

The Witch 431

Chapter 431: Visiting Blackthorn City

The Peak-stage Second-Circle Wizard didn't just have no nuggets; even the rod was gone.

After Aeliana's initial shock and surprise, her expression transitioned to disgust and contempt as she stared at the unconscious wizard.

Humanity had enough difficulties with procreation after mana transformed women into witches. If many men castrated themselves for power, the human population would dwindle even further.

Women didn't become witches by choice, but men had the choice to become wizards. Thus, they have practically sinned against humanity.

That said, Aeliana didn't really care about such things.

She only found the wizard repulsive because the wizard had become an existence that was neither a man nor a woman.

Nevertheless, Vaan thought nothing of it.

As such, when Aeliana noticed his calm indifference to the discovery, she couldn't but ask, "Aren't you surprised in the least, my Lord?"

"Don't be so surprised, Aeli. There will be more of him from where he came," Vaan casually said before commenting, "But I guess it's normal for you to be shocked seeing such a person for the first time. I guess you haven't heard about the birds and bees."

"What do you mean by the birds and the bees, my Lord?" Aeliana asked curiously.

"Ah... You could say it's a popular saying in my past life. The metaphors used to describe gender identification in the era I lived," Vaan briefly revealed a bit of his past life and the modern era to Aeliana.

Although Aeliana was surprised by the revelation, she didn't find it unbelievable.

At the very least, it would be more believable to say his knowledge and skills were acquired from his past life rather than an intelligence-improving unique physique.

"How does the saying go, my Lord?" Aeliana enquired.

"Let's see... It's about how the world has the birds and the bees... The birds and the birds, the bees and the bees, the birds that used to be bees, the bees that used to be birds, the birds and bees that don't identify as the birds and the bees, the birds that only look like bees, and the bees that look like birds but still have stingers."

Aelian was immediately dumbfounded by Vaan's spew of words that sounded like nonsense. But after she digested the meaning behind them, she became even more dumbfounded and shocked.

What the actual fuck!

"What in tarnation happened in that world? No, actually, I don't want to know, my Lord," Aeliana replied with a speechless look.

"I wouldn't want to know if I was others either. It's a pretty messed up world in its own ways," Vaan softly chuckled with amusement.

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Nevertheless, after studying the wizard, Vaan shifted his focus to the wizard's staff, which appeared to be a more important object of interest to study.

The staff was completely comprised of materials that had high magic conductivity.

And among them, there was one material that Vaan did not recognize. Furthermore, that material appeared to act as the core component of the magic staff; it was the translucent blue crystal orb embedded at the top of the magic staff.

At first, Vaan figured it was a material that couldn't be found within the seven witch kingdoms. But later, with a dragon's help, he realized it was a material that could be found almost everywhere in the seven witch kingdoms.

His expression immediately turned serious.

"What's wrong, my Lord? What's so special about this blue crystal orb that you stare at it so intently?" Aeliana asked with surprise.

"This blue crystal orb is not a natural material, but one made from processing a witch's mana veins. That's how it possesses near-perfect magic conductivity," Vaan explained.

Once Aeliana heard that, her expression darkened as her body trembled with rage.

It wasn't hard to guess what her Lord's words implied. A witch would die if she had all her mana veins extracted.

And even then, they didn't know how many witches had their mana veins extracted to produce a single magic orb for the wizard's staff.

Nevertheless, after Vaan learned everything he wanted to know, he handed the unconscious wizard over to the dragons to be managed like the rest.

Afterward, Vaan accepted an interspatial bag containing a list of items he had previously requested the Red Dragon Clan to produce.

Although it was far from enough for the war, at the very least, they could be used immediately. As such, he took everything and left the interspatial bag behind for the dragons.

"Well then, we'll be back with more batches of people. Keep their groups separated so we can return them to their original locations without mistakes."

"Yes, Supreme Leader," Astarot answered before informing him, "Oh yes, another young elite has ascended to Rank 5."

"Great, I'll take him with me."

"Understood, Supreme Leader. I'll call him over."

Shortly after, Vaan returned to Fort Whitebridge with Aeliana and the Rank 5 dragon, collected the three Rank 4 Mental Strength Potions off Artemis, then assisted Artemis's advancement to Early-stage High Witch.

With the Rank 5 dragon's teleportation magic, Vaan reached Dragontail and Ironhaven quickly to do the same for Agatha and Mesulina as promised.

Afterward, Vaan and Aeliana went after the other groups of infiltrators.

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The dark clouds in the skies drifted aimlessly and soundlessly, carried by the soft wind until the sun slowly rose on the horizon and changed the current.

A quiet night quickly passed by, but Vaan and Aeliana had completed many objectives during its timeframe, such as capturing all five groups of infiltrators.

Due to the time limit set by Vaan, the dragons had worked quickly on their prisoners. As such, Vaan and Aeliana were able to return each infiltrator group to their original locations within two hours of getting knocked out by the sleeping effect.

A magic bell was used to wake them up.

Under the effects of hypnotism and brainwashing, the infiltrators had no concept of the lost time. They didn't even know they had fallen asleep; they simply carried on with their mission ignorantly, not knowing what had been done to them or how their thoughts had been altered.

They had basically become Vaan's sleeper agents, waiting to be activated.

In the morning, Aeliana returned to Sunpeak Town and joined the others in taking care of its development, Astoria went back to Blackmoon Academy, and Vaan arrived at the capital alone.

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"I imagined I would visit the capital, but I didn't think it would be under these current circumstances..." Vaan quietly commented to himself as he approached the towering black walls of Blackthorn City.

Blackthorn City wasn't just the capital city of the Kingdom of Black Rose and its largest city at that; it was also one enormous fortress, the kingdom's last line of defense against Gehenna.

"Truly a city of spires... No wonder everyone wants to live here," Vaan commented thoughtfully, sensing the incredible concentration of mana within the capital.

With thousands of magic towers drawing mana from the atmosphere, the mana concentration had reached a level where simply living in the capital for a day was equivalent to a night of dual-practicing with a skilled pleasure partner.

Of course, dual-practicing in such an environment would produce even greater effects.

That said, the capital's mana concentration still wouldn't hold a candle to a magic tower that could completely monopolize the mana currents.

Although Blackthorn City appeared grand and majestic outside, the air inside completely changed upon Vaan's entry.

It stank with the stench of greed, death, and oppression.

Although the city was home to two million people, the busy streets remained spacious and uncrowded due to the vast land covered.

Men without backgrounds were lower than pet dogs in such a place.

Vaan didn't take long to spot rows of chained naked men with only pieces of cloth covering their private spots on the streets.

They were whipped into metal cages and transported around like cheap goods as they were transferred from one hand to another before they were sent off to the mines.

Judging by their whip scars, muscular builds, and pale complexions, the naked men in chains were regular slave laborers who were used to mining in dark caves.

Nevertheless, Vaan couldn't help but frown. Even with his mental fortitude, he still found the sight unpleasant. But that was just how he expected the capital to be.

Blackthorn City was a matriarchal haven for the supremacist witches.

That said, despite standing in the middle of the busy street, no one came to bother Vaan. In fact, his entry into the city had been incredibly smooth despite it being his first visit.

The guardswomen did not try to stop him. They even appeared respectful after their initial frown when they read his information on their magic screen.

Evidently, the city's magitech security was highly advanced, containing information on citizens outside the city, and not just those entering it.

He was identified as Venerable Sage Vaan Raphna.

'That's some pretty advanced magic technology,' Vaan thought before shaking his head. A brief look around, and he could immediately tell what was wrong with the kingdom's capital.

While it seemed the Kingdom of Black Rose also had its advanced magic technology, they have, unfortunately, focused in the wrong direction. The capital's witches lived in luxuries and indulged in avarice.

It would be strange if development didn't stagnate in such an environment.

"Excuse me, Venerable Raphna," a guardswoman carefully approached Vaan after discussing with her fellow guardswomen.

"I can see that you have arrived without an escort. The capital has been restless and chaotic in recent times. I'm afraid trouble will find you if you are not well protected in the city."

"Would you like me to summons some guards to escort you to your destination?" the guardswoman suggested.

"Thank you for your concern, but there's no need," Vaan shook his head before replying with a smile, "I'm here to look for trouble."

"Pardon?"

Chapter 432: Chaotic City

"Never mind that. Would you be so kind as to point me toward the Vossen Household's direction?" Vaan politely requested with a charming smile.

"Ah..."

The guardswoman was briefly entranced before she blankly extended a finger northward and told Vaan to keep an eye out for the magic tower with the Vossen Household's crest, which had three interlocking circles within a triangle.

"Thank you."

Shortly after, Vaan left.

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Two miles down the smooth, marbled road, away from the city gate, the chaotic situation within Blackthorn City became more evident.

Blasts of magic resounded left and right, tearing through the air and quaking the ground. Large groups of battle witches stormed through a vibrant garden of herbs, trampling it underfoot, and encircled a magic tower.

Not long after, they lay siege to the magic tower, barraging it with a volley of destructive spells, forcing its self-defense to activate. Dozens of magic circles appeared around the magic tower, acting as barriers, shielding it from the bombardment.

Boom! Boom!

The ground rumbled like the empty bowels of a hungry titan, and the air screamed with deafening explosions, but the magic tower remained fast and steady in its place like an immovable, unbreakable mountain under the protection of its magic barriers.

However, the onslaught was relentless, unyielding, and neverending, chipping away at the magic tower's defensive barriers like stubborn woodpeckers.

Eventually, a single crack appeared, and with it, radial and circular cracks spread across the magic barriers like fractured glass.

With one final blast, the whole defense crumbled apart and dissipated like dying embers from a wild bushfire.

"Halt!"

The Early-stage High Witch leading the battle witch group halted the attack and stared at the seemingly vulnerable magic tower solemnly.

"Lady Franziska, I give you one last chance to submit to me! If you remain stubborn, you can say goodbye to your magic tower!" the Early-stage High Witch barked.

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Similar situations played out throughout Blackthorn City as major witch factions and groups competed for power and authority.

The collapse of order had plunged the capital into a lawless zone, allowing the reign of chaos and pandemonium.

Where there wasn't a big battle, there would be crowds of spectators watching the show. Since they couldn't stop it, they simply enjoyed it.

By then, everyone had already learned about the Holy Knight Empire's intentions, Queen Sybil's scheme, and Queen Henrietta's disappearance.

Without their ruler, the people went crazy, unrestrained in their actions, and indulged in anarchy.

Nevertheless, Vaan calmly strolled down the chaotic street, making his way to the Vossen Household. Brawls and flying bodies obstructed his path, but he smoothly evaded them with minimum effort and movements like the wind flowing through the gaps of swaying grass.

At the same time, his handsomeness, high-quality clothing, and elegant maneuver caught the eyes of a few interested witches observing the chaos at a café's outdoor sitting area.

"Wait a moment, handsome. You look a little familiar... May I interest you with a drink and have some of your time?"

"Not interested."

Vaan's indifferent reply stunned the bold Peak-stage Senior Witch as he flitted around her and continued on his way.

The bold Peak-stage Senior Witch didn't expect to be rejected so blatantly.

At the same time, the jarring snickers of her peers caused her to feel shame and humiliation, clouding her judgment with rage.

"Stop right there! I don't know where you're from, but do you think you can just walk away when a witch is talking to you?!"

Vaan paused his step with a sigh before he turned around and accepted the drink previously offered by the witch—only to splash it in her face, as if to cool her head with its coldness.

In that instant, not only did his actions stun the Peak-stage Senior Witch but also her peers at the nearby café's outdoor sitting area.

They had never seen such a bold man before; it wasn't something any man would ever dare to do in the capital of witches.

However, the Peak-stage Senior Witch surprisingly didn't explode with greater rage. Perhaps thanks to the effect of the cold drink, her anger was seemingly silent.

She calmly wiped her face and scrutinized Vaan's figure before she asked in a low tone, "Do you have any idea what you have just done?"

"I was watering a flower. Is that a problem?" Vaan replied with a cool smile.

"Watering a flower?" the Peak-stage Senior Witch blanked for a moment before she laughed with self-ridicule and amazement. "I must say... If you want to flirt, that's not how you do it."

"Is watering a dung flower considered flirting in the capital? What a strange culture you have around here," Vaan muttered, seemingly self-absorbed in his thoughts, as he turned to leave again.

"Hahahaha—!! A dung flower, he said! That's rich!" The Peak-stage Senior Witch's peers cackled with laughter, fueling the person's shame and humiliation.

Evidently, the man didn't praise her for being pretty but insulted her for being ugly and smelly. Hence, she needed to be washed with water.

"H-How dare you! I was being nice to you, and yet you disrespected me! You're just asking to die!" the Peak-stage Senior Witch roared furiously as her expression contorted with malevolence and murderous intentions.

She immediately raised her finger at Vaan's back and channeled mana for a spell. But before she could complete her spell, Vaan's figure disappeared from her vision.

Pak!

The Peak-stage Senior Witch heard a resounding slap in the next instant.

She felt a sudden burning pain on her right cheek as her vision blurred, and her body felt weightless; she was smacked flying by the tremendous force of Vaan's backhand.

"If you want my respect, you will do better to hide that contempt of yours—or better yet, don't have any of it to show at all. Did you think I wouldn't notice if you concealed it?" Vaan coolly stated before shifting his gaze to the other stunned witches.

The witches at the café's outdoor sitting area had immediately stood up after their friend was struck. But when they met Vaan's indifferent gaze, the immense pressure of a Peak-level Demigod dragon soul weighed down on them.

As such, they froze on the spot, seemingly stricken with fear and confusion, not fully understanding why that was the case.

Chapter 433: I'm Your Worst Nightmare

Nevertheless, Vaan's face was burned into their memories, which caused a jolt to their minds when it overlapped with a matching picture.

"The first male Venerable Sage in history... Vaan Raphna... That man was Vaan Raphna...! But didn't the news say he was already dead?"

"I don't think that's important here. How can a man exert such pressure with just his gaze alone? Just how strong is he? I can still feel goosebumps when I recall his gaze!"

The witches decided not to pursue Vaan. As such, he freely walked away without further issues from their group.

Even proud witches know when to lower their heads if they meet someone far more powerful than them, let alone a passing grim reaper.

The witches felt like they just had a very close encounter with death.

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Meanwhile, Vaan continued on his way. With his Omni-Sense spread out, he covered a large area of land and grasped its ongoing situations.

"When many ambitious witches without the overwhelming power to make a difference gather, all you get is this big shitfest once order collapses, huh?" Vaan commented as he observed the situation.

Sometime later, the Vossen Household entered Vaan's detection range before he picked up the pace with a frown. He covered large distances with each step and even cut through people's territories as he took a shortcut, making a beeline for the Vossen Household.

"Halt! Who gives a lowly man like you the right to run on my land?! In my territory, you can only walk or crawl—!"

Pak!

A haughty and arrogant witch was quickly smacked out of the way when she tried to obstruct Vaan's path and confront him.

Her body smashed into her own magic tower's defensive barriers before falling to the ground. She remained motionless, her neck bent at a weird angle, and her eyes rolled back, seemingly lifeless.

However, a few moments later, the magic tower's mana flowed into the witch's broken body and restored it. The witch's eyes rolled back into place before she stood up and fixed her broken neck with a dumb look, failing to recall what had happened to her.

Her memory was a blur.

"Who am I? What was I doing? Where was I going?" the witch muttered to herself.

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Blackthorn City, Central District

The Vossen Household, like many other renowned households and famous witches, possessed a magic tower of their own that didn't lose to others in terms of height and majesty, only inferior to Queen Henrietta's.

At that moment, the Vossen Household's magic tower was being sieged by another renowned household, the Calarook Household.

Many buildings around the magic tower had been damaged, destroyed, or completely cleared for land.

"Come out, Lady Arabelle! It's time we settle the scores between us once and for all! The loser must submit to the victor! What do you think? Must I keep destroying your homes to force you out?" the matriarch of the Calarook Household, Brigid Calarook, spoke.

"Do you think I'm stupid, Lady Brigid?! Do you think I don't know you are working with other renowned households and have them lying in wait to ambush me?! Stop wasting my time and fuck off!" Arabelle roared out the window of her magic tower before slamming it shut.

"Grandma, I can't find Lillias!" Linetta rushed over with concern and urgency and said, "I don't think she made it inside!"

"Keep searching. She has to be!" Arabelle strong hoped.

However, her hopes were shortly dashed by Brigid's raucous laughter outside. One of the Calarook's battle witches had caught Lillias hiding in the ruins of a broken building and brought her over.

"Lady Arabelle, take a look outside and see who I have caught. Isn't she one of your precious granddaughters?" Brigid laughed before threatening Arabelle, "If you don't accept my challenge, I can't guarantee what I will do to her!"

"You're completely shameless, Lady Brigid!" Arabelle cursed with red eyes, seeing Lillias struggling in Brigid's arms.

Lillias made an attempt on Brigid's life with an earthen spike spell, but the latter blocked it with a magic barrier, shattering the earthen spike into countless smaller shards.

"Nice try. Unfortunately, the power is too weak, and the speed is too slow!"

Pak!

A strong slap soon knocked Lillias unconscious, causing her body to become limp and obedient in Brigid's arms.

"Lillias!" Arabelle cried before roaring furiously, "Damn you, you filthy whore! You dare lay a hand on my granddaughter!?"

"If you have a problem with it, come out and face—Who's there?!" Brigid didn't finish speaking when she suddenly sensed incomparable danger from her rear.

"Someone's coming!" one of the Calarook's battle witches alerted a split second later.

However, no one could stop Vaan's lightning-fast movement as he closed the gap between him and Brigid in an instant.

Although Brigid instinctively summoned multiple layers of shield to block Vaan's charge, they all shattered like glass when they contacted his body; they failed to buy her a single moment.

Brigid's face paled immediately.

"Who—!"

Without waiting for her to finish her question, Vaan grabbed her arm and ripped it off her body like tearing up paper. Then, he retrieved the unconscious Lillias from Brigid's torn arm and sent the hag flying with a kick!

"Arghhh—!"

Brigid cried in pain as she flew through the air, clutching her missing arm. She vomited mouthfuls of blood moments later due to her crushed and damaged organs.

"Lady Brigid!"

The Calarook's battle witches chased after their matriarch while the other half protected their rear from the sudden threat, Vaan.

Brigid's pale face dripped with cold sweat as her people tended to her wounds with healing magic and recovery potions.

"Who are you?! How dare you interfere with the Calarook Household's matters!" Brigid barked as she bought time for her reinforcements to arrive.

However, Vaan didn't pay her any attention immediately.

He checked Lillias's condition before cutting his thumb and dripping some of his potent blood into her mouth, granting her a swift recovery.

Lillias regained consciousness almost immediately in Vaan's arm. Her eyes widened with a dumb look, wondering if she was in a dream.

Nevertheless, Vaan stomped Brigid's detached arm and reduced it to ashes with his Fire Authority. Then, he finally glanced at Brigid's people.

"You only need to know I'm your worst nightmare," Vaan coolly stated.

Chapter 434: You and What Army?

Inside Vossen's magic tower, Arabelle and Linetta sighed with relief. Fortunately, Lillias was saved—No, not just Lillias; they were all saved.

"Vaan is here, grandmother! Everything's going to be okay!" Linetta exclaimed excitedly with near-blind worship.

She understood Vaan was a meticulous and careful person. Thus, the only reason he dared to appear alone must be due to absolute confidence in his strength.

"Let's hope so," Arabelle said with slight concern.

She didn't want to underestimate Vaan's strength, but he was alone, and the enemy was not. The full might of the Calarook Household stood against him, not to mention the other households hiding nearby.

"No, we can't just sit here and wait for Lord Vahn to save us! We must assist him! Now is our chance to counterattack!"

After Arabelle spoke objectively with a clenched fist, she immediately instructed her subordinates to gather all abled battle witches in the magic tower for battle.

"You, young lady, will not be going anywhere. You're still young and inexperienced, so stay here where it is safe."

"But..."

"No, buts."

"Yes, Grandmother..."

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Meanwhile, Vaan's claim made Brigid Calarook and her people cackle with laughter, full of disdain and derision.

"You're my worst nightmare? You may have caught me off-guard, but all you did was inflict some pain. Did you think I would fear you because of that?! I fear no man, mongrel!"

"You should."

After Vaan coolly replied to Brigid, he placed Lillias down on her feet and signaled her to take a few steps back to safety. At that moment, Lillias still had a blank, dreamy look, but she still followed his instruction obediently.

Then, Vaan turned around to face Brigid seriously.

"I know you're trying to buy time, but it's useless. Your helpers won't be coming out to assist you. It's clear that they have decided to adopt a wait-and-see stance."

"It matters not. Even without them, I still have an army. You, on the other hand, are alone. I will take care of you before the Vossens decide to ride your momentum."

Brigid stood up, tall and proud, after her missing arm stopped bleeding and glared at Vaan viciously yet confidently.

Her confidence was backed by a thousand Peak-stage Senior Witches...

However, Vaan waved his hand before every battle witch around Brigid Calarook combusted into blue flames, causing them to scream in brief agonizing pain. Within moments, Brigid's entire army of battle witches collapsed to the ground, reduced to charred corpses.

Brigid's confident expression froze; only shock and disbelief could be seen in her eyes.

"You and what army again?" Vaan casually asked.

When Brigid heard his voice, she felt so cold and indifferent that it chilled her heart. It was as if Vaan had done something insignificant, not worth mentioning.

"But don't you worry. You won't get an easy death like the rest of them. Thanks to you, Vossen Household's plans were delayed. Thus, I'll make sure you suffer sufficiently."

Right after Brigid heard that, she immediately turned around to flee, knowing she had no chance at victory. Her opponent wielded an unknown fire ability of unparalleled might.

She didn't even know how he was controlling it.

"If I didn't permit you to leave, you can forget about trying to escape. You can only blame yourself for trying to realize your ambitions without the strength to back it, offending the people."

With that, Vaan flicked his wrist upward, raising a wall of blue flames to cut off Brigid's escape. But she did not slow down and even sped up with a determined look.

If she couldn't endure the blue flames with her magic barriers, then she would gladly die within the blue flames. That way, she wouldn't have to experience torment at the very least.

Unfortunately, while Brigid had a good idea, the reality was cruel.

Bang!

Brigid slammed into the wall of blue flames like she would with a high-grade metal wall, solid and seemingly indestructible. Her magic barriers shattered, and her inner organs shook, causing her to aggravate her old wounds and spit out some blood.

"This... is impossible...! How can fire feel so solid?! Why? Why doesn't it burn?! Why can't I feel a shred of magic power from it?! Just what kind of power is this?!"

Brigid pounded the blue fire wall with her fists, much to her dismay, but the blue fire wall refused to give way and repelled her.

"You're not even a Transcendent. Did you think someone at your level could feel or even understand divine power? It burns when I want it to burn. A manifestation of my will, you could say; nothing more, nothing less."

"Stay away from me!!"

Brigid cried, suddenly losing her mind. She threw every destructive spell her mind could conjure at Vaan as he steadily approached with calm steps. With each step he took, her confidence cracked until it shattered completely, plunging her into a state of frenzied desperation.

However, no matter what spell she tossed at Vaan, they shattered or bounced off his protective layer of dragon aura.

How could an Early-stage High Witch possibly break a Peak-stage Aura Lord's pure defensive aura?

Bereaved, despaired, yet desperate and stubborn, Brigid's eyes darted left and right for a path to life. She scrambled to the side with panicked steps—only to stumble and fall.

"Nooo—!"

Brigid cried with fear when Vaan caught her ankle and lifted her up like a weightless doll. Then, he slammed her into the ground repeatedly, shattering every bone in her body and making a mess of her inside.

Bone shards pierced out of her skin, and blood flowed from her seven orifices.

Brigid was rendered powerless, broken in mind and body. In such a state, she had no power to resist, even if she wanted to.

Vaan picked her back up by the hair, raising her body until their eyes met. The fear in her eyes became evident.

"Yes... those are the right eyes. You fear no man because the capital didn't have any strong men. But now, it has me."

"Please spare me..." Brigid Calarook pleaded weakly.

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Meanwhile, Arabelle rushed out of the magic tower with her troops, only to stop in their tracks, stunned by the scene outside.

They were greeted with a land filled with charred corpses and a broken, disheveled, and pitiful Brigid in Vaan's grasp.

Chapter 435: Capital's Enemy

While Arabelle was mobilizing her troops, she had completely missed the scene of battle. Thus, she was utterly clueless as to what had transpired during the small timeframe she wasn't watching.

"W-What happened here? The battle is already over? These scorched witches... bear the mark of Calarook. Did Her Majesty return and quell the dissidents?"

Arabelle and her battle witches were astonished and shocked by the fiery carnage, which they immediately assumed to be the work of Queen Henrietta.

However, the possibility was quickly dashed when they gave it more thought; it simply didn't make sense.

"Lord Vahn did this...?" Arabelle muttered with a frown.

She may have greatly underestimated Vaan's strength, but she wasn't sure if killing so many witches was in their best interests, even if she wanted them dead for herself.

Vaan's power display to restore order could backfire.

"Grandmother..."

"Lillias, are you alright? Are you hurt anywhere?"

Lillias's voice quickly shifted Arabelle's attention to her as the latter showed her immediate concern, thoroughly checking her body for injuries but finding none. Not even a mark was left behind by Brigid's slap.

"I'm fine. Vahn healed me... I think?"

"That's great. Go inside to your sister. It's unsafe outside."

"Yes, grandmother."

With that, Lillias obediently headed inside the magic tower. She didn't want to be caught by the enemy again and cause more trouble for the people around her.

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Pak!

After Brigid pleaded, Vaan smacked her across the cheeks. But he used too much strength and tore off her lower jaw and hair, sending her body flying a short distance away.

Although Brigid managed to survive his last blow, she was still half a foot in the grave.

Brigid lay on the ground with her face in the dirt, bloodied and teary, her eyes unfocused, and her mind barely conscious.

For a moment, her mind regained clarity.

She wondered where things went wrong and for what purpose did she desperately competed so hard with others to acquire power and authority. She should have been content with her freedom when she was liberated from the oppression of men many years ago.

Alas, power and authority were like addictive drugs, intoxicating her after giving her a taste of them. In the end, she became what she originally despised; oppressing the opposite gender after acquiring the position of superiority.

The same applied to most witches from the supremacist faction.

"It seems you have gained enlightenment at the end of your life. May it be a lesson you can carry to your next life. Go on, be at peace. The world burdens you no longer."

After Brigid heard those words, the life in her eyes finally faded as she passed away. However, she didn't leave with any resentment, only regret.

Some people only sought amends after they realized it was too late.

Vaan didn't regret his actions, nor would he look back on them; he only looked ahead and moved forward.

Whether they were right or wrong choices, only extreme means could have hope of bringing changes to corrupted and twisted souls.

"I do not seek to enslave and oppress. However, I do desire to dominate and change, restore order and balance, and guide this kingdom on the correct path to greatness. So lay down the swords in your hearts and submit to me, and there will be no more pointless bloodshed today."

Vaan's voice resounded, allowing the witches hiding in the surroundings to hear his words, loud and clear.

"Shut up your trap, imperial dog! We will not be swayed by your lies! Even if we have to die today, we will never submit to men! Not in the past, not now, not definitely not in the future—!!!"

A charming woman's voice filled with anguish and fury thundered in the distance. With it, legions of witches from multiple renowned households in the capital arrived.

Vaan's appearance had forced even ambitious household matriarchs to put aside their differences and unite their forces to confront him after news of his power was spread by the nearby witches.

"That's right! There's no way such a powerful man exists in this kingdom! How dare an imperial scum like you set foot on our sacred ground and infiltrate so deeply into our kingdom! However, that's also fine! If we can take down someone as strong as you, it will definitely be a great loss for the Holy Knight Empire!"

"You're wrong! Lord Vahn is not from the Holy Knight Empire—!"

"Save your words, Lady Arabelle. Your words are wasted on them. They will not listen to you. More importantly, by speaking up for me, you have attracted their hostilities. Return to your tower with your people at once. Otherwise, I can't guarantee your safety."

Although Arabelle tried to speak up for Vaan, he discouraged her, knowing her words would only fall on deaf ears.

"Lord Vahn...? Lord Vahn, she said! How dare you, Lady Arabelle—! Where is your pride as a woman and a High Witch of this great kingdom?! Arabelle Vossen has forgotten her place! A dog of the empire, she has become!"

"Don't spare her! Death to the traitors—!!"

Just as Vaan anticipated, the supremacist faction witches did not take kindly to Arabelle's words and immediately labeled her a traitor.

"Leave now!" Vaan urged.

Arabelle paled at once, realizing the unfavorable situation she had created for her household. Even if the Vossen Household were famous in the capital, it would still perish overnight once ganged on by multiple other households.

Thus, she heeded Vaan's words and immediately pulled her troops back to the magic tower for refuge from the angry mob.

"Don't let her leave! After her!"

"I think not. You will go no further."

Although the angry supremacist witches wanted to pursue Arabelle's group, Vaan denied them the opportunity with a stomp, raising a towering blanket of blue fire behind him to obstruct their path.

Supremacist witches' attention soon focused on Vaan entirely.

Killing the chicken to scare the monkeys only worked for some people, not everyone. If the monkeys don't fear death, then killing chickens would become pointless, no matter how many are killed.

Vaan knew his already tactic didn't work, and his words wouldn't reach the witches either.

Thus, he could only resort to the most trustworthy and straightforward method to resolve the problem, with sheer violence.

Chapter 436: Dog-Beating Fire Fists

"Kill him! Even if you have to lay down your lives, I want that imperial dog dead!"

A household matriarch commanded her people to commence their attack, intending to use them as cannon fodder to exhaust Vaan's strength. Other supremacist matriarchs also voiced similar orders.

Without knowing the extent of Vaan's strength, they didn't intend to risk their own necks to find out.

"Die—!!!"

Shortly after the witches sentenced Vaan to death, thousands of battle witches fired their offensive spells at once.

However, Vaan calmly faced the incoming spells without any intention of evading them. Instead, a spherical field of blue flames quickly covered his body, shielding him from the attacks.

Against a Peak-stage Demigod-rank fire barrier, all ice spells evaporated, fire spells extinguished, earth spells crumbled, and wind spells absorbed, restoring the barrier's durability and strengthening it instead.

Due to the overwhelming difference in power, the battle witches simply couldn't breach Vaan's fire barrier, no matter how big of a numerical advantage they had.

"The fire barrier is too sturdy! Our spells are useless against it, my Lady! Please give us further instructions! What should we do?"

"Keep pressing the attack! I don't believe that imperial dog can keep up the fire barrier forever! Surely, our attacks must have some effect, no matter insignificant they are! Even ants can take down an elephant with enough numbers!"

With the matriarch's orders spoken, the battle witches stubbornly bombarded Vaan's fire barrier without any consideration for their mana reserve. They believed Vaan took a greater toll enduring all their attacks and would cave in at some point.

However, they had no idea Vaan's fire ability borrowed the force of the Fire Law; it was a divine power. Thus, their hopes of exhausting his magic power were futile, for he was using none, to begin with.

Only his mental strength was considered, and the mental strength of a Peak-stage Demigod-rank soul wasn't so easy to tire.

"My Lady, that man's fire ability is still as sturdy as ever! It still hasn't shown signs of weakening under our barrage of attacks!"

After bombarding the fire barrier with offensive spells for twenty minutes straight, the battle witches began to lose hope, wondering if victory was within the realms of possibility for them. The more time passed, the greater their realization regarding Vaan's strength.

Even if they didn't fear death, powerlessness was a different form of despair. They would question why they needed to keep struggling when their efforts were fruitless.

"Go after the Vossens! Yes, Vossens had sided with this imperial dog! If we capture them, the imperial dog will have no choice but to come out of his shell!"

"Focus your attacks on the Vossen's magic tower! Take down their magic defense system!"

Shortly after the matriarchs directed, the battle witches shifted their attentions to the Vossen Household's magic tower and redirected their attacks.

They needed to achieve at least something to keep their morale up. Otherwise, everyone would be disheartened by their futile attempts.

Nevertheless, a new towering pillar of blue flames covered the Vossen Household's magic tower, shielding it from the bombardment of spells.

When the battle witches witnessed its majestic and towering presence, they felt a sense of helplessness.

"Was this the right thing to do? Perhaps, we should have listened to what the man had to say... With this much power, he could kill all of us if he wanted to."

"It's a bit too late to reflect on our matriarchs' decision now. We can only keep going forward!"

Doubts started sprouting in the battle witches' hearts, but they still followed their orders.

Meanwhile, Vaan considered how he should beat so many witches into submission.

After all, beating up a few witches was not the same as beating up several tens of thousands. It would take too much time to go through them all one by one; he didn't have enough limbs to swing around.

Thus, he needed a suitable method for mass beating.

'Let's do that,' Vaan decided on an idea.

Shortly after, his fire barrier suddenly pulsated, blasting outward, shattering all incoming spells, and striking the surrounding battle witches.

"Ahhh—!"

Numerous battle witches were sent flying like broken kites with their strings cut, only suffering from the shockwave. They were unharmed by the blue flames as they didn't burn as hot as they appeared.

Vaan couldn't keep killing indiscriminately if we wanted to use them alive.

"I'm still... alive? The blue flames didn't burn me? How is that possible?"

"The imperial dog has broken out of his shell! This is our chance to kill him! Don't waste the opportunity! He must not have much strength left after enduring our attacks for so long—!"

Following the battle witches' surprise, the matriarchs excitedly barked new orders. But they quickly noticed something wrong when they saw Vaan's ridiculing, smug look.

"Hold on! Something isn't right—!"

"Did you all have fun shooting your spells indiscriminately, only to achieve nothing? Well, your playtime is over. Now, it's my turn to attack."

After Vaan declared his intent to attack, his super-inflated fire barrier suddenly fragmented, transforming into several thousands of condensed fire fists.

At the same time, the ground was suddenly lifted like it was under an anti-gravity spell. Large masses of earth crumbled apart before they coated the fire fists and formed a rocky, hard, and heavy outer shell.

"Have a taste of my Thousand Dog-Beating Fists."

Bam! Bam! Bam!

Numerous rocky fire fists rained down on the battle witches, smashing them in the faces and other parts of their bodies, knocking out their teeth and breaking their bones.

"Ah, nooo—!"

Painful wails resounded across the battlefield as the rocky fire fists bombarded the battle witches, shattering their hastily conjured shields and battering their bodies with heavy blows.

Left, left, right, left jabs, right hook, and uppercut!

While Vaan seemingly boxed the empty air, thousands of battle witches fell victim to his bone-crushing rocky fire fists that almost moved in tandem with his movements.

Of course, he didn't need to use physical movements to control the thousands of rocky fire fists, but they still assisted to some degree. It was mostly for self-entertainment.

"Ahh—! He's too strong!"

"Retreat! Retreat and reorganize the formation!"

The matriarchs barked out their commands amidst the chaotic and disorganized mob as the battle witches desperately fended off Vaan's rocky fire fists.

Chapter 437: The Blood Craves Violence

The battle witches were beaten black and blue until all of their teeth scattered on the floor, and they couldn't tell left from right. They were pained, disorientated, immobilized, and confused. The matriarchs' orders had little effect on them under such conditions.

Nevertheless, Vaan didn't focus on beating down the already incapacitated witches and sent his rocky fire fists after the ones that fled to safer distances.

At the same time, Vaan kicked off the ground and shot straight for one of the commanding matriarchs in the sky.

Boom... Boom...!

Flames spewed from the soles of Vaan's feet, thrusting him forward with subsequent greater bursts of speed.

Although the blonde matriarch sensed the incoming threat, she noticed it too late due to her preoccupation with commanding her people. By the time she turned around, Vaan had already grabbed hold of her ankle.

"Shit!" the blonde matriarch's expression instantly changed.

Ka-cha!

Vaan hurled the blonde matriarch into the ground below with excessive force, snapping her lower leg bones before her body even struck the ground. Her face almost wanted to rip off from the wind resistance.

For an instant, her otherworldly beauty became hideous and unsightly. Tears and snot threatened to come out as she faced the rapidly closing ground with barely opened eyes.

Bam!

The ground cracked as the blonde matriarch's body heavily slammed into it, shattering her bones and organs and splattering with blood.

It wouldn't be strange if she died on the spot. But considering the tenacious lifeforce of witches, not to mention a Light-attribute Early-stage High Witch at that, the possibility was unlikely.

Even so, the blonde matriarch was immobilized in her crippled and critically injured state.

"Still alive? Then, you can still be beaten."

"Wait. Let's negotiate. Spare my life, and I will call off the attack."

After Vaan gripped the blonde matriarch's hair and raised her broken body in the air, she quickly mustered her remaining strength to propose a deal.

However, Vaan wasn't interested.

"What attack?" Vaan directed the blonde matriarch's unsteady gaze to the direction of the fleeing witches before he said, "You mean the ones running away over there? Even if you attack, what can you do?"

"And even if I agree, what would you do? Scheme against me in the future? Your hatred and contempt for men run deep. We need to fix that," Vaan stated blankly.

Shortly after, he slammed her body back into the ground repeatedly, causing her to cough up mouthfuls of blood each time.

The threat of death loomed over the blonde matriarch as her light-attribute mana failed to keep up with her aggravating wounds.

But Vaan seemed to know exactly how much force he should use as not to kill her instantly, only to torment her. As such, the blonde matriarch was kept on the delicate, thin thread, hovering between life and death.

Being prepared to die and facing death were two different kinds of experiences. The latter tested the blond matriarch's resolution, keeping her in a tense state.

She couldn't live, but she couldn't die either. She was forced to endure wave after wave of pain; it nearly drove her crazy.

"The imperial dog has caught our Lady! All battle witches on me! We must save our Lady!" a Peak-stage Senior Witch took the lead to rescue the blonde matriarch.

However, dozens of rocky fire fists came her way, battered her body into a bloodied mess, then dropped her out of the sky as strength left her.

Under the might of the rocky fire fists, the resisting witches were reduced to broken dolls sprawled on the ground.

"Dammit, he's too strong! We can't get close at all! Those fists are in the way! However, we can't do anything about them! They are numerous, strong, and unpredictable!"

"Get back! They're still coming after us! It's like they have a will of their own! Watch out—!"

"Ahhh! No—! Save me!"

The battle witches belonging to the blonde matriarch's household were frustrated by their powerlessness. They could only watch her beaten up from a distance, but even then, the rocky fire fists didn't give them a break and came after them.

Vaan's eyes might have been on the blonde matriarch, but she wasn't his sole focus. Every hostile witch within the range of his Omni-Sense was a target to be beaten.

Nevertheless, the blonde matriarch's will was stubborn; it would take some time to break her spirit and make her submit through violence.

The process was slower than ideal, but the results were guaranteed.

As Vaan bashed the blonde matriarch's face in, healed her, then bashed her again, a crimson hue flickered across his eyes, his fist tingled, and his blood slightly boiled with excitement.

The violence stimulated his dragon blood, making him instinctively crave more violence. Even so, he managed to suppress the urge with his powerful will.

'Old dragons are wise, but the young are hot-blooded, huh?'

Vaan mused unsurprisingly, having anticipated that dragon blood transfusion would have side effects along with its benefits. That said, the side effect could be negated by his will. Thus, it was negligible.

...

Meanwhile, further away from the battlefield outside the Vossen Household's magic tower, numerous witches caught wind of the big battle and observed from a distance.

But unlike the supremacist witch faction, they did not readily lend their assistance after finding out their opponent was an extremely powerful man.

Even a portion of the supremacist witch faction remained on standby and simply watched from a distance. They saw no benefit in assisting early, only losses.

"Shouldn't we assist those witches in taking down that man, my Lady? I can hear them calling him an imperial dog. If we allow this man to rampage in our capital city as he pleases, the other witch kingdoms will look down on us."

"There's no benefit in joining the fray early. Besides, those supremacist witches have been too full of themselves. Someone ought to take them down a peg."

"That's true... But that's not the only reason we aren't helping, right? My Lady?"

"Mm. More importantly, that man isn't necessarily from the empire. I've never heard of the empire having someone who commands such perfect control of fire and earth and with such power at that. His affinity is too fiery to be one of those Wienerless. How peculiar..."

"Also, his face looks a little familiar..."

Chapter 438: I'm Tired, So Let's Fight Another Day

"You also think so, huh? Then, it's not just my imagination. This man looks like the deceased Vaan Raphna, that was recently entitled Venerable Sage for his contribution to the study of magic. Clearly, the information was false. Not only is he wise, but he is also extremely powerful. It does make one wonder whether he had been part of this kingdom from the start or not."

"I remembered, my Lady. There was a lot of opposition from the supremacist witch faction when Her Majesty pushed forward the idea. Do you think they played a part in Her Majesty's disappearance, my Lady?"

"That, I can't say for sure. However, I'm confident Her Majesty's decision was the final spark that pushed some of them to lean toward Queen Sybil's side. After all, they had always been unhappy with Her Majesty's neutral stance."

"It's hard to get anything done right with the supremacist witch faction interfering with their extreme ideology."

"That can't be helped, especially when half of the capital belongs to the supremacist witch faction. That man's claim was no different from waging war with every witch in the capital. I wonder if he can last long enough to back it up."

...

As the neutral witches chattered and watched from a distance, Vaan continued to beat down the several ten thousand battle witches, heavy-handedly without a care for their beauty.

Ten-thousands... twenty-thousands... thirty-thousands... forty-thousands...

The number of broken bodies soared as Vaan's rocky fire fists hunted down their targets like vengeful spirits with deep grudges, leaving behind a trail of wailing battle witches sprawling on the streets stained in their blood and tears.

The matriarchs wanted to create distance and regroup their forces, but Vaan's rocky fire fists stubbornly pursued them, leaving them without a choice.

"Ahhh—! No, spare me! It hurts so much!"

The battle witches caught by Vaan personally endured a more excruciating beating as he struck them where it hurt. Electrifying pain drowned their senses and left behind lingering numbness, only to make them feel more sensitive to the next wave of pain.

"Unhand me, you filthy animal! My pristine body isn't for the likes of you to touch! Even if I die, I'll never surrender to you—!"

Pak!

Vaan smacked the next matriarch across the face, bruising her left cheek and knocking out several teeth.

"It looks like you haven't been beaten hard enough. Don't worry. I'll make sure to give you some special attention."

Pak! Pak! Pak!

Shortly after Vaan made his promise, he raised his hand and slapped the matriarch repeatedly as he held her up by the throat; he made sure each cheek got its fair share of damage.

The matriarch ended up losing all her teeth, and her face swelled up like a bloodied pig, appearing unsightly and gruesome. She could barely keep her eyes open due to the swelling and bleeding. Even so, she refused to submit.

"You may break my body, but you will never break my spirit! I admit you are strong, but you are just one man. Men will forever be beneath us superior witches—!"

"Do you dare say the same thing if men were given equal opportunity for growth? Not that I really care. I didn't come here to fight for them; I came to fight for myself. We'll just have to see how long you can keep up such stubbornness."

Pak! Pak!

Shortly after his reply, Vaan continued to deform the matriarch's appearance with his beating, twisting it into something even more hideous and unsightly.

It was true that he believed men's potential wasn't inferior to witches. However, it was also true that the aura cultivation of men accumulated power more slowly than the witches' magic cultivation.

Furthermore, he wouldn't gain much from raising an army of strong aura users except for the sake of possessing a strong army. On the other hand, if he raised an army of strong witches, he would have a strong army and no shortage of competent dual-practice partners to improve himself.

If he wanted to explore the vast stars and boundless Chaos, he must reach the divine rank at least. Raising a strong witch kingdom was just the first step towards that goal.

"Just kill me..."

"You want to die? Then, kill yourself. I'm not stopping you."

"..."

"Don't want to kill yourself? It seems you still prefer to live. Then, submit to me, and your suffering will end. Since you can't win, why resist? Life will be easier if you learn to let go."

"...Fine. I will surrender. Please end this madness."

The matriarch voiced her submission with a tired look, as if it took all the remaining strength in her body to utter those words. But in doing so, her heart felt at peace as if she had put down a burden.

"Swear it with the Oath of Magic."

"Don't do it, my Lady! We must never submit ourselves to men! They will only enslave and oppress us again! What have we been fighting for if you give up now?!"

Despite the pleas of the matriarch's people, she still swore her allegiance to Vaan with the Oath of Magic, putting her life and death in his hands.

In that instant, the entire thousand beaten battle witches from the matriarch's household lost their fighting spirit and dropped to the ground. They appeared like they had lost their souls.

Nevertheless, the matriarch was only one of many matriarchs who had banded together to challenge Vaan. Many still had yet to submit, and many more were waiting for the opportunity to strike him down.

That said, the first matriarch's submission produced a domino effect, making it easier for Vaan to subjugate the following matriarchs and their people.

In two hours, he made all forty-thousand supremacist witches swear their allegiance with the Oath of Magic.

Unfortunately, the supremacist witch faction made up half of the capital's population. Forty thousand was only a small fraction of their numbers.

If he had to go through them in batches, it would take too much time to subjugate them all. Thus, he needed to change his tactic and lure all the hostile, opportunistic witches out to attack him at once.

"I know there are many who still want me dead. However, I am tired, so let's fight another day, okay?" Vaan suggested, appearing a bit unstable and short of breath.

...

Chapter 439: Bullet Time

Vaan's tired voice wasn't loud, but every witch lurking in the surroundings heard it. Even so, no one made a move immediately. In fact, their movements were almost non-existent, resulting in the area being silent.

Only the distant clashes of conflict occurring in other parts of the capital could be subtly heard.

Evidently, the supremacist witches did not trust Vaan's words; they were very apprehensive. If they carelessly attacked, they would suffer a heavy beating at the very least and death at most.

To make his words more convincing, Vaan withdrew his power.

As such, the thousand rocky fire fists crumbled to the ground, and the fire barrier protecting Vossen's magic tower also dissipated into thin air.

Once the supremacist witches witnessed that, they finally gained confidence.

"The imperial dog is tired? My Lady, this is our chance. If members of our household become the ones to strike down that vile man, we will enjoy a higher standing among the witches."

"Mm. I am aware of that. Prepare the troops. We will be the ones to claim that wretch fool's head!"

Shortly after the blue-dressed matriarch issued her order from the forty-fifth floor of her magic tower's balcony, two thousand battle witches quickly rallied outside. In fact, they had been there from the start; they were only waiting for the matriarch's order to set out.

"Two-thousand battle witches, all ready to be mobilized at your command, my Lady."

"Then, let us quickly head over to the Vossen's magic tower. We can't be too fast or too slow; we have to get there at just the right time to steal the glory with minimum casualties."

"Yes, my Lady!"

...

Several dozen households numbering from three hundred to three thousand quickly made their move after they witnessed Vaan's seemingly vulnerable state. Some were faster and hasty than others, while others were slower and more prudent.

Nevertheless, Vaan quickly attracted over two hundred thousand supremacist witches toward his location.

Blackthorn City had over two million residents, of which only four hundred thousand were neutral witches or witches who sympathized with men, two hundred and fifty thousand were male witch descendants, and three hundred and fifty thousand were male slaves.

The remaining million people were all supremacist witches. And at that moment, one-fifth of them was hell-bent on slaying Vaan.

Among them, many had realized Vaan was no imperial spy. However, he was a powerful man, an existence they could not tolerate. His very existence threatened the haven they had built for themselves.

He could potentially destroy the three-hundred-year idea they had established that men could never be as powerful as witches.

Once the men realize that belief was false, lofty ambitions and rebellious intentions would fester in their hearts, leading to an uprising as they fight for the rights that had been deprived of them from birth.

Vaan sometimes wondered if he was granted the unique heaven-rank ability, Wisdom From The Void, to restore balance to the seven witch kingdoms due to the unfair treatment of men, which restricted their access to knowledge and learning.

If it was truly heaven's intention, it could only be disappointed. After all, the world picked the original host of the body to carry out the noble mission, but they got him instead.

...

"My Lord, do you need us to assist you in battle?" a subjugated matriarch asked, slightly unwilling and still recovering from her injuries.

Although she had sworn the Oath of Magic, her heart was not loyal. She could only follow Vaan's orders by force, not by choice.

Nevertheless, Vaan shook his head.

"Take your people and retreat to the foot of Vossen's magic tower. This is my battle and my fun. I don't need any of you to interfere, not that you can do much in your current state anyway. Just sit back and enjoy the show."

"Understood."

Shortly after the subjugated supremacist witches moved away from the blood-stained street outside the Vossen's territory, Vaan reassumed a tired and worn-out appearance.

"Die, imperial dog! Your head will be mine—!"

Following a distant roar, a matriarch revealed her hidden Early-stage High Witch rank power for the first time, surprising many spectators and rivals alike. A giant lightning spear was raised high above her head, crackling with the power of annihilation.

Bzzt—!

Shortly after the matriarch hurled the giant lightning spear with all her might, Vaan narrowed his eyes and stood his ground with a shred of defense.

Boom!

The direct hit transformed Vaan's area into a field of white light, discharging snake-like lightning sparks in all directions indiscriminately.

"Hahahaha! That's what you get for being arrogant, you wretched fool! Did you think you could enjoy my full-powered attack—?!"

Before the lightning-attribute matriarch could finish celebrating her kill, the white lightning dissipated, revealing Vaan's unharmed appearance. Nothing changed except the aura he exuded.

Ding!

<You have entered Bullet Time>

<Your speed has increased by 50 points>

<You have become immune to lightning damage below Mid-level Rank 1>

<Duration: 30 seconds>

...

After getting energized by the lightning spear, everyone's movements within Vaan's vision became slower, which fascinated him.

"What an interesting feeling..." Vaan commented on the buff.

Ding!

<You have been struck by lightning again>

<Your body has been tempered by lightning>

<Your base speed has been improved by one point>

<Bullet Time has been extended by fifteen seconds>

...

Ding!

<You have been struck by lightning again>

<Bullet Time has been extended by fifteen seconds>

...

"Dammit, why won't you just die?! How are you completely fine after taking such a powerful attack?!"

"Well, I'll be damned. That startled me. I didn't expect Lady Electra to be a High Witch. She hid herself well. Unfortunately, she wasted her surprise. That vile man has a high affinity with lightning; avoid using lightning attacks!"

"Yes, my Lady!"

While the lightning-attribute matriarch was dismayed by her ineffective spells, the other matriarch quickly recovered from their surprise and rushed in with their troops.

"Don't give the households a chance! That glory of slaying this imperial dog shall be ours! Blast him to kingdom come!"

"Die!!!"

The supremacist witches shouted excitedly, unaware of Vaan's ploy to lure them in.

When a few matriarchs noticed Vaan's sudden smile and eyes flickering with lightning sparks at the last moment, they immediately felt uneasy.

Something was wrong, but unfortunately, it was too late to retreat...

Chapter 440: Submit Before Absolute Power

Two-hundred thousand supremacist witches fell short of Vaan's ideal number, but he didn't find it surprising. The supremacist witches were selfish and sly, if nothing else. As such, it was actually amazing that he managed to attract two-hundred thousand supremacist witches with his cheap trick.

Perhaps, the overindulgence and unhealthy lifestyle in the capital had led them to become mentally weak and numb to danger.

But then again, what he really attracted was roughly two hundred household matriarchs. The rest of the supremacist witches were just following orders.

Nevertheless, Vaan wouldn't be any less lenient on them because of that.

"Wait! Something is not right—!"

"Too late."

Vaan's eyes shimmered with a cold light before his tyrannical dragon aura exploded outward like the surging tides, assaulting the shores in waves.

At the same time, a curtain of blue flames rose high in the sky, ensnaring the two hundred thousand supremacist witches within it, cutting off their escape and forcing them to face him.

Swoosh!

Vaan cracked the ground with a strong step and lunged straight into the army of supremacist witches that filled the ground and sky.

Like a beast ravaging a garden of flowers, the supremacist witches were helplessly and brutally beaten; countless bones shattered, and blood splattered everywhere, painting the area in red.

"Dammit! How could I fall for such a cheap trick? Curse this vile man! My excitement has blinded my judgment!"

"If you have the energy to curse, then put some more effort into taking him down! Otherwise, we'll be the ones to suffer! This sly man isn't tired at all!"

Although the matriarchs realized their predicament, there was nothing they could do. Their fates were sealed when Vaan raised the flame curtain.

...

From day to night, the supremacist witches' screams resounded from within the towering flame curtain. The spectators outside its boundary could only speculate about the ongoing situation based on their hearing.

However, without the visual aid, their imaginations ran wild, picturing the scene within the flame curtain to be more horrific than it actually was. Even so, their imaginations weren't far from the truth.

After one day and night, the painful wails within the flame curtain finally died down. Shortly after, the flame curtain dissipated into thin air, revealing the supremacist witches' broken and bloodied bodies scattering across the ground.

A cold chill ran down everyone's spines when they saw Vaan standing amidst the mountains of 'corpses,' but in truth, only a few had actually died. The rest were very much alive, albeit barely.

Nevertheless, everyone understood one truth: no one was Vaan's opponent. Therefore, if he was hellbent on subjugating the entire capital, they only had two options; to submit or die.

Once the two hundred thousand supremacist witches swore their Oath of Magic, the remaining witches from the supremacist witch faction had no choice but to recognize Vaan's influence, no matter how much they despised him for being a man.

After all, once the surrendered witches recovered, they wouldn't just be facing Vaan but also his two hundred forty thousand subjugated witches.

Under such circumstances, they were presented with three choices; to either kill themselves before they suffer humiliation at Vaan's hand, take the initiative to surrender themselves and swear their allegiance to avoid the beating, or flee the kingdom before they get caught.

Considering they cherished their lives, killing themselves would be the last thing they would do. No, it wasn't something they would ever do. They didn't want to die.

"Dammit, which hole did this menace crawl out from? He has completely ruined my plans!"

Up on the fifty-third floor of a distant magic tower, a supremacist matriarch bit her nails with a grudging look.

Originally, she was preparing to maximize her benefits in the capital before taking all her wealth and fleeing to the Kingdom of Verdant Woods with her people before the empire attacked. But now, she was about to be forced out of the capital before she could take everything she could.

At the same time, other supremacist matriarchs were also having similar thoughts in their magic towers.

Without Queen Henrietta around to hold the fort, they believed the Kingdom of Black Rose was done. Thus, it was in their best interest to take what they could and flee to a neighboring witch kingdom to start over.

Most of them didn't care what happened to the Kingdom of Black Rose so long as they survived.

They were no different from parasites, leeching off the kingdom when it was still prosperous and readily abandoning it once it sank.

"What will become of us now, Margaret?"

"I don't know... Whatever that man—the Lord wills..."

A few surrendered witches looked like they had lost their souls as they dragged their broken bodies to the side of the streets and recuperated from their injuries.

They had no idea what the future had in store for them now that they had sworn their allegiance to man. However, they thought the worst.

Meanwhile, several neutral matriarchs led their battle witches over, numbering in the twenty thousand. At first, it seemed like they had come to fight, but they didn't have a shred of hostile intentions.

A leading black-haired matriarch signaled her people to stop at a safe distance from Vaan before she approached him by herself.

"I have a few questions I want to ask you, Your Excellency. If you permit it?"

"Ask away."

After the black-haired matriarch asked, Vaan calmly consented with a simple hand gesture. Once the black-haired matriarch received his confirmation, she sought out his intentions.

"What do you intend to do once you force everyone to submit to you, Your Excellency?"

"Raise an army to repel the empire's inevitable invasion, abolish slavery, grant equal rights to men and women alike, and reshape this kingdom."

The black-haired matriarch and the other neutral witches were immediately astonished, not because of the content of Vaan's reply but the confidence he exuded in uttering them.

"How can you be so sure we can win against the empire if we follow you? How can we be sure that you're not working for the empire? And if the whole kingdom follows you, how do you intend to face Her Majesty's wrath?"

"All of that can be answered with one simple question."

Shortly after Vaan spoke, he extended his hand toward the sky.

In the next instant, the vast sky trembled as an incomparable amount of fiery power gathered high above the capital, forming a miniature blue sun that grew with alarming speed.

Eventually, the blue sun became so enormous it blotted out the immediate sky, transforming the capital into a scorching summer. Even so, it didn't stop growing and raising the temperature.

Everyone felt unbearable under its intense heat despite the distance between them.

At the same time, they were all deeply shocked; their hearts trembled due to the seemingly infinite power of fire.

"Do you think anyone can stop me if I really want to do something?"

Faced with Vaan's question, the black-haired matriarch couldn't think of anyone besides the seven Great Devils from Gehenna. As for people on Pangea, there were none.

The black-haired matriarch didn't doubt that if Vaan dropped the blue sun on the capital, nothing would be left of it. Everything would disappear in a short instant.

Even the Holy Knight Empire's mighty army was nothing against the giant blue sun.

The black-haired matriarch directly dropped down to one of her knees in front of Vaan, forcing the battle witches behind her to do the same.

"I, Fidelia Vandran, and House Vandran recognize your absolute power and submit to you, Your Excellency!" the black-haired matriarch declared.

Following her declaration, several other neutral matriarchs and their troops also marched forward and lowered themselves in front of Vaan, directly swearing their allegiance with the Oath of Magic.

"House Vandran also submits to you, Your Excellency..."

"House Carpathia swears their allegiance to you, Your Excellency..."

"Hermia offers her allegiance..."

...

As neutral matriarchs and their personal troops continued to take turns offering their allegiances, even the witches that didn't belong to any big or renowned households stepped forward in droves to surrender themselves.

The heat made them sweat profusely and suffocated them, burning their lungs with each inhale; it only grew worse with each passing moment.

"Please have mercy, my Lord!"

Finally, after the witches started pleading, Vaan released the enormous accumulation of fire back to the world.

The blue sun dissipated into thin air, taking all the heat with it. Within moments, the blue sun completely disappeared without a trace, making it seem like an illusion.

However, no one dared to question Vaan's power.

"Not Divine, but above Transcendent... Beyond Transcendent...! This power has to be Beyond Transcendent...! Someone has transcended Transcendents and acquired a greater level of power! And it was a man, no less! How can we fight someone like this?"

The notion of fleeing vanished from many supremacist witches' minds as they felt weak in their knees and fell back on their rears with abject disbelief and shivering horror. Even if they lied to themselves and denied the truth, the image of the enormous blue sun was forever engraved in their memories; it was an unforgettable memory.

Nowhere was safe if they earned Vaan's ire.

If he really wanted to kill them, it would be as easy as turning over his hand. They finally understood that very well.

After the capital's neutral witches submitted, the remaining supremacist witches finally came forward on their own accord to surrender for the chance at life.

Although Vaan could have displayed his absolute power from the start, the effect wouldn't have been as great. It was only made possible after repeatedly weakening their spirits and shattering their beliefs.

Nevertheless, after such a gargantuan event, the capital's witches had, more or less, all fallen under his control.