

The Witch 321

Chapter 321: Aeliana's Compromise

"An intelligence network?" Aeliana uttered with a startled look.

"That's right. An intelligence network." Eniwse calmly nodded before speaking, "As you may already know, Vaan has an inhuman capacity for learning. Knowledge is his weapon."

"However, no matter how intelligent he may be, a person without information is like a bird without wings. As a man living in the Black Rose Kingdom, much information isn't privy to him. And seeing how much he has grown in the time I haven't seen him makes him all the more desirable, let alone to others."

"Thus, an intelligence network that can provide him with crucial information about his possible enemies will allow him to make full use of his intelligence," Eniwse stated with a sharp glint.

She had been too passive.

If she had used excessive force to teach Isabelle Gleriath a harsh lesson that she would never forget and put her in her place, a tragedy would never have taken place.

Vaan had placed his trust in her to protect him, and she had failed him.

It was a mistake she would never forget, nor will she repeat it.

That's why she didn't say anything, even though Vaan seemed to have more women around him. She didn't have the right to monopolize him after she failed to protect him.

Furthermore, her power alone was not enough to protect someone extraordinary like him. So having more people on his side was for the better.

Perhaps she put up with Isabelle's atrocious behavior because they didn't have the power to be high-profile at the time.

Thus, they couldn't afford to attract attention.

Nevertheless, since she was given a second chance, she would never make the same mistake again. This time, she will set things right and keep Vaan from harm's way.

Aeliana immediately felt the clear difference between them after she listened to Eniwse's explanation.

She didn't want to admit it, but she had to accept the fact that Eniwse deserved to be the head witch in Vaan's harem.

It wasn't that long since Eniwse recovered from her Abomination state, but she had already come up with a plan that could help Vaan in the long run.

Meanwhile, she had recovered from her Abomination state much earlier than Eniwse, but all she could think about was monopolizing Vaan's affection.

She had done nothing to help him and had been on the receiving end of his kindness.

"You have won me over, Lady Eniwse." Aeliana softly sighed with despondence before stating, "I have to admit that I am inferior to you. While your power is lacking, you have the right mindset. You deserve to be the head witch."

"As I said, none of that is important to me, Lady Aeliana," Eniwse said with a calm smile before continuing, "Since we are both Vaan's people, there's no need for us to compete and compare with each other. Vaan's interest comes before ours."

"Furthermore, even if there has to be a head witch, it's not up to us to decide, so we shouldn't worry about it. We only need to consider what we can do to make Vaan's life easier. That said, I feel like there will be difficult times ahead of us," Eniwse mentioned.

Aeliana softly sighed with even more dejection.

The longer she listened to Eniwse speak, the inferior she felt. She was like a child before Eniwse, fighting over trivial things while the person in question was pondering over adult matters.

She thought her loyalty to Vaan was strong, but it was only a feeling. On the other hand, Eniwse's loyalty was more practical.

Nevertheless, Eniwse could sense Aeliana's feelings.

"There's no need to be dejected, Lady Aeliana, " Eniwse consoled her before mentioning, "I have been with Vaan longer. Thus, I've heard and learned much from him, Lady Aeliana."

"Even the idea to set up an intelligence network to collect information isn't my original idea, but something inspired by a quote Vaan once mentioned in passing. It went like this: Know thy enemy, know thy self. A thousand battles, a thousand victories."

"Supposedly, a great strategist called Sun Tzu came up with this quote. Although I've never heard of such a name in history, I can feel that this person was very wise," Eniwse added.

"Know thy enemy, know thy self... A thousand battles, a thousand victories..." Aeliana softly muttered before her eyes gradually widened with surprise.

It wasn't a big quote, but the meaning was clear and powerful, full of wisdom.

"Setting up the intelligence network... Can I help you with it, Lady Eniwse?" Aeliana asked.

"Of course, Lady Aeliana! I thought you would never ask," Eniwse quickly permitted with an enthusiastic smile and said, "It's not something I can pull off on my own. For starters, we would need a base for our operations and hire trustworthy people to run it."

"Let us work together and do what we can for Vaan, Lady Aeliana," Eniwse extend a hand to Aeliana for a handshake.

"It would be my honor, Lady Eniwse." Aeliana accepted the handshake happily before mentioning, "As for the base of operation, you don't have to worry about that."

"You might not know this, but I am the Lord of Sunpeak Town. Although the place is a little rundown now, it will become the most prosperous trading city in the central region in the future."

Furthermore, Dahlia and I assisted Lord Vahn in purchasing several dozen properties and listed them all under his name. Thus, we won't need to worry about funds for the intelligence network's operations—"

"Ah, but of course, we will need Lord Vahn's approval," Aeliana suddenly added.

"I see. That's reassuring to hear," Eniwse commented with a self-deprecating smile, feeling she had missed out on a fair bit of Vaan's life. Then, after a brief moment, she quickly shook her head and asked with doubt, "But who is Dahlia?"

"Ah, Dahlia is..." Aeliana proceeded to explain the details to Eniwse and fill her in on Vaan's plan for Sunpeak Town.

After Eniwse understood the gist of the situation, they began brainstorming ideas and planning the structure of their intelligence network.

They wanted to devise a concrete plan before proposing it to Vaan together.

Chapter 322: Hester's Attempted Breakthrough

Somewhere on Ninth Peak, Hester walked around aimlessly without a destination in mind and observed the dragon interactions around her.

Whether they were on land or in the sky, each red dragon she spotted had the power to devastate cities and slaughter humans like cutting weeds—if they were let loose and rampaged throughout the kingdom.

"A single mountain of dragons is enough to reduce a witch kingdom to ruin. And yet, nine such mountains exist within the depths of the Thousand Fog Mountains... The collective strength of the Black Rose Kingdom is far too lacking in comparison," Hester silently thought.

Even if she advanced to the High Witch rank, she would still be weaker than a single Rank 4 dragon.

"Fortunately, Lord Narvim is reasonable, and we share a common threat," Hester added.

If the red dragons weren't trying to hide from the eyes of the Gehenna Realm's Great Devils, they could have chosen to dominate the world and enslave the humans.

After all, they wield that much power.

However, they didn't, and it was best that humans become their friend, not foe – That much was clear to Hester.

Her existence felt more insignificant than ever after she learned about the Netherworld Realm and had her eyes opened to realms beyond Gehenna.

The threat posed by Gehenna's Great Devils was nothing compared to the greater beings dwelling in the depths of the Netherworld Realm.

Hester hadn't fully grasped why denizens of the Netherworld Realm desired their world so much.

However, she clearly understood that while Gehenna's Great Devils were the first to be attracted to their world, they wouldn't be the last.

As news spreads of the crack connecting their worlds, more powerful beings would be attracted.

"Out of everyone in the group, my power is the weakest. Furthermore, my talent and background are also lacking compared to the others. Therefore, I can only compensate for my shortcomings by working harder," Hester thought.

After looking around Ninth Peak for a bit longer, Hester found a suitable spot in the open to form her next magic circle and become a High Witch.

The environment was rich in mana, and the dragons minded their own business. So Hester didn't have to worry about the dragons interrupting her advancement.

"If I keep following Sir Vahn, I will get plenty of opportunities to grow. However, If I fall too far behind in strength, I'll become a burden like I am now and be left behind. That's why I have to advance!" Hester believed.

She also had her own pride.

Becoming a beggar that completely relied on Vaan's benefits to progress her cultivation was unacceptable to her.

After all, their relationship was originally that of mutual benefits.

If her strength was no longer of use to Vaan, he did not need to keep dual-practicing with her, especially when he had better choices.

'I must succeed!' Hester firmly willed.

After she adjusted her breathing, the scattered mana particles around her started to gather and enter her body, making their way toward her heart.

The two mana rings revolving around her heart had already been strengthened to the limit and achieved saturation.

Although there was plenty of room to form several more mana rings around her heart, it wasn't an easy feat anyone could accomplish.

After all, each additional mana ring had to be bigger than the last to prevent the mana rings from clashing. Furthermore, the force of attraction in the center would pull in any nearby mana particles that weren't already a part of the mana rings.

That's why it was so difficult to advance, and a lot of mental strength was required.

Nevertheless, Hester believed she had met all the prerequisites for a successful breakthrough to the High Witch rank.

As mana particles gathered inside her body, Hester manipulated them to form the frame of her third mana ring.

At the same time, the force of attraction in the center immediately acted upon them. It attempted to pull the mana particles out of their form and suck them into Hester's Magic Domain, the location of her mana reserve.

However, Hester expended her mental strength to strengthen her control over the mana particles and kept them in place.

After the third mana ring's frame was formed, Hester continued to pour additional mana particles inside to condense into a solid and stable form.

The mana on Ninth Peak was abundant, but Hester would undoubtedly fail if she purely relied on them to form her third mana ring.

After all, the process of gathering the required amount of mana would take too long, and she didn't have anywhere near enough mental strength to last until the third mana ring was completed.

No one did.

Thus, Hester started to supply her third mana ring's formation with the reserve of mana stored inside her Magic Domain.

...

As the process went on, Hester's breakthrough attempt attracted the attention of nearby dragons, including the senior dragon, Jergag.

Although some dragons among the crowd disliked humans, they were too prideful and disdainful to interrupt Hester's breakthrough.

Their peers would look down on them if they did.

As such, the dragons only observed from a distance out of curiosity since they had nothing better to do anyway.

At the same time, it was an opportunity for dragons to study how humans cultivate closely. They wouldn't pass the chance to acquire new knowledge.

...

A short while later, Vaan also dropped.

He quickly spotted Jergag among the crowd of dragons before he made his way over to greet the senior dragon and watch Hester's breakthrough together.

After all, he was the most familiar with Senior Jergag compared to the rest of the dragons gathered.

"Senior Jergag," Vaan politely greeted.

"Oh, Vaan." Jergag immediately revealed a pleasant and welcoming look before he said, "You also came to watch."

"That's right, Senior." Vaan admitted with a nod before casually asking, "How's the situation so far?"

"Unfortunately, you're going to be disappointed, Vaan. Your friend will fail at this rate if no one provides her with aid," Jergag said with a shake of his head.

"What? Fail?"

Vaan was taken aback by surprise before he quickly frowned and focused his attention on Hester in the distance to see for himself.

Although advancement to the High Witch rank wasn't easy, he thought Hester had a good shot. Yet, she was still going to fail, according to Jergag, who didn't have a reason to lie.

It wasn't long before Vaan also noticed the problem in Hester's attempted breakthrough.

Chapter 323: Assisted Breakthrough

Possessing sufficient mental strength wasn't just one of the key requirements to a witch's successful breakthrough; it was also the most important.

However, simply possessing sufficient mental strength was far from enough; careful usage of it was also crucial.

Just like the best result in a marathon race couldn't be achieved by sprinting from the start, the same applied to witches advancing their ranks.

Use too much energy, and one won't be able to finish the race. On the other hand, use too little, and one would take too long.

Hester possessed sufficient mental strength to advance her rank, but she had used too much mental strength at the start, and no longer had enough to complete her third mana ring.

Although Vaan wasn't present at the start of Hester's breakthrough attempt, he could guess that much due to the person's anxious expression.

It was evident that Hester herself knew she had made a mistake in her hasty decision to advance her rank. And that single mistake was all it took to turn her breakthrough attempt into a failure.

She had sufficient mental strength but not the right mental state.

At that moment, Hester's third mana ring was about three-quarters completed. Even if she gave up now, her incomplete mana ring would quickly destabilize due to the central force of attraction.

If that happened, it would also affect her two saturated mana rings and produce an outburst of mana akin to a mana bomb exploding inside her body.

She would undoubtedly die—just like many others who failed to advance to the High Witch rank.

Nevertheless, Hester did not give up and fought to the bitter end; she did everything possible to compensate for her first mistake and lack of mental strength to complete the third mana ring.

Alas, it was futile.

To begin with, advancing to the High Witch rank was an extremely difficult process that left no room for mistakes.

Attempting to patch up one hole would only lead to creating more holes.

'Dammit! I was too hasty!' Hester silently bit her lip with regret.

She was swept up in her own emotions and made one of the most basic mistakes witches could have made.

It was too late to turn back, but at the same time, she didn't come so far just to give up.

Hester pinned the last of her hope on a miracle happening.

She might just overcome the crisis if she could forcefully draw out any latent power hidden within the depths of her being once her mental strength was exhausted.

'It's do or die,' Hester understood.

She was at a crucial juncture in forming her third mana ring; it wasn't a process that would just let her pause and seek help.

Hester could only rely on herself.

However, as she was running low on mental strength and control over the third mana ring's formation was slipping, a foreign force suddenly assisted her and took away the massive burden on her mind.

"Focus," Jergag's voice resounded in her mind.

It was no time to be distracted, and Hester herself knew that very well, especially when her life had just been hanging by a thread.

As such, she could only silently keep the gratitude to herself and thank the senior dragon later.

At the same time, thanks to Jergag's powerful mental strength and a general understanding of the witch cultivation method, Hester easily overcame her crisis and formed her third mana ring.

The moment the third mana ring was formed, it clicked into place, achieving its optimum position around the heart without disrupting the movements of the other two mana rings.

Rather, it synergized with the other two mana rings to generate more power and force of attraction in the center.

This granted Hester a faster natural mana recovery rate, access to triple-layered magic, and more powerful spells only privy to High Witches.

"So this is what it feels like to become a High Witch..." Hester muttered after sensing the benefits provided by the presence of the complete third mana ring.

With all the pressure off her mind and body, Hester suddenly found herself devoid of energy as she slumped to the side and passed out.

"Mind Zero," Vaan casually uttered after walking over.

It was the state after one's mental strength was exhausted.

Although Jergag carried Hester through the latter parts of her High Witch advancement, Hester didn't dare to relax and used her remaining mental strength to see it through to the end.

Nevertheless, he was impressed that Senior Jergag could assist Hester's breakthrough in such a simple manner.

It appeared that anyone could have done the same as long as they could manipulate mana and had strong mental strength.

That said, Jergag was a Peak Rank 4 True Dragon with mental strength comparable to Rank 5 beings. Not just any dragon could have done the same thing as easily as the senior dragon.

Even so, the risk of High Witch advancements could be eliminated if witches could employ the dragons' help. In other words, they could raise a large number of High Witches.

However, Vaan wasn't too interested in such an idea.

He might consider if the witches were his people, but other witches? What did they have to do with him?

Even if he did help unrelated witches, they would not feel grateful and may even stab him in the back.

"Thank you for lending a hand, Senior Jergag," Vaan politely said.

"Haha, don't mention it, young friend." Jergag casually chuckled as if he had done something minor before saying, "How can I refuse an opportunity to return the favor after what you've done for me? This old dragon isn't ungrateful."

"Anyway, you should take your friend back to the guest building. If I'm not wrong, this is hardly the place for a lady to lay," Jergag added before Vaan could speak.

"I'll do just that then, Senior Jergag," Vaan agreed with a wry smile.

The senior dragon wasn't interested in continuing a meaningless exchange of words regarding favors and gratitude, and Vaan bothered with etiquette if it wasn't required of him.

He appreciated the senior dragon's straightforwardness.

After taking Hester back to the guest building and settling her into bed, Vaan was greeted by Lord Narvim outside.

"Come with me, Vahn," Lord Narvim demanded with a firm tone.

Vaan immediately had a bad feeling.

Chapter 324: Khaleesi's Generosity

Nevertheless, Vaan hopped on the ninth dragon lord's back before Lord Narvim took off and brought him to another mountain peak, the Eighth Peak.

They were going to see the eighth dragon lord, Lord Khaleesi.

As Vaan suspected, the two dragon lords had some business with him, and it was most likely related to his intimate moment with Eniwse.

If he was only suspicious before, then he was now completely certain the two dragon lords were the culprits behind the roaring thunders and spying.

Nevertheless, shortly after they arrived at Khaleesi's lair, Lord Narvim brought Vaan before Khaleesi and moved to the side.

Vaan immediately felt the mighty pressure of a Rank 5 True Dragon bearing down on him as Khaleesi gave him a hard.

Time slowly passed, but Vaan stood his ground like an unmovable mountain and stared back at the eighth dragon lord quietly and patiently.

Since it was the other party who wanted to see him, naturally, he shouldn't and wouldn't be the one to speak first.

Several more moments passed before Khaleesi withdrew her stern gaze and broke the silence

"You got guts, human." Khaleesi sighed before shaking her head self-deprecatingly and saying, "I don't know whether you are brave or just foolish. However, only a man with courage is worthy of my daughter."

"Do you know why you are here, human?" Khaleesi asked with a slightly threatening tone.

However, Vaan shook his head with a calm smile, seemingly unaffected by the pressure, and said, "How would I know if you don't say? But if I have to guess, it's related to Eniwse."

"Yes, and no. Eniwse is the reason why you are even here, but not the reason why I wanted to see you, Vahn," Khaleesi said with a softer tone and even addressed him by name.

She had exerted her pressure twice, but Vaan remained unwavering and completely at ease. There was no need for her to test him further; he wasn't faking it.

"You don't seem surprised to learn that Eniwse is my daughter and Narvim's, Vahn," Khaleesi added.

"Well... I had some suspicions, but your words confirmed them," Vaan replied honestly with a smile before adding, "Still, I wonder if you can clarify why that is the case, Lord Khaleesi. After all, you're a dragon, and she's undoubtedly human."

"Human, that she is. I won't deny that truth," Khaleesi acknowledged that point before continuing, "However, you see, she was my daughter in her past life. And while she is no longer a dragon in her second life, she is still my daughter."

"After all, her physical form may have changed, but her dragon soul remains, albeit sealed, or rather, dormant. Nevertheless, as she grows stronger, she will slowly recall her memories and knowledge."

"The reason why I wanted to see you was to reward you for curing her abnormality and releasing her from her suffering," Khaleesi shortly stated her intention.

However, Vaan casually shook his head and refused, "There's no need for that. I didn't save Eniwse because I was expecting a reward. I saved her because she is my woman."

Khaleesi's eye instinctively twitched when she heard Vaan's uncomfortable claim.

Even so, she suppressed the urge to smack Vaan, remained calm, and reminded herself that her daughter was now a human.

"Then don't think of it as a reward but as a gift." Khaleesi glanced at Narvim before saying, "Unlike my unless husband here, I am very generous to people I am fond of."

"First, while you stay on Eighth Peak, your status will be second only to mine. Second, you have my full protection in the Red Dragon Clan. Third, with my authority as a dragon lord, I permit you to freely leave and visit the Red Dragon Clan without having your memory wiped."

"However, your strength is too low, and I fear you will die some stupid death once you leave. Thus, that brings us to my fourth gift. Whatever knowledge, potion, or herb you require to improve your strength, I will provide it to the best of my ability and authority," Khaleesi stated domineeringly.

"Lord Khaleesi sure doesn't hold back. I'm afraid the word 'generous' was just an understatement. Since Lord Khaleesi already said as much, it would be rude and hypocritical of me to refuse a second time," Vaan graciously accepted.

Naturally, he did not want to refuse the first time. Rather, he was stressing his relationship with Eniwse to receive even more benefits.

And as expected, he was not disappointed and even impressed by the eighth dragon lord's generosity.

He was practically her son-in-law.

"Still, I must say, Lord Khaleesi. The gifts are great, but I'm not so sure you are fond of me. Rather, I get the feeling that you hate me," Vaan casually teased with a sly look.

"Stinky kid, you are just imagining things. I am not just fond of you; I am very fond of you!" Khaleesi stressed, but her gnashing teeth implied otherwise. "And you can drop the honorifics. You may call me Khaleesi directly."

"Alright, Khaleesi," Vaan quickly agreed as if he had achieved his aim.

At the same time, Khaleesi realized she was falling for Vaan's tricks and felt like she had eaten shit. The bastard was very sly and scheming.

"Oh, right. Khaleesi, I would like to—"

"Hm?" Khaleesi interrupted Vaan with a glare and spat, "Don't push your luck, stinky kid."

"I was just going to say that I would like to make use of your fourth gift now, Khaleesi." Vaan softly chuckled before asking, "What did you think I was going to say?"

"Hmph!" Khaleesi rolled her eyes and snorted. "Speak! What do you need?"

"Ahem." Vaan cleared his throat with a dry cough and got down to business. "I would like to take a look at your collection of fire-attribute plants."

He had, more or less, grasped some understanding of the eighth dragon lord's nature.

While Khaleesi could use harsh words and appear unapproachable, she had a good heart. She could dislike him, but she would still look after him.

The same went for her husband, Narvim.

It was also why Narvim simply smiled wryly when he was called useless. She didn't actually think he was useless; she was just venting off some of her resentment.

Chapter 325: Condition and Warning

"Ahem!" Narvim coughed loudly to make his presence known before saying, "After we return to Ninth Peak, you can also take a look at my collection of fire-attribute plants and take what you need, Vahn."

"If I don't give you the same benefits as my wife, I'm afraid I would seem like a miser," Narvim added.

"Then, I will thank you in advance, Lord Narvim," Vaan honestly accepted as he acknowledged the protection of both dragon lords. "I will definitely take a look if I can't find what I need here."

"Hmph! Don't bother, Vahn," Khaleesi immediately snorted before saying, "Narvim's magical plant collection has been dwindling by the years. Everything he has, I also have. But what I have, he doesn't."

"If you can't find what you need from my magical plant collection, then you definitely won't find it in his magical plant collection," Khaleesi asserted.

"If you say so, Khaleesi," Vaan replied with a slight smile, amused by the dragon couple's competition.

If any other dragon had witnessed the scene in the eighth dragon lord's lair, they would have been overwhelmed with envy.

He didn't doubt that the fire-attribute plants in the two dragon lord's magical plant collections were all precious resources.

It was even possible that their fire-attribute plants were obtained from the Trial by Fire and possessed miraculous properties.

"Haiz," Narvim sighed and helplessly asked, "Would it hurt you to leave me some face in front of Vahn, Khaleesi? After all, I am still a dragon lord. You're making me look bad here."

"Why should I care about you? You obviously didn't care about me all those years. Just because I am willing to talk to you again, it doesn't mean I've completely forgiven you," Khaleesi replied snappishly and said, "If you want to make me happy, go and face that corner, and wait until we're done."

"I—Yes, my Lady," Narvim readily complied after listening to his wife.

Vaan watched the ninth dragon lord accept his punishment like a kid that had done something wrong and felt a little bad for the guy.

Nevertheless, it wasn't his place to interfere with the couple's relationship.

'Poor guy. He's a proud dragon lord to others but a meek husband to his wife,' Vaan silently thought with amusement.

"Alright, take a look and see what you can use," Khaleesi stated.

After the eighth dragon lord stomped the ground beneath her, a large magic circle quickly expanded from the point of contact, followed by a brilliant, blinding, and encompassing white light swallowing the lair.

Vaan saw nothing but a white space of nothingness.

However, it only lasted an instant before the white light faded, revealing a new scenery in place of the old lair.

A barren land of hot rocks and rivers of lava replaced the smooth marbled floor, precious gems, and luxurious lair decorations.

Although the scenery did appear much different from the Land of Fire, the space didn't feel as vast. Instead, it felt enclosed and limited, like a sub-realm.

Even so, it was still spacious enough for Vaan and the two dragon lords to roam unhindered.

There were mountains of treasures, but the fire-attribute magical plants growing by the edges of the lava rivers quickly attracted Vaan's attention.

"This is my pocket world. And as you can see, it's where I store my possessions and grow my magical plants," Khaleesi introduced her sub-realm.

"To be honest, I didn't think you would go straight for the magical plants, Vaan. I assumed you would have been more interested in the accumulated knowledge of our Red Dragon Clan."

"Oh, believe me when I say this; I am interested in the Red Dragon Clan's knowledge," Vaan admitted before adding, "However, what I lack most isn't knowledge, but precious resources to grow."

"Soul Masters can learn quickly, simply because they are Soul Masters, dear. But without the aid of precious resources, they can't grow as quickly," Narvim explained.

However, Khaleesi naturally knew that already.

"Do you think I don't know that? I'm not stupid." Khaleesi rolled her eyes and said, "However, the world is full of precious resources. You just have to look for them. On the other hand, not just anyone can access our clan's knowledge."

"Furthermore, Soul Masters have an insatiable appetite for knowledge. Thus, it makes more sense that Vahn would find our knowledge more valuable," Khaleesi added.

"More valuable doesn't always equal more practical, right? And since you offered them both to me, it doesn't matter what comes first since I get both in the end," Vaan replied before stating, "I simply chose to prioritize practical uses."

"That's true." Khaleesi acknowledged Vaan's point with a nod before urging him, "Well then, what are you waiting for? Go and pick what you need."

However, Vaan wasn't in a hurry to grab the fire-attribute magical plants he needed.

"You are very generous with your gifts, but I don't believe in free lunches," Vaan calmly mentioned before asking her, "What conditions do you have for me to enjoy such benefits?"

"Oh? I was wondering when you would ask, Vahn," Khaleesi smiled before she shook her head and said, "However, you don't need to worry. I won't ask something impossible of you."

"I only need you to cherish and protect my daughter and keep our secret from her. I want her to awaken her memories and remember us naturally. And when the time comes, if she still wants to acknowledge us as her parents, that would be great."

"Of course, if you make our daughter cry, you can forget about the benefits. We'll definitely make you wish you were better off dead," Khaleesi warned him with a dangerous glint in her eyes like she was ready to skin him alive.

"I will never abandon my woman. It's only natural that I cherish and protect her," Vaan firmly stated before cheekily adding, "However, I can't promise that I would never make her cry... After all, I always make her cry in bed."

"..."

Khaleesi's facial expression became frozen stiff for a moment before it contorted with anger as her body shook along with the surrounding space.

"Y-You stinking rascal!" Khaleesi roared with a trembling voice.

Chapter 326: Bloodvein Ganoderma

"Hold it, Khaleesi! Don't do it! We need him!" Narvim quickly jumped in front of Vaan and held Khaleesi back.

"Don't get in my way, Narvim!" Khaleesi roared before glaring at Vaan. "I'm going to teach him a lesson! He bullied our daughter!"

"T-That's not it! Vaan's words had a different meaning!" Narvim quickly explained before saying, "And if you beat him to death, our daughter will hate you!"

Khaleesi immediately retreated after hearing Narvim's statement and glared at him.

"Who said anything about beating the stinking brat to death?! I just want to teach him a little lesson!" Khaleesi snorted and asked, "Do you think I'm stupid?!"

She knew exactly what Vaan meant, but it angered her nonetheless.

Just because she understood human views and values were different from dragons, it didn't change the fact that she would still feel uncomfortable hearing about her daughter's union.

Eniwse was still a baby in her eyes.

Meanwhile, Khaleesi's question made Narvim speechless. He was unable to answer, nor did he dare to.

"I..." Narvim uttered, but no other words came out of his mouth.

"Argh, forget it. I don't want to argue with him," Khaleesi conceded with a helpless look when she saw her husband's dilemma.

Shortly after, she glanced at Vaan and snorted, causing a strong wave of wind to blow against his face and whip his hair back.

Nevertheless, Vaan remained firm in his spot and unfazed.

"You... don't you have the slightest bit of fear for me? I am still a mighty Rank 5 True Dragon, you know?" Khaleesi asked, feeling a bit baffled by Vahn's fearlessness.

"Hm, not really," Vaan casually replied and smiled. "I know my worth."

While it was true that he was nowhere close to the eighth dragon lord's power, he wasn't afraid that the eighth or ninth dragon lord would harm him.

They might actually beat him up if he kept teasing and provoking them, but they wouldn't try to kill him or cripple his potential.

"Hmph. You're not very likable; you know that? I can't be bothered talking to you further. Go and pick whatever you need already," Khaleesi said with a frown.

When she saw Vaan's smile, she didn't see the smile of a handsome young man. Instead, she felt like she saw the cunning smile of an old man.

Considering her 'baby' was intimate with this 'old' man, she would naturally feel terrible.

"Alright," Vaan agreed with a chuckle before shifting his attention to the fire-attribute magical plants growing by the lava river.

Since he somehow managed to avoid a beating despite his teasing and provocation, he decided to call it even for their peeking.

...

After Vaan strolled over to the nearest lava river, he closely observed the fire-attribute magical plants to determine their quality and properties.

'Fire Dragon Grass, Vermillion Roots, Blood Ganoderma...' Vaan listed the fire-attribute magical herbs one by one and skipped the ones he failed to recognize.

Nevertheless, the fire-attribute magical herbs didn't just grow on the edge of the lava river.

Vaan noticed some thriving directly on the surface of the lava river without burning to a crisp, such as the Fire Lotus, but that wasn't all.

Some fire-attribute magical herbs even thrived inside the lava river, completely submerged.

That said, no matter which fire-attribute magical herb Vaan spotted, not a single one of them was below rank-three quality.

There were even a few rank-four magical herbs.

'As expected of a Rank 5 being's magical plant collection, the magical herbs here all have excellent quality. A fire-attribute witch would go crazy if they saw this scene,' Vaan silently thought.

Although he was tempted to pocket everything, he didn't have an adequate environment to store them like the eighth dragon lord.

Furthermore, he did not need so many fire-attribute magical herbs; just a few would do.

'If I want to raise my body's fire affinity swiftly, I'll need herbs like the Fire Dragon Grass or Blood Ganoderma. Too bad there isn't any above rank-three quality,' was what Vaan originally thought.

However, he felt like he had overlooked something.

Due to the lava river being heavily concentrated in fire-attribute mana, it was difficult to guess the number, type, and quality of magical plants hidden inside.

As such, Vaan felt like he should explore the river bed.

After all, using a single high-quality magical herb was much more effective than several low-quality ones.

"I'll be back in a moment," Vaan informed.

Shortly after, he stripped himself bare in front of the two dragon lords without shame and dove into the lava river.

"..."

"..."

Khaleesi and Narvim didn't get the chance to speak before Vaan disappeared, but they were both speechless due to his boldness.

Dragons don't wear clothes, but humans definitely do.

"No hesitation at all. Does this fella not have the slightest bit of shame?" Narvim wondered with amazement for a moment before he noticed his wife wasn't responding. "Dear? Are you alright?"

"Ah? Yeah." Khaleesi quickly snapped out of her daze and said, "Don't worry, I'm fine. I just came to the realization that Vahn and our daughter are naturally endowed... No wonder they're a match."

Narvim couldn't help but frown after hearing those words.

Naturally endowed...?

...

Sometime later, Vaan emerged from the surface of the lava river with only a fire-attribute single magical herb in hand and returned to the dragon lords.

It was a Blood Ganoderma but noticeably larger than the Rank 3 Blood Ganodermas growing on the surface rocks.

It also had blood-like veins spread across it.

"Peak-Rank 4 Bloodvein Ganoderma." The corners of Khaleesi's mouth twitched before she said, "You sure know how to pick the good stuff. That sort of quality can only be acquired near the end of the third trial."

"I won't put it to waste," Vaan accepted the praise with a smile before he noticed Narvim staring down at his crotch with a frown. "Hm? Do you like what you see?"

"Yeah..." Narvim answered thoughtlessly, still dwelling over his wife's words before he realized Vaan's question and suddenly jolted from shock. "Wait... What the fuck? No! I meant no!"

"Uh-huh..."

"Stop, don't look at me like that, dear!"

Chapter 327: Fire Spirit Body

At that moment, Narvim wished he could just find a cave to hide in.

He did not pay enough attention to realize sooner that Vaan's question was directed at his man tool and not the precious Peak-Rank 4 Bloodvein Ganoderma.

Of course, the Peak-Rank 4 Bloodvein Ganoderma was nice to look at. It was something even dragon lords would find useful to some degree.

Alas, Vaan wasn't asking about the Bloodvein Ganoderma. Thus, he created a great misunderstanding.

Even if he could clear the misunderstanding, his wife's strange gaze felt more penetrative than any glare he had received in the past few hundred years.

It was a blow to his psyche.

"It's alright. I won't question your taste, Lord Narvim. Everyone is bound to have one or two unique traits," Vaan said with an understanding look.

"Pft!" Narvim spurted blood and passed out after taking critical damage from Vaan's remark.

As if Vaan hadn't dealt enough mental blows to Narvim, he glanced at Narvim's body on the ground and added with a surprised look, "Passed out from shock? I suppose some unwanted realizations can do that to people and dragons."

Narvim's body trembled.

"Alright, that's enough joking around, Vahn. That mouth of yours could really kill him, you know? More importantly, what do you plan to do with the Bloodvein Ganoderma?" Khaleesi changed the topic. "Do you want me to refine it into a potion, or will you consume it as is?"

When Khaleesi glanced at the Peak-Rank 4 Bloodvein Ganoderma, her eyes revealed a hint of envy.

The Peak-Rank 4 Bloodvein Ganoderma was something she had been saving for herself. She didn't expect Vahn to find it.

Nevertheless, she had given her word, and her pride wouldn't allow her to go back on it.

It seemed fate had other plans.

"Unless you can refine a Rank 5 potion that can enhance the effects of this Bloodvein Ganoderma, I do plan to consume it as is," Vaan answered after some thought.

Although the Peak-Rank 4 Bloodvein Ganoderma was just a single magical herb, he speculated its effects wouldn't be inferior to half the Stalactite Milk Pond.

And considering the system could help him completely absorb the Bloodvein Ganoderma's efficacy, it didn't matter if it was a Peak-Rank 4 magical herb or Peak-Rank 4 potion.

The effect would be the same.

That's why he required at least a Rank 5 potion if he wanted to receive more benefits out of the Peak-Rank 4 Bloodvein Ganoderma.

"Rank 5 potion, huh?" Khaleesi muttered thoughtfully before saying, "I can indeed refine Rank 5 potions. Unfortunately, I lack quality supplementary ingredients for the Peak-Rank 4 Bloodvein Ganoderma."

"Still, a Peak-Rank 4 Bloodvein Ganoderma Potion is not bad, you know? It will tame the Bloodvein Ganoderma's fiery properties and allow you to absorb its efficacy smoothly," Khaleesi mentioned shortly after.

"If you can't handle the Bloodvein Ganoderma's fiery properties, consuming it raw is akin to suicide. Your life would be lost, and a precious magical herb would be wasted."

"You don't have to worry about that, Khaleesi," Vaan assured before acknowledging, "I am aware of the risks. However, I have complete confidence."

"Since you already said as much, I won't continue to persuade you. If you're ready, you can just take it here. I will watch over you," Khaleesi coolly promised.

She was secretly curious and wanted to find out why Vahn chose the Bloodvein Ganoderma when there were better herbs for strengthening the physique and enhancing strength.

Perhaps he was still interested in raising his fire affinity to challenge the Trial by Fire.

"Thank you, Khaleesi."

With the eighth dragon lord's guarantee to watch over him, Vaan didn't hesitate to sit down on the spot and chomp on the Peak-Rank 4 Bloodvein Ganoderma.

In that instant, the heavily concentrated fiery energy within the Peak-Rank 4 Bloodvein Ganoderma flooded into his body like air escaping from an overly-inflated balloon.

Whether it was his meridian or veins, the fiery energy rushed through every channel and burned everything in its path.

Although extreme pain coursed through Vaan's body, he still found it tolerable.

Thus, he continued to chomp down on the remaining Peak-Rank 4 Bloodvein Ganoderma and absorb the rest of its properties.

As a result of his action, the additional surges of fiery energy caused his skin to glow red before his body inflated like a balloon.

Fortunately, he possessed the Earth Spirit Body and 21% fire affinity, which allowed him to avoid being burned to death from the inside out and combusting into flames.

Ding!

<Your Heaven-Swallowing Physique has improved>

<Overall strength increased by 10 points>

<Fire-attribute absorption increased by 10%>

<Fire-attribute affinity increased by 10%>

...

<Your Heaven-Swallowing Physique has improved>

<Overall strength increased by 7 points>

<Fire-attribute absorption increased by 7%>

<Fire-attribute affinity increased by 7%>

...

As Vaan's body absorbed the magical properties of the Peak-Rank 4 Bloodvein Ganoderma, his physique swiftly improved to the point that Khaleesi found it alarming.

She didn't expect to witness such explosive growth. The effect didn't seem much different from a Rank 5 potion.

'Perfect fire compatibility?' Khaleesi's eyes flickered as she speculated.

Unless Vahn's body was completely absorbing all of the Bloodvein Ganoderma's magical properties, she couldn't think of any other reason.

However, it didn't make sense either.

'Vahn's fire affinity shouldn't be that high... How is this possible?' Khaleesi wondered.

...

Seconds turned into minutes, and minutes turned into hours.

As time passed, the momentum of Vaan's bodily improvement and strengthening slowed down drastically.

...

Ding!

<Overall strength increased by 3 points>

<Fire-attribute absorption increased by 0.05%>

<Fire-attribute affinity increased by 0.05%>

...

Eventually, the Bloodvein Ganoderma's efficacy was exhausted after Vaan gained 200 points of strength and hit an incredible 60% absorption and affinity to the fire attribute.

...

Ding!

<Your body has completely absorbed all the efficacy the Bloodvein Ganoderma had to offer>

<Bloodvein Ganoderma will no longer improve your physique>

<Consuming additional Bloodvein Ganoderma will recover your stamina and vitality>

...

Ding!

<Your fire-attribute absorption ability has surpassed a special threshold>

<Your fire-attribute affinity has surpassed a special threshold>

<You have acquired an additional sub-physique, Fire Spirit Body (Low-rank)>

=====

Chapter 328: Body Limitations

=====

[Fire Spirit Body (Low-rank)]

Overview: Fire Spirit Body is a special physique blessed by fire and loved by the Fire Spirits. By possessing the Fire Spirit Body, you have become an existence closer to the source of true fire.

Effect 1: When Low-rank Fire Spirits are nearby, they will immediately notice your existence.

Sub-effect 1.1: There is a chance that Low-rank Fire Spirits will actively communicate with you.

Sub-effect 1.2: There is a slight chance that Low-rank Fire Spirits will willingly establish a contract with you.

Effect 2: When you are in contact with natural flames, your base strength will increase by 40%, and stamina and vitality will recover 40% faster.

Note: the effect is subject to change depending on the quality of the natural flames and your body's condition.

Effect 3: Consuming fire-attribute medicine will grant a 40% increase in its effect.

=====

Even after Vaan completely absorbed the Peak-Rank 4 Bloodvein Ganoderma and acquired the Fire Spirit Body, his body had yet to cool down.

Although his skin no longer glowed red from the heat, his veins and meridians underneath remained bright like the sun, making his skin seem semi-transparent. Even the shape of his beating heart could be seen on his chest.

His appearance resembled the Bloodvein Ganoderma.

Nevertheless, the heat gradually cooled, and the light faded, allowing his body to return to normal again.

However, Khaleesi was utterly shocked with bulging-wide eyes.

"Fire Spirit Body!" Khaleesi exclaimed.

Although the dragon lords all had the Fire Spirit Body, she knew just how difficult it was to acquire it, let alone advance it.

This was especially true for their Red Dragon Clan since their migration from Chaos.

Their altered bodies, which were necessities to adapt to the new world and avoid its suppression, made it much more difficult for them to raise their fire affinity.

Even so, Vahn achieved the Fire Spirit Body with a single Bloodvein Ganoderma. It wasn't much different from ascending the sky in a single step.

If the other dragons from the younger generations knew, they would have gone mad with envy.

Nevertheless, Vaan did not pay attention to Khaleesi and focused on his improvement.

'Status,' he willed.

Ding!

=====

[Status]

«Name»

[Vaan Raphna (Vahn Cadieux)]

«Race»

[Human (85%), Devil (10%), Dragon (5%)]

«Bloodline»

[Spatial Bloodline (Heaven-rank)]

[Immortal Lycan Bloodline (Divine-rank)]

[Fire Dragon God Bloodline (Divine-rank)]

«Age»

[20 (Body), 31 (Soul)]

[Estimated Lifespan: 1000 – 1200 years]

«Unique Physique»

[Heaven-Swallowing Physique (Heaven-rank) (Upgradeable)]

[Immortal Lycan Physique (Low-rank) (Upgradeable)]

[Fire Dragon Physique (Low-rank) (Upgradeable)]

«Sub-physique»

[Earth Spirit Body (Low-rank) (Upgradeable)]

[Fire Spirit Body (Low-rank) (Upgradeable)]

«Cultivation»

Aura Circulation Method: The Way of the White Tiger (Mid rank)

Cultivation Level: Early Rank 3 Aura Grandmaster

Aura Power: 250

«Skills»

«[Expand]»

«Ability»

«[Expand]»

=====

«Physical Attributes»

[453 → 487 Defense (↑34)] [High-level Rank 3] [250 Aura Power] [22 → 24 Dragon Force (↑2)]
[Total Defense: 725 → 761 (↑36) (Low-level Rank 4 → Mid-level Rank 4)]

[401 → 601 Strength (↑200)] [Mid-level Rank 3] [250 Aura Power] [40 → 60 Dragon Force (↑20)]
[Total Strength: 691 → 911 (↑220) (Low-level Rank 4 → Mid-level Rank 4)]

[217 → 225 Speed (↑8)] [High-level Rank 2 → Peak-level Rank 2] [250 Aura Power] [Total Speed:
467 → 475 (↑8) (High-level Rank 3)]

=====

«Lycan State»

[Total Defense: 761 → 1004 (↑243) (Mid-level Rank 4 → High-level Rank 4)]

[Total Strength: 911 → 1211 (↑300) (Mid-level Rank 4 → Low-level Rank 5)]

[Total Speed: 475 → 587 (↑112) (High-level Rank 3 → Low-level Rank 4)]

=====

«Elemental Affinity»

[Earth: 53%]

[Wind: 13%]

[Lightning: 12%]

[Light: 5%]

[Wood: 25%]

[Fire: 21 → 60% (↑39)]

=====

"Fuuu..." Vaan slowly exhaled after checking his overall improvement.

Thanks to the Peak-Rank 4 Bloodvein Ganoderma, his strength had also grown explosively.

However, his unbalanced physical attributes became even more unbalanced—No, it was thrown completely off-balance.

'I need to find some way to improve my speed,' Vaan thought with a frown, unsatisfied with his present state.

While Low-level Rank 5 strength gave him the power to kill Rank 5 beings, it didn't matter if he couldn't land his attacks.

Thus, it was crucial that he improve his speed.

Vaan gave the stunned dragon lord a slight smile before he went to put on his clothes.

At the same time, Khaleesi recovered from her shock. She glanced down at her husband before she decided to give him a kick.

"How long are you going to pretend to sleep?"

"Ah?" Narvim woke up with an embarrassed look and coughed, "Ahem, the ground felt so comfortable that I ended up taking a nap. How long was I out for—"

Narvim suddenly stopped asking when his gaze fell on Vaan and slowly widened with shock.

"What the fuck—!" He couldn't help but curse once he realized the state of Vaan's body, which had achieved the half-spiritual fire state. "Fire Spirit Body?! But how?! Did I accidentally slumber for a few years?"

"Nonsense. It's only been a few hours," Khaleesi corrected.

"Taking a few years to acquire the Fire Spirit Body is nonsense, but taking a few hours to do the same isn't?" Narvim retorted with disbelief.

Although he knew Khaleesi was serious, he still found the truth hard to believe.

Even if humans could achieve the Fire Spirit Body, it wasn't something humans could achieve in a few hours with sheer talents alone.

At the very least, not with ordinary talents; it had to be heaven-defying talents!

"What a monster!" Narvim cried shortly after.

If the ninth dragon lord knew what Vaan was thinking at that moment, he would be even more shocked.

The Fire Spirit Body had taken much longer compared to the time when Vaan achieved his Earth Spirit Body.

It became clear to Vaan that the more elemental sub-physique he tried to acquire, the more difficult it would become.

However, he wasn't sure if this was just limited to time or if it would also have a stricter requirement for resources.

'It seems like my body also has its own limitations, after all. That makes sense... In fact, it would be very strange if I could acquire every elemental spirit body without consequences,' Vaan thought.

Chapter 329: Hester's Dejection

"Vahn, what are you, exactly?" Narvim couldn't help but ask. "Are you really human? No, it's hard to say you are still human at this point."

Although he couldn't exactly tell how strong Vahn had become, he sensed multiple sources of power from his body.

While these sources of power weren't strong individually, it was another matter once they were combined.

Even if Vahn's strength wasn't comparable to dragon lords yet, it had already diverged from the natural path most humans took.

It was difficult to categorize his strength according to their standard power system.

"What do you mean, Lord Narvim? I am me. Don't you already know that?" Vaan vaguely responded with a smile before suddenly adding, "Well, I suppose you could say I am a human that is not like other humans."

"He's right about that," Khaleesi suddenly joined the conversation and said, "Vahn's not just a human; he's also a Soul Master, and logic doesn't follow Soul Masters."

"So, let's leave it at that. Everyone has a secret or two they want to keep to themselves. Since Vahn doesn't plan to share, we shouldn't pry," Khaleesi stated shortly after before shifting her attention back to Vaan.

"Now that you have the Fire Spirit Body, I would highly doubt it if you said you weren't interested in the Trial by Fire. When do you plan to challenge it, Vahn?"

"I did plan to challenge the Trial by Fire after I absorbed the Bloodvein Ganoderma," Vaan admitted his original intention with a nod before saying, "However, my strength has grown too much. I need some time to adjust to my strength."

Even though the Peak-Rank 4 Bloodvein Ganoderma mainly raised his fire affinity, he still got 200 points of strength out of it.

Thus, any other fire-attribute magical plant with strengthening properties would have very limited effects on him.

Nevertheless, after the dragon lords listened, Narvim immediately revealed his interest.

"You need some time to adjust to your new strength, huh?" Narvim muttered before suggesting, "If that's the case, then there's no faster way of adapting to your new strength than through sparring."

"How about a spar with me, Vahn?" Narvim volunteered shortly after.

"Sparring with you?" Vaan glanced up at the ninth dragon lord's huge body and smiled wryly, "My strength might have risen swiftly, but I haven't forgotten my place. There's too much of a power gap between us."

"I'm afraid you will just swat me to death with a single attack, Lord Narvim," Vaan added.

He might be able to touch the threshold of Rank 5 in his Lycan Transformation state, but the ninth dragon lord was somewhere at the peak of Rank 5.

Although it was only the difference between levels of the same rank, Vaan wouldn't be surprised if the gap was even greater than the difference between Rank 0 to Peak-level Rank 4.

There was a reason why Rank 5 was called the Transcendent Rank; it was on a whole different level of power.

"You don't have to worry about that, Vahn. I will suppress my strength down to Peak-level Rank 4. If something really did happen to you, do you think I could face my daughter?" Narvim mentioned before adding, "Besides, I'm quite interested in your body."

"..."

Vaan and Khaleesi both gave Narvim a weird stare, causing the latter's smile to stiffen with a blank look.

"Wait... It's not like that. Fuck, I'm serious. It's not like that!" Narvim cursed with a reddening face as his blood pressure rose.

He swore such a misunderstanding would be the death of him one day.

"Hahaha..." Vaan chuckled and knowingly said, "Don't you just want to beat me up for teasing you? What makes you think I will agree and give you that satisfaction, Lord Narvim?"

"Damn, brat. You're really testing my patience here," Narvim impatiently stated and asked, "Would you rather be beaten by another dragon or me? You should know that the younger dragons don't look at humans favorably after what happened recently."

"True," Vaan smiled.

If he had to spar with a stronger opponent, an experienced dragon with great control and on good terms with him, like the eighth dragon lord, was the best choice.

There was a higher risk of accidents if he sparred with other Peak-level Rank 4 dragons.

Just when Narvim thought Vaan would agree to spar with him, the latter replied, "Kukuku, I still don't want to spar with you. I'd rather ask Senior Jergag."

"Tch!" Narvim clicked his tongue.

...

...

...

Ninth Peak, Guest Building.

After Hester had ample rest, she woke up in an unfamiliar yet familiar environment; it was the room she had selected in the guest building.

However, she didn't have any recollection of returning to the room on her own.

'How did I...?'

While she was wondering, the ninth mountain peak suddenly shook with unnatural tremors and caught her attention.

Although the strong tremors startled her, she didn't think anyone in the Black Rose Kingdom could challenge the dragons.

Thus, she didn't believe the sound of battle outside was due to the dragon clan being attacked.

'I should check it out,' Hester decided to be nosy.

With such an uproar, she wouldn't be able to go back to sleep anyway.

Nevertheless, the moment she hopped out of bed and stood on her two feet, she was amazed by how light her body felt.

The increased rate of natural mana absorption made it feel as if the world itself was giving her its blessings.

"Ah, that's right. I successfully advanced. I'm no longer a Senior Witch but a High Witch!" Hester clenched her fist with joy and excitement.

The feeling of success was exhilarating.

However, she couldn't have done it without the help she received during the critical moment. She had to repay her benefactor.

"Now that I'm a High Witch, I should actually be able to help Vahn now—" was what Hester initially thought.

Alas, the moment she arrived at the source of the unnatural tremors, she was immediately stunned by the scene that unfolded before her eyes.

Vaan and Senior Jergag traded blows for blows. Each time they clashed, the air seemingly exploded, and the ground trembled.

She had seen Headmaster Astoria in action, but even her power paled in comparison.

"I've fallen far behind again," Hester sighed dejectedly.

Chapter 330: Various Thoughts

'He has grown again...'

Astoria spectated the spar between Vaan and Senior Jergag from a distance with a wry and self-deprecating smile.

In the blink of an eye, the weak person she decided to protect for the future of humanity had surpassed her.

Vaan had grown at a rate others could only dream of replicating.

After all, his physique was far too superior and unique compared to any other physique she had seen in existence.

It was like a great vessel that could devour all power and convert it into strength without wastage. As such, Vaan's sheer physical strength had already surpassed the known limits granted to men.

Without the enhancement of aura, the physical strength of Aura Masters was limited.

However, Vaan didn't seem to have a limit on the growth of his physical strength. If he could train his physical strength and aura to the extreme, even she could not imagine how powerful he would become.

Astoria suddenly had a vague sense of a greater force at work.

Vaan's rise was unstoppable as if a hidden hand had guided him up until this step. He possessed a destiny so great he could be regarded as heaven's chosen.

Those who followed him would prosper, and those who were against him would suffer.

'He could be the savior of this world or its destroyer, depending on how the world treats him,' Astoria thought with knitted brows.

Based on their past interaction, she knew Vaan was quite reasonable.

However, she was also aware of just how poorly the supremacist faction's witches treated men. It was even worse in the capital.

If she can't prevent a grudge from forming between the two sides, their conflict could potentially shatter the kingdom.

'I have to keep him away from the capital,' Astoria silently swore to herself.

Meanwhile, Eniwse and Aeliana didn't have such complicated thoughts as they watched the spar between Vaan and Senior Jergag.

They took pride in his growth, and his glory was also their glory.

...

...

...

As Vaan sparred with Senior Jergag, he did not pay attention to the onlookers, nor did he have such luxuries to be distracted.

Even so, he could still the dragons' cheers of excitement.

It was just a friendly bout between him and Senior Jergag, nothing big or exciting to watch. However, the dragons of the younger generations were just as excited as his last spar with Gryme.

Fights between humans and dragons were more interesting than fights between two dragons, especially when the latter was commonly seen in their dragon clan.

More importantly, the young dragons all wanted to see one outcome; Vaan's miserable defeat. But, unfortunately for them, such a thing was not going to happen.

Senior Jergag knew when to pull his punches. After all, he wasn't competing but assisting.

Nevertheless, each time they traded blows, the air resonated loudly from their clashes, and strong winds blew in all directions.

"Very impressive, Vahn. With that, you should have, more or less, adapted to your current strength now, right?" Senior Jergag casually asked as if he hadn't even worked up a sweat. "How about we put a stop to our spar here?"

"Sounds good, Senior Jergag. Thank you for helping me out," Vaan readily agreed and expressed his gratitude for the elderly dragon's assistance.

He ended his Lycan state and wiped his sweat with his ragged clothes, which had been torn to shreds after failing to withstand the intensity of their spar.

Regular clothes cannot endure high-level battles. He needed to consider better equipment.

Ding!

<You have ended Lycan Transformation>

<You will enter a weakened state for five minutes>

"Your strength has improved significantly, but your defense and speed are rather lacking, especially your speed, Vahn. You should really work on it," Senior Jergag offered his feedback.

"Yes, I've also noticed that problem," Vaan openly acknowledged his shortcoming and said, "However, I can only work on it when the opportunity arises."

Boo...!

Meanwhile, the voices of disapproval and disappointment sounded when the dragons didn't get to see what they came to watch.

(Get lost, you punks! This isn't a show!)

(Crap, Elder Jergag is angry. Let's quickly leave!)

Right after Senior Jergag scolded the crowd, the young dragons immediately scattered in fear of getting into trouble.

Ding!

<Your understanding of the dragon tongue increased>

<+2 proficiency in the dragon language>

...

"Sorry about that, Vahn. Members of the younger generations are still too immature. I hope you aren't offended by them," Senior Jergag apologized for the crowd's unruliness.

Nevertheless, Vaan wasn't some edge lord that would get butthurt just because he heard something unsavory or people looked at him unkindly.

It had grown accustomed to such treatment while trying to survive in the slums.

"You don't have to worry about that, Senior Jergag," Vaan calmly smiled and said, "Words and stares can't hurt me."

"That's good," Jergag nodded with relief.

He believed Vaan had the potential to overcome the Trial by Fire and lead the Red Dragon Clan.

At that time, if Vaan wanted to remove all the dissidents to reinforce his rule, none of the senior dragons would complain.

However, it was best if they could avoid such a scenario.

"Will you challenge the Trial by Fire now?" Senior Jergag asked shortly after.

However, Vaan shook his head.

"Not immediately, soon," Vaan replied before explaining further, "I need some rest to catch my breath. Also, I have company."

Astoria, Hester, Eniwse, and Aeliana were seen making their way over from different directions.

"True." Senior Jergag acknowledged with a nod and said, "Even if you have the Fire Spirit Body now, the Trial by Fire isn't a place you can take lightly. So it'd be best if you are properly prepared."

"Anyhow, this old dragon won't take up any more of your time. I will be entering isolated meditation to digest some insights, young friend. I wish you all the best with the Trial by Fire. Take care."

"You too, Senior Jergag."

With that said, the elderly dragon took off for his cave, leaving Vaan behind to accompany the ladies approaching him.