

The Witch 341

Chapter 341: The Guardian and Gatekeeper

Zssh—!

When Vaan's body made contact with the raging whirlpool of lava, his flesh sizzled with burns from the heat.

However, the temperatures were only slightly higher than the third stage's lava pool. It wasn't terrifyingly high like it actually seemed.

As such, Vaan successfully made it through to the fourth stage without getting incinerated into ashes.

His leap of faith had paid off.

Fortunately, he had made the right call. The overwhelming sense of threat and death was just an illusion and didn't possess any substance.

But considering it could fool him and all the dragon lords, it wasn't just any low-level illusion. If he had the opportunity, he really wanted to dissect it and learn how the illusion worked.

Nevertheless, a completely different scene unfolded in the fourth stage.

He did not free-fall in another vast open space. Rather, he was already standing on solid ground when he gained awareness of his surroundings.

Vaan recalled a brief moment when he felt space was warped and realized his body must have passed through a type of teleportation magic array.

This was further proven by the engraved magic circle on the ground beneath his feet.

After Vaan studied the magic circle and memorized all of its complex details, he finally shifted his attention to the rest of the fourth stage.

The teleportation magic array had sent him to one corner of the fourth trial region.

There weren't any fire pillars, inferno geysers, lava pools, or rock islands filled with quality fire-attribute magical plants.

It was just a desert filled with sand that did not melt despite the terrible temperature in the fourth stage.

Clearly, it wasn't ordinary sand.

At the center of the fourth trial region was an enormous black pyramid blocked off by a wall of raging yellow flames.

Vaan quickly spotted a large fire phoenix resting on top of the black pyramid while overseeing the entire fourth trial region.

At the same time, the large fire phoenix glanced back after sensing Vaan's gaze.

[Welcome to the fourth stage. I am the guardian of this stage and the gatekeeper of the fifth stage. If you pass my test, you will receive thirty drops of the Fire Dragon God's blood essence and access to the fifth stage.]

[Additionally, you would have the right to rule the Red Dragon Clan. Unfortunately, you do not possess dragon origins. Thus, the Red Dragon Clan will not listen to you unconditionally. At most, you can only be an honorary dragon lord.]

[However, on the off-chance that you do manage to pass the fifth stage, no dragon will question your legitimacy and right to rule the clan. Every dragon in the clan will obey you unconditionally.]

The Quasi-Divine Fire Spirit spoke.

"I heard the reward for clearing the fourth stage was only seven drops of the Fire Dragon God's blood essence?" Vaan mentioned.

[Seven drops of the Fire Dragon God's blood essence is only the minimum reward for passing the fourth stage. It's only natural that better performance deserves better rewards.]

[Since you have passed the previous three stages perfectly, thirty drops of the Fire Dragon God's blood essence is the right amount you deserve once you pass my test.]

The Quasi-Divine Fire Spirit explained.

[Also, you have three unused quotas. Thus, your quota for the fourth stage has been raised to six. Aren't you glad you didn't use them earlier?]

Vaan could sense the Quasi-Divine Fire Spirit's smirk after he listened.

Nevertheless, judging by the progressively increasing quality of fire-attribute magical plants in each stage, the fourth stage was expected to possess Rank 5 fire-attribute magical plants.

However, Vaan could not spot a single fire-attribute magical plant, let alone any Rank 5 fire-attribute magical plants.

[The Rank 5 fire-attribute magical plants are kept in a special environment to grow. I will grant you entry to the garden when you wish you use your quotes.]

The Quasi-Divine Fire Spirit explained, knowing what Vaan was thinking.

"I see," Vaan acknowledged with a nod before focusing on the fourth stage. "What do I need to do to pass your test, Lord Fire Spirit?"

[Nothing complicated. You just need to pass through the wall of flames to clear my test. But, of course, I will evaluate you on the time taken and the means used. Straightforward enough, right?]

Quasi-Divine Fire Spirit stated.

"Yes," Vaan nodded.

Of course, he wasn't naïve enough to believe that a straightforward objective was equivalent to being easy to accomplish.

After all, it was still the fourth stage.

Furthermore, he was situated on the edge of the fourth trial region. And yet, he could sense the terrifying heat emanating from the wall of flames surrounding the black pyramid.

The temperature would definitely soar once he approached the center.

Nevertheless, Vaan didn't hesitate to take his first step forward. The objective was clear, and time was ticking.

That said, Vaan didn't get very far before being forced to stop and retreat a few steps from the wall of flames.

The heat emanating from the wall of flames was even more terrifying than he could have imagined.

'Of course, I anticipated that it wouldn't be easy. But to think I would be burned this badly before I even get close...' Vaan frowned.

He was hoping to save his Fire Dragon God's blood essence until the last stage in order to use it all at once.

However, he wouldn't be able to proceed with the fourth stage unless he relied on the Fire Dragon God's blood essence for swift improvements.

'Since the Quasi-Divine Fire Spirit called itself the guardian of this stage, those must be its flames,' Vaan guessed.

He might have improved a lot, but he was still a mortal.

On the other hand, the Quasi-Divine Fire Spirit possessed some aura of divinity. It was no different from a demigod, a being that transcended mortality but was not quite a god yet.

'If I want to pass the fourth stage, I don't have much choice,' Vaan settled on his decision.

Man proposes, but god disposes; not everything would go according to one's wishes.

After Vaan took out the three bottles containing the fifteen drops of the Fire Dragon God's blood essence, he decisively consumed them all at once.

"Ugh..."

Vaan quickly grunted with gritted teeth as the potent fiery power of a Rank 6 coursed through his body.

Chapter 342: Incomplete Fusion

"Uarghhh—!"

As the Fire Dragon God's fiery power flooded Vaan's body, rushing through every channel in his system, Vaan raised his head to the skies and let out a mighty roar.

In that instant, the sound wave from Vaan shook the air and made the sand tremble with ripples like a splash in calm water.

It contained deafening volume akin to a dragon roar, something that shouldn't have come out of a human's mouth.

Ding!

<Warning: Your body is breaking down due to an influx of overbearing power>

<It is recommended to delegate a portion of the power to the Heaven-Swallowing Space to alleviate the problem>

'No! An overbearing force is needed to reforge the body effectively!' Vaan refused the system's advice.

His situation has not yet reached such a critical point.

Vaan forcefully endured the raging power of the Fire Dragon God's blood essence as it rampaged through his body.

His veins and meridians lit up with glowing red light, becoming visible under his skin.

Eventually, the light intensified to the point that his body appeared seemingly hollow, containing nothing light underneath.

Naturally, the pain that followed was extreme as various degrees of burns occurred throughout his body.

But while the Fire Dragon God's blood essence wrecked Vaan's body, his regenerative ability also operated at maximum capacity to repair the damages, slowing down the breakdown.

Nevertheless, Vaan sensed that his body was breaking down faster than it could absorb the power of the Fire Dragon God's blood essence.

As such, he increased his heart rate and entered Lycan form, boosting his natural regenerative abilities by a notch.

At the same time, he took out a few magical herbs with healing properties and consumed them raw. He also received healing from his second spirit, the Wood Spirit, Emerald.

As a result, the increased healing negated the breakdown, allowing the power of the Fire Dragon God's blood essence to be assimilated into the body smoothly.

Nevertheless, the process wasn't completely free of consequences.

The Immortal Lycan Bloodline and the Fire Dragon God Bloodline began to mix and clash, altering the form of his Lycan state.

Ding!

<Your Immortal Lycan Bloodline and Fire Dragon God Bloodline have started to clash>

<Your Lycan Transformation is getting affected>

In addition to his long white hair, which had grown out during the start of his Lycan Transformation, two horns protruded backward from the side of his head.

Several strips of his long hair also turned glowing red as if they had been charged with fire-attribute mana.

At the same time, his flesh cackled like roasted pork belly before blackening, forming hard scales in places his silvery-white fur didn't grow and clashed in areas that did.

Nevertheless, the two bloodlines didn't completely oppose each other.

Ding!

<Your Immortal Lycan Bloodline and Fire Dragon God Bloodline have begun to merge>

<Your physique is consolidating>

<Your scales are being strengthened>

<Your claws are being reinforced>

<Your eyesight is improving>

<Your physical attributes are being adjusted>

<A new bloodline is being created>

...

Ding!

<A variation of the Wolgan Lupus Draconis Bloodline, the Celestial Dragonwolf Bloodline (Incomplete), has been created>

<The Celestial Dragonwolf Bloodline (Incomplete) has been created>

<The Celestial Dragonwolf Physique (Incomplete) has been formed>

<Due to an incomplete fusion of the two divine-rank bloodlines, some abilities have been altered and changed>

<You are currently unable to reverse the transformation state>

...

Ding!

<Lycan Transformation has been changed to Celestial Dragonwolf Transformation>

<Blessings of the Moon has been changed to Blessings of the Sun and Moon>

...

====

[Celestial Dragonwolf Transformation (Incomplete) (Low-rank)]

Overview: A mutation of the Lycan Transformation due to the forceful fusion of two divine-rank bloodlines.

Effect: 30% increase in defense, strength, speed, senses, and regeneration.

Effect 2: Dragonwolf Scale Armament (Current level: Mid-level Rank 5 defensive power).

Effect 3: Enhanced Dragonwolf Claw (Mid-level Rank 5 offensive power).

Effect 4: Blessing of the Sun and Moon's effect is increased by 30%.

Limitation: When you end the transformation state, you will enter a weakened state equal to half of your base physical capabilities for the same duration spent in the transformation state.

Restriction: Currently unable to deactivate.

=====

[Blessing of the Sun and Moon (Incomplete) (Low-rank) (Physique-Dependant)]

Overview: A tyrannical divine ability unique to the Celestial Dragonwolf, also known as the Sun-Moon Devouring Tyrant, ruler of the night and day, overlord of the earth and sky.

Effect: Able to draw power from lunar ice and solar fire to boost physical growth, combat prowess, recovery, and comprehension of Ice and Fire Laws.

Effect 1.1: 1% overall increase from moonlight and sunlight.

Effect 1.2: 20% increase from direct icy or fiery sources.

Effect 2: 10% immunity to ice and fire damage.

Restriction: Due to an unbalanced and incomplete fusion, currently unable to gain the benefits of lunar power.

=====

[Status]

«Name»

[Vaan Raphna (Vahn Cadieux)]

«Race»

[Human (70%), Devil (10%), (Dragon (15%), (Spirit (5%)]

«Bloodline»

[Spatial Bloodline (Heaven-rank)]

[Immortal Lycan Bloodline (Divine-rank)]

[Fire Dragon God Bloodline (Divine-rank)]

[Celestial Dragonwolf Bloodline (Incomplete) (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)]

[Celestial Dragonwolf Physique (Incomplete) (Low-rank) (Upgradeable)]

«Sub-physique»

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

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

=====

«Elemental Affinity»

[Earth: 55%]

[Wind: 13%]

[Lightning: 12%]

[Light: 5%]

[Wood: 25%]

[Fire: 70% → 80% (↑10%)]

=====

After the effects of the Fire Dragon God's blood essence subsided, Vaan sighed with relief before checking his status.

Although there were several issues and losses, the result was still better than he had hoped.

At the very least, the improvement and abilities he gained significantly increased—or rather, it guaranteed his chance of passing the fourth stage.

Vaan no longer felt pressured by the heat. Thus, he quickly resumed his advance and passed the wall of flames with little time.

It didn't require much effort, which was completely different from his prior attempt.

However, he didn't have the luxury of celebrating his achievement as there were pressing issues he had to resolve quickly.

He needed to fix the incomplete fusion in order to end the Celestial Dragonwolf Transformation. Otherwise, his life might be in danger.

Chapter 343: The Inheritance

[Congratulations. You have exceeded my expectations and passed the test with flying colors. As promised, you will receive thirty drops of the Fire Dragon God's blood essence.]

Shortly after the Quasi-Divine Fire Spirit spoke, a miniature fire phoenix branched off its main body and delivered the bottle to Vaan.

Nevertheless, Vaan didn't have any thoughts of immediately consuming the thirty drops of the Fire Dragon God's blood essence.

Although the Celestial Dragonwolf Transformation had much milder side effects than the Lycan Transformation and didn't threaten his life for prolonged usage, there's no telling what lasting effects it'll have on his body if he doesn't find a way to revert.

As such, he needed to clear the Trial by Fire quickly and seek the dragon lords' vast knowledge to find a solution.

However, the Quasi-Divine Fire Spirit's following message suddenly surprised him.

[Congratulations on passing all the stages. You have cleared the Trial by Fire and gained the right to the Fire Dragon God's inheritance.]

"What?" Vaan was stunned before he asked with doubt, "What about the fifth stage?"

[This Lord's test was the fifth stage.]

[You might be wondering what about the fourth stage in that case, and I can tell you this; you had already passed the fourth stage when you charged into this region. Thus, in truth, there aren't really five stages but five tests.]

[These tests were designed to find five important qualities in the Fire Dragon God's successor: Diligence, talent, temperance, courage, and finally, decisiveness.]

[Originally, this last test was designed to be impossible for mortals to pass. After all, the flames of a Demigod aren't something ordinary mortals can endure. Thus, the only prerequisite to pass was to endure the baptism of flames to a half-dead state.]

[This Lord would have withdrawn the flames and saved your life once it reached that point.]

[However, not only did you endure the baptism of flames, but you also overcame it, even though you had to use a special method with harmful effects. Still, you did it without hesitation.]

[As such, you still passed despite doing things differently.]

"So, what now?" Vaan asked.

[Since you didn't use a single quota and passed all five stages of the Trial by Fire, you can go on ahead and enter the Fire Dragon God's tomb to accept the inheritance as the Fire Dragon God's successor.]

[If you pass the last stage, all the fire-attribute magical plants and other parts of the Fire Dragon God's inheritance will belong to you.]

The Quasi-Divine Fire Spirit informed, causing Vaan's brows to crease.

"I thought you said I've already cleared all the stages of the Trial by Fire, Lord Fire Spirit?" Vaan mentioned.

[And that you have.]

The Quasi-Divine Fire Spirit acknowledged.

[All testing stages have been cleared. You can view the inheritance stage as a bonus stage to collect your rewards. There is no harm and only benefits, so you don't have to worry.]

[That said, it still depends on whether you can accept all of the Fire Dragon God's inheritance. However, if you do succeed, the problem you are facing with your current appearance will be easily resolved.]

The Quasi-Divine Fire Spirit explained with a mysterious smile.

Vaan could see that the Quasi-Divine Fire Spirit had no intention of explaining anything further and left things vague in order to surprise him.

He could only enter the black pyramid and find out for himself.

"I understand," Vaan replied.

Shortly after, he headed towards the dark opening in the black pyramid. The moment he did, trails of flames lit on both sides of the corridor, illuminating the path ahead.

Vaan followed the given path and eventually reached the heart of the black pyramid, a large open space filled with treasured magical plants of Rank 5 quality.

That said, the black pyramid was a treasure in and of itself. It was entirely comprised of a special alloy that surpassed Rank 5 materials.

Vaan wouldn't be surprised if it could endure the full-powered attacks of Rank 6 beings.

Nevertheless, he gradually settled his gaze on the center, where the Fire Dragon God's giant body was laid to rest.

Over the course of three hundred years, much of the Fire Dragon God's blood essence had been extracted for the Trial by Fire, causing the outer shell of the Fire Dragon God's carcass to dry like an empty husk.

As such, there weren't many drops of the Fire Dragon God's blood essence left; about a thousand drops.

All the Rank 5 fire-attribute magical plants in the heart of the black pyramid were also nurtured by the Fire Dragon God's blood essence.

Countless fireflies roamed the magical plant garden and tended to them. Vaan later realized they weren't actually fireflies but tiny Fire Spirits.

Nevertheless, as Vaan continued to follow the set path to the center, he eventually found himself in front of the Fire Dragon God's head, which had been split open.

A single semi-transparent grey pearl containing unimaginable power was embedded inside but easily within reach of Vaan's hand.

"This is..."

Vaan's calm expression changed as his eyes widened with a startled look, visibly shocked by the divine object in front of him.

[Kukuku, it seems you have recognized what it is.]

The Quasi-Divine Fire Spirit suddenly appeared beside Vaan, chuckling, with its main body after downsizing.

[That's right; it's the Fire Dragon God's soul—or what's left of the Fire Dragon God's soul after being refined for the successor to absorb safely. It contains pure dragon soul force.]

[Although there isn't enough dragon soul force to achieve a complete deification of the soul, even if you somehow manage to absorb all of it, achieving partial deification and raising your soul to the Demigod rank is still possible.]

[And as this Lord said earlier, your issues will be easily resolved once your soul reaches that level. Even if it's only a temporary solution, it should still last you long enough to find a proper solution.]

The Quasi-Divine Fire Spirit explained.

Vaan had little-to-no information about the Demigod rank. Thus, he couldn't guess what sort of solution he would have once his soul reached such a level.

However, he fully understood why absorbing the dragon soul pearl would make him the Fire Dragon God's successor officially.

Once he absorbed the dragon soul pearl, he would no longer be considered an 'outsider.'

All members of the Red Dragon Clan would be forced to recognize him as one of their own and the closest kin of the Fire Dragon God.

And if they don't agree with his right to rule, he could suppress them with his dragon soul.

Chapter 344: Progeny of the Fire Dragon God

"How should I absorb the dragon soul force inside this dragon soul pearl?" Vaan asked before adding, "I can't just swallow it as I would with normal medicine, right?"

Although he had the system to help him absorb the dragon soul force, it's not something people knew about, and he would rather keep it that way.

[Aren't you a Soul Master? This dragon soul pearl should be like a heavenly elixir to you. That said, not just anyone can be a Soul Master, and being a Soul Master doesn't guarantee you can fully absorb the dragon soul force on your own either.]

[That's why I am here. It's my duty to help the Fire Dragon God's successor absorb the dragon soul force. And by the looks of it, I'd dare say you have a very high chance of fully absorbing every ounce of the dragon soul force.]

The Quasi-Divine Fire Spirit claimed.

"That sounds about right," Vaan acknowledged with a calm nod.

Although he had considered the possibility that the Fire Dragon God's soul would take over his body to revive itself, it was simply impossible.

As the Quasi-Divine Fire Spirit mentioned, the dragon soul pearl was no longer the Fire Dragon God's soul but pure dragon soul force after undergoing refinement.

As such, the dragon soul pearl didn't contain any remnant will or even memories; it was just pure nourishment for the soul.

[When you're ready.]

"Let us start right away."

[Very well.]

Shortly after the Quasi-Divine Fire Spirit received Vaan's consent, it controlled the dragon soul pearl with mental control and pressed it against his forehead.

[There will be some minor discomfort, but don't resist the dragon soul force.]

The Quasi-Divine Fire Spirit instructed.

Shortly after, the dragon soul force was extracted and channeled directly into Vaan's mind like a steady stream, flowing and consistent.

Ding!

<Your soul is being nourished by potent dragon soul force>

<Your source of existence has become more defined>

<Your source of existence has acquired the dragon trait>

<You have acquired the dragon soul>

<Your soul strength has significantly improved>

<Your Heaven-Swallowing Space is expanding>

...

Ding!

<Your source of existence has become more defined>

<Your soul strength has reached the mortal limit>

...

Ding!

<Your source of existence has become more defined>

<Your soul strength has surpassed the mortal limit>

...

Ding!

<Your source of existence has become more defined>

<Your soul strength has surpassed the mortal limit>

...

Vaan's soul continued to be nourished by the dragon soul force, growing at a rapid yet smooth rate that could make others turn green with envy.

Despite the rapid growth, Vaan did not feel the slightest pain.

After the initial discomfort when the dragon soul force drilled into his mind, he only felt a soothing sensation with increasing clarity.

While being immersed in the feeling, Vaan lost track of time.

Ding!

<Your source of existence has become more defined>

<Your soul has received partial deification>

<Your soul has reached the Demigod rank>

...

<Your source of existence has become more defined>

<Your soul has received partial deification>

<Your soul has advanced within the Demigod rank>

...

...

Ding!

<Your source of existence has become more defined>

<Your soul has received partial deification>

<Your soul has reached the limit of the Demigod rank>

<Your lifespan has significantly increased>

<The soul attribute has been added to your status>

<The law attribute has been added to your status>

...

Ding!

<You have collected sufficient information on Rank 5 and above>

<Would you like to update the information in the Power System (Human)?>

'Yes!'

...

Ding!

<The information has been updated>

...

=====

«Power System (Human)»

[Rank 0 Ordinary Human: 0 – 24 Power] [5-Low, 10-Mid, 15-High, 20-Peak] [Normal Witch]
[Aura User]

[Rank 1 Special Human: 25 – 99 Power] [25-Low, 50-Mid, 75-High, 90-Peak] [Apprentice Witch]
[Aura Warrior]

[Rank 2 Super Human: 100 – 249 Power] [100-Low, 150-Mid, 200-High, 225-Peak] [True Witch]
[Aura Master]

[Rank 3 Ascended Human: 250 – 549 Power] [250-Low, 350-Mid, 450-High, 500-Peak] [Senior
Witch] [Aura Grandmaster]

[Rank 4 Extraordinary Human: 550 – 1050 Power] [550-Low, 750-Mid, 950-High, 1050-Peak]
[High Witch] [Aura Lord]

[Rank 5 Transcendent Human: 1200 – 2499 Power] [1200-Low, 1700-Mid, 2200-High, 2500-Peak]
[Transcendent Witch] [Aura King]

[Rank 5.5 Semi-Deified Human: 2500-5000 Power] [2500-Low, 3250-Mid, 4000-High, 4750-Peak]
[??? Witch] [Aura ???] [Demigod]

[Rank 6 Deified Human: ?????? - ?????? Power]

=====

An unknown amount of time passed before the dragon soul pearl was depleted, ending Vaan's soul
nourishment process.

Vaan slowly opened his eyes and found his perception of the world had changed—or rather; it was reinforced.

He had a better sense of the Fire Law, which governed the world.

However, his perception wasn't just limited to the Fire Law; he could also sense the other universal laws, albeit much weaker.

[Congratulations. You have fully absorbed the dragon soul force and, once again, well exceeded my expectations.]

The Quasi-Divine Fire Spirit spoke.

It had expected Vaan to reach the Demigod rank. But what it didn't expect was that Vaan would also reach the limit of the Demigod rank.

The difference between the beginning of the Demigod rank and the limit was no small difference. In fact, the gap was enormous.

As such, logically thinking, it shouldn't have been possible to achieve—not unless Vaan's soul was also extremely compatible with the dragon soul force.

The Quasi-Divine Fire Spirit couldn't help but believe Vaan possessed great destiny.

He was fated to rule the dragons.

[Now that you have thoroughly absorbed the dragon soul force and acquired a Demigod-rank dragon soul, you're not just any ordinary successor.]

[You have become the progeny of the Fire Dragon God. Therefore, when members of the Red Dragon God see you, it would be like seeing the Fire Dragon God himself.]

[All the resources of the Trial by Fire belong to you now, and the entire Red Dragon Clan is yours to command.]

"Right," Vaan nodded.

[Well, then. I'm sure you need to adapt to your current changes. So, I won't take up any more of your time. You may call out to me when you need me.]

"Understood," Vaan nodded again.

The Quasi-Divine Fire Spirit had spoken correctly. He had undergone staggering growth and changes. Thus, he needed time to review everything.

'Status!' Vaan willed.

Chapter 345: Vaan's Return

Ding!

[Status]

«Name»

[Vaan Raphna (Vahn Cadieux)]

«Race»

[Human (70%), Devil (10%), (Dragon (15%), (Spirit (5%)]

«Bloodline»

[Spatial Bloodline (Heaven-rank)]

[Immortal Lycan Bloodline (Locked) (Divine-rank)]

[Fire Dragon God Bloodline (Locked) (Divine-rank)]

[Celestial Dragonwolf Bloodline (Incomplete) (Divine-rank)]

«Age»

[20 (Body), 31 (Soul)]

[Estimated Lifespan: 6200 – 11200 years]

«Unique Physique»

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

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

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

[Celestial Dragonwolf Physique (Incomplete) (Low-rank) (Upgradeable)]

«Sub-physique»

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

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

«Cultivation»

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

Cultivation Level: Early Rank 3 Aura Grandmaster

Aura Power: 250

...

Soul Type: Dragon Soul

Soul Cultivation Method: N/A

Cultivation Level: Demigod Rank

Soul Strength: 5000

...

«Law»

Law Comprehension Method: N/A

Fire Law: 0.01%

...

«Skills»

[Expand]

«Abilities»

[Expand]

...

=====

«Physical Attributes»

[750 Defense] [Mid-level Rank 4] [250 Aura Power] [Total Defense: 1000 (High-level Rank 4)]

[1100 Strength] [Peak-level Rank 4] [250 Aura Power] [Total Strength: 1350 (Low-level Rank 5)]

[250 Speed] [Low-level Rank 3] [250 Aura Power] [Total Speed: 500 (Peak-level Rank 3)]

=====

«Celestial Dragonwolf Transformation»

Effect: 30% base physical attributes increase.

[750 → 975 Defense (↑225)] [Mid-level Rank 4 → High-level Rank 4] [250 Aura Power] [Total Defense: 1000 → 1225 (↑225) (High-level Rank 4 → Low-level Rank 5)]

[1100 → 1430 Strength (↑330)] [Peak-level Rank 4 → Low-level Rank 5] [250 Aura Power] [Total Strength: 1350 → 1680 (↑330) (Low-level Rank 5)]

[250 → 325 Speed (↑75)] [Low-level Rank 3] [250 Aura Power] [Total Speed: 500 → 575 (↑75) (Peak-level Rank 3)]

Dragonwolf Scale Armament: (Mid-level Rank 5 defensive power) (Durability: 100%)

Enhanced Dragonwolf Claws: (Mid-level Rank 5 offensive power) (Durability: 100%)

=====

«Elemental Affinity»

[Earth: 55%]

[Wind: 13%]

[Lightning: 12%]

[Light: 5%]

[Wood: 25%]

[Fire: 80%]

=====

"Combat prowess of a Low-level Rank 5, huh?" Vaan muttered.

In his transformed state, his strength and defense had reached Low-rank Rank 5. Without a doubt, he had gained more than he had lost.

If he also made use of his spirit body blessings, his strength and defense could potentially increase all the way up to Mid-level Rank 5.

Even if he didn't use his blessings, he had the dragonwolf scales and claws, which boasted Mid-level Rank 5 defensive and offensive capabilities.

Thus, he could stand his ground against other Mid-level Rank 5 beings as long as his speed could keep up.

Nevertheless, the most significant change Vaan experienced was not his Demigod-rank soul but his Heaven-Swallowing Space, which had expanded tenfold.

In other words, he had a storage space rivaling ten Blackmoon Cities.

Furthermore, a tenfold increase in the Heaven-Swallowing Space had also boosted his learning capabilities to an unimaginable level.

He felt even less human and more like an almighty god.

However, this sense of invincibility was just an illusion. He possessed a Demigod-rank dragon soul with five thousand points of soul power but had no means to use it to its fullest potential.

It was like possessing a trained body with the greatest talent for improving further but not knowing how to use it—or rather, he hasn't learned how to use it.

And in terms of learning, Vaan was extremely confident in himself; he just needed time to adapt.

'I need to perceive the Fire Laws and raise my Fire Authority as much as possible. That is the only way I can demonstrate the full power of my Demigod-rank dragon soul,' Vaan thought.

However, he wasn't in a hurry to perceive the Fire Laws; he had to take care of a few issues.

'The Quasi-Divine Fire Spirit said I can easily resolve my locked transformation problem once I have a Demigod-rank dragon soul, and I can now understand why.' Vaan understood what he could do.

His Demigod-rank dragon soul granted him special control over his own body. He could understand it at the micro level and alter it according to his will.

Something like this would have required the system's assistance, but not anymore.

After Vaan studied his transformed body for a few moments, he quickly grasped the overall situation and commenced the reverse process.

Since it was his first time trying to reverse his transformation, he strained his body and expended more soul strength than necessary.

Furthermore, he couldn't retract his horns, fur, claws, and scales. Instead, he shed them all like a snake shedding off a layer of skin.

As a result, his body entered a weakened state, which was no different from the side effects of exiting the Celestial Dragonwolf Transformation.

He only needed some time to recovery.

More importantly, he had successfully recovered his human appearance and kept his long white hair as a bonus.

'I need to resolve my bloodline problem if I want to skip this tedious process in the future,' Vaan noted.

After resting for a bit, Vaan decided to return to the surface to check on the others. Considering he had been away for an extended period, he didn't doubt the ladies were worried sick.

"Lord Fire Spirit," Vaan called out after pocketing a few Rank 5 fire-attribute magical plants to take back as souvenirs.

There were over a hundred Rank 5 fire-attribute magical plants inside the heart of the black pyramid.

If he didn't start using them, when would he?

[I'm here. What do you need? Also, you don't need to call me Lord Fire Spirit. Although you have just reached Peak-level Demigod rank, we are still peers. As such, you can call me Flamewing directly.]

"Understood, Flamewing," Vaan acknowledged before requesting, "I need you to send me to the surface. After I inform my people of my well-being, I will return to study your flames."

[You want to perceive the Fire Laws through my flames in order to raise your Fire Authority? Hahaha, well, then. I'll be looking forward to that.]

[Alright, I'll send you back first. Come and find me when you've settled your matters outside.]

The Quasi-Divine Fire Spirit responded with amusement.

Shortly after the two exited the black pyramid, a fiery pillar of fire erupted under Vaan's feet and launched him back to the surface.

Vaan shot through every layer and returned to the Land of Fire in a matter of seconds, startling every dragon on his way back.

Shortly after he landed on solid ground and suited up, the surrounding dragons in the area all stared at him blankly.

After a moment, their bodies shook with startling realizations before they lowered their heads subserviently to pay their respect.

(Welcome the Progeny of the Fire Dragon God!)

Chapter 346: Absolute Authority

(Welcome the Progeny of the Fire Dragon God!)

(We pay our respects to the supreme leader!)

After the initial group of dragons recognized the progenitor's soul from Vaan and welcomed him, the rest of the dragons in the area also followed suit.

They weren't stupid.

There was only one reason why they could sense the Fire Dragon God, their progenitor's soul from the human; that person conquered the Trial by Fire and inherited the Fire Dragon God's legacy.

Although the Fire Dragon God's inheritance fell into the hands of a human, they did not feel the slightest aversion, dislike, envy, or any negative emotions, for that matter.

They only felt respect and reverence.

The fact that this human could pass the fourth stage, which none of the Peak Lords could, let alone the fifth stage, showed that he possessed peerless talent and potential, surpassing the entire clan.

That alone was worthy of their respect.

However, most importantly, this person was now their new god; they couldn't go against this person, even if they had the will.

They were suppressed by their bloodline, the Fire Dragon God's bloodline.

(Raise your heads and relax. Do not mind my presence and continue on with whatever it is you were all doing.)

Vaan conveyed his message in the Dragon Tongue, surprising many.

It hadn't been long since Vaan came to their clan, yet he had already learned their language.

Even the brightest minds in their clan would take several months to learn another language, let alone the Dragon Tongue, which had more complexity than the human language.

And to achieve the same fluency, it would take half a year to a year.

(Yes, Supreme Leader!)

The dragons did not dare refuse the command of their new god and quickly lifted their heads. Even so, they couldn't just ignore his presence.

(Quick, inform the Peak Lords!)

(Even Lord Astarot?)

While many dragons were eager to deliver the exciting news, some dragons from the first mountain hesitated, uncertain how their Peak Lord would react.

After all, Lord Astarot was regarded as the acting leader of the Red Dragon Clan. Therefore, there might be some conflict of interest if Lord Astarot was unwilling to hand over his authority.

They could only pray Lord Astarot's ambitions wouldn't contradict the Fire Dragon God's will.

Meanwhile, shortly after Vaan had spoken, he purposely picked a random young dragon to give him a lift back to the ninth mountain to test his influence.

Unsurprisingly, the young dragon obliged happily and subserviently with respect, honor, and excitement.

Still, Vaan underestimated the influence his dragon soul could exert on the members of the Red Dragon Clan. He didn't expect it to be at the level of blind worship straight from the start.

He only hoped the young dragon wouldn't go around bragging about being ridden by the new god later.

It could invite misunderstandings.

Nevertheless, shortly after Vaan arrived at Ninth Peak, Narvim and Khaleesi also came from Eighth Peak around the same time.

He had headed to Ninth Peak directly, yet the two dragon lords had already caught wind of his return.

The news certainly traveled fast.

Vaan guessed they had received telepathic messages from their subordinates stationed in the Land of Fire.

However, he later realized they must have sensed his emerging presence the moment he returned from the Trial by Fire due to their bloodline.

This was further confirmed by the seven Peak-level Rank 5 presences heading toward him from the other seven mountains.

The nine Peak Lords were all coming to meet him.

Nevertheless, Vaan didn't focus on the dragon lords. Instead, he checked on the ladies with his Omni-Sense.

After his soul reached the Peak-level Demigod rank, the range of his Omni-Sense greatly expanded, easily covering Ninth Peak.

As such, he easily located everyone.

He found each of them in a different location, focused on their own training, whether they were accumulating mana from the rich environment or learning magic and other knowledge from the dragons.

No one was idle. As such, his worries were unfounded.

Whether they were too busy training to think about him or they busied themselves with training to stop thinking about him, he understood that no one currently needed comforting.

As such, Vaan could focus on the dragon lords.

...

"I don't believe it. You actually managed to conquer the Trial by Fire and inherit the Fire Dragon God's legacy," Narvim uttered with amazement before showering Vaan with praises. "Hahaha! How astonishing! Just what I would expect from my son-in—"

Khaleesi suddenly smacked Narvim on the back of his head before forcing it down while lowering her own at the same time.

"Stop acting all familiar and pay some proper respects!" Khaleesi chided before giving Vaan a formal greeting, "Khaleesi, Lord of Eighth Peak, pays her respect to the new sky!"

"Ahem, right," Narvim coughed before he adopted a serious look and followed suit, "Narvim, Lord of Ninth Peak, pays his respect to the new sky!"

Vaan didn't care for such formalities among those he was familiar with. But before he could respond, the rest of the dragon lords arrived one by one.

...

"Kemun, Lord of Seventh Peak, pays his respect to the new sky!"

"Tyvrin, Lord of Sixth Peak, pays his respect to the new sky!"

"Friatus, Lord of Fifth Peak, pays his respect to the new sky!"

"Pedyssin, Lord of Fourth Peak, pays her respect to the new sky!"

"Sondrei, Lord of Third Peak, pays her respect to the new sky!"

"Irmos, Lord of Second Peak, pays her respect to the new sky!"

"Astarot, Lord of First Peak, pays his respect to the new sky!"

...

Without exception, the seven dragon lords lowered their heads subserviently, expressing their acknowledgment of Vaan's authority.

No one questioned his legitimacy and right to rule the Red Dragon Clan.

When dragons from the first mountain saw such a scene, they quickly realized their worries were unfounded.

They had greatly underestimated the will of the Fire Dragon God and the influence of Vaan's dragon soul. He possessed absolute authority over the Red Dragon Clan.

"Raise your heads," Vaan commanded. Then, after looking left and right, he said, "I'm sure you all have a lot to ask. Let us talk elsewhere."

"Yes, Supreme Leader," the dragon lords acknowledged.

Chapter 347: Discussion at Dragon Summit

"Shall we move to the Dragon Summit, Supreme Leader?" Astarot took the initiative to suggest the location.

"Alright," Vaan casually agreed.

Shortly after Vaan and the dragon lords arrived at the Dragon Summit, Astarot and the others immediately used magic to alter the area's design.

They didn't dare sit on their nine thrones and tower over their new god. As such, they lowered their thrones and built a grander throne for Vaan.

At the same time, Vaan watched their handiwork and felt speechless by their extravagance.

While time was wasted on such luxuries, they could have been doing something more productive. After all, they were there to talk.

Nevertheless, Vaan didn't spoil the mood and let the dragon lords continue their work since they seemed very invested.

A few minutes later, a small golden throne with crystal decorations was created on top of a huge earthen pillar, facing the other nine dragon thrones.

Only after Vaan took his seat on the new throne did the dragon lords also sit on theirs.

"Alright. I'm sure you are all dying for answers," Vaan calmly mentioned before urging them, "Go ahead and ask your questions."

"What do you plan to do with the Red Dragon Clan, Supreme Leader?" Astarot asked his question after exchanging glances with the other dragon lords and reaching a tacit understanding.

"This is what you all want to know first, huh?" Vaan repeated with a thoughtful look, not finding it all that surprising.

The dragon lords prioritized their dragon clan's welfare over their own interests. Vaan had already realized this when he passed the fourth stage.

The nine dragon lords were not just leaders but also the strongest dragons within the Red Dragon Clan.

They were required to maintain order in the clan, guide the younger generations on the correct path, and safeguard the clan as a whole from outside threats.

Thus, staying alive was also their responsibility.

They couldn't risk their lives for opportunities like other dragons. As such, they couldn't proceed beyond the third stage in the Trial by Fire.

"Hm, let's say I have big plans for the Red Dragon Clan," Vaan vaguely replied with a smile.

When Astarot and the other dragon lords heard Vaan's vague reply, they immediately revealed concerned looks.

Vaan could guess what they were worried about.

The Red Dragon Clan possessed immense power; they could easily topple and reshuffle the world's current power balance.

The dragon lords feared he would use the Red Dragon Clan to conquer the world.

However, their worries were unfounded.

"Don't worry. Whatever it is you are all thinking, it's not like that." Vaan decided to stop teasing the dragon lords and clarify his words.

"When I said I have big plans for the Red Dragon Clan, I meant strengthening our power by raising more members to Rank 5 and, if we are lucky, perhaps even beyond that. And for that purpose, we will need to use many precious resources."

Astarot and the other dragon lords appeared startled before they wore doubtful looks and came up with the same guess.

"Does that mean...?"

"Yes, it's exactly what you are all thinking," Vaan admitted before Astarot could finish. "Since the Fire Dragon God's inheritance has already been acquired, the Trial by Fire serves no purpose other than a training ground."

"There's no need to conserve its resources if we want to be in our strongest state when an all-out war with Gehenna finally breaks out," Vaan firmly stated.

"You're right, Supreme Leader." Astarot and several other dragon lords agreed with Vaan's point before Pedyssin, the fourth dragon lord, asked, "But how will you divide the resources? I doubt there will be enough for everyone."

"You're right about that; there isn't enough resource in the Trial by Fire to support the whole clan," Vaan acknowledged with a nod before saying, "That's why I need all your help."

"Please command me, Supreme Leader. What shall you have me do? My claws are yours to use," Kemun, the seventh dragon lord, volunteered with a proud and eager look.

Vaan glanced at Kemun's claws with interest.

"Really?" Vaan uttered with a mischievous smile and said, "Well, they do look like excellent materials for crafting fine weapons."

When Kemun heard Vaan's words, he revealed a horrified look and froze on the spot, uncertain of how to respond.

"Hahaha, excuse me. It was a poor joke," Vaan chuckled before shaking his head and moving on with the topic.

"I understand your eagerness, but this isn't a one dragon's job. I will require all of you to participate. I want you all to cooperate in picking out the top fifty talents among the younger generations to train them. Of course, the younger, the better."

"They will become part of a young elite group and leave the mountains to search for more precious resources once they reach an adequate level of strength," Vaan explained.

Once Vaan said up until that point, Tyvrin and a few other dragon lords became startled.

"I understand the dire need for precious resources, but I don't believe that is a good idea, Supreme Leader," Tyvrin raised his opinion.

"I believe you are already aware, but we isolated ourselves from the rest of the world to hide our strength from the seven Great Devils of Gehenna."

"Sending our young elites out will expose them to the eyes and ears of Gehenna and may even cause the seven Great Devils to descend earlier," Tyvrin added.

"I can understand the initial logic behind the clan's isolation. However, I have a different opinion on this matter," Vaan calmly argued.

"It's fine to enter isolation to hide your strength from Gehenna for some time. However, isolating for too long would only draw Gehenna's suspicions and make your clan seem weak."

"Given three hundred years have passed, I'm almost certain that the seven Great Devils are already aware of the Fire Dragon God's passing and your clan's vulnerability," Vaan stated.

"Assuming you are right about the seven Great Devils, Supreme Leader." Astarot frowned deeply before asking, "But if that's the case, why haven't they made a move? And why must we send out our young elites?"

"That's an excellent question, Lord Astarot." Vaan praised with a smile before saying, "This is what I think; I believe it's because..."

Chapter 348: Discussion at Dragon Summit (2)

"...the seven Great Devils are facing other problems, which prevents them from descending into our world," Vaan said.

"According to what I learned, Chaos is infinitely vast and filled with countless realms, and Gehenna is only a single drop in this vast ocean of realms. Therefore, it's reasonable to think that even Gehenna would have a few neighboring realms."

"If this world is truly that attractive to the denizens of Chaos, what do you all think would happen once the neighboring realms discovered there was only a single dimensional crack in Gehenna?" Vaan asked.

"Considering even one of the Storm Calamity Witch's close retainer, a Rank 6 being, chose to enter the cycle of reincarnation to be reborn outside of Chaos, there's no doubt that these neighboring realms would invade Gehenna," Kemun stated.

"Right," Astarot nodded before adding, "Realm Wars are frequent in Chaos. The denizens of Chaos are always clashing for resources and opportunities. If I recall correctly, Hades and Baator weren't on good terms with Gehenna."

"If it's Hades and Baator, they'll definitely invade Gehenna once they learn about the dimension crack leading to this world," Narvim agreed.

"Hades and Baator, huh? Well, that saves some explanation," Vaan uttered before saying, "Given that situation, the seven Great Devils would be doing everything they can to seal the information from escaping their realm."

"Considering they are also the rulers of Gehenna, they can't freely descend on this world either. It would leave their realms vulnerable. That's like putting the chariot before the horse. As such, they have to stay in Gehenna to protect it."

"However, they don't want to give up on this world either. That must be why Devil's Contractors exist," Vaan guessed.

"I don't want to contradict you, Supreme Leader. However, your reasoning seems to have a serious flaw," Irmoos, the second dragon lord, mentioned. "What said is based on the assumption that the seven Great Devils can't descend due to the threat of other realms."

"However, nothing actually restricts the seven Great Devils from descending. It's not like their bodies have been sealed or anything. If they really wanted to, they could descend into this world for a short period without the other realms finding out."

"Ultimately, I think the seven Great Devils aren't aware of our Fire Dragon God's passing like you believe. That's why they are being wary and haven't descended," Irmoss added.

"That's where you're wrong, Lord Irmoss," Narvim contradicted before inputting his own opinion, "In truth, I believe the seven Great Devils don't care about our Fire Dragon God at all if they were forced into an all-out fight."

"After all, they hold the advantage of seven-to-one. Still, our dragon race is one of the stronger races. Thus, even if our Fire Dragon God couldn't win, he could still take down one or two of the seven Great Devils."

"That's why they have never fought," Narvim stated.

The seven Great Devils might be rulers of Gehenna and work together, but that didn't mean they were friendly with each other.

In fact, they would be wary of each other.

Suffering losses to the Fire Dragon God would just give the other Great Devils a chance to backstab them.

"Ultimately, the Great Devils are most wary of us, dragon lords, the Transcendent Witches, and the Aura Kings," Narvim continued. "After all, they aren't residents of this world, so their powers will be suppressed, making them vulnerable."

"That's why they have been biding their time, waiting for this world's laws to weaken, easing the suppression before they descend."

Vaan had heard the same thing from Narvim before, but he only just realized that it was Narvim's personal insight and not the dragon lords' collective opinion.

Nevertheless, after listening to Narvim's opinion, Sondrei, the third dragon lord, frowned with doubt.

"Let's assume what you said is true, Lord Narvim. In that case, why are they wasting troops on the northern frontier? Why the need for Devil's Contractors?" Sondrei asked before adding, "Is it not because they need spies to gather information and search for our clan?"

"Allow me to answer that question," Vaan calmly stated before saying, "I believe what you said about using the demons to gather information is partly true. They need the demons and Devil's Contractors to learn about this world."

"However, they should have already gathered their information and learned much about this world. As such, I believe the constant pressure on the northern frontier is just a smokescreen to divert everyone's attention from their true objective."

"Which is?" Khaleesi asked, expecting an answer.

However, Vaan nonchalantly shrugged.

"I don't know," he replied before mentioning, "I know too little about the current state of affairs in the world. Unfortunately, most information has been restricted from the public, and I've only been able to keep up with this conversation using what little information I've learned."

"However, if I have to guess, I believe it's most likely related to why the Great Devils are willing to lend their divine powers to humans and create the Devil's Contractors. They found a way to speed up the suppression-easing process, perhaps?" Vaan guessed.

The dragon lords all became startled while listening as Vaan might very well be speaking the truth. That said, he hadn't finished speaking.

"Whatever it is, my original plan remains unchanged," Vaan firmly stated before urging the dragon lords, "I need you all to train the young talents to a certain standard before sending them out to gather information and resources."

"Of course, none of you should neglect your own training while carrying out my task," Vaan suddenly added.

"After all, you are the strongest in the clan, the closest to Rank 6. Therefore, as long as anyone of you is confident in surpassing the mortal limit, most of the precious resources will be directed to you," Vaan declared.

Although the dragon lords were astonished and grateful after learning they would receive most of the precious resources, they were still concerned about their young talents.

If they lost all their genius, their clan would decline into ruin.

"Why do you insist on sending out our young talents, Supreme Leader?" Astarot asked despite believing the supreme leader had a good reason.

In fact, Astarot could already guess the reason; the answer was obvious enough. Even so, he wanted to confirm it by hearing from the supreme leader directly.

Chapter 349: Discussion at Dragon Summit (3)

"Considering the Red Dragon Clan has been hiding in isolation for so long, the seven Great Devils won't expect dragons to emerge from their isolation. Thus, if a group of dragons suddenly emerged, it would certainly throw a wrench in their planning," Vaan began to explain.

"Why did the dragons stop hiding? Why did they suddenly appear? Why now? Who gave them the courage? What are they plotting? The enemy would most likely think along these lines."

"And if they only saw that members of the younger generations of the clan were all Rank 5, then they would believe the members of the older generations would be even more powerful. That would make them wary," Vaan added.

"So we are trying to bluff the Great Devils into thinking we have become even stronger than them during our isolation, huh? Not a bad idea," Astarot thought before saying, "However, the odds don't seem that high."

"Right," Irmoos nodded in agreement before adding, "There's a chance they will see through our bluff. What then?"

"Then not much will change. Maybe the Devil's Contractors would go on a dragon hunt, but the Great Devils themselves still won't descend, not before they achieve their original objective through the Devil's Contractors," Vaan calmly replied.

"However, if our bluff does succeed, we will buy ourselves some valuable time and figure out what the Great Devils are trying to achieve using the Devil's Contractors."

"Furthermore, the bolder we act, the warier they may become. The key is not to show fear. That would also give us more freedom to do things in the open," Vaan added.

"More importantly, it's been three hundred years since your clan moved to this world. These mountains might be your home, but the vast sky is your territory. Opportunities are out there, not here. If your clan stays caged to these mountains, when will you ever spread your clipped wings?"

Because of Vaan's dragon soul, his words easily influenced the dragon lords, causing their blood to boil and awakening something inside them.

At the same time, the dragon lords felt like they had been struck by a bolt of lightning, waking them up as if they had come to a sudden realization.

Suddenly, Astarot turned to Narvim with a regretful and apologetic look.

"I believe I—No, all of us owe you an apology, Lord Narvim," Astarot stated.

They had all blamed Narvim, saying he had lost his edge and become conservative. However, those very same words applied to the rest of them.

"You weren't the only one to have lost your edge and become conservative; we all have. I've only realized that now, and for that, I am sorry," Astarot sincerely apologized while reflecting on his mistake.

Narvim was surprised but quickly recovered and waived off the apology.

"Why make it such a big deal? I would have already forgotten about it if you didn't mention it. So let it be water under the bridge. I didn't take it to heart, Lord Astarot," Narvim replied before mentioning, "More importantly, we need to carry out the Supreme Leader's task."

"Right. Thank you, Lord Narvim." Astarot replied with a gratified look, followed by the other dragon lords.

Shortly after, they returned their attention to Vaan with bright eyes full of vigor and life, which wasn't evident earlier.

Any skepticism they had earlier was no longer present.

Their Supreme Leader had the boldness and decisiveness to lead their clan, the qualities of a leader they didn't have. They were originally generals, not leaders.

And at that moment, they felt like the Fire Dragon God had returned to lead them again.

"We will carry out your task with diligence and haste, Supreme Leader," Astarot and the other dragon lords declared faithfully.

However, Vaan shook his head and said, "No, we aren't done here."

As such, the dragon lords stayed back as they continued their discussion, addressing various clan matters and world affairs.

At the same time, Vaan learned more about the Thousand Fog Mountains and the various kingdoms and empires situated beyond the seven witch kingdoms.

Sometime later, their discussion finally ended.

However, Vaan still didn't let the dragon lords leave to carry out his task. Instead, he brought them to the Trial by Fire, quickly arriving at the bottom of the third stage.

Seeing Astarot and the rest of the dragon lords having no problem on the third stage, Vaan nodded before proceeding to the lava whirlpool.

"Follow me," Vaan instructed before pausing for a moment, then added, "Last one to arrive at the fourth stage will not be rewarded."

Shortly after Vaan spoke, he jumped into the lava whirlpool without hesitation, startling all the dragon lords.

Although Vaan cleared the Trial by Fire, he never told the dragon lords how he cleared it, especially the fourth stage. As such, the dragon lords stared at the lava whirlpool with dread and hesitation.

Even if they conjured their most powerful defensive barriers to enter the fourth stage forcefully, the flames would still shatter their defensive barrier instantly and burn them to death.

That was how powerful the dragon lords believed the flames were, not knowing it was all just an illusion set up by the late Fire Dragon God.

Nevertheless, the dragon lords only hesitated for a moment before Narvim and Khaleesi dived into the whirlpool.

They held onto the hope that Vaan called them to the fourth stage for a reason, not to wish them dead.

"Oh, to hell with it. Here goes nothing!" Astarot followed after Narvim and Khaleesi.

Afterward, the rest of the dragon lords followed one by one, leaving Kemun last to enter. Some conjured barriers, and some did not.

Nevertheless, Vaan waited in the fourth trial region as the dragon lords appeared one by one.

"Ahhh—! I'm burning!!" Kemun cried, rolling in the hot sand to put out the imaginary fire while the others watched him.

The spectacle amused Vaan.

He kept his silence and gave the dragon lords time to adapt to the new environment, adjust their mental state, and accept reality.

Vaan didn't find it surprising that they would all be shocked and dumbfounded after realizing an illusion had kept them from entering the fourth stage for so many years.

Chapter 350: Spirit Selection

Before the dragon lords could recover from their shock and try to figure out Vaan's intentions for bringing them to the fourth stage, they were surprised by another discovery.

"Lord Fire Spirit's true body!" Tyvrin exclaimed.

The other dragon lords followed Tyvrin's line of sight before they, too, were surprised to see the Quasi-Divine Fire Spirit's true body resting on top of the black pyramid.

Nevertheless, Kemun's cry continued to resound in the background before Pedyssin, the closest to Kemun, grumbled with annoyance.

"Wake up already! You're fine!" Pedyssin nudged the seventh dragon lord.

After Kemun realized he was fine, like Pedyssin said, he couldn't help but feel embarrassed for showing such a shameful display.

"Err, please forget what you saw, Lord Pedyssin," Kemun requested awkwardly.

However, Pedyssin rolled her eyes at him before returning her attention to the Quasi-Divine Fire Spirit in the distance like the others.

The Quasi-Divine Fire Spirit was the Fire Dragon God's closest companion and someone they also respected and worshipped.

After all, the Quasi-Divine Fire Spirit possessed some aura of divinity and wasn't far from achieving godhood.

Furthermore, the Quasi-Divine Fire Spirit was the strongest being in the Red Dragon Clan and its true guardian protector.

Considering it had been many years since the dragon lords had the chance to marvel at the Quasi-Divine Fire Spirit's majestic fire body, they couldn't help but feel a little emotional.

Meanwhile, Flamewing sensed their gazes before it raised its head and glanced at Vaan with a questioning look.

"Why did you bring them here, Vahn?" Flamewing asked with his powerful and telepathic voice.

At the same time, Astarot and the other dragon lords also shifted their attention back to Vaan, wondering the same thing.

From what they could see, the fourth stage didn't possess many benefits like the previous three stages.

It was a desolate desert region with no thriving fire-attribute magical plants or blood lava pools in sight.

Only the Quasi-Divine Fire Spirit's wall of flames contained some benefits, albeit basic ones.

"I wanted to give them the opportunity to make a contract with the Fire Spirits," Vaan answered before asking, "Will that be a problem, Flamewing?"

"No, not at all." Flamewing shook his head and said, "You are the supreme leader of the Red Dragon Clan. Of course, I would respect the decisions you make."

"Furthermore, the Trial by Fire has been cleared. Therefore, it's just the right time to release the Fire Spirits," Flamewing calmly added with a nod.

Shortly after, the Quasi-Divine Fire Spirit made a gesture before hundreds of Low-rank Fire Spirits flew out of the pyramid.

"Fire Spirits!"

Astarot and the rest of the dragon lords immediately revealed their excitement.

Because all the Fire Spirits in the entire Land of Fire had been kept in the deepest part of the Trial by Fire, no dragon had been able to befriend and enter a contract with any Fire Spirits.

This was to ensure the difficulty of the Trial by Fire in finding the successor with the best fire talent.

After all, contracting a Fire Spirit could easily raise one's fire talent.

Nevertheless, Vaan passed through the wall of flames and scaled the black pyramid before settling himself on the spot left of the Quasi-Divine Fire Spirit and away from the dragon lords.

Considering his high-fire affinity, he figured his presence would affect the spirit selection process if he stayed close to the dragon lords.

However, he underestimated his attractiveness to the Fire Spirits.

"Go, see if there's any dragon you would like to enter a contract with," Flamewing instructed the Fire Spirits, but none of them moved towards the dragon lords.

Instead, they kept their eyes on Vaan.

After all, if the Fire Spirits wanted to pick a new home, they would naturally go for the best one. They wouldn't settle for inferior homes if better options were available.

When Flamewing and the dragon lords understood the situation, they all felt awkward, especially the latter.

"Ahem, it seems like you need to contract a Fire Spirit first before the rest of these children would even consider looking at the dragon lords," Flamewing said wryly.

"So it seems, indeed." Vaan also wryly scratched his head.

At the same time, the dragon lords immediately all felt embarrassed that they weren't worthy of the Fire Spirits' glances. Still, they could easily accept the situation.

After all, they were being compared to their new sky, someone with peerless talent and potential hardly seen in a whole lifetime.

"If you really wish it, I don't mind if we enter a contract, Vahn," Flamewing stated before suddenly adding, "However, I would rather we not."

"Why?" Vaan casually asked.

"Because you don't plan on staying in the Red Dragon Clan. If I follow you, I will not be able to protect the Red Dragon Clan or continue maintaining and managing the Trial by Fire," Flamewing stated. "That said, this is just a superficial reason. After all, guaranteeing your safety is more important."

"In truth, I just don't want my inadequacies to be the reason holding back your growth. I might be powerful now, but I am still a Fire Spirit of Chaos. My potential and talents are limited. Unless I encounter some fortuitous opportunities or return to Chaos, I am unlikely to become a true Divine Fire Spirit."

"On the other hand, these children are all born in this world. They may be young and weak now, but their talents and future potential cannot be estimated. Of course, investing in them won't be easy."

"Still, once the world merges with Chaos, you will definitely realize their true worth," Flamewing vouched.

That said, the decision was ultimately up to Vaan. Thus, Flamewing didn't try to persuade him after explaining its reason.

"I see," Vaan uttered before appearing to be in thought.

Becoming his spirit companion would have been in the Quasi-Divine Fire Spirit's best interest. However, it chose to put Vaan's interest before its own.

After considering the short and long-term benefits, Vaan was clear on his choice.

"Alright, I've made up my mind. I'll pick one of these little guys," Vaan decided to enter a contract with one of the Low-rank Fire Spirits.

"But who should I choose, I wonder?"