

The Witch 351

Chapter 351: Spirit Selection (2)

There were hundreds of Low-rank Fire Spirits for Vaan to choose from, but he wasn't sure which one would be the most suited for him.

Some Fire Spirits took on various forms of aerial creatures like eagles, hawks, crows, and phoenixes. Others took on the forms of ground creatures like salamanders, tigers, and cats.

There were many forms of Fire Spirits.

But regardless of whether they were aerial or ground Fire Spirits, they were all capable of flight, which didn't surprise Vaan.

They were Fire Spirits, after all.

"If you're interested in entering a contract with this person, come closer to him. He will choose one among you to be his spirit companion," Flamewing instructed, thinking it would help narrow down the options for Vaan to decide.

Naturally, the Fire Spirits were all interested.

However, even if they were all Low-rank Fire Spirits, they also have their differences in character and express different levels of eagerness.

Flamewing figured Vaan could decide based on how they reacted.

Without surprise, the Low-rank Fire Spirits all became excited and rushed toward Vaan with frenzied excitement after learning he was willing to contract one of them.

Many Fire Spirits didn't hesitate to push and shove others to get ahead of everyone. But, at the same time, some were also more considerate and tried not to bump into anyone.

Nevertheless, it was a chaotic rush.

Vaan watched as one of the Fire Spirits, a mountain bluebird, which stood at the front of the race, fell all the way to the very back.

Every time the mountain bluebird got knocked over or pushed aside, it would try to get back into the race, only to be pushed and knocked aside by others again.

After dozens of shoving and pushing, the mountain bluebird felt defeated. It turned its back to the others and slowly flew back toward the black pyramid's entrance dispiritedly.

Its strength was, more or less, the same as the other Low-rank Fire Spirits. But because of its gentle nature, it couldn't compete with any of them.

That said, the mountain bluebird wasn't the only Fire Spirit with a gentle nature. Even so, it was the only one to fall far behind until it hit dead last in the race.

It could be said that it was very unlucky.

Vaan's powerful sense captured the actions of every Fire Spirit in the race. However, only the Fire Spirit with the mountain bluebird form caught his interest.

He felt like its situation was very relatable.

"Have you decided which Fire Spirit you want to contract?" Flamewing asked after noticing Vaan's smile.

"Yeah," Vaan nodded and pointed to the leaving Fire Spirit. "I pick the one leaving in the far back."

"Are you sure?" Flamewing quickly asked with astonishment before adding, "That one seems to be the weakest Fire Spirit out of them."

"Weakest? Perhaps," Vaan acknowledged with a nod before stubbornly saying, "But that's the one I want."

He did not deny that kindness was a form of weakness. But it could also become a form of strength.

It just so happens that the mountain bluebird didn't get the chance to prove itself.

He had also been in the same situation.

Because of the uniqueness of his Heaven-Swallowing Physique, he couldn't cultivate his aura like every other aura user.

But did that mean his talent was poor and he was destined for mediocrity?

Definitely not.

He just needed the right condition—the right opportunity to utilize his innate talent to its fullest potential.

That's why he decided he would also give the mountain bluebird an opportunity. Who knows, maybe it will also give him a pleasant surprise.

"Very well," Flamewing acknowledged Vaan's will before calling the dispirited Fire Spirit back.

After the dispirited Fire Spirit learned it had been chosen, it appeared stunned with disbelief. Even when it was brought in front of Vaan, it remained petrified.

"Well, little one, want to become my spirit companion?"

Only after Vaan asked a question did the Fire Spirit finally snap back to reality and become overjoyed. It flapped its wings around him, expressing its willingness to form a contract with him.

Ding!

<A Low-rank Fire Spirit wishes to enter a Spirit Contract with you>

<Do you accept? Y/N>

'Yes!' Vaan willed.

Shortly after he accepted the Spirit Contract, a spirit link was immediately formed between him and the mountain bluebird-type Fire Spirit.

Ding!

<The Spirit Contract has been established>

<You have acquired your third contracted spirit>

<The contracted spirit tab has been updated>

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«Contracted Spirits»

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

True Name: Topaz

Nickname: Tia

Given Name: Tatiana

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

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

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

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

Mana Capacity: 674/675

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Second Spirit: Emerald (Named Spirit) (Wood Spirit)

True Name: Emerald

Nickname: Mera

Given Name: Esmeralda

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

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

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

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

Mana Capacity: 549/549

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Third Spirit: Fire Spirit (Unnamed Spirit)

Spirit Rank: Peak-Low rank (Peak-level Rank 2 equivalent)

Unique Talent: Unknown (Unawakened)

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

Contracted Magic 2: [Fire Manipulation (Power Limit: Peak-level Rank 1 (One rank lower than contracted spirit))]

Mana Capacity: 220/249

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After checking the Fire Spirit's status tab, Vaan knew he had made the right choice.

Although the Fire Spirit was much weaker than his first two contracted spirits, it possessed something the other two did not: a unique talent, albeit unawakened.

At the very least, the system managed to detect it.

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(Nooo—! This isn't fair. Why wasn't I chosen? I was first too...)

(Aww, if I knew it, I wouldn't have tried so hard to race.)

(Well, we can still have our chances with the dragon lords...)

(Oh, yeah... The dragon lords...)

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Meanwhile, Vaan also heard the other Fire Spirits' complaints and didn't know whether to laugh or cry.

He kind of felt bad for the dragon lords.

Chapter 352: Spirit Selection (3)

While Vaan felt bad for the dragon lords, they were feeling bad for him, thinking he was sacrificing his interest and prioritizing theirs.

"I can't believe it. The Supreme Leader chose the worse Fire Spirit to leave the better Fire Spirits for us... We don't deserve such a good Supreme Leader..." Pedyssin uttered.

"Ahh, I feel so guilty," Imross exclaimed and said, "We wouldn't have even gotten this chance to contract the Fire Spirits if the Supreme Leader didn't clear the Trial by Fire."

"And yet, he, the greatest talent the Red Dragon Clan had ever seen, is leaving the best Fire Spirits for us..."

"Haiz, It's already too late to stop the Supreme Leader," Sondrei sighed before mentioning, "He has already accepted the Spirit Contract with that Fire Spirit. How can the Supreme Leader be so selfless?"

"Everyone, always remember this moment," Astarot said emotionally with red eyes before adding, "The Supreme Leader has great expectations of us. We must not disappoint him!"

"Yes!" agreed the rest of the dragon lords beside Narvim and Khaleesi.

Considering their experience with Vaan, they doubted he was selfless like the rest of the dragon lords believed him to be.

They figured there might have been something special about that particular Fire Spirit he picked.

After all, Vaan didn't hesitate to pick the best magical plant in Khaleesi's collection.

Nevertheless, Khaleesi quickly changed her mind when Vaan returned to the dragon lords' side and gifted her a Rank 5 fire-attribute magical plant.

"This is repayment for the Peak-Rank 4 Bloodvein Ganoderma I used," Vaan said, handing over a Rank 5 Flameheart Lotus, which had similar properties.

But while the Rank 5 Flameheart Lotus had similar properties to the Peak-Rank 4 Bloodvein Ganoderma, the two were not comparable at all.

The Rank 5 Flameheart Lotus was far more potent than the Peak-Rank 4 Bloodvein Ganoderma.

Once the Rank 5 Flameheart Lotus was refined into a Rank 5 Flameheart Lotus Potion, its effects would be amplified even further.

Even ten—no, twenty Peak-Rank 4 Bloodvein Ganodermas would outvalue such a precious item.

"This is too precious, Vahn. I can't accept it," Khaleesi politely refused.

"Don't want it? Then..." Vaan shrugged before turning to Narvim. "This is for you, Lord Nar—"

"Nonsense! Of course, I want it!" Khaleesi snatched the Rank 5 Flameheart Lotus faster than Narvim could react. "How can you just give it away like that?!"

Khaleesi almost had a heart attack.

On the other hand, Narvim witnessed the precious Rank 5 Flameheart Lotus slip away like a gust of wind and felt pained in his heart

Opportunities were hard to come by and disappeared fast when they did come.

Nevertheless, Vaan simply smiled in response to Khaleesi's statement. It might seem a bit mean, but at least his method was very effective in getting the other party to accept.

No bullshit was required.

Meanwhile, the other dragon lords showed interest in the Rank 5 Flameheart Lotus, but they quickly controlled themselves.

After all, they were already promised precious resources to surpass their mortal limits. So there was no need to feel envious of a single Rank 5 Flameheart Lotus.

They were better than that.

Nevertheless, the spirit selection proceeded, and the dragon lords all contracted their Fire Spirits one by one.

Although it took a fair bit of time for them to decide the best among the hundreds of Fire Spirits to contract, they managed to get through them all in the end.

That said, the Fire Spirits were mildly offended.

(Hmph! We are settling with you because we don't have better choices. How dare you be picky with us! Take this! And that! Hyaa—!)

The newly contracted Fire Spirits pinched and pulled on the dragon lords' whiskers as they expressed their discontent.

Nevertheless, the dragon lords simply accepted their tantrums with wry looks. The Fire Spirits were no different from precious little children in their eyes.

That said, Kemun's contracted Fire Spirit was more mischievous as it messed around in his nasal cavity, causing him to sneeze.

A-choo!

The Fire Spirit flew out and slammed into the sand with a quiet poof. A few moments later, the Fire Spirit's head popped out of the sand and cried.

(Boohoo... He bullied me! I want to change partners!)

Kemun's eye twitched.

He didn't do anything and felt wrong. At the same time, he felt like it was a mistake to contract the Fire Spirit. They were going to become headaches and hard to please.

After all, the problem stemmed from the fact that they failed to contract the person they really wanted.

"Now listen here, you little s... thing. Don't cry... okay?" Kemun attempted to appease his contracted Fire Spirit.

He did his best to control his temper since the spirits had to be respected.

Nevertheless, it was still utter chaos for the dragon lords.

That said, it was none of Vaan's problem. Thus, he made them all leave to carry out their task. They could only try to appease the little troublemakers in their own time.

The next group of dragons to contract the Fire Spirits would be the young talents the dragon lords select.

Vaan didn't doubt there would be more chaos then. Still, that was a problem for others to about another time.

After the dragon lords left and the rest of the Fire Spirits returned to the heart of the black pyramid, Vaan summoned his contracted Fire Spirit to talk to it.

"Since I already called the others Topaz and Emerald, your true name shall be Ruby. Sorry if you're not a female," Vaan apologized while naming it.

"Fyuu, fyuu—!" the Fire Spirit expressed its emotion.

"Yes, yes, fuck you too," Vaan casually replied, didn't expect to be cursed. He guessed all Fire Spirits had fiery tempers.

However, he quickly paused after realizing Ruby wasn't cursing him. It just sounded like it but was, in fact, saying it was happy with the name.

Vaan saw the shock and devastation in its eyes, welling up with tears, and felt guilty.

"Oh, shit. Sorry, I didn't mean it," Vaan quickly apologized before explaining, "You know, fyuu-fyuu sort of sounds like... Well, never mind."

"How did I even mishear when we have telepathy? Is this part of your bad luck, perhaps?" Vaan wondered.

"Fyuu..."

Ruby appeared even more despondent as it couldn't deny that it was indeed plagued by bad luck.

Chapter 353: Perceiving the Fire Law

Vaan gradually learned Ruby was indeed a female Fire Spirit. Even so, Ruby was just happy to be given any True Name at all.

After all, Name Bestowal allowed her to raise a rank.

Ding!

<The Fire Spirit's information has been updated>

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Third Spirit: Ruby (Named Spirit) (Fire Spirit)

True Name: Ruby

Nickname: Ru

Given Name: Rubena

Spirit Rank: Peak-Low Rank → Early-Mid Rank (Low-level Rank 3 equivalent)

Unique Talent: Unknown (Unawakened)

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

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

Contracted Magic 3 (New): [Fire Transference (Effect: 10% excess fire damage will be transferred to the contracted spirit)]

Mana Capacity: 220/255

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"Fyuu, fyuu~!" Ruby flapped her tiny wings excitedly.

After she became a Mid-rank Fire Spirit, she gained a new ability, which allowed her to absorb a portion of the fire damage Vaan received.

And if the fire damage wasn't too much for her, she could turn it into her own power and grow.

Suddenly, Topaz jumped out of Vaan's body and landed in front of Ruby. Then, she studied Ruby from top to bottom before giving her a pompous look while patting her chest.

"Kyu!"

Topaz welcomed Ruby into the crew before claiming she was the big boss and that Ruby had to listen to her.

"Fyuu?" Ruby tilted her head, wondering why she had to listen to her. She didn't believe Topaz.

As such, Topaz wanted to assert her dominance by bringing out her trusty sidekick to back up her claim.

However, Emerald was reluctant to come out after being called.

"Kyu!" Topaz grumbled with annoyance before she went back into Vaan's body to drag Emerald out forcefully despite her resistance and protest.

As a result, Emerald's small body lit on fire and started burning the moment she came out of Vaan's body.

"Myuu, myuu!" Emerald cried, overpowering Topaz to hurry back inside Vaan's body for refuge.

"Tia, no bullying Mera," Vaan warned.

"Fyuu, fyuu!" Ruby pranced around Topaz, singing a rhythmic tune, "No bully, no bully!"

Topaz immediately sulked.

...

Nevertheless, after Vaan interacted with his contracted spirits for some time, he shifted his attention to the wall of flames.

Before dismissing the dragon lords, he had informed them that he would be training in the fourth stage for a period of time.

[It seems you are ready to perceive the Fire Law through my flames, Vahn. However, I must remind you that these golden flames of mine are the culmination of three hundred years of understanding the Fire Law.]

[Although I believe you would achieve swifter progress in your understanding if you start with lower-level flames, it doesn't look like you'll listen to me. As such, I can only wish you good luck.]

The Quasi-Divine Fire Spirit spoke with a hint of pessimism.

It believed the Fire Law hidden within its golden flames was too complex for Vaan to perceive and understand and that he was biting more than he could chew.

As such, the Quasi-Divine Fire Spirit was also looking forward to seeing Vaan fail to perceive the secrets of its golden flames.

Vaan might be the more peerless genius Flamewing had ever seen, but even geniuses needed to experience setbacks and eat humble pies in order to grow even further.

Blind arrogance and confidence had always been the downfall of many geniuses.

...

Nevertheless, after Vaan removed his clothes and sat in the golden flames, he closed his eyes and entered meditation.

Although he had shut off his vision, his Omni-Sense expanded to the limit, easily covering the region of golden flames and beyond.

However, he soon contracted his Omni-Sense, compressing it to only focus on the region of golden flames.

While the universal law of fire was ever-present and encompassing, it was also usually elusive and out of touch.

Only beings with strong affinity and perception could sense them.

But even if the universal law of fire could be perceived in the atmosphere, it is not necessarily understood.

As such, perceiving visible sources of fire, where the universal law of fire is most present, was the simplest method to understand it.

Vaan tried to perceive the Fire Laws within the Quasi-Divine Fire Spirit's golden flames, but the concept of laws was new to him.

It was the domain of divine beings and where they drew their near-infinite power.

Nevertheless, Vaan questioned the origin of laws.

Had they always existed during the formation of the world, or were they created by a much higher-level being? Why couldn't mortals sense them? Why were they invisible to the naked eye?

Why was their presence only known when one's soul reached a higher state?

As Vaan pondered the questions in the Quasi-Divine Fire Spirit's golden flames, he gradually formed his own idea on the matter.

The reason mortals couldn't see the universal laws wasn't due to the universal laws being invisible. They simply had no substance, just like a dream; it only existed in the mind.

So then, what exactly is the Fire Law?

Vaan believed the Fire Law was a cumulation of all spiritual beliefs on the concept of fire, and the same applied to all other laws.

After all, he doubted a Sword Law existed before the very first sword's creation.

'Universal laws are the power of beliefs... By understanding the world's cumulative belief in a certain element, people can tap into its power...'

'Flamewing can summon golden flames because that's his own understanding and interpretation of the world's cumulative belief of fire.'

The Quasi-Divine Fire Spirit strongly believed golden flames were hotter than normal red flames. Thus, golden flames manifested.

'What is the hottest form of fire to me?' Vaan mused.

He lost track of time while he meditated.

Ding!

<Your understanding of the Fire Law is sharply increasing>

<Comprehension of the Fire Law is at 0.07%>

<Comprehension of the Fire Law is at 0.13%>

<Comprehension of the Fire Law is at 0.39%>

<Comprehension of the Fire Law is at 0.85%>

<Comprehension of the Fire Law is at 1.7%>

<Comprehension of the Fire Law is at 4.99%>

<Your Fire Authority has increased significantly>

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Chapter 354: Crashlanded on Ninth Peak

Shortly after Vaan reached a 5% comprehension of the Fire Law, he felt like he had struck a bottleneck.

Even if he could continue to increase his comprehension, he wouldn't be able to draw more power from the Fire Law in his current state.

In other words, 5% law was the power limit for Peak Demigods.

As such, he decided to end his law-perceiving session and test the power of his current Fire Authority.

The moment Vaan opened his eyes, they flickered with a fiery glow.

In that instant, a large wave of golden flames burst into being, completely replacing Flamewing's golden flames in the area.

However, Vaan's flames only retained their golden color for a brief moment before turning azure blue.

Ding!

<You have comprehended Golden Flames>

<You have comprehended Azure Flames>

...

Meanwhile, Flamewing had observed Vaan for three whole days.

Although he still didn't believe Vaan could learn much by perceiving his golden flames, he had to give Vaan credit for being persistent and diligent.

When Vaan's golden flames erupted with power not inferior to his own, Flamewing's eyes widened in shock.

Then shortly after Vaan's golden flames turned azure blue, Flamewing became even more shocked that he stumbled to get up for a better look and almost fell off the top of the black pyramid.

[What the fuck!]

Flamewing cussed.

Three days!

It took three days for Vaan to comprehend the secrets of his golden flames and also came up with his own interpretation of the Fire Law!

Not even the most monstrous genius of Chaos could have achieved that feat in such little time—at least during Flamewing's time in Chaos; he had not heard such things were possible.

[Perhaps, this is the real reason everyone wants to leave Chaos when a new Chaosverse enters its destruction cycle and begins to merge with Chaos... It's a place that gives birth to true monsters.]

Flamewing guessed, feeling helpless and envious.

What took others centuries to achieve only took Vaan days to do the same.

Flamewing did not know if there was any Soul Master in Chaos who could even compare to Vaan in sheer talent.

Soul Masters were impressive in their own way, but not like this.

Flamewing did not know that Vaan's ungodly learning speed had nothing to do with Soul Masters. Instead, it was all credited to his Heaven-Swallowing Physique—or, more precisely, his heaven-rank ability, Wisdom from the Void.

...

Meanwhile, Vaan quickly adapted to his Fire Authority and began to control his blue flames skillfully, forming various animals and weapons with just his mind.

Using the power of the Fire Law was as easy as breathing.

Vaan only needed to maintain three aspects to control the power of the Fire Law: visualization, concentration, and intent.

It just so happens that he excelled in these aspects.

'With this, my soul combat prowess, being at the Peak-level Demigod rank, has far outstripped my physical combat prowess. Truly worthy of being the Fire Dragon God's inheritance,' Vaan thought.

He wondered if he should go on a hunt for more divine-level inheritances.

That said, how could such opportunities be so easy to come by?

These divine-level inheritances weren't just cabbages lying on the road for him to pick up. He was unlikely to find another inheritance of such level in their world.

He could only take his chances in Chaos.

After Vaan finished testing his Fire Authority, Flamewing immediately took the chance to speak with him.

[You never cease to amaze me, Vahn. Always exceeding my expectations. Now that you have the power to defend yourself, I guess you will be leaving the Red Dragon Clan and returning to human society?]

Flamewing guessed.

"Soon, but not quite yet," Vaan replied after shaking his head. "I still have a bit more training to do and a few things to settle in the Red Dragon Clan."

Vaan was aware of his strength and weakness.

Although he could use Peak Demigod-rank fire attacks by commanding the Fire Law, it won't be as effective against a strong opponent with high fire affinity or well-equipped with fire-resisting magic tools.

As such, he was prepared to use the Red Dragon Clan's large reserve of mana stones to raise his Aura Cultivation.

Once his Aura Cultivation was raised to an adequate level, it would make up for his lacking speed and allow him to become more rounded.

[I see. Well, then. Go and do what you need to do.]

Flamewing didn't waste any more of Vaan's time and sent him out of the Trial by Fire without waiting for him to make the request.

After returning to the surface, Vaan shook his head. The Quasi-Divine Fire Spirit could have at least waited for him to put on some clothes.

He wasn't embarrassed to be seen butt-naked, but he wasn't exactly an exhibitionist either.

Vaan took out a fresh set of clothes from his Heaven-Swallowing Space and wore them. Afterward, he borrowed the power of fire to fly back to Ninth Peak.

Along the way, every dragon he encountered made gestures of respect and worship as they acknowledged his presence and authority.

They did not dare to neglect the new sky.

Nevertheless, upon reaching Ninth Peak, Vaan noticed an unfamiliar dragon flying towards him from Eighth Peak's direction.

It did not show any sign of respect like the other dragons, nor did it seem to be slowing down, almost as if it intended to crash into him.

Vaan furrowed his brows as he observed the incoming dragon while standing firm on the spot. He did not intend to move.

Right at the last moment, the dragon swerved to the left and crashlanded into the ground beside him with a boom, kicking a cloud of dust and soil.

A woman's coughing was heard shortly within the cloud of dust and soil before it eventually dispersed, revealing Eniwse's figure in place of the dragon.

Without a doubt, the dragon earlier was Eniwse after using Dragonification.

That said, her Dragonification appeared much more complete, as she did not look much different from any other red dragon in the Red Dragon Clan.

It no longer resembled her wyvern-type abomination state.

"It seems your Dragonification is almost perfected. Though, you still need to work on your control by the looks of it, Eniwse," Vaan commented with a smile while extending a hand to help her up.

"Haha... That much is obvious, huh?" Eniwse chuckled with some embarrassment as she accepted Vaan's support.

Chapter 355: Dragon Exercise

After Vaan pulled Eniwse up, he immediately noticed her struggle to stand, not because she was injured but lacking strength.

"Although Dragonification significantly raises my physical capabilities, it also consumes a great deal of mana and strains the body. As a result, I will enter a weakened state every time I finish using it," Eniwse explained after sensing Vaan's thoughts.

"Aunty Khaleesi said I need to strengthen my body with physical training or consume dragon blood essence to reduce the side effects."

"Aunty Khaleesi, huh?" Vaan uttered with a weird look.

"Right," Eniwse affirmed with a nod before mentioning, "You probably weren't aware since you were training inside the Trial by Fire, but Auntie Khaleesi and Uncle Narvim had been helping me perfect my Dragonification."

"They've also used precious magical herbs and prepared medicinal baths to strengthen my body over these past few days. I don't know why, but we seemed to be fond of each other and got along very well the moment we met."

"Maybe it has something to do with you becoming the Red Dragon Clan's supreme leader?" Eniwse guessed.

She couldn't think of any other reason why the two dragon lords would treat her so well.

Of course, the dragon lords' care wasn't just limited to Eniwse. They also helped Headmaster Astoria, Lady Aeliana, and Lady Hester with their training.

"Is that so? You might be right," Vaan casually agreed with her guess before saying, "Since they took great care of everyone, I should find them and repay the favor."

He was looking for Khaleesi and Narvim anyway.

The Red Dragon God's inheritance didn't include any mana stones, but it was a different story for the nine dragon lords.

Considering the rich level of mana in the nine peaks of the Red Dragon Clan, the value of mana stones was no different from any other ordinary stones to the dragons.

They could create more mana stones with their magic if they were needed.

"I know where they are. Actually, I was just on my way to see Uncle Narvim when I spotted you," Eniwse mentioned before offering, "Vaan. I can take you to him."

"Alright," Vaan agreed with a nod.

He had already located Narvim's position on Ninth Peak with Omni-Sense, but he accepted Eniwse's offer nonetheless.

More importantly, he found it quite weird to hear Eniwse address the two dragon lords as such. He figured the two dragon lords also had mixed feelings about it.

...

A few moments later, Vaan and Eniwse arrived at a flat training ground on the northern side of Ninth Peak, where six Rank 4 young dragons under three hundred years old performed physical exercises under Narvim's supervision.

The six young dragons all performed the same set of movements but with varying speeds and precision.

Furthermore, the movements looked complicated and bizarre, especially when performed by the dragons. It was like a mix of gymnastics and aerobatics.

That said, Vaan could tell that they weren't just random movements.

Physical exercise was efficiently depleting the energy in the dragons' muscles and burning their fat, leaving their bodies in a starved and exhausted state.

And by entering a starved and exhausted state, their bodies naturally but greedily absorb the surrounding mana to replenish and nourish themselves.

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Meanwhile, Narvim noticed Vaan and Eniwse's arrival before he instructed the six young dragons to continue their training on their own.

"What brings you here, Supreme Leader?" Narvim greeted.

"I have some business with you," Vaan stated before glancing at the young dragons. "But before that, I'm interested in the physical exercise they are performing."

"Oh? If you're interested in our dragon exercise, I can teach you. However, it won't be of any use to you. The human physique is far too different from dragons," Narvim mentioned thoughtfully.

"I will decide if it'll be useful or not," Vaan firmly replied before asking, "Is there only this type of dragon exercise? I'm interested in learning them all."

"Of course, there are different types of dragon exercises. However, the one they are learning is the best kind, the Fire Dragon God Exercise," Narvim explained before suggesting, "Well, since you wish to learn them all, let's head back to my cave."

"I'm certain I have a copy of every dragon exercise stored in my treasury," Narvim added before paying attention to Eniwse. "Oh, right. Did you also need something from me, lassie?"

"Aunty Khaleesi said she needed some Rank 3 Sunfire Grass for the next medicinal bath, Uncle Narvim," Eniwse informed.

"Is that so? I understand," Narvim uttered, seemingly calm on the surface. "We were just about to head to the cave anyway. Since it's on the back way, you can follow us to grab some before heading back to... Aunty Khaleesi."

Narvim's composure almost fell when he noticed Vaan's sneaky smile on the side. He felt a blood rush, but he quickly forcefully suppressed it.

"Let us go," Narvim said with a forced smile.

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Shortly after arriving at Narvim's cave, Eniwse grabbed what Khaleesi required, the Rank 3 Sunfire Grass, leaving Vaan and Narvim alone.

"So, Uncle Narvim—"

"Don't!" Narvim instantly stopped Vaan with a distressed look before pleading, "Take it as I am begging you, Supreme Leader. Don't start this too. Please."

The dragon lord appeared to be at his wit's end.

"Hahaha... Alright," Vaan softly chuckled.

It was amusing to tease the dragon lord.

If Narvim and Khaleesi had just been open about the truth and told Eniwse everything, they wouldn't be having this problem.

Nevertheless, after Narvim rummaged through a pile of treasured artifacts and quality minerals, he picked out a semi-transparent white crystal with runic engravings and passed it to Vaan.

"This is a memory crystal. It contains a record of all the dragon exercises inside. You just need to press the side with the three overlaying circles against your forehead to peruse its contents," Narvim explained. "If there's nothing else, I will leave first."

Narvim appeared in a hurry to leave, wishing to get away from Vaan as soon as possible.

Nevertheless, Vaan didn't try to keep him. Thus, he kept his message short.

"I also need a lot of mana stones. The higher quality, the better. Apart from that, there's nothing else I need from you," Vaan stated.

Narvim tapped the ground and summoned a large chest enchanted with spatial magic.

"The mana stones are inside, Supreme Leader. Take as many as you require," Narvim informed before fleeing the cave without another word.

Chapter 356: Way of the Formless Dragon

Shortly after Narvim left everything and fled, Vaan smiled wryly before deciding to check out the mana stone chest first.

Being a simple interspatial storage mana tool, the mana stone chest did not require instructions on its usage.

Vaan just unsealed the lock and opened the chest like any other normal chest.

Inside the chest was a large warehouse containing numerous mana stones that could easily reach hundreds of thousands.

However, the most important point wasn't the sheer number of mana stones but their sizes and qualities.

The most ordinary mana stones were the common low-rank mana stones the size of grains and pellets.

On the other hand, the smallest mid-rank and high-rank mana stones were at least the size of a fist. The biggest mana stone was comparable to his own body size. Its value could easily reach the millions.

Nevertheless, this was only Narvim's wealth, the poorest of the nine Peak Lords. The other dragon lords undoubtedly had even more mana stones.

It was hard to say how far he could advance his Aura Cultivation with such wealth.

After Vaan finished inspecting the mana stones, he returned his attention to the memory crystal, which was the size of a watermelon.

It may have been small for Narvim but definitely not for him.

He picked the memory crystal with both hands and pressed his forehead against the side with three overlapping circles per Narvim's instruction.

In that instant, Vaan's consciousness was sucked into the memory crystals. He found his mind inside an empty white space with three dozen bubbles floating around him.

At the same time, each bubble contained a memory of a single dragon performing a particular set of physical exercises.

When Vaan focused his mind on a single memory bubble, rows of texts in glowing golden light appeared, recording the name and detailed instructions of the physical exercise.

Vaan memorized everything with a glance and watched the memory recording from start to finish before moving on to the next memory bubble.

Ding!

<Your knowledge of the Dragon Tongue has increased>

< You have memorized Basic-level Swift Dragon Exercise>

...

As Vaan perused the memory bubbles, he learned the dragon exercise and improved his proficiency in the dragon language simultaneously, killing two birds with one stone.

Ding!

<Your knowledge of the Dragon Tongue has increased>

< You have memorized Intermediate-level Swift Dragon Exercise>

...

Ding!

<Your knowledge of the Dragon Tongue has increased>

< You have memorized Expert-level Swift Dragon Exercise>

...

Ding!

<Your knowledge of the Dragon Tongue has increased>

< You have memorized Basic-level Tyrant Dragon Exercise>

...

Sometime later, Vaan finished memorizing all twelve dragon exercises, which were divided into basic, intermediate, and expert levels.

Ding!

<Dragon Tongue proficiency has reached 5000 points>

<Dragon Tongue (Low-rank) → Dragon Tongue (Mid-rank)>

...

Although Vaan memorized everything, he didn't actually learn them all, as the dragon texts contained some unfamiliar words.

However, the visual record of the physical exercises greatly helped him fill in the blanks and raise his proficiency in the dragon language.

Ding!

<You have learned Swift Dragon Exercise>

<You have learned Tyrant Dragon Exercise>

<You have learned Immovable Dragon Exercise>

<You have learned Sky Dragon Exercise>

...

After reaching Mid-rank Dragon Tongue, Vaan completely understood all twelve dragon exercises, including the Fire Dragon God Exercise, the best physical exercise of the Red Dragon Clan.

"Hm, Narvim was right. These physical exercises don't really have an effect on me due to the contrasting physique between humans and dragons," Vaan muttered after testing a few sets of physical exercises.

Although they worked to some degree, the effects were limited. However, that didn't mean the newly acquired knowledge was useless.

Vaan had grasped the essence of every physical exercise and also gained a thorough understanding of the dragons' physique, becoming the most knowledgeable person in the Red Dragon Clan regarding their physical training.

In other words, he became the most competent teacher in imparting the knowledge of physical exercises to other dragons without mistakes.

Nevertheless, that wasn't his purpose for learning the dragons' physical exercises.

Ding!

<You have compiled the essence of the twelve dragon exercises and created a new dragon exercise, the Formless Dragon God Exercise>

Formless Dragon God Exercise wasn't much better than the Fire Dragon God Exercise, but any improvement was still an improvement.

That said, the Formless Dragon God Exercise wasn't actually an improved version of the Fire Dragon God Exercise.

Instead, it was more accurate to call it an optimized version.

The Fire Dragon God Exercise was simply outdated for the current dragons of the Red Dragon after altering their physiques to adapt to the present world.

Vaan still had a long way from being able to create a higher-rank physical exercise for the dragons on the spot.

Nevertheless, he wasn't finished after creating the Formless Dragon God Exercise.

Ding!

<You have compiled the cumulative knowledge and essence of dragon exercises and aura cultivation to create a high-rank aura circulation method, Way of the Formless Dragon>

...

=====

[Way of the Formless Dragon (High-rank) (Aura circulation method)]

Overview: An original aura circulation method created by combining the cumulative insight of physical exercises and aura cultivation.

Humans training in this aura circulation method can gain the physical might and defensive physique of a dragon without losing their original form and root.

Furthermore, their aura will also gain dragon traits, becoming dragon aura.

The upper limit of training is currently unknown.

=====

After Vaan created the Way of the Formless Dragon, there was no better opportunity to test it than the present.

As such, Vaan quickly pocketed a large quantity of mana stones into his Heaven-Swallowing Space and moved to a more spacious and open area within the cave to commence his aura cultivation.

Unlike the Way of the White Tiger, he couldn't absorb and circulate the mana using the system.

The Way of the Formless Dragon required him to absorb mana, circulate it, and perform a particular set of physical exercises simultaneously for the desired result.

Ding!

<Your aura power has increased by 20 points>

<Your aura power has become denser>

<Your aura power has gained draconic traits>

<Dragon aura has been produced>

...

Chapter 357: Changes in Sunpeak Town

As Vaan trained in the Way of the Formless Dragon, he consumed a large number of mana stones only to produce a small amount of dragon aura.

However, dragon aura was much denser than the normal aura. Thus, even if the dragon aura was smaller, the power was still comparable to a greater normal aura.

Nevertheless, his dragon aura wasn't the only thing improving.

After performing the required set of physical movements a few hundred times with increasing tempo, Vaan began to feel the burn in his tired muscles.

Thus, he absorbed more mana and allowed it to nourish his body.

Ding!

<Your body is being strengthened>

<Your body is being strengthened>

<Your speed has improved by three points>

...

Due to Vaan's high defense and strength, some benefits of practicing the Way of the Formless Dragon could not be seen.

Even so, his body still improved in a way that also increased his speed.

That said, Vaan wasn't the least bit surprised that his speed could also be improved from practicing the Way of the Formless Dragon.

After all, he had incorporated the essence of the Swift Dragon Exercise, which prioritized speed, in its creation.

Even so, the essence of the Swift Dragon Exercise wasn't purely about improving speed.

Rather, it emphasized the development of elasticity and flexibility in the muscles over mass. Thus, improving the body's overall toughness and strength without any loss of speed.

As such, Vaan didn't have to worry about developing excessive muscle masses that would make him bulky and impede his freedom of movement.

Ding!

<Your dragon aura has increased>

<Your speed has increased by 3 points>

...

While Vaan was immersed in aura cultivation, everyone else in the Red Dragon Clan was also focused on their individual training.

Hester worked on consolidating her third mana ring and stabilizing her power as an Early-stage High Witch, using the abundance of mana found in the Red Dragon Clan's atmosphere.

She hoped to achieve saturation in her third mana ring as soon as possible so she could borrow the dragons' help again to advance to the Mid-stage High Witch rank.

It might be selfish of her to rely on the dragons, but she would be a fool if she didn't take advantage of the opportunity presented to her.

Furthermore, it was Headmaster Astoria who gave her the idea.

Just two days ago, Headmaster Astoria sought help from the ninth dragon lord and successfully overcame the barrier that prevented every Early-stage High Witch from becoming Mid-stage High Witch.

Since then, Headmaster Astoria had been consolidating her fourth mana ring and stabilizing her power as a Mid-stage High Witch.

Besides Headmaster Astoria, Lady Aeliana also borrowed the eighth dragon lord's help to form her third mana ring and advance to Early-stage High Witch.

Hester felt a sense of inferiority when she thought of Lady Aeliana.

After all, while it was true that Lady Aeliana requested the eighth dragon lord's help to advance to Early-stage High Witch safely, the eighth dragon lord didn't actually get a chance to help.

Lady Aeliana's advancement to Early-stage High Witch was smooth without any problem. She only asked the eighth dragon lord for insurance.

Nevertheless, it wasn't the time for Hester to feel down due to her lack of talent.

She knew that Lady Aeliana's talent wasn't easy to come by. In fact, Lady Aeliana had suffered a great deal to acquire her strong mental fortitude.

Hester was confident in her determination, but even she wasn't so sure she could endure three years of hellish agony without losing her mind.

As such, she had a great deal of respect for Lady Aeliana.

'Even if others don't think well of me, I have to use my connections to compensate for my lack of talent. That is the only way I can keep up with them,' Hester understood.

...

...

...

Over the past month, Sunpeak Town has undergone great changes.

When news of the curse being lifted from the land spread to its neighboring regions, travelers and merchants alike started to use the fast route passing through the town once more.

However, any business-minded person could easily smell the money when they recalled Sunpeak Town's prosperity in the past.

As a result, Sunpeak Town's population increased tenfold, the outer buildings were all renovated, and even the town's wall was repaired.

As more people traveled and moved into Sunpeak Town, life was breathed back into the town with a fresh new look.

However, the heart of the town, the central district, remained decrepit and old, like a cancerous disease that refused to be removed.

Although the original townspeople didn't pay attention to the business world, even they could sense a great storm brewing over Sunpeak Town amidst its revitalization.

...

Inside the old town lord's estate, a young Mid-stage True Witch carrying a stack of letters knocked on the doors to the lord's bedchamber.

After receiving permission from Lady Solana, the acting lord of Sunpeak Town, the young Mid-stage True Witch entered.

"Lady Solana, I've brought invitations and messages from merchants and the neighboring lords," the young Mid-stage True Witch informed.

"Thank you, Marilla. You can just leave them on the desk in the left corner like last time," Solana instructed with a tired tone.

"Yes, Lady Solana," Marilla complied obediently.

Nevertheless, while heading over to the desk in the left corner, she snuck a glance at Solana sitting beside the bed with dark bags under her eyes.

It was clear that Solana had not slept for many days.

However, another lady occupied her bed, deep in slumber with a weak breath, bandaged body, and exuded a strong stench of herbal medicine.

Besides the severely-wounded lady on the bed, there was also another person in the bedchamber.

After Marilla completed her task, Cyrena immediately picked up the letters from the desk to read them one by one.

"Milady, please get some rest. Your body won't hold at this rate," Marilla worriedly suggested as she was about to leave the room

However, Solana shook her head.

"You don't have to worry about my health, Marilla. I will rest when I need to," Solana stated before requesting, "Please return to your post and keep watch of the situation outside."

"I understand, Milady," Marilla obeyed with a soft sigh.

Chapter 358: Dahlia Awakes

Shortly after Marilla left the lord's bedchamber, silence returned to the room. From time to time, only the sound of paper tearing was heard as Cyrena went through the letters.

After Cyrena finished reading all the letters, her expression turned grave.

"I'm afraid the situation has taken a turn for the worse as we feared, Lady Solana," Cyrena informed with a heavy tone. "Among these few dozen invitation letters, one came from High Witch Beth, and two came from the Lord of Wolfwater and the Lord of Eastcliff."

"News of Sunpeak Town has finally spread beyond the neighboring regions and attracted the attention of the other regional lords. If we continue refusing all invitations, we'll also offend these powerful lords and a High Witch on top of that."

"Even if I continue to borrow my mother's name, it won't have much effect on these witches. They are more powerful than my mother," Cyrena added.

"It doesn't matter if we offend them all, Cyrena," Solana replied.

"We've already offended too many people by holding onto Vahn's properties. Adding a few more people to the list won't change anything. Have you forgotten what happened to poor Lady Dahlia here?"

"These greedy and lawless people aren't afraid to use underhanded means to force us to sell Vahn's properties to them," Solana stated with a grim look.

The reason the central town area remained mostly decrepit and old wasn't due to a lack of redevelopment funds. Actually, they did lack funds for all the buildings.

Still, they had enough to kickstart the redevelopment project on at least a few buildings.

However, the biggest problem was the lack of materials. They couldn't procure building materials without merchants trying to rip them off with ridiculously jacked-up prices, all in a bid to acquire some prime building shares as collateral.

Dahlia volunteered to seek reasonable sellers outside of the region. But before she made it very far outside of Sunpeak Town, she was ambushed and beaten to a half-dead state by 'bandits.'

However, Solana wasn't so stupid as to believe that normal 'bandits' ambushed Lady Dahlia.

"The invitations from these merchants are no different from traps, and the same goes for invitations from High Witch Beth, Lord of Wolfwater, and Lord of Eastcliff," Solana continued.

"If we accept their invitations, we would have to leave the estate and meet them at their place. However, I am willing to bet that we will be ambushed on the road by their competitors."

Solana was a strong Senior Witch and a Sword Master, but even she couldn't handle too many opponents at once, especially not when she was worn out.

"Doesn't that mean even if we want to sell Teacher's properties to them, we can't?" Cyrena asked with a frown.

"That much should have been pretty obvious by now," Solana answered before mentioning, "We refused to sell Vahn's properties to them for so long due to the low market value."

"However, now that the market value is countless times higher, they aren't willing to purchase the properties at such prices and always try to downplay the costs."

Most of the merchants were just small-time businesspeople.

They only wanted to buy cheap and sell high for quick and easy money. They were not interested in developing the land and opening up businesses for long-term profits.

As for the wealthier merchants that were willing to purchase properties at the current market prices, they were only interested in the ones that weren't for sale—the ones Vahn had reserved for his own development plans.

Only very few had been willing to purchase the properties on sale at the current market prices.

Yet, even after they acquired the redevelopment funds from selling off the few properties and lands, they couldn't spend them for actual redevelopment.

"If only Aeliana or Headmaster Astoria was here. With their power, these merchants wouldn't dare act so lawlessly," Solana sighed.

However, she didn't actually believe her daughter or Headmaster Astoria could completely reverse or avoid their current predicament. At most, they would only be able to ease the situation.

After all, she was still the acting lord of Sunpeak.

Most merchants and lords wouldn't openly oppose another lord in their own territory, even if they were unhappy with the missed opportunity to profit.

And yet, the merchants and neighboring lords were becoming more bold and lawless by the day. Still, they were crafty enough not to leave behind evidence.

Even if Solana wanted to find Dahlia's assailants and punish them, she didn't know where to start. She had made too many enemies in the past month.

The merchants were unlikely to sell each other out and most likely to make her investigation difficult.

Nevertheless, the heavy atmosphere turned depressing once Aeliana and Headmaster Astoria's names were brought up.

It had been over a month since Vaan's group headed for the Thousand Fog Mountains without further news from them.

Very few people came back alive after disappearing inside the Thousand Fog Mountains for a few weeks, let alone a whole month.

Solana and Cyrena did not hold much hope that the group was alive, but they didn't want to give up believing.

'Teacher, where are you? Please come back. We need your wisdom,' Cyrena silently prayed.

Even she could tell the current situation was not normal.

She felt like many hidden and powerful forces were eyeing Sunpeak Town and wanting to swallow it whole.

Strength alone wouldn't be able to solve the problem.

"Ugh..."

A pained grunt was suddenly heard before Solana and Cyrena shifted their attention to Dahlia, who had finally regained consciousness.

"You're finally awake, Lady Dahlia," Solana sighed with heartfelt relief. "I was beginning to think you would never wake up. You were unconscious for seven days straight."

"Seven... days?" Dahlia uttered weakly. She recalled her attack before she wondered, "How am I still alive?"

"You were very lucky, Lady Dahlia. The townspeople found you in a pool of blood outside the town and brought you back," Solana stated.

"I did use healing magic on you, but it was mostly thanks to Cyrena's potions that kept you alive. But, honestly, we weren't sure if you would make it. We don't know if your attackers purposely left you half-dead or they just failed to finish you."

"Right, I shouldn't be asking you while you are still recovering, but do you remember who attacked you or how many of them there were?" Solana asked shortly after.

"I..." Dahlia furrowed her brows.

Chapter 359: Solana's Fury

Dahlia tried to recall her attack, but she couldn't help but shake her head, albeit slowly and weakly, in response.

"I couldn't see their faces, but there was more than one person... They also used both magic and weapons," Dahlia recalled her blurred memory with a frown.

"Right," Solana acknowledged with a nod before mentioning, "Your body suffered various burns and countless cuts and stabs. They were definitely caused by fire magic and blade weapons."

"But despite your mutilated state, your attackers seemed to have avoided all the lethal areas. Your serious condition was mostly due to blood loss," Solana added.

That's why even though she used healing magic, Cyrena's potions played a more significant role in Dahlia's recovery.

Her level of healing magic could only seal the wounds and restore Dahlia's appearance. However, she couldn't replenish the loss of blood.

"Oh, right. Your chest area suffered the most wounds. How strange, considering they missed all your vitals," Solana recalled.

Dahlia frowned before becoming startled in the next instant. She immediately checked her Magic Domain.

"Fortunately, the mana stones with me haven't been taken," Dahlia heaved a sigh of relief.

"Your life is more important than some mana stones, Lady Dahlia. Don't put so much importance on the mana stones. Mana stones can be recovered if lost, but not your life," Solana stated as she stood up. "I think I've bothered you enough. I better let you rest."

Since Dahlia didn't know much about her attackers, there was no point in pressing the topic.

"Wait."

Dahlia tried to stop Solana from leaving, but her hand was too weak to reach her. Still, Solana stopped when she heard her.

"Is there something else, Lady Dahlia?" Solana asked.

"Since I've been out for an entire week, a lot must have happened, right?" Dahlia asked, smelling the pungent fragrance of medicine in the room. "A lot of medicinal ingredients must have been used for my recovery... Did we manage to restore the supply chain from Redpine City?"

Solana glanced at Cyrena and let her answer Dahlia's question.

"Unfortunately, no." Cyrena shook her head with a sigh and said, "There hasn't been any news from Redpine City. Considering you were ambushed outside town, I believe all of our supplies from Redpine City had been intercepted and stolen by others."

"The last of our ingredients with healing properties were used on you, Lady Dahlia," Cyrena stated.

"I see..." Dahlia appeared disappointed.

"Enough thinking and just rest, Lady Dahlia," Solana reminded with a firmer tone before adding, "We'll continue our discussion another time."

"In that case, you should also do the same, Lady Solana. You must not have gotten much sleep this past week, have you?" Dahlia guessed.

"Yeah, so don't worry. I plan to get some shut-eye even if you didn't tell me. Try not to leave the room while I am asleep," Solana mentioned.

Shortly after, she leaned against the wall next to the door and hugged her sword close to her chest. Within seconds of closing her eyes, she already started snoozing.

Dahlia could immediately guess how tired Solana had been by how fast she fell asleep.

Silence quickly returned to the room.

Although Dahlia had been unconscious for a whole week, she soon felt drowsy from the lack of attention and fell asleep again.

Cyrena didn't plan to stay up alone.

Considering the uncertain future, she wanted to be in her best state when the next problem arose. Thus, she took a nap after killing the lights in the room.

Several hours quickly passed as the three ladies slept in the dark, silent room. The only sound came from their breathing and the rustle of wind outside the window.

Creak...

The wooden floor creaked under pressure as footsteps were heard outside the lord's bedchamber. After the first footstep, the subsequent creaks became softer yet closer.

A slight frown appeared on Solana's sleeping face, but her eyes remained shut.

Before long, the door to the lord's bedchamber was slowly opened subtly as possible, revealing a young lady in a white blouse and black skirt.

The young lady did not have the appearance of an assassin, but she carried a small dagger laced with vicious poison in her hand.

After the young lady checked the room, she immediately aimed the poisoned dagger at Solana's vulnerable neck.

Cling!

The poison dagger was immediately blocked by Solana's slightly unsheathed sword. At the same time, Solana's eyes snapped open to glare at her assailant.

Although she immediately recognized Marilla's familiar appearance, she did not show mercy or hesitation.

Puchi!

Marilla's body was quickly pinned to the opened door by swords of light before she could make her next move.

Puchi! Puchi!

Solana summoned more swords of light and skewered Marilla's limbs in place, robbing Marilla of her mobility.

"Ahhh!"

Marilla's scream resounded to the pain inflicted upon her while simultaneously waking up Dahlia and Cyrena.

Meanwhile, the poison dagger dropped to the ground before the wooden floor sizzled, corroded by the poison.

Solana's pupils quickly shrank before she turned her solemn gaze to Marilla and coldly asked, "Why did you betray me, Marilla?"

Marilla's body trembled as tears quickly filled up her eyes and overflowed.

"I'm terribly sorry, Lady Solana... I didn't have a choice. They took my mother and forced poison into my body," Marilla confessed, knowing she couldn't win.

She failed to save her mother and also betrayed Lady Solana. Thus, she despaired.

"They?" Solana's eyes flickered with a sharp glint as she interrogated, "Who are they? Do you know who they are? Tell me!"

"I-I don't know, Milady. Their faces were covered... However, they had a particular accent. I don't think they are from—"

Marilla suddenly stopped talking as blood gushed out of her mouth, followed by blood pouring out of her eyes and the rest of her orifices.

Solana was immediately shocked before she flashed beside Marilla to inspect her situation. However, she was helpless and couldn't save her.

Within moments, Marilla drew her last breath and passed away.

"Dammit!" Solana hammered the wooden door with helpless frustration and anger, cracking it into splinters.

"Was that an anti-confession spell?" Dahlia asked with a startled look.

"No!" Solana firmly denied it before saying, "It was poison, designed to erupt after some time. Our enemies planned to get rid of Marilla, regardless of the task's success."

"They are just toying with us!" Solana clenched her fist furiously.

Chapter 360: Fight Fire With Fire

"This... doesn't make any sense." Cyrena frowned with confusion.

"It has only been a few hours since we received letters from High Witch Beth, Lord of Wolfwater, Lord of Eastcliff, and the other batch of merchants. Reasonably thinking, they shouldn't have known we were planning to refuse their invitations, so we haven't offended them yet."

"So this kind of attempt on your life doesn't seem to be something they would do now, Lady Solana," Cyrena mentioned.

"You're right, Cyrena," Solana agreed with Cyrena's thought, still fuming over Marilla's death.

"These dirty tactics must belong to another group. And whatever group it is, I don't think they have any interest in negotiating with us over the central properties."

"If they did, then what they did here was an extremely stupid idea. I would rather sell the properties to a dog than sell to them! They have infuriated me!" Solana swore to avenge Marilla's death.

After she sealed the wounds on Marilla's body, she cleaned up the blood and poison before moving outside the room to handle the rest of the task.

A short while later, Solana returned to the bedroom after she finished handling Marilla's body.

"I'll be back," Solana informed Dahlia and Cyrena before instructing them, "Try not to go anywhere."

"Huh? Where are you going now, Lady Solana?" Cyrena quickly asked.

"So many forces could act so rampant in Sunpeak Town because we lack the security of magic tools, unlike Redpine City. As such, Sunpeak Town is no different from a haven for lawless people to gather," Solana mentioned.

They did have some security-type magic tools installed in the past. But that was before the town declined due to the curse.

When people fled the town during the chaos, most of the magic tools were also salvaged and sold off to the black market somewhere by scavengers.

"However, I suddenly recalled that each region lord was given a long-range communication magic tool to contact the capital for emergencies. I just hope it's still within the estate somewhere," Solana mentioned.

Dahlia getting hurt was a trivial matter to Queen Henrietta, but an assassination attempt on her life was a different matter entirely.

She was the previous lord and the current acting lord of Sunpeak Town.

As such, an assassination attempt on her life was equivalent to challenging Queen Henrietta's authority in the Kingdom of Black Rose.

Nevertheless, when Dahlia understood Solana's intention, she was surprised and asked for confirmation, "You're going to contact the capital and seek help from Her Majesty?"

"Yeah," Solana nodded. "Since information regarding this region is most likely locked down, the communication magic tool is our only chance of letting our words reach Her Majesty's ears."

"But if you contact the capital with it, there's a high chance that it will attract even more greedy hyenas from the capital over," Dahlia mentioned with a frown.

However, Solana was aware of such a risk.

"I know, but that's also exactly what I want," Solana admitted with a nod before explaining, "The last thing these greedy lords and merchants want is even more competitors."

"So, if we can attract many opportunists from the capital over, it'll completely upset the current power balance between these outside forces."

"We might be able to find a chance to reverse our situation within such chaos," Solana added.

Shortly after, she left to search the estate. However, she returned in disappointment a few hours later.

"The communication magic tool is not in this building. It might have been taken during the time I neglected it to manage the Golden Peacock Inn." Solana sighed.

"However, I'm still going to find those bastards responsible for Marilla's death and make them pay. Tomorrow morning, I will post an announcement outside regarding this incident. I make those greedy lords and merchants look for those bastards."

"If they fail to turn in the culprits, I will use the 'communication magic tool' to inform the capital about the assassination attempt on an acting lord," Solana declared.

"What?" Cyrena immediately jumped with fright and raised her objection against the idea, "No, you can't, Lady Solana. It's way too dangerous. That's no different from playing with fire."

"Sometimes we need fire to fire," Solana was determined.

Although Cyrena was still against the idea, she failed to persuade Solana. Unfortunately, there wasn't much she could do besides concocting low-level potions.

However, even that was out of the question since they ran out of raw ingredients.

She could only sigh and resign herself to whatever fate had in store for her.

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Thousand Fog Mountains, Nine Mountain Peaks

Back in the Red Dragon Clan, Vaan exhausted Narvim's mana stones on his aura cultivation before he moved to Eighth Peak to go after Khaleesi's mana stones.

Upon meeting Khaleesi, he found her supervising Eniwse's body-enhancing medicinal bath.

Although he didn't know this body-enhancing medicinal bath would affect Eniwse's voluptuous melons, he hoped it wouldn't grow any bigger.

While size didn't matter to him, it wasn't good for Eniwse's back.

Nevertheless, Vaan recalled Eniwse's previous words and decided to leave fifteen drops of the Fire Dragon God's blood essence with Khaleesi.

The eighth dragon lord appeared to be the expert in training Eniwse. Thus, she would know how to use the Fire Dragon God's blood essence to strengthen Eniwse's body effectively.

Still, he informed Khaleesi to notify him if she required more drops of the Fire Dragon God's blood essence for Eniwse's body-strengthening process.

And if Khaleesi was left with excess blood essence, she could use it on herself.

Afterward, Vaan gained access to Khaleesi's vault and robbed all her mana stones before he decided to pay another visit to the Trial by Fire.

Considering he was planning to leave the Red Dragon Clan soon, it wouldn't do if he didn't record every magical plant with Emerald's specialized magic, Plant Compendium.

As long as Emerald became powerful enough, it was possible to recreate any type of fire-attribute magical plant in the Trial by Fire.

However, it wasn't just limited to fire-attribute magical plants in the Trial by Fire, but any magical plant in general.

After Vaan finished his task in the Trial by Fire, he suddenly felt a sense of discomfort and frowned.