

The Witch 491

Chapter 491: Evil Incarnate

News of Adeline's death spread throughout the Delarosa's territory like a domino effect, accelerating the inevitable surrender of her people. Everyone already knew they couldn't win. Thus, her death cemented that truth.

Ultimately, most members were loyal to the Delarosa Household itself and not to an authoritative individual like High Witch Adeline. As such, they were freed of command upon her death and had no aversion to surrendering.

In fact, Adeline's surrendered subordinates even assisted with the aftermath's cleanup.

With the convenience of magic and the effort of several hundred witches, the Delarosa's estate returned to its post-battle state in a matter of minutes, albeit only in appearance for some parts.

After all, Vaan's flames had ripped holes through the main residential building, which had a strong defense against outside attacks.

The ceilings could be patched up, but the materials lost to the flames couldn't be easily replaced.

While a portion of Arabelle's force went to free Marchioness Belline's loyal subordinates held in the underground cellar, Vaan followed Linetta and Lillias's lead to their mother's bedchamber.

Linetta and Lillias both stopped at the door to take a deep breath and calm their turbulent emotions before proceeding to enter.

It had been a while since they had seen their mother. Even when they were home, they had not been able to see their mother since she fell ill and was bedridden.

Their aunt had banned everyone from entering their mother's bedchamber. They were told their mother's illness was highly contagious and deadly.

Everyone who ever came to treat Marchioness Belline died shortly after their first visit. But thinking back on it, Linetta and Lillias believed Adeline had silenced them to conceal her secret.

Over time, Marchioness Belline's illness evolved into something truly untreatable.

Whether it was Vaan, Linetta, Lillias, or Arabelle, everyone frowned the moment they entered Marchioness Belline's bedchamber.

Vaan's fire barrier had burned its surroundings during its time protecting Marchioness Belline's bedridden body. However, it still failed to erase the terrible stench that suffocated the room.

Naturally, the source of the horrendous stench came from Marchioness Belline's body, which was wrapped in dirty, black-stained bandages that didn't seem to have been washed or replaced in years.

Furthermore, underneath such dirty bandages, Vaan could see that Marchioness Belline's skin was plagued with rot and black pus.

If not for the weak breath of life coming from Marchioness Belline's body, Vaan would have assumed he was looking at a mummified corpse.

Nevertheless, his observation and thought only lasted an instant before Vaan decisively waved his hand, burning away all the foul airborne diseases in front of him.

He quickly pulled Linetta and Lillias back several steps in the next instant, with Arabelle following closely beside him.

"Be careful. Breathing in the foul air will make you sick."

Linetta and Lillias heard Vaan's warning, but they were distracted, devastated by the state of their mother.

It was far worse than they could have imagined.

After Vaan burned away the foul air in the immediate surroundings, he spread his flames into a dome shape like it was casting out a net to contain the rest of the foul air in the room. Then, he skillfully yet effortlessly shrank the fire dome, pushing the foul air back to its source – Marchioness Belline, who was at the center of it.

"Vahn... Our mother... Can you save her?" Linetta asked with a trembling voice, fearing his answer.

Although she had a lot of faith in Vaan's extensive knowledge and means, her mother's condition was beyond anything she had ever seen.

To save her was no different from trying to bring someone back to life.

Marchioness Belline would have already been dead if she had not protected her core organs with mana all this while. Her perseverance and determination to live was noteworthy.

"Of course," Vaan assured.

Although he confidently promised Linetta, Marchioness Belline's situation was quite tricky. Her original disease, the mutated corpse poison, had given birth to hundreds of variant diseases, which continued to multiply in numbers.

If Marchioness Belline weren't bedridden, she would have been a walking disaster, spreading her terrible diseases and death everywhere like a Queen of Plague.

Such a highly aggressive, self-multiplying disease would have been very difficult to contain once it broke out. The death toll would have also been unimaginably high if it did.

Fortunately, he had it under control before it got the chance.

"Still, I must say... Your mother's condition wasn't this bad when I arrived. Adeline's death must have triggered the rapid changes in her body," Vaan mentioned with a frown before adding, "It seems we have underestimated Adeline's viciousness."

They had not been thorough with their interrogation.

Given Marchioness Belline had been reduced to a bedridden state, Adeline had plenty of chances to kill her over the years.

However, Adeline kept her alive to suffer a fate worse than death.

The mutated corpse poison was born from Adeline's life experiments on her unborn children in their dead fetus states. Since they came from her body, it wasn't farfetched to say they were also a part of her. As such, she also had some control over the mutated corpse poison.

As long as Adeline lived, she would keep Belline teetering on the edge of life and death, suffering unimaginable pain and torment. And if she died, a terrible self-multiplying plague of death would have been unleashed on the world, taking countless lives with her.

Adeline wasn't a fallen witch or a demon, but she was worse than both of them combined; she was like an incarnate of evil.

When Arabelle and the two young ladies listened to Vaan's analysis, they were shocked by the potential future that could have unfolded.

Fortunately, they had gone to Marchioness Belline right after Adeline's death, giving Vaan a chance to control the spread before the worse happened.

Nevertheless, Marchioness Belline's disease-spreading body was declining as they spoke.

"You should hurry, Lord Vahn. I don't think Lady Belline can hold on much longer," Arabelle stated seriously.

Vaan acknowledged with a nod.

After carefully studying Belline's declining condition, Vaan thought of multiple solutions with his vast knowledge.

However, most of them required ingredient collection and preparation, which were time-consuming and ultimately troublesome to do.

That said, there was no need for him to go through all the trouble himself when he had a reliable clan of true dragons, masters of magic, he could call upon to solve the problems for him.

'Zodreg, come down and treat this person right now.'

'Yes, Supreme Leader!'

Chapter 492: A Dreadful Existence

Shortly after Zodreg complied, a round spatial rift opened in the room's ceilings. The boundless sky was revealed on the other side of it, including Zodreg's huge draconic figure.

Roar!

As Zodreg's dragon roar resounded in the bedchamber, space and time were seemingly locked down. Vaan's fire barrier disappeared, but the black fog of various diseases oozing out of Marchioness Belline's body did not spread; they were frozen in stasis.

Next, a blue-lit magic circle appeared above Marchioness Belline's body, expanding to cover her whole body. After it descended and phased through her body like a scanner, it disappeared without a trace.

However, moments later, several more magic circles of blue, green, golden, and white light appeared in tiers like stacking a tower of colorful mana rings.

They took turns phasing through Marchioness Belline's body in order. And each time they did, the black fog of death-carrying diseases dissipated, the black-stained bandages whitened, and colors returned to Marchioness Belline's skin.

Linetta and Lillias watched their mother's body bathed in the light of magic circles, one after the other, but they strangely didn't feel the slightest concern regarding the treatment process.

The light was warm, gentle, and soothing.

Plus, the result was smooth and clear. There wasn't any conflict between the black fog of death-carrying diseases and the soothing light of the magic circles. It wasn't a forceful elimination but more like a religious baptism of evil spirits, converting them into benevolent spirits.

As such, some of the black fog lost its aggressive-spreading and life-destroying traits, transforming into white vital energy that helped restore Marchioness Belline's weakened body.

From a superficial perspective, Marchioness Belline's illness was being treated with high-level restorative spells.

From the perspective of someone with deeper insight, it would seem like Marchioness Belline's body's time was being reversed back to a period when the illness didn't exist.

However, Vaan had the deepest insight with his Omni-Sense and understood the truth was much more complex than that.

It just seemed like Zodreg was reversing Marchioness Belline's time with temporal magic. In truth, he was commanding her runaway, corrupted cells to return to her body and resume their original jobs correctly.

In essence, it was like forcefully overwriting every cancer cell in the body and reprogramming or resetting their functions.

Vaan fell into deep thought as he observed the changes with Omni-Sense.

Cancer cells were considered part of the body. But they weren't obedient; they behaved rebelliously and grew uncontrollably, which ultimately made them destructive and harmful.

However, if their changes could be freely controlled, perhaps strengthening or evolving the body could be possible instead. It would be better than removing the cancerous cells before they cause further damage to the body.

Alas, the difficulty of such a feat was staggering, and most people wouldn't get such an option.

That said, Zodreg was not Vaan.

was impossible for Zodreg to control all of Marchioness Belline's corrupted cells, which had transformed into deathly diseases, and make them behave properly again with just his sheer will.

It was only achievable with magic – magic that seemed simple for Zodreg but far more complex and powerful than the normal magic used by the people of Pangea.

Dragon magic – a derivative of ancient magic based on the dragon race's insights into the primordial language.

Whether it was the dragon race's language, magic, or even runes, they were all derived and drew their power from the primordial language.

That being the case, if Vaan asked where the power of the primordial language came from, no one in the Red Dragon Clan would be able to give him an exact answer.

Although it wasn't hard to guess that an incredibly powerful law powered this primordial language, no one knew why such a language had such power and why it was the only language to possess such power.

Simply by uttering its true words, anyone could invoke its power, regardless of one's strength and ability.

Of course, whether one could bear the backlash was another story completely.

Still, Vaan was definitely interested in learning the primordial language if he was given the chance. There could be some great secret or truth of Chaos hidden within it.

Roar!

Zodreg's dragon roar resounded again.

As a result, this time, the magic circles of blue, green, golden, and white light superimposed, turning into a single, larger, more colorful magic circle.

Marchioness Belline's corrupted cells had all been restored to their original form, but the true source of the mutated corpse poison that plagued her was still hidden in the deepest parts of her body.

Normally, removing all the mutated corpse poison from Marchioness Belline's body should have been difficult.

However, as the superimposed and colorful magic circle rose from the ground and passed through Marchioness Belline's body, it caught every last trace of the mutated corpse poison.

Like reeling in an entire school of fish with an inescapable net, not a single bit of the mutated corpse poison could slip through it.

As such, the greenish-black goo was ripped right out of Marchioness Belline's front body, following the colorful, superimposed magic circle.

Scree—!!!

Everyone was immediately caught off guard by the greenish-black goo's piercing scream as it strongly resisted the magic circle's push.

Whether it was Arabelle, Linetta, or Lillias, they were all horrified by the living greenish-black goo that had myriads of tiny human-shape faces screaming on its surface. It was as if countless souls were trapped in the gooey substance and wanted to escape.

Linetta and Lillias couldn't help but shiver in horror as they witnessed such a dreadful existence, desperately trying to get back into their mother's body.

Unfortunately, Zodreg didn't give it such a chance.

Roar!

Zodreg locked down space and time around the living goo with his dragon roar, causing it to freeze in place. Then, the superimposed magic circle altered its shape, wrapping around the living goo to trap it in its new cubic form.

The living goo desperately bashed itself against every corner of the magic cube to escape but to no avail.

The magic cube had no opening.

Gulp!

"Is... Is it over?" Lillias asked with a shaken tone, completely spooked by the mutated corpse poison's true form.

Vaan calmly nodded.

But shortly after, his gaze suddenly flickered with a sharp glint.

Zodreg could completely erase the mutated corpse poison from existence if he wanted to. But he chose to keep it in captivity instead.

There must be a reason for his choice.

Chapter 493: Life-Bound Hex

Marchioness Belline's treatment process had been a series of shocks, horror, and even awe, one after the other.

The unveiled evil in the Delarosa Household had been too shocking.

Arabelle couldn't even begin to describe how she felt after the whole ordeal was over; she was left numb and speechless.

Nevertheless, her eyes had been truly opened to the depths and profundity of magic.

True dragons were on a whole different level regarding understanding and using magic. They could cast so many high-level spells simultaneously and unrestrained.

On the other hand, witches like her were limited by the number of their mana rings.

Of course, a massive disparity existed between an Early-stage High Witch and a Rank 5 True Dragon. Thus, it went without saying that Zodreg could simultaneously cast more spells than her.

However, Arabelle also understood that even Transcendent Witches could not cast as many spells as Zodreg, let alone do so freely.

As such, She wondered where the problem lay for there to be such a huge existing disparity.

What made the dragons superior in magic?

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Meanwhile, Zodreg's dragon roar caused an uproar not only within the Delarosa's estate but also the entire city.

Among the various forces that came to assist Linetta and Lillias in freeing the Delarosa Marquisate from High Witch Adeline's control, many battle witches had participated in the war.

While they weren't fortunate enough to receive direct guidance from Lord Vahn and ascend to the High Witch rank, they were still there to witness the might and majesty of the red dragons during the final battle.

The emergence of the red dragons had truly shocked all of them to the core; no one knew Lord Vahn had such a trump card hidden up his sleeves.

The Holy Knight Empire lost their chance to win the moment Lord Vahn decided to fight for their kingdom.

Although everyone didn't know what kind of relationship Lord Vahn and the red dragons shared, they knew the red dragons backed Lord Vahn. Most people believed they were friends. As for anything beyond that, no one dared to make assumptions.

It was already an amazing feat to befriend the legendary dragons and even receive their help.

How could mere humans ever dream of ruling them?

Nevertheless, once everyone, including the ex-supremacist witches, found out Vaan was backed by the mighty dragon race, the last trace of resentment regarding their forceful and humiliating swear of fealty disappeared.

They started genuinely accepting the reality of their situation that a man was their lord.

Whether it was Lord Vahn's power or the dragon's, neither of them were things they could fight against. Furthermore, Lord Vahn and the dragons were both wise and knowledgeable. The witch kingdom would definitely flourish under their lead.

"To think there would be a day where I would feel happy and fortunate about swearing my allegiance to Lord Vahn, even if it wasn't by choice..." an ex-supremacist witch in the city softly sighed after gazing at the two figures in the sky.

If you can't beat them, join them – the ex-supremacist witch thought.

The ex-supremacist witch felt she was shameless to think like that. Still, she had some self-awareness and recognized that times have changed.

Those that followed the flow would live, and those that went against it would perish.

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In the sky, Vaan had met up with Zodreg after leaving the marchioness's bedchamber. He wanted to give Linetta and Lillias quality time to catch up with their soon-to-awaken mother.

"Supreme Leader, I have cured Marchioness Belline's illness per your instruction. However, I could only treat the root cause. To make a full recovery, my magic alone will not suffice," Zodreg reported.

"I know," Vaan nodded.

Although Marchioness Belline regained a healthy body through Zodreg's treatment, that was all there was: a healthy body.

Her cultivation and shortened lifespan weren't accounted for.

"Since Marchioness Belline has experience reaching the High Witch rank, it shouldn't take long for her to regain her power through practice. On the other hand, her shortened lifespan... is a little more tricky to resolve, Supreme Leader," Zodreg mentioned.

Vaan shifted his gaze to the magic cube containing the moving black goo and frowned.

Naturally, a shortened lifespan could be extended through medicine and higher attainments in cultivation.

But if that were all there was to it, Zodreg wouldn't have considered it a problem.

"Does it have something to do with this ungodly creation?" Vaan casually asked as he referred to the moving black goo contained in Zodreg's magic cube.

"Yes, Supreme Leader," Zodreg affirmed.

"When I diagnosed and treated Marchioness Belline, I discovered she also had another problem in her body besides the mutated corpse poison. The black goo you see now is a result of the two synergizing together to produce magical effects. We usually call this kind of thing a hex."

"More specifically, this one should be called a Life-bound Hex... Probably," Zodreg stated with some uncertainty.

Evidently, Zodreg knew a bit about hexes but not enough to consider himself an expert in the field.

As for Vaan, he was even less familiar with hexes. In fact, it was his first time hearing about hexes. None of the knowledge he acquired in the Kingdom of Black Rose had delved into such a topic.

"Hexes are mostly curses, except they aren't purely magic; they require mediums to create and activate. But it's also precisely because they require mediums that it makes them more troublesome to remove."

After noticing Vaan had little-to-no knowledge of hex magic, Zodreg explained the nature of hexes to him.

"So, simple dispel magic won't work, huh?" Vaan muttered with a frown.

Thanks to his inhuman comprehensive ability, he didn't even need to ask Zodreg about the effects of the Life-bound Hex.

One could roughly guess just by hearing its name.

A Life-bound Hex was a hex that could bind a person's life to the medium used. In other words, Marchioness Belline's life was bound to the living black goo.

If the black goo were destroyed, Marchioness Belline would also die along with it. This was most likely why Zodreg kept the black goo instead of eliminating it.

Even if the consequence weren't that serious, a reduction in Marchioness Belline's lifespan would kill her all the same.

Nevertheless, Vaan was made aware of a possible third-party involvement.

Chapter 494: Revisiting the Dimensional Crack

After Vaan learned more about hexes from Zodreg, he became increasingly certain a third party was behind the Life-bound Hex.

Sure, curse-type hexes seemed like something evil witches would use.

However, at the same time, it could also be said that they wouldn't; they couldn't use something they haven't learned or have any knowledge about.

After all, hexes required a combination of special materials and runic inscription in the right sequence to produce magic.

In other words, preparation and knowledge was the only requirement to perform hexes. It was something that even ordinary people with zero magic could create as long as they had the knowledge and prepared the materials.

Since witches could use magic, they had a low chance of stumbling upon such a discovery.

More importantly, the world was still new to magic. Seekers of magic knowledge had barely tapped into its depth and mysteries.

Something as profound as hexes was unlikely to be discovered and studied by a person of Pangea.

As such, the Life-bound Hex was more likely created by someone from Chaos or, at the very least, connected to someone from it.

Of course, the biggest deciding factor in his conclusion was something else.

Besides the foul, pungent, rotting stench, the Life-bound Hex also possessed a very faint but unique fishy smell. No doubt, the scent belonged to one of the special materials or ingredients used to create the Life-bound Hex.

However, Vaan couldn't put a name on it even after he scoured his knowledge bank.

No creature or object with such a unique fishy smell was recorded within the Kingdom of Black Rose. Its origins belonged outside, whether it came from one of the other six witch kingdoms or beyond.

Nevertheless, he understood the fishy smell belonged to a creature or object of the sea, which helped narrow down his list of places.

"Do you know where this kind of fishy smell comes from, Zodreg?"

"I do not, Supreme Leader."

After Vaan explained the particular fishy smell, which possessed two conflicting traits of fire and ice, to Zodreg, the latter shook his head with guilt for failing to provide an adequate answer.

However, after a moment, Zodreg recalled a very recent report.

"Supreme Leader, I may not know what kind of sea creature or thing possessed the smell you describe. However, I've thought of one place that may hold the answer you seek," Zodreg mentioned.

"You mean the Great Ratholos Empire?" Vaan casually guessed.

"Uh... That's right, Supreme Leader," Zodreg replied after a moment of surprise. But after he thought about it, he didn't find it all that surprising and held Vaan in higher regard.

The supreme leader was all-knowing – Zodreg thought.

In truth, Vaan had only recently learned about the Great Ratholos Empire's specialty when he perused the information in the imperial library earlier.

"Indeed... If it's the Great Ratholos Empire, they have a higher chance of having the answer I seek compared to other places," Vaan acknowledged.

The Great Ratholos Empire was a country of body-building fanatics that dared to challenge the extremities of the land, sky, and sea in pursuit of their strength.

As such, the vast amount of knowledge the Great Ratholos Empire accumulated on marine life and oddities was among the highest in Pangea, if not already the highest.

Thus, if Vaan wanted to look into a particular sea creature or object, that would be the first place he should look.

There, he could also have a chance to find the culprit behind the Life-bound Hex.

According to Zodreg, the Life-bound Hex was possibly divided into a master hex and a subordinate hex. Unless the master hex was destroyed, the subordinate hex would continue to reform itself, and such reformation would steal Marchioness Belline's life force each time until she died.

Based on that information, the master hex was most likely possessed by the hex caster.

But before setting out to track down such a person, there were a few things Vaan had to settle in the Black Rose Kingdom and Holy Knight Empire.

At the very least, Marchioness Belline's situation wasn't too urgent for him to set out immediately.

The Life-bound Hex was a type of low-level curse that drained her life until she died; it would slowly lead her to her death and couldn't kill her right away.

That said, whoever cast the Life-bound Hex on Marchioness Belline clearly had a grudge against her. Unless he figured out who that person was first, he would be prolonging his search.

"What should I do with this, Supreme Leader?" Zodreg asked, referring to the abominable screaming black goo he captured.

"Keep it safe for now," Vaan replied before further instructing, "Create a spatial portal to the crack in the dimension, then return to the clan and have someone create some life-extension potions and send them to Marchioness Belline."

"Understood, Supreme Leader!" Zodreg complied.

Shortly after the spatial rift opened, Vaan flew through without hesitation and reached the dimensional crack north of Blackthorn City.

Linetta and Lillias had just reunited with their mother and would spend at least one night or day together.

Vaan didn't intend to spend that time waiting for them and doing nothing.

There were many things to do.

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Vaan glanced at the enormous dimensional crack leading to the Gehenna Realm and softly sighed, reflecting on his struggles to reach his present status.

The threat of death was always lurking around the corner.

A day would come when he would be forced to face the seven Great Devils of Gehenna. It was an inevitable future.

The stronger he grew, the bigger the threats he had to face.

Chaos, in particular, was screaming with danger. And yet, it was also precisely this infinitely vast, unknown world that seemed to be calling out to him.

He had no idea why Chaos was calling out to him or why he even thought that might be the case.

However, until he made ample preparation, he wasn't ready to explore it and find out.

With that in mind, Vaan found himself a nice spot on the ground and sat down to meditate, right in front of the mirror-like dimension crack revealing the gloomy crimson world of Gehenna beyond.

Chapter 495: Truest Heir

Although Vaan's highest elemental affinity was fire, this was achieved through fortuitous encounters. In his present state, it also provided him with the strongest fighting power out of all his abilities.

Still, when asked which element Vaan possessed the greatest innate talent for, the answer would undoubtedly be the spatial element.

Whether it was the Heaven-Swallowing Space or Wisdom from the Void, they were his greatest advantage.

Unfortunately, he could not use any of them to their fullest potential due to his lack of spatial comprehension.

At the very least, he believed his two spatial abilities had a lot of room for improvement.

Unless Vaan could weaponize his Heaven-Swallowing Space or perceive hidden information in the space with Wisdom from the Void, it couldn't be said that he had been using any of the two to their fullest potential.

In order to weaponize his Heaven-Swallowing Space, Vaan had to overcome his limitation, which was the size of the objects he could store and the point of entry he could create for the Heaven-Swallowing Space.

Vaan couldn't store items that were larger than twice his body mass, nor could he create a point of entry beyond his body.

If he could manipulate the size and location of the entry point to the Heaven-Swallowing Space, it would become an extremely powerful ability.

For example, if he could store an entire mountain and drop it out of the sky, even such a simple move could potentially kill countless Rank 5 beings.

The bigger the mountain and the higher the height he dropped it, the greater its destructive capabilities!

Wiping out countries or killing the planet, which reached the destructive power of Rank 6 divine beings, wouldn't be outside the realm of possibilities!

But of course, if Vaan could actually manipulate the Heaven-Swallowing Space to such a scale and distance, his spatial comprehension would most likely not be far from Rank 6 divine beings.

However, Vaan was not satisfied with this kind of result.

Being a Demigod-rank capable of Divine-rank attacks was not enough to defeat the seven Great Devils of Gehenna.

If the seven Great Devils of Gehenna were all peak Divine-rank beings, low-level Rank 6 attacks would be far from enough to defeat them.

He needed a much stronger trump card – an ultimate attack that could slay any Rank 6 divine beings.

And developing such an ultimate attack would be possible if he comprehended the spatial law – Vaan believed.

The Law of Space...

While it was one of the universal laws that governed the world like the elemental laws of fire, water, wind, and earth, they were not on the same level.

Of course, at their zenith, all laws were equal.

However, their starting points were not. The spatial law had a higher requirement to comprehend. As such, its initial power would also be greater.

'With my Demigod-rank soul and an innate talent with the spatial element, comprehending the Spatial Law shouldn't be difficult,' Vaan thought.

Shortly after he shut his eyes off from the world of light, he perceived the world in perpetual darkness with his mind.

Without his vision, his other sense sharpened.

However, the comprehension of universal laws did not rely on the five mortal senses. Thus, Vaan shut off his other four human senses one by one.

It wasn't easy.

Still, through a period of meditation, Vaan eventually entered a state of emptiness.

In his state of emptiness, Vaan was like an unfettered soul that had been released through the confinement and limitation of his mortal body, free to roam the boundless world that seemed infinitely more vast.

Specks of different colored light appeared around him—some up close, some further away, like the stars in the night skies.

They were the hidden universal laws that governed the world.

However, for some reason, Vaan could perceive much clearer than when he comprehended the Fire Law in the Fire Dragon Clan.

Undoubtedly, it was due to the dimensional crack connecting the two worlds.

It wasn't hard to guess where the dimensional crack was located even with all of Vaan's mortal sense shut. After all, the universal laws of the two worlds were clashing intensely in front of him.

Just like Vaan suspected, the dimensional crack was a great place to perceive and comprehend the laws.

'Let me see how much I can understand during this period,' Vaan mused without the concern that he might get attacked by demons crossing over from Gehenna.

He had ten Rank 5 young elite dragons patrolling the sky in the area; the ten Rank 5 dragons wouldn't allow the demons to disturb their supreme leader's meditation.

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Holy Knight Empire, Holy City

Right outside the imperial great hall on palace grounds, a sudden spatial rift appeared, alarming the nearby imperial guards.

"Who goes there—!?" the imperial guards barked.

They immediately grabbed the hilt of their swords, ready to draw them for battle. But the moment they sensed one of the aura of two emerging people, they quickly felt stunned.

It felt like a type of holy aura, but it commanded majesty and respect.

"Well, isn't this quite the warm welcome, Astoria?" Henrietta casually uttered.

She observed her surroundings without feeling threatened in the slightest. The imperial guards were Peak-stage Aura Grandmasters at best.

"Lord Astarot said the holy city was already under control, but I suppose people here still hold prejudice and hostilities towards witches. Maybe I should suppress them with my power a bit," Henrietta suggested with a mischievous smile.

"This is how they are supposed to react if two unknown people suddenly trespassed in the imperial palace, Your Majesty," Astoria rolled her eyes and said, "This has nothing to do with hostilities towards witches... probably."

A few moments later, Astoria furrowed her brows, having noticed the imperial guards' odd stares as they studied her in silent surprise and confusion.

The imperial guards were trying to ascertain Astoria's identity.

They couldn't figure out why they subconsciously felt the need to pay her the utmost respect despite it being their first meeting.

Why did a witch possess a majesty aura that seemed vastly superior to the late emperor, an Aura King, at the peak of his reign?

Suddenly, one of the imperial guard's eyes beamed before kneeling down with a devoted fist-palm salute.

"I greet the truest heir to the imperial throne of the Holy Knight Empire!" the imperial guard shouted excitedly.

Truest... heir?

Astoria and Henrietta were both greatly taken aback by the imperial guard's sudden statement and behavior. Even the other imperial guards glanced over with surprise and confusion.

"This... What kind of situation is this?" Henrietta asked with surprise.

Chapter 496: Elderwatch Family

Whether it was Astoria or Henrietta, they quickly realized the excited imperial guard's strange choice of words.

It would have been understandable if the imperial guard had said true heir or legitimate heir.

After all, Astoria was the firstborn of Siegfried Braveheart, the last king of the old Holy Knight Kingdom.

However, the imperial guard had used the word "truest."

What on earth was the truest heir? An heir that was even more authentic than the true heir? What does that even mean?

More importantly, Astoria had been severely injured and taken away for recovery before she could even set foot into the holy city.

Given she had been away from the Holy Knight Empire for three hundred years, the number of people that could still recognize her shouldn't exceed the number of fingers on one's hand.

And yet, the imperial guard recognized her as the truest heir to the imperial throne without addressing her name.

In other words, her identity as Siegfried's firstborn wasn't important to this imperial guard; there was another reason for his recognition.

'Could it be...?'

Astoria suddenly thought of her golden dragon bloodline.

That said, she also found it hard to believe it would suddenly become the highest qualification to rule the Holy Knight Empire. After all, she had never known about the existence of the golden dragon bloodline prior to the bloodline awakening.

Her late father had never mentioned anything about it to her when he was still around.

"Who are you? Why did you call me the truest heir?" Astoria inquired with knitted brows.

Although her tone made her question sound like an interrogation, the kneeling imperial guard felt a surge of excitement and honor upon hearing her words directed at him.

The imperial guard was overwhelmed with joy, as if he was meeting and interacting with his idol for the first time.

However, it must be noted that the imperial guard didn't have such strong feelings prior to their meeting.

"I am Perrin Elderwatch, my Lady. Wilbert Elderwatch, the Imperial Legion's commander, is my grandfather," Perrin introduced himself before saying, "And I apologize for not being able to explain my reason here."

"However, if you could follow me to meet my grandfather, we will be sure to answer all of your doubts then, my Lady," Perrin requested with a sincere and serious look.

"Elderwatch... Imperial Legion..." Astoria softly uttered with a frown, not in a hurry to agree. Instead, she asked, "Who is Gregoria Elderwatch to you?"

"That would be my great-grandfather, my Lady," Perrin answered with his head lowered, still kneeling on one knee subserviently.

"Great-grandfather..." Astoria softly sighed at the passing generations.

She had almost forgotten that the witches and people outside the seven witch kingdoms lived completely different lives.

Three hundred years have passed since she left the Holy Knight Empire; many witches were still struggling to produce a single offspring during this time. And yet, upon her return, she had already met someone from the fourth generation of the Elderwatch family.

Astoria was once again reminded of the fleeting lives of ordinary humans.

Even the most accomplished aura user might not necessarily live past three hundred years. In comparison, the least talented witch could easily live past this threshold.

As for her, Astoria vaguely sensed living one or two thousand years wouldn't be a problem with her present rank.

"I will see your grandfather. I would also like to visit your great-grandfather's grave and pay my respects to him," Astoria agreed after another soft sigh.

Gregorio Elderwatch was her father's most trusted confidante and friend; he was also like an uncle to her.

She missed the life in her memory, but unfortunately, she couldn't rewind time to the past.

"That's great! But—"

"But before that, Queen Henrietta of the Black Rose Kingdom would like to meet Vaan... um, the Sun God..." Astoria interrupted Perrin before he could finish speaking. "Ahem, where is he now?"

"The Sun God? His Divinity was in the imperial library but mysteriously disappeared after that. No one in the palace knows where the Sun God went, but neither do we have the right to ask," Perrin replied truthfully.

"Is that so? I understand," Astoria calmly said after a moment of pause.

During that brief pause, a Rank 5 dragon had telepathically informed her of Vaan's whereabouts as it hid in the cloudy skies and watched over the empire's holy city.

Shortly after Astoria relayed the information to Henrietta, the latter suggested, "I'll be fine heading back to look for Vaan on my own, Astoria. I promise there won't be any conflict between us, so why don't you stay here to finish your business first and meet up with us later?"

"It seems to be something important and closely related to you," Henrietta added.

"...Alright," Astoria nodded after some thought.

As Henrietta said, Perrin and Wilbert seemed to know some important information about her Golden Dragon Bloodline – something she was curious and eager to learn about.

"Then, it's decided," Henrietta said.

Moments after they said their goodbyes, the two went separate ways.

Henrietta flew out of the palace on her own but ended up receiving a quick lift back to her kingdom from the Rank 5 dragon hidden in the sky.

Meanwhile, Astoria followed Perrin to the Imperial Legion's barrack, which was a short walk down the western main road from the imperial palace's front gates.

Although it was a short walk past the imperial palace's area, the Imperial Legion's barrack was enormous—at least four times the land coverage of the palace grounds.

Furthermore, the gate, walls, and residential buildings within weren't skimped during their construction stage in the least; they used the finest construction materials—the same ones that built the imperial palace, glistening in reinforced marbles and sturdy alloys.

From a short glance outside, the Imperial Legion's barrack did not look like the military barrack of the most powerful legion in the empire at all.

Rather, it appeared closer to an immensely wealthy household's estate that occupied an entire city district, which by the way, wasn't far from the truth.

The Elderwatch family owned the entire property; land, buildings, and all.

Astoria had mixed feelings when she stared at the sturdy front gate made of reinforced black steel, which served zero protection from trespassers.

Any trained aura user could jump its walls if they wanted to—but whether they dared to was another story.

The Elderwatch family had always been a close supporter of the Braveheart imperial family. But even though the Braveheart family declined, the Elderwatch family did not; they retained their glory and even prospered.

"Right, my Lady... There was something I wanted to correct earlier. My great-grandfather doesn't have a grave for you to visit; he hasn't passed away yet," Perrin mentioned softly and sneakily as if he didn't want it to be heard by anyone else.

"What?" Astoria uttered with surprise.

Gregorio Elderwatch was already in his late forties when she left the Holy Knight Empire. Given the passage of time, the person would be nearing three hundred and fifty years of age!

It was the first time Astoria heard of a man living to such an age!

Aura Kings had a chance to live to such an age, but Gregorio Elderwatch couldn't be one; he wasn't a witch descendant and lacked the basic quality to cultivate aura.

Unless Gregorio Elderwatch consumed some heavenly medicine to extend his lifespan, Astoria couldn't think of any other possibilities—not because they didn't exist, but because they were too low for her to consider them.

"Are you serious?" Astoria asked.

"Yes, my Lady," Perrin confirmed before saying, "However, if you want to see my great-grandfather, you have to receive my grandfather's permission first. Otherwise, I can only disappoint you."

Perrin looked like he really wanted to accede to all of Astoria's requests, as she was the "truest heir."

However, he couldn't violate his family's rules.

That said, there was no reason for his grandfather, Wilbert Elderwatch, to refuse the truest heir from meeting his great-grandfather, Gregorio.

Shortly after Astoria and Perrin set foot into the barrack, Wilbert was notified of the visit, and they held their meeting at the reception hall.

On the way, Astoria was baffled by the soldiers' mixed reactions.

Some members of the Imperial Legion revealed intense and exaggerated reactions when she leaked her golden dragon aura, like Perrin.

Others showed little-to-no reaction.

By the time Astoria reached the reception hall, she understood only the Elderwatch family's direct members with real blood ties exhibited strong reactions to her golden dragon aura.

Outsiders weren't affected by it, nor did they recognize it.

'The Elderwatch family also possessed some relation to the Golden Dragon Bloodline,' Astoria concluded.

Still, she didn't understand why Perrin needed to be secretive about it.

Fortunately, Perrin had promised to provide the answers she sought once they met up with Wilbert Elderwatch in the reception hall.

...

As Perrin escorted Astoria inside the reception hall, she immediately noticed a single old man clad in knightly armor waiting within.

There were no attendants to serve the drinks and snacks; they had all been dismissed.

Nevertheless, once the door was shut on their way in, Wilbert immediately dropped down onto one knee and saluted Astoria with utmost respect and devotion.

"This old subordinate greets the Chieftess!"

Astoria: "..."

Chapter 497: Blessed Golden Dragon Tribe

First, she was called the 'truest heir.' And now, it was the 'chieftess.'

Astoria felt a little speechless.

Still, the doubt in her heart grew along with the desire for the missing knowledge regarding the Golden Dragon Bloodline. As such, she became a little impatient with their secrecy.

"It seems you don't know why I addressed you as the Chieftess or anything related to your bloodline, for that matter, Your Imperial Highness," Wilbert mentioned.

"That's right," Astoria admitted with furrowed brows.

Wilbert immediately noticed the impatience in her eyes. Thus, he did not dare to continue with idle chatter; he decided to start explaining everything to dispel her doubts.

"Your Golden Dragon Bloodline is something that runs through the veins of every direct member of the Braveheart family and my Elderwatch family. Our two families and several others used to be part of a very ancient and powerful tribe called the Blessed Golden Dragon Tribe, which once ruled as the absolute hegemon of this world."

"However, time is the bane of existence; everything rises and falls with time. Our Blessed Golden Dragon Tribe was no exception. Our noble Golden Dragon Bloodline thinned, and bloodline awakening became difficult following the passage of time."

"Eventually, awakening the Golden Dragon Bloodline became nothing more than an impossible dream to achieve. Unfortunately, this also led to the dissolution of our Blessed Golden Dragon Tribe and the separation of the five great families—but not without setting a condition for their return."

"Whoever succeeded in awakening the Golden Dragon Bloodline would have the allegiance of the five great families; they would unite and help the person rebuild the Blessed Golden Dragon Tribe anew."

"Your Imperial Highness, you are the first person in a hundred thousand years since the dissolution of the Blessed Golden Dragon Tribe to have awakened the Golden Dragon Bloodline. Naturally, you have become the chieftess of our once great Blessed Golden Dragon Tribe."

"The Elderwatch family is willing to follow you, Your Imperial Highness—No, Chieftess. You have the Elderwatch family's allegiance," Wilbert stated with heartfelt relief.

The Elderwatch family had longed for the Blessed Golden Dragon Tribe's revival. And today, their wish was finally realized.

After Astoria finished listening, her furrowed brows did not relax. On the contrary, her frown deepened instead.

Only a fool would believe everything they are told without leaving room for doubt, especially if it was such an unbelievable story as this one.

"I can sense your sincerity, and I want to believe you; I really do, Sir Wilbert," Astoria said as she helped the old legion commander stand back up on his feet. "However, I still have some doubts."

"First of all, there are hardly any records of history dating back several thousand years, let alone ten thousand years. How do you know there haven't been any successful awakeners of this bloodline in the last hundred thousand years?" Astoria asked doubtfully.

"Furthermore, if it was all true, why do you keep it a secret from the public? Why aren't there any records of the Blessed Golden Dragon Tribe and the Golden Dragon Bloodline? Is it related to the real reason behind the Blessed Golden Dragon Tribe's decline and dissolution?"

"Finally, from what I understood, your Elderwatch family should also be one of the Blessed Golden Dragon Tribe's five great families. Why did your Elderwatch family choose to support my Braveheart family all these years?" Astoria added with a sharp look.

She had felt it just now when she helped the Imperial Legion's commander stand up.

This old man, who was nearing three hundred years and possessed the vigorous breath of a Peak-level Rank 4 being, was actually suppressing his true vigorous breath as a High-level Rank 5 being!

In other words, his physical strength was most likely not inferior to the late emperor! And this was without aura cultivation! Just pure physical power from the body!

Astoria was alarmed by the discovery and subconsciously put up her guard.

Although she mostly guessed Wilbert's true strength based on the feeling she sensed, she didn't think she was far off.

Nevertheless, Wilbert didn't have the slightest intention to harm her; he simply smiled after realizing his true strength was exposed. Hiding his power had just been a means of self-preservation.

After all, the tallest trees always experience the strongest winds.

Astoria's reaction was normal; anyone else in her shoes would have reacted the same way. Wilbert didn't have any reason to be offended by it, nor would he.

It was a trivial matter.

Nevertheless, Wilbert's smile shortly disappeared, replaced by a solemn expression as he faced Astoria's questions.

"It's just as you suspect, Chieftess. The inability to awaken the Golden Dragon Bloodline wouldn't be enough to cause a hegemon power like the Blessed Golden Dragon Tribe to decline and dissolve," Wilbert admitted.

"Even without the power granted from bloodline awakening, our dormant Golden Dragon Bloodline still blessed our tribesmen with superior physiques and talents compared to ordinary humans. So given our already solid foundation, we would have continued our reign over Pangea for a very long time."

"Unfortunately, our Blessed Golden Dragon Tribe have extremely powerful enemies; they would never let us grow and threaten their positions among the stars. If they knew we still existed in today's age, they would immediately descend and slaughter us to extinction," Wilbert sighed disappointedly.

"There aren't any records of the Blessed Golden Dragon Tribe and its history because it has only been passed down by word of mouth from the family heads to the next generation of family heads, Chieftess."

"Of course, our Elderwatch family had decided to do things a little differently. Every direct member of our family will learn our history once they reach adulthood. This is to guarantee the knowledge would never be lost to time," Wilbert mentioned.

"As to why we, the Elderwatch family, decided to support the Braveheart family despite being of equal standing in the tribe, that's because the Braveheart family had produced the most bloodline awakeners in history."

"We believed if any family had a chance at producing another bloodline awakener, it would be your Braveheart family, Chieftess. And as it turns out, we weren't wrong," Wilbert smiled.

The Elderwatch family had also been the weakest among the five great families of the Blessed Golden Dragon Tribe, having produced the least bloodline awakeners.

However, there was no need for Wilbert to bring this up matter unless Astoria asked him about it.

After all, it was a little embarrassing and shameful.

Nevertheless, after Astoria understood the story for the most part, she couldn't help but feel shocked.

Even without aura, Wilbert Elderwatch could reach the late stage of the transcendent rank in strength with just the physical might of his body.

How much stronger would he become if he awakened his dormant Golden Dragon Bloodline?

Astoria couldn't be certain.

However, she felt like she had found a way to strengthen humanity significantly and raise their chance of resisting the seven Great Devils of Gehenna.

"Thank you for sharing your knowledge, Sir Wilbert. It was very informative," Astoria expressed her gratitude before adding, "However, if you don't mind me asking, there's still one more matter I wish to hear about if you know anything."

Wilbert never made it clear who were the powerful enemies that brought the downfall of the Blessed Golden Dragon Tribe, only that they came from beyond the sky.

However, Astoria understood Wilbert probably didn't know much about these enemies either. Otherwise, he would have explained it.

What she wanted to learn about was something else.

"I know what you wish to ask, Chieftess. However, I purposely saved it last for someone else to explain to you," Wilbert said with a smile before instructing, "Please follow me."

"Alright," Astoria readily agreed.

At first, she thought Wilbert intended for his grandson, Perrin, to explain the last matter to her. But since they were leaving the reception hall, that didn't seem to be the case.

As such, she thought of Gregorio and felt rising anticipation for their meeting.

Astoria quietly followed Wilbert and passed several training grounds and residential buildings before entering a quiet, secluded courtyard surrounded by heavy security.

The courtyard was enormous and filled with a variety of growing, healthy, and colorful plants and herbs neatly arranged in a spiral-like pattern.

It almost seemed like a natural magic formation deployed to enhance cultivation and growth.

Evidently, someone was taking great care of the plants and herbs in the courtyard, and that someone was most likely Gregorio Elderwatch.

However, Astoria didn't see the person in the courtyard.

As Wilbert led her toward the bedroom at the end, she suddenly thought about Gregorio's possible state due to his old age, and fear gripped her heart.

Time was unkind to mortals.

Fortunately, Astoria's imagination wasn't realized; the person wasn't so weak that he was bedridden.

When Astoria and Wilbert entered the room, the elderly man was found reading a book by the open window like a retired sage. The soft breeze caused his long white hair and beard to flutter in the wind.

The environment was very serene and peaceful.

Nevertheless, the sudden noise caused by their entry prompted Gregorio to glance over to the entrance.

In that moment, his expression brightened warmly with relief and joy.

"Hahaha, how wonderful! I didn't believe it when I heard you were still alive a few days ago. Glad I was wrong! It's good to see you alive and well, Astoria lass! You still look the same after all these years," Gregorio heartily rejoiced with a soft chuckle while stroking his long beard.

He would have walked over to receive Astoria, who was like a niece to him, with open arms, but simply chuckling joy already sapped all the energy out of him.

"I'm also happy to see you alive and well, Uncle Gregorio," Astoria replied honestly, slightly tearing up with emotion.

Gregorio Elderwatch was likely the only living person left from the old Holy Knight Kingdom that was close to her.

Chapter 498: Golden Dragon Pangea

Astoria previously had doubts regarding Gregorio's health status. But after seeing Gregorio in person, the fog of doubts in her mind instantly cleared up; she was pleasantly surprised.

Although Gregorio Elderwatch seemed to have lost some strength due to his reduction in body mass, he was still healthy for his old age.

This wouldn't have been possible for a normal body refiner if they didn't have something special like the Golden Dragon Bloodline coursing through their veins.

Descendants of a golden dragon were all blessed with longer lifespans, strong physiques, and innate talents in general.

However, how did the members of the Blessed Golden Dragon Tribe become descendants of a golden dragon in the first place?

That was what Astoria wanted to learn.

Gregorio was good at reading people's expressions due to his wealth of experience as someone who had lived long. As such, he understood Astoria's thoughts at a glance.

He glanced at his son, Wilbert, and waved him off.

"Leave us."

"Yes, Father."

Wilbert obediently complied, no questions asked. He carefully closed the door on his way out and went back to his own business as the Imperial Legion's commander.

Although the Holy Knight Empire's citizens had more or less accepted Vaan as the incarnation of their Sun God, a small minority of the people still caused trouble against his will due to their hostility and disdain toward witches.

However, the minor conflicts in the holy city had been kept under control thanks to the Imperial Legion's assistance.

...

Back inside Gregorio's living quarters, the elderly man casually poured two cups of tea on the table and gestured to Astoria to sit.

"My son, Wilbert, should have explained our background and history to you. However, he seemed to have left some parts out for me," Gregorio casually started speaking, "Normally, you should have learned about this matter from your father."

"Unfortunately, he left us in an untimely matter," Gregorio sighed with regret.

He still blamed himself for failing to protect King Siegfried and letting the Braveheart family decline despite being his closest friend and confidante.

Even after he realized what had transpired in the imperial palace, he couldn't do anything to King Siegfried's younger brother, Argos, and Elsbeth. Argos was still a member of the Braveheart family, and Elsbeth was needed to bear Argos's child and continue the Braveheart family's lineage.

If he had known Astoria was still alive all this time, he wouldn't have silently watched the couple getting away with their unforgiving crimes.

Gregorio's hair turned grey overnight when he knew he was forced to watch in silence as the culprits behind his friend's death lived as they pleased.

"Thank you for staying alive, Astoria. Not only have you grown up well, but you have also brought back hope for the Blessed Golden Dragon Tribe as well," Gregorio said with heartfelt gratification.

"I do not dare claim all the credit, Uncle Gregorio," Astoria shook her head and said, "I simply got lucky."

She knew her Golden Dragon Bloodline was unlikely to have awakened if it wasn't stimulated by Vaan's blood essence, which also contained the blood essence of the Fire Dragon God.

"What is the origin of our Blessed Golden Dragon Tribe, Uncle? How did we humans become the descendants of a golden dragon?" Astoria knitted her brows and asked shortly after.

"You're quite curious about this, aren't you?" Gregorio calmly smiled before replying, "To be honest, even I cannot be certain of the truth. I can only tell you what I've heard from my father, which was also told by his father and so on."

"I'm fine with that, Uncle," Astoria acknowledged.

Right now, she couldn't even begin to guess the origins of their golden dragon ancestor.

Thus, even if she was told an altered or inaccurate version of their history, she still believed there would be some truth amidst the lies.

Myths and legends didn't sprout from nothing; there must have been a source or spark of inspiration.

"Very well," Gregorio nodded shortly after receiving Astoria's acknowledgment.

"According to the words of our earliest forefathers, the world we live in today used to be a desolate and lifeless blue planet without any land; it was just a boundless sea. The Pangea continent of today only existed after our golden dragon ancestor, Pangea, was banished here from the stars beyond the sky."

Gregorio had only just started talking, but Astoria was already shocked to the core; her eyes widened in sheer disbelief.

Astoria wouldn't be surprised if their golden dragon ancestor were a god-like existence that could create an entire continent with their power.

However, she didn't think the Pangea continent and the golden dragon ancestor sharing the same name was a mere coincidence.

"You don't mean..."

"It's precisely what you are thinking, Astoria," Gregorio confirmed with a nod before she could finish speaking.

"The Pangea continent is what remains of our golden dragon ancestor's body. It was said that after Pangea was confined to this lifeless sea world, a long time passed before life was born on her dying celestial body," Gregorio stated.

Astoria's lips twitched.

Just as she suspected, the Pangea continent was the remains of their golden dragon ancestor. It was truly unbelievable that a dragon could grow to such immense size.

Astoria couldn't even imagine how powerful the golden dragon ancestor was at the peak of her power.

Pangea was truly a god-like existence. And yet, such a god-like existence was also confined to this blue world until death took her.

The golden dragon ancestor's enemies must have been even more powerful than her.

It wasn't just Chaos that had unfathomable existences; their cosmos also had terribly powerful existences beyond their wildest imaginations.

Compared to such existences, humans were as insignificant as specks of dust in the vast sea of stars.

"If the Pangea continent is our golden dragon ancestor's celestial body, how could it look the way it does? Is it even possible to reduce the body of such a powerful existence to this state with time, Uncle Gregorio?" Astoria frowned with doubt.

"It can," Gregorio sadly nodded.

"According to our forefathers, this world used to be treacherous and unforgiving, completely incapable of nurturing life. The boundless sea was toxic and would corrode anything. Even our golden dragon ancestor was no exception."

"However, our golden dragon ancestor was extremely powerful. If she truly wanted to protect herself from the toxic seawater, no harm would befall her, no matter how long she soaked in the boundless sea," Gregorio explained.

"Then why did our golden dragon ancestor's body still get reduced to this state?" Astoria's frown deepened.

The more she listened, the harder it was for her to believe.

Nevertheless, Gregorio was patient and didn't get offended by her doubts. After all, he, too, once had the same doubts when his father recounted the story to him.

It might seem like a bullshit story, but once he told her the full story, she would realize everything fitted together and made sense.

"That's because our golden dragon ancestor willingly allowed herself to fall to such a state, Astoria," Gregorio calmly stated.

"Our world used to be treacherous and unforgiving, completely incapable of nurturing life. Thus, even though various life emerged on Pangea's celestial body, natural diseases and disasters constantly plagued them. Their lives were full of death and suffering."

"What do you think our golden dragon ancestor felt during such an age?" Gregorio asked.

"Pangea must have felt incomparable loneliness while she confined to this world... The lives that emerged on her celestial body must have been regarded like her children. As such, their company brought her joy, and their suffering and death brought her great sorrow... right?" Astoria guessed.

"That's right," Gregorio nodded.

"Countless millions of years had passed during such an era. In that era, the golden dragon ancestor favored the first humans and accepted them as her children; she transfused her blood essence into their bodies and transformed them into dragonkin, increasing their chances of survival. That was how the Blessed Golden Dragon Tribe was born."

"Alas, although the golden dragon ancestor succeeded in her attempt, our human ancestors still died from toxic rainstorms polluting their pure water sources. In the end, the golden dragon ancestor sacrificed herself to give every race a chance at life."

"And how was that achieved?" Astoria asked.

"The golden dragon ancestor purified the boundless sea by using the potent life force in her blood essence," Gregorio stated.

"Of course, the golden dragon ancestor's blood essence was far from enough to purify the entire boundless sea even if she exhausted every last drop of it. Still, it was more than enough to create a safe zone around the golden dragon ancestor's celestial body and allow life to thrive for a long time."

"That may also be why our Blessed Golden Dragon Tribe was the only group to possess the Golden Dragon Bloodline; no one else received the golden dragon ancestor's blood transfusion besides our human ancestors," Gregorio further inserted his opinion.

"I see... To think we would have such a long history..." Astoria uttered with a thoughtful look.

Although she still doubted the validity of Gregorio's story, she chose to accept it for the time being. She thought it was quite interesting.

If it were true, it would have been one incredible history. And if it wasn't true, it was still one impressive story.

Nevertheless, Gregorio wasn't finished.

"Others may forget, but our Blessed Golden Dragon Tribe must remember Pangea's love and sacrifice. It is our duty to realize the golden dragon ancestor's greatest wish."

"Pangea's greatest wish?"

Chapter 499: Zenith Control

Black Rose Kingdom, north of Blackthorn City

...

Ding!

<Your understanding of the Space Law is increasing>

<Comprehension of the Space Law is at 0.09%>

<Comprehension of the Space Law is at 0.17%>

<Comprehension of the Space Law is at 0.33%>

<Comprehension of the Space Law is at 0.71%>

<Comprehension of the Space Law is at 0.99%>

<Your Authority of Space has increased>

...

Vaan continued to meditate a short distance away from the dimensional crack, Gehenna's Gateway, with complete serenity and focus. He remained undisturbed despite his immediate surroundings crackling with tiny tears in space.

These tiny tears in space were only the size and shape of silk threads; they were extremely thin but long.

However, the most startling points about these thread-like spatial tears were their numbers and movements.

Thousand upon thousands of thread-like spatial tears weaved around Vaan's body like numerous flying serpents coiling around each other but never contacting. Altogether, they formed a near-invisible barrier with extremely high defensive and offensive capabilities.

If any Rank 6 divine being with spatial law comprehension had witnessed the scene, they would have been shocked beyond belief.

After all, they wouldn't be able to replicate the same scene with their level of control even if they were given a thousand years of practice.

Although Vaan had yet to achieve substantial progress in his spatial law comprehension, his control of space had already reached the zenith of its level!

In other words, Vaan's spatial manipulation was already at the top of his peers.

While others were still figuring out how to use 100% power from their 1% spatial law comprehension, Vaan was already drawing out 200%, 300%, or even 500% power from his.

They were not on the same level.

Two people of equal strength could throw a rock with the same mass and density, but the power generated by the rock could be significantly different depending on their technique and condition.

...

In the sky above the clouds, two of the ten Rank 5 young dragon elites stationed in the north secretly observed Vaan's spatial control through a magic screen with absolute awe.

"How long has it been since the Supreme Leader started practicing his spatial manipulation? A few hours?" one of them asked.

"I think so," the other answered vaguely.

They were completely engrossed in watching the Supreme Leader's control of space that they lost track of time.

"It's the first time I've seen someone manipulate space so skillfully; it's almost like looking at a work of art. Furthermore, I can sense such a threatening power of space from it... It's almost as scary as the flames from Lord Fire Spirit," the first dragon, Nox, commented.

"Almost?" the second dragon, Gidris, uttered with a startled look. "Are you saying the Supreme Leader's comprehension of the Space Law has already reached the same heights as Lord Fire Spirit's Fire Law?"

"Of course not," Nox shook his head and said, "Even if it's the Supreme Leader, it's impossible for him to comprehend a law to the peak Demigod rank in just a mere few hours. I'm talking about the power being generated!"

"It's possible to generate peak Demigod-rank power of law without having peak Demigod-rank law comprehension?" Gidris asked dumbfoundedly.

"You... Did you not study the elemental laws at all?" Nox glanced at the Gidris speechlessly before saying, "Of course, it's possible!"

"Look carefully at what's really going on with the Supreme Leader's spatial power. Those thread-like spatial tears didn't have much power at the start. But since they started spinning and weaving, their power has been growing exponentially with their speed!"

"The surrounding air is getting pulled in and generating wind to increase the spatial thread's rotation speed. Each spatial thread is only getting faster, not slower. What does that mean? It means they are not encountering any resistance at all!"

"Those spatial threads are following a very complicated acceleration flow to amplify each other's speed and power!" Nox explained zealously.

It was like creating a rope out of many thin strings. Individually, the strings weren't that strong. But after weaving countless of them together, they become extremely tough and durable.

Of course, Vaan's spatial vortex was much more complex than that.

Gidris couldn't help but tremble with shock.

He was lazy when it came to studying theoretical knowledge, but that didn't mean he was stupid. As such, he easily understood Nox's words.

However, it was also precisely because he understood Nox's words so well that he was utterly shocked.

After all, in order to manipulate so many thread-like spatial tears in such a complex way without a single mistake, one didn't just need precise control of the spatial power; they also required an unimaginable level of calculation.

It wasn't something just anyone could do.

Calling the Supreme Leader a genius or prodigy was simply an understatement; he was way too monstrous.

"Hm?"

Gidris suddenly frowned, having detected a large group of demon wolves that had just passed through the dimensional crack from Gehenna's side and headed toward the Supreme Leader.

Nevertheless, they weren't the first group to have entered Pangea in the last few hours.

Nox and Gidris had already slaughtered multiple small groups of demon wolves to keep them away from the Supreme Leader.

Even the nearby witch camp had been warned to stay away.

However, this time, the incoming group of demon wolves appeared to be particularly large; there were at least several hundred of them.

Furthermore, their average strength was also higher, being around Mid-level Rank 3 and a High-level Rank 4 demon wolf among them.

"High-level Rank 4 Shadow Wolf... Its strength would have been at least Mid-level Rank 5 in Chaos. To think a King-rank demon wolf would come this time. Fortunately, its strength has been suppressed."

"Wait. Don't interfere."

Gidris was prepared to make quick work of the demon wolves before they reached Vaan when Nox suddenly stopped him.

"Why?" Gidris frowned.

"Just watch," Nox calmly stated.

On the large magic screen in front of them, hundreds of shadow wolves continued toward Vaan's location to investigate the spatial anomaly.

Considering Vaan's location wasn't very far from the dimensional crack in the first place, the shadow wolves reached him very quickly.

However, the shadow wolves suddenly came to a grinding halt and wanted to turn back shortly after passing the thirty-yard distance between them.

They had finally sensed the threatening power of space surrounding Vaan.

Unfortunately, they realized too late and came too close to Vaan's vortex of spatial threads weaving at high speed, which looked like a sphere of powerful revolving winds with a vacuum space in its center.

"Awroo!"

The shadow wolves howled and whimpered as they were pulled toward Vaan's spatial vortex against their will. The closer they got, the stronger the force of attraction.

In the end, the closest shadow wolves were lifted off the ground and sucked straight into Vaan's spatial vortex.

Rip!

Without a surprise, the shadow wolves were shredded into countless pieces by the incredibly sharp and fast spatial threads.

It was death by a thousand cuts!

The area quickly turned into a bloody mess as the shadow wolves continued to get sucked into Vaan's meat grinder and had their flesh and blood scattered everywhere.

"Awroo!" the King-rank Shadow Wolf howled furiously as its kin died one after the other.

Unlike the other shadow wolves, the King-rank Shadow Wolf was able to yank itself outside of Vaan's gravitational pull.

It faced Vaan's direction from a safe location and opened its mouth.

In that instant, black particles materialized and gathered towards the King-rank Shadow Wolf's open mouth rapidly. The dark energy collected and compressed as the King-rank Shadow accumulated its power.

Several breaths later, the King-rank Shadow Wolf finally fired the dark energy ball toward Vaan with lightning speed.

It was a darkness-attribute attack with devouring properties that could disrupt the flow of Vaan's spatial vortex and cancel it—at least, that was what the King-rank Shadow Wolf thought.

However, the dark energy ball simply dispersed upon contacting Vaan's spatial vortex, turning into fuel that further enhanced the spatial threads' speed.

When two forces collided, it was natural for the stronger force to devour the weaker one.

The King-rank Shadow Wolf had overestimated itself.

Nevertheless, the King-rank Shadow Wolf quickly understood the situation. Since it couldn't save its remaining kin, it could only flee. Otherwise, it wouldn't even be able to save itself.

However, just as it turned around to escape back to Gehenna, Vaan's eyes snapped open with a sharp glint.

"You want to run after picking a fight?" he uttered coolly.

With a quick flick, the vortex of spatial threads stopped revolving around Vaan; they were shot, spiraling toward the King-rank Shadow Wolf like a cone-shaped drill with lightning swiftness.

The King-rank Shadow Wolf failed to outrun Vaan's lightning-fast spatial attack and died without an intact body.

In fact, the spatial attack was so fast that ordinary people wouldn't even be able to make out its cone shape drilling.

It just seemed like the King-rank Shadow Wolf was struck by a shockwave and exploded into thousands of pieces.

...

In another location of the sky, Henrietta witnessed the scene shortly after she appeared and couldn't help but fall into deep thoughts.

'Master, what do you think of that attack? Do you think I can recreate the same move with my ability?' Henrietta asked.

"..."

Henrietta's master fell silent for a long time.

'Never make that person your enemy,' Henrietta's master eventually said before adding, 'I know you are talented, but even if I give you a million years, you will never reach that man's level of spatial control.'

'He is a monster without equal,' Henrietta's master firmly stated.

Henrietta only managed to catch a glimpse of the cone-shaped spatial attack. However, her master was different; she witnessed the entire attack. All six thousand thread-like spatial tears were moved around like air.

She had never seen anyone with such free control of space as if it was a toy.

'Just who is he?' Henrietta's master wondered.

Chapter 500: High Compatibility

Although Henrietta was unconvinced by her master's words, she was also aware that her master must have some basis for such a high opinion of Vaan.

Perhaps, Vaan's spatial attack was far more complex than she saw.

"It's not like I was going to make him an enemy anyway; I already promised Astoria, Master," Henrietta mumbled to herself.

'Not being his enemy is not enough!' Henrietta's master firmly stated, giving Henrietta a sudden fright due to her assertiveness.

'What do you mean not being his enemy is not enough? What more do you want from me?' Henrietta responded speechlessly before asking, "Don't tell me you want me to steal him from Astoria, Master?"

'If you can't share that man with your friend, then that's precisely what I'm asking you to do!' Henrietta's master confirmed her suspicion.

'You... You've gone mad, Master! What's wrong with you? You were the one who told me no man was worthy of me, so what is this all about? Furthermore, how could I do such a shameless thing to my friend?'

'There is nothing wrong with me. The mad one is you for not seeing such a perfect man in front of you, Henrietta!' Henrietta's master retorted with a snort.

'This man is very compatible with you—! Can't you see it, my dear disciple? If you dual practice with him, your power will improve by leaps and bounds! So what if you have to be shameless? All is fair in love and war!' Henrietta's master asserted.

The corners of Henrietta's eyes couldn't help but twitch several times.

She held a lot of respect for her master, someone who possessed great knowledge and experience due to her long age. Her master was a proud woman and could be a role model for many.

However, everything her master had just said made her want to throw all her respect out the window.

'Master, don't forget that we are two people sharing one body. The way I see it, it is you who desperately wishes to dual practice with him!' Henrietta stated presumptuously.

The more she thought about it, the stronger she felt she was correct.

Otherwise, why was her master so eager to make Vaan her dual-practice partner? Did her master enjoy watching others do it?

Alas, Henrietta couldn't be more wrong.

'You... idiot disciple...! Are you trying to anger me to death?! Do I have to explain everything for you to understand?!' Henrietta's master roared thunderously in Henrietta's mind.

'Take a careful at that man's physique! Have you ever seen another man with such a high affinity to fire and space, the two elements you are cultivating?! That man has a unique spatial physique that could accommodate other sub-physiques!'

'However, that isn't the most important point! He has a Mid-rank Fire Spirit Body! Moreover, it's a Mid-rank Fire Spirit Body that is halfway to becoming a High-rank Fire Spirit Body! Do you understand how difficult it is for a human to attain a spiritual physique of such quality?!

'If you dual practice with that man, even if you can't increase witch cultivation, you will surely be able to raise your comprehension of the Fire Law very quickly! I wouldn't even be surprised if your understanding reaches the Demigod rank within three months!' Henrietta's master stated.

'D-Demigod-rank Fire Law comprehension in three months? You must be exaggerating, Master...'
Henrietta doubted, but she was shaken by her master's claim.

After all, it was extremely difficult for High Witches to improve in Pangea, let alone Transcendent Witches.

That's why she shifted her focus and got an early headstart in comprehending the laws with the assistance of her master. But even then, it was no easy task to understand the laws at her level; the higher one's comprehension, the slower their progress.

She barely reached the peak of the Transcendent rank after so many years. And yet, her master claimed her Fire Law could reach the Demigod rank within three months by dual practicing with Vaan.

How could there be such an easy path?

'Furthermore, I've only heard of dual practice as a low-level method to increase mana accumulation. How could it possibly improve my comprehension of the Fire Law quickly?' Henrietta added with a frown.

'That's because witches have only ever dual-practiced with mediocre men while being mediocre themselves,' Henrietta's master coolly stated.

'Do you think they ever considered whether their partners were extremely compatible with them? Don't forget; not everyone has a chance to perceive the laws early. It's already impressive to comprehend the law at the Transcendent rank. As for those below the Transcendent rank? They must be dreaming.'

'Since that man's fire affinity is so high, the Fire Law would always be present around him. Thus, when you practice with him, your perception of the Fire Law will be higher than normal, allowing you to comprehend the Fire Law more easily.'

'However, this alone won't help you reach Demigod-rank Fire Law comprehension within three months,' Henrietta's master stated.

'Then, how will dual-practicing with Vaan help me reach Demigod-rank Fire Law comprehension within three months, Master?' Henrietta frowned.

'Of course, it would be thanks to that man's own Fire Law comprehension; it is at a much higher level than yours. Also, his insights into the Fire Law are hidden in the world around him. Thanks to the compatibility of your two bodies, his hidden insights will also cycle through your body and be picked up by you during dual practice.'

'Why else do you think cultivators love to fight so much and, sometimes, receive sudden sparks of enlightenment from them? Of course, in your case, you'll be fighting in bed to receive these sudden sparks of enlightenment,' Henrietta's master softly chuckled.

As Henrietta listened to her master, she suddenly noticed an important detail and frowned.

'Wait a minute...' Henrietta stopped her master before asking, 'Doesn't that mean it's not necessary to dual practice with Vaan in order to receive his insights? Don't I just need to be close to him or fight him?'

'Well, yes.'

Henrietta's master's blunt confirmation made Henrietta speechless.

'However, the effect would be minimal. You need to have direct body contact for extended periods to reap the most benefits, and such a matter can only be achieved through dual practice,' Henrietta's master continued.

'Do you think that man will just allow you to stick to him for nothing? And you, a chaste woman, can glue yourself to a random man without being in a relationship just because it benefits you? Isn't that even more shameless?'

'You have to give something in order to receive something; it's a give-and-take relationship. Even if there is no love, a relationship is a must. You are currently in a favorable position to make this demand,' Henrietta's master stated.

She detested loose women with no self-respect for their bodies. The world was quite different from where she came from.

'Ahem, what do you mean I'm in a favorable position to make the demand, Master?' Henrietta coughed with embarrassment.

'Right now, you are in a very awkward position,' Henrietta's master stated.

'Although you are still the queen of the Black Rose Kingdom, most of your people have sworn their allegiance to that man with the Oath of Magic. In other words, no one will follow your orders over him, and that also makes the people feel awkward.'

'However, if you marry that man, you can hand control of the kingdom over to him and resolve this moral issue once and for all. You will also get your freedom, and no one will question his legitimacy to rule the kingdom.'

'Furthermore, you two can dual practice as husband and wife; both side benefits from all of this. He has no reason to refuse your demand. After all, you are still a peerless beauty,' Henrietta's master stated.

Henrietta felt even more embarrassed by her master's words. She felt like her master was making fun of her.

After all, even though she had been cold to all men and seemed aloof, she was actually insecure about her body. She had gained too much power too early and retained the appearance of when she was seventeen all these years.

Although she had thought about altering her appearance to boost her confidence, she was greatly scolded by her master.

"Why must you change yourself to please other people? Do you want to look fake? That's the mentality of the weak!" – her master had said those words to her.

Nevertheless, Henrietta still sighed when she glanced at herself.

"How can I be considered a peerless beauty? I still have my baby face, am short, and my chest is small... There's no way men like this kind of underdeveloped body..." Henrietta blurted unconfidently with her hung down.

Her hands felt nothing when she placed them on her chest.

"I don't discriminate. Though... I must admit, tapping that would feel a little illegal."

"I don't need your comment... huh?"

Henrietta suddenly froze when she realized someone other than her master had commented, and from a short distance away.

She glanced up mechanically and discovered Vaan studying her body intently as he gave a genuine and serious evaluation.

"You wanted to meet me?" Vaan asked.

However, Henrietta did not respond. She was frozen like stone. In fact, she thought being a stone wouldn't be so bad; no one would notice her.

Unfortunately, the reality of the situation was that Vaan had approached her and overheard what she thought about herself when she was distracted.

"I..." Henrietta stuttered.

She felt so ashamed and embarrassed she wished she could disappear on the spot.

This was not how she wanted them to meet!

