

The Witch 531

Chapter 531: Restless Night

Although Astoria was no stranger to pain, the inexplicable pain came from her most vulnerable yet guarded area. It was a place that had never been harmed before. As such, she couldn't bear the sharp pain.

Even so, the sharp pain only lasted an instant before a greater sense of pleasure flooded her body.

However, it was the mixture of pain and pleasure that truly turned the overall experience into something exhilarating and unforgettable.

"Ahhnn~!"

"Yes~~!"

"Ahh, it's so good~~~!"

Astoria's painful cry turned into helpless moans of bliss and joy as she experienced the wonders of being a woman for the first time.

Her world suddenly became more colorful and lively.

She felt like her mind flew through space and time, and the countless spots of stars turned into shooting stars that raced past her endlessly. It was magical and full of wonder.

Suddenly, she thought it was worth it – to have lived so long as a single woman only to meet Vaan and offer her everything to him.

She was grateful to be alive.

Don't live for the sake of living. Such a life couldn't be considered living. It wasn't living unless there was something worth living for.

People needed a purpose for living – it could be a dream, a goal, or even a responsibility.

Eternal life?

She didn't want it.

What good was eternal life if there was no one to spend it with? Astoria could no longer imagine a world without Vaan.

Nevertheless, such thoughts were the last thing on her mind.

As they were in the heat of their bed battle, Astoria didn't care for anything else. She just wanted to enjoy the moment with the man she loved.

Astoria became a curious kitten who had just awakened a new desire. She didn't blindly follow Vaan's rhythm and started exploring different things on her own accord. She changed positions as if she were taste-testing different flavors of pleasure to find the right catnip for her.

As if she was going to just lay there like a washboard and let her man do all the pleasure works.

"Ahhnn~!"

As Vaan continued his seemingly robotic yet very controlled piston movement, thrusting in and out of the honey cave, Astoria's moans of ecstasy kept resounding throughout the room. The atmosphere was utterly painted pink with their heated love-making.

Vaan was naturally impressive, but Astoria couldn't be underestimated.

Fountains of love nectar repeatedly sprayed from her honeypot, indicating her climaxes. Still, she never paused for a break, so neither did Vaan.

They continued at it like beasts in heat with endless stamina.

It was bound to be a restless night.

They started early in the night and only decided to stop after the first ray of day shined through their room's windows.

Astoria nestled her head on Vaan's broad, developed chest as she cuddled him and enjoyed the touch of his body and the warmth emanating from it.

Her cheeks were rosy and hot from the overnight physical exertion. However, she was like a newly bloomed flower, still full of vitality.

At the same time, her pristine body seemingly glowed with renewed beauty.

On the other hand, Vaan was like a dried seaweed, sapped of its essence. He was a mighty lion at the start but a sick cat towards the end. Astoria had drained him, unlike any woman he had before.

The number of times he ejaculated in that single night was more than he had ever done in a whole week.

There wasn't a spot in the room that hadn't been stained with traces of their love-making.

The once neat and clean princess room had become a complete mess. As if a wild bear had rolled around inside, the tables, chairs, desk, and even the wardrobe had either been damaged or broken.

Naturally, it was impossible for the bed, which endured the heat of the battle, to have survived. All of its legs weren't just broken; they were all shattered.

A physically-abled woman like Astoria was already bound to last much longer than other witches. But coupled with her light element and Golden Dragon Bloodline, she became a force to be reckoned with.

Vaan always had great endurance, but he had finally met his match.

Perhaps it was time for him to start considering Vitality Enhancers to strengthen the vitality of his little brother like other men did.

Nevertheless, that was something for another time.

At that moment, Vaan just wanted to continue cuddling with Astoria in the broken bed and enjoying the peace and calm for a bit longer.

It wouldn't be too late to check his improvements later.

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Outside the couple's bedroom, the apprehensive palace servants secretly peeked at the closed door from both ends of the corridor with vigilance and dark bags under their eyes. Evidently, they had been kept up all night and had not gotten a wink of sleep.

After seeing the noise had died down and the floor had stopped shaking with tremors, they finally heaved sighs of relief.

"Everyone, the storm has passed. I repeat, the storm has passed!" a palace maid excitedly informed with joy.

"Thank god, it's over!" another palace maid cheered before mentioning with exaggeration, "I thought the whole palace was going to fall apart!"

"Tell me about it! Who knew it would be so earthshaking when the Sun God was doing the deed with someone?"

"It wasn't just with anyone either but Her Imperial Majesty! Is she going to be alright? Who are we supposed to report this to?" a nervous palace maid wondered.

Suddenly, the palace servants on the right corridor noticed the head palace eunuch heading towards them from the left. The person paused behind a group of palace maids, casting her shadow over their heads.

As a result, the left group of palace maids noticed the head palace eunuch's presence and jumped with fright.

"H-Head Eunuch Blaize!" the frightened palace maids addressed.

"Stop loitering here and get back to work!" Head Eunuch Blaize barked with a frown before threatening them, "Or do you want to be punished for neglecting your duties?!"

"W-We'll go back to work now!"

Shortly after the palace maids sluggishly rushed back to work, Head Eunuch Blaize stopped before the only bedroom door in the corridor. Once he adjusted his emotion and appearance, he knocked on the door.

"Your Divinity. Your Imperial Majesty. Minister Mistral seeks your audience in the Great Hall to address a problem."

Chapter 532: Vaan's Suspicion

Shortly after Vaan heard Head Eunuch Blaize's news, his Omni-Sense immediately scanned the entire palace and locked onto the Great Hall.

Inside the Great Hall, Minister Mistral could be seen pacing back and forth anxiously with impatience. Clearly, he had something urgent to discuss with the Sun God or Imperial Princess.

However, Vaan could already guess what the problem was.

After all, he made such a big wave with his return when he decided to save the suffering Darkans and brought some of them back to the palace. Such news would surely spread to everyone in the holy capital unless people lived under a rock.

Since the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade was looking for them, it could only mean the envoys from the Great Ratholos Empire had finally lost their patience and caused trouble.

"I understand. I will see Minister Mistral shortly," Vaan acknowledged before dismissing the head eunuch, "You may return first."

"Understood, Sun God," Head Eunuch Blaize complied.

He took a few steps back and bowed to the door to show his respect before leaving to take care of other matters in the palace.

"This matter is most likely related to Red Dragon Clan. Leave this to me."

"Mm."

Shortly after Astoria obediently agreed, she watched Vaan purify his body with flames and put on his dragon-silk clothing. A blissful smile hung on her face.

Just watching her man getting up in the morning for work was also a form of joy.

She found happiness in the simplest of things.

Meanwhile, as Vaan prepared to leave, he also checked the system log. Without any surprise, he had reaped a bountiful harvest from the night of dual practice.

Ding!

<You have completed an unassigned Subjugation-type Witch Hunt>

<You have obtained the target's primal essence and light-attribute mana>

<You have absorbed an enormous quantity of light-attribute refined mana from a Late-stage High Witch>

<Calculating appropriate rewards...>

<...>

...

Ding!

<The system has issued you an objective mission>

<Objective mission: Collect 5 High Witch-level primal essences>

<Upon completion of the mission, you will be able to awaken a High Witch-level specialized magic>

...

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Ding!

<The rewards have been calculated>

<Based on the enormous quantity of light-attribute refined mana collected from the High Witch, a list of suitable rewards is available>

<Please allocate points to the directives according to your preference for improvement (103 chances remaining)>

<Directive 1: Reinforce the body with light-attribute refined mana and increase your three physical aspects (Defense, Strength, and Speed) by one unit each>

<Note: This is a balanced increase – Higher physical aspects may receive a smaller increase, and lower physical aspects may receive a bigger increase>

<Note 3: There is a slight chance to upgrade an existing low-rank talent to a higher rank>

<Cost: 1 point per selection (value of improvement will depreciate from repeated selection)>

<Directive 2: Use light-attribute refined mana to raise your affinity to the light element by 1%>

<Note: There is a slight chance to upgrade an existing healing-type talent>

<Cost: 1 point per selection (value of improvement will depreciate from repeated selection)>

<Directive 3: Feed the light-attribute refined mana to the Heaven-Swallowing Space and expand its subspace>

<Note: There be unexpected gains or nothing at all>

<Cost: 1 point per selection>

<...>

...

Ding!

<You have allocated 77 points to Directive 1, 23 points to Directive 2, 3 points to Directive 3>

<Allocating light-attribute refined mana to designated areas of improvement>

<...>

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Shortly after making his choice, Vaan experienced the changes to his body carried out by the system. The light-attribute refined mana he received from Astoria certainly couldn't be underestimated. There was a lot he could do with it.

However, he had another agenda for leaving all the work to the system.

Since his soul rank has reached Peak Demigod, Vaan figured his soul power was powerful enough to study the system in greater detail.

Unfortunately, even after focusing his perception to the limit, he still couldn't peek inside the system's main body, which was hidden inside the depths of his soul.

He could only sense a source of soul power released from it.

That said, this source of soul power had no conscious will. But it was still guided by an unknown law. If it did have a conscious will, he would have felt threatened by the system's existence long ago.

After all, a conscious will would imply the system was another being's soul or acting on behalf of another being to play the part. It would also mean another existence secretly monitored him. Such a situation involved too many risk factors.

Fortunately, that was not the case.

Nevertheless, after his failed attempt, Vaan understood his level of existence was still too low to comprehend the system. The system existed on a much higher level.

Vaan couldn't help but delve into deeper thoughts regarding the system.

Why did Fuhengir have it? If it was given by Balmodan the Undying, what was the Great Devil's purpose? Did the Great Devil create it? Or did the Great Devil find it somewhere?

Vaan didn't think the system was something a Rank 6 divine being could create.

As such, he was more inclined to believe the system was an ancient artifact or primordial relic found by Balmodan the Undying and later gifted to Fuhengir for testing.

However, it would raise a bigger issue if that was the case.

If Balmodan the Undying didn't have a problem handing such a valuable asset to Fuhengir, the Great Devil likely had other, more valuable and powerful ancient artifacts or primordial relics.

And this was just the Balmodan the Undying.

If the other six Great Devils also had such trump cards, it was impossible for Pangea to win against Gehenna even if they reached the same number of Rank 6 divine beings.

'What a headache,' Vaan thought.

He understood the urgency to increase his own trump cards. But just because he wished it didn't mean it would just happen.

It wasn't a problem he could resolve quickly.

As such, he slightly shook his head and pushed the thoughts to the back of his mind. He could only focus on other objectives.

'Status!' Vaan willed.

Chapter 533: Soul Suppression

Ding!

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[Status]

«Name»

[Vaan Raphna (Vahn Cadieux)]

«Title»

[Supreme Leader]

[Venerable Sage (of magic theory)]

[Venerable Sage (of aura cultivation)]

«Race»

[Human (75%)]

[Dragonwolf (20%)]

[Spirit (5%)]

«Bloodline»

[Spatial Bloodline (Heaven-rank)]

[Celestial Dragonwolf Bloodline (Divine-rank)]

«Age»

[20 (Body), 31 (Soul)]

[Estimated Lifespan: 7000 – 12000 years]

«Unique Physique»

[Heaven-Swallowing Physique (Heaven-rank) (Upgradeable)]

[Celestial Dragonwolf Physique (Low-rank) (Upgradeable)]

«Sub-physique»

[Earth Spirit Body (Low-rank) (Upgradeable)]

[Fire Spirit Body (Mid-rank) (Upgradeable)]

«Cultivation»

Aura Circulation Method: Heavenly Formless Dragon Art (Peak-rank)

Cultivation Level: Mid Rank 5 Aura King

Aura Power: 1705

Special Trait: Dragon Aura

...

Soul Trait: Dragon

Soul Cultivation Method: N/A

Cultivation Level: Peak Demigod Rank

Soul Strength: 5000

...

Mana Cultivation Method: Unnamed

Mana Cultivation Level: Peak-stage True Warlock rank

Magic Power: 225 – 350

...

«Law»

Law Comprehension Method: N/A

Fire Law: 5%

Space Law: 1%

...

«Skills»

[Expand]

«Abilities»

[Expand]

...

«Physical Attributes»

[900 → 920 Defense (↑20)] [Mid-level Rank 4] [1705 Aura Power] [Total Defense: 2605 → 2625 (↑ 20) (Early Demigod Rank)]

[1150 Strength] [Peak-level Rank 4] [1705 Aura Power] [Total Strength: 2855 (Early Demigod Rank)]

[600 → 810 Speed (↑210)] [Low-level Rank 4 → Mid-level Rank 4] [1705 Aura Power] [Total Speed: 2305 → 2515 (↑ 210) (Early Demigod Rank)]

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«Celestial Dragonwolf Transformation»

Effect: 50% base physical attributes increase.

[920 → 1330 Defense (↑410)] [Mid-level Rank 4 → Low-level Rank 5] [1705 Aura Power] [Total Defense: 2625 → 3035 (↑410) (Early Demigod Rank)]

[1150 → 1650 Strength (↑575)] [Peak-level Rank 4 → Low-level Rank 5] [1705 Aura Power] [Total Strength: 2855 → 3430 (↑575) (Early Demigod Rank → Middle Demigod Rank)]

[810 → 1215 Speed (↑405)] [Mid-level Rank 4 → Low-level Rank 5] [1705 Aura Power] [Total Speed: 2515 → 2920 (↑405) (Early Demigod Rank)]

Dragonwolf Scale Armament: High-level Rank 5 defensive power (Durability: 100%)

Enhanced Dragonwolf Claws: High-level Rank 5 offensive power (Durability: 100%)

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«Elemental Affinity»

[Earth: 55%]

[Wind: 13%]

[Lightning: 12%]

[Light: 5% → 20% (↑15%)]

[Wood: 25%]

[Fire: 80%]

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Thanks to the incredible potency of Astoria's light-attribute refined mana, Vaan was able to raise his speed attributes significantly.

Although his strength attribute failed to improve a single unit, the importance of his physical attributes becoming more balanced was more critical. Since all three of his physical attributes had reached the Early Demigod Rank, he no longer had a weakness.

Nevertheless, Vaan was surprised that despite such incredible improvements, he still failed to upgrade a single talent.

Evidently, it was easier to awaken a talent than it was to upgrade it.

Vaan was reaching the potential limit granted by his Celestial Dragonwolf Physique. Despite possessing a Divine-rank bloodline, the physique itself was only of the low rank.

If he wanted to upgrade his talents, he would have to raise the rank of his physique first.

However, he lacked the resources to carry it out.

It was impossible for divine-rank wolf blood essence to be just lying around waiting for him to collect it, let alone divine-rank dragonwolf blood essence.

Of course, if he managed to upgrade the talents related to his Celestial Dragonwolf Bloodline repeatedly, it was also possible to raise the rank of his Celestial Dragonwolf Physique.

However, the difficulty of such an endeavor wouldn't be easier either.

Even so, between high difficulty and rarity, at least one could progress with hard work while the other had no chance.

Before leaving the room, Vaan had already sorted out his thoughts.

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Inside the Great Hall, Minister Mistral's eyes lit up like the stars the moment he saw Vaan enter. He didn't mind the fact that Astoria didn't accompany him. After all, the Sun God had a bigger say than the Imperial Princess.

Of course, this was only true for most people in the Holy Knight Empire.

To the Elderwatch family and the other hidden members of the ancient Blessed Golden Dragon Tribe, Astoria's words held greater sway.

"It's great that you are here, Your Divinity!" Minister Mistral rejoiced before saying with regret, "I deeply apologize for bothering you so early in the morning. However, we have a situation outside."

"It's the envoys, isn't it?" Vaan casually mentioned.

"This..." Minister Mistral uttered with surprise before seeking confirmation, "You were already aware, Your Divinity?"

"Since you acknowledge me as your Sun God, I would be a living joke of a Sun God if I am not even aware of what's happening outside the palace with my divine sense, don't you think so?" Vaan nonchalantly replied.

"That's... true," Minister Mistral hesitantly agreed before seeking Vaan's decision, "What will you do with them, Your Divinity?"

The Great Ratholos Empire's envoys expected the Sun God or Imperial Princess to meet them upon their return. But after waiting the entire evening, the last trace of their patience disappeared.

As such, it wasn't strange that they would make a scene in the holy capital.

That said, the Great Ratholos Empire's envoy group still had self-awareness and self-restraint. They didn't resort to physical violence in order to be noticed. They simply barked outside the palace gates all night.

They threatened to return to the Great Ratholos Empire and report their mistreatment to Emperor Varan if they couldn't see the Sun God or Imperial Princess.

Naturally, such a threat was no different from the buzzes of flies to Vaan. But to Minister Mistral, it was close to a declaration of war. As such, it was not a matter he could simply shrug off, even if he knew his empire had the backing of the Sun God.

"Let them see me. I'll entertain them," Vaan stated as he lazily sat on the high throne with his head rested on one closed fist, glancing down indifferently.

"Yes, Your Divinity! I'll have people bring them to meet you right away!" Minister Mistral gladly answered with bright eyes.

He was finally freed from the dilemma and external pressure. He didn't have to endure the envoys' hounding and could finally have peace of mind.

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Shortly after the palace servants escorted the Great Ratholos Empire's envoys into the Great Hall, the leading envoy, Mortimer, glanced up at Vaan on his high seat with narrowed eyes.

"The Holy Knight Empire's Sun God? Was it so difficult to meet you, Your Excellency—!?" Mortimer complained with evident frustration when he suddenly started clutching his throat with both hands.

Minister Mistral was ready to scold the envoy for addressing the Sun God incorrectly and release his pent-up frustration. But then, he quickly noticed the envoys' strange behaviors.

An unfathomable oppressive pressure weighed down on the soul of every envoy, causing them to become petrified with fear the moment they glanced into Vaan's cold yet seemingly indifferent eyes.

The oppression was so powerful they couldn't breathe or talk. It was like they had been locked on by a mighty dragon from ancient times.

"I know why you have come, but you don't get to make demands here," Vaan stated emotionlessly.

Chapter 534: Mortimer's Idea

No matter how frustrated Mortimer and his group felt regarding the Holy Knight Empire's treatment, Vaan was the wrong person for them to vent their frustration. Even if they were the Great Ratholos Empire's representatives, their positions were far beneath Vaan's.

If they want to complain to someone, it could only be minister-level officials like Minister Mistral or below.

They could not do the same to the ruler of the country, let alone the country's god. The country's ruler had to be respected, and its god had to be absolutely respected!

Unfortunately, Mortimer's group made the mistake of disrespecting Vaan at the start of their meeting by directing their frustration at him.

Of course, this was something Vaan planned and intended to happen.

Whether it was diplomacy or trade negotiations, they had to be conducted calmly. Becoming emotionally aggressive and irrational would only put the party at a significant disadvantage.

Thanks to Mortimer making two critical errors upon their meeting, Vaan gained great leverage in their talk and could control its flow.

Under the oppressive suppression of his Peak Demigod-rank soul, the envoys' faces started to swell with redness from lack of oxygen as blood rushed to their heads.

Mortimer and his people wanted to overcome the soul suppression with the sheer force of their will to restore their respiration and not die from asphyxiation. But they couldn't muster the slightest strength.

In front of an absolute existence, their meager will to resist meant nothing.

Mortimer and their men had their fair share of extreme dangers and life-or-death situations training in the Great Ratholos Empire. Thus, they thought they had already conquered their fear of death long ago.

However, under Vaan's cold, suppressive gaze that made them feel like pitiful, insignificant insects, unknown fear sprouted in their hearts – one, unlike anything they felt before.

Not even Emperor Varan and the Wyvern Lord could instill such fear that they were unable to think, act, or breathe.

Just when Mortimer and his men thought they would suffocate to death, Vaan removed the oppressive suppression by glancing elsewhere. The overwhelming intimidation simply came from the intent in his gaze.

But under the vast difference in their soul rank, a powerful effect was produced.

If the same intimidating intent had been directed at ordinary, untrained people, their hearts would simply stop beating.

Nevertheless, once the oppressive suppression disappeared, Mortimer and his men desperately gasped for air.

It was strange, considering extremely trained warriors like them could hold their breaths for at least half an hour. And yet, what appeared to be a few dozen breaths felt like an eternity. Perhaps their body didn't actually need the sudden large intake of air; their minds just made them naturally react that way due to the intense fear of death by asphyxiation.

Mortimer was immediately humbled before they could discuss the purpose of their visit.

Unfortunately, not everyone would have greater self-awareness of the situation after such an experience. Some combat their fears with aggression and false bravado.

"Your Excellency! You may be the Holy Knight Empire's Sun God, but we are not your believers! We are representatives of the Great Ratholos Empire! You have no right to treat us this way!"

Mortimer's fear-recovering eyes trembled with greater fear when a Peak-level Rank 3 warrior behind him criticized the Sun God. In that instant, blood rushed to his head as his heart boiled with rage. He wanted to turn about and scold the foolish warrior immediately.

However, Vaan's oppressive intent once again suppressed Mortimer and his men, silencing their movements, voice, and breathing.

"I have no right?" Vaan calmly glanced at the furious yet scared warrior and asked increasingly coldly, "Who decided that? You? Your emperor? Only the strong gets to decide what is right and wrong!"

Boom...!

Vaan's aura exploded outward.

At the same time, the surrounding space was seemingly locked as a newfound pressure weighed down on Mortimer's group. Their knees slammed into the ground as the heavy pressure forcefully made them kneel and grovel on the floor.

Even the marbled floor couldn't withstand the pressure and cracked under the impact.

"And you are not one of them!" Vaan firmly said to the hot-headed Peak-level Rank 3 warrior.

Just when Mortimer's group thought they had landed into deep trouble due to Marc's, the hot-headed Peak-level Rank 3 warrior's thoughtless remarks, Vaan freed them from his pressure and sank back into his seat lazily.

"Not only do you not have respect for another country's revered deity, but your group also has neither patience nor sincerity. You only waited three days, not three months. What right do you have to complain?" Vaan mentioned.

"I think we are done here. You're not welcome in this country. Go back and explain truthfully to your emperor what you did here without a hint of falsehood."

"Then, tell him I said to choose qualified representatives next time. Otherwise, he may risk his country declining," Vaan advised Mortimer shortly after.

The Sun God's decision was like dropping a hammer on Mortimer's heart. Before they could negotiate anything, they were already getting shooed out of the country.

However, since the Sun God had already made his decision, Mortimer couldn't say anything to change it.

Now, his only worst fear was Marc being unrepentant and saying something else to aggravate the situation.

Marc...

This person wasn't one of his guards but the subordinate of another lord with whom he was acquainted and on friendly terms. He wouldn't have agreed if the lord had not requested to add the person to his group as a favor.

He wondered if his acquaintance specifically sent the person to sabotage his mission.

Just when Mortimer thought about threatening Marc with a glare to warn him not to say anything else, he suddenly had an idea.

The person wasn't one of his, so there was no need to care about the person's life or death. Instead, he should use the person's brashness to test the Sun God's bottom line.

As long as he claimed to have nothing to do with Marc's choice of words and conduct, the Sun God would most likely let them go beside the person in question.

At the end of the day, they were still representatives of the Great Ratholos Empire.

Chapter 535: You Wouldn't Dare...

"Then, we will take our leave, Your Excellency. It's a pity that we couldn't discuss cooperation," Mortimer politely said with a bow, but he still didn't recognize Vaan as a deity but just a powerful person.

At the same time, he paid specific attention to Marc, who was about to erupt, thinking he had it all figured out.

However, little did he know, his thoughts couldn't escape Vaan's cold, calculating eyes.

"Fuck! Are we really leaving just like that, Lord Mortimer?! Didn't you hear what the person just said?! Do you have no spine?" Marc criticized Mortimer before pointing his shaking finger at Vaan, evidently scared but still determined.

"Do you really think yourself a god? You're just someone who got lucky and befriended the almighty and revered dragons! If we had the same opportunities to meet the dragons, do you really think we would lose to you?!"

"I think you've grown too arrogant because you have the dragons backing you! However, I should have you know our mighty empire worships the dragons! They'll definitely choose us over you! How dare you threaten us!" Marc barked with confidence the more he spoke.

He was so insolent and brazen in his words that Mortimer and the rest of the group were shocked by them.

The Great Ratholos Empire had extensive knowledge of dragons and their sub-species. Thus, they figured out that the Rank 5 Red Dragons that assisted the Black Rose Kingdom in the war were relatively young among their species.

As such, many people within the Great Ratholos Empire believed that even stronger red dragons were hidden somewhere in the world.

After all, if the young adult dragons were already mighty Rank 5 beings, how powerful were the adult dragons?

Then, there were also the senior dragons, lord dragons, and possibly the chief dragons!

The tribe of red dragons was definitely a force to be reckoned with!

If they were willing to assist the Black Rose Kingdom, there was definitely a chance for the humans to befriend them, too!

Such a hidden superpower was crucial for the survival of Pangea in the face of Gehenna's invasion!

Nevertheless, there was no solid evidence to back Marc's claim.

While it was true that Rank 5 Red Dragons appeared to assist the Black Rose Kingdom in the war against the Holy Knight Empire, the exact reason was still unclear.

For all they knew, the red dragons could have chosen to make their appearance to ward away the foreign invaders and stop them from disturbing their lands.

The Sun God being a friend of the red dragons was only an unfound rumor recently becoming popular and mostly accepted as the truth by the general populace.

However, no one could even figure out where the source of the rumor came from.

"Hahaha... How dare I threaten you?" Vaan started laughing with a ridiculing look before he shook his head.

"No, no, no. You got it all wrong. That was just a piece of advice. However, if you don't stop pointing that finger, I will kill you where you stand."

"Now, that was a threat. See the difference?" Vaan calmly pointed out.

"Hmph!" Marc snorted before smiling brazenly with his finger still pointing at the Sun God.

He had been provoking the so-called Sun God, but so far, all the Sun God did was pressure them with his power and try to shoo them away.

"Even if you are powerful, I don't believe you would dare to kill the envoys of a rival emp—"

Poof!

Before Marc could finish his smug remark, his whole body was combusted into blue flames and reduced to black ashes.

Mortimer and his men stared intently as Marc was burned to death. Afterward, they stared back and forth between the residual blue flames and Vaan.

Where was the magic staff? Where was the feminine appearance? Where was the flow of magic?

There was truly a man who could command the power of fire at will without becoming a wizard. Perhaps he was the Sun God, as the Holy Knight Empire believed!

Only such a being dared to kill another country's representative!

"Your Divinity, this rude man was someone who tagged along at the request of an acquaintance of mine. He did not represent us nor our intentions," Mortimer didn't hesitate to say the words he had prepared in advance, making his group's stance clear from Marc's.

"Apparently not," Vaan casually acknowledged, allowing Mortimer's group to relax for a moment. But then, he gripped their hearts with his following words, "However, he did accompany you, and you did let him act as he pleased."

"Don't think that I didn't notice that, Mr. Envoy. You must think I am a fool because I am very strong. Not everyone is a muscle brain like your people. However, I am merciful enough to spare all of you. So, get lost."

"Next time the Great Ratholos Empire wants something, have the emperor come see me himself," Vaan coolly stated.

"I..."

Mortimer was given time to respond before Vaan waved his hand at them. In that instant, the space in front of them immediately twisted and distorted in a circular formation. It closed in on his group rapidly and devoured them.

"Your Divinity, was it too much to kill them?" Minister Mistral asked with concern.

"Sometimes, such extreme measures must be exercised in order to force out the scheming rats in hiding, even if it means risking a war with another country," Vaan casually stated.

'Did you capture everything, Zodreg,' Vaan asked shortly after.

'All perfectly recorded, Supreme Leader,' Zodreg answered, making an 'ok' gesture with one of his front legs as he monitored the hidden recording artifacts through a magic screen. 'But did we really need to record such a trivial incident?'

'No matter how trivial, it's always good to record any incident. You never know when they might be useful,' Vaan nonchalantly replied.

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Meanwhile, before Mortimer's group could understand what had happened to them, they passed through a tunnel of chaotic space and exited outside the palace. During their short passage, they suffered all kinds of cuts and battering in the chaotic space.

By the time they landed outside the palace's eastern gates, they were filled with bleeding wounds and broken limbs.

"Uh..." the wounded group groaned on the ground.

At the same time, a person in white robes approached them, casting a shadow over them as the person blocked some of the sunlight with their tall body.

"Oh, my... How did this happen to the esteemed envoys of the Great Ratholos Empire? Please let me take you back to our temple to treat your wounds," the person said in a feminine voice.

Mortimer glanced up and tried to identify the white-robed man.

"Someone from the Sun God Temple?"

Chapter 536: High Priest Setheiman

In the heart of the holy capital's eastern district, the main holy temple of the Sun God Temple was located. Though it wasn't the most impressive landmark in the holy capital, the main holy temple was still the third wonder after the sun god's statue and imperial palace.

The main holy temple was built like a pyramid with a golden peak to absorb the sun's radiance and covered enormous grounds.

However, its interior was filled with countless rooms and open spaces.

The main holy temple was home to more than 20-thousand priests and 15-thousand templars in active service. They also received more than 800-thousand visitors on a daily basis.

After all, it was also where qualifying imperial soldiers carried out their rites of passage. They became holy knights if they served the empire and holy templars if they served the Sun God Temple.

After Mortimer's group was brought to the Sun God Temple's main holy temple, they received the care of countless priests. With the aid of both medicine and magic, all their wounds healed in no time.

Once they were fully recovered, the temple priests escorted Mortimer's group to a large open bath of cleansing to wash away the dirt and blood and invigorate their bodies with renewed energy.

Mortimer's group was offered fresh sets of clothes after they finished cleansing and invigorating their bodies.

Shortly after, the temple priests escorted them to a private yet spacious room.

Looking at the multiple rows of seats and tables and the single platform in front, it seemed to have been a room frequently used by higher-ranking priests to preach the teachings of the Sun God Temple to new believers.

There, a single person awaited them – the same white-robed man who brought them to the main holy temple.

However, the person had his hood down, which exposed his elderly appearance. The white-robed old man was full of wrinkles and had a long white beard.

Mortimer's group found it hard to match the same feminine voice to the white-robed old man.

"We have escorted the guests to you, High Priest Setheiman."

"Un, thank you for your services."

"Then, we will take our leave now, High Priest Setheiman."

After a short exchange, the priests bowed to the white-robed old man and retreated from the lecture room, closing the door quietly on their way out.

"High Priest Setheiman, we are thankful for the aid you have provided us," Mortimer expressed his gratitude before firmly stating, "But if you are thinking about converting us into believers of your religion, you can forget about it."

"Don't be in a hurry to jump to conclusions, esteemed envoy of the Great Ratholos Empire," High Priest Setheiman calmly gestured for Mortimer's group to stop leaving before saying, "If that had been my intention, I would have at least planned a tour for you to experience the greatness of our Sun God Temple first."

"But of course, strong men like you wouldn't be so easily convinced to follow the teachings of the Sun God Temple when you have your own symbol of faith," High Priest Setheiman added with understanding.

"Then what do you want from us?" Mortimer frowned before mentioning, "The Holy Knight Empire has treated us quite poorly. However, the Sun God Temple appears to be quite different; you have treated us well."

"So, at the very least, I am willing to lend an ear to whatever you have on your mind, High Priest Setheiman. My men call me Lord Mortimer," Mortimer said.

"Lord Mortimer, was it? Then, I will be frank with you. I want to hear what happened to you in the imperial. Who did you meet? Was it the Imperial Princess? Or was it the false Sun God?" High Priest Setheiman inquired.

"This..." Mortimer hesitated with a frown.

No matter what, he was still a proud warrior. It was humiliating to talk about how they were suppressed and beaten inside the Great Hall, even if it was by the powerful Sun God.

Nevertheless, he noticed something important from the High Priest's words – he did not acknowledge the Sun God.

If the entire Sun God Temple shared the same view, he could gain something out of it.

"I heard Lord Mortimer—No, the Great Ratholos Empire is interested in meeting the dragons that appeared during the war," High Priest Setheiman quickly mentioned after seeing Mortimer's hesitation.

"That's right," Mortimer admitted with a frown before asking with suspicion, "What are you trying to say, High Priest Setheiman?"

"Although I don't know who you met and what transpired during the meeting, I can guess that negotiations didn't go well. But if contacting the dragons is what you are after... the Sun God Temple can help," High Priest Setheiman stated.

"Oh?" Mortimer was intrigued once he learned the Sun God Temple could help him. "How does the Sun God Temple intend to achieve that? What do you want in return?"

"We can't absolutely guarantee you will meet the dragons. However, the dragons are located somewhere in the Black Rose Kingdom. The Sun God Temple can grant you safe passage through the empire to reach the Black Rose Kingdom," High Priest Setheiman promised. "Perhaps the witches are more willing to negotiate."

"I don't ask for much. I just want to know who you met in the imperial palace and what happened for you to be kicked out as you did," High Priest Setheiman added.

Of course, saying the witches were more willing to negotiate was nonsense.

The witches of the seven witch kingdoms detested men – that was a known fact. Trying to negotiate with them was like talking to a wall; it wouldn't respond.

Nevertheless, Mortimer's group had already blown away their chances with the Holy Knight Empire's Sun God.

Mortimer felt like he had no choice but to take the risk of meeting the witches, no matter how slim the chances were.

After all, the dragons' existence was far too critical to the Great Ratholos Empire's future development and prosperity.

Nevertheless, the Sun God already said they weren't welcomed in the Holy Knight Empire. Thus, if the Sun God Temple helped them pass through the Holy Knight Empire, it would be openly going against the Sun God.

And yet, High Priest Setheiman only wanted information on the meeting?

"The information you want doesn't seem to be worth the risk the Sun God Temple is willing to take. Don't you think so, Head Priest Setheiman?" Mortimer mentioned, frowning with doubt.

"You don't have to worry about that, Lord Mortimer. The Sun God Temple will decide whether the information is worth it after we hear it," High Priest Setheiman boldly stated.

"Alright..."

Mortimer eventually agreed with the deal after High Priest Setheiman won his trust.

Considering the bigger picture, there was not much to lose from letting High Priest Setheiman learn about the details of his meeting with the Sun God.

Nevertheless, after Mortimer retold his experience in the imperial palace's Great Hall, he noticed High Priest Setheiman furrow his brows in deep thought.

A short while later, High Priest Setheiman's eyes lit up with excitement, having realized something seemingly significant or crucial.

However, Mortimer couldn't figure out just exactly what the High Priest found out.

"Thank you, Lord Mortimer. I understand sharing such a sensitive experience with me wasn't easy. However, the information you have provided is useful to our Sun God Temple," High Priest Setheiman sincerely expressed.

"Please stay with us and enjoy our temple's hospitality for the time being. I promise you and your men will receive the highest level of treatment during your stay as you wait for your holy templar escort to be arranged."

"Now, please excuse me first, Lord Mortimer. I have something important to report to the Archpriest," High Priest Setheiman stated.

Before Mortimer could say anything, High Priest Setheiman had already left the private lecture room to do things.

"Someone, come and settle our esteemed guests into the spare rooms on the third floor! They must be treated with the highest form of respect!"

"Yes, High Priest Setheiman!"

Multiple voices were heard entering the private lecture room through the opened door High Priest Setheiman left behind, along with other distant noises.

Evidently, the private lecture room had good sound insulation. No sound could come in or out as long as the door was shut.

"It seems like High Priest Setheiman and the Sun God Temple are planning something big, Lord Mortimer," Eiram quietly mentioned after noticing the subtle details before shortly adding, "I think they are planning to go against the self-proclaimed Sun God..."

"But seeing how powerful the self-proclaimed Sun God was, whatever they are planning to do against him, I don't think it's anything different from suicide. I'm afraid..." Eiram whispered to Lord Mortimer.

"Holy Knight Empire has its own fair share of internal conflict." Mortimer rubbed his chin thoughtfully.

"Right now, we have two choices – we could stay a bit longer and observe the situation, or leave as soon as the holy templar escort is arranged to avoid getting implicated in the Sun God Temple's mess."

"What do you all think?" Mortimer sought his men's opinion.

Chapter 537: Archpriest Thurman

In the central interior of the Sun God Temple's main holy temple, a heavily fortified crystal glass pillar radiated with brilliance. It was the main source of light and illuminated the temple's core region.

However, the main purpose of collecting and gathering the concentrated sun rays within the glass pillar wasn't to illuminate the temple's interior. It was only a byproduct of its primary purpose.

The crystal glass pillar was a mana fusion reactor – its primary purpose was to mix mana and sunlight to create light-attribute mana for cultivation.

Although the Sun God Temple's light-attribute mana fusion reactor wasn't the only one of its kind in the Holy Knight Empire, it was the biggest and most impressive.

As such, the main temple possessed a pleasant, healthy atmosphere. The sick would get better, and the wounded would recover faster. Even people's lifespans would prolong staying in such a place.

However, the effects varied.

Furthermore, the light-attribute mana fusion reactor wasn't perfected. Overexposure to the temple's light-attribute mana could result in disfiguration and genetic defects.

Of course, only ordinary people had the greatest risk. Aura users and trained priests had higher resistance to the side effects.

At the foot of the central crystal glass pillar, High Priest Setheiman took a spiral staircase leading underground. It was a restricted area reserved only for the priests of the Sun God Temple. Outsiders weren't permitted on the underground floors.

After all, it was the main temple's inner sanctum – the place where most priests of higher rankings trained.

It was also the place with the most abundant amount of light-attribute mana.

As such, at least a thousand priests were always meditating on the prayer mats by the crystal glass pillar at any given time.

Nevertheless, High Priest Setheiman didn't stop on the first underground floor but continued down to the final fifth underground floor.

The final fifth underground floor only had three dozen rooms along the walls and open space at its center, where a single sun god statue was situated right under the end of the crystal glass pillar.

At the same time, the sun god statue was partially submerged in a pond filled with mana stones.

The sunlight from the crystal glass pillar was concentrated on the sun god statue, which heated up the pondwater with bubbling steam as mana was released from the mana stones inside.

Evidently, it was the place where the most light-attribute mana was created.

There were thirty-six prayer mats around the pond with the sun god statue, but only one was occupied by a person – an elderly man dressed in the temple's white robes.

The elderly man's snow-white hair and beard reached all the way down to his waist. It seemed to signify his long age, but in truth, some active priests of lower ranking were even more advanced in years than the elderly man.

Nevertheless, no one would doubt that the elderly man was the highest authority of the Sun God Temple, judging by the five-sun mark on the back of his white robe.

"Archpriest Thurman," High Priest Setheiman greeted respectfully, bowing with one hand placed over his chest.

However, the white-robed elderly man with five suns remained irresponsive, his eyes shut, seemingly deep in meditation.

"I have important news regarding the false Sun God's meeting with the Great Ratholos Empire's envoys. I hope you can shed some light on the subject from your perspective, Your Holiness," High Priest Setheiman requested subserviently.

Once Archpriest Thurman heard High Priest Setheiman mention the false Sun God, his eyes immediately snapped open with a solemn glint.

"What happened, High Priest Setheiman," Archpriest Thursman softly asked, seemingly indifferent but actually paying close attention to the matter.

"So, it's like this..." High Priest Setheiman briefly explained the events that unfolded during the meeting between the false Sun God and the Great Ratholos Empire's envoys.

He also included how he acquired the information by making a deal with the Great Ratholos Empire's envoys.

"You've done very well, High Priest Setheiman," Archpriest Thurman first praised before his expression turned serious.

"Never in the history of the Holy Knight Empire—No, in all of Pangea had an envoy ever been attacked, let alone killed during diplomacy by the other party. For something like this to happen... the envoy was either incompetent and foolish to the point of courting death, or something made the false Sun God impulsive..."

"But considering the Great Ratholos Empire had always worshipped dragons since its founding, it's very unlikely they would send incompetent people to negotiate..." Archpriest Thurman mentioned with a frown.

The Holy Knight Empire and the Great Ratholos Empire had never gotten along due to the conflicting views of their faith.

Even so, they were never enemies. They were just bad neighbors who were unwilling to interact with each other.

After all, if they met, they would only engage in a never-ending debate about the true history of Pangea according to their faith.

Since most people from the Holy Knight Empire followed the teachings of the Sun God Temple, they believed it was the Sun God that gave birth to all life on Pangea.

On the other hand, the Great Ratholos Empire's people believed their Dragon God created all life and even the land itself. As such, true dragons were like royal descendants to the Great Ratholos Empire's people.

"That said, I've also heard the Great Ratholos Empire's guardian beast, the Wyvern Lord, was nearing the end of its lifespan," Archpriest Thurman mentioned.

"It wouldn't be a surprise if the Great Ratholos Empire's envoys acted forcefully out of desperation to acquire dragon blood for their guardian beast and angered the false Sun God. Even so, there are too many complications with killing an envoy."

"There's no way someone who led the witches to win the war against our empire would act so impulsively and irrationally..." Archpriest Thurman suddenly smiled smugly before adding, "Unless there is a problem with his mind."

"Do you also think the false Sun God practiced the Holy Aura Scripture that purposely altered to mess with his mind, Your Holiness?" High Priest Setheiman asked, half suppressing his excitement.

The Archpriest most likely came to the same conclusion as him.

"We don't know for certain. However, it is a high possibility," Archpriest Thurman answered conservatively before saying decisively, "As long as we can detect even a wisp of holy aura in him, we will be able to confirm the truth!"

"I have an important task for you, High Priest Setheiman," Archpriest Thurman mentioned seriously shortly after.

"Please instruct me, Your Holiness," High Priest Setheiman expressed his willingness to complete the task, regardless of what was asked of him.

"I want you to go and invite the false Sun God to our main temple. It doesn't matter how you do it or what you say. We just need the Sun God to visit our main temple," Archpriest Thurman stated while holding back his own excitement. "Do you think you can do it, High Priest Setheiman?"

"I will do whatever it costs to make it happen, Your Holiness!" High Priest Setheiman promised with a bow.

"Then, make haste," Archpriest Thurman urged, mentioning, "The longer we delay, the more likely the false Sun God will realize there is a problem with the Holy Aura Scripture we sent to the imperial palace."

"We can't let the false Sun God become wary of the Sun God Temple before we invite him into our inner sanctum," Archpriest Thurman stressed.

"Yes, Your Holiness!"

...

Shortly after High Priest Setheiman acknowledged the urgency of the situation and left to carry out his task, Archpriest Thurman directed his gaze to the closed-door rooms on the same floor.

These closed-door rooms were private meditation chambers. Thus, the closed doors indicated their occupancy. And at that moment, there were sixteen such private meditation chambers with their doors shut.

Although the private meditation chambers were built with sound insulation to prevent disturbance, the occupants could still hear outside if they really wanted to.

Archpriest Thurman didn't believe there wasn't even a single person eavesdropping on such an important subject.

"Gentlemen, I believe you have overheard everything and understood the situation," Archpriest Thurman stated.

"Ever since the false Sun God had proclaimed himself the Sun God of our faith, we have been losing daily visitors, and our donations have also steeply dropped. And that's not the end of it. Since the person decided to return and play god, our profits have continued to drop again."

"Our believers would rather camp outside the palace for a chance to catch the false Sun God's attention than to visit our temple for divine blessings," Archpriest Thurman mentioned.

"So, what do you propose?" an effeminate voice escaped from one of the private meditation chambers, neither agreeing nor rejecting Archpriest Thurman's statements.

"A Sun God we cannot control is one we do not need," Archpriest Thurman coldly stated before saying, "I know half of you are still waiting to see whether the false Sun God is truly the Sun God of our faith."

"However, you should all know better than anyone else that there was never a Sun God. Our faith was founded on the basis of profits – profits that we could use to enhance ourselves and improve our lives! And right now, this self-proclaimed Sun God wants to take away everything we built. I cannot allow that."

"I need all your help in powering the One-Mind Unity Spell. Once it's confirmed that the false Sun God had practiced our faulty Holy Aura Scripture and made his mind vulnerable, we will lure him into our spell and make him our puppet."

"I don't think I need to say what having the false Sun God in our control entails," Archpriest Thurman mentioned with a wicked grin.

Naturally, the other Archpriests inside their meditation chambers all understood the implication.

The Sun God Temple had great influence in the Holy Knight Empire, but that was all there was to it. It was still inferior to the imperial family and the Imperial Legion that backed it.

However, if they could control the false Sun God, they could finally overthrow the old monarchy and become the new rulers.

Several Archpriests were quickly tempted by the prospect of acquiring more cultivation resources and reaching new heights in life.

Chapter 538: Reviewing Knowledge

Shortly after Vaan dismissed the Great Ratholos Empire's envoy group back in the imperial palace, he returned to his private study.

Once he sat down at his desk, he pulled out the blank papers, picked up the feather ink pen, and recorded various instructions for management, education, development directions, and training down to the minute details.

The four volumes of the Heavenly Fire Art was also written down.

Vaan intended to pass everything to Astoria to assist her with managing the empire. He understood it could be daunting for Astoria to reform the entire empire while there was a mountain of issues that required resolving in all areas.

After all, even if Astoria could handle everything by herself, it would still take much longer. That's why he hoped his instructions would serve to speed up the process.

Nevertheless, despite the vast amount of information he needed to write down, he finished the task within two hours. His handwriting speed was incredibly fast and seemed mechanical.

After Vaan packaged the papers together, he stored them in his Heaven-Swallowing Space. Then, he wrote many letters addressed to specific individuals within the empire.

"Did you need something, Your Divinity?" a palace servant inquired after getting called inside the private study room.

"Find people to deliver these letters to the recipients written on them. You can ask the Minister of Internal Affairs for help if it's required. I just need these letters delivered," Vaan calmly instructed, passing the stack of letters to the palace servant.

"Understood, Your Divinity," the palace servant accepted the letters and bowed subserviently before taking his leave.

Naturally, the letters were addressed to the lords, nobles, and aristocrats who handed in flawed aura cultivation methods.

The letters detailed their required presence in the imperial palace within three days.

Failing to comply with the summoning would result in the strip of their nobility and rights in the empire; their lands and possessions would be confiscated, and they would be imprisoned until further notice.

'Zodreg, you will follow this person and oversee this matter. If these people intend to reject my summoning and flee the country, you can execute them on the spot.'

'Yes, Supreme Leader.'

After Zodreg received Vaan's order, he left to track the movements of the letters, ensuring they reached their destinations and their contents were followed.

...

Vaan felt Zodreg's presence becoming distant before the dragon left the range of his Omni-Sense. Once he lost track of Zodreg, he no longer paid attention to the matter.

Since he settled two matters in the morning, he deserved a break.

Of course, a break away from trivial management matters could only mean more self-improvement.

Naturally, raising his aura cultivation with divine energy was impossible while he was on Pangea. However, he could still review the knowledge he acquired from the exchange with Henrietta.

Thinking back to that moment, Vaan was still impressed by the sophistication of the energy cultivation system in Empyrean Scarletsea's Divine Realm.

Even if Pangea didn't lack spirit energy, he highly doubted human civilizations on Pangea would have reached the same level of development in the energy cultivation system.

The energy cultivation system in Empyrean Scarletsea's Divine Realm was something that took billions of years to develop. A few thousand Pangea years would only scratch the surface of it.

Nevertheless, Vaan understood the divine energy he acquired from the asteroids was the higher form of spirit energy.

Furthermore, based on Empyrean Scarletsea's observation of the sea of stars, the divine energy he acquired wasn't naturally formed. Instead, they were the remnants of fallen divine practitioners.

That further confirmed Vaan's speculation of the asteroid field being the remains of the celestial bodies that once existed there.

Divine energy could only be naturally formed in the Divine Realm – that was why it was called the Divine Realm.

However, there wasn't just a single Divine Realm. In fact, there could be as many Divine Realms as there were galaxies in the chaosverse.

The Divine Realm referred to the innermost region of stars that orbited the supermassive black hole found at the heart of its galaxy. The naturally formed divine energy was a byproduct of the endless swirl of light visibly seen coating the supermassive black hole.

Simply put, the supermassive black holes in the chaosverse were like giant divine energy plants.

...

In the energy cultivation system, mortals begin cultivation by refining spirit energy and accumulating it inside their bodies.

Since spirit energy was the energy of life produced by all lifeforms, it had the benefit of enhancing the body.

Naturally, enhancing the body came with increased physical attributes and longer lifespans.

Possessing gaseous wisps of spirit energy in the Dantian was the sign of being a mortal practitioner entering the Body Tempering Realm or Energy Refining Realm.

To advance to the Energy Condensation Realm, mortal practitioners had to transform their gaseous wisps of spirit energy into liquid form.

Solidifying that liquid spirit energy was the next step to advance Energy Condensation Realm practitioners to the Revolving Core Realm.

To reach the Heaven Ascension Realm, the solid spirit energy in the practitioner's Dantian would have to achieve a certain mass and revolution speed.

The steps leading up until this point were quite similar to Vaan's procedure in his mana cultivation to become a Warlock. The only difference was that he combined it all into a single step.

Nevertheless, there was another problem Vaan had to address if he wanted to embark on the path of spirit energy cultivation.

The spirit energy cultivation system mostly used the Upper Dantian as its energy center.

However, he had already used the Upper Dantian for his mana cultivation and his Middle Dantian for his aura cultivation. Thus, he was only left with the Lower Dantian.

Using the Lower Dantian for the cultivation of spirit energy was the less-trodden path.

According to Emphyrean Scarletsea's information, this was due to the difficulty of reaching the Void Realm, also known as the Shattered Core Realm.

Exactly as its name implied, it required Heaven Ascension Realm practitioners to shatter their core in order to advance to the next realm. The idea was to use the explosive power brought by the eruption of energy to completely reform the Dantian into a vastly larger space for storing more energy.

It was the process of creating an inner world in the Dantian.

However, even Vaan could see it was incredibly risky and dangerous. It was an instantaneous step with great demand for reaction speed and mental strength.

According to Emphyrean Scarletsea, many mortals died on this step because they weren't quick enough or their mental strength was lacking to control the energy eruption.

Vaan didn't find this surprising at all.

After all, the Upper Dantian was located in the head. Letting a large amount of spirit energy run wildly in such a sensitive area would naturally spell one's doom.

There was no second chance for anyone who failed to create the inner world in their Upper Dantian.

Even so, many practitioners still chose the Upper Dantian because it was the closest energy center to the brain. Reaction time and mental strength would be much greater in this location than in the Lower Dantian.

As such, while the practitioners who chose the Upper Dantian experienced the most death, they also had the most success.

It was all or nothing – they either rose above others or died trying.

Nevertheless, as Vaan reviewed the knowledge of energy cultivation, the more fated he felt to cultivate spirit energy in his Lower Dantian.

Reaction time? Mental strength?

He excelled in these aspects to the point that he was inhuman. To say he was overqualified would still be an understatement.

If anyone could cultivate spirit energy in their Lower Dantian to the Void Realm, it would be him.

After all, he still had Heaven-Swallowing Space to back him up.

Thus, even if he failed, he wouldn't be seriously injured. He just had to restart the spirit energy cultivation from the beginning.

Furthermore, what he had was divine energy, not spirit energy. Divine energy would help him have an even easier time breezing through the early realms of spirit energy cultivation.

'Spirit energy cultivation... I look forward to reaching great success in this...' Vaan thought with expectations.

Nevertheless, there was another requirement to cultivate spirit energy in the Lower Dantian – to have a firm physical foundation.

According to the standards of Empyrean Scarletsea's Divine Realm, a firm physical foundation was needed to compensate for the lack of mental strength in controlling the spirit energy in the Lower Dantian.

Without sufficient control, it was easy for the spirit energy to hurt the meridians while drawing power from the Lower Dantian.

Although Vaan was completely confident in his mental strength, he didn't want to skip over the basics.

Overconfidence was the beginning of one's downfall.

Vaan didn't have so much ego that he would gamble his life just to prove Empyrean Scarletsea wrong in his spirit energy control in the Lower Dantian.

More importantly, it just so happened that he needed to strengthen his physique to proceed with his aura cultivation smoothly.

With that thought in mind, Vaan withdrew a handful of the Hundred-Thousand-Year Stalactite Milk from his Heaven-Swallowing Space.

Gulp!

Vaan downed every drop without hesitation.

Considering the potency of the Hundred-Thousand-Year Stalactite Milk, a handful of it was a good amount for starters—or so he thought.

Vaan's eyes immediately bulged in the next instant while experiencing the domineering potency of the Hundred-Thousand-Year Stalactite Milk.

Ding!

<[Notification]: A handful of Divine-rank Stalactite Milk has been detected in your system>

<[System]: The System will help you absorb 100% of the Divine-rank Stalactite Milk's efficacy>

<[Earth Spirit Body]: You have been blessed with a 30% increase in the earth-attribute medicine's effect>

...

Chapter 539: Overwhelming Effect

The Divine-rank Stalactite Milk had a white, semi-transparent, weak luster. But after it entered Vaan's body and contacted his organic matter, its color and brilliance immediately transformed.

Like an exploding star, the Divine-rank Stalactite Milk radiated brightly. The Divine-rank Stalactite Milk unloaded its earth-attribute elemental power and flooded Vaan's meridian channels, allowing them to be visibly seen from the outside with a bright copper glow.

However, the copper brilliance wasn't just limited to his major meridian channels but covered all of his blood vessels from top to bottom.

The complex system of illuminated blood vessels made Vaan's body look like it was filled with cracks. But his body was far from falling apart. On the contrary, it was getting strengthened, especially his major meridians and minor blood vessels.

Although the Divine-rank Stalactite Milk made Vaan feel a tremendous strain on his major meridians and minor blood vessels, it was a different kind of strain caused by his aura cultivation.

His powerful aura strained his blood vessels by stretching them like rubber. In contrast, the Divine-rank Stalactite Milk strained them by battering them like tempering steel through hammering.

Furthermore, this battering sensation wasn't limited to a single area but spread throughout his body's blood vessels. It was like his entire blood vessel system was being tempered by millions of tiny hammers – they covered every spot and left no stone unturned.

Vaan subconsciously circulated his dragon aura to resist the strain brought by the Divine-rank Stalactite Milk's overwhelming potency.

Normally, such a maneuver in this instance would be considered extremely foolish as the additional strain caused by his circulating aura could potentially rupture his blood vessels and inflict severe internal injuries or even cripple him.

However, Vaan's quick thinking and gamble paid off handsomely, allowing him to reap the maximum benefits out of the Divine-rank Stalactite Milk.

Not only did his blood vessels not rupture, but they also became much firmer and elastic due to the repeated stretching and tightening.

Ding!

<Your major meridians and minor blood vessels have been significantly strengthened>

<Your major meridians and minor blood vessels have reached the middle levels of the Transcendent rank>

<Your major meridians and minor blood vessels are no longer strained due to your aura cultivation>

<You have discovered a special body refining method for tempering your major meridians and minor blood vessels>

...

Although multiple system notifications resounded, the effects of the overwhelmingly potent Divine-rank Stalactite Milk had not ended.

After flooding Vaan's major meridians and minor blood vessels, it spread to its five viscera, six organs, muscles, bones, and flesh.

His entire body enjoyed an overall improvement brought by the Divine-rank Stalactite Milk.

Ding!

<Your defense attribute has improved by 100 units>

<Your earth affinity has increased by 15%>

<Your Low-rank Earth Spirit Body has upgraded to a Mid-rank Earth Spirit Body>

...

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«Physical Attributes»

[920 → 1020 Defense (↑100)] [Mid-level Rank 4] [1705 Aura Power] [Total Defense: 2625 → 2725 (↑100) (Early Demigod Rank)]

[1150 Strength] [Peak-level Rank 4] [1705 Aura Power] [Total Strength: 2855 (Early Demigod Rank)]

[810 Speed] [Mid-level Rank 4] [1705 Aura Power] [Total Speed: 2515 (Early Demigod Rank)]

...

«Elemental Affinity»

[Earth: 55% → 70% (↑15%)]

[Wind: 13%]

[Lightning: 12%]

[Light: 20%]

[Wood: 25%]

[Fire: 80%]

...

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[Earth Spirit Body (Mid-rank)]

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

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

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

Effect 2 (Updated): When you are in touch with the earth, the earth will bless you with up to a 60% increase in overall defense and natural regeneration. The actual effect is dependent on the richness of the earth elements in the area.

Effect 3 (Updated): When consuming earth-attribute medicine, you will enjoy up to a 60% increase in effectiveness. The quality of the earth-attribute medicine and the earth elements in the area determines the actual value.

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Shortly after the effects subsided, Vaan's contracted earth spirit, Topaz, excitedly materialized outside his body.

"Kyu, kyuu~!" Topaz chimed happily.

She hopped and skipped around Vaan's body energetically before flying up to his face and showering him with affection by pecking on his cheeks.

Eventually, she ran out of excess energy and settled on the palm of Vaan's hand to rest.

"You really like your new home, huh? Tia?" Vaan commented with a smile.

"Kyu!" Topaz answered, nodding her head repeatedly.

Shortly after, Vaan played with Tia for a little while. After all, it had been a while since he let her out. He poked her soft cheeks with a single finger as he teased her. At first, Tia didn't mind Vaan's poking; she enjoyed the contact.

As such, she simply gave Vaan a big, innocent, and pure smile in response.

However, Vaan's pokes repeatedly caused her head to turn and tilt. Thus, her smile gradually disappeared, replaced by annoyance.

Afterward, she retaliated by clinging to Vaan's finger with all four of her limbs like a bear hug. She fought back against Vaan's finger by biting it, but the strength she invested in her bites made them no different from soft nibbles.

Vaan chuckled and willingly surrendered the battle, letting the little earth fairy win.

As a result, Topaz thought she defeated the finger and tamed it. She sat on top of it triumphantly before giving Vaan a haughty look, warning him not to mess with her.

She might be small, but she wasn't so easily bullied – When Vaan understood that message she gave him with her look, he couldn't help but chuckle louder.

After all, as the first of his contracted spirits, Topaz was like the elder sister to his other two elemental spirits, Ruby and Emerald. It has always been her who bullied them and never the other way around.

"Alright, alright. Settle down now," Vaan said before reflecting on his changes.

The Hundred-Thousand-Year Stalactite Milk was truly deserving to be a divine-rank earth-attribute medicine. Its potency was simply overpowering.

It was fortunate that he had decided to test its effects first. Now, he knew that he couldn't give it to his women unless he diluted its effects. Otherwise, he would have harmed them instead.

Chapter 540: Fat Bird

Vaan had to admit he had slightly underestimated the potency of the Divine-rank Stalactite Milk. But if he hadn't, he might not have discovered a special method for tempering his channels.

The biggest difference was brought by the increased 30% effectiveness from his Earth Spirit Body, which he did not anticipate.

After all, the system already allowed him to absorb 100% efficacy of any consumable product with medicinal properties. It was normal to assume there was nothing left to absorb beyond that.

However, the reality of the situation was quite different. He ended up absorbing 130% of the Divine-rank Stalactite Milk's potency. That was why it felt so overpowering.

Nevertheless, that just proved Vaan still knew very little about the divine rank.

Despite all that, Vaan was fortunate to make the mistake. He had gained a lot of it. Even so, he still hoped he wouldn't make another mistake. The next time might not be as unforgiving.

After all, they tend to be disasters rather than blessings.

"Kyu, kyu~!" Topaz suddenly tugged Vaan's clothes in a swinging motion, feeling bored.

However, Vaan was preoccupied with calculating the right dilution level of the Divine-rank Stalactite Milk to give to his women.

"I'm a bit busy right now, Tia," Vaan stated before suggesting, "Why don't you go and play with your sisters instead?"

"Kyu!" Topaz readily agreed with bright eyes, thinking it was an excellent idea.

"Just don't bully them too much," Vaan calmly instructed.

"Kyu, kyu, kyu..." Topaz expressed an exaggerated look of astonishment, asking how he could think she would do such an unthinkable thing to her dear sisters.

She would never...

Topaz had hands linked behind her back and her feet facing each other as she posed innocently and explained she would never do such a thing.

"Kyu, kyu," Topaz patted her chest as she promised she would be a good girl to Ruby and Emerald.

"Alright, alright. I get it, Tia. I'll let them out now," Vaan acknowledged her promise even though he didn't believe her. He was amused by her shameless dishonesty and found it cute.

Who did she take after? – Vaan wondered.

Nevertheless, shortly after the fire and wood spirits were released outside, they each reacted differently.

Emerald glanced up at Vaan and tilted her head in confusion while rubbing her sleepy eyes. She wondered why he called her out.

"Myuu?"

Seeing Vaan didn't have a good reason besides asking her to play with Topaz, she immediately tugged on his clothes and requested to go back inside.

On the other hand, Ruby did a loop around the room in the air, expressing her curiosity towards the new environment, unaware she was shedding flames behind her.

Fortunately, Vaan easily collected all the falling flames before they could destroy important documents and turn the room into a sea of flames.

At the same time, Topaz, who had been waiting for the two spirits to appear, immediately revealed her haughty nature.

"Kyu, kyu, kyuu, kyu!" Topaz tooted her horn, boasting about her new quality home. She told Topaz and Ruby to come over and pay their respects to their elder sister.

Bow to me, peasants—!

Ruby, while in flight, noticed Topaz's calling and flew over. She perched herself on Vaan's hand, right next to Topaz.

"..."

Topaz immediately went silent when she glanced up at Ruby's enlarged flaming figure, which had tripled in size since the last time she saw her.

While Ruby still had the form of a mountain bluebird, she had become fat and round, easily beating Topaz in size.

"Fyuu?"

Ruby lowered her head to get a better look at Topaz, wondering what the big sis wanted from her. She didn't quite hear what she said earlier.

However, Topaz felt suppressed by Ruby's blue flames despite being a High-rank Earth Spirit. She was a higher-ranking spirit than Ruby, and yet she was getting intimidated and suppressed.

Even so, Ruby didn't have any malicious intent.

She was purely curious.

Nevertheless, that was enough for Topaz to admit her defeat readily as she backed away from Ruby. She waved her hands at Ruby, telling her not to come closer.

"Kyu, kyu, kyu," Topaz said she would acknowledge Ruby as the big sister from now, so she didn't need to pay respect to her anymore.

Ruby wasn't sure what was going on. But seeing Topaz bowing to her, she thought she should reach out her wing to pat her head.

"Kyu!" Topaz cried, retreating further.

Then, she repeatedly apologized, saying she would never try to bully them again. She was quite startled by Ruby's flames despite being an earth spirit.

She wasn't supposed to be afraid of fire.

Meanwhile, Vaan observed the interaction between Ruby and Topaz with interest after he let Emerald back inside his body.

Even he was surprised by Ruby's size, but not by much.

Ruby had been constantly nourished by the great environment inside his High-rank Fire Spirit Body and unknowingly became a Peak-Mid-rank Fire Spirit, just a step away from becoming a High-rank spirit like Topaz.

Since Vaan didn't let her out to play frequently, it was the same as constantly feeding her highly nutritious food and not letting her exercise. As such, it was no surprise that Ruby would become a fat bird spirit.

Nevertheless, Vaan was most intrigued by Topaz's fear of Ruby's flames, which seemed even more powerful than ordinary Early-High-rank Fire Spirits.

Perhaps her unknown talent was showing signs of awakening.

...

While Vaan was deep in thought, he was interrupted by a sudden knock on the door. Ruby and Topaz also glanced toward the entrance with newfound curiosity.

"High Priest Setheiman, from the Sun God Temple, wishes to see you and invite you to visit the main holy temple," a palace servant informed before seeking Vaan's opinion, "Do you wish to see him, Your Divinity?"

Vaan's eyes flickered with a sharp glint, thinking the Sun God Temple acted quicker than he anticipated.

Clearly, the Sun God Temple's authorities were in a hurry.

"Sure, tell him I will see him shortly," Vaan calmly replied.

"Understood, Your Divinity."

Shortly after the palace servant left to deliver the message, Vaan stood up and prepared to leave with the two spirits.

However, he didn't even need to urge them.

"Kyu, kyuu!"

Topaz was already parked on his head, excitedly and eagerly urging him to take them outside, while Ruby was quietly perched on his shoulders with anticipation.