulped.

For some reason, it looked bigger than last time.

No, it was definitely bigger than last time—so big that she feared it wouldn't fit inside her. It might even break her if her Lord forced it.

She immediately felt nervous as her heart palpitated.

But under her nervousness was a greater sense of excitement and anticipation. The suspense of waiting turned it into a thrilling experience.

Nevertheless, Vaan didn't attack her with his bulging rod immediately.

Instead, he used his fingers to rub her flower cave and clean it out roughly. A few breaths were all it took to make her water fountain spray with the color of the rainbow.

"Ahhh...!" Aeliana couldn't contain her voice as she moaned. She made a very erotic sound she never knew she could make.

She had been a quiet person in their last dual-practice session. But this time, her Lord had forced it out of her.

It was a sort of self-discovery.

At the same time, Aeliana also realized that such shameful yet erotic noises could enhance the dual-practice experience.

She felt like her Lord preferred to hear her shameful voice. Thus, she didn't try to suppress it.

Shortly after Vaan stimulated Aeliana's body and prepared it for his injection, he rammed his hot rod into her wet cave without warning.

"Ahhh~~~!" Aeliana moaned uncontrollably.

Although she felt the pain of her honey cave expanding, such pain was insignificant compared to the torment of her twisted mana veins.

As such, the pain was surprisingly comfortable, like scratching an itch.

She was deriving a greater sense of pleasure from the pain inflicted upon her body; it was a better stimulus for pleasure than actual pleasure.

More importantly, it made her feel alive.

"Mmmm! It's great, my Lord! This is so good~! I love it~~!" Aeliana exclaimed with elation while being roughly hammered by Vaan.

Her legs subconsciously locked together around his hips and synced with his piston-like movements.

At the same time, Vaan also enjoyed making a mess of Aeliana without holding back; his little brother felt very happy.

He could tear and break Aeliana as he pleased, and her body would heal back to normal.

After all, she possessed two of the strongest healing attributes.

While Vaan had done many missionary positions in the past, the amount of pleasure derived couldn't be compared to what he was presently experiencing.

He felt like he could test the limits of his pleasuring skills on Aeliana without consequence.

He stimulated her erogenous zones and applied the fifth level of pleasure, but she was taking everything in very well.

At the same time, mana gathered in their room at an unprecedented rate.

Within a few minutes of connecting their bodies, the mana concentration within the room reached a level that wasn't inferior to training under a Rank 3 Mana Gathering Spell.

Although the excellent mana-rich environment contributed to an extent, it was hard to imagine the mana concentration level if they continued for several hours.

It gave a whole meaning to dual practice.

As long as their bodies could bear the strain and had the pleasure skills to match their intensity, dual practice wasn't inferior to top-quality mana potions.

In other words, higher-rank people could also enjoy the benefits of dual practice; it wasn't limited to the lower ranks.

Nevertheless, Vaan gradually lowered the intensity of their dual-practice session.

Gathering such a large amount of mana drew too much attention.

After all, they were still in the middle of the Thousand Fog Mountains, where all sorts of danger could be lurking at every corner.

"Why are you slowing down, My Lord?" Aeliana soft asked with an affectionate and tender gaze while her breath was erratic.

Although the dual-practice session felt so short that it could be considered a quickie, her body was already drenched in sweat, and the room reeked of her love nectar.

She didn't know how often she had climaxed in such a short timeframe, but it was probably quite a lot.



"We're drawing too much attention," Vaan replied.

But alas, it was still too late.

Rumble...!

Chapter 268: Magma Wyrn

The entire cave started shaking with soft and distant tremors that grew closer over time as if something big was approaching.

However, it wasn't coming from the surface but deeper underground.

Astoria and Hester barely rested before they became alerted, and their gazes turned sharp with alarm. They immediately shot to their feet and exited their room, gathering in the main cave to meet up with the others.

At that time, Vaan and Aeliana had quickly dressed and headed into the main cave.

However, the main cave wasn't safe.

Grrrr!

Volcan Wolf growled dangerously with all its fur standing up as if it felt highly threatened by the approaching entity.

"The cave is not safe. Get us out, Tia."

"Kyuuu!"

Shortly after she received Vaan's instruction, Topaz immediately opened up the short path to the surface.

Everyone didn't hesitate to jump out once the path was clear. Even after landing on the surface, they didn't stay in the area and quickly created distance.

A few moments later, the cave floor ruptured, revealing a huge reptilian head with hard molten rock scales and numerous sharp teeth.

The cave quickly collapsed along with the surrounding area, and the earth consumed everything left behind.

It was followed by a rising cloud of dust that clashed with the thick fog and pushed it away.

Nevertheless, everyone could somewhat make out the huge shadow within the cloud of dust and fog. It was, by no means, small.

"A giant earthworm? No, it's a wyrm! And Magma Wyrms, at that!" Vaan determined with his sharp eyes.

As the dust settled, the Magma Wyrms' humongous body was revealed behind the veil of fog. It had glowing lava running in between the gaps of its scales and looked like rivers.

Its arrival quickly caused the surrounding temperatures to rise; it almost seemed like it came straight from the mantle layer.

However, no wyrm could have traveled that fast, nor would it have been attracted over such a great distance.

In other words, there was a magma pool somewhere nearby.

"A Magma Wyrms? How can there be a Magma Wyrms here?" Hester uttered with shock before mentioning, "There weren't any records of a Magma Wyrms in the middle regions—No, in all of the Thousand Fog Mountains before..."

"Probably because everyone who ventured into the Thousand Fog Mountains had only explored the surface and not delved into its subterranean region," Astoria guessed before asking Vaan, "What did you do with Lord Aeliana, Teacher Raphna? How did you two manage to draw so much mana into this area?"

"What else do you think we were doing, Headmaster Astoria? Naturally, it was dual practice," Vaan stated.

"What?" Astoria and Hester were even more shocked to hear Vaan's claim.

"Dual practice can achieve such a high rate of mana gathering?" Hester asked with disbelief.

If such a high rate of mana gathering could be achieved in dual practice, what would be the use of mana stones, potions, and miraculous medicine?

She wouldn't need to rely on any other type of cultivation resources if she had a natural power charger like Vaan.

"I think we have more important things to be concerned about right now. The Magma Wurm has turned its attention on us." Vaan's eyes were locked onto the serpentine dragon before he added, "And it doesn't look friendly."

Vaan wasn't wrong.

Due to the cave collapsing upon the Magma Wurm's arrival, the concentrated mana had dispersed back into the surroundings.

Thus, the Magma Wurm had made a trip in vain.

And right when it was disappointed about the fruitless trip after leaving its magma pool, it found prey to make up for it.

Roar!

The Magma Wurm used its dragon roar on them.

But besides the Volcan Wolf and Topaz becoming intimidated by it, the rest of the group did pretty well in resisting its fear-inducing voice.

That said, Hester had more difficulty in doing so.

Awrooo!

The Volcan Wolf howled back in an attempt to bolster its confidence and shake off its fear. At the same time, it was also telling the Magma Wyrms to back off.

However, all it did was direct the Magma Wyrms' attention to it.

Nevertheless, Hester stood beside the Volcan Wolf, ready to protect it from Magma Wyrms, even when she wasn't sure if she could stand up against it.

"This Magma Wurm is around Low-level Rank 4," Astoria informed the group before smiling wryly.

"Jeez, a Rank 4 dragon-type beast in the middle regions. Wait til other people hear about this. I doubt Peak-stage Senior Witches would still dare to venture into the Thousand Fog Mountains' middle regions after this."

"Do you think its dragon scales will make good equipment, Teacher Raphna?" Astoria asked shortly after.

If it was just a Low-level Rank 4, there was nothing to worry about. It wasn't something they couldn't handle.

Furthermore, she also noticed Vaan was unaffected by the Magma Wurm's dragon roar.

She was beginning to see how strong he truly was.

After all, if he was unfazed by the dragon roar of a Low-level Rank 4 Magma Wurm, then that meant that he had the strength to stand against it or even defeat it.

"It's coming," Vaan alerted without answering Astoria's question.

In that instance, the wyrm lunged at the Volcan Wolf head-first, which caused all of the wolf's fur to stand on end.

However, it stood its ground, preparing to lay down its life to protect the group. It was scared, but it didn't run away.

Nevertheless, Hester and the wolf didn't need to make a move.

"Eat this!"

Astoria came swooping in with her jet-black greatsword and swung its blunt side against the side of the wyrm's head.

Smack!

The impact resounded loudly, and the wyrm's attack trajectory was diverted in a different direction, away from Hester and the Volcan Wolf.

Boom!

The wyrm's head slammed into the ground just over a dozen yards away before it burrowed into the ground and disappeared from sight.

"Careful, it's not over yet," Astoria warned with a more solemn expression.

Even with her brute strength, her attack only packed enough power to re-direct the wyrm's course and not send it flying.

Chapter 269: Broken Kite

Several breaths quickly passed without any sign of the Magma Wyrms resurfacing. However, the group did not let down their guard.

Vaan stomped the ground, and the tremors spread across the ground like a sonar scan before he located the wyrm's position.

Bam!

He stomped the ground again and continued to do so periodically to watch the wyrm's movement in the earth.

It appeared to have shaken off the effect of Astoria's concussive blow before he made its way back toward the surface.

The way it was able to travel through the earth made it not much different from an earthworm. If anything, it was more like an earthworm that obtained the bloodline of a fire dragon than a real Magma Wyrms.

That said, there wasn't much difference between the two; they were basically the same.

"It's coming again," Vaan alerted before adding, "It's on you, Headmaster Astoria."

A few moments later, Astoria felt the ground beneath her feet rumble with growing tremors before she quickly jumped into the air.

Boom!

Not long after, the ground exploded with flying soil and debris as the wyrm shot out of the ground—only to be slammed down by Astoria's downward slash.

However, it wasn't just a normal downward slash, but one empowered with her light-attribute refined mana.

Grand Sword Wave!

Puchi!

The wyrm was blasted with sharp sword light before the surface of its scales cracked and split apart, allowing Astoria's greatsword to press into its flesh.

Roar!

The Magma Wyrms roared with pain before retaliating, going against Astoria's greatsword with a flick of its head and brushing her off.

But before she was flung away, her greatsword dug deeper into its flesh. Alas, it was only a little deeper.

'Too shallow!' Astoria's eyes glinted with seriousness.

She had underestimated the Magma Wyrms' strength and defense; it was infinitely close to Mid-level Rank 4.

Nevertheless, while Astoria was still airborne, the wyrms locked onto her figure with a vengeful gaze.

Swish! Swish!

The wyrms quickly prepared to lunge at Astoria and gobble her whole when two bullets fired by Vaan suddenly pierced its left eye.

Roar—!

The wyrms roared with even greater fury and pain.

It was just two small bullets, but it was more than enough to blind its big left eye partially.

Nevertheless, it wasn't true blindness. The wyrms' left vision was only partially blocked by the two bullets, which had melted after penetrating a layer of its eye.

At the same time, Aeliana didn't remain idle.

She entered her Dryad form and summoned large, overgrowing roots from the earth to wrap around the wyrms' humongous serpentine body and bind it in place.

Tens, hundreds, thousands of roots quickly intertwined and wrapped around the wyrm until even its serpentine body couldn't be seen.

The wyrm had interrupted her lovely time with her Lord. It had to pay for its irredeemable action!

Aeliana gave the wyrm a death sentence.

'Die!'

Under her control of the wood element, thorns sprouted from the vine-like roots and stabbed into various parts of the wyrm's body.

Roar!

The wyrm roared furiously.

However, it was temporarily helpless against Aeliana's thorny roots, which had high elastic strength and binding power when used in large numbers.

The wyrm was successfully trapped in place.

Nevertheless, it only lasted a short period before smoke started to rise from the thorny roots wrapped around its body.

The thorny roots were burned by the wyrm's lava, causing them to become brittle.

After a strong shake, the countless thorny roots were snapped off the wyrm's body.

Hester fired her black iron spikes to pin it back into the ground, but she lacked the power. As a result, most of her black iron spikes failed to penetrate the wyrm's hard scales and bounced off.

She narrowed her eyes in that instant.



Shortly after, she quickly targeted the gaps in between the dragon scales instead. But even then, her spikes were melted rapidly under the wyrm's body's molten-hot temperature.

"As expected of a sub-species of dragons, its defense is ridiculously high," Hester commented with a solemn look.

Nevertheless, as everyone contributed to taking down the Magma Wym, the Volcan Wolf also joined the fray.

It jumped straight into the wyrm's rear to bite its tail end.

"Wolfie, get back!" Hester immediately shouted.

However, it was too late.

The Magma Wym was, after all, a dragon; it had its own pride. It felt insulted and looked down upon, seeing how even a Rank 3 Volcan Wolf had the audacity to attack it.

Roar!

After the wyrm broke free from the roots, it immediately swung its tail end at the Volcan Wolf and slapped it away.

The Volcan Wolf was struck by a tremendous force that shattered all the bones in its body. Like a broken kite with its string cut, it flew off lifelessly into the distance and disappeared into the thick fog.

"No!" Hester cried.

"Aeliana, go and heal it," Vaan quickly instructed with calmness, but his eyes became more serious. "Headmaster Astoria and I can handle it from it."

"Yes, Lord Vahn!" Aeliana obeyed without hesitation.

Shortly after she left, Vaan switched out his gunblades for the Rank 4 Black Sword and took on the wyrm together with Astoria.

At the same time, Hester provided support in the rear.

"Stay back, Teacher Raphna!" Astoria warned.

"The Magma Wyrn has proven to be more powerful than we could have imagined. It's truly deserved to be called a dragon! You're not strong enough to take on its attack!"

"I have the highest defense out of everyone here," Vaan claimed.

However, Astoria didn't believe it.

"Don't be ridiculous, Teacher Raphna. Now's not the time to be..." Astoria suddenly stopped speaking, and her eyes widened at Vaan's change. "Teacher Raphna, you..."

Ba-dump!

"From here on out, keep everything you see to yourself," Vaan stated after entering Lycan Transformation. "We must end things swiftly before we attract any more attention."

...

«Lycan Transformation»

[Total Defense: 556 → 709 (↑153) (Low-level Rank 4)]

[Total Strength: 467 → 575 (↑108) (High-level Rank 3 → Low-level Rank 4)]

[Total Speed: 465 → 572 (↑107) (High-level Rank 3 → Low-level Rank 4)]

Ding!

<You are blessed by the earth>

<Your defense has been raised by 26% of your base defense [306]]>

<Total Defense: 709 → 788 (↑79) (Low-level Rank 4 → Mid-level Rank 4)>

Chapter 270: A Moment of Silence

Hester and Astoria were greatly surprised by Vaan's transformation, but they could only ask questions later.

As Vaan said, dragging the battle would attract more attention.

They wouldn't be in a good position if more dragon-type beasts were drawn to their battle when they already had difficulty dealing with one.

Nevertheless, the Magma Wurm wasn't stupid.

Vaan's transformation gave off a certain pressure that made it feel threatened.

Roar!

The wyrn roared to intimidate and deter him. But at the same time, it was also using its dragon roar to summon its kin.

"It's calling for others," Vaan narrowed its eyes.

Swoosh!

Vaan and Astoria dashed toward the wyrn from two different directions with their weapons tightly gripped in their hands.

However, the wyrn ignored Astoria and focused on Vaan, viewing him as the greater threat.

In the next instant, the wyrm swept its tail end at him.

"Be careful, Teacher Raphna!" Astoria immediately warned him.

Vaan naturally saw the incoming attack.

But instead of evading, Vaan chose to take the attack head-on for two reasons; to test the extent of his defense and to allow Astoria to strike a decisive blow.

The wyrm wouldn't just sit still and wait to be hit. They had to look for openings.

"Teacher Raphna!" Astoria cried.

Boom!

The wyrm's tail swing slammed into Vaan, but he endured it with little to no damage.

However, the ground he stood on couldn't withstand the tremendous force and gave way, causing his feet to plow the earth.

Vaan was pushed over two dozen yards before he came to a stop.

"I'm fine!" he shouted.

Roar!

The wyrm cried after Astoria struck its eye in the same instance.

Although it managed to close its injured left eye, protecting it from being cleaved by Astoria's greatsword, the powerful force behind her swing still inflicted a great deal of pain.

It felt like its injured left eye was being crushed under the force.

Nevertheless, Astoria swung her greatsword at the wyrm's left eye several more times after seeing the first attack did little damage.

Roar!

The wyrm cried under the barrage of attack and shook its head repeatedly before slapping her away with its head.

After shaking Astoria off, it immediately dived into the ground.

However, Vaan had his Rank 4 Black Sword wedged in between the scales on the wyrm's tail end. Thus, he was dragged underground with the wyrm.

"Kyuuu!" Topaz panicked after Vaan disappeared.

"Don't worry, Tia. We'll definitely find him," Astoria calmed her before urging, "Let's follow them before we lose them."

"Kyuu!" Topaz agreed.

"Lady Hester, check on Lord Aeliana and the Volcan Wolf. I'll take care of things here," Astoria instructed before she jumped into the tunnel with Topaz.

Hester naturally didn't refuse and immediately headed over to Aeliana's location.

She was aware of her own strength; she wasn't strong enough to hurt the Magma Wyrms.

If she followed Astoria and fought in the limited tunnel space, she was more likely to lose her life than contribute to the fight.

...

Sometime later, Hester reached Aeliana's general location before she spotted her with the Volcan Wolf.

Although the wolf's broken body was restored, it wasn't moving.

"How is it, Lord Aeliana?" Hester asked with a bad feeling.

However, Aeliana shook her head.

"It didn't make it," Aeliana said with a sigh before adding, "The wyrm's attack shattered all of its bones and organs. Although I managed to restore its body, it didn't last long enough to survive during the healing process."

After Hester heard that, she immediately felt sad.

It was rare to come across a loyal beast, and its life was lost just like that—All because she allowed it to follow the group in the middle regions.

It was a short-lived companion.

"Its death is on me," Hester said with a sad sigh.

The two ladies underwent a moment of silence for the fallen wolf.

Shortly after, Aeliana said, "Don't take it too hard on yourself."

"It was prepared to die when it chose to follow us. It served its purpose and died a noble death. We can only honor it by giving it a proper burial or returning its body to its kin."

"Anyway, where's Headmaster Astoria and Lord Vahn?" Aeliana asked shortly after.

"Sir Vahn was dragged underground by the Magma Wyrms, and Headmaster Astoria went to chase after them," Hester explained with her gaze fixed on the wolf's motionless body.

After Aeliana heard that, she simply responded, "Oh, I see."

"Huh? Aren't you worried for them, Lord Aeliana?" Hester glanced at her with furrowed brows when she noticed the lack of concern.

Nevertheless, Aeliana casually shook her head.

"Lord Vahn will deal with it," Aeliana confidently claimed.

She had the utmost trust in him.

...

Meanwhile, Vaan continued to be pulled by the Magma Wyrms as it plowed through the earth like water, reaching deeper and deeper into the subterranean region.

At the same time, he could feel the earth's temperature rising. He instantly knew the Magma Wyrms were returning to the magma pool.

Since its kin didn't come for help despite its repeated roar, they most likely didn't hear it, being so deep underground.

However, it would be a different situation if the Magma Wyrms returned to its nest and called for help directly.

Ba-dump! Ba-dump!

While he was under the Lycan Transformation, his heart continued to beat powerfully. But within the adrenaline-like blood rush, there was also a hint of excitement.

Safety first had been his motto, but there was no such thing as safety in the Thousand Fog Mountains.

But instead of being worried about the unknown, he looked forward to it with anticipation.

A game of chess could only be played when the first step was taken.

There was a sense of thrill in solving problems as they arise rather than solving all his problems before they become problems.

He was more willing to take risks.

No doubt, it was a change brought by his staggering growth in strength. The strong had more freedom of choice.

'I've changed, huh?' Vaan silently reflected.