

The Witch 41

Chapter 41: Teaching Qualifications

"Of course, Teacher," Linetta agreed.

"Very well; then, I will begin," Vaan nodded before quizzing her, "What are the four classifications of offensive magic called? List them in order from worse to best and explain why they are ranked accordingly."

"Yes, Teacher," Linetta complied.

"The four classifications of offensive magic are Preparation, Charge, Chant, and Battle Magic; they have been ranked accordingly due to their battle-readiness and execution."

"Very good," Vaan nodded approvingly before quizzing her further, "Now explain what each of them does; why are they called as such? Start with Preparation Magic."

"Yes, Teacher. Preparation Magic has the slowest execution and cannot be readily used in battle because it requires time to prepare due to its complexity and multitude of other magic involved."

"Unlike other offensive magic which focuses solely on destructive power, Preparation Magic has more diversity in its usage depending on its magic combination."

"It can be long-lasting like Construct Magic, sustaining like Trap Magic and Illusion Magic, or short-lived but powerful like Activation Magic."

"Impressive; you've completely summarized Preparation Magic," Vaan nodded with praise before urging her to continue, "Proceed with Charge Magic."

"Charge Magic comes after Preparation Magic because of the time it takes to gather mana from the surrounding atmosphere to increase its destructive power," Linetta answered.

"Charge Magic can take even longer than Preparation Magic, but it is ranked above Preparation Magic because it can be prematurely activated at the expense of its destructive power not reaching its peak."

Listening to Linetta's answer, Vaan nodded with acknowledgment.

As expected of a member of a noble household, Linetta's foundational knowledge was solid.

Nevertheless, it was too early to arrive at a conclusion; there were two more classifications of offensive magic.

"Chant Magic is next; go on," he said.

"Yes, Teacher," Linetta obliged and said, "Chant Magic, as its name implies, is magic that requires chanting to activate; it comprises of simple magic, but witches can easily invoke them with as little as a single word."

"Nevertheless, it still cannot hold a candle to Battle Magic which can be activated instantaneously with a single thought."

"And of these four classifications of offensive magic, which classification do you think your specialized magic, Earth Acceleration, falls under?" Vaan quizzed her.

However, Linetta furrowed her brows at such an obvious answer.

"All specialized magic falls under the Battle Magic classification because they can be activated with a single thought," she answered, nonetheless.

"That's right," Vaan agreed with a nod before saying, "Since your specialized magic, Earth Acceleration, falls under Battle Magic and can be activated with a single thought, why do you still need to chant Rock Bullet?"

"This..." Linetta furrowed her brows.

Vaan finally asked her a tricky question that she could not immediately answer.

Nevertheless, her hesitation only lasted a short moment before she came up with an answer after a bit of pondering.

"It's not necessary to chant, but I find that vocalizing my magic allows me to execute it even more quickly," she said.

"Do you know why that is the case?" Vaan continued to quiz her while they were on the topic.

"This... I'm not sure..." Linetta replied before throwing the question back at Vaan, "Do you know the reason, Teacher?"

"If you don't realize it yourself, I believe they will teach you this after you become a Senior Witch; all magic is simply a manifestation of your will, given form," Vaan stated.

"Because you are still relatively new to magic, your mind has yet to develop strong imagery of your spells. This is why you rely on vocalization to give power to your magic and hand movements to guide it."

"It's that simple?" Linetta uttered with surprise and disbelief.

The truth seemed so painfully obvious, yet she did not realize it until it was finally mentioned by someone else.

Why was it like this?

"Sometimes, the simple truth is hidden in plain sight yet goes seemingly unnoticed by everyone; this is because everyone has their own sphere of logic. Unless you develop a habit of looking beyond the box you build yourself in, you won't see what exists out there," Vaan explained.

"Nevertheless, this isn't exactly the focus of our lesson, nor what I am trying to point out. What I want to say is that you have realized vocalizing your spells still gives power and speed to your specialized magic."

"So, what does this tell you?" he asked.

As the magic lesson continued, Linetta began to develop a genuine respect for Vaan's theoretical knowledge of magic.

His knowledge of magic was so firm that he made her, who she thought to be quite adept in learning magic, feel like a beginner again.

"I don't know, Teacher," Linetta answered with a wry smile after failing to come up with an answer.

"What am I supposed to realize?" she asked shortly after.

"You gave up too readily, my Lady. If you think a little harder, you will realize it," Vaan shook his head wryly before saying, "If you still seek the answer from me, I can tell you. However, this isn't beneficial to you in the long run if you remain dependent on others for answers."

"You see, learning magic is a process of self-enlightenment and realization. Established answers can point you in a certain direction and allow you to reach it quicker, but if you want to proceed further, you will have to rely on yourself."

"Thus, I believe as a teacher; my job is not to simply give you answers to things that you don't know, but to guide you into arriving at the answers you seek on your own."

"That being said, do you still want to hear the answer from me?" he asked.

"No, Teacher," Linetta shook her head before saying firmly, "I will try to figure out the answer on my own."

Nevertheless, she was extremely shocked in her heart.

She thought she had evaluated Vaan highly, but she realized that her evaluation of him was still far, far too low.

Is this really his first time teaching magic? Why does he seem even more qualified in teaching than veteran teachers? Why does he know so much about magic? What exactly is his background?

As Linetta had these thoughts about Vaan, her curiosity and interest in him grew.

At the same time, her anticipation in regards to the offensive magic he would teach her also rose to a new peak.

Chapter 42: Magic Assignment

Vaan sat by a rock and patiently waited for Linetta's answer without making the slightest sound and disturbing her train of thoughts.

Nevertheless, as minutes passed, he began to wonder if he had placed too much expectation on her.

"I think I get it," Linetta suddenly said.

"Oh?" Vaan smiled before asking for her answer, "Let's hear what you've figured out then."

"Yes, Teacher," Linetta nodded.

"Magic classifications are just classifications; nothing more and nothing less. Just because magic is put under a specific category, it doesn't mean they are fixed under it. In fact, magic can belong under almost any category depending on how you wield it."

"For example, Rock Pillar, a Chant Magic, summons a normal rock pillar. But if you charge it more mana than necessary, its size will grow accordingly. Or if you use Rock Pillar repeatedly with a clear framework in mind, it falls under Construction Magic, a type of Preparation Magic."

"As for Battle Magic... I can only assume it's only possible when I use Rock Pillar frequently to the point of mastery and build a strong image of it in mind, which would eventually allow me to invoke it without the assistance of a chant," Linetta explained.

"Very good," Vaan clapped with praise and surprise.

"I was only expecting you to notice that magic isn't fixed to the magic classifications they are labeled under. However, you went ahead and even explained how they aren't fixed, my Lady."

"Thank you, Teacher," Linetta smiled with joy, strangely feeling an odd sense of satisfaction every time Vaan praised her.

"But what does understanding this has to do with the offensive magic you'll teach me?" she asked shortly after.

"You're jumping started to the questions again, my Lady," Vaan sternly reminded before softening his tone in the next moment.

"Nevertheless, I'll answer your question this time; it has everything to do with the offensive magic I will teach you. Specialized magic like Earth Acceleration is extremely powerful in attacking. But from what I have observed in your Rock Bullet, it was the most basic application of Earth Acceleration."

"Of course, such basic application of Earth Acceleration was all you needed to kill the young warrior and not enough for me to understand your level of comprehension in your specialized magic."

"Thus, I will quiz you; how can you increase the offensive power of Rock Bullet?" Vaan asked.

"By pouring more mana into Earth Acceleration and increasing the Rock Bullet's speed?" Linetta answered before she suddenly paused with a frown.

"But this is probably not the answer you are looking for..." she muttered before pondering deeper into the question.

After a few moments, her eyes lit up.

"If I can use double-layered magic and apply Earth Acceleration to the Rock Bullet's rotation speed, it will greatly increase the penetrative power of Rock Bullet," she added to her answer.

She felt quite satisfied with it.

But after seeing Vaan's slight smile, she took a blow to her self-esteem.

"I-is there more to it?" she asked with doubt.

"If we are talking about Double-Layered Magic, then yes, you are thinking correctly to accelerate Rock Bullet's rotation speed," Vaan nodded.

"But, in that case, you also apply Strengthening Magic on the Rock Bullet to reinforce its sturdiness so that the Rock Bullet doesn't shatter on impact against strong targets with tough skin like the Rank 3 Dark Hellhound."

"Let's not forget that with Double-Layered Magic, you can also apply other elemental magic like Fire Magic and turn Rock Bullet into a Blazing Rock Bullet and the likes," he added.

"However, you have completely missed the point about Double-Layered Magic, my Lady. We are talking about a 'what if' here. Have you forgotten who can use Double-Layer Magic in the first place, my Lady?"

"Only Senior Witches and above can use Double-Layered Magic..." Linetta answered with an embarrassed smile.

She was too caught up on the thought of increasing Rock Bullet's power that she completely ignored the cultivation requirement for the use of Double-Layered Magic.

The difference between True Witch and Senior Witch lies in the number of magic circles they have formed, which also directly correlates to the number of magic they can cast simultaneously.

Since Senior Witches possess two magic circles, it wasn't strange for them to use Double-Layered Magic.

However, it was a different story for her, who had only formed one magic circle around her heart.

"But if we exclude the use Double-Layered Magic, how else can we increase the offensive power of Rock Bullet?" she asked with knitted brows.

"You're seeking shortcuts again, my Lady," Vaan slightly smiled before asking, "Shouldn't you already know the answer after all that I've said?"

Linetta was stunned by Vaan's question.

Nevertheless, after taking a short moment to recall his words, she quickly found the answer she sought.

It was indeed something she should have realized immediately.

"The stronger the medium, the stronger the offensive power it can exert; if the rock is fragile, Rock Bullet's offensive power will be limited..." Linetta muttered.

"That means we'll be focusing on Preparation Magic to prepare a strong medium for Rock Bullet?"

"That's right," Vaan nodded before asking her one last question, "And what do you think is the strongest earth element an earth-attribute witch can use, my Lady?"

"Metal," Linetta did not even take half a breath to answer.

"Exactly," Vaan nodded with acknowledgment before stating, "And with that, concludes our lesson."

"...Huh?" Linetta's expression immediately froze before voicing her confusion, "You're not going to teach me the offensive magic required for defeating the Rank 3 Dark Hellhound, Vaan?"

"I've already given you all the clues you needed for it, my Lady. Your assignment is to figure the rest out for yourself," Vaan stated with a smile.

"Or do you still need me to teach you that too? I thought it should be a fairly easy assignment at this point, though..." he added.

"Ah, no. I understand now, Teacher," Linetta stated.

The path was clear for her.

Nevertheless, she found Vaan's magic lesson too interesting; it was very engaging, unlike any other magic lesson she's taken, where she would have to listen to the teacher's lecture first and ask questions later.

Chapter 43: Linetta's Addiction

In essence, Vaan's assignment was to build her personal weapon.

Since Earth Magic was Linetta's specialty, and Earth Acceleration was her Specialized Magic, she only lacked an excellent medium to help them exert their full potential.

She needed an earth-element weapon that she could easily control with Earth Magic and not break upon impact with Earth Acceleration.

Within a short moment, Linetta came up with a simple metal spear design.

However, she didn't want to settle for a simple design; every bit of detail on a projectile weapon could affect its overall performance in flight.

Linetta intended to use her wealth of knowledge to design her best projectile weapon.

At the same time, she relied on her earth affinity to sense the earth elements within the large cave; even if she wanted to build a mighty spear, she could not do it without the strong materials.

While Linetta started searching for rare minerals hidden in the cave, whether they were in the open, hanging on the ceiling, or buried in the ground, Vaan watched over her.

There was something Vaan didn't mention, and Linetta didn't realize it either; applying her Earth Acceleration to Rock Bullet was considered Double-Layered Magic.

This is why Specialized Magic is a witch's most important magic; it isn't limited by their magic circles.

As long as True Witches combine their Specialized Magic with other magic, they can cast powerful Double-Layered Magic like Senior Witches.

But Senior Witches with two magic circles can combine their Specialized Magic with two other magic to cast Triple-Layered Magic like High Witches and so on.

'Linetta's Specialize Magic can be ranked amongst the top offensive magic; producing Rank 3 offensive power is no problem for her with a good earth medium,' Vaan mused.

Half an hour later, Linetta approached Vaan and suddenly pulled him up from his seat by the arm.

"What's the matter, my Lady?" Vaan asked. "I don't think you've finished your assignment yet."

"I... I need your help. I ran out of mana again," Linetta said with a blush.

After hearing her reason, Vaan nodded with a smile.

"I understand, my Lady. Allow me to assist you in your mana recovery," he replied with a gentlemanly bow.

Shortly after, Vaan escorted Linetta back to the tent.

It didn't take long before Linetta's erotic cries of pleasure escaped from the tent as Vaan made love to her, painting the interior in a pinkish atmosphere with their intimate acts of lust and carnal desires.

Lilias peeked her head through the curtain entrance, but she was quickly caught as a soft pillow was thrown at her face.

"Uwah—!"

"No peeking!"

Linetta shouted at her young sister with a flushed face, full of embarrassment, while Vaan was drilling her from behind, making her body quiver in pleasure with every thrust.

When Lilias's eyes fell on the scene before her, her heartbeat raced, turning her cheeks and body hot with arousal.

And before long, she had another bleeding nose.

"Ahhhn~! W-wait, Vaan~!! S-stop~! Lillias is still watching~! No—Ahhh~!" Linetta moaned with sheer bliss.

Linetta tried to pause their intimate act, but she was weak to Vaan's sensual touches and could not help but beg for more.

"Ahh, yes~! Right there, keep touching me there, Vaan~!"

"Mmmnn—!"

Soon, Linetta's resistance collapsed along with her reason; she drowned herself in pleasure and lost herself in the moment.

Vaan's magical touch was an addiction she could not free herself from.

Linetta rotated her body around and wrapped her legs around Vaan, sealing off his path of escape as if she didn't intend to let him go until she milked him dry.

But when has Vaan ever lost a battle of attrition in bed?

Vaan boldly held Linetta's waist and lifted her body into the air, thrusting her pleasure hole with his bulging dragon more forcefully and roughly.

"Ahhn! W-wait, Vaan! This is too much~~~! I love it~!!" Linetta moaned with sheer bliss and elation.

The hot scene gradually became too much for Lillias to bear; she left on her own accord.

"T-this is crazy! How can my dignified sister behave like that? It must feel really good...!" Lillias muttered while stopping her nosebleed.

Meanwhile, Captain Rhys and the young warriors cannot help but lament their miserable fates.

"Haiz... They're at it again. This is pure torture."

"I wish this escort mission will end soon..."

"Me too. I'm losing sanity here."

"Once we reach the next city, I'm definitely paying the brothels a visit to blow off some serious steam!" a young warrior said resolutely.

"Ha, that's if we make it," another young warrior laughed before saying, "For now, your best solution is to beat the dragon and shoot some dragon breaths or cool yourself underwater again."

Nevertheless, some young warriors could not help but direct their lust-filled gazes at Lillias, who was aroused and frustrated like them.

"Should we..."

Smack!

Just as two young warriors thought of approaching Lady Lillias, Captain Rhys suddenly smacked them on the back of the heads.

"Don't even think about it. Are you trying to court death? Haven't you realized that Lady Lillias has to avoid bodily stimulation due to her condition?" Captain Rhys warned them.

"We were just thinking about it... We haven't actually—"

"I said don't even think about it and don't even talk about it! Defiling a noble witch in your mind is also a punishable offense, do you understand?"

"Yes, Captain..."

...

Two hours flew by before the tent regained its tranquility.

Linetta was seen fixing her hair in a mirror with a refreshing look, feeling energized despite finishing an intense session with Vaan just mere moments ago.

She hummed with a joyful tune before flashing Vaan a flirty look while he was calmly putting on his clothes.

With each intimate session they committed, their hearts grew closer to each other—or so Linetta wanted to believe.

"Hm?" Linetta suddenly noticed something about her mana.

"Hey, Vaan. Are you also knowledgeable in witch cultivation? I have a question to ask," she called him.

Chapter 44: Magic Domain

"Although my knowledge is mostly acquired from books, please ask away, my Lady. I will answer where I can," Vaan calmly gestured.

Linetta von Delarosa nodded.

Shortly after, she took a few moments to gather her thoughts before she began, "Actually, it's fine even if you don't have an answer."

"It's like this; witches gather mana and condense them to form a ring of mana, which we call a Magic Circle. Thus, an Apprentice Witch officially becomes a True Witch by forming the first Magic Circle. This is rather simple to do."

"However, I heard it becomes much more difficult to form the second Magic Circle after the first one. Why is this the case? Also, why must witches continue to condense their first Magic Circle after forming it? Why can't they start forming their second Magic Circle right after the first?"

"My Lady, you didn't try to form the second Magic Circle, did you?" Vaan asked with surprise.

"Of course not!" Linetta replied with a shake of her head.

"Although my teachers didn't tell me, there must be an established reason for it. I might be talented, but I'm not talented to the point that I can steer away from the established path in witch training. I wouldn't want to make a mistake just because I thought I found a more efficient method."

"It's good that you didn't make an attempt, my Lady. It would have been disastrous," Vaan stated.

"Magic Circles are like mana magnets, which consolidate all the mana scattered throughout the body, making it easier to gather and use for magic. They have their own sphere of influence, which is known as a Magic Domain."

Vaan began to explain.

"This is why witches can naturally recover mana over time even if they are not actively gathering mana to recover from their mana-deficient state. As I mentioned, Magic Circles are like mana magnets with their own sphere of influence."

"Thus, if you try to create a second Magic Circle around the heart, they would either repel or devour each other. That's why you must condense your first Magic Circle until saturation. Otherwise, you run the risk of collapsing your first Magic Circle and returning to square one in witch cultivation, my Lady."

Vaan's simple explanation easily dispersed the doubts in Linetta's heart; everything made sense to her.

But, at the same time, the truth shocked her.

Thankfully, she didn't try to be a smartass and attempt the formation of her second Magic Circle before the condensation of her first Magic Circle could reach saturation.

"No wonder my teacher said it's dangerous business to advance to the next rank. If the Magic Circle collapse, a witch's cultivation getting crippled would be considered light," Linetta uttered with dread.

She felt goosebumps just thinking about the heavier consequences.

Vaan nodded.

"The collapse of a witch's Magic Circle would make the compressed mana run wild, resulting in severe injuries, death, or even a berserk transformation," Vaan stated.

"That's why it is also essential for witches to train their state of mind. Higher-level witches have greater risks of their mana going berserk if they don't keep their emotions in check."

"Isn't my Magic Circle at a high risk of collapsing since my mana is low right now?" Linetta suddenly asked with shock.

"Pfft!" Vaan quickly covered his laughter.

"Hm?" Linetta furrowed her brows at Vaan's reaction and asked solemnly, "Are you making fun of me, Vaan?"

"Not at all, my Lady," Vaan denied with a shake of his head. Then, he smiled and said, "It's just that I think you can be pretty cute sometimes, my Lady."

"Do you build a warehouse to store things in it, or do you build it to tear it back down?" Vaan quizzed her with an amused smile.

After Linetta heard Vaan's question, she immediately blushed with embarrassment. She had asked a stupid question without thinking again.

It was unlike her to be like this. However, this had only been happening when she interacted with Vaan.

"I've made a fool of myself, Vaan. I am ashamed," Linetta said wryly.

"Don't be, my Lady," Vaan said with a consoling smile.

"It might turn out to be a good thing that you brought up this topic, my Lady. Initially, I wasn't going to talk about this since it might be too early for you. But I changed my mind; you have the right to know. After all, this knowledge will be useful to you."

"Oh? What might it be?" Linetta inquired with interest.

"As I previously mentioned, Magic Circles are mana magnets with their own sphere of influence called Magic Domain. Nevertheless, in essence, a Magic Domain is a subspace," Vaan explained.

"This is where all the mana for your magic is stored. However, mana isn't the only thing you can store in your Magic Domain. Although you have yet to use it yourself, My Lady should be aware of this, right?"

Linetta nodded.

She was aware that Senior Witches and above had independent subspaces to store their items.

However, she only knew it had something to do with Spatial Magic. She didn't expect it was directly linked to the witches' Magic Circles.

"I understand now," Linetta's eyes flickered with understanding.

To put stuff in her Magic Domain, she needed to use Spatial Magic to connect it to the outside world.

That is how she can put items into her Magic Domain without punching a hole in her chest and exposing the Magic Circle around her heart.

"No wonder you said this is useful to me. After I complete my Earth Armament, I will need a place to hold it for the convenience of not needing to carry it. And this place is my Magic Domain, which I require Spatial Magic to access," Linetta spoke.

"Yes, my Lady," Vaan nodded with a smile.

But then, he shortly warned her, "However, this method of storage is not without its risks. If you lack even a bit of control in Spatial Magic and miss the connection to your Magic Domain, you will end up putting a hole in your own body."

"Right," Linetta nodded, fully aware of the risk involved with Spatial Magic.

Chapter 45: Earth Spirit Body

Even though Linetta was fully aware of the risks associated with Spatial Magic, she had quite a bit of confidence in her Spatial Magic.

After all, Spatial Magic was her second most used magic. As such, she had quite a bit of proficiency in using Spatial Magic—not through talent but hard work.

She had practiced Spatial Magic to a satisfactory level in the past to prevent the risk of failing her familiar summoning.

"Before you even think about storing anything in your Magic Domain, I must warn you, my Lady. A True Witch's Magic Domain is quite frail, even more so if you have yet to reach Peak-stage True Witch."

Vaan suddenly reminded Linetta just as she thought about testing her Magic Domain's storage.

"Even if you succeed in establishing the connection to the Magic Domain with Spatial Magic, the Magic Domain will still collapse if the items you put inside the Magic Domain aren't correctly placed within its dedicated storage space, my Lady."

"You see, the Magic Domain's walls are quite delicate. A bit of poking, and it'll collapse with your Magic Circle. Only when you have a second Magic Circle to fortify the Magic Domain will it become relatively safer to use the storage space."

"I see. No wonder the teachers don't teach this to True Witches. It's too risky for them," Linetta uttered with understanding.

After learning about the risks, even she would have to think twice before making an attempt. After all, she was putting her life on the line to use her nascent storage space.

Nevertheless, this is also what separates geniuses from the ordinary; to do things that others can't at the same level.

Vaan saw the look in Linetta's eyes and understood that she was bent on testing the skill.

Vaan quickly sighed and reminded her, "We are all depending on you to get away from the Rank 3 Dark Hellhound, my Lady. Therefore, it is better to put off such risky attempts for later when you have a safer environment to practice in."

"Nevertheless, you can use Spirit Magic to attach your spirit to a wisp of mana. That way, you can use the spiritized mana to explore and understand the specific dimensions within your personal storage space inside your Magic Domain," Vaan added.

Although Vaan had recommended that Linetta avoid the attempt until they get out, he also wanted to leave behind some guarantee in case she practiced behind his back and made a mistake.

"Spirit Magic?" Linetta's eyes lit up.

Spirit Magic had a wide range of uses, but it was mostly considered sensory magic, a type of support magic. Nevertheless, that's what makes it harmless.

As such, even if she adhered to Vaan's advice and postponed testing her storage space, it doesn't hurt to check out its dimensions with Spirit Magic first.

Sometime later, Vaan returned to the Stalactite Milk Pond and continued to drink his portion of the Stalactite Milk and improve his physique.

Ding!

<Your Heaven-Swallowing Physique has improved>

<Overall defense increased by 9 points>

<Earth-attribute absorption increased 9%>

<Earth-attribute resistance increased by 9%>

...

<Your Heaven-Swallowing Physique has improved>

<Overall defense increased by 8 points>

<Earth-attribute absorption increased by 8%>

<Earth-attribute resistance increased by 8%>

...

Vaan continued to hear a string of system notifications until his Earth-attribute absorption and Earth-attribute resistance were both capped at 49%.

Even so, Vaan didn't stop drinking. Instead, he continued until his overall body defense reached a total of 150 points before it finally capped.

At the same time, his Earth-attribute absorption and resistance, which capped at 49%, also made the last push and hit 50%.

Ding!

<Your body has completely absorbed the maximum benefits Stalactite Milk has to offer.

<Stalactite Milk will no longer improve your physique>

<When consuming Stalactite Milk, your body will only enjoy a recovery effect>

...

Ding!

<Your Earth-attribute absorption has reached a special threshold>

<Your Earth-attribute resistance has reached a special threshold>

<You have acquired a sub-physique, Earth Spirit Body (Low-rank)>

=====

[Earth Spirit Body (Low-rank)]

Overview: Earth Spirit Body is a special physique blessed by the earth and loved by the Earth Spirits. By possessing the Earth Spirit Body, you have become an existence closer to the earth.

Effect 1: When encountering a Low-rank Earth Spirit, they will immediately take notice of your existence.

Sub-effect 1.1: There is a chance that the Low-rank Earth Spirit will actively communicate with you.

Sub-effect 1.2: There is a slight chance that the Low-rank Earth Spirit is willing to establish a contract with you.

Effect 2: When you are in touch with the earth, the earth will bless you with a 20% increase in overall defense and natural regeneration.

Effect 3: When consuming Earth-attribute medicine, you will enjoy a 20% increase in its effect.

=====

Vaan's eyes flickered with a hint of excitement after listening to the string of system notifications in his head.

The Earth Spirit Body was great, but it wasn't his most crucial discovery.

'I've only picked up slight clues about them in the library books, but I've finally obtained conclusive news of their existence; elemental spirits. Nevertheless, this is quite a pleasant surprise. I sated my curiosity and also obtained a trump card,' Vaan mused thoughtfully.

Without the system's assistance in maximizing the effects of Stalactite Milk, it would have been impossible for him to acquire the Low-rank Earth Spirit Body so soon.

That was despite the fact that he was consuming a miraculous medicine like Stalactite Milk.

After all, not everyone gets to chance upon such a large reservoir of rare Earth-attribute medicine that can improve one's physique and affinity to the earth.

In other words, it wasn't so easy for others to acquire the Earth Spirit Body.

That being said, there was still one other candidate that had a good chance of acquiring the Earth Spirit Body.

Vaan glanced in Linetta's direction with a thoughtful look.

'If Linetta can acquire the Earth Spirit Body, our chances of leaving the Blackmoon Region will increase significantly,' Vaan mused.

The Rank 3 Dark Hellhound was the biggest problem, but it wasn't the only problem.

Chapter 46: Complete Preparation

Over the next few hours, Linetta completed the forging of not one but two spears with the minerals she could find in the cave.

With her control over earth-attribute objects, it was not difficult for her to fuse metals and create sturdy weapons. In fact, the top weapon and armor makers in the seven witch kingdoms were all earth-attribute witches.

Linetta's spears were black, mostly due to the meteorite iron, tungsten, carbon, and titanium used in their production.

After Linetta reinforced the two black spears with mana, they were comparable to High-grade Magic Weapons, unbreakable to Rank 3 Beasts.

Linetta moved to the Stalactite Milk Pond right after completing her assignment and consumed her share of the Stalactite Milk.

The more she drank, the less she had to carry – was what she thought.

However, Vaan's lecture on the Magic Domain's storage space allowed her to save the trouble of manually carrying the Stalactite Milk.

Even so, the Stalactite Milk exceeded the capacity of her Magic Domain's storage space. Thus, she still had to drink a portion of it to store everything.

While she was busy with that, the Lillias watched her.

On the other hand, Captain Rhys and the young warriors meditated to condition themselves for the journey outside the cave.

Meanwhile, Vaan strolled around the cave, seemingly looking for something. Furthermore, his stroll coincidentally overlapped with the places Linetta visited to collect her minerals.

The escort group's members noticed Vaan's action, but no one chose to bother him.

They thought Vaan was searching for more hidden treasures, but they didn't have their hopes up. Even if Vaan did find something, it wouldn't belong to them.

Sometime later, Vaan returned to the group, satisfied with his stroll. However, his expression was calm on the surface.

"Don't be too disappointed, Brother Vaan. The Stalactite Milk Ponder was already an amazing discovery. We shouldn't expect to find any more treasure in this cave," Captain Rhys consoled.

However, Vaan simply replied with a slight smile.

Ding!

<A True Witch with an Earth Spirit Body has been detected in the vicinity>

<Physical intimacy with this Earth Spirit Body has been determined to be beneficial>

...

The system suddenly notified Vaan in his mind. However, the system didn't mention the specifics of the benefits.

'It seems like I have to dual cultivate with Linetta again to find out,' Vaan mused thoughtfully. He had anticipated Linetta gaining the Earth Spirit Body. Thus, he wasn't surprised in the least.

A short moment later, Linetta finished drinking the Stalactite Milk to her satisfaction and stored the rest in her Magic Domain with spatial magic.

"I suppose preparations are complete now, my Lady? Will we be heading out right away?" Captain Rhys inquired.

However, Linetta shook her head.

"No. There's still one last bit of preparation needed before we head out and face the Rank 3 Dark Hellhound."

The moment Linetta cast her glance at Vaan after saying that, Captain Rhys's lips immediately twitched. He understood what she implied.

"Are you willing to assist me in mana recovery again, Vaan?" Linetta turned to Vaan and asked.

"It would be my pleasure, my Lady," Vaan replied with a smile.

...

'Goddammit—!'

Shortly after Vaan and Linnetta disappeared into the tent, the young warriors from the escort group started cussing in their minds.

It was the first time they had to endure such mental torture on an escort mission.

The moment Linetta's euphoric moans echoed out of the tent, the young warriors all pictured themselves in Vaan's position and got excited.

They couldn't help themselves.

Nevertheless, Vaan and Linetta ended their dual cultivation after battling in bed for five rounds. It wasn't particularly long, but long enough for Linetta to recover sufficient mana for the battle ahead of them.

At the same time, Vaan was the biggest beneficiary of their exchange.

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[STATUS]

Name: Vaan Raphna

Race: Human (90%)

Age: 20

Unique Physique: [Heaven-Swallowing Physique], [Earth Spirit Body (Low-rank)]

Cultivation: N/A

Spirit Contract/s: [Unnamed Fairy (Low-rank Earth Spirit)]

Skills: [Basic-level Weaponcrafting] [Intermediate-level Heavenly Massage] [Basic-level Hand-to-Hand Combat] [Intermediate-level Cloud Evading Steps] [Expert-level Mental Focus] [Expert-level Magical Foundation] [Expert-level Mana Application] [Expert-level Mineral Interaction] [Basic-level Dagger Mastery]

Ability: [Heaven-Swallowing Space] [Magic Vision (Low-rank)] [Regeneration (Low-rank)] [Earth Acceleration (Low-rank)] [Earth Manipulation (Contract-dependant)] [Telepathy (Contract-only)]

Stats: [150 Defense] [23 Strength] [31 Speed]

Unnamed Fairy's Mana: [100/100]

Elemental Affinity: [50% Earth]

Elemental Resistance: [50% Earth]

...

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During Vaan's stroll around the cave, he had gathered valuable minerals. But more importantly, his main objective was precisely to look for an earth spirit.

The cave had an incredible natural earth treasure like the Stalactite Milk. Vaan believed there would have been at least one earth spirit in the area.

Even so, Vaan was still surprised when he actually found one, an adorable female fairy that was only the size of his finger.

Furthermore, the fairy was willing to enter a contract with Vaan and now resides within his Earth Spirit Body, allowing him to use the fairy's abilities.

The unnamed fairy had been hiding, but she wasn't timid. Rather, she was playful and hoped someone would find her—as if she was playing a game of Hide and Seek.

As such, the unnamed fairy easily entered a contract with Vaan after he found her—which wasn't particularly difficult with Magic Vision. Vaan saw right through the earth spirit.

Nevertheless, it was only a low-rank earth spirit. Thus, its abilities were limited.

Even so, beggars can't be choosers.

Vaan was more than happy to contract the unnamed fairy, which enabled him to use Earth Manipulation with the unnamed fairy's mana.

With the unnamed fairy's abilities, Vaan will have an easier time forging more complex weapons.

Vaan wanted to communicate with his contracted earth spirit, but unfortunately, he would have to wait.

The unnamed fairy went dormant right after entering his Earth Spirit Body.

After Linetta packed up the tent, she turned to Captain Rhys and said, "All preparations are complete. We are ready on our side. How about your side, Captain Rhys?"

"We've been prepared for quite a while now, my Lady. We can set out anytime," Captain Rhys replied.

"Then let us head out. We've stayed in this cave long enough."

Chapter 47: Missing Wagon

Blackmoon Region

Along the upper streams that run through the vast crescent-shaped valley, several heads popped out of the cold water before they met with the misty morning light that had only just started to shine over the region.

Having spent a fair bit of time in the underground cavern, the escort group had nearly forgotten an entire night had gone by.

"It seems like the area is clear," Captain Rhys confirmed before quickly adding, "However, everyone should keep their guards up. The Dark Hellhounds could be hiding nearby."

Vaan nodded with approval.

They had to keep this bit of vigilance if they didn't want to lose their lives carelessly.

Although the Dark Hellhounds don't usually come out during the day, it would be strange if they gave up so quickly and the group killed many of their kind.

After everyone got out of the water and made it to land, Captain Rhys and the young warriors scanned the vicinity.

"Captain, the Dark Hellhounds are all gone. Should we retrieve our wagons?" a young warrior asked after confirming no Dark Hellhound in the area.

Even Vaan's Magic Vision failed to pick up any cluster of mana.

However, that bothered him.

According to the Beast Encyclopedia, the Dark Hellhounds were vengeful and protective of their kind.

One night of waiting shouldn't have been enough to make them give up their pursuit.

Despite that, it didn't change the fact that there was no Dark Hellhounds in the area. They had either retreated to their mountain caves or died off somewhere.

Vaan was more inclined to believe in the latter, which concerned him.

"Our wagons had a lot of goods on them. If the Dark Hellhounds are gone, I would naturally want to retrieve them. However, we have to see what Lady Linette has to say," Captain Rhys shifted the focus to Linetta.

"What do you think, Vaan?" Linetta turned to Vaan instead.

"Personally, I believe we should continue to leave as soon as possible to avoid any unexpected variables. After all, we are in the wild by ourselves," Vaan stated.

"However, it is also true that you can now kill a Rank 3 Dark Hellhound with your present preparations. Thus, it's entirely up to you whether we continue the journey as is or return to the wage, my Lady."

"I see," Linetta uttered.

Although Vaan recommended moving on, he was also curious about the wagons. Linetta pondered after seeing that.

Shortly after, she made her decision.

"We only moved a bit upstream to avoid being pincerred in our original location. But seeing as there are no Dark Hellhounds around, and the abandoned wagons aren't that far from here, we'll head back to retrieve them," Linetta stated.

"I am grateful for your consideration, my Lady," Captain Rhys expressed before giving Vaan a slightly forced smile.

Vaan smiled back slightly but had no comment.

A short while later, the escort group reached the location where they abandoned the wagons. However, they only found one of the two wagons.

Furthermore, there were quite a few more Dark Hellhound bodies in the area than they remembered. Even so, their memories weren't very vivid to begin with due to everything happening quickly at the time.

Vaan scouted the area on his own and found traces of other battles, including bloodstains from humans, severed limbs, and even several lumps of earth where bodies may have been buried.

"F*ck! Someone stole our wagon," a young warrior expressed his discontent with the present situation.

"No sh*t, Captain Obvious," another one replied sarcastically.

They could all see that someone or some group had taken their wagon. However, the question is why they only took one and not both of the wagons.

"That so strange... If I see two wagons of goods lying around, I wouldn't just take one," Captain Rhys raised his doubt with a pondering look.

"Maybe the other party was being considerate of us?" a young warrior speculated.

"Or the other party had a small group. One wagon was probably the limit they could take without inconveniencing their travel," Vaan added.

"That's plausible," Captain Rhys nodded and said, "The wagons have our Steelguard Escort Group's crest. We were bound to catch up to them if they were greedy enough to take both wagons."

"Nevertheless, you guys got our wagon, even if it's only one of them. Let us continue on your journey," Vaan urged.

"Who knows, maybe we will catch up to the thieves if we are quick enough," Vaan nonchalantly added with a shrug shortly after.

After hearing that, Captain Rhys and the young warriors solemnly nodded.

The escort group quickly loaded all the Dark Hellhound carcasses their wagon could carry before continuing on their way.

"What's wrong, Vaan?" Linetta noticed Vaan's deep pondering look while riding on the Earth Salamander together with Liliias.

"We killed a few Rank 2 Dark Hellhounds, but only Rank 1 Dark Hellhounds were left behind. We can assume that the other party took all Rank 2 Dark Hellhound carcasses," Vaan mentioned.

"The Rank 2 Dark Hellhound's value is more than five times that of a Rank 1 Dark Hellhound. It makes sense for them to take the more valuable goods, right?" Linetta thought.

However, Vaan shook his head, seeing she had completely missed the point.

"The wagons weren't left very far from the stream, and there were far more carcasses from Rank 1 Dark Hellhounds lying around," Vaan mentioned.

"This could also mean that the other party's wagon is full of Rank 2 Dark Hellhound carcasses. Considering the other party sustained several casualties, there's even a high chance that they killed the Rank 3 Dark Hellhound."

"However, a party that can kill a Rank 3 Dark Hellhound, regardless of their losses, is no ordinary party," Vaan calmly stated.

After Linetta and Lillias heard Vaan's speculation, they contemplated with serious expressions.

"Sister, do you think this party was a group of commissioned assassins?" Lillias wondered. She could not help but suspect again that their aunty commissioned assassins to kill them.

"I'm not so sure..." Linetta replied with a frown.

Chapter 48: Leaving Blackmoon Region

Linetta couldn't be sure if their aunty commissioned people to assassinate them on the road to the capital.

It was just a blind guess that they couldn't confirm.

However, if the wagon thief party had been a group of assassins, they would have caught up to them in the underground cave if they were truly their targets.

After all, their abandoned wagons near the streams were enough tracks to prove that they had taken refuge in their underground shelter. Despite that, the thief party took a wagon with the most valuable carcasses and went ahead.

However, suppose the thief party was assassins. In that case, they could have deemed it unfavorable to assassinate their target in the underground cave.

After all, there was only one entrance.

Furthermore, the unfavorable positioning would easily expose their presence before they could come close to their targets with stealth.

Whichever is the case, Linetta could only stay vigilant until she reached the capital. The only person she could trust was her sister, Liliias, and Vaan.

The person had taught her very valuable lessons that it was hard for her not to put her trust in him. Vaan was someone she could depend on.

"Vaan, can we talk for a bit?"

"Of course, my Lady."

Shortly after, Linetta had a quiet conversation with Vaan regarding her concerns about assassins and her route to the capital.

Moving forward, the escort group reached the northern up of the Blackmoon Region unexpectedly smoothly.

Although they encountered a few Rank 1 and Rank 2 Dark Hellhounds on the road, it was a small issue dealing with such beasts in small numbers.

Linetta had been eager to test the attack power of her earth magic-imbued black spears. However, she ended up leaving all the Rank 2 Dark Hellhounds to Captain Rhys under Vaan's recommendation.

Just like that, they reached the northern end up of the Blackmoon Region without encountering another Rank 3 Dark Hellhound.

The final stretch of the Blackmoon Region was an uphill climb until the ground leveled with the two cliffs on the side.

Captain Rhys and the young warriors expended some effort to bring the wagon out.

Nevertheless, after the escort reached the top of the slope, they officially left the Blackmoon Region. The bright sun in the sky welcomed them with its warm sunlight.

"We've finally made it out of death's den. It's good to be alive!" a young warrior rejoiced while bathing in the sunlight.

The other young warriors also took a brief break.

"That's enough rest. Sunpeak Town is another two hours trip from here. If you keep idling, it'll be dark by the time we arrive!" Captain Rhys hounded the young warriors.

Meanwhile, Vaan casually enjoyed the new scenery.

Having spent two years since his transmigration in Blackmoon City, he finally got to see how the Blackmoon Region looked from above.

Without the sun's blessing, Blackmoon Region was undoubtedly a dark, gloomy, and barren place, a clear contrast to the brick-laden road and lively green forest.

The escort group continued the trip on the brick-laden road.

Before long, two other paths, found on either side of the brick-laden road, merged with it and became the main road.

Another wagon group of four people merged from the right path and headed towards Sunpeak Town alongside the escort group.

"Hey, brother. Impressive ride you got there."

A stubby-bearded man shot up a conversation with Vaan, who seemed easier to approach than the two ladies, yet more important than the rest of the escort group.

Vaan's eyes flickered subtly.

'This person is quite selective with who he should talk to...' Vaan mused.

"You didn't just come out from the Blackmoon Region with your group, did you?" the stubby-bearded man continued.

Vaan flashed the person a glance and calmly replied, "And so what if we did?"

At the same time, Linetta and Lillias, who were riding the Earth Salamander with Vaan, turned their heads and scrutinized the stubby-bearded man.

They tried to guess his intentions.

"Hoho, easy there. I don't have any ill intentions," the stubby-bearded man quickly denied whatever thoughts they may have of him.

"I came from Redcliff City on the right side of Blackmoon Region. I don't know what happened, but I felt the tremors last night. Such strong tremors must have driven the Dark Hellhounds crazy. You are all fortunate to have made it out alive."

"You can also say that we were unlucky to have picked such a time to leave Blackmoon City," Vaan casually said, though he did not honestly think that.

"Hahaha, that's true. You have my sympathy," the stubby-bearded man softly chuckled before asking, "Where are you all headed? Judging by your impressive mount, I'd say a rundown town like Sunpeak is not your final destination."

"Why do you want to know?" Linetta interjected with a sharp look, causing the stubby-bearded man to feel intimidated.

"My apologies, my Lady. I'm not trying to pry into your business," the stubby-bearded man said with a forced smile. "It's just that I am heading to the capital. But as you can see, my group is rather small, and traveling anywhere is dangerous for a small group like mine."

"Thus, I thought it would be safer to travel together if we happened to be heading to the same destination. No, even if it's even partially on the way to our destinations, it would be great if we could travel together," the stubby-bearded man stated.

"If you were so afraid of the dangers on the road, you should have just hired an escort group to protect you on the way."

Captain Rhys inserted his opinion with a grumpy look after overhearing their conversation.

He disliked people who chose to risk their lives to save some money. It was bad business for escort groups, but it was also less business overall if the people died.

"Well... this brother speaks a lot of sense. I would very much like to hire an escort group to guide me to the capital... Unfortunately, my wallet disagrees with me," the stubby-bearded man smiled ruefully.

Chapter 49: Sunpeak Town

Linetta scrutinized the stubby-bearded man for a moment.

"We're spending a night in Sunpeak Town and taking Goblin's Road to the next city at midday. Follow us if you want. However, we won't be waiting for you," Linetta stated shortly after.

"Thank you, my Lady," the stubby-bearded man expressed his gratitude before saying, "You can just call me Old Ronnie. May I know which noble house you hail from?"

"You can just refer to me as Linette. Just Linette. We are not that close. So please don't talk to me unless you have something important to say. Furthermore, I don't like us traveling side by side. So either you travel in front or behind us," Linetta expressed evident dislike for the person.

At the same time, she also used her nickname, which was only a one-syllable difference.

Nevertheless, Old Ronnie did not know that. Thus, he immediately deemed Linetta and her sister to be witches from an ordinary household.

"Understood, my Lady," Old Ronnie voiced his compliance.

However, his tone sounded less eager after understanding the witches did not hail from a notable household.

Shortly after, Old Ronnie lagged behind the escort group, where he could no longer eavesdrop or join in on Vaan's conversation with Linetta and Lillias.

"Kind of harsh of you to treat him as such, don't you think, my Lady?" Vaan softly voiced his amusement.

"I don't care. I don't like that person. He stinks like opportunist people. If I give him my household name, he would be buttering me up like a fly, very annoying," Linetta stated with a grudging look.

"Yeah!" Lillias chimed.

Being part of the Delarosa Household, Linetta and Lillias had seen and interacted with their fair share of opportunist people who sought to build a relationship with them simply based on their noble background.

"So you already know," Vaan slightly smiled.

"Well, it also seems like you noticed that he was an opportunist person," Linetta gave Vaan a sidelong glance.

"Occupation habit," Vaan casually yet vaguely replied with a smile.

Captain Rhys soon approached them on the side of the Earth Salamander as they traveled on the main road.

"Are we really taking Goblin's Road to the next city, my Lady?" Captain Rhys asked for confirmation after overhearing the conversation earlier.

However, Linetta didn't answer. Instead, she turned her head to Vaan and passed the explanation job to him.

"Of course not. We are taking the other road," Vaan casually said.

Between Sunpeak Town and the next city was Red Goblin Mountain. As such, the road to the next city was split into two main roads around the mountain.

One was Goblin's Road, the more popular route due to its flat land and low-level danger.

However, it was also a dense forest path with poor visibility, making it a popular spot for bandits.

On the other hand, the other road, Hobgoblin's Road, was less frequently taken due to its higher-level danger and highland, which also makes it more difficult for heavy wagons and carriers to pass.

But unlike Goblin's Road, it was open and free of bandits. It didn't have any spots that bandits could use to hide for ambushing.

Hobgoblin's Road was the best choice for avoiding sneak attacks and ambushes on the road—or so Captain Rhys thought after hearing Vaan's answer.

However, Vaan had other plans for divulging the information.

"Nevertheless, it seems like Brother Vaan will still be accompanying us to the next city," Captain Rhys understood.

"Yeah," Vaan nodded.

"Sunpeak Town is not a good place to stay. I heard it used to be a prosperous town in the past. But after the Lord of Sunpeak Town passed away a few years without any heirs, Sunpeak Town declined to the point that it became a den for banditry nearby."

Of course, that was not Vaan's true reason for not staying. His trip to Sunpeak Town had already been delayed by half a day.

There was no telling where his woman, Eniwse, who had turned into a Wyvern-type Abomination, had gone since then.

As such, tagging with Linetta's group will quickly get him to the next city. But before they leave Sunpeak Town, he needed to fish for information.

Sometime later, Sunpeak Town came into view.

It was a small town, home to three thousand people, situated right by the bottom of Red Goblin Mountain's cliff, surrounded by green forest trees, and protected by a high stone wall.

Due to the special terrain of the region, it had the best spots to view the sunrise outside of Red Goblin Mountain.

At that moment, they couldn't enjoy such a view due to the darkening hour.

"Since we made it here, we can assume that the wagon thieves had already reached Sunpeak Town and sold off the spoils much earlier than us," Captain Rhys said with a sigh.

Shortly after, Captain Rhys turned to face Linetta.

"My Lady, since it is getting dark, please go right ahead and pick an inn to settle your lodgings. We will rejoin you after we sell off the carcasses."

"Alright," Linetta nodded.

As they arrived in front of the battered wooden gate with blue bloodstains, Vaan dismounted the Earth Salamander with Lillias before Linetta unsummoned her familiar.

"The state of Sunpeak Town is terrible, as expected. Who knows when was the last time they had these gates repaired or replaced," Vaan casually commented as he entered the town with Lillias and Linetta.

However, just as they stepped through the darkness of the gate, Vaan whispered to Linetta, "We've been secretly followed since we've taken the main road to town, my Lady."

In the next instance, when they stepped out on the other side of the stone wall, Vaan acted as if nothing had happened.

Linetta also did her best to appear normal, but she felt heavy-hearted.

She still had this faint hope that her aunt didn't commission a hit on her and her sister after they left home to seek help in the capital.

However, there was no reason to be secretly followed and watched unless assassins were targeting them, looking for the opportune chance to strike.

Chapter 50: Lady Solana

After settling her turbulent emotions, Linetta casually asked, "What's the best inn in town, Vaan? Do you know?"

"Golden Peacock Inn—or so I've heard, my Lady," Vaan answered.

He was well-read and well-informed, but there was a limit to how much he could learn about another town he had never been to.

Books contain vast knowledge, but they don't always record everything.

As the proverb says, "Traveling thousands of miles is better than reading thousands of books."

"Golden Peacock Inn, was it? Let's dine and settle our lodgings there," Linetta decided without bothering to hear the other options.

Alas, when they arrived at the inn with the golden peacock sign, they found that even the so-called best inn in Sunpeak Town was shabby.

Despite that, Golden Peacock Inn was in much better condition than the other buildings they came across on the way.

"Even the best inn in town is only this much, huh?" Linetta uttered while glancing at the building's exterior condition.

"We shouldn't expect much from Sunpeak Town," Vaan stated.

"No one wants to invest in Sunpeak Town with the frequent bandit raids. It's only been able to last until now, thanks to the wealth brought in by travelers. Without a lord to govern it, Sunpeak Town cannot stand on its feet again."

"But isn't that strange? How can there not be a new lord after so long?" Lillias wondered with doubt while clinging to one of Vaan's arms.

"It's not my place to comment on that, my Lady," Vaan calmly replied with a slight smile.

Naturally, Vaan knew Sunpeak Town's situation was fishy. He even had an educated guess as to its underlying cause.

However, a loose tongue can get him killed.

"Ehhh, why not?" Lillias asked thoughtlessly.

However, Linetta admonished her for asking Vaan a difficult question. The town was soulless, but there were eyes everywhere.

As such, Linetta quickly ushered Lillias into the inn.

...

"Good evening, dear customers. How may I help you tonight?" the innkeeper eagerly greeted at the counter.

The innkeeper was a woman roughly in her mid-40s with a pale complexion, blue eyes, and blonde hair.

If not for the slight wrinkles on her face that came with age, she could have retained her beauty like many others.

Vaan subconsciously activated Magic Vision to study the innkeeper. He was immediately baffled by the innkeeper's outstanding magic circuit and two Magic Circles.

The innkeeper should already be a high-level Senior Witch. And yet, she was aging like an average person.

"I'd like to book two rooms for the night; one single and one double. Also, I'll have three servings of your inn's specialty, thank you," Linetta stated.

"Understood, dear customers. Please take a seat anywhere you like. The food will be brought out shortly."

Shortly after the female innkeeper directed them, Linetta, Lillias, and Vaan glanced at the seats and tables in the dining hall.

Apart from three other small groups of two to four people, the dining hall was mostly empty.

Vaan suspected that everyone present was all the travelers that arrived in Sunpeak Town that day. Despite being a town connected to four different cities by roads, business was poor as expected.

While Vaan, Linetta, and Lillias secretly studied the people in the dining hall after picking their table, the people also secretly studied them.

Fifteen minutes later, the innkeeper brought out three plates of herb-roasted golden pheasants that exuded pleasant and appetizing scents.

"Is there anything else I can get for you all, dear customers? Drinks, perhaps? If you have any questions, feel free to ask. I will be happy to answer them all," the innkeeper said.

"Where did you get these golden pheasants?" Lillias wondered with a mouth-watering expression while smelling the fragrant herb-roasted golden pheasant in front of her.

She figured Sunpeak Town would only have Dark Hellhound or Horned Rabbits on the menu.

After all, there were only goblins around the area apart from those two beasts brought by travelers from the Blackmoon Region.

"The golden pheasants are mostly imported from Redcliff City. But since golden pheasants are relatively easy to raise, I also cultivated a few of my own in the backyard to keep the business afloat," the innkeeper politely replied.

"Ehh... It sounds like it's quite difficult living here. Why don't you move elsewhere?"

After hearing Lillias's question, the innkeeper forced a smile.

"It seems like dear customers haven't heard the rumors circulating this town. Many of the residents do wish to leave, but Lady Helia, Lord of Redpine City, has ordered that none of the residents shall leave the town for we are cursed."

"Cursed? What kind of curse can't be resolved with magic?" Linetta raised an eyebrow in doubt.

"The kind that prevents the use of magic, I presume," Vaan interjected before shifting his gaze to the innkeeper. "I would like four mugs of your finest mead, please, innkeeper. Three for us and one for you—if you don't mind joining us at the table for further talk, beautiful."

"Of course, you can put your drink and service time on our tab," Vaan added with a charming smile.

"My, aren't you a sweet one. For a handsome young man like you, I'll be willing to sit down for a talk anytime," the innkeeper replied with an equally sweet smile.

But then, the innkeeper shook her head and added, "Unfortunately, I will have to decline the offer to drink, handsome. I don't drink on the job."

"Fair enough," Vaan casual replied with an understanding nod despite the poor business in the inn.

"I will fetch your drinks now, dear customers," the innkeeper informed before leaving to fill three mugs with mead.

Right then, Vaan received a slight elbow jab from a disgruntled Linetta, who sat on his left while Lillias was sitting on his right at a table for six.

"Little brother, you are very daring. Even if no one can use magic in this town, no one dares to hit on Lady Solana, who is a Peak-stage Senior Witch," a beer-bellied man from another table spoke.

"Lady Solana, you say? Well, ain't that just my luck?" Vaan smiled wryly.