

The Witch 391

Chapter 391: Solana's Night (2)

Solana was very tight—not because she had a narrow cave but because she knew how to tighten it. Coupled with Vaan's big dragon, it felt even tighter.

Although Solana's mind went blank from the pleasure, she gradually regained her reason. Soon, she wrestled with Vaan for dominance. She attempted to disrupt his rhythm by shaking her hips and contracting her cave.

Vaan felt like a snake coiled around his big dragon, strangling it to squeeze out all its juice; it felt incredibly amazing and sensational.

Like lying on a grassy field under the warm sun, it was peaceful and serene, soothing and relaxing; it made him want to like climax right away.

However, Vaan was no amateur; he had great self-control. Thus, he was able to refrain from climaxing early.

As a master in the field, he wouldn't allow himself to climax before his partner did.

More importantly, premature ejaculation would greatly diminish the sense of satisfaction from climaxing.

Climaxing was like using charge magic. The longer the charge time, the greater power produced. Only by charging to the limit would the greatest reward be achieved.

Vaan might have engaged in countless acts of dual practice that it was no different from drinking water to him, but that didn't mean he became cold and indifferent to pleasure. Rather, he enjoyed it even more, albeit with a refined taste.

After all, even if he only drank water, he would still like it to be fresh. Not salty, dirty, or contaminated. Heck, it could even be sweet and tasty with a competent partner.

Although Solana lacked technique, she had excellent hips and a plump rear, great for thrusting from behind.

Solana climaxed three times in such a position.

Still, her favorite position was the cowgirl. As such, after the fourth climax, she stubbornly wrestled with Vaan for control, pushing him down on the bed as she saddled on top.

Naturally, it wouldn't have been achievable for her, given Vaan's skill and strength. However, he had allowed it.

Sometimes, taking turns controlling the rhythm or competing for it spiced things up and made it more interesting.

After all, dual-practice was an act that required two people's cooperation. If only one person did all the work, it would become stale and boring.

Vaan's had his fair share of partners that laid still like wooden blocks; they just wanted to be salted fishes.

Nevertheless, while Solana enjoyed her cowboy position, the bed, which was barely holding Vaan's weight, finally gave out.

The two dropped to floor level with a bang. It was unfortunate that all four of the bed's legs had snapped at once, but at least Vaan's third leg didn't.

"Ahhh~!" Solana moaned uncontrollably with exhilaration as Vaan's rod poked deep inside her, making her womb feel full and warm. Vaan had also shot his load inside her.

Solana's whole body shivered violently with ecstasy as she achieved her greatest climax ever.

At the same time, her cave was stretched so much by Vaan's rod that she was unlikely to be satisfied by anything smaller.

Her cave had been molded only to suit Vaan.

Nevertheless, after enjoying several breaths of sheer bliss, Solana continued to ride on top of Vaan as usual, treating the bed-breaking incident like it had never happened.

The bed would have been sad if it had feelings.

After Solana climaxed seven times, the mana gathering inside the room became concentrated and rich.

"Don't just focus on the pleasure, Lady Solana. This mana density level should be adequate. If you don't want to stay behind everyone else, you should take this chance to advance to the High Witch rank while I watch over you," Vaan said.

Although Solana's body was unwilling to stop, she also knew advancing to the High Witch rank was important.

Still, she couldn't help but feel a little dispirited, knowing she would become even more indebted to Vaan.

"Alright," Solana acknowledged.

She reluctantly peeled herself away from Vaan and occupied an empty spot on the broken bed, adopting a meditative position and closing her eyes.

Soon, she drew the surrounding mana into her body to form her third mana ring.

Half an hour later, Solana successfully advanced to Early-stage High Witch, albeit with much difficulty. She was so mentally exhausted that she decided to take a nap on the spot to recover.

Despite receiving Vaan's help, she took much longer than the other witch merchant who had also advanced with Vaan's help.

Vaan had purposely reduced his assistance to the bare minimum in order to provide Solana with the valuable experience of better understanding the advancement difficulty.

Only with a proper understanding of the advancement's difficulty would Solana make appropriate preparations for her future advancements and not underestimate it, even if he wasn't around.

Giving too much help wasn't always a good thing. It would deprive witches of their independence, making them incapable of achieving great things on their own.

They would develop the tendency to rely on external forces to achieve their advancements, always choosing the easy way out instead of relying on their own efforts.

Nevertheless, after Solana fell asleep to recover her mental strength, Vaan tucked her into bed properly before he used fire to cleanse the sweat and bodily fluids on his body.

Shortly after, he donned a new set of dragon fabric clothes, stored away the old set, and made his way toward the door to leave for another spare room.

When Vaan approached the door, several hasty footsteps were immediately heard on the other side as Silvaria, Dahlia, and Cyrena scrambled to escape like frightened children, afraid of getting caught for secretly eavesdropping.

Although they scattered to their rooms, Vaan was already aware of their presence from the start; he just chose to ignore them.

Still, it was Solana's mistake for not setting up a sound barrier. As such, everyone in the lord's estate was made aware of their dual practice.

"Why didn't you run as well?" Vaan casually asked the only person standing outside the room with an amused smile after he opened the door.

"Hehehe..." Aeliana giggled with a shy and foolish look before saying bashfully, "My Lord, you still have some stamina to spare, right? I don't think my mother, alone, is enough to satisfy you. Can I... also?"

"Let's go to your room," Vaan replied with a casual smile.

After Aeliana heard Vaan's answer, her eyes lit up with excitement and anticipation. She finally got another opportunity to dual-practice with him.

Chapter 392: Zodreg's Eagerness

Shortly after Vaan entered Aeliana's room and shut the door, three other bedroom doors opened almost simultaneously.

Cyrena, Dahlia, and Silvaria poked their heads out of their rooms before they noticed each other. Then, after a short period of awkward silence, they wryly smiled at each other before withdrawing their heads back into their rooms.

Meanwhile, Aeliana did not make the same mistake as her mother. Once she entered her room with Vaan, she immediately insulated the room with a sound barrier.

Even if she didn't do it, Vaan would have asked her to.

Although Solana had forgotten the first time, he also chose not to remind her. He wanted to see how Astoria would react to hearing them making love.

Without a doubt, Astoria had also woken up like everyone else, except she chose not to be a busybody like the others.

That said, she could still hear the noises from her room. So even though she didn't purposely eavesdrop on Vaan's room, she still heard everything until she eventually set up a sound barrier to get some peaceful sleep.

However, Astoria ended up having a dream of herself in Solana's position, making love with Vaan. The scenes made her body feel hot, like an animal in heat.

When morning came, Astoria noticed a patch of wetness around her nether region and immediately understood it was bodily fluids secreted from her body.

"Why am I like this?" Astoria quietly asked herself, blushing with shame.

She had a wet dream about Vaan.

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Meanwhile, Aeliana had a fantastic night of passion with Vaan. She was in sheer bliss during the whole moment with Vaan and went for several dozen of rounds that night.

Everything was as wonderful—no, it was even better than the last time she remembered. Her dual practice with Vaan was always something to look forward to—or so she thought until morning came.

When both mother and daughter woke up in the morning, they felt extremely uncomfortable and terrible, like someone had punched them in the gut several times.

They felt nauseous, sore, and lethargic.

Multiple bruises had appeared all over their bodies, and their knees felt weak; they trembled when they tried to stand up and walk.

After the taste of heaven went away, only hell awaited them. An amazing night had turned into a miserable morning.

It was like getting drunk and partying hard, then experiencing a bad hangover.

"Ugh..." Aeliana groaned as she lay in bed sluggishly like a lazy cat, unwilling to get up.

She didn't have any regrets or complaints about spending the night with her lord. It was a beautiful night, and she also made noticeable progress in mana ring saturation from it.

However, if she spent another night with Vaan, she felt like she might die.

Nevertheless, Aeliana sped up her natural recovery with healing magic before feeling a little better. Eventually, she recovered enough energy to leave the bed.

When she bumped into her mother, they didn't say a word and simply stared at each other in silence. It only took them a single glance to understand each other's situation.

Aeliana couldn't even be bothered complaining to her mother about stealing her lord. Vaan was too much for them to handle alone.

They would have been even more miserable if either of them had monopolized Vaan for the entire night.

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While the ladies were slowly getting up and waiting for breakfast, Vaan had left the lord's estate much earlier in the morning.

He paid a short trip to the Red Dragon Clan to check on the others, including Eniwse and Hester. He also collected the information extracted from Dorothy.

When he perused the information stored inside the memory crystal given by Astarot, a frown appeared on his face.

The information hidden in Dorothy's mind revealed some major plans to destabilize the Kingdom of Black Rose. Multiple unexpected parties involved in the schemes were also exposed. And the old issue with the division of Fuhengir's body had also resurfaced.

A great storm was coming, and the Kingdom of Black Rose was the center of it.

"Humans don't change, even if the world changes; greedy as always," Vaan commented with a glum yet indifferent look before shaking his head. "Well, I'll be leaving now, Lord Astarot."

"Would you like to take my son with you? He has achieved Rank 5 strength and is ready to descend the mountains. I believe he will be of use to you, Supreme Leader," Astarot quickly mentioned, causing Vaan to pause.

"Alright," Vaan nodded before saying, "That's just perfect. I do have some uses for him. I hope more will reach Rank 5 soon."

"With your support of resources, the young elites are making great progress, Supreme Leader. You can expect to see another six Rank 5 in the following week," Astarot informed, then said, "I will call Zodreg now."

"No need, father. I am already here," Zodreg's voice sounded from a distance as he popped out from behind a corner.

Evidently, Zodreg had been eavesdropping on the conversation nearby.

Zodreg had been eager to explore the world since he became a Rank 5 being. After learning of Vaan's arrival, he knew his chance had come.

"Well, that saves us time. Go on, then. Follow the Supreme Leader, and see the world. Always be aware of your surroundings and watch out for danger. Listen to the Supreme Leader's orders..."

Astarot continued to list several instructions before he ran out of things to say.

"We're leaving," Vaan informed, becoming a little impatient.

Although Astarot suggested bringing Zodreg, he was still reluctant to see his son leave the mountain after keeping him close for so many years.

Nevertheless, his son was bound to leave eventually. Thus, Astarot reluctantly saw his son off.

Without further delay, Zodreg entered the gateway with Vaan and left the Red Dragon Clan, returning to the vicinity of Sunpeak Town.

Zodreg immediately inhaled deeply. The air wasn't as fresh as the Red Dragon Clan's nine peaks, but it had the taste of freedom.

"So this is the world after three hundred years," Zodreg observed his surrounding."

"You will have plenty of opportunities to sightsee. But, right now, I have a task for you," Vaan mentioned before explaining Zodreg's job, "I need you to scout the neighboring regions."

"Whether it's people or magic, anything you find suspicious, I want you to record everything and report back to me once you are done."

"But, of course, you must do so while staying out of sight," Vaan added.

"Understood, Supreme Leader!"

Zodreg readily accepted Vaan's task with excitement. It was the perfect first job for him since he could sightsee at the same time.

Chapter 393: Risk of War

Zodreg cast a pseudo-invisibility spell on himself and disappeared from sight. But clear distortion in his occupied space could be vaguely seen when his large body moved.

It was a camouflage spell that made use of bending light.

Nevertheless, shortly after Zodreg took off for the skies with a strong gust of wind, Vaan also didn't linger in the area; he packed up the black cubic magic tool and dragged Dorothy back to Sunpeak Town.

Many witches noticed him when he dragged Dorothy down the streets. But even though the sight displeased most of them, they soon cowered in fear and didn't dare to be busybodies.

If they had learned anything in the past few days, troublemakers would be punished harshly. Thus, they shouldn't intervene and let the local lord's people deal with it.

But if no one from the local lord's faction appeared to punish the insolent man for mistreating the witch, it could only mean the man held an important position.

As such, Despite receiving countless stares with mixed emotions, Vaan made it to the lord's estate without an issue.

By that time, breakfast was almost ready.

Vaan called everyone to the dining table for a meeting over breakfast, as he had important information to share and discuss with them.

It didn't take long for everyone to show up.

"What have you learned from Dorothy, Vaan?" Astoria enquired after glancing unconscious body dumped in one corner of the dining room. "I suppose it's something quite serious?"

"Quite so," Vaan nodded before adding, "You would all be shocked once you hear what I have learned."

"The Kingdom of Verdant Woods is plotting to monopolize the businesses in our kingdom's central region and control the flow of information. For that purpose, they have bribed many witches from our kingdom to work with them."

"Even the Holy Knight Empire is involved," Vaan added.

"What?" Astoria and the others uttered with surprise.

Their kingdom's witches working with the Kingdom of Verdant Woods was one thing, but they didn't expect even the Holy Knight Empire to be involved.

A few moments later, they frowned with doubts and confusion.

"If we also count the Assembly of Silent Night, we can assume at least four parties are interested in the development of the central region..." Solana mentioned with a deep look, then wondered, "But why?"

"Could it be related to the missing part of Furehengir's incident twenty years ago?" Astoria guessed before knitting her brows with a deeper look. "They still haven't given up the search for it?"

"But even if they haven't given up, it doesn't make sense for the Holy Knight Empire to cooperate with the Kingdom of Verdant Woods, not to mention the witches from our own kingdom..."

"Do you have their names, Vaan?" Astoria enquired shortly after.

"No, she didn't know anything about the witches that defected." Vaan shook his head and said, "She might be part of the first group to infiltrate the kingdom, but she isn't much different from cannon fodder to the Kingdom of Verdant Woods."

"If I'm not wrong, Transcendent Sybil sent Dorothy to our kingdom on purpose, fully expecting her to mess up and get caught for interrogation," Vaan boldly claimed.

"But why the hell would Queen Sybil send someone incompetent like that just to expose their own plan to the kingdom?" Silvaria asked with confusion. "That doesn't make sense."

"That's because Transcendent Sybil never expected anyone to crack the anti-confession spell on Dorothy's mind," Vaan replied.

"Transcendent Sybil was most likely hoping for the anti-confession spell to activate and kill Dorothy during interrogation. That way, Dorothy would fulfill the role Transcendent Sybil had secretly intended for her."

"Is Dorothy someone important outside the seven witch kingdoms, Vaan?" Astoria asked, recalling a conversation they had previously.

"I don't exactly know if she's considered anyone important since she lived in the Kingdom of Verdant Woods. However, her father, Baron Chalfont, is from the Holy Knight Empire," Vaan mentioned.

"Baron Chalfont...?" Astoria recalled the name before nodding with understanding. "I see... I'm getting the picture now. This could indeed become a big problem."

"Why is that? Who is Baron Chalfont, Headmaster Astoria?" Cyrena asked curiously.

"Baron Chalfont is a southern war hero. The reason the Holy Knight Empire can enjoy its current standing is also partly thanks to his contributions during the warring kingdom period," Astoria answered.

"Although he has retired and is no longer active on the southern front to his old wounds, he now guards part of the Holy Knight Empire's northern borders as one of their border lords. His barony lies just south of our kingdom."

"Queen Sybil is trying to instigate a war between Baron Chalfont and our kingdom," Astoria concluded.

"Is there some bad blood between our kingdoms? Why is Queen Sybil plotting against our kingdom when we should be united?" Dahlia frowned before adding, "Also, what kind of storm can a retired baron cause?"

"Don't look down on Baron Chalfont just because he only holds the rank of baron. If it weren't for his loyalty to his lord, Count Eldridge, he would have been conferred the noble rank of a marquess," Astoria mentioned.

"Furthermore, Baron Chalfont has a strong army of battle-hardened soldiers and connections to many powerful lords in the Holy Knight Empire. He could rally up quite a mighty force if he badly desired our kingdom's ruin."

"Of course, that is also under the assumption that Dorothy is a precious daughter to Baron Chalfont. Fortunately, we don't have to worry about that because Dorothy is still alive. So it's safe to say we have avoided the worse possible outcome," Astoria added.

"Still, what does Queen Sybil hope to achieve by trying to instigate this war between us? Don't tell me she's after our land, right?" Aeliana raised her eyebrow in doubt.

"No, that does seem to be the most plausible reason," Vaan inputted his opinion before continuing, "The Kingdom of Verdant Woods is rich in plant-based resources, but they lack mineral deposits of rare metals needed for magic tool productions."

"Thus, if Transcendent Sybil wished to keep up with the development of magic tool technology and doesn't care for the consequences, targeting our mineral-rich land is her most likely choice," Vaan stated.

"This is ridiculous." Silvaria angrily slammed the table with her palm before she barked, "Is Queen Sybil not afraid of sparking a continental war?!"

Chapter 394: Risk of War (2)

"Birds die in pursuit of food, and humans die in pursuit of wealth. Humans have always been capable of both great and stupid things," Vaan casually commented.

"That said, Transcendent Sybil shouldn't be blinded by greed to the point of being that stupid. Unless she had betrayed humanity, she must have devised a solid plan to ensure the war between our kingdom and the Holy Knight Empire without involving other countries."

"Right," Astoria agreed, calming down after listening to Vaan's words. Then, she added, "To begin with, the risk of continental war is only high when any of the witch kingdoms wage war on other countries."

"We are the defenders of humanity. So, other countries will be nervous concerning our intentions and ambition if we invade another human country instead of defending against Gehenna."

"It's a different story if the Holy Knight Empire is the aggressor and the one to initiate the war," Astoria stated after some consideration.

"Exactly." Vaan nodded before adding, "The risk of a continental war is much lower if the Holy Knight Empire invaded our kingdom instead. Other countries will not act against our kingdom as we have the moral high ground. On the contrary, they might even try to mediate for us."

"However, if the Holy Knight Empire had terrible relations with their neighboring countries, a continental war would still be unavoidable. But in that event, those countries will attack the Holy Knight Empire from the back while the Holy Knight Empire is busy warring with our kingdom."

"That said, it would also be a different story if we launched a counteroffensive strategy and invaded the Holy Knight Empire after they failed against us. In that case, various countries are still more likely to support the Holy Knight Empire's war effort against us," Vaan mentioned.

In other words, the seven witch kingdoms could only defend against their aggressors and not invade them if they wished to avoid a continental war.

"Still, the Holy Knight Empire isn't stupid. There's no way they can win against seven witch kingdoms by themselves. They might have bigger and stronger armies, but the strength of an army isn't what determines the outcome of a war; it's the number of Transcendents," Solana added.

"Right," Vaan agreed.

As Solana said, the deciding factor in wars was determined by the number of Transcendents and not the strength of armies.

It was the same in his previous world. It didn't matter how powerful a country's military force was. Only a single nuke was needed to cripple it.

"So if Transcendent Sybil wants to drag Baron Chalfont and the rest of the Holy Knight Empire into the war, she must have some way to guarantee no help would come to the Kingdom of Black Rose," Vaan stated.

"Some way to guarantee no help would come to our kingdom...?" Silvaria muttered with a frown before she solemnly said, "If we consider the geography of the seven witch kingdoms, the Kingdom of Black Rose is the most isolated."

"We have the Kingdom of Verdant Woods to our east, the Great Ashfallen Forest and dimensional crack leading to Gehenna in the north, the Thousand Fog Mountains northwest, the Kingdom of Scarlet Flame surrounded by a natural barrier of active volcanoes to the west, and finally the Holy Knight Empire to our south."

"Queen Sybil only needs to seal off the small passage through the volcanic mountain range to the west and lock down her kingdom to cut off all news in our kingdom from making it to the other witch kingdoms," Silvaria said with a heavy look. "We need to inform Her Majesty about this."

"That's probably one of this kingdom's biggest problems right now," Vaan calmly stated, causing everyone to glance toward him and wait for him to continue.

"What do you mean by that, Sir Vahn?" Silvaria asked.

"Given what I have done in Sunpeak Town, news should have long made it to the capital. However, we haven't seen or heard anything about Queen Henrietta or the capital's people coming here," Vaan mentioned.

"As such, we can assume our enemies have already intercepted and sealed off all news from reaching the capital."

"If you blindly head to the capital, there's a high chance you'll be ambushed on the road by one of three possible parties: the Assembly of Silent Night, the Kingdom of Verdant Woods, or the capital's witches bribed by Transcendent Sybil," Vaan stated.

Of course, the three parties listed were only the parties they knew to be inside the Kingdom of Black Rose, not all of the parties involved.

"Then, what do you suggest we do, Sir Vahn? Are we just going to sit here and wait for a war to break out?" Silvaria asked.

"Of course, we can't let that happen," Vaan replied before adding, "However, we don't even know if Queen Henrietta is still in the capital or not."

"If I were Transcendent Sybil, I would have lured Queen Henrietta away and trapped her somewhere if I wanted to give the Holy Knight Empire any chance of winning the war against the Kingdom of Black Rose."

"And in the event that you managed to reach the capital to report Transcendent Sybil's scheme while Queen Henrietta is not present, what do you think will happen?" Vaan quizzed.

Silvaria did not answer—not because she couldn't but because she didn't need to. The answer was obvious.

Her life would be at risk.

It was unclear how many witches from the capital had sided with Transcendent Sybil. However, one thing was clear; they would try to silence her if her intentions and knowledge were known.

And if she tried to expose the truth about witches working for Transcendent Sybil without knowing their names or how many were involved, everyone would doubt each other.

As a result, the capital would plunge into chaos. The kingdom would be vulnerable due to infighting, giving enemies the perfect chance to invade them.

"Relax. There's no need to worry too much. There's always a solution to every problem," Vaan calmly assured.

"Transcendent Sybil would likely incite Baron Chalfont's rage without confirming Dorothy's death. So, if we can find a way to let Baron Chalfont know his daughter is alive, the border lords won't be able to rally up enough force to drag the whole empire to war with our kingdom."

"Furthermore, if Baron Chalfont learns of Transcendent Sybil's scheme against him, it'll be pretty interesting to see," Vaan rubbed his chin with a smile.

Chapter 395: Risk of War (3)

Despite everything Vaan said, they were all assumptions. Thus, a single piece of incorrect information would make it all wrong.

Nevertheless, Transcendent Sybil must have done some research on Baron Chalfont to believe Dorothy was precious to him.

Perhaps Dorothy lived with her mother in the Kingdom of Verdant Woods because Baron Chalfont purposely sent them there. The environment was certainly more suitable for witches than the Holy Knight Empire.

That said, Baron Chalfont's importance wasn't Vaan's biggest concern; it was the Holy Knight Empire's desire.

If the Holy Knight Empire itself wanted war with the Kingdom of Black Rose to happen, Baron Chalfont's role would become inconsequential.

They just needed justification for starting the war.

Alas, there wasn't enough information on the Holy Knight Empire. Thus, it was impossible for Vaan to anticipate their move accurately.

Everything came down to information.

With all the right information, it was possible for Vaan to make his enemies dance in the palm of his hands without lifting a finger. But without information, his options would be limited, and luck would play a larger part.

Nevertheless, after everyone at the dining table heard Vaan's solution, the heavy mood surrounding them was lifted.

"I see," Solana uttered with a clear look. "If we can let Baron Chalfont learn about Queen Sybil's scheme against him, we'll be able to flip Queen Sybil's plans around and turn Baron Chalfont against her."

"However, making it happen is easier said than done. How do we bring the news to Baron Chalfont? It won't be easy to cross the border. Our enemies won't let us leave the central region as we please either."

"Especially the Assembly of Silent Night. Their strength was entirely beyond my imagination. As we stand, only Sir Vahn is capable of dealing with them. The rest of us don't stand a chance if we are outnumbered," Solana stated.

Despite becoming an Early-stage High Witch overnight, she did not have any confidence in dealing with multiple A-rank Witch Hunters, let alone a single S-rank Witch Hunter.

High Witches might have a greater destructive range, but it was useless against opponents skilled in stealth and assassination. They were in the open while their enemies were in the dark.

"As Solana said, your individual strength is too low," Vaan acknowledged.

"The Assembly of Silent Night has shown us how far behind the Kingdom of Black Rose is compared to the rest of the world. The Kingdom of Black Rose might have been one of the strongest countries in the past, but now the other countries have caught up and surpassed it at the middle level."

"I don't want to be the bringer of bad news, but to be honest, as things are, a war with the Holy Knight Empire is very likely," Vaan calmly stated.

"What?" Silvaria was startled along with the others before she mentioned, "But didn't you say the war can be avoided if we can inform Baron Chalfont?"

"Yes, but Baron Chalfont only represents a part of the Holy Knight Empire, not its entirety," Vaan replied.

"Even if we can shift Baron Chalfont's hostility to the Kingdom of Verdant Woods, the Kingdom of Black Rose would still likely partake in the war to defend the Kingdom of Verdant Woods from the Holy Knight Empire's invasion along with other witch kingdoms."

"More importantly, the Assembly of Silent Night's leader is one of the Devil's Contractors. Worse of all, that person is Elrich Salazar, Marquis and Lord of Equinox City in the Holy Knight Empire," Vaan informed.

Boom...

The final piece of information was like a massive explosion, shocking the minds of everyone present greatly.

They would never anticipate one of the Devil's Contractors would hold such an important and high position in the Holy Knight Empire!

It completely changed their perspective of the overall situation.

"Isn't that extremely bad?" Dahlia asked with trembling lips.

"Very!" Solana replied with a grave look. "If there's any chance that Elrich Salazar knows of Queen Sybil's intention, he will push forward to make the war happen. No, it might have been his intention from the start!"

"If the Holy Knight Empire conquers the Kingdom of Black Rose and occupies all of its lands under Elrich Salazar's lead, the demons of Gehenna would be granted smooth access to central Pangea," Solana added solemnly.

Astoria and the other ladies all wore grim and deep looks, pondering ways to minimize the casualties caught in the fires of war.

However, they realized the situation was beyond their capability and authority. It wasn't a problem they could solve on their own.

They needed to convene with Queen Henrietta and all the highest-ranking witches and regional lords in the kingdom.

It was a kingdom-level problem.

"Time is not on our side. The enemies' schemes had been in motion for quite some time while we have realized," Vaan stated indifferently before assuring them, "However, there's no need to despair."

"Even if war breaks out before we can contact Transcendent Henrietta and come up with countermeasures, I can guarantee that the flames of war will not swallow Sunpeak Town. Sunpeak Town will stand strong and even prosper, no matter how big of an army marches on our doorsteps."

"Everything will be fine because I am here," Vaan confidently declared with a hint of arrogance.

Although he sounded very arrogant, there was truth in his words. The greatest military might was at his beck and call.

Furthermore, his own power had surpassed the mortal limits.

As such, Vaan's bold claim provided a strong calming effect on everyone—for they have witnessed his strength.

Still, although they knew he was strong, they didn't know how strong he was exactly.

"If I may ask, how strong are you exactly, Teacher?" Cyrena asked curiously.

"Me?" Vaan smiled at Cyrena before casually saying, "Let us just say it is beyond Transcendent. So, leave all the external matters to me. Everyone else should focus on training and Sunpeak Town's development."

"That said, I will need to revise our building blueprints. I want to build a colossal magic tower on the top of the Red Goblin Mountains. Its height should be at least ten-thousand feet," Vaan stated, shocking everyone.

Ten-thousand feet-tall magic tower!

"Is that even possible? Why do we need to build such a colossal magic tower in that location, specifically, Vahn?" Dahlia enquired.

"Well, that's because..."

Chapter 396: Mana Currents

"Well, that's because building the colossal magic tower at the top of the Red Goblin Mountains is necessary for us to acquire closer access to the mana currents in the sky and also allow us to monopolize the flow of mana," Vaan casually replied.

"Frankly speaking, a ten-thousand-foot magic tower might not be tall enough. So ideally, I would prefer if we could build a thirty-thousand-foot magic tower or even a hundred-thousand-foot magic tower."

"However, we can't bite off more than we can chew. Time, effort, and resources would be wasted if the magic tower crumbles due to flaws in its construction or if it gets destroyed by our enemies. Thus, we can only take things one step at a time," Vaan stated.

He would only consider upgrading the magic tower to thirty-thousand feet and beyond after stabilizing the situation in the kingdom and confirming the structural integrity of the ten-thousand-foot magic tower.

Nevertheless, the colossal magic tower project was just the first step of his plan to build an orbital tower that could extend into outer space.

He had not forgotten the original purpose of the Red Dragon Clan's migration.

They left Chaos in search of opportunities that could further their potential and advance their power beyond the divine.

However, the world of Pangea that they landed in was devoid of the opportunities they sought.

But just because Pangea lacked the opportunities the Red Dragon Clan sought, it didn't mean the opportunities weren't present in the vast universe.

Vaan suspected the universe had its own group of divine beings that weren't inferior to the denizens of Chaos.

According to Narvim's introduction to Chaos, the current universe was going through its destruction cycle after expanding too much. But thanks to an absolute being of the past, Chaos was created to save the dying universes from returning to nothingness.

As such, it was safer to assume the world of Pangea was situated somewhere in the outermost part of the universe, and the opportunities were located somewhere closer to the center.

Vaan wouldn't have dreamed of interstellar travel in his lifetime, given the world's current level of technology.

However, the power of magic made anything possible to achieve; coupled with his knowledge, it was within reach.

Although it was still a distant goal, it wouldn't be achievable unless steps were taken toward it.

While Vaan briefly thought about his future plans, Astoria and the others had no idea what he was talking about.

"What are these mana currents mentioned, Vaan? How would accessing them help us monopolize the flow of mana?" Astoria enquired curiously, vaguely suspecting Vaan was planning something groundbreaking.

"Just as their name implies, they are currents of mana that can only be found high in the sky," Vaan explained.

"As you all know, an overwhelming amount of mana is constantly pouring into our world at any given moment due to the dimensional crack connecting to Gehenna. As such, the area with the densest concentration of mana is also in front of the dimensional crack."

"However, the Great Ashfallen Forest separates the dimensional crack from the rest of the kingdom. At the same time, mana is weightless, like air. Thus, most of the mana is already scattered by the wind by the time it spreads to the rest of the world. As a result, only a few surface areas are actually concentrated in mana."

"That said, it's an entirely different story in the sky. I discovered the wind currents created by the large dimensional crack have also weaved the endless output of mana into thick mana currents in the air," Vaan stated.

The reason the Red Dragon Clan was so rich in mana was also due to the nine peaks being much closer to the mana currents in the sky.

That's why mana stones were nothing to the dragons, and they could constantly power the fog and illusions around the Thousand Fog Mountains.

"If we can connect to the mana currents via our magic towers directly, we will have an infinite supply of mana, and the value of mana stones will become as cheap as dirt," Vaan claimed.

Everyone was dumbfounded after listening to him; it just sounded like something from a fairy tale book.

But when they pictured a world filled with endless mana stones, they couldn't help but feel excited. It could effectively eliminate poverty and conflicts, and they will never have problems with mana shortage again.

However, the mana stone-producing magic tower would also incite endless greed from those desiring to monopolize it.

Thus, they would also need the strength to protect it—which they did not need to worry about since they had Vaan.

"So we only need to build this ten-thousand-foot magic tower on the Red Goblin Mountains before we can access this endless source of mana? Amazing!" Cyrena exclaimed as her eyes beamed with excitement and anticipation.

However, Vaan shortly killed her expectation with his following reply.

"Of course not." Vaan shook his head and said, "If the mana currents were that close to the surface, everyone would have long discovered it. Unfortunately, the mana currents are much higher in the sky than you think."

"Still, even though building a ten-thousand-foot magic tower on the Red Goblin Mountains would only bring us a bit closer to the mana currents, the concentration of mana up there is still richer."

"Thus, we can still benefit from such a magic tower since the increased mana supply will help with Sunpeak Town's development and ease the burden on our expenses," Vaan added.

"Where do we start, Sir Vahn? What do you need?" Solana asked with bright eyes.

She could already envision the future if everything went according to Vaan's idea. If she weren't wrong, the magic tower would become a central pillar in the Kingdom of Black Rose. Its attraction would transform the entire area into a megalopolis, unlike any capital city she had ever seen.

Although it would also come with managerial issues, among many other kinds of problems, she wanted to believe in the potential future of the kingdom where they weren't held back by such matters.

"I already have a general blueprint of the ten-thousand-foot magic tower in my mind," Vaan stated.

"However, I will need to study the foundation of the Red Goblin Mountains and modify the blueprint accordingly. That should take some time."

"Before I leave, I will write down a list of materials and their estimated amounts required for the magic tower's construction," Vaan stated.

Shortly after, he received a pen and paper and wrote down the list of materials and estimated amounts according to his calculations before passing the piece of paper to Solana.

When Solana glanced at the list, her eyes almost popped out of their sockets.

"T-T-This... isn't this too much? Can we even afford this?" Solana asked while holding onto the list with trembling hands.

Chapter 397: Death Blade

Vaan's written list mostly contained Rank 3 materials and above. Only very few materials were Rank 1 and Rank 2. The most shocking part of the list was the astronomical quantity of each item.

According to Solana's rough calculation, Vaan's ten-thousand-foot magic tower would consume around ten times more construction materials than a standard three-thousand-foot magic tower.

It wasn't a project that could be completed in a day.

Nevertheless, Solana understood that the ten-thousand-foot magic tower Vaan envisioned wouldn't just be taller but also much wider than the usual magic tower.

Little did she know, Vaan had only listed a portion of the material required to construct the ten-thousand-foot magic tower.

She would have received a bigger shock if she had known the overall cost.

Shortly after Solana raised her concern regarding the ten-thousand-foot magic tower being too big of a project that it wouldn't benefit Sunpeak Town's development in the short term, Vaan assured her of the magic tower's construction plan.

The ten-thousand-foot magic tower was divided into three construction stages: the inner core, body main, and outer shell.

Only the inner core needed to be completed before they could start harnessing mana from the sky.

Although the amount would be limited and far from the magic tower's full potential, it would at least provide Sunpeak Town with a steady supply of mana for development.

Vaan estimated the inner core would take no more than three days to complete as long as the materials were prepared.

After everyone finished breakfast, Vaan left behind a generous amount of mana stones for Cyrena, Dahlia, and the others to use before he headed for the Red Goblin Mountains.

On his way out, he gave Sunpeak Town a quick scan with his Omni-Sense.

Shortly after Vaan left, Aeliana set up a containment room and placed Dorothy inside after nursing her back to health.

Then, she buried herself inside her study room, reviewing some old laws and reforming them to adapt to the changes in Sunpeak Town.

Additionally, she penned down new laws regarding how trades are conducted in Sunpeak Town to control price fluctuations of goods, prevent exploitation, and eliminate fraudulent and deceptive businesses.

To ensure the new laws were enforced properly, Aeliana posted a list of hefty fines and severe punishments for each crime on the town's bulletin board.

At the same time, people would be granted rewards for reporting any crimes committed in Sunpeak Town—but only if their reports were confirmed to be true.

Furthermore, Aeliana posted a recruitment notice to increase the town's security after considering the lack of subordinates she could use.

Meanwhile, Cyrena practiced her magic on the training ground next to the lord's estate as she waited for her potioning warehouse to restock on ingredients.

Dahlia left the lord's estate with Silvaria after the latter volunteered to accompany her around central town for an on-site inspection of the development area.

On the other hand, Solana took the material list to negotiate with the subordinated witch merchants and work with a feasible material supply plan without crippling their ability to do business and pay back their debts.

As for Astoria, she went to supervise the recruitment and train the recruits.

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"Start searching."

Several miles east of Sunpeak Town, a small group of black cloaks arrived in the forest and started searching the area after a leading S-rank Witch Hunter gave the order.

After taking several minutes and expanding their search radius by three hundred feet, they finally stumbled upon what they were looking for.

"I've found it, Lord Death Blade," an A-rank Witch Hunter alerted, drawing the rest of the group over.

A patch of grass was quickly removed from the ground, revealing a trapdoor leading to a hidden underground bunker.

Within the underground bunker, several spare pieces of high-quality equipment, several months' worth of rations, and a long-range communication-type magic tool were stored.

"Investigate it."

"Yes, Lord Death Blade."

Shortly after receiving the order, multiple A-rank Witch Hunters entered the underground bunker and thoroughly inspected the area, checking every hint left behind.

Sometime later, the A-rank Witch Hunters exited the bunker after completing their investigation.

"Group A and Group B had been designated to the Sunpeak Region, but it's been a couple of days since their bunker was last used, Lord Death Blade," the A-rank Witch Hunter reported.

"Infamous Enigma and Lethal Shade wouldn't have led their groups away from their posts without informing the organization..." Death Blade muttered with a frown.

"But even if they abandoned their missions, Lord Dream Streak and Lord Smiling Knife would have reported it. So the fact that they have all gone missing implies something major had happened inside Sunpeak Town, or they have all been killed..."

"Considering the content of their last report, it's safe to assume they are all dead," Death Blade guessed before falling silent, contemplating his information.

"Whoever killed two S-rank Witch Hunters and over a hundred A-rank Witch Hunters from our organization would have to possess at least Mid-level Rank 5 power..."

"But to be able to kill off everyone from Group A and Group B without letting even a single survivor escape and report back to their organization, the person's strength would have to be even higher. That means this person has to be at least High-level Rank 5 or even Peak-level Rank 5..."

"However, there wasn't any information on such a powerful person residing inside Sunpeak Town, not to mention very few have reached such a level of power... We didn't receive news of any Rank 5 beings passing through our encirclement either..."

"That would mean this person teleported to Sunpeak Town before he killed everyone..." Death Blade analyzed with a deep look before suddenly glancing at one of his subordinates. "There wasn't any news on the Black Rose Transcendent leaving Blackthorn City, was there?"

"None, Lord Death Blade," the A-rank Witch Hunter answered before further adding, "In fact, there hasn't been any news coming from beyond the Hundred Night City."

"Hm? Does that mean someone else is preventing news from entering and leaving the central region?" Death Blade wondered with a frown. "We need to investigate this. But of course, the issue in Sunpeak Town comes first."

"You, you, and you." Death Blade picked out three A-rank Witch Hunters before ordering them, "Disguise yourselves as merchants and mercenaries and enter the town to collect information."

"Yes, Lord Death Blade!" the three A-rank Witch Hunters complied.

Chapter 398: Secret Room

After the three A-rank Witch Hunters disguised themselves and left behind their black cloaks and equipment, they immediately departed for Sunpeak Town.

"What about us, Lord Death Blade?" another A-rank Witch Hunter in the group asked.

"Cover up the supply bunker. We are relocating," Death Blade commanded before moving ahead of the group and settling on a spot roughly two hundred yards away from the original location.

"Two of you, stay here and watch the spot," Death Blade instructed another two A-rank Witch Hunters from his group after they caught up with him. "If the others don't return within twenty-four hours, assume they are dead and return to Group C."

"The rest of you, follow me."

"Understood, Lord Death Blade."

After the two A-rank Witch Hunters complied, Death Blade brought the remaining three members with him and left the region.

Sometime later, Death Blade's small detached group temporarily returned to the central command center of their operations, located in another part of the forest roughly sixty miles southeast of the Red Goblin Mountains.

Similar to the supply bunker, the central command center was also concealed underground.

However, Death Blade already knew its general location. Thus, his group did not waste any time searching for it.

"You're back so soon, Lord Death Blade? Have you already figured out the situation in the Sunpeak Region?" another S-rank Witch Hunter greeted inside the underground command center.

The person's features weren't concealed. Thus, his burly and hairy appearance was revealed. He didn't look much different from a topless grey wolf with yellow eyes that could stand on two feet.

Nevertheless, his most defining feature was the long scar that ran through his left eye and down to his shoulders, which gave him an overall domineering and oppressive aura.

"Lord Steel Jackal," Death Blade acknowledged the S-rank Witch Hunter's presence with a nod before replying, "Not yet. However, I need to make an important report to the leader. Group A and Group B had likely been wiped out."

"Group A and Group B?" Steel Jackal's laidback gaze turned serious before he asked, "And Lord Dream Streak and Lord Smiling Knife?"

"Most likely dead, too. The situation will only be clearer after my men gather information from Sunpeak Town," Death Blade answered.

"I see... The leader won't be happy hearing about this, but alright. Go on, then."

Steel Jackal stepped aside, letting Death Blade pass to use the long-range communication-type magic tool to contact their leader.

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Holy Knight Empire's northern border region, Equinox City

Inside the lord's castle, a middle-aged-looking man was sitting inside his study room, going through a pile of documents related to his city.

The man had a very pale complexion and skinny build, making him look quite sick and devoid of body warmth.

However, his short blonde hair, sharp blue eyes, and golden-patterned white robe radiating with holiness negated his sickly image; it painted him the picture of being healthy and full of vitality.

The person was precisely Ulrich Salazar, Marquis and Lord of Equinox City.

No one from the Holy Knight Empire would have ever thought he would have anything to do with the six Devil's Contractors, let alone be one of them.

While going through his paperwork, Ulrich's ruby ring suddenly lit up, causing his pen hand to pause in their place. His eyes narrowed slightly before he placed his feather ink pen down and stood up.

"I'll be entering the isolation chamber for holy meditation and training. Do not disturb me until I come out."

"Understood, Lord Salazar."

Shortly after servants in the lord's castle noted Ulrich's instruction, he entered his isolation chamber on the underground floor and sealed the door, locking himself in.

Afterward, he walked up to a bookshelf, rearranged a few enchanted books in a specific order, then rotated a gold vase around halfway.

Click!

Something clicked behind the bookshelf, causing the bookshelf to loosen and drop an inch. Then, Ulrich slid the bookshelf to the left side, revealing the plain rock wall with dozens of socket holes.

The rock wall did not appear any different from the rest of the wall in the isolation chamber.

However, Ulrich raised his left hand, embedded his ruby ring into the middle socket, and then twisted it.

Click!

A hidden compartment in the wall was revealed, storing a single manual called Salazar's Holy Circulation Method.

It appeared to be Ulrich's signature aura circulation method, which many holy knights below Rank 4 Aura Lord could only dream of learning.

Without a doubt, it was a priceless treasure to many holy knights in the empire.

However, Ulrich didn't show any care as he grabbed it from the hidden compartment and swapped it out for a white enchanted book on the bookshelf.

After the white enchanted book replaced the manual's original spot, Ulrich pressed down on it, activating another hidden mechanism.

Soon, a door-sized wall slab with the hidden compartment dropped to the ground, revealing a new entrance leading to Ulrich's secret room.

After Ulrich entered the secret room, the door-sized wall slab rose, closing off the entrance. At the same time, the bookshelf slid back into place and concealed the rock wall behind it.

Ulrich had taken multiple steps just to reach his secret room.

Even his signature aura circulation method was used as bait to divert his enemy's attention if they ever breached his isolation chamber.

However, it made perfect sense why the secret room was so strictly hidden and guarded. Countless treasures were found inside.

Whether they were mana stones, rare minerals, magic tools, secret manuals, or potions, they were all high quality.

Such a level of precaution was necessary in order for Ulrich to keep his wealth and secrets safe.

Nevertheless, inside the secret room, Ulrich picked up a seemingly ordinary black mask on the table and wore it.

However, his outward appearance immediately transformed into an indiscernible shadowy figure that didn't seem human.

Afterward, he removed the ruby ring from his finger and inserted it into another socket on a cubic magic tool on the table.

A crimson hologram immediately appeared, revealing Death Blade's face.

"Quickly state your matter, Death Blade," Ulrich demanded in a raspy, cold, and menacingly low voice.

Chapter 399: Three Barons

Holy Knight Empire's northern border region, fifty-two miles east of Equinox City

A few hours after Ulrich received Death Blade's report on the abnormal situation in the Kingdom of Black Rose's Sunpeak Region, he found himself standing in front of Holsworthy City, another city ruled by another border lord.

He had immediately departed for Holsworthy City to use one of his hidden cards the moment he sensed an uneasy feeling from Death Blade's report.

As a Peak-level Rank 5 being, which stood at the precipice of mortal limits and just before the divine, Ulrich knew his uneasy feelings didn't just stem from simple paranoia.

His sixth sense told him something had gone terribly wrong, which could threaten his life and position.

As such, he acted with haste.

'I didn't think I'll be using this hidden card so soon,' Ulrich Salazar thought as he glanced at the fortified western entrance of Holsworthy City.

'But who is it? Who in the Kingdom of Black Rose is making me feel such uneasiness? Transcendent Henrietta? No, it can't be her. She's only on my level at most, not stronger.'

'It has to be someone else... but who?'

Ulrich didn't know who decimated Group A and Group B. However, he did know he had to act first on the off chance his identity was compromised.

"Halt! Identify yourselves and state your purpose for visiting!"

"How impudent! The Lord of Equinox City stands before you! I demand you to open the gate and make way for my Lord at once!"

Shortly after the sentries warned Ulrich's group from approaching the gate further, one of Ulrich's escorts stepped forward and barked back at the sentries fiercely.

"Get down from your walls and behave yourselves. Do not keep my Lord waiting!"

"Wait?"

The sentries were immediately startled.

They did not receive any advance notice of Marquis Salazar's visit. Thus, they didn't expect such an important person to show up.

Nevertheless, they scrutinized Ulrich Salazar's figure from the top of the wall before they confirmed the person was indeed Marquis Salazar, the Lord of Equinox City.

"Open gate!" the sentries barked.

Shortly after the city gate opened, Ulrich's group made a beeline to the local lord's castle with an additional company from some sentries.

As such, they reached the local lord's castle smoothly without running into trouble which could cause friction between the two neighboring territories.

When Baron Aderlard, the Lord of Holsworthy City, was notified of Ulrich's unannounced visit, he rushed out of his castle to receive Ulrich personally.

"Lord Salazar! What brings you to my humble city?" Baron Aderlard greeted with open smiles while clasping his hands together nervously.

"Nothing much, Sir Aderlard. I just felt stuffy, holing up in my city all the time, so I decided to pay you a visit," Ulrich replied, returning an equally friendly smile before he politely asked, "You won't mind if I tour your castle, right?"

However, Ulrich didn't wait for Baron Aderlard's answer before he barged into the castle grounds.

"I..."

Baron Aderlard helplessly followed right after Ulrich, wanting to stop him. However, he was at a loss, uncertain what to say without offending the marquis.

Ultimately, he failed to stop Ulrich from entering the hall.

Inside the hall, two other border lords were present, standing around a big stone table with a strategic map laid out on top of it.

They immediately became jumpy when they saw Ulrich enter.

"L-Lord Salazar," the two border lords greeted.

"Oh? So Sir Ranulf and Sir Gregory were also here. Why didn't you come out and receive me with Sir Aderlard?" Ulrich casually asked with a calm yet indifferent smile.

Baron Ranulf and Baron Gregory felt pressured by Marquis Ulrich's gaze, causing them to stutter in response.

"I... We..."

Nevertheless, Ulrich's focus didn't stay on them.

He shifted his gaze to the strategic map on the stone table, marked with multiple points of interest in the Kingdom of Black Rose and the empire forces placed near them.

"And what do we have here? Three border lords strategizing swift invasion tactics on the Kingdom of Black Rose? Is this the will of the emperor? Now I feel kind of left out for not hearing anything about this," Ulrich expressed his slight disappointment.

The three border lords immediately sweated.

"You have always been an advocate of peace, Lord Salazar. We didn't think you would have any interest in this matter. Thus, we chose not to include you," Baron Aderlard explained with a wry yet awkward smile.

"Even if you chose not to include, you should have sent an invitation out of courtesy, no? Or you purposely chose not to because you were afraid of this matter becoming public and reaching the emperor's ears, Sir Aderlard?" Ulrich replied with a half smile.

"I heard the three of you have been getting all buddy-buddy with Transcendent Sybil. I don't think this war you all want to start was the emperor's will."

"Perhaps you have all been charmed by the witch?" Ulrich casually guessed.

The border lords revealed their terror and fear when they realized Ulrich knew they had been making secret deals with the queen of the Verdant Woods Kingdom.

"Relax, I am not here to point out your faults or turn you in for the emperor to punish. You can even say I am on your side," Ulrich assure them before mentioning, "I might have seemed like an advocate of peace, but I've only ever acted with the empire's best interests in mind."

"Now that the empire has stabilized from its warring years and consolidated its strength, it's time for the empire to expand again. The emperor's intentions on the witch kingdoms have always been vague and unclear. However, the emperor has always wished to dominate the continent. I'm sure you all know this."

"As such, I don't believe you would be stupid enough to secretly work with Transcendent Sybil and plot an invasion on the Black Rose Kingdom unless you are confident the empire would benefit from it."

"So why don't you fill me in on the details? How will invading the Black Rose Kingdom benefit our empire? How can you be certain the other six witch kingdoms won't unite against our empire? And how can you guarantee this wasn't a trap set up by Transcendent Sybil?"

"If you can convince me, I will happily join your cause. I'm quite confident my army would be of great help should I join," Ulrich stated.

After he said his piece and made his stance clear, the three border lords sighed with relief and thanked their lucky stars.

Fortunately, the marquis was reasonable and willing to hear them out.

"We would be overjoyed if we could have you on board, Lord Salazar," Baron Aderlard expressed his honest thoughts. "Please take a seat. We'll explain everything we have uncovered about the witch kingdoms in the past twenty years, including what we have learned from Transcendent Sybil."

"Alright," Ulrich nodded and took his seat around the stone table. Then, he commented, "Still, I must say I'm surprised. You've been in contact with Transcendent Sybil much longer than I anticipated."

"Transcendent Sybil was the one who reached out to us first. Thanks to that, we were able to learn a little about the hidden conflicts between the seven Transcendent Witches," Baron Aderlard replied.

Shortly after, he willingly explained everything to Ulrich, unsuspecting of any ulterior motives the person might have.

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Chapter 400: Emerald City

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Kingdom of Verdant Woods was a country full of fertile fields and overgrown trees of vibrant green colors. Very few rocky regions existed within the kingdom's domain.

As a result, the production of crops, livestock, and high-quality lumber was its primary source of income.

In fact, the Kingdom of Verdant Woods held the highest food production within the seven witch kingdoms and had no competition. None of the other six witch kingdoms could come close to it in terms of food production.

As such, the Kingdom of Verdant Woods was also commonly called the Kingdom of Food or the Kingdom of Farmers by the other six witch kingdoms.

Naturally, the residents of the Kingdom of Verdant Woods had always been unhappy with such a reputation.

After all, farmers had always been considered plebeians, whether it was the past or present. So even though wealthy farmers existed among them, the people would always feel like they were poor, lower-class people.

The capital city, Emerald City, the city of trees, was founded in the Holy Tree Forest, filled with overgrown oak trees that reached up to four hundred feet in height.

However, they weren't just abnormally tall due to the blessing of mana; they were also tenacious and sturdy, comparable to Rank 3 materials and above.

They were indubitably oak trees of the highest quality in the kingdom.

That said, the oak trees in Emerald City had even more impressive heights, having reached a staggering twelve-hundred foot and beyond.

But while they were impressively tall compared to their ancestral past, their appearance hardly resembled oak trees. Their growth was artificial, and their forms were even more unnatural, having been weaved into spires.

They were magic towers.

At the heart of Emerald City, Queen Sybil's magic tower was the most impressive of them all, reaching a colossal height of three-thousand feet and lording over all other oak trees and magic tower.

It wasn't just Queen Sybil's magic tower but also the holy tree of the forest, possessing partial sentience and defensive strength comparable to Rank 5 magic tools.

Oak trees were precious, but the holy tree's value couldn't be measured.

All magic tools and equipment made from its branches would be Low-level Rank 5 at the very least, even if they were created by incompetent artificers.

At that moment, Henrietta Rosegarden was confined in a spacious cage formed by seemingly unbreakable roots intricately weaved together underneath the holy tree.

All forms of magic inside the cage had also been sealed by a Transcendent-level spell fueled by the holy tree's seemingly endless vitality.

Only a select few knew of Henrietta's situation, including Queen Sybil, who planned out the trap to contain her.

After Henrietta exhausted all methods to break free from her containment within the past two weeks, she had given up on trying to escape entirely.

She simply sat in a meditative position with her eyes closed and conserved her energy.

Even when Queen Sybil arrived to see her, Henrietta did not show the slightest reaction to her presence, simply treating Queen Sybil as air.

Unlike Henrietta Rosegarden, who appeared to be the epitome of youthful beauty, Sybil Lundqvist was much inferior in terms of looks.

In fact, Sybil was lacking in human resemblance and beauty.

The Green Flower Transcendent looked more like a sculpted wooden doll that had been sanded and polished. She possessed long leaf-like green hair, emerald eyes, a woody-olive complexion, pointy ears, and an inverted triangle figure.

If she stood still with her eyes shut, she could be mistaken for a tree that looked like a human and not a human that looked like a tree.

"Still stubborn and aloof, huh? But for how much longer can you remain as such? You know, you wouldn't be stuck here if you had been cooperative. You only need to tell me the secret of your power, and you'll be freed," Sybil stated.

Over the past three hundred years, six out of the seven Transcendent Witches had been stuck at the initial rank since acquiring their power.

Only Henrietta had continuously improved and eventually reached the peak of Rank 5 power.

As a result, Henrietta had also attracted the envy and greed of other witches, not just the Transcendent Witches.

Even so, she had never shared her secret, no matter how much the others asked.

"Hmph! Stubborn to the end, I see," Sybil snorted when Henrietta ignored her. Then she said, "Well, I don't think you can stay silent for much longer!"

"Let me share a piece of interesting information with you; I've just received news that the next step of my grand plan is ready to be implemented. Soon, you will lose your kingdom to the Holy Knight Empire."

"Of course, that can be avoided if you just share your secret. Don't you think you are too selfish to keep such important knowledge to yourself?" Sybil mentioned.

Henrietta slowly opened her eyes, revealing glints of cold light.

"I may have been foolish enough to believe you were finally willing to sell some of your holy tree's branches to me, but that doesn't mean I am stupid!" Henrietta coldly spat. "You know as well as I know that you won't be spared from my wrath once I am released!"

"That's why even if I told you my secret, you would still keep me here. Don't think that I don't know an insatiable wench like you have been eyeing my land. Your ambition is great, but unfortunately, you are too ignorant! You don't even know what kind of irreversible mistake you've made."

"But since I am generous, let me enlighten you! Even if others learn my secret, no one can replicate my feats, especially you. You fused with the holy tree for more power and gave up whatever meager potential you had."

"You might be unstoppable in your domain, but you will be forever stuck with the holy tree, unable to go anywhere. Over time, the holy tree will steal from you, your intelligence, power, and ultimately your life for its own evolution."

"So congratulations, you have doomed yourself," Henrietta ridiculed.

"Bullshit! Do you think your scare tactic will work on me?!" Sybil argued distrustfully of Henrietta's words. "I just need to stay stronger than the holy tree in order not to be devoured by it! Your secret is needed for that cause!"

"This is why I am too lazy to speak with you and the others. Neither of you listens to me," Henrietta coldly replied before shutting her eyes

No matter what Sybil said, Henrietta no longer paid attention to her.

"Hmph! Since you want to be stubborn to the end, you wait for your kingdom to burn in the fires of war!" Sybil spat before leaving disappointedly.