

The Witch 281

Chapter 281: Declaration of Challenge

Shortly after the dragon lord directed his attention to Vaan's group, everyone tensed up.

"Your group has nothing to worry about. You are not criminals but guests of our land. As such, you won't be judged like these black witches. On the contrary, you are free to stay for as long as you like," Lord Narvim promised before adding, "However, we need to wipe your memories when you decide to leave."

"Our memories, huh? In other words, you want to keep news of your dragon tribe's existence from spreading, Your Excellency," Vaan stated before saying, "It's a pity for those who make it here after much troubles and trials."

"If you don't want your memories wiped, you can prove you are worthy of keeping them by overcoming the second stage in the Trial by Fire, Human," Lord Narvim casually stated.

"The Trial by Fire... I must say I am a little interested." Vaan rubbed his chin with a smile before mentioning, "But more importantly, according to the traces left behind by the Fallen Witches, there should have been another two in their group, possibly the one with spatial abilities and an illusion spell expert."

Since he didn't know which of the Fallen Witches had been killed, he could only say possibly. That said, it didn't stop him from suspecting the two Fallen Witches had escaped.

"What do you plan to do with those two Fallen Witches that fled, Your Excellency?" Vaan asked.

After all, news about the dragons was bound to spread if they weren't swiftly dealt with.

"You don't have to worry about that, Human. Did you think it is easy to come and go from this place, more so under the eyes of so many dragons? Two black witches managed to slip away, but it's not hard to track them," Lord Narvim coolly said.

"The spatial-attribute black witch didn't bother hiding the spatial coordinates of her space gate. Thus, it was quite easy to read her destination. This Lord will deal with those two runaway black witches later."

"Since Your Excellency has already said as such, I shan't speak of this matter further," Vaan politely said.

Given this dragon tribe's immense wisdom, he suspected even complex spatial spells were child's play to them.

"Your Excellency, I have a personal vendetta with one of the Fallen Witches. I wonder if you can bestow me with the opportunity to settle my grudge first?" Aeliana suddenly requested with a determined look.

"Oh?"

Lord Narvim glanced at Aeliana with interest before shifting his gaze to the green-skinned black witch. Then, after looking back and forth between the two, he grasped the picture.

"Interesting. You're the Plant-type Abomination that had been treated. But before you were cured, you must have suffered a lot at the hands of this black witch, huh? That explains why your soul also looks a bit special," Lord Narvim muttered before nodding, "Very well, this Lord will allow it."

"Thank you, Your Excellency," Aeliana expressed her gratitude with a slight bow.

"Did you hear that, proud dragons of the Ninth Peak? This witch has declared a challenge to this other black witch," Lord Narvim hollered to the crowd before barking, "Prepare the stage!"

Roar!

Numerous True Dragons quickly roared with excitement.

Shortly after, the ground rumbled before the circle expanded, pulling Vaan's group away from the Fallen Witches.

The earth on the border rose high, transforming into tall earth walls before everything transmuted into black iron and became a black metal cage.

But although it was called a cage, it was very spacious, enough for Aeliana and Elvira to fight without restraints.

Roar!

(I was a little unhappy with the Lord's decision, but that human managed to spice things up. I hope she won't give that black witch an easy death for what she has done to the young.)

(I also hope so, but it won't be easy without assistance. After all, that black witch appears to be more powerful than her challenger.)

(That's true... Surely, she isn't so foolish as to challenge a more powerful opponent by herself, right? After all, her side currently holds the advantage of four to two.)

(But that is only an advantage in numbers. Numbers mean nothing in front of a stronger power. The black witches are definitely stronger than that group of four humans.)

(Naturally, if we are only looking at raw power. However, from what I see, the potential of that group of humans is much higher than the black witches.)

The crowd of True Dragons buzzed with discussion, even before the start of the battle.

Although the scale of the battle between humans was unlikely to match a battle between dragons like them, they were strangely more excited to watch the humans fight.

Perhaps, it was because they rarely had human visitors, and a battle between humans was different from what they usually see every day.

"Are you sure you can defeat Fallen Witch Elvira on your own?" Vaan inquired.

"I am not sure, but I can't wait any longer, Lord Vahn. I don't think I will get another chance like this," Aeliana shook her head with uncertainty before sincerely requesting, "I hope you won't stop me."

"If your mind is made up, I naturally won't stop you," Vaan calmly said.

"Thank you, Lord Vahn."

...

Meanwhile, on Elvira's side, the other Fallen Witch, Levana, asked her, "Do you need any help?"

"Does it look like they will let you help me?" Elvira indifferently responded before glancing at the dragon lord. "Can I turn down this challenge?"

"You will have to see if the other side agrees. We won't interfere in your human disputes. But, of course, you still have to choose your punishment, even if you managed to survive your fight with your challenger," Lord Narvim coolly stated.

"I see," Elvira uttered.

She didn't have a choice.

The consequences of her past actions couldn't be blamed on anyone but herself. This was something she had to face.

Seeing Aeliana stepping forward by herself, Elvira also stepped forward to face her.

"How foolish." Elvira shook her head and asked disdainfully, "Do you think you can beat me by yourself, Lord of Sunpeak Town?"

"How would I know if I don't try? Do you think I am still the same person shackled in your lab?" Aeliana coolly replied.

"Aren't you?" Elvira smirked coldly before saying, "Don't take it personally. It was all for research purposes."

"Yeah? Well, it was pretty fucking personal to me," Aeliana spat.

Chapter 282: Start of Battle

"Since the challenger has decided to fight the challenged by herself, the unrelated parties shall be excused from the ring," Lord Narvim calmly declared.

Shortly after the unrelated parties were removed from the battle ring, Lord Narvim glanced at Fallen Witch Levana and said, "You do not need to witness this fight, black witch."

"If no one pleads for you, you will be sent to the land of fire to take the Trial by Fire."

Nevertheless, not a single dragon spoke for Levana.

The True Dragons didn't have any reason to help out someone associated with the person who murdered one of their young.

Roar!

(Get rid of her!)

(Let the black witch die!)

(Justice for my child!)

Several True Dragons voiced their strong opinion on the matter with cold gazes. They didn't have a hint of compassion for the black witch.

"Very well." Lord Narvim calmly nodded without any surprise and issued his instruction, "Someone, come and take her to the land of fire to undergo the Trial by Fire."

"Yes, my Lord!"

Shortly after a Peak-level Rank 4 True Dragon volunteered, Levana was quickly taken away to the Ninth Peak's center.

There, they made their way down to the land of fire.

Levana didn't resist nor attempt to escape during her escort. There was no use in trying without Claudette's spatial ability.

'My only chance of survival lies in this so-called Trial of Fire. Fortunately, I am a fire-attribute High Witch, so I should have a better chance than others,' Levana silently thought.

...

Meanwhile, shortly after sending Fallen Witch Levana off, Lord Narvim shifted his attention to Vaan's side.

"Human, how about joining this Lord's side for a chat as we watch the battle unfold together?" Lord Narvim invited Vaan.

"Since the Lord of the Ninth Peak took the initiative to invite me, how can I decline? I would be honored to join you for a chat, Your Excellency," Vaan accepted cordially.

"Be careful," Astoria reminded with a whisper.

"Your concern is always appreciated, but you don't need to worry, Headmaster Astoria," Vaan calmly assured her before saying, "I am a man who has lived in the Kingdom of Black Rose all my life. I know where to draw the line between respect and rudeness."

"If you keep this up, others might mistake you for a naggy wife sending her husband off," Vaan added a joke with a smile.

Astoria was caught off guard by his teasing.

"W-who is your wife?" she responded in a chiding tone with a slight blush.

Nevertheless, the tension she felt from being surrounded by so many powerful True Dragons was slightly abated.

"Hahaha..." Vaan simply laughed it off and left.

"This guy..." Astoria softly muttered with an annoyed look.

But shortly after Vaan disappeared to the dragon lord's side for a chat, her lips curved into a smile. At the same time, she had a blank look in her eyes as if she was trying to imagine her life as Vaan's wife.

Nevertheless, the image was quickly scrapped after it appeared in her mind as she recalled Hester was still beside her.

...

"My sincerest apologies, Your Excellency. I hope I didn't make you wait long," Vaan apologized.

"Not at all, Human." Lord Narvim casually shook his head and asked, "Why don't you start by telling me your name? It would be rude of this Lord to keep calling the Spirit Contractor of a High-rank Earth Spirit as Human."

"It's Vaan Raphna or Vahn Cadieux. Whichever you prefer, Your Excellency. I go by both names," Vaan replied.

"Well then, Vaan. It seems you are as interested in this chat as I am," Lord Narvim calmly mentioned before giving him the courtesy of the first question, "This Lord will let you ask first."

"Then, I shall be frank and bold, Your Excellency. I noticed that you treated the Fallen Witches quite fairly. If we had been in their shoes, you would have treated us the same way," Vaan mentioned before asking, "You don't have any discrimination against the Fallen Witches, do you? Your Excellency?"

"Hah, an interesting first question, Vaan. You were quite sharp to have noticed—"

Roar!

The dragon lord didn't finish speaking before the crowd of True Dragons suddenly roared after witnessing the start of the battle between Aeliana and Elvira.

Boom!

A lance of black water had been fired without prior warning, forcing Aeliana to conjure several swords of light with her first Specialized Magic to block the attack.

However, the lance of black water quickly shattered Aeliana's light swords one by one before striking her in the shoulder and knocking her off her feet.

She was sent flying over thirty yards before she came to a complete stop. Even so, she was still some distance from the wall.

"A sneak attack, huh? How unsurprising, coming from a deplorable and ugly mug of a person like you," Aeliana spat condescendingly.

"In a battle of life and death, the methods do not matter, only the results. And in a battle of magic, the one to strike first gains the upper hand," Elvira coldly responded without guilt or shame. "I will not ask for forgiveness. Just know that you suffered at my hands in the past. And today, you will also die by my hands."

Aeliana's gaze sharpened before she noticed her shoulder wound was healing.

The black water lance had penetrated her shoulder, and the dark-attribute mana infused in the water spell corroded her flesh, preventing her wound from healing.

"Insignificant trick," Aeliana spat.

In the next moment, she decisively and ruthlessly dug into her open wound and tore out the corrupted flesh with her own hand without so much as a wince of pain.

Shortly after she tossed aside the corrupted piece of flesh in a dismissive manner, her shoulder wound rapidly healed.

Although her light-attribute mana could have negated the dark-attribute mana's effect, she didn't want to turn it into a battle of attrition in which Elvira clearly held the upper hand due to her larger mana pool.

"Don't think your death will be an easy one, Elvira," Aeliana spat as she underwent Dryad Transformation, turning her body into fibrous substances.

At the same time, she fully released her suppressed killing intent.

Chapter 283: Vine Killer

With Aeliana's killing intent fully released at one sole target, Elvira felt like she was blasted with a wave of hot air, causing her atmosphere to feel heavy and suffocating.

"Hahaha, that's some impressive killing intent you have there. Are you sure you're not a demon?" Elvira ridiculed Aeliana for being closer to demons than Fallen Witches.

Although she appeared nonchalant, her body was slightly tense as she was affected by the heavy killing intent to some extent.

Nevertheless, Elvira shook her head and also underwent a transformation as her green flesh turned into fibrous substances like trees.

Before long, Elvira became a Dryad like Aeliana.

If the remaining human features were ignored, her Dryad form shared the same appearance as Aeliana's.

After all, their powers originated from the same source.

Nevertheless, Elvira did not reveal her Dryad Transformation ability, even when she was fighting Astoria and Ember back in her pocket realm.

Thus, it implied she hadn't been using her full strength back then.

"It looks like you can use Dryad Transformation now," Elvira's glinted with interest before she said, "However, you've forgotten where your power came from. Do you think you can beat me, the one who assimilated the original source of this power?"

"You talk too much," Aeliana coldly spat.

After turning into a Dryad, her immediate surrounding was affected by her soft and warm green-glowing aura. The patches of grass on the ground experienced accelerated growth and proliferated beyond their standard size.

Nevertheless, Aeliana infused mana into the ground with a stomp before numerous sharp roots rushed under the surface, heading toward Elvira like slithering snakes.

"Really? Do you think this level of attack can hurt me? I'm offended," Elvira snorted, countering Aeliana's attack with a similar move.

Numerous sharp roots also rushed out with a stomp of her own to clash with Aeliana's attack.

However, in contrast to the healthy brown color of Aeliana's sharp roots, Elvira's roots were black and insidious. At the same time, they were also thicker than Aeliana's.

Between a single attribute attack and a triple attribute attack, the victor was decided in a short clash.

As the two groups of roots smashed into each other and intertwined like two groups of snakes trying to coil and strangle each other, Elvira's dark roots overpowered Aeliana's brown roots.

The brown roots were quickly eroded by Elvira's dark attributes before they turned brittle and shattered like glass.

After overcoming Aeliana's attack, Elvira's dark roots continued to advance towards their target like earthen spikes shooting out of the ground.

But before they could reach Aeliana, they suddenly stopped as if they had just reached the limit of their extension.

"Hm?" Elvira frowned.

Underneath the surface, the dark roots had been broken by a new group of thorny green vines that appeared even more tenacious than the brown roots as they were empowered by light.

The light negated the darkness and cut off Elvira's power supply to her dark roots.

But after cutting off the dark roots from Elvira, the thorny green vines proceeded to coil around them and devoured the water inside them to fuel their own growth.

However, it wasn't just the water.

The thorny green vines also assimilated the broken dark roots and made them a part of them.

Shortly after, they intertwined together and formed a giant vine serpent with numerous wooden spikes on its back and two wooden horns, making it resemble a type of sea dragon.

Nevertheless, Aeliana controlled the vine serpent to coil around her protectively, ready to receive Elvira's next attack.

Instead of taking the initiative to launch the next attack, she had chosen to be on the defensive side.

"Grafting, huh? Hmph, so what if you stole a bit of my power? Your power is still incomparable to my own," Elvira snorted.

Losing a few of her roots and mana was trivial; she could always produce more.

However, she didn't intend to do such a thing. Using such a low-level attack against Aeliana's vine serpent was just inefficient and an extravagant waste of time and mana.

"Let me show what high-level grafting is about," Elvira boasted.

She quickly produced several different plants with her Dryad Power. There was a thorny purple flower, a black lotus, and red ginseng-like roots.

Dryads could recreate any plant they understand.

After they were produced, the red flower's stem replaced the black lotus's, and the red ginseng-like roots were added to the stem's bottom.

At the same time, the red flower petals also merged with the lotus.

The three plants were combined and transformed, creating a brand new budding flower-like plant with unknown effects.

"Have a taste of its effects," Elvira uttered.

In that instant, she channeled her power into the reddish-black budding flower, causing it to grow over ten feet tall.

Countless purple spores were released upon blossoming before Elvira waved them at Aeliana.

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

She immediately manipulated her vine serpent to devour all the unknown purple spores with a suction-like ability, which made it seem like a real living creature instead of an ordinary combination of plants created through magic.

Although the vine serpent devoured all the purple spores, it suddenly wilted from the inside out like it was undergoing rapid aging until death.

"Vine Killer."

Aeliana's eyes instantly narrowed with a sharp look.

"Vine Killer?" Elvira snickered with contempt and said, "My flower is no ordinary Vine Killer; it's a flower that kills all plants!"

Aeliana's wilting vine serpent suddenly disintegrated in pieces as purple spores poured out of it and rushed at Aeliana.

There was no doubt that the purple spores were fatal to her in her Dryad form.

But even though her instincts screamed with danger, she didn't lose her calmness and faced the imminent threat with a clear mind.

The purple spores were deadly, but they lacked firepower!

Infinite Sword Light!

Numerous swords of light formed in midair around Aeliana before shooting toward the incoming cloud of purple spores like volleys of arrows—No, they were more like ballistic missiles; incredible fast.

Aeliana rarely used her first Specialized Magic, Sword of Light. But once she did, she immediately stole the spotlight.

Tens... Hundreds... Thousands...

Countless tiny swords of light continued to form and bombard the cloud of purple spores with rapid speed, quickly whittling chunks of purple spores at a time and forwarding on their flight path to Elvira.

Chapter 284: Will of the Spirit

Upon seeing the power behind Aeliana's swords of light, Elvira's expression immediately turned grave.

She could understand Aeliana's Dryad Transformation being powerful, but she didn't expect her Sword of Light to be just as powerful as well.

They were both at the same level of power that a Mid-stage High Witch could exert!

If she didn't have years of accumulated knowledge and the advantage of possessing more elemental attributes than Aeliana, she might really have a chance of losing!

That said, Aeliana was also burning up her mana reserve by using her Sword of Light on a grand scale just to keep the cloud of purple spores from reaching her.

Nevertheless, she couldn't stop until her sword lights destroyed every single purple spore in front of her.

"Hmph!" Elvira snorted.

A column of black water rose into the air with a quick stomp, blocking all the sword lights from reaching her body.

The water absorbed the light while the darkness negated it, breaking down the sword lights into nothing.

Shortly after every purple spore was destroyed, Aeliana ended her barrage of sword lights. In the same breath, the column of black water also dropped to the ground, returning to the earth.

"I've underestimated you. With the quality of your magic circles, you are indeed only a Peak-stage Senior Witch. But the power of your Specialized Magic has far exceeded that level," Elvira commented before declaring resolutely, "As such, I will view you as fellow Mid-stage High Witch and use every ounce of my power to destroy you!"

"Less nonsense. Actions speak louder than words," Aeliana coolly stated, appearing more confident.

She knew she had grown much stronger despite still being a Peak-stage Senior Witch. Even so, she didn't realize the extent of her power until she fought seriously.

Nevertheless, Elvira's expression became colder after hearing Aeliana's words.

She didn't waste another breath and used a strong step to lunge toward Aeliana, taking the initiative to close the distance between them.

Elvira wanted to bring their fight to close quarters where she could also take advantage of her strong body.

However, Aeliana definitely knew where her disadvantages lay.

She quickly drew her distance by running alongside the ring's wall and fired sword lights at Elvira to hinder her advances.

...

Meanwhile, outside the battle ring, the dragon lord's expression had become grim after Elvira revealed her Dryad Transformation.

Countless True Dragons watching outside the battle ring also frowned with doubts.

"Such wickedness... To think this black witch had committed such a heinous and sacrilegious act against the spirits...! She does not deserve to live!" Lord Narvim grumbled with outrage.

Vaan silently studied the dragon lord's expression on the side and suspected he could see the Wood Spirit suffering inside Elvira's body.

'Is the Wood Spirit still alive?' Vaan wondered with surprise.

Nevertheless, as he watched the dragon lord, he felt the dragon lord wanted to fly into the battle ring immediately and execute the Fallen Witch himself on the spot.

"I thought Your Excellency doesn't discriminate against the Fallen Witches?" Vaan mentioned with a slight smile.

"Naturally, this Lord doesn't." Lord Narvim reined in his rage and said with a frown, "Black witches or not, they are still humans, even if they have become a little different. After all, there are all sorts of circumstances that causes witches to undergo inversion."

"Thus, black witches aren't evil until they wilfully commit evil," Lord Narvim stated before glaring at Elvira from a distance dangerously. "Like this one. This black witch has gone too far!"

"Then, do you plan to interfere in their duel, Your Excellency?" Vaan casually asked.

Once Lord Narvim heard that, he shook his head with a helpless sigh.

"Unfortunately, I won't. I am a dragon of my word. I will not interfere in the dispute between these two witches," Lord Narvim stated.

"I see," Vaan casually uttered before glancing back at the battle in the ring.

Originally, the dragon lord wanted to chat with him about other things.

But after Elvira revealed her Dryad Powers, the dragon lord's mind was completely occupied by the Wood Spirit's suffering, leaving no room for other thoughts.

...

Boom, boom, boom!

The ground shattered under Elvira's deflected attacks as she continued to chase Aeliana and close their distance.

But while she was using everything to enter close quarters, Aeliana was also using everything to keep her away.

Their prolonged game of cat and mouse made Elvira impatient and furious. So much effort expended, yet so little gain.

At the same time, Aeliana's smug look further fueled her infuriation as her blood boiled.

Ba-dump!

Perhaps due to her old age, Elvira's heart couldn't handle the excitement and stimulation; it suddenly made a much weaker beat, causing her face to turn pale.

Elvira's pursuit abruptly ended as she fell to her knees and broke into cold sweats.

Ba-dump!

"Arghhh! How dare you choose this time to retaliate! No, how are you even alive?! You should be dead!" Elvira barked while clutching her heart area in pain.

The prolonged battle against Aeliana had seemingly weakened Elvira to a point where the Wood Spirit inside her could try to break free from her body.

Nevertheless, it was only the Wood Spirit's lingering will.

Aeliana was surprised by the sudden situation at first. But after a moment, she immediately revealed a delighted smile.

"Well, well, well... What do we have here? After all that boasting, it turns out this is where the true difference in our abilities lies. Mine are completely my own, whereas yours were only borrowed," Aeliana gloated before coolly stating, "This is the end."

She summoned a powerful sword of light with her remaining mana and also infused her wood-attribute mana into it with the intent to finish Elvira off.

But just as she sent the sword of light on its way, Elvira howled hysterically and overcame her immobility before leaping out of the way.

Although she managed to suppress the Wood Spirit's lingering will and preserved her life in the nick of time, she still lost her right arm in the process.

"I won't be croaking just yet!" Elvira spat with bloodshot eyes.

"Tch!" Aeliana clicked her tongue with a frosty gaze before uttering coldly, "A last-ditch effort, huh? No matter. I will take my time torturing you before I kill you."

But just as Aeliana raised her hand to gather her mana and summon another sword of light, it dissipated before she wobbled and fell onto one of her knees.

"Out of mana, huh?" Elvira uttered with a pleasant surprise before laughing hysterically, "Hahahaha!"

Chapter 285: The Outcome

After realizing her opponent had exhausted her mana, Elvira's confidence spiked as she concluded her victory.

After all, she had already suppressed the rampaging Wood Spirit's lingering will inside her body while her opponent was experiencing the effects of mana depletion.

Nevertheless, Aeliana's lightheadedness and lack of strength were only temporary.

It was something all witches experienced during mana depletion due to the body requiring to adjust to the absence of mana. After all, the body is consistently nourished by mana.

Thus, the sudden disappearance of mana in the body generates a shock akin to a lack of oxygen supply, which the body requires to function.

But since the human body still had oxygen to function in the absence of mana, it was also like eating ordinary food after enjoying high-quality food for a long time.

Even though it's still food, the body finds it unpalatable; the body had been used to high performance and found it hard to adapt to low performance suddenly.

"You did well lasting this long against me. But, alas, you failed to overcome the difference in our mana reserves. Too bad, huh? You were so close, Lord of Sunpeak Town," Elvira made a snarky remark as she approached Aeliana gloatingly.

"Don't bother burning your life force to keep fighting and just give up; it will make your death easier. The conversion of life force to mana is terrible, and the spells invoked under such conditions won't be as strong. You've lost; accept it."

"We don't know that yet," Aeliana said in a low tone.

Her head was lowered and didn't meet Elvira's gaze, but she had a stubborn and defiant look on her face. She was prepared to burn her life force to fight until the end.

After all, Elvira only had one arm, and her guard was down. It was easy to regenerate an entire arm so quickly, even with the Wood Spirit's powers.

Thus, Aeliana waited for the crucial moment in Elvira's attack to make her decisive move.

...

Meanwhile, the dragon lord sighed outside the battle ring with every other True Dragon pinning their hopes on Aeliana's victory.

Her mana depletion had dashed their hopes.

"Alas, she still couldn't overcome the fundamental difference in their magic attainment. Now is the time for you to step in. You can still save her, Vaan. This Lord can't and won't intervene in your human disputes, but you can," Lord Narvim spoke.

However, Vaan shook his head calmly.

"She hasn't lost yet," Vaan stated.

No, but she's about to die – was what the dragon lord wanted to say.

But seeing the calm and indifferent look in Vaan's eyes that didn't show the slightest concern, the dragon lord wondered if he was confident or simply heartless.

"Her death will be on you," Lord Narvim solemnly stated without speaking further on the matter. It was unfitting of a dragon of his status to persuade the human further.

Nevertheless, Vaan had the utmost confidence in Aeliana's victory.

"Her victory will be, Your Excellency," Vaan smiled.

At the same time, Astoria and Hester looked like they were prepared to jump into the battle ring to save Aeliana.

They gave Vaan an eye signal, but he dissuaded them with a shake of his head.

"Did Sir Vahn give up on Lord Aeliana?"

"That shouldn't be the case..."

Astoria responded with a frown after Hester asked her with surprise.

Nevertheless, they lost their chance after their brief moment of hesitation. It was too late for them to save Aeliana from Elvira's finishing blow then, even if they wanted to.

...

"Goodbye, Lord of Sunpeak Town. Rest assured, knowing that after your death, your body will become a part of me to make my Dryad Power complete," Elvira declared with her hand raised, producing a water lance in the air.

Even at that moment, she could not see Aeliana's expression.

That said, she assumed she had given up despite her stubborn words, seeing how she remained in an unfavorable and despairing position of kneeling on the ground with one knee and head lowered.

However, Elvira was wrong.

In the matter of a short breath, Aeliana's stubborn look underwent a few changes as her eyelashes fluttered with surprise, then eyes brightened with joy and blazing hope.

Her dried mana veins were suddenly filled with mana that came from seemingly nowhere.

However, Aeliana quickly realized where the mana came from.

"Die!" Elvira uttered her death sentence.

But in the same instant, Aeliana's eyes glinted with sharpness as she made her move, slamming the ground with her palm.

At such proximity, Elvira had no time to react to the dozens of sword lights conjured out of thin air and impaling her body at rapid speed.

"What!" Elvira cried, eyes widening with disbelief.

She didn't die immediately as Aeliana's sword lights only served to disable her movements. At the same time, her mana veins were damaged by said sword lights, barring her from her magic.

Furthermore, vines grew out of the ground and wrapped around her body, digging into her flesh and further restraining her movements.

Aeliana completely disabled Elvira, leaving no chance for her to make any comebacks.

Shortly after, she stood up and glanced at Elvira with a frosty look.

"I told you; you're death won't be an easy one," Aeliana coldly reminded.

In that instance, Elvira knew she was fucked. However, she couldn't understand where Aeliana gained her sudden power.

"How...? You used up your mana. You shouldn't have been able to cast your spells this fast, nor this powerfully!" Elvira spouted with disbelief.

Having performed body transmutation on herself, she was also no stranger to pain. Even so, her face slowly paled from the vines draining her blood.

After wracking her brain for a short moment, she could only think of one possibility.

"A Servant Contract?! No, that doesn't make sense. Witches only use Servant Contracts to supply their companions and familiars, not receive them... Unless... you entered a Servant Contract with another witch!" That must be right!" Elvira guessed before criticizing her, "You've cheated!"

"You can think whatever you want, but you won't get any answers from me. That said, let me return these words to you; the method doesn't matter, only the results," Aeliana coolly stated before saying, "Now grit your teeth and taste a bit of my pain."

"Arghhh—!"

Chapter 286: Spirit Extraction

For the following half an hour, only Elvira's scream could be heard resounding from the battle ring.

Aeliana tortured her to her heart's content, using all methods she could think of, including ordinary methods such as skinning, ripping nails, eye gorging, and organ removal.

She did everything to inflict the most significant pain on Elvira, causing some True Dragons to have mixed feelings.

Only the close families and friends of the young dragon that had been killed took pleasure in watching the gruesome sight.

But even they couldn't help but silently admit that it was a wicked thing to do to another life.

Nevertheless, Aeliana was eventually satisfied with her revenge when Elvira exhausted her strength from screaming and started pleading for quick release.

A part of Aeliana wanted to continue, but she couldn't keep her Lord waiting.

Thus, she eventually ended Elvira's life.

...

"It's finally over," Lord Narvim said with a soft sigh before commenting, "No life deserves such suffering."

The dragon lord detested Elvira for her heinous acts against a Wood Spirit, but even he couldn't bear to watch her wail in pain.

During Vaan's short stay at Ninth Peak, he had come to understand that the Lord of the Ninth Peak was a bit of a pacifist.

However, he wasn't so sure if the dragon lords of the other eight mountain peaks were the same.

Nevertheless, if the other dragon lords had the same strength as Lord Narvim, then the red dragon tribe was powerful beyond belief.

They had the power to erase any human kingdom from existence if Transcendent Witches weren't added into the picture.

"Thank you, my Lord. I was able to win, thanks to your blessings," Aeliana expressed her gratitude after reaching Vaan's location.

"It's nothing much. I hope you find some peace after succeeding in your revenge," Vaan casually said before returning his attention to the dragon lord.

"I apologize for making you watch something unsightly, Your Excellency," Vaan apologized before arguing, "However, I beg to differ. Some irredeemable lives deserve such suffering. Perhaps, it will teach them to do more good in their next life after understanding the pain that they inflict on others."

"Fighting violence with violence is not the answer. It's just an endless cycle of hatred," Lord Narvim casually stated.

"The cycle of hatred can't continue if everyone is dead." Vaan shook his head with a slight smile and said, "Sometimes, it takes a greater evil to defeat evil."

"Except evil can't be erased," Lord Narvim replied.

"No, but it can be defeated again and again," Vaan casually stated.

Lord Narvim glanced at Vaan in the eye and said, "If not for everything you've said and shown thus far, I might have mistaken you for a righteous person, Vaan."

"Me? Righteous?" Vaan shook his head with a soft chuckle and said, "That can't be farther from the truth, Your Excellency. I simply believe there should be balance in all things. Although I condemn evil, I also don't mind getting my hands dirty if it is required of me."

"You might call me hypocritical or selfish, but such is life. What is right and wrong when one's life is at stake? I'm just doing what I can to live in this unforgiving world," Vaan stated.

Lord Narvim tried to smile after listening to Vaan, but his smile looked especially terrifying and menacing as a dragon.

Nevertheless, he didn't disagree.

"Walk with me," Lord Narvim stated.

Shortly after Vaan nodded, he followed the dragon lord into the battle ring before they stopped before Elvira's corpse.

"Poor thing," Lord Narvim uttered after glancing at Elvira's corpse, but Vaan knew the dragon lord was referring to the Wood Spirit.

"Can you save the Wood Spirit, Your Excellency?" Vaan inquired.

At the same time, Astoria and Hester had made their way over. However, they didn't speak and simply listened in.

"This Lord can try, but it is unlikely. Perhaps, only a Rank 6 divine being can save it," Lord Narvim replied before mentioning, "Spirits are pretty much in their astral forms. Thus, when they are torn apart, it's akin to losing a piece of their soul."

"Although this Lord can extract the Wood Spirit from the black witch and piece her back together, this Lord can't make up for what she has lost," Lord Narvim stated before casting a glance at Aeliana. "Unless..."

Lord Narvim didn't finish his sentence, but everyone understood his meaning. He needed the Wood Spirit's essence that was inside Aeliana.

"Of course, that also doesn't guarantee a high chance of success even if this Lord gathered all the Wood Spirit's pieces. Bringing back a lost soul is god's domain," Lord Narvim mentioned.

Furthermore, it was unlikely for Aeliana to agree to it.

After all, it was detrimental to her since the Wood Spirit's essence inside her had already perfectly fused and become a part of her.

Perhaps, her own soul would be at stake if the Wood Spirit's essence was extracted from her.

"This Lord will give the Wood Spirit a proper burial," Lord Narvim shortly stated before saying, "Hopefully, the new spirit born from its remain won't have to go through the same tragic experience."

A few moments later, everyone witnessed the dragon lord speaking in its dragon language, imbued with mana.

Its mana-imbued words invoked magic, and Elvira's body transmutation was slowly reversed, allowing the Wood Spirit's remains to be extracted along with other creatures she had merged with her body.

After the Wood Spirit's remains were collected, Vaan and the others watched the dragon lord pieced the Wood Spirit back together.

However, several parts that made it whole were clearly missing.

The Wood Spirit was missing a left hand, right toe, and parts of her wings. Although it didn't seem like much, that was only on the surface.

The Wood Spirit was missing more crucial parts internally.

Nevertheless, much of the Wood Spirit's external features were restored; she had her eyes closed and appeared to be peacefully sleeping. But no matter how much they want it, the Wood Spirit wouldn't be able to open her eyes.

Even so, everyone vaguely Wood Spirit's lingering will to live.

The dragon lord sighed again with helplessness as he was unable to help the Wood Spirit proceed further beyond this point.

It was beyond his ability.

Nevertheless, Vaan glanced at the Wood Spirit with a contemplating look.

Spirits were quite rare, to begin with. Thus, he felt like letting it go without trying something would be a waste.

Perhaps, only he can help it.

"May I, Your Excellency?" Vaan requested.

Chapter 287: Soul Master

Roar!

A Peak-level Rank 4 True Dragon suddenly roared outside the battle ring after hearing Vaan's request to the dragon lord.

"Presumptuous human! Do you think you can save the Wood Spirit when even Lord Ninth is helpless?! How dare you look down on the dragon lord!" the Peak-level Rank 4 True Dragon. "Do you think you are more capable than—"

"Pipe down, Tyvrin! You will not be rude to our guest!" Lord Narvim silenced the Peak-level Rank 4 True Dragon before it could finish speaking its mind.

"Y-Yes, Lord Ninth! I apologize for speaking out of turn." Tyvrin's aura diminished after being scolded, but then he said, "However, I cannot stand this human's blind arrogance."

"The epitome of blind arrogance is when you immediately assume something despite having zero knowledge of it, Tyvrin," Lord Narvim coolly stated before saying, "As a pursuer of the truth, I am

disappointed in you. One does not assume the unknown but questions it. That is how you learn about the unknown."

The unknown was to be feared.

Making assumptions about the unknown is disregarding the unknown, and ignoring that which hasn't been understood is sheer arrogance.

"I understand, Lord Ninth. It was my mistake," Tyvrin quickly reflected on himself before turning to Vaan. "I apologize for thoughtlessly criticizing you, Human."

Although Tyvrin apologized, Vaan could tell that he was not convinced that he could save the Wood Spirit.

Nevertheless, Vaan didn't find it surprising that all dragons were as well-mannered and reasonable as the dragon lord.

After all, one of the True Dragons was killed by humans. Thus, it was just wishful thinking to hope every dragon would welcome them with smiles.

"This Lord hope you won't take it to heart, Vaan," Lord Narvim spoke apologetically to Vaan for his kin's mistake before saying, "However, I hope you also understand his doubts."

"If you are not confident, it's best that you let this Lord put the Wood Spirit to rest. It has already suffered much. Thus, it won't be good to desecrate its astral body any further."

"I understand where you are coming from, Your Excellency," Vaan calmly replied before shaking his head.

"However, we should also respect the Wood Spirit's will. Even if it's just a lingering will from when it was whole, it still shows how desperately it wanted to live. Thus, who are we to deny it of its chance to live again, no matter how slim that chance may be?"

"You've made a valid point, Vaan. I wish you the best of luck," Lord Narvim offered his blessings.

Although the dragon lord didn't know what Vaan could do, he sincerely hoped he could do something for the Wood Spirit.

At the same time, whether it was Vaan's group or the True Dragons, everyone watched him curiously.

Without a doubt, they were about to learn one of his secrets.

Nevertheless, it was a secret he no longer needed to keep, nor could he keep it from the dragon lord's seemingly piercing and all-seeing eyes.

As a Rank 5 being, the dragon lord had undoubtedly developed abilities that allowed him to glimpse into the divine.

Thus, the dragon lord already had suspicions regarding the form of his soul.

Furthermore, he had already straightened things out with his group. He also learned that the dragons appeared relatively neutral in matters related to humans and demons but had great respect for spirits.

As such, saving the Wood Spirit had more benefits than disadvantages.

If Vaan had one concern, it would be the price to use Name Bestowal on the Wood Spirit. He didn't doubt that the price he had to pay would be much greater than the previous times.

After all, the Wood Spirit's astral body required a greater degree of reparation.

That said, he believed the acquisition of a Wood Spirit and the goodwill of the red dragon tribe would be worth it.

"If you need anything to prepare, just let this Lord know," Lord Narvim suddenly added.

"That won't be necessary, Your Excellency," Vaan replied. Shortly after, he moved his lips close to the Wood Spirit's soft pale ears and whispered, "Awaken, Emerald."

He gave the Wood Spirit a simple True Name that matched with Topaz.

Up until that point, he still wasn't sure whether Name Bestowal would work since the target was unconscious in her incomplete astral form.

Furthermore, the target had to accept the True Name for it to work.

Fortunately, his concerns were unwarranted. Shortly after uttering the Wood Spirit's new name, he quickly felt his mental strength sapped from his body in large quantities.

At the same time, he lost one-third of his Heaven-Swallow Space, which accounted for more than three months of hard work.

As he suspected, the price was no small.

'The price was three months' worth of mana accumulation from dual-practicing, huh? But I mostly dual-practice with Apprentice Witches and True Witches. Now that I have more resources and connections to higher-rank witches, I should earn back what I lost much quicker,' Vaan mused.

Nevertheless, the dragon lord and the others witness the restoration of the Wood Spirit's incomplete astral bodies with their own eyes.

Several breaths after the Wood Spirit's complete restoration, she regained consciousness and lay her eyes on Vaan, the first person she saw upon opening her eyes.

Afterward, she glanced around blankly with increasing clarity before her eyes brightened with a mixture of joy and caution. Sensing all the gazes on her, she subconsciously shot to her feet and hid behind Vaan.

That said, it didn't stop her from studying her surroundings curiously.

"Myuu?" Emerald uttered.

At the same time, everyone also studied the Wood Spirit in wonder. Surprises were written over their faces.

Although the Wood Spirit's astral form was completely restored, she had also undergone a significant change in appearance.

Rather than a mature-looking Dryad, the Wood Spirit had adopted the form of a little girl in a leafy-green dress with pale skin, sparkling emerald eyes, and two antenna-like branches sticking out of her head.

Vaan had named her based on the color of her beautiful emerald eyes, just like he did with Topaz.

"A Soul Master..." Lord Narvim uttered with awe.

Chapter 288: Second Spirit

"How unexpected, Vaan. You are truly full of surprises. Are you really a Soul Master?" Lord Narvim asked shortly after.

Besides a Soul Master, the dragon lord couldn't think of another answer for what he had just witnessed. Even so, he didn't just want to assume it. Thus, he sought Vaan's confirmation.

At the same time, Vaan had anticipated that there would be questions about his divine ability.

However, he was inwardly surprised that even the dragon lord didn't know about the divine ability that only the Great Devils could use.

No, the dragon lord definitely knew about such a divine ability.

Vaan guessed that it didn't cross the dragon lord's mind that someone besides Rank 6 beings could use a divine ability like Name Bestowal, or any divine abilities for that matter.

"Probably, Your Excellency. The truth is I've never heard about Soul Masters or what they can do, but I assume it's what you are suspecting, Your Excellency," Vaan decided to feign ignorance with a mixture of truth and lies to learn more about Soul Masters.

After all, the dragon lord seemed to have a way of knowing when people lie.

Thus, if he mixed the lies with the truth, it would obscure his answer, making the dragon believe that he truly didn't know about Soul Masters but didn't want to share his method to become one.

"It's the first time I've heard about Soul Masters as well," Astoria and Hester chimed in, not knowing their input helped Vaan hide the truth.

Although Vaan didn't mind sharing his secret, he preferred not to if given a choice.

After all, it would save the hassle of explaining.

As expected, after the dragon lord heard their answers, he only frowned for a moment before he didn't pay them further thoughts.

"Is that so? Well, it's not surprising that you humans don't know about Soul Masters. After all, Soul Masters are incredibly rare, even in Chaos," Lord Narvim proceeded to explain.

"Soul Masters, as their names implied, they are masters on the topic of souls. They have the ability to improve their souls and mend damaged or broken ones. However, not everyone can have this ability. It is determined at birth, and even if one is born with it, they wouldn't know until they awaken it."

"Thus, you can tell just how special and talented Vaan is for having this kind of ability," Lord Narvim mentioned.

Aeliana proudly smiled as if it was a matter of course, while Astoria and Hester stared at Vaan with amazement.

Hester also couldn't help but sigh. Some people were just born differently.

"You're probably aware of this, but let this Lord remind you, Vaan," Lord Narvim suddenly mentioned.

"You are shortening your lifespan every time you use your soul force to mend another being's soul. So, it would be best if you don't use this ability too often. That said, this Lord is grateful for your willingness to sacrifice yourself to save the Wood Spirit. It was a very noble thing to do."

"You will be Ninth Peak's most respected guest for as long as you stay here. This guarantee that no dragon will mistreat you while you are here," Lord Narvim promised shortly after.

"I see," Vaan uttered before cupping his fist for a respectful bow. "Thank you, Your Excellency. You are too kind."

"No, thank you, Vaan," Lord Narvim replied. A few moments later, he glanced at Emerald and communicated to it in the spirit language. "Do you remember everything that happened to you?"

Emerald gave a small nod as she continued to hide behind Vaan.

"What do you want to do now? If you stay here, this Lord guarantees that you will never have to go through such a terrible experience again," Lord Narvim promised before adding, "However, this land isn't exactly the best place for a Wood Spirit to stay."

Emerald listened to the dragon lord's promise before she clutched on Vaan's clothes and met his gaze.

Ding!

<Wood Spirit Emerald wishes to enter a Spirit Contract with you>

<Do you accept? Y / N>

'Yes!' Vaan willed.

Although he didn't know what the dragon lord said to Emerald, he wasn't going to refuse the Spirit Contract with her after paying such a hefty price.

Ding!

<The Spirit Contract has been established>

<You have acquired your second contracted spirit>

<The contracted spirit tab will be opened>

...

=====

«Contracted Spirit/s»

First Spirit: Topaz (Named Spirit) (Earth Spirit)

Spirit Rank: Early-High rank (Low-level Rank 4 equivalent)

Contracted Magic 1: [Telepathy (You can commute with other earth spirits)]

Contracted Magic 2: [Earth Manipulation (Power Limit: Low-level Rank 3 (One rank lower than contracted spirit))]

Contracted Magic 3: [Earth Transmutation (Transmutation Limit: Low-level Rank 3 materials (One rank lower than contracted spirit))]

Mana Capacity: 607/623

...

Second Spirit: emerald (Named Spirit) (Wood Spirit)

Spirit Rank: Peak-Mid rank (Peak-level Rank 3 equivalent)

Contracted Magic 1: [Telepathy (You can commute with other wood spirits)]

Contracted Magic 2: [Wood Manipulation (Power Limit: Peak-level Rank 2 (One rank lower than contracted spirit))]

Contracted Magic 3: [Plant Compendium (Recreation Limit: Peak-level Rank 2 (One rank lower than contracted spirit))]

Mana Capacity: 62/539

...

=====

[Wood Manipulation (Contract-dependant)]

Overview: The ability to manipulate all plant-based lifeforms, including general control and accelerated growth.

Restriction: Peak-level Rank 2 Magic or lower.

...

[Plant Compendium (Contract-dependant)]

Overview: The ability to devour any plant-based lifeform, gain a complete understanding of it, and recreate it through magic.

Restriction: Peak-level Rank 2 plant or lower.

=====

Shortly after the Spirit Contract was completed, Emerald underwent another change. She shrunk to the same size as Topaz as if she had just entered power-saving mode due to her low mana.

"Myuu?" Emerald uttered with surprise.

Nevertheless, unlike Topaz, Emerald appeared to be able to change her size freely, albeit as long as she had enough mana.

"So you have made your choice," Lord Narvim calmly uttered, not finding the Wood Spirit's decision surprising in the least.

After all, she was given a new life thanks to Vaan.

It didn't matter if Vaan's wood affinity was low. High wood affinity was the quickest to win over a Wood Spirit, but it wasn't the only way.

Little did the dragon lord know, the Wood Spirit was completely loyal to Vaan after receiving her True Name.

Thus, only Vaan could have become her Spirit Contractor.

Chapter 289: The Boss

"Myuu, myuu!" Emerald voiced.

"You want to go inside and rest, huh?" Vaan understood Emerald's wish due to their newly established telepathy and nodded, "Alright, off you go."

Emerald turned into green light as she disappeared inside Vaan's chest.

Ding!

<Your body does not meet the minimum requirement to house the Wood Spirit>

<Your body has been blessed by the Wood Spirit to fulfill the Spirit Contract>

<Your wood affinity has been raised by 20%>

...

=====

«Elemental Affinity»

[Earth: 53%]

[Wind: 13%]

[Lightning: 12%]

[Light: 5%]

[Wood: 5% → 25% (↑20)]

=====

Shortly after Emerald entered Vaan's body and raised his wood affinity, Vaan was pleasantly surprised by the additional benefit.

If he could enter more Spirit Contracts with other elemental spirits, he could easily increase his elemental affinity without relying on large amounts of precious earthly resources.

A few moments after Emerald disappeared inside Vaan's chest, she suddenly came out again—or rather, she had been kicked out.

Vaan and the others stared at her with surprise.

"Don't you want to rest?"

"Myu, myuu..."

Emerald expressed that she did want to rest after Vaan asked her.

Nevertheless, after Vaan let her inside for a second time, Emerald got kicked out again. She lowered her head with a depressed look.

"Myuu..." Emerald uttered despondently.

"What is this? Is there an issue with accommodating the Wood Spirit? Why does she come out with such a sad look, Vaan?" Lord Narvim inquired with doubts. "There shouldn't be any issue once a Spirit Contract is established, though..."

"That's not it, Your Excellency," Vaan replied with a frown.

It didn't take him long to realize the problem. He quickly summoned Topaz and had her answer for the issue.

"Mind explaining yourself, Tia?"

"Kyu, kyuu, kyuu," Topaz replied with an attitude as she had puffed cheeks and crossed arms, facing in another direction.

"You don't want to share your space with another spirit because it feels squishy? That's why you kick her out? That's not how you should treat a fellow spirit, Tia. Don't you know that is bullying? She's your sister now," Vaan mildly chided.

"Kyu..." Topaz lowered her head, feeling wronged.

She felt like Vaan had abandoned her and was showing favoritism to the new spirit over her, who had been with him much earlier.

"Look here, Tia. She has been through a lot. As the first spirit, you are also the big sister. Thus, it's your responsibility to look after her and make her feel welcomed, not bully her," Vaan lectured before adding, "Do you know what she has been through?"

Shortly after, Vaan recounted Emerald's experience to Topaz, letting her know exactly how tragic Emerald's life had been.

After Topaz finished listening, she felt guilty.

"Kyu, kyuu..." Topaz understood her mistake.

Shortly after, she flew up to Vaan's cheeks and rubbed her own cheeks against his, hoping he would not be unhappy with her anymore.

"I'm not the one you should be apologizing to, am I? As I said, you're the first spirit. Thus, you are a big sister and the boss now. You have to learn how to take care of your little sister."

'Boss...' Topaz only heard one word before her eyes beamed.

Shortly after, she nodded, acknowledging she understood his words before she flew down to Emerald to pat her head as if to express her apology.

However, she used too much force and caused Emerald's head to bob slightly.

"Kyu, kyuu, kyuu!" Topaz promised to take good care of Emerald as she continued to pat Emerald's head with one hand and her chest with the other.

'You can leave it to me,' she conveyed.

But although she was expressing her apology to Emerald, from another perspective, it looked like she was a lion that had just placed its paw on its prey.

"Myuu..." Emerald looked like a lamb that was about to be butchered.

The unreliable big sister and the submissive little sister – Vaan felt like these terms described his two contracted spirits perfectly.

He smiled wryly.

"Alright, you can go back first," Vaan dismissed Topaz with a wry smile.

Shortly after Topaz turned into yellow light and entered Vaan's chest, Emerald felt instant release from the pressure.

She quickly started to climb up Vaan's leg before he picked her up with two fingers and placed her on his shoulder.

"Tia won't kick you out again, but I'll figure out a better place for you to rest soon," Vaan promised her.

"Myu, myuu," Emerald thanked him with a peek on the cheeks.

"So it was an issue between the spirits," Lord Narvim commented as he glanced at Emerald and Vaan's interaction. "This Lord didn't think the Wood Spirit would still have any trust left in humans. I hope you can continue to treat her well."

"By the way, have you thought of a name for your Wood Spirit?" Lord Narvim asked shortly after.

"It's Esmeralda, Your Excellency. Mera for short," Vaan replied before turning to Emerald. "What do you think? Do you like your nickname, Mera?"

"Mera, mera!" Emerald spoke enthusiastically, surprising everyone.

"Oh my, she's already learning how to speak our language," Astoria exclaimed with her hands clapped together before adding, "It looks like our little Mera is even more talented than little Tia."

"Don't let Tia hear that, or there'll be trouble again, Headmaster Astoria," Vaan smiled wryly.

"Of course, Teacher Raphna. We wouldn't want little Tia to be jealous," Astoria softly chuckled before bringing herself closer to Emerald. "Hi, Mera. I'm Astoria. Do you want to be friends?"

Emerald was quite comfortable on Vaan's shoulder despite being surrounded by giants, something she wasn't used to in her new form.

But after Astoria approached her, she was immediately startled to her feet before she hid behind Vaan's neck.

Astoria immediately expressed her regret.

It was difficult to befriend spirits without the matching elemental affinity, and even more so when the spirit had a bad history with humans.

Nevertheless, after some idle chat, the dragon dismissed the crowd of dragons and returned the battle ring to the way it was before. Afterward, he extended an invitation to them.

"Let's return to this Lord's cave. There is much for us to talk about."

"Of course, Your Excellency."

Chapter 290: Narvim's Surprise

Shortly after Vaan's group agreed to the dragon lord's invitation, they were surprised to witness the dragon lord lowering himself to offer them a ride on his back.

"Is this appropriate, Your Excellency?" Astoria asked, knowing it may seem disrespectful and humiliating to let humans ride on a dragon's back.

After all, dragons were said to be a proud race.

"Do you think this Lord will find it disrespectful and humiliating?" Lord Narvim glanced at Astoria and said, "This Lord highly regards Vaan, and you are also all guests of this Lord. Thus, this Lord will treat you all hospitably."

"It is only disrespectful and humiliating if you see this Lord as a pet ride despite this Lord's extended generosity," Lord Narvim stated.

"I understand, Your Excellency," Astoria acknowledged with a nod and said, "I will certainly not think that way."

Nevertheless, it was an opportunity for everyone to ride on the back of a Rank 5 being; it was a privilege that not everyone could enjoy.

It was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, one could say.

After everyone hopped on the dragon lord's back, Lord Narvim took off and flew towards Ninth Peak's center, where everyone saw the steep chasm to the land of fire.

They passed many dragon caves on their way down before reaching a noticeably larger dragon cave that stood out from the rest.

As it was located around halfway down the chasm, the extreme heat emanating from the land of fire didn't particularly affect them.

It was only warm at best.

After entering the dragon lord's cave, everyone dismounted off the dragon lord before studying the dragon cave with surprise.

The exterior didn't look fancy; it was primitive at best.

However, inside the dragon cave, it was luxuriously decorated in quality metal and jewels.

Even so, what stood out most wasn't the glittering jewels illuminating the dragon cave nor the smooth marbled surface of blue mithril that reinforced the cave's structural integrity.

It was the dragon lord's huge collection of knowledge sitting in one corner like a mountain.

"Oh? It looks like the little one has fallen asleep," Astoria suddenly commented after noticing Emerald soundly asleep on Vaan's shoulder.

She must have been truly exhausted.

"Allow me to settle my spirit's accommodation first, Your Excellency," Vaan spoke, to which the dragon lord agreed without a fuss.

The dragon lord always had the spirit's interest in mind.

Nevertheless, Vaan asked Aeliana to use her ability to create a suitable home made of high-quality plants and supplied her with the mana he collected from the dragon fragments.

After Emerald's plant home was created, he stored it inside his Heaven-Swallowing Space and transferred Emerald there to avoid Topaz disturbing her rest.

His Heaven-Swallowing Space wasn't just a subspace he could expand limitlessly with mana; he could also build worlds within like his own miniature universe if he had the capability.

"Did you just stuff Mera into an interspatial storage, Teacher Raphna?" Astoria asked with knitted brows.

"Interspatial storage... Something like that," Vaan vaguely replied before adding, "However, I would say it's also an independent world that only I possess."

"Soul Masters have independent spiritual worlds that could be used to accommodate spirits without an issue," Lord Narvim commented.

"I see... Soul Masters have a lot of convenient capabilities, huh?" Astoria muttered.

"It is the most desired profession in all of Chaos," Lord Narvim casually said.

Vaan didn't know about the Soul Masters' spiritual worlds, but he appreciated the dragon lord's unexpected assistance nonetheless.

Shortly after, Lord Narvim directed the group's attention to a big passageway leading into a different cave.

"Come, this Lord has a place to show you."

When they followed the dragon lord and reached the end of the passageway, they entered a larger cave with multiple passages connected to other dragon caves.

The place appeared to be recently constructed, but everyone only roamed the large cave with e gazes briefly before the center caught their attention.

Several dragons surrounded a cage, studying an ugly wyvern held within.

"Eniwse..." Vaan immediately recognized the Wyvern-type Abomination in the cage.

Nevertheless, he felt the side effects of losing a third of his subspace. It decreased his intellectual ability and took him longer to confirm it was Eniwse's Abomination form.

"You said you came to the Thousand Fog Mountains in search of the Wyvern-type Abomination to save her. This Lord thought to surprise you all by showing her whereabouts without informing you all in advance," Lord Narvim mentioned, expecting everyone to be pleasantly surprised by the discovery.

However, Hester furrowed her brows and asked, "What are they doing to her, Your Excellency?"

"Nothing that would concern you." Lord Narvim realized the Wyvern-type Abomination's captivity may cause some misunderstanding, so he quickly explained, "They are only studying Abomination with simple observation techniques."

"We haven't done anything to her yet. She came to us, writhing in pain. Thus, we've been looking for ways to help her since then. But without a foolproof solution to treat her, we didn't dare to carry out any procedures," Lord Narvim stated.

At that moment, the Wyvern-type Abomination showed no sign of writhing in pain or resisting despite being held in captivity.

The group quickly learned that Eniwse had been put under particularly strong anesthetics to numb her pain, which was why she appeared more peaceful instead.

Nevertheless, the dragon's anesthetics weren't strong enough to completely numb the pain; it was only strong enough to reduce the pain down to a level that Eniwse could tolerate.

However, such anesthetics would become completely useless the moment the dragon attempted any treatment, as the pain would be amplified.

"This Lord is quite curious. How did you overcome the pain hurdle when you treated this lady, Vaan?" Lord Narvim inquired with curiosity.

Astoria and Hester also glanced at Vaan with curiosity regarding his treatment process.

After all, Aeliana's recovery was an unprecedented achievement. It would be a lie if they said they weren't interested in hearing the process.

"Would you believe me if I said I used pleasure to negate the pain, your Excellency?" Vaan nonchalantly asked.

"Pleasure?" Everyone furrowed their brows upon hearing Vaan's answer before Lord Narvim responded with some doubts. "Pleasure can indeed negate the pain, but..."

"The pleasure level would have to be at the same level as the pain, if not greater. For you to do that while administering the treatment..."

"I am ambidextrous, and multitasking isn't a problem for me, Your Excellency," Vaan replied with a smile.