

## The Witch 471

### Chapter 471: Heavenly Formless Dragon Art

Even after Ulrich's head rolled on the ground and faced Emperor Renardier, he could only look at the person with incomprehensible disbelief, wondering why he was betrayed.

Unfortunately, he would never get the answer.

After all, Emperor Renardier didn't like Ulrich's gaze and immediately followed up with a strong stomp, causing the person's head to explode like a watermelon.

Boom!

The entire mountaintop shook under the impact.

"Between someone dead and someone alive, I believe there's no need for me to prove who is more worthy of your divine blessing, master."

'Kekeke... Oh, how the mighty have fallen. Very well, accept the contract, and you shall receive my divine power. I'm interested to see how you will use it.'

Following Helcan's words, Emperor Renardier received a visual message prompt like a system asking whether he agreed to the contract.

Naturally, he accepted without hesitation.

Shortly after, Emperor Renardier immediately felt an intangible power flowing into his body, filling every corner of his being. In that instant, he felt like he was overflowing with strength.

Thanks to Helcan's divine power, Emperor Renardier got a glimpse and taste of what existed beyond the Transcendent rank.

"Such... power! How marvelous," Emperor Renardier savored the sensation before glancing at Vaan. "You shouldn't have waited for me. Now that I have received the divine blessing of Helcan the Mighty, I am unstoppable!"

Following Emperor Renardier's declaration, his aura and divine power surged in waves as he powered himself up. The way he could freely manipulate Helcan's divine power to strengthen himself was an exceptionally wonderful experience.

"Hahaha! Is this what it feels like for witches when they control their mana?! I can get used to this! Such free control...!" Emperor Renardier laughed maniacally.

After his magic buffs expired, his strength had dropped back to High-level Rank 5. But with Helcan's divine power, it rose back up to Peak-level Rank 5.

If Emperor Renardier could combine his aura as a Late-stage Aura King with Helcan's divine power, achieving the level of a Demigod was not impossible.

Unfortunately, he was still new to Helcan's divine power and couldn't control it skillfully like Ulrich. The latter had taken many years before he could achieve some success in the fusion.

Emperor Renardier would have to be a heaven-defying genius if he wanted to achieve the same result instantly.

As such, Vaan wasn't worried in the least; he was far from worrying.

Why would a Peak Demigod have such worries?

"Heh."

"Something funny to you, young man?"

"Yeah, you. You have become a broken, delusional person, drunk on power. Compared to before, you are a joke now. I'd dare say you have become even weaker."

"I will make you regret saying that."

"You won't be able to."

A big grin appeared on Vaan's face at the end of their exchange. He stored his greatsword in the Heaven-Swallowing Space and linked his hands behind his back.

Ding!

<You have fully comprehended Emperor Renardier's aura circulation method (Peak-rank)>

<You have merged Emperor Renardier's peak-rank aura circulation method with the Way of the Formless Dragon (High-rank)>

<You have created the Heavenly Formless Dragon Art (Peak-rank)>

...

"Hmph!"

Following Emperor Renardier's cold snort, he immediately closed the gap between him and Vaan with a strong step, shattering the ground beneath his feet...

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On the main battlefield, the imperial soldiers continued to suffer casualties at the hands of the battle witches and dragons.

Furthermore, many of them also got crushed to death in the rear from large, heavy boulders rolling down the rocky mountain.

They had prepared them for the enemy, yet they were killed by them instead.

It was pretty ironic.

With the imperial army's dwindling numbers, many imperial soldiers began to lose hope in their emperor. Perhaps, before the emperor could take down their enemy leader, they would be wiped out first.

Boom!

Suddenly, the rocky mountain behind them shattered apart, and a figure flew over, crashing into the middle of their ranks like a fallen meteor.

"Y-Your Imperial Majesty!"

The imperial soldiers immediately cried once they identified the figure in the newly formed pit with half a step in the grave.

A gaping hole could be found in Emperor Renardier's stomach, with severe burns in all parts of his body. Even his hair was all gone without a trace. His armor was also broken and melted into his flesh.

Taking a single blue flaming spear to the stomach, Emperor Renardier was instantly defeated.

Shortly after, a wave of blue flames forced everyone to retreat some distance as Vaan's figure descended into the area.

Emperor Renardier lay powerlessly on the ground with an expression that showed he refused to accept the current situation as he stared up at Vaan.

"You said you weren't going to use your fire ability..." Emperor Renardier weakly uttered.

"I did, but only to achieve my goal," Vaan acknowledged before he coolly said, "Since I achieved my goal, there was no more use for you. Besides, it seemed you needed a reality check."

After Emperor Renardier heard that, the light faded from his eyes. He accepted the fact that it was impossible to beat Vaan. Even if he had reached the level of a Demigod, he still wouldn't be Vaan's opponent.

"Kill me," Emperor Renardier said.

"You will die, but not by my hands," Vaan stated before glancing around at the nervous imperial soldiers. "Your emperor has been defeated! If you want to live, throw away your weapons and surrender! Otherwise, I can reduce you all to ashes here and now!"

Following Vaan's declaration, his blue flames surged toward the sky before turning bright white and round like the sun, appearing seemingly holy and overflowing with boundless power as it grew in size and temperature.

When the imperial soldiers saw that, several of them threw away their swords and dropped to their knees to prostrate without hesitation.

And after the first few did it, others followed like a chain reaction as more joined in amidst the fear, confusion, and uncertainty they all felt.

They felt lost.

"For what and whom have we been fighting...?"

"The emperor we believed in emanates such demonic power, and the enemy leader we've been fighting against seems like the incarnation of the Sun God we worship..."

"Did we try to challenge our own god...?"

Chapter 472: Sudden Turn

At first, not many imperial soldiers thought much of Vaan's power when he summoned the small white sun above their heads. Some even scoffed at him for trying to mimic the sun god they worshipped; they also looked down on those that got easily fooled by it.

However, as the white sun continued to grow in size and temperature, reaching an unbelievable level clearly no mortal had achieved, they had no choice but to acknowledge his divinity.

Even if Vaan wasn't their sun god, he was at least a god among men. And attracting the wrath of such a divine being was the same as bringing ruination to their great empire.

If Vaan wanted to, he could erase their great empire from the face of the earth – that was what many imperial soldiers started to believe as they sensed the enormity of the ever-growing white sun in the sky.

By that point, no mortal armor could protect them from the destructiveness of the white sun if it descended. So, although the heat tormented them, they didn't dare to lift their heads. Their life and death were completely at Vaan's mercy.

As such, even if they didn't acknowledge Vaan and prostrated out of worship, they bowed to plead for mercy.

Those who knew better understood his silent message:

"For years, you have all worshipped an empty god. But now that I am here, I can be your god – a real, living god in the flesh; I will be your giver of light, vanquisher of darkness, and all that is unholy."

With Emperor Renardier's fall to darkness, the imperial soldiers lost their pillar and belief. But if they accepted Vaan, it could become a blessing from a disaster.

Once the imperial soldiers understood that, they completely surrendered.

"Your humble servant greets the Sun God!"

"Your humble servant greets the Sun God!"

One by one, the imperial soldiers gave in and chanted as if it was a prayer. And as if they feared their words couldn't be heard, they vocalized their acknowledgment even louder than the last.

Shortly after the entire imperial army surrendered, Vaan finally retracted the white sun from the sky. At the same time, he made a path for Astoria and the others to reach him.

"He's all yours. Deal with him however you see fit and feel, Astoria," Vaan stated.

When Astoria glanced at Emperor Renardier on the ground, she didn't feel any resentment or hatred, only pity.

After all, the one who robbed her life and family was not Emperor Renardier but his parents. And even then, it was only a suspicion that she had yet to confirm.

She was too young and powerless then to investigate. But now, she could do so and put her heart at peace. And the one who gave her that opportunity was Vaan.

The feelings she felt for Vaan couldn't be described at that moment.

At first, Astoria did not have it in her to kill Emperor Renardier after looking at the person's pitiful state. But then, she remembered that he was the reason why so many people had to die – they died for his selfish ambition.

Her anger immediately surged when she remembered that.

It seemed that the strange atmosphere surrounding the imperial soldiers and Vaan could easily make one forget the tragedy of moments ago.

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Pft!

Meanwhile, Emperor Renardier coughed up a puddle of blood, feeling bottomless anger, pain, and agony after seeing his people prostrated to the enemy. He had fought so hard for the prosperity of his empire, and yet his people readily abandoned him to move forward.

The despair and fury Emperor Renardier felt at that moment made him plunge deeper into the darkness.

'Kekekeke, what a miserable thing you are. Even with my divine power, you couldn't achieve what you desired. And after your sorry defeat, your people abandoned you. Your status as emperor and years of rule means nothing to them. Do you hate it? Do you detest it?

Tell me, what is it that you desire most now?'

'I desire revenge – revenge against the ones who stood in the way of my ambition and all those who abandoned me! I want them all to die!!'

'Kekeke, ah... the hatred. Such delicacy. Surrender your body and mind to me, and I will grant you even more power to fulfill your desire!'

Following the Great Devil Helcan's promise, Emperor Renardier accepted without hesitation.

Even if he had to fall into the deepest pits of hell, he would make sure everyone else suffered with him.

Wrath and malice filled his entire being.

...

Just when Astoria was prepared to cut off Emperor Renardier's head without sparing the person any words, she suddenly noticed Emperor Renardier's black pupils dilated, swallowing the blue and white part of his eyes.

At that moment, Emperor Renardier directed all his hatred and malice at Vaan – the person he wanted to kill most.

If this person didn't exist, he wouldn't have fallen so deeply.

Without warning, Emperor Renardier's body picked itself off the ground and lunged at Vaan with all his fingers and thumb pinched together like a sharpened spear, ready to drill through Vaan's body.

Vaan's eyes instantly narrowed at once, readying himself to block and counter—when Astoria's figure beside him suddenly threw herself in front of him.

"Watch out!!" Astoria cried.



Puchi!

Even with Peak-level Rank 5 armor forged by the dragons, it barely protected Astoria's chest from getting penetrated, as Emperor Renardier's sharp attack put a significant dent in it.

At the same time, the impact sent her body flying, slamming into Vaan. The two were blasted away together—not because Vaan couldn't stop it from happening but because doing so would hurt Astoria even more.

The two were thrown more than several hundred yards away before Astoria coughed up blood with a pale face, feeling completely powerless and devoid of strength.

"Why are you so foolish, Astoria? I could have blocked that..." Vaan sighed with a grave look, holding her in his arms as he forced-fed her his potent blood.

However, Astoria could only respond with a foolish and innocent smile.

"Hehe, my body moved before I could think..." Astoria said before throwing up another mouthful of blood.

"Shh, conserve your strength."

"Mm..."

#### Chapter 473: Vaan's Rage

Although the Peak-level Rank 5 dragon armor protected Astoria, her own body's defense failed to withstand the shock, thus, resulting in critical injuries.

On the other hand, Vaan was still in his Celestial Dragonwolf Transformation. Adding his elemental blessing, his defense could easily reach Peak-level Rank 5. So even if he did get hurt, he would still be in a far better state than Astoria.

Nevertheless, even with the heightened healing properties of his blood, he still failed to bring Astoria out of her critical state.

Her condition was far too serious, and he couldn't afford to spare too much blood either. After all, Emperor Renardier suddenly got stronger, having reached Early-stage Demigod rank.

"You called, Supreme Leader?"

"Take her back to the clan for immediate treatment. Have the dragon lords treat her if it is required. I want her healed. Is that clear?"

"Yes, Supreme Leader!"

Shortly after Vaan did everything he could to preserve Astoria's life, he handed her over to Zodreg to bring her back to the Red Dragon Clan, where they could provide the best treatment possible.

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Meanwhile, shortly after Vaan and Astoria were sent flying away, the imperial soldiers shivered in terror at Emperor Renardier's rise.

His demonic power seemed to have skyrocketed to the point that he didn't seem human anymore. In fact, a normal human wouldn't be able to stand, much less attack with the broken and damaged state his body was in.

"How dare you!"

Aeliana roared furiously, immediately slamming the ground with her Dryad-transformed palms.

In that instant, seeds sprouted from her palm, intertwined, and proliferated rapidly, resulting in a powerful, sharp vine pillar piercing out of the ground at Emperor Renardier's feet, aiming straight for his head.

However, Emperor Renardier simply tilted his head to the side before grabbing the vine pillar with his bare hand. He uprooted it from the ground and flung it away.

As a result, Aeliana was dragged and thrown away along with it. She crashed into many imperial soldiers.

It was just a casual move from Emperor Renardier, but it resulted in heavy injuries for many people.

"Out of my way, insects. I don't have time for weaklings," Emperor Renardier coolly spat.

Seeing that the demonic emperor showed no interest in them, many people from the battle witches and imperial soldiers' side expressed their relief.

As Eniwse and Hester deliberated over whether they could stop such an opponent, the person walked off in Vaan's direction. As such, they hurried over to Aeliana's location to check on her instead.

"I'm alright!"

Aeliana spat with a gloomy frown after she crawled out from among the bodies of the groaning imperial soldiers, who had been used to cushion her fall, albeit not really.

She had been flung so effortlessly.

Even if she wanted to take revenge for her lord, she lacked the qualifications to do so. The enemy was too strong.

"What should we do?" Hester asked.

"Treat the injured and evacuate the area. Unfortunately, there's nothing we can do about that thing. Only Lord Vahn can deal with such a person," Aeliana stated.

"Sigh. I guess that's all we can do," Eniwse agreed with a sigh and said, "Even if we can't assist him, we can at least not become his burden."

Shortly after, they pulled the battle witches away with the matriarchs and also healed the injured imperial soldiers with their healing spells.

"Why are you healing us?"

"Do you prefer if we don't?"

"Uh..."

After receiving such a question, the imperial soldier was unable to answer. Naturally, he wanted to be healed. But at the same time, he couldn't say it.

Many imperial soldiers had mixed feelings about receiving treatment from the witches – people who they had been trying to kill. Even so, the feeling was not bad.

In the end, they were still people—unlike whatever demonic entity Emperor Renardier had become.

...

Step by step, Emperor Renardier approached Vaan's location before he stopped roughly thirty yards away.

At the same time, Vaan glanced back at Emperor Renardier with a cold gaze.

"You shouldn't be able to walk."

"A funny thing to say. No matter how broken this body is, it is still my will that commands. With a strong and indomitable will, even a cripple can walk again. You can achieve anything as long as your will is strong enough."

"..."

Shortly after Emperor Renardier spoke, a brief silence followed.

"Thank you for sparing the others. I'd take it that Emperor Renardier is no longer with us. Are you the Great Devil, Helcan the Mighty?" Vaan asked.

"It is I," the demonic emperor calmly nodded and said with a grim smile, "And I have no interest in weaklings. You, on the other hand, are a different story. I haven't heard or seen anyone like you in Pangea before. I'm interested in fighting you and finding out your limits."

"I would have been interested in taking my time, fighting someone strong like you, too," Vaan admitted before his expression turned colder. "...Unfortunately, you hurt someone you shouldn't have."

"That imbecile from earlier? Kekeke, such meager strength, yet dared to stand in my way," Helcan chuckled sinisterly before scoffing, "If anything, she hurt herself. The blame is not mine to bear."

"..."

Vaan was silent for a moment. He wanted to converse with Helcan to fish for information and feel out his opponent. That was the most logical thing to do against a person who has been possessed by a Rank 6 divine being.

However, he found it difficult to do when he was feeling bottomless rage inside. In the end, he inwardly sighed. It seemed Astoria's importance weighed more heavily on his heart than he believed she did.

Sometimes, one just had to forget about the calculations and consequences and resort to their primal instincts, letting loose once in a while.

"Can you feel it?"

"Feel what?"

"My animosity!"

Shortly after Vaan stopped suppressing his rage, something in his mind had snapped, causing his aura to change completely into that of a wild beast.

It almost seemed like he had turned into a different person as he glared at the demonic emperor, full of wrath.

Boom!

A beam of multi-colored flames struck down where Helcan's incarnation stood and burned away everything instantly except the person standing in it.

Even with the broken Rank 5 armor melting into molten liquid, his clothes turning to ashes, and his flesh becoming charcoal black, Helcan's incarnation remained standing with a casual expression that soon lifted into a smile, seemingly unaffected.

"Is this the extent of your animosity? Kekeke, I'm definitely feeling it! Such amazing comprehension of the Fire Law for one so young!" Helcan's incarnation exclaimed heartily.

Despite feeling the full extent of the pain of being burned alive, Helcan's incarnation remained so nonchalant to it.

If everyone realized that, they would be horrified by his tolerance.

"Go to hell!" Vaan roared.

Chapter 474: A Sense of Deja Vu

Boom!

Another beam of multi-colored flames struck down on Helcan's incarnation, causing him to sink several dozen feet lower after the ground cracked, shattered, and concaved under the sheer force of the impact.

Following the force of impact, the cracked surface and broken rocks disappeared into a single molten substance, forming a pool of lava and sinking Helcan's incarnation in the ground further until he completely submerged.

After the earth in the area was liquified, it was further reduced to gas under the terrifyingly intense heat. The eruption of gaseous earthen substances made the region impossible for anyone else to come close to it, let alone survive within it.

It was no different from the surface of the sun.

Helcan's incarnation was thoroughly burned inside out, not just his exterior. But despite sustaining such damage, his body failed to lose its form when everything else around him did.

Vaan's multi-colored flames only managed to burn Helcan's incarnation at a surface level.

Only the flesh was burned; the muscle, bones, and organs were all intact despite such high heat flowing through them. They were reinforced and protected by Helcan's divinity to keep his incarnation from being destroyed.

After all, Emperor Renardier's body was the only medium keeping Helcan's connection to Pangea.

Swoosh!

Helcan's incarnation suddenly shot out of the fiery region, appearing no different from an undead that had just crawled out from the purgatory level of hell, charred black from top to bottom with magma lines all over his body.

Even his eyes were seemingly gone, replaced by two pits of fire spewing out from their sockets.

Emperor Renardier's resemblance was nowhere to be found. Helcan's incarnation had completely turned into an undead-looking fire demon after taking on Vaan's flames.

"Kekekeke! C'mon, show me more! This can't be everything you got, boy!"

Helcan's incarnation excitedly lunged toward Vaan, seriously aiming his claw-like hands at the latter's heart without concerning himself with whether Vaan could on his attack.

At the same time, Vaan narrowed his eyes with a fierce glint.

Extreme Lightning Flash Step!

With a quick burst of instantaneous speed, Vaan evaded to the side of Helcan's incarnation's attack, then took a two-handed sword pose before his greatsword even appeared in his grip.

Puchi!

Helcan's incarnation immediately lost his left hand after Vaan swung down on it.

Evidently, physical attacks were still effective against Helcan's incarnation. Only the effect of Vaan's Fire Authority was limited by Helcan's divinity.

Nevertheless, after Helcan's incarnation lost his left arm, he immediately lunged after it, grabbing it with his right hand and jamming it back in place.

Vaan's eyes flickered.

"How inconvenient. If only I also had a weapon and set of equipment that I could utilize to bring out my strength."

"Boohoo."

During the next clash, Vaan cut off Helcan's incarnation's arm again.

However, he did not give the latter another chance to reattach it, as he immediately burned it with his flames, reducing it to ashes and scattering it in the wind.

Helcan's incarnation failed to recover his missing arm in such a state. Evidently, Helcan's divinity didn't extend to parts that had been detached from the main body.

But even if Vaan hacked Helcan's incarnation into a million pieces and erased them one by one, he still wouldn't be satisfied.

After all, doing so would only send Helcan back to Gehenna; it wouldn't make the Great Devil suffer during his incarnation in Pangea, nor would he gain much information from it.

During the first several exchanges, Vaan's rage had already subsided. It seemed it was only a momentary surge of emotion, which he couldn't keep up for long.



Even if he wanted to shut off his mind, he couldn't stop his heaven-defying thought processing from taking in all the information and analyzing the battle in detail.

Suddenly, Vaan stopped using physical attacks and kept his distance from Helcan's incarnation; he only continued to use his Fire Authority afterward.

First came the blue flames, then the purple flames, the black flames, the green flames, the white flames, the red flames, the yellow flames...

Vaan's subsequent fire attacks continued to change color as he bombarded Helcan's incarnation. He tested the effect of each attack, collected the information, and experimented with a new attack each time.

"Kekeke, you must really hate me for you to keep using something that's clearly ineffective but still inflicts the most pain. I suppose that woman was really important to you," Helcan's incarnation chuckled sinisterly.

"She is," Vaan coolly admitted before adding, "However, I am thankful towards you. Thanks to this mistake, I am reminded of what's most important – of what I have to cast away to protect every other thing I consider important."

"Also, thanks to your appearance, I now know a little of what to expect moving forward and prepare for it. So no, I do not hate you. I only feel grateful."

"Let this be the first and last mistake I'll ever make," Vaan declared.

If he were given another choice, he would kill Emperor Renardier on the spot.

It was too much for him to expect he could have emotions like a normal human being. He was most definitely not a normal human being. He was given a great gift and a certain destiny to fulfill. To desire some normality in his life was a great injustice to the gift he was given.

He mustn't be tied down by human emotions, morals, and expectations; they were chains, and complacency was the guillotine.

Never again would he forget.

'To protect, I have to abandon. To save, I have to destroy...' Vaan thought before getting a strange sense of déjà vu, even though he had no recollection of a similar incident.

"I don't really get what you are trying to say, but if you're that grateful to me, you should serve me! Someone as talented as you should be a general in my divine kingdom!"

"You want me to serve you? Sure, I'll serve you... to these flames!"

Helcan's incarnation tried to recruit Vaan, but he was suddenly met with a beam of grey flames, causing him to frown with discomfort.

"What the hell are you trying to do? Stop it. Such a disgusting flame..." Helcan's incarnation demanded with displeasure.

However, Vaan wouldn't stop just because Helcan's incarnation demanded it so.

#### Chapter 475: Flames That Burn Divinity

Helcan started to feel uncomfortable despite showing seemingly absolute tolerance to pain previously because Vaan's flames were no longer just burning the physical world; he was learning to target his soul – his divinity.

Thus, Vaan required practice. And due to time-constraint, he had to improvise.

From white flames to dark grey flames, then light grey flames, Vaan continued to apply different concepts – different actualizations to manifest flames with different effects.

Each time he got closer to his goal, his flames also became fainter in color. At the same time, Helcan's incarnation also felt increasingly frustrated and furious.

"Stop it! I said fucking stop it! Don't you dare use such disgusting flames on me, you wretched human!"

"And I should stop because you said so?"

Following Vaan's retort, he trapped Helcan's incarnation in a cage of very faint grey flames, leaving the person nowhere to run—not because the person couldn't, but because the person didn't want any contact with his flames.

"Dammit! I gave you a chance to serve a great Rank 6 divine being and above billions of lives, second only to me in my divine kingdom! And yet you dare refuse and anger! Don't you fear my wrath?!"

"No, but you should start fearing me."

"How impudent! You are but a mere Peak-stage Demigod, while I am a Peak-stage Divine Spirit! The gap in our power is as vast as the earth and sky! Even if this incarnation can't exhibit my full power, there's nothing you can do that would make me feel threatened! To you, I am everlast—  
Arghh!!"

Just when Helcan's incarnation became heated in his speech, he was struck by something that made him feel pain unlike anything he had ever felt before and definitely on a completely different level compared to the previous flames.

If the early flames were like small tugs on his soul, the latest one was like a butcher knife that cleaved into his soul!

It was a gut-wrenching, soul-tearing sensation that reached the very core of his entire being! Helcan didn't just feel threatened; he actually felt fear – fear towards a mere Peak-stage Demigod!

Such humiliation!

"You!" Helcan's incarnation pointed his finger at Vaan with an intense glare and barked, "What kind of flame did you just use?!"

"You didn't see it? Try taking another look," Vaan smiled coldly after he finally succeeded in manifesting his special concept.

Of course, he didn't give his enemy another chance to make a comeback or escape; he struck Helcan's incarnation with the full might of his new flames that seemed invisible to the naked eye.

"Arghhh—!!!" Helcan's incarnation squealed like a pig getting slaughtered.

He couldn't see Vaan's flames, but he could clearly feel his divinity... burning away! His divinity was getting burned away by a Peak-stage Demigod's Fire Authority!

That said, Vaan's flames weren't really invisible. There were outlining distortions and tears in space that made it seem like his flames were hidden.

However, where the main body of his flames should have been, nothing could be sensed. That's because there was nothing there at all!

"T-T-This is...! But, no, that's impossible! How? How can you wield such power?! No one in Chaos should be able to wield the power of nothingness anymore! How?!"

"Well, I am someone who can pick up the slightest details and learn from it. But as for what I learned, why should I tell you? Also, this isn't Chaos; this is Pangea! So just go ahead and fuck off back to Gehenna, you son of bitch!"

After giving Helcan's incarnation the middle finger, Vaan watched him burned to nothingness, body and mind, by his Flames of Nihility.

Indeed, Helcan had been right on the mark regarding the nature of his Flames of Nihility.

He had implemented the powerful concept of nothingness into his comprehension of the Fire Law, though it had taken him numerous attempts before he succeeded.

The concept of nothingness was something he had come to learn after hearing about Chaos and chaos cycles from Narvim. And he experienced first-hand its destructiveness when he found the Realm Fragment in the Red Goblin Mountains.

The Realm Fragment wasn't sharp because it was a dimensional shard; it was because of the remnant power of nothingness attached to the concentrated power of existence.

In order for Chaos to exist eternally when all chaosverse were fated to fade to nothing... It had to be because it was overflowing with the power of existence to counteract nothingness.

This wasn't a difficult conclusion based on logic.

In order to manifest the Flames of Nihility, he had to understand that fire isn't just about the state of being hot; it was just one aspect of the Fire Law. The main aspect of the Fire Law is the ability to burn and destroy.

Since nothingness also had the power to destroy, it was possible to create a link and manifest the flames that could burn away one's existence.

The power of existence made anything possible; the only limit was one's imagination and level of existence.

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Chaos, Gehenna Realm

Within a star system with seven planets, Helcan's furious roar resounded throughout the barren-looking red planet, which was also the fourth planet in the star system.

Helcan ruled the entire red planet; it was his divine kingdom. And in this world of red, the denizens of his Divine Might Kingdom all felt his fury during his outburst. Even the other Great Devils were alerted by it.

"Dammit—! I swear if you step into Chaos, I will use everything at my disposal to kill you! How dare you harm my source of divinity!" Helcan bellowed with rage within the walls of his shiny, red stone castle that looked like it was made from the crystallized blood of countless warm-blooded beings.

After Helcan's incarnation was burned to nothingness by Vaan's Flames of Nihility, his soul was damaged.

Although he could exploit his divine kingdom's resources to recover, restoring the soul damage would take several hundred years. The extent of his power was also reduced during such a period.

Considering Chaos was full of chaotic, turbulent situations, being in such a state was the same as allowing others to exploit him.

"Someone seems rather feisty today. What happened?"

"Piss off, Balmodan! I have no interest in entertaining you today!"

Helcan glared menacingly at Balmodan, finding his self-invited, sudden visit unwelcoming.

Chapter 476: Nothingness and Existence

Helcan the Mighty's main body was that of a ten-foot-tall demonic gorilla with two curled-back horns. He was huge and burly, packed with physical power within his bulky muscles.

Even without his known title, anyone could guess he was a tyrant with immense brute strength.

However, the crimson glow within his red eyes had weakened since Vaan had burned away some of his divinity, effectively reducing his power and lifespan.

If Helcan knew someone on Pangea could harm his divinity, he would have never possessed Emperor Renardier's body with his divine consciousness.

Naturally, any divine being risked getting their divinity harmed when they possessed weak vessels. But such risks were usually negligible in the mortal realm since no one should have been capable of harming their divinity.

Unfortunately, there was one in Pangea.

"It seems like you got your ass beat in Pangea after using divine possession," Balmodon the Undying laughed before abruptly becoming cold and nonchalant, saying threateningly, "I'd fix that tone if I were you."

"Did you think you are still my equal after losing some of your divinity? I guess you're only around the Late-stage Divine Spirit rank now," Balmodon added with a cold laugh.

Unlike Helcan, who was a true demon from birth, Balmodon was originally human and still retained the appearance of one, albeit much larger than most.

Although Balmodon wasn't as tall or bulky as Helcan, his muscles were more defined and seemed incomparably heavy. This was especially visible at a glance as Balmodon was topless, only wearing ragged leather shorts and some semblance of straw sandals.

With rough patches of hair on his chest and forearm, a sharp gaze, and messy, long, mane-like hair, Balmodon looked like he descended from an ancient line of tribal humans who lived primitive lifestyles.

Of course, the desolate land in the background played a part in giving Balmodon such an impression. If the person were put in a normal human society, many would take him for a bum on the streets, albeit an abnormally large and strong one.

"What do you want, Balmodon?" Helcan grumbled with a softer and more receptive tone, clearly giving in to Balmodon's threat.

A wise devil would not pick a losing battle when the odds are stacked against him.

"Tell me everything that happened during your divine possession. It's best if you don't leave out any detail," Balmodon stated before reminding Helcan, "Also, don't forget Nightmare, Hades, and Baator are watching our realm."

"Are you trying to make our secret known? If not, you better pipe down on your voice," Balmodon scolded right after.

"Right..."

Helcan acknowledged his mistake, but he couldn't calm the fury he had in his heart.

After all, he had lost several thousand years' worth of divinity in a single day. Even if he obtained all of Pangea for himself, it wouldn't be able to make up for the loss, let alone only a part of it.

Pangea was just a primitive planet in a desolate region of the latest chaosverse; its tiny population would offer little faith value.

"Someone in Pangea has reached the Peak-stage Demigod rank and wields the power of nothingness. We will only suffer if we send our divine consciousness over," Helcan stated.

"Peak-stage Demigod? So fast?" Balmodon frowned and said, "No one was expected to reach the Demigod rank for another two hundred years and seven hundred years for the peak of it..."

"Perhaps... This person has my—"

Balmodon's eyes lit up at a certain possibility when Helcan immediately shut him down the next moment.

"You think that missing primordial relic of yours could raise a person to Peak-stage Demigod? You must be kidding me. Even if that person slayed the seven Transcendent Witches, it wouldn't be enough to reach the Demigod rank, let alone the Peak-stage Demigod rank."

"True, you have a point."

Balmodon acknowledged Helcan's reason without a hint of anger and gave it some more thought for other possibilities.

If honest remarks easily incited the Great Devils, they would have long destroyed themselves from infighting.

"A desolate place like Pangea has no divine energy... It's impossible to reach the Peak-stage Demigod rank without some form of assistance in its present stage of transition to Chaos... Perhaps... that Fire Dragon God finally croaked and passed on his soul energy! Haha!"

Although Balmodon thought that, he didn't seem to believe it seriously and simply laughed it off as a joke.

However, Helcan surprised him when he partly agreed.



"I also thought of that," Helcan nodded before saying, "However, this person's comprehension of the Fire Law has already reached the permissible peak of his level, and you know just how difficult it is to comprehend the laws; it's even more difficult than reaching its corresponding soul rank."

"Considering this person is still young but has abilities that don't match his age, I believe he is a reincarnated expert of his chaosverse," Helcan stated.

There were two types of reincarnation: the normal reincarnation through the natural cycle and the unnatural one that doesn't.

Naturally, the one that entered the natural cycle of reincarnation would have their level of existence reset with a slight chance of retaining their memories.

On the other hand, unnatural reincarnation doesn't reset one's level of existence since it is done by maliciously entering a living body and wiping out the original soul, replacing it with one's own soul. By doing so, one would be able to skip the natural cycle of reincarnation and keep their level of existence and memories fully intact.

Balmodon didn't need to ask to understand which of the two types of reincarnation Helcan was referring to.

"That does seem to be the most plausible reason," Balmodon acknowledged before muttering, "A reincarnated expert from the new chaosverse, huh?"

Nevertheless, Helcan failed to mention Vaan's connection with the Red Dragon Clan. Not only did he reveal his dragon bloodline, but he also exposed the dragons.

However, the thought of Vaan acquiring the Fire Dragon God's inheritance and leading the Red Dragon Clan never crossed Helcan's mind.

After all, Vaan was the supreme commander in the Kingdom of Black Rose's war with the Holy Knight Empire. So it wasn't strange for the dragons to follow his orders since the Red Dragon Clan was working with the Kingdom of Black Rose to repel the Holy Knight Empire.

If anything, Vaan only shared a friendly relationship with the Red Dragon Clan, and his dragon bloodline was proof of that friendship.

However, that's also why Helcan believed Vaan couldn't be the Red Dragon Clan's Supreme Leader. After all, he possessed more than just the dragon bloodline; he also had a wolven bloodline.

The proud dragons would never follow such a mixed-blooded being nor allow such a person to obtain their Fire Dragon God's inheritance—if the Fire Dragon God had truly passed away, that is.

What made Helcan even more certain of that was the age of the Rank 5 dragons; they were all relatively very young – still far from the same age as the adults, seniors, elders, and dragon lords in their clan.

"Right, we need to be careful of the Fire Dragon God and Red Dragon Clan. I fear they have become more powerful than ever," Helcan mentioned.

"Why do you say that?" Balmodon frowned before asking, "What have you not told me, Helcan?"

"I've met Rank 5 dragons during my divine possession," Helcan stated.

"However, they were all relatively young – somewhere around 300-odd years. They would have only been newborns when the Red Dragon Clan fled to Pangea. And yet, their young are already at such a level. It's hard to say what level of power the older ones have achieved."

"Given the desolateness of Pangea, I find it hard to believe anyone could ascend to the Demigod rank, let alone the Divine Spirit rank," Balmodon said with narrowed eyes.

"That said, 80% of Pangea's surface is covered by water and remains practically unexplored by humans. The Red Dragon Clan could have access to far richer resources that we aren't aware of. So they are still a cause of concern."

"It seems we need to speed up our plan. Otherwise, Pangea will become too strong to subjugate, and we will end up with another powerful neighbor. We need to consult with the others," Balmodon said seriously.

"That goes without saying," Helcan coolly said before mentioning, "However, you have missed the most important part of what I said: There's someone in Pangea who can wield the power of nothingness!"

"Do you not understand the gravity of this discovery, or are you feigning ignorance?" Helcan asked gravely.

"No, I don't understand the gravity of this. Why don't you tell me what's so important about this wielder of nothingness, Helcan?" Balmodon coolly asked, not putting any importance on the subject at all.

Nevertheless, he didn't give Helcan a chance to speak before he continued, "Was it true nothingness or just a concept of another law, hm? Do you think it's something special because no one in Chaos can use it?"

"It was just a concept but still nothingness, nonetheless. Isn't it obviously special since no one else in Chaos can use it?" Helcan retorted unhappily.

"Hahaha!" Balmodon cracked up with laughter and patted Helcan heavily on the back, saying, "You stupid gorilla! You're so funny!"

"What do you mean it's obviously something special? It should be obvious that no one in Chaos can wield the power of nothingness! That's because Chaos itself is existence! Nothingness can only 'exist' outside existence, not within it!"

"How can you say something so ignorant? Did you not learn in a demon academy in your younger years? Oh, wait... I guess you didn't, or more like, you couldn't. Hahaha..." Balmodon continued to laugh at Helcan.

However, Helcan could only endure Balmodon's humiliation in silence.

'Just you wait, you fucker. Once I recover my strength and surpass you, I'm going to fuck you up!' Helcan secretly vowed while gnashing his teeth.

Chapter 477: Uh... Yeah, A Lot Has Changed During Your Absence

From nothingness came everything in existence, and everything in existence would eventually return to nothingness – such was the perpetual cycle of life and death of chaosverses. That was, until Chaos was created, enabling infinite growth of existence – an everlasting Chaos.

Vaan couldn't even begin to imagine how powerful a person had to be to create Chaos. It was, without a doubt, an incredibly impressive feat far out of his reach and many others—if not everyone's reach as well.

Nevertheless, he felt like he could partly understand the sheer will of desperation the person had before Chaos was created.

After all, before Chaos existed, the person's only chaosverse was bound for destruction; the power to create Chaos stemmed from the will to save his dying chaosverse.

Vaan had a feeling understanding nothingness was the first step toward realizing the same power that created Chaos.

If he followed the same path as that great being, perhaps he could also reach the same height one day – or so he hoped.

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Shortly after Vaan destroyed Helcan's incarnation, he went ahead and settled the remnant unrest within the imperial army and prepared to enter the Holy Knight Empire's capital city with the battle witch army.

But before the last step, he left Zafnir and the other Rank 5 dragons in charge of supervising the two armies before returning to the Red Dragon Clan via Zafnir's spatial magic.

Upon his return, he quickly found out Astoria's emergency treatment had already concluded.

Thanks to the third dragon lord's magic and medicine, Astoria was safely brought out of mortal danger. Although she was still weak, she didn't suffer any lingering trauma miraculously.

"There's no lingering trauma?" Vaan repeated for confirmation with a surprised look.

"None, Supreme Leader," Lord Sondrei confirmed before saying, "Lady Astoria was extremely lucky in this case."

"She would have died from that Early-stage Demigod-level attack if her body had been weaker. And if her body were any stronger, it would have been more difficult for her to recover fully. Fortunately, she's a light-attribute High Witch and received some crucial preliminary treatment."

"Thanks to that, she will not only recover fully, but her body will also become stronger than before. We could almost call it a blessing from a disaster," Lord Sondrei added.

"Destruction and reconstruction, huh?" Vaan muttered thoughtfully.

After Vaan received the medical report from the third dragon lord, he went ahead and visited Astoria in the guest building of Ninth Peak, where she was resting.

"Vaan..."

"Don't move. You are still weak and need to rest."

Astoria wanted to get up from her bed to receive Vaan when he entered her room. However, he immediately advised her against it, forcing her back into bed.

"I did something really foolish this time, didn't I?" Astoria asked with her head down.

"That you did; it was truly foolish of you," Vaan admitted without mincing his words before adding, "However, I don't blame you. I am to be blamed for allowing it to happen in the first place."

"Don't be so hard on yourself," Astoria slowly shook her head and said with a sigh, "No one could have guessed that Emperor Renardier would still be able to move in such a broken and disabled state, and with such power and speed on top of that."

"But he was a Devil's Contractor. I should have anticipated the possibility and killed him before he was given a chance to make a comeback," Vaan argued before suddenly frowning. "No... he wasn't even a Devil's Contractor anymore at that point but the Great Devil Helcan himself."

"Emperor Renardier must have made a new deal and let the Great Devil Helcan incarnate in his body," Vaan guessed.

Once he realized that, he couldn't help but look down on the person.

'What a weak-willed little bitch,' he thought.

Nevertheless, that was the difference between them. Even with two hundred years of life experience, Emperor Renardier was still someone who was born with everything from the start.

On the other hand, he started from rock bottom and made his way up in life. The despair the two of them would feel after losing everything would be very different.

At the very least, he wouldn't be consumed by despair like that puss—Ahem, like that emperor.

"Like I said, you are being too hard on yourself," Astoria softly said.

"You have been blessed with intelligence unlike anyone I have ever seen, but you are still human, not a god, Vaan. You can't see the future or predict it without the necessary information. Unfortunately, we know too little about Devil's Contractors."

"Still, we can learn from our mistakes and do better," Astoria added with a smile.

"That's the issue, Astoria," Vaan wryly smiled back and said, "We make mistakes and learn from them. But sometimes, we don't get that chance. Sometimes, it just takes one mistake to end everything."

"It's a cruel and unforgiving world we live in. We can't afford to make mistakes. I hope you won't be so foolish again. I don't want you to die for me; I want you to live for me. Do you understand?" Vaan stated.

"Mm..." Astoria nodded, feeling guilty.

Nevertheless, she was still a Mid-stage High Witch. It was already a miracle that she was able to react to an Early-stage Demigod-level attack.

She wasn't given enough time to think, nor was she capable of pulling herself back out in such a situation.

Even so, if there was one thing they had both learned from this incident, it was the extent of her feelings.

She was willing to sacrifice herself for Vaan—not because she felt a sense of responsibility to protect him for humanity's future, but because she truly loved him after all.

Although she was able to affirm her genuine feelings, it also cost her greatly. She wasn't oblivious to the invisible wall Vaan had put between them.

Even though he was in front of her, their relationship also seemed to have become more distant.

Astoria was unlike any of Vaan's other women; when she loved someone, she loved them with her life. It was the purest form of love, uncorrupted by greed and self-interest.

However, while her love was as sweet as honey, it was also toxic as poison. Too much of it was deadly. As the saying goes: love makes people stupid and do illogical things.

Furthermore, love was also like a flame; the bigger it was, the faster it died out.

Thus, if they wanted to tread the long path together, Vaan had to kill some of their feelings and love moderately.

They needed balance.

Astoria seemed to have understood that. Thus, she didn't say anything and reflected on her mistake; it had been a valuable lesson for them both.

Since they were both still alive, they could still move forward together.

"Get some more rest now. You can rejoin us after you recover your strength. I will handle everything until then," Vaan said, tucking Astoria into bed.

Although Astoria was unwilling to be absent during such a crucial moment of the kingdom and empire, she accepted her situation.

"Mm," Astoria softly nodded.

Shortly after, Vaan left the guest building and had a dragon lord send him back to the Holy Knight Empire.

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Meanwhile, back in the Kingdom of Black Rose, Henrietta had rushed back with Ember and her subordinates after they finished settling down the people of the Kingdom of Verdant Woods.

However, the moment they hastily returned to Blackthorn City, they were immediately stunned by the atmosphere inside.

At first, they thought the city had been deserted for the war. However, they realized the witches were mostly cooped up in their magic towers, producing and refining mana stones.

On the other hand, the supremacist witches that did roam outside didn't abuse or torture the male slaves that passed them.

Henrietta almost failed to recognize her own city under such a strange situation.

Nevertheless, when the witches spotted Henrietta in the city, they stood frozen on the spot instead of coming forward to greet her.

"What's the matter? I was only away for a short while, and you've already forgotten who I am?" Henrietta frowned with a raised eyebrow.



The dumbfounded witches immediately glanced at each other, trying to figure out how they should respond to Henrietta.

After all, all the witches in Blackthorn City had sworn their allegiance to Vaan. Thus, even if Henrietta was still the official ruler of the Kingdom of Black Rose, she only existed in name – since all it would take was a single word from Vaan to turn all the witches against Henrietta.

Nevertheless, they figured that they could still serve her as long as there was no official conflict of interest between Vaan and Henrietta.

"Welcome back, Your Majesty. It's gratifying to see you safely return. I knew nothing could happen to you. But, uh... Yeah, a lot has changed during your absence..."

"What of the war with the Holy Knight Empire? I heard they invaded us?"

"Rather than explaining, it'll be easier to see the situation for yourself, Your Majesty. We can take the teleportation platform to reach the border region instantly, Your Majesty."

"We have a teleportation platform...?"

"Yes... A lot has changed..."

After the neutral witch briefed her, Henrietta and Ember followed the neutral witch to the teleportation platform in the central district and reached Fort Whitebridge quickly.

But by the time they stopped by the edge of the wall for a look, there was nothing to see, not even a trace of battle. Everything had been cleaned up.

"..." Henrietta was silent for a moment before asking, "So what did you want to show me again?"

"Uh..."

The neutral witch scratched the back of her head, feeling at a loss for a moment. Soon, a light bulb lit up in her head before she quickly pulled a battle witch over for a inquiry.

Only then did they all finally learn the latest news of the war.

#### Chapter 478: Henrietta's Shock and Suspicion

However, Henrietta's casual confusion and bewilderment soon turned into serious shock after she learned the battle witch army had already departed to invade the Holy Knight Empire.

"What did you just say?! Someone called Lord Vaan led the battle witch army to invade the Holy Knight Empire?! And with less than 300 thousand battle witches, no less?!" Henrietta bellowed, demanding immediate confirmation.

It was one thing to be invaded by other countries but to invade other countries had entirely different consequences!

The possibility of a continental war happening alarmed Henrietta greatly.

"What about the dragons? How many dragons assisted in battle?" Henrietta quickly added, thinking the decision to invade was due to the Red Dragon Clan's involvement.

However, the battle witch didn't immediately answer.

"..."

The battle witch could only blink once at Henrietta for a moment, maintaining a respectful smile while hiding the dumb look she suppressed from showing.

"I'm sorry? What did you just say, Your Majesty? There are dragons?"

"The dragons didn't participate?"

Henrietta was immediately startled after realizing the dragons didn't participate in defending the Kingdom of Black Rose's borders. However, she didn't elaborate.

More importantly, how on earth did they fend off the Holy Knight Empire's 1.5-million-strong army with only a mere 300-thousand battle witch army?

Furthermore, they only lost 20 thousand battle witches in battle...

Thinking up until that point, Henrietta immediately focused on the supreme commander of the battle witch army, the one who led the witches to such an overwhelming victory against the Holy Knight Empire.

"This Lord Vaan... He couldn't be the same deceased Vaan Raphna I approved to be entitled as a Venerable Sage, right?" Henrietta asked.

"I'm afraid he is, and he is actually still alive, Your Majesty," Ember mentioned, still dwelling over the topic of dragons.

However, she also understood that Henrietta didn't intend to talk more about it.

At the same time, Henrietta directed her attention to Ember.

"You knew this man was alive the whole time and didn't disclose this information to me?" Henrietta wondered with furrowed brows.

"I couldn't, Your Majesty," Ember smiled wryly with a bit of guilt before saying, "Astoria is obsessed with this man. She didn't want you to know he was still alive until he was officially entitled Venerable Sage."

"..."

Henrietta immediately felt speechless.

She was only away from her kingdom for a short while. Yet, it felt like she was a cavewoman that had just been unfrozen from ice and returned to human society—only to find out the world had changed entirely. It was just one piece of surprising news and shock after the other.

"Astoria is obsessed with a man... To think that after three hundred years, she finally shows interest in someone. Now, I'm quite curious about this man."

"Are you not also talking about yourself, Your Majesty?" Ember teased with a soft chuckle, but she was also curious about this abnormal existence that emerged in their kingdom.

"Nonsense. How can I target the same man as one of my best friends?" Henrietta scoffed and said, "I am only expressing pure curiosity. Nothing more, nothing less. There's no man worthy of me in this world."

"Sure, if you say so, Your Majesty," Ember giggled, not intending to argue with Henrietta on that point.

Nevertheless, after finding out the Kingdom of Black Rose had repelled the Holy Knight Empire's invasion, they were somewhat relieved.

But at the same time, they gained a greater concern, especially when the situation of the battle witch army in the Holy Knight Empire was unclear.

However, they couldn't just leave the kingdom and chase after the battle witch army's tail—not without grasping the full picture, at least.

"Tell me how the battle here took place."

"Yes, Your Majesty."

Shortly after the battle witch complied, recounting the details of the battle in the border regions. During that time, Henrietta and Ember revealed alternating expressions between astonishment, shock, and confusion.

However, the battle witch didn't find it strange for them to exhibit such reactions. Any normal person would have reacted the same way.

After all, the battle against the Holy Knight Empire couldn't be judged with normal common sense.

While the tactics they deployed against the Holy Knight Empire were impressive, they were still the least remarkable aspects on the list.

The mana utilization method... The high number of High Witches... The extremely powerful defensive upgrade of the forts... The advanced magic tools, equipment, and magic bombs...

A skilled strategist could deploy great tactics, but none of the other aspects could be acquired just because they wished for it.

It defied their common sense.

But while Ember had no idea how the battle witches suddenly acquired such means from Vaan, Henrietta highly suspected the Red Dragon Clan's involvement.

After all, she had an agreement with the Red Dragon Clan.

In Henrietta's opinion, it was impossible for an intelligent man like Vaan to exist, much less in their kingdom, which deprived men of their rights.

Not only did Vaan reveal overwhelming wisdom that did not his age, but he also had an unmatched fire ability that could repel Emperor Renardier's personal attack. In addition, he provided all those incredible aspects and led the battle witches to victory.

Putting all those key points together, Henrietta arrived at a conclusion: Vaan was not human; he was, in fact, one of the dragon lords who had transformed into a human appearance with magic.

The more she thought about it, the more she believed it to be the case.

It was the only way for the Red Dragon Clan to honor their agreement to join hands and defend against any foreign invasions without exposing their true existence.

However, she did remember learning that dragons couldn't transform into human beings, even with their magic, at least not in Pangea.

Perhaps, they found a way?

'It's indeed possible for dragons to transform into human beings. However, this is only possible for beasts when they reach the Divine Beast Realm,' Henrietta's master mentioned.

'What is the Divine Beast Realm? How does it compare to the Transcendent Rank, master?' Henrietta asked.

'How does it compare to the Transcendent Rank? They're not comparable at all!' Henrietta's master scoffed.

'Beasts in the Divine Beast Realm are far stronger than Transcendents. Even the Rank 6 beings of Chaos might not be as strong as them. They are more comparable to the Celestials and Divine Origin Realm experts of my world.'

'That said, Pangea and Chaos possess something that even my world did not: mana. The power of existence here is so abundant I still find it hard to believe such places exist. You don't even need to learn runes, manipulation techniques, and special incantations to bend the world's laws to your whims.'

'As such, it's still quite possible that the dragons have found a way to transform into human beings without reaching the adequate level,' Henrietta's master stated.

That was also the reason why she wanted Henrietta to give up on the Kingdom of Black Rose and enter Chaos. It was a world with infinite possibilities due to the manifestation of the power of existence itself.

There, she would have hope of forging a new, perfect body and achieving her dream of reaching the fabled Beyond True Divinity Realm.

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After Henrietta listened to her master's opinion, she was even more sure of her suspicion.

"I need to make a trip to the Thousand Fog Mountains," Henrietta informed Ember, which surprised the latter.

"The Thousand Fog Mountains?" Ember furrowed her brows with confusion before asking with doubt, "Not the Holy Knight Empire?"

"You heard me, Ember," Henrietta smiled mysteriously.

The Red Dragon Clan was located within the Thousand Fog Mountains and was comparably close, unlike the Holy Knight Empire.

If she visited the Red Dragon Clan, she could better grasp the situation and, if need be, have the dragons send her to the battle witch army's location via spatial magic within mere seconds.

It was a much better option than venturing into the Holy Knight Empire alone without a clear direction, possibly wasting several days before she located the battle witch army.

"Alright, if you wish, Your Majesty," Ember shrugged helplessly.

Even if she asked, Henrietta was unlikely to tell her the reason for visiting the Thousand Fog Mountains.

Everyone had their secrets, and even as a close friend, it wasn't her place to pry.

Henrietta appreciated Ember's understanding.

Nevertheless, just as Henrietta and Ember prepared to depart from Fort Whitebridge, Henrietta suddenly thought of something she had missed.

"Oh, right." Henrietta immediately turned back to the battle witch she had spoken with earlier and asked her, "How did this Lord Vaan convince everyone to follow his orders?"

Considering the battle witch army consisted of 250 thousand witches, many of them were likely supremacist witches from the capital.

Such stubborn people wouldn't have followed the orders of an unknown man willingly.

As such, Henrietta suspected 'Lord Vaan' used some special dragon magic to gain their cooperation and obedience.

However, the battle witch gave Henrietta a strange look when she asked the question.

"Didn't you take the teleportation platform from the capital to get here, Your Majesty?" the battle witch asked, further adding, "You didn't hear it from the others there?"

"No, why?" Henrietta frowned.

"It was sheer violence, Your Majesty... Lord Vaan... He beat up everyone in the capital until they submitted of their own volition and swore their allegiance with the Oath of Magic."

Upon hearing that, Ember, beside Henrietta, immediately put on a serious expression, finding Vaan's actions to be challenging Henrietta's authority as the kingdom's ruler.

However, what she didn't expect was that Henrietta would suddenly burst into hysterical laughter in the same instant.

"Hahahahahahaha! Sheer violence, huh? I see, I see!" Henrietta wiped her tears of laughter and said, "I need to hear more about this later. Oh, but did Lord Vaan at least knock out all of Matriarch Shyla's teeth? Or pluck out all of that old hag's, Matriarch Starla's hair? Oh, oh!

What about—"

"Ahem! Your Majesty!"

Ember coughed, signaling Henrietta to calm down while the battle witch stared at her with a dumbfounded, speechless look.

Chapter 479: Obliterated Without a Chance to Resist

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On the top of a lush green hill on the outskirts of the Holy Knight Empire's capital city, Vaan, his ladies, the border lords, a few matriarchs, and a few imperial lords were situated. There, they camped, overlooking the grand city with the enormous Sun God statue at its center.

They were waiting for the city gates to open.

However, after waiting more than half an hour, it became clear that the city gates weren't opening for anyone. That was even after they announced the empire's defeat in war and demanded the city to surrender peacefully.

"Imperial soldiers are arming themselves and lining up on the walls, my Lord. It seems that the city intends to fight with whatever troops they have left, even after losing their army and emperor," Aeliana commented with a frown.

"The Holy Knight Empire's capital city is home to more than 10 million people. If they intend to fight to the bitter end, they could definitely hold out for a while. However, it's unlikely that everyone in the city would want to go down with it," Vaan said before giving the dragons to scout the city.

'Find out who is commanding the city to resist.'

'Yes, Supreme Leader.'

Shortly after Zodreg and the other nine Rank 5 dragons answered, they immediately flew over the skies of the holy city.

At the same time, Vaan and the others patiently waited for their news.

When Vaan said the city could hold out for a while if they intended to resist to the bitter end, he was only speaking for his army. It was a different story if he was included in the picture.

Nevertheless, after waiting for fifteen minutes, Zodreg and the others returned with their reports.

'Supreme Leader, it appears the Queen Dowager, the emperor's mother, is leading the resistance. She is forcefully conscripting soldiers from the general populace to make up the numbers.'

'There are also some conflicts among the people getting conscripted, Supreme Leader.'

'It appears there are a number of people who do not want to be conscripted to fight. A few people have been executed on the spot for refusing.'

'Supreme Leader, I have discovered an entire legion of powerful aura users. It seems they are all at least Peak-stage Aura Lords, which should be stronger than most nobles and lords. They seem to be called the Great Imperial Legion.'

'The empire had such a strong card left but didn't use it in the war?'

Shortly after hearing the report, Vaan immediately pulled a high-ranking imperial soldier over to learn more about the Great Imperial Legion. Once he listened to the details, he quickly understood why the Great Imperial Legion wasn't brought along for the war.

The Great Imperial Legion was loyal to the empire, but they also placed great importance on the imperial lineage.

In other words, they answered to the true heir.

"That's fine. I've heard enough," Vaan stated.

"My Lord, if you can, please spare the members of the Great Imperial Legion," the imperial soldier pleaded before adding, "It'll be a great loss for our empire."

"That will depend on their attitude," Vaan calmly replied before directing everyone, "Ready the troops and prepare to enter the city. I will have them open the gates for us."

"Yes, my Lord!" the imperial commanders and matriarch witches answered.

There will be no further war. Their war with the Holy Knight Empire had already ended with the emperor's death and the imperial army's submission.

Now was the time to clean up, and they had to do it fast.

After all, even if they had enough justifications for invading the Holy Knight Empire, the other countries may not readily accept the Kingdom of Black Rose taking over another country.

And even if they did, there was always a chance that the Holy Knight Empire's neighboring countries would take the opportunity to divide the land for themselves while the Holy Knight Empire was weakened without consideration for the consequences.

There were always idiots blinded by greed like that; they would fuck around and find out the hard way.

As such, Vaan had to stabilize the Holy Knight Empire quickly before the hungry hyenas started getting ideas.

'Show them the recordings.'

'Yes, Supreme Leader.'

Following Vaan's instruction, Zodreg and the other Rank 5 dragons brought out the magic tools and displayed the large records in the sky for all to see. From beginning to end, the Holy Knight Empire was shown to be at fault.

All their schemes were exposed, but the real nail in the coffin was the reveal of not one but two Devil's Contractors. More importantly, they were none other than their emperor and peace-loving, holier-than-thou Marquis Salazar.

The hearts of the empire were immediately shattered, common people and imperial soldiers alike. Even the Great Imperial Legion appeared to have lost its soul.

With such darkness exposed to the world, their pride in being part of the Holy Knight Empire was utterly destroyed.

"Don't believe it! There's no way our emperor could have been a Devil's Contractor! That's just witchcraft! Illusions, conjured to confuse and demoralize us! Do not fall for the witches' schemes and tricks!"

An enraged voice bellowed as the Queen Dowager made her appearance on the northern walls, accompanied by a man who appeared to be a Rank 5 Aura King.

However, he was only an Early-stage Aura King, far from the emperor's height.

Even so, the man possessed a commanding presence and authority that could sway others into obeying him, albeit still inferior to the emperor.

He was Duke Elfed, the Queen Dowager's nephew from her side of the family, which had gained power after the Queen Dowager's husband ascended the throne and made her the empress.

That said, Duke Elfed and the Queen Dowager appeared intimate without any feelings attached, as if they had made a deal after learning Emperor Renardier died.

"Stay strong, proud warriors, sons, and daughters of the empire! We shall not and will not fall for the enemy's tricks! Do not believe the lies that they show you!" Duke Elfed thundered, attempting to raise everyone's morale.

However, his efforts, while somewhat effective, were still ultimately in vain in the end. Vaan only needed a crack in their hearts, let alone a gaping abyss.

The Queen Dowager and Duke Elfed's superficial patching wouldn't be able to recover the empire's fighting spirits after what was to come.

"I'll be back," Vaan informed Eniwse, Aeliana, and Hester.

Shortly after, Vaan launched himself into the air, leaving behind a trail of blue flames as he had his way over the capital. He eventually stopped at a good spot in the sky and looked down at the masses below.

"The war has already ended, and you have lost. Therefore, cease this meaningless resistance and surrender. There is no need for the empire to continue bleeding. Anyone who still resists will be regarded as an accomplice of the Devil's Contractor and a traitor to humanity," Vaan stated.

His voice traveled far and wide, easily reaching the ears of every person gathered near the northern city walls.

The women, children, and some imperial soldiers were all ready to give up.

However, on the other hand, the lords and nobles who feared losing their positions strongly rejected the idea, even if they knew it wasn't a good choice.

That was because they couldn't accept the potentially miserable life that would follow after the Holy Knight Empire acknowledged its defeat.

As such, they would rather dig a deeper grave for themselves than surrender.

"We haven't lost yet! Our walls still stand firm and tall! Our defenses are strong, and we have the protection of our Sun God! So your paltry tricks won't work on us!" Duke Elfed barked before ordering the troops, "Shoot him down! How dare a witch's plaything soar over our heads!"

Multiple ballistae aimed their giant arrows up and fired. But at Vaan's height, they failed to reach him. Even if some did, they lost most of their power to affect him.

Vaan casually swatted the giant arrows away like they were flies, then glanced down at Duke Elfed with a cool, indifferent expression.

Since the person expressed his desire to resist, he could only blame himself for what followed.

Vaan pointed his index finger at the person, and a beam of white flames descended from the heavens with unimaginable speed and destructive power.

The capital city's magic barrier, which the people had pride and confidence in, was easily torn apart instantly.

Duke Elfed's defiant look stiffened as the bright white light greeted him like the coming of heavenly judgment.

Boom!

The highly destructive white flames struck Duke Elfed's location, vaporizing everything in its path as it melted away that part of the city wall and continued into the ground for several dozen feet.

After the white flames' brilliance subsided, Duke Elfed's figure was nowhere to be seen, gone from the world, completely obliterated without a chance to resist or evade.

Before the person could repel the empire's calamity and sit on the promised throne, he had departed from the world.

Many gazes were directed at Duke Elfed's absent spot, full of shock and disbelief, including the Queen Dowager's as she craned her neck to the hole in the ground beside her.

The pain of her missing arm, which had disappeared along with Duke Elfed, wasn't registered in her absent-minded state; she appeared out of touch with the world in her shock.

Nevertheless, people eventually recovered from their frozen state before they glanced up at Vaan in the sky with newfound fear and dread.

"Your Sun God is not here, but I am. And I assure you, my divine wrath is very real," Vaan calmly stated.

#### Chapter 480: Elsbeth's Judgment

Following Vaan's claim, an immense amount of fiery power converged toward him from every direction, causing his body to shine brightly and blindingly. The intense radiance forced everyone to look away or lower their gazes, almost as if they were bowing their heads.

Instead of summoning a white sun to intimidate the mass, Vaan himself became the white sun, embodying the holiness and purity of its white flames.

Although the scale was small, the presence Vaan radiated was just as great; his divine presence commanded respect and worship.

In that instant, his gaze carried that much more weight.

Even if the people couldn't see it, they could still feel it, which forced them to acknowledge his divine might and prostrate on the ground. The being before them was someone who could dictate their life and death with a single thought, just like the Sun God they worshipped.

To the people of the Holy Knight Empire, the Sun God represented absolute authority.

Within his domain, he was both the giver of life and the reaper of death; his light was warm to those who followed him and scorching to those who opposed him.

Without the Sun God's light, there would only be darkness in the world.

The Sun God was viewed as holy and benevolent, but he never solely represented the goodness of the world. No, The mistaken belief was formed by his blinding, pure light and festered through the passage of time.

However, when the people of the Holy Knight Empire first worshipped the Sun God, he was originally viewed as neither solely good nor evil, benevolent nor malevolent – for he was the arbiter of good and evil, the bringer of balance.

Good and evil did not choose him; he decided what was good and evil.

In the past, the Holy Knight Empire frequently used the Sun God's name to conquer its neighboring kingdoms; the neighboring kingdoms were labeled heretics for not conforming to their faith in the Sun God.

Because of that, no other country in Pangea followed the same faith in the Holy Knight Empire's Sun God. To them, the Sun God was a false god made up by the Holy Knight Empire to be used as an excuse for its selfish, aggressive territorial expansion.

However, the people of the Holy Knight Empire truly believed in the Sun God. The prosperity they enjoyed was all credited to their faith in the Sun God.

As such, when Vaan's image started to overlap with the Sun God's statue in the minds of the imperial soldiers, they quickly lost their will to fight and disobeyed Elsbeth, the Queen Dowager.

They could fight any man but never a god.

Submit, and they might live or defy, and they will die. There was no in-between; resistance was futile – such was the kind of divine presence Vaan projected.

"The Sun God in the flesh...!"

"It's the Sun God! Our god has emerged!"

Following numerous exclamations of the Sun God, many old war veterans prostrated on the ground while shivering in fear without daring to look up.

After all, the Sun God was opposing their empire.

It was possible that the Sun God had emerged to deliver his judgment and wrath for their past misdeeds of misusing his name to wage war and conquer other small countries.

"What the hell are you all doing?! How dare you bow to the enemy! Get up! Get up right this instant! Get up and fight!"

Despite Elsbeth's hysterical and mad howlings, no one listened to her. Her authority as the Queen Dowager meant nothing in front of the Sun God.

No one dared to squeak, let alone speak on her behalf. The pressure from Vaan's silence also made them hold their breath. Even one clenched their rear, not daring to let out a fart.

"Elsbeth Braveheart, the emperor's mother... The Holy Knight Empire can be spared, but you won't be. A treacherous snake like you must die. But before that, I will have you spill every crime you have committed during your lifetime. I doubt the information I have is everything."

"What the hell do you know about me?! And who the hell do you think you are to judge me – when you yourself are a dishonest person with the audacity to impersonate our Sun God!"

Elsbeth spat at Vaan venomously after listening to him condemn her while looking down from above with a cool, collected, and indifferent expression.



"Impersonate your Sun God?" Vaan coldly smirked with a hint of tease as he coolly replied, "Did I claim myself as such? I am only using my power as I see fit. How you interpret it is your problem, not mine."

"And even if I am impersonating your Sun God, that would be considered a merciful act on my part since I can just erase this entire city with a wave of my hand," Vaan coolly stated. "As for your crimes... I do know quite a fair bit."

"Secretly instigating conflicts between members of the pro-loyalist faction, ordering the assassination of countless key figures with opposing views, oppressing witches, removing every woman praised to be more beautiful than you, and even every person who had ever spouted a single bad word about you, your husband, or your son had all disappeared from the face of the earth."

"I could go on and list the names of every person of status you had removed within the last hundred years, but I'm sure the people are wise enough to guess your shadow is behind everyone who had mysteriously disappeared, and this is only the tip of the iceberg."

Shortly after Vaan said that, he shifted his attention to the rest of the people within the Holy Knight Empire's capital city whilst ignoring Elsbeth's livid, ghastly expression.

"People of the Holy Knight Empire, I will give you one last chance at salvation. Apprehend the Queen Dowager and deliver her to me, and you will be spared from my wrath. I will be waiting on the hill outside your northern walls, but don't test my patience."

Not even several breaths after Vaan finished speaking and returned to his hill, members of the Great Imperial Legion immediately acted. They surrounded Elsbeth, disabled her movements and magic, then dragged her to the hill outside.

As that happened, countless people also poured out of the holy city, chasing after them as if they feared being left behind, which didn't come as a surprise for Vaan.

After all, not everyone could directly participate in apprehending Elsbeth and delivering her to him. Thus, in that sense, many people wouldn't be spared from Vaan's wrath.

However, if they followed the Great Imperial Legion and Elsbeth outside the wall together, they could at least express their intent to defy the Queen Dowager.

Thanks to the dragons relaying Vaan's message, everyone in the holy city received it. As such, they all moved towards the north and poured out of the northern gate in streams with fear and anxiety.

Even so, it would still take time before the people emptied the city.

"What the hell are you all doing?! I am the Queen Dowager! This is treason! How dare you treat me like this—! So much for your damn loyalty!"

"Our loyalty lies with the true monarchy of this country, and you are not of royal blood. Thus, we can only sacrifice you for the good of the empire."

As the members of the Great Imperial Legion dragged Elsbeth up the hill, where Vaan waited with his people, the converted imperial army and the battle witch army also cleared the path for them like a split in the sea.

Eventually, Elsbeth was delivered in front of Vaan before the Great Imperial Legion retreated several steps with their heads lowered out of respect.

Elsbeth's furious curses and desperate howlings were completely ignored up until that point. But, alas, she eventually made Vaan the target of her curses in front of Aeliana.

Pak! Pak! Pak!

Aeliana repeatedly slapped Elsbeth across the cheeks mercilessly, shattering her teeth, cheekbones, and jaw until she lost the ability and strength to wail.

Only muffled growlings of pain escaped Elsbeth's bloodied, split lips.

Nevertheless, Aeliana knew how to hold back and didn't rob Elsbeth of her life before Vaan settled his business with her.

After Aeliana finished delivering her punishment, Vaan waited some time for the people of the Holy Knight Empire to gather outside the city.

Their numbers easily reached the millions within minutes. But despite such a large gathering of people, they were not noisy; no one uttered a single word.

Still, their deathly silence spoke louder than any word of unease.

They had lost a ruler and found a god, but they did not know what future lay ahead of them; they were lost and concerned.

They feared the unknown future and needed an answer, an answer that only Vaan could provide.

"Your emperor is no more, but the imperial throne is not without a legitimate heir. The firstborn of Siegfried Braveheart, the seventeenth ruler of the Holy Knight Kingdom, still lives. So if you still have some loyalty to the old monarchy, she can be your ruler. The Holy Knight Empire will not fall under the Kingdom of Black Rose's sovereignty."

Shortly after Vaan declared that, everyone was greatly surprised, pleasantly even.

However, only the Great Imperial Legion and the loyalist imperials were happy with Vaan's decision. Many people wanted Vaan to be their ruler instead.

"We don't want the legitimate heir! We want you, Your Divine Grace! Please lead us!" they said.

Unfortunately, Vaan could only shake his head and disappoint them.

"I can be your protector but not your ruler," Vaan coolly stated.

Even if the Kingdom of Black Rose had all the necessary justifications for conquering the Holy Knight Empire, there were still too many issues.

More importantly, Vaan had no interest in the throne.

A ruler had too many responsibilities and managerial work, something he didn't have time for; it would hold him back and delay his improvement. As such, it was better to put someone else he could trust in power.

That way, he could still have control over the country and not be burdened by its responsibilities, no matter how many countries he ended up controlling through such a method.

At the same time, the countries wouldn't be alarmed by any single country gaining too much power and territory through war and risking a continental war.

It was the best choice to make.

After all, even if Vaan prepared all the necessary steps for the Holy Knight Empire to fall under the Kingdom of Black Rose's sovereignty, the probability of starting a continental war still wouldn't be reduced to zero.

He couldn't expect everyone to make reasonable and wise choices; he had to account for the stubborn and stupid.

Humanity could be united under a single cause, but not a single nation. People wanted their independence, even if it was just an illusion.

Nevertheless, shortly after Vaan spoke, the imperials quickly gave up.

Afterward, Elsbeth's ability to talk was restored before she was interrogated with magic under Vaan's orders. And with everything recorded and projected on a large holographic screen, her crime was revealed to everyone one by one, including the shocking truth of three hundred years ago.

The Queen Dowager was far more vicious and venomous than the people could have imagined. Even her origin was startling.

Elsbeth had been eyeing the position of queen even before she was married into the Braveheart royal family, and she was originally a brothel worker from the capital's red-light district.

In other words, Siegfried's younger brother, the previous emperor, had married a prostitute!

The Braveheart royal family would have never allowed it if they had known it!

Alas, Elsbeth managed to change her appearance, erase her history, adopt a new identity as a noble's daughter, and marry into royalty! Her deceit and cunningness in pulling it all off were shocking but also impressive.

Nevertheless, Siegfried's younger brother was never Elsbeth's target for marriage.

Elsbeth had attempted to seduce King Siegfried on numerous occasions. She made King Siegfried's official wife, Anastasia, infertile and unable to produce a male heir solely so she could have a chance with King Siegfried.

However, King Siegfried never spared her a glance. Only after she realized she had no chance did she settle for King Siegfried's younger brother, Argos Braveheart.

The people were even more shocked when they learned Elsbeth ruined the strong brotherly bond between Siegfried and Argos and awakened Argos's ambition for the throne.

Siegfried and Anastasia's sudden deaths were subsequent outcomes of Elsbeth and Argos's ambitions.

The people eventually became numb to Elsbeth's list of crimes as they were revealed from the oldest to the most recent years.

Elsbeth seemed capable of every vile and immoral deed possible, even sleeping with her great nephew – though they had learned earlier that she was a commoner without any blood relations to Duke Elfed's family.

Even so, it didn't make the people any less enraged after they learned all her wicked deeds. Not a single person from the Holy Knight Empire's capital city revered or respected her at that point.

"It's no surprise that the mother would be more devilish than the devil spawn she raised," Vaan commented before asking the people, "How do you all want this wench to answer for her crimes?"

"Off with her head!"

Countless people roared outrage amidst other death sentences as Elsbeth regained clarity of her mind and grasped the situation with a nasty look.

"Very well. The Queen Dowager shall give head to every man present."

Following Vaan's calm declaration, Elsbeth's expression froze before flushing with a darker shade of red from anger and humiliation.

She was now the Queen Dowager, not the cheap whore she used to be!

"That's not what they said—!"

Puchi!

Vaan decapitated Elsbeth with a quick swipe of his sharp claws before anyone could register what was going on.

Elsbeth died with a furious expression as her head rolled down the hill.

"It was just a joke; don't take it too seriously. But I guess it's too late to tell you that," Vaan casually said shortly after.