

## The Witch 571

### Chapter 571: Late-Stage Aura King

Shortly after drawing up a general space helmet design with a list of requirements, Vaan handed it to the female Rank 5 Red Dragon.

'Thank you for your company, Emi. You may head back to the clan first and hand this design to one of the dragon lords. I still have things to do in the sea of stars.'

'Understood, Supreme Leader.'

Emi obediently complied with Vaan's instructions without hesitation despite her curiosity regarding his business in the sea of stars.

Naturally, it was for Vaan to improve his cultivation.

Shortly after Emi departed from the sea of stars, Vaan extracted another divine energy crystal from one of the few dozen asteroid pieces he previously collected.

Although he had given a portion of the divine energy crystals to Henrietta and Empyrean Scarletsea due to the value of the knowledge they provided, he still had more than plenty left for himself.

Once Vaan extracted the divine energy, he immediately circulated it inside his body according to the Heavenly Formless Dragon Art.

Since his meridians were no longer strained due to the tempering benefits of the Divine-rank Stalactite Milk, it only made sense to advance his aura cultivation first.

Empyrean Scarletsea's energy cultivation method, the True Scarletsea Divine Scripture, could wait.

Impressive as it seemed, divine energy was a limited resource; its value in Pangea couldn't even be quantified. As such, it was better to invest the divine energy in something he already had great progress in than to start something else from the beginning.

The benefit of advancing his aura cultivation by a stage outweighed breaking through the first several realms of energy cultivation.

More importantly, he needed the strain to push his body past his limits.

Ding!

<You have absorbed a large amount of divine energy>

<You have refined the divine energy with the Heavenly Formless Dragon Art (Peak-rank)>

<You have greatly improved your aura power by 495 units>

<Aura Power: 1705 → 2200>

After depleting three fist-size divine energy crystals, Vaan acquired the required amount of divine energy to reach the next stage in his aura cultivation.

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Ding!

<Your aura power has surpassed a bottleneck>

<Your aura cultivation has advanced to the next stage>

<Mid-stage Aura King → Late-stage Aura King>

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Ding!

<Your major meridians and blood vessels have become burdened and strained by your potent aura power>

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Although Vaan's major meridians and blood vessels were strained by the aura power flowing through them again, it was exactly what he wanted.

Vaan swallowed a mouthful of Divine-rank Stalactite Milk from his Heaven-Swallowing Space. Then, he manipulated the Fire Law to soak himself in fire. Due to his high fire affinity, low-level flames had little effect.

Thus, he used flames capable of burning Early-stage Demigods.

Afterward, he guided a sliver of the flames into his body and ran it along his major meridians and blood vessels in tandem with his aura power.

As a result, he borrowed the triple force of vigorous aura power, Demigod-rank flames, and potency of Divine-rank Stalactite Milk to temper his major meridians and blood vessels, enhancing their toughness and elasticity.

The higher the advancement, the greater the difficulty.

Vaan began feeling the resistance of the higher physical states he wanted to reach. His limited divine-rank bloodline could only help him so far. Pushing his physical body beyond its limits required more than just resources; he also needed grit and tenacity.

As such, he gritted his teeth and endured the pain of his tempering meridians and blood vessels.

Time slowly passed, one hour after another.

The high internal temperature of Vaan's body caused sweat to ooze out of his pores, along with impurities.

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Ding!

<You have increased your defense attribute by 100 units>

<You have improved your earth affinity by 10%>

<Earth Affinity: 70% → 80%>

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<You have made a breakthrough in your Earth Spirit Body>

<Mid-rank Earth Spirit Body → High-rank Earth Spirit>

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Ding!

<You have successfully tempered major meridians and blood vessels to the Late-stage Transcendent Rank>

<Your major meridians and blood vessels are no longer burdened by your rigorous aura power>

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After the effects subsided, Vaan exhaled a small cloud of steaming-hot, foul air.

'Status!'

Ding!

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### «Physical Attributes»

[1050 → 1150 Defense (↑100)] [Peak-level Rank 4] [1705 → 2200 Aura Power (↑495)] [Total Defense: 2755 → 3350 (↑595) (Early Demigod Rank → Middle Demigod Rank)]

[1150 → 1200 Strength (↑50)] [Peak-level Rank 4 → Low-level Rank 5] [1705 → 2200 Aura Power (↑495)] [Total Strength: 2855 → 3400 (↑ 545) (Early Demigod Rank → Middle Demigod Rank)]

[930 → 950 Speed (↑20)] [Mid-level Rank 4] [1705 → 2200 Aura Power (↑495)] [Total Speed: 2635 → 3150 (↑515) (Early Demigod Rank)]

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### «Celestial Dragonwolf Transformation»

Effect: 50% base physical attributes increase.

[1150 → 1725 Defense (↑575)] [Peak-level Rank 4 → Mid-level Rank 5] [2200 Aura Power] [Total Defense: 3350 → 3925 (↑575) (Early Demigod Rank → Middle Demigod Rank)]

[1200 → 1800 Strength (↑600)] [Low-level Rank 5 → Mid-level Rank 5] [2200 Aura Power] [Total Strength: 3400 → 4000 (↑600) (Middle Demigod Rank → Late Demigod Rank)]

[950 → 1425 Speed (↑475)] [Mid-level Rank 4 → Low-level Rank 5] [2200 Aura Power] [Total Speed: 3150 → 3625 (↑475) (Early Demigod Rank → Middle 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: 70% → 80% (↑10%)]

[Wind: 13%]

[Lightning: 12%]

[Light: 30%]

[Wood: 25%]

[Fire: 80%]

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After seeing the significant improvements in his physical attributes, Vaan truly started to appreciate the divine-rank bloodline he possessed.

It had really helped him strengthen his physical body smoothly up until this point.

In the world of aura users, there was no separation between physical attributes and aura power when grading one's cultivation rank. Whether one had little physical attributes and high aura power or high physical attributes and little aura power, they would still be given the same cultivation rank due to their equal battle power.

However, it was clear that this was an outdated and incorrect grading system for aura cultivation since humans underestimated the potential of the physical body.

The potential of the physical body was not inferior to aura power.

As such, now that Vaan had reached the Late-stage Aura King rank in aura cultivation, he was most likely the most accomplished aura user in the entire world of Pangea.

Other so-called Late-stage Aura Kings like Emperor Reinardier wouldn't have as much aura power as he did.

'Quite a fair bit of time has passed. I should head back,' Vaan thought with a frown.

It was getting harder and also taking him longer to advance.

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Red Dragon Clan, Seventh Peak

"Lord Kemun, the Supreme Leader has instructed me to hand this to you for study and production," Emi informed the first dragon lord upon her return.

"Oh?" the mention of Supreme Leader immediately caught Kemun's complete attention; he faced the young dragon elite before casually demanding, "Let me take a look then."

"Yes, Lord Kemun," Emi complied.

With a quick sneeze, a rolled-up paper protected inside a bubble barrier flew out of her nostril, heading straight toward the seventh dragon lord.

"Eww... Couldn't you have stored this inside of your personal subspace instead, little lady?" Lord Kemun lightly complained after accepting the rolled-up paper in mid-air with magic.

"Hehe!" Emi simply chuckled.

It was definitely not the response a normal young elite would give to one of the nine dragon lords unless they share a close relationship.

"How is the outside world?" Kemun casually asked his daughter shortly after as he unrolled the paper with telekinetic magic and glanced at its contents.

However, he didn't wait for his daughter's reply before asking with a baffled look, "What kind of design is this supposed to be?"

Naturally, the details of the design were all recorded. But usually, one could guess the general function of the design based on its drawing – or so Kemun thought.

"The Supreme Leader said this space helmet can help us breathe in the sea of stars, Father," Emi answered, behaving more seriously.

"Help us breathe in the sea of stars? This round, bubble-looking thing?" Kemun uttered with doubt and unwillingness—not because he didn't believe in the space helmet's function but because he didn't think it looked good.

If he wore such a thing, what would be the difference between his head and a magic lightbulb?

"What's the matter, Lord Kemun? You don't want to carry out the Supreme Leader's will?" the first dragon lord's voice traveled over as the being flew over.

"Lord Astarot? What brings you to my peak?" Kemun frowned.

"I heard the Supreme Leader has something new for us to make, so I came to check," Lord Astarot calmly stated as a matter of fact.

"You've been spying on my peak?" Kemun's expression darkened as he pondered the first dragon lord's intention.

However, Astarot had nothing to hide.

"Of course. I've been getting complaints from the sacred Fire Spirits that you have been bullying your contracted Fire Spirit, Lord Kemun. Naturally, I have to keep an eye on you and make sure



you don't do anything that could anger Lord Flamewing," Lord Astarot stated openly with a calm demeanor.

"That little s... thing complained to other lords?" Kemun's anger almost flared up when he thought of his contracted spirit but forced himself to remain calm, albeit with some indignance. "Don't listen to that little thing. It's a natural troublemaker, Lord Astarot."

"Yeah, yeah, now let me see the Supreme Leader's design, Lord Kemun," Astarot shortly took the design paper from the seventh dragon lord and inspected it with a calm demeanor.

However, his expression quickly stiffened with an odd look after he perused the details.

The space helmet's function and requirements were clearly written, detailing what they had to do to complete the design on their end.

Astarot understood the need for the space helmet, but even he thought the Supreme Leader could have put a little more effort into designing the form.

It was just a big round bubble.

Wearing such a big glass dome on their heads would make them look ridiculous, like clowns. And if they accidentally released their fire breath in such a closed, limited environment full of oxygen, they would definitely become a joke.

"The Supreme Leader wants us to wear something that looks like this if we want to go to the sea of stars?" Astarot asked with a deep, solemn look.

Chapter 572: Hades's Jade Soul King

Chaos, Realm of Gehenna

Several hundred thousand kilometers away from the Illusory Demon Forest, where the dimensional crack to Pangea was hidden, a vast region of shattered earth and floating landmasses could be found.

Beneath was a seemingly bottomless abyss of pitch darkness. It was unknown what was hidden in its depths, but it wasn't the main point of interest in the region. Instead, it was the floating landmasses that had risen to the high heavens.

It appeared to be a zero-gravity or anti-gravity zone.

From a distance, the layers upon layers of floating landmasses looked like an enormous fractured pillar.

The floating region didn't look like a place that would accommodate any life.

However, on the contrary, it was home to some of the most powerful demons and demonic beasts within a 300,000-kilometer radius of the floating region.

Nevertheless, the floating region's main attraction was undoubtedly the very top in the starry sea of Chaos, where a far larger floating landmass could be found.

In fact, the floating landmass was vast enough to be called a small continent.

On this small continent, which floated in the space region above Gehenna, a magnificently grand black palace could be found at its center.

It was the Undying Devil Palace, the residence of the Great Devil Balmodan, ruler of Gehenna's Wolf God Domain.

Just by comparison, the total surface coverage of all the floating landmasses in the region put together was larger than the Pangea continent by several folds.

Based on this information, it was clear the realm of Gehenna, as a whole, was incomparably vast.

As such, ordinary demons would take countless years to cross the distance between the Illusory Demon Forest and Undying Devil Palace by foot—and that was only possible if they could make the journey without dying to unforeseen danger along the way.

Fortunately, there were over three dozen ancient portals on the edge of the land surrounding the Undying Devil Palace. Each ancient portal led to a different region – some within the Wolf God Domain and others outside of it.

At that moment, Great Devil Balmodan received a guest from outside of Gehenna.

Balmodan sat on a hard-bone throne covered in soft fur in the Great Hall. A short distance away from him, a large skeletal figure coated in green flames also sat on a bone throne.

However, this bone throne was much larger and completely comprised of whole skeletal figures. It also exuded a weak green glow, similar to the large skeletal figure's ghostly green flames.

The large skeletal figure was sitting on a self-made throne full of specters that it controlled.

None of it was physical.

"Tell me, what business does the Jade Soul King of Hades have to visit my humble Undying Devil Palace today?" Balmodan asked, seemingly calm but wary in his heart.

The Jade Soul King of Hades was another Peak Rank 6 divine existence and domain ruler like him. He wasn't the most preferable opponent nor the easiest one to face due to his spectral skills.

Furthermore, Hades and Gehenna were roughly equal in power.

Although their relationship wasn't good, it wasn't bad either. They were just neighbors who rarely interacted, which Balmodan wanted to maintain. It was better than a Realm War, which would weaken both sides and make their neighboring realms cast their greedy eyes in their direction.

Realm Wars were far too common in Chaos – most didn't even need a personal reason, just greed for resources.

"Oh please, Immortal Lycan King. Don't act like you don't know why I'm here," Jade Soul King grinned eerily as the green flames in his empty eye sockets flickered.

"If you don't say, how could I possibly know, Jade Soul King?" Balmodan coolly replied while secretly feeling alarmed in his heart.

It almost seemed like the Jade Soul King learned about Pangea.

"It is better to ask than to assume, lest unintentionally disrespect is given," Balmodan added.

"Kekeke, this is why I like doing business with you, Immortal Lycan King. At the very least, you are willing to negotiate with me," Jade Soul King chuckled sinisterly before saying, "However, it's nothing new."

"I need a new batch of souls to refine a new divine soul pill. I need ten million souls this time," the Jade Soul King stated the purpose of his visit before asking, "You'll give it to me, won't you, Immortal Lycan King?"

"Ten million souls is not a small number, Jade Soul King," Balmodan emphasized with a frown before asking solemnly, "Should I agree, what can you offer in return?"

Even if he was a Great Devil, ruling over billions of lives in his domain, ten million was still not a small number to freely squander. After all, it was hard to guess when the Jade Soul King would visit Gehenna and ask for more souls again.

The cumulative souls would add up to a sizeable sum over multiple deals – it could hurt his divinity.

"One of my divine soul pills if I succeed in the refinement," Jade Soul King stated.

"That's it? For ten million souls, all you have to offer is something I might not even get? Surely, you have something more tangible to offer for ten million souls, Jade Soul King," Balmodan replied with a deep frown.

Even if he was willing to do business with the Jade Soul King, it was based on an equivalent exchange. He wouldn't agree to suffer losses. If there were no profit to gain, then there would be no deal to make.

Gehenna not wanting a Realm War with Hades didn't mean it was afraid of one.

Balmodan wouldn't let Jade Soul King take advantage of him.

"Kekeke, divine soul pills are absolutely priceless in Chaos. I was giving you face by offering you the chance to receive one from me. But since you don't want it, that's also fine," Jade Soul King

chuckled before asking, "How about a cart's worth of Rank 6 Starcore Iron for a hundred million souls?"

Tap, tap, tap...

Balmodan tapped the armrest of his throne with a finger, weighing the value of the deal.

The heavy iron of a star's core was indeed valuable to Rank 6 divine beings, as they could only harvest it from dead stars.

However, a hundred million souls was also not a small sum.

That said, it was still better than giving ten million souls for something that would most likely fail and give him nothing in return.

Balmodan was not stupid; he could see through Jade Soul King's sly intention.

A divine soul pill had an incredibly low success rate.

If the promise of a divine soul pill was all it took to get ten million souls, the Jade Soul King would keep coming back for the same deal every time.

In other words, Balmodan would only be giving free souls for nothing.

Nevertheless, before Balmodan could decide, he was suddenly notified of a subordinate requesting an audience. His subordinate, Thyrius of the Shadow Wolf Clan, came with urgent news.

Balmodan didn't doubt Thyrius brought urgent news related to Pangea. Thus, his expression couldn't help but turn grim and dark. The timing couldn't have been any worse.

"What's wrong, Immortal Lycan King? Your subordinate has something important to report. We should let him in and hear what he has to say," Jade Soul King said, seeming considerate, but he was, in fact, not.

The Jade Soul King's intention was clear – he wanted to listen in on Thyrius's report.

As such, Balmodan's expression darkened further.

"Let him in!"

Shortly after Balmodan gave the order, Thyrius was brought inside the Great Hall. Almost immediately, he noticed the tense atmosphere in the Great Hall.

His master's grim expression nearly frightened him to death.

"What is so urgent for you to come and report, Thyrius?" Balmodan asked with an oppressive and suffocating aura, threatening the Shadow Wolf Clan's leader to think carefully before he gave an answer.

Thyrius glanced at the Jade Soul King, and his body quickly trembled. He also understood he had come at a bad moment in that instant.

"Kekeke, out with it, wolf boy. What did you come to report to your master?" Jade Soul King urged with an eerily smile before adding threateningly, "You better speak the truth. If you lie in front of me, I will kill you."

Thyrius immediately shook with fear.

He had walked into a hall of death – if he reported fake news, the Jade Soul King would kill him. But if he reported the actual news, his master would definitely kill him. Either choice led to death. He was doomed the moment he entered the Great Hall.

Thyrius cursed his ill fate, but he still knew which choice to pick – He had to follow the will of his master.

"Master, there's an uprising in my region of jurisdiction, and my clan's power is not enough to suppress them. So I came to request urgent—"

Splat!

Thyrius did not finish his false report before a giant green-glowing bone feet slammed down and crushed his body into a meat paste.

"Didn't I say I will kill you if you lie? Kekeke, did you have a death wish?" Jade Soul King chuckled sinisterly to the corpse before saying, "Don't worry, Immortal Lycan King. I'll get the truth out of him for you."

Shortly after, Thyrius's soul was extracted from his bloodied corpse. An expression of fear was written all over his as he helplessly flew into the Jade Soul King's grasp.

Balmodan wasn't fazed when Jade Soul King killed his subordinate. But he quickly exploded with rage when he realized what Jade Soul King intended to do with Thyrius's soul.

"Jade Soul King, my Undying Devil Palace isn't a place for you to act as you please!"

Chapter 573: Revealed Secrets

"What do you mean 'act as I please?' I was just punishing a dishonest subordinate on your behalf, Immortal Lycan King. A subordinate who lies to his master deserves death," Jade Soul King replied nonchalantly, preparing to extract information directly from Thyrius's soul.

Suddenly, Balmodan had made a preemptive move at Jade Soul King, clawing at the hand that held Thyrius's soul—only for the latter to block it with a bone shield cloaked in eerie green flames.

Boom!

The Great Hall suddenly resonated and shook violently from the powerful impact of their clash. However, the rebounding force pushed back neither side.

Balmodan exerted more force on the green-flaming bone shield but did not budge it. At the same time, Jade Soul King increased the power of his green-flaming bone shield but also failed to force Balmodan back.

The two were locked in a stalemate, with neither side losing to the other.

Rumble...!

The ground shook with low, reverberating tremors.

Before long, cracks formed underneath Balmodan's feet as the weight of the clashing forces traveled into the ground. With each additional exertion of physical might, the fractured floor expanded further and further, reaching the corners of the Great Hall.

"Kekeke, why are you so angry, Immortal Lycan King? He was just a mere subordinate," Jade Soul King chuckled eerily, antagonizing Balmodan before asking, "There's no need to harm our relationship over him, don't you think?"

"He wasn't just a mere subordinate! He was a semi-divine being who had inherited some of my bloodline! That makes him a descendant of mine! Even if he has to be punished, only I have the right to punish him! Not you, Jade Soul King!" Balmodan roared.

He exerted even more force to break the green-flaming bone shield, which only resulted in further damage to the Great Hall's floor.

At the same time, Jade Soul King bought more than enough time to extract the memories from Thyrius's soul.

As such, all of Thyrius's information regarding Pangea entered his sea of consciousness.

"Kekeke, so that's the real reason behind your attack, Immortal Lycan King," Jade Soul King chuckled before suddenly snorting, "Hmph!"

With a flick of his wrist, a tremendous surge of power channeled into the green-flaming bone shield, greatly pushing against Balmodan's claws.

Boom!

Balmodan was finally forced to retreat several paces as his claw separated from the green-flaming bone shield.

However, the rebounding force also forced Jade Soul King back.



The Jade Soul King's bone throne collapsed into a pile of broken bones in the process. But shortly after, the broken bones reformed, forging a bone staff with a crown cage containing an orb of green flames within.

Jade Soul King grabbed his bone staff and slammed the ground, causing an outburst of green flames to run along the fractured floor. The green flames covered the floor around the Jade Soul King, forming a sea of green flames and becoming part of his domain.

Within the Jade Soul King's domain, he could use his power as he pleased, which gave him an advantage over everyone entering it.

"Summoning your domain so soon, Jade Soul King? Are you afraid of me?" Balmodan grimly asked as his surroundings surged with cool, white streaks of moonlight that also had a tinge of crimson in the mix.

Rumble...!

Within moments, a beam of concentrated moonlight suddenly descended from above the Undying Devil Palace. It passed through the Great Hall's transparent ceiling and slammed into the ground around Balmodan.

In that instant, time seemed to flow backward in slow motion as the beam of concentrated moonlight bounced off the surface of the floor and scattered into floating particles of moonlight.

They looked like rising raindrops.

These floating particles of moonlight soon converged within Balmodan's body, significantly increasing his physical attributes.

The entire phenomenon was part of Balmodan's support-type domain, which differed from Jade Soul King's attack-type domain.

Balmodan had summoned his domain in response to Jade Soul King summoning his.

It appeared like a big fight between these two Peak Rank 6 divine beings could break out at any given moment. Neither side wanted to be at a disadvantage due to being ill-prepared if it did.

However, Jade Soul King still had a calm expression—not that people could tell from his skinless, bony face.

"Kekeke, since I learned Gehenna's great secret, I doubt you'll just let me leave scot-free, Immortal Lycan King," Jade Soul King stated before suddenly adding, "However, I must say I'm surprised."

"I didn't expect Gehenna to be so poor that they would put great importance on such a barren world. A world without spirit energy has little to no value. Well, I suppose the abundant toxic seawater is somewhat useful for refining poison, among other things."

"Still, I doubt that's enough to be of interest to the seven Great Devils of Gehenna," Jade Soul King mentioned as he fished for more information.

Even after perusing the information from Thyrius's soul, Pangea did not appear the least bit valuable to him.

However, the Seven Great Devils' interest in Pangea piqued his interest.

Thus, Pangea must have some other hidden secrets not included in the information he acquired from the soul of the Immortal Lycan King's subordinate.

"Hmph, so what if it's a barren world?" Balmodan's eyes flickered subtly before snorting, "It's still a gateway to the new chaosverse. Pangea itself isn't important. What's important is what lies beyond it."

"A new chaosverse is always filled with countless opportunities and resources," Balmodan coolly stated, diverting Jade Soul King's attention to the chaosverse.

"Kekeke, that's true," Jade Soul King acknowledged before revealing a piece of important information, "Where else did you think I acquired Starcore Iron, Immortal Lycan King?"

"You mean..."

"That's right," Jade Soul King openly admitted, knowing what Balmodan wanted to say before he could finish saying it. "Hades also has a dimensional crack leading to the new chaosverse. On top of that, our dimensional crack is connected to a dead star realm."

"You didn't honestly think Gehenna was so special that it was the only one granted such an opportunity, Immortal Lycan King?" Jade Soul King asked, the two orbs of green flames in his eye sockets narrowed as if he was squinting his eyes—if he had any.

#### Chapter 574: Spirit Sentinel of Fire

"Who do you take me for, Jade Soul King?" Balmodan coolly uttered before continuing, "I may not have lived as long as you or the other Great Devils of Gehenna, but I am still a Great Devil of Gehenna, lording over a vast region of land."

"Even an ignorant buffoon living under a rock must have heard the history of Chaos at least once, let alone I. Of course, I would know Gehenna wouldn't be the only realm connected to the new chaosverse! However, the start of every destruction cycle is always incredibly slow. It could take several hundred thousand years or even millions of years before a second world enters Chaos!"

"Furthermore, there hasn't been any news of the new chaosverse's destruction cycle spreading in our Eternal Darkheaven Sector, not to mention it was estimated that the chaosverse's destruction cycle wouldn't begin for another six billion years!"

"That's why we had to keep Pangea secret. Who knows how many denizens of Chaos would swarm to our realm for a chance to explore the new chaosverse if the news spread?" Balmodan stated.

Although he didn't want to continue such a topic with the Jade Soul King, he figured he had at least successfully degraded Pangea's value and diverted the Jade Soul King's attention to another matter – or so he thought.

Unfortunately, Jade Soul King had a sharp mind.

"So you also know the new chaosverse's destruction cycle started six billion years earlier than its predicted time, Immortal Lycan King," Jade Soul King acknowledged Balmodan's information before gravely mentioning, "Then you should also know that in the 128 chaos cycles of Chaos's existence, this has never happened before!"

"Something is seriously wrong with this new chaosverse, Immortal Lycan King. Tell me what you have learned about the new chaosverse, and I will also share Hades's experience and discovery with you," Jade Soul King offered.

"You definitely know something. Otherwise, given its overwhelming strength, why hasn't Gehenna conquered Pangea in the three hundred years since its discovery? Perhaps Pangea has something that made even the seven Great Devils of Gehenna afraid or wary?"

When Balmodan heard Jade Soul King mention that, his expression turned grave and gloomy. It became clear to him that Jade Soul King noticed the flaw in his statement.

"You must understand that Hades is also connected to the new chaosverse. Whatever hidden dangers it has, Gehenna won't be facing it alone. That's why our two realms should share what we know and overcome it together. Otherwise, it could destroy us," Jade Soul King stressed.

"Then, you tell me what you have experienced and discovered in the new chaosverse first, Jade Soul King," Balmodan firmly demanded before adding, "You owe that much for killing my subordinate. I won't ask for other compensation if you tell me."

The atmosphere suddenly intensified when Jade Soul King glared at Balmodan in silence. A battle between the two seemed inevitable.

However, Jade Soul King suddenly sighed and withdrew his attack-type domain.

"While exploring the dead star realm in the new chaosverse, our forces encountered a Spirit Sentinel of Fire and suffered devastating losses. Seven hundred Quasi-Soul Kings and three billion undead soldiers below Rank 5 – that was the loss we incurred due to the spirit sentinel of fire," Jade Soul King revealed.

When Balmodan learned of Hades's losses, his pupils shrank into slits from shock and alarm.

Given Hades was home to undead beings that didn't require the normal sustenance of life to continue their existences, he didn't find it surprising if Hades could send such a large force to explore the new chaosverse's sea of stars.

However, the death of seven hundred Quasi-Soul Kings truly shocked him.

That was equivalent to seven hundred semi-divine-rank devils. Even for Gehenna, seven hundred semi-divine-rank devils weren't a small number.

Jade Soul King wasn't exaggerating Hades's losses when he said it suffered devastating losses.

"Hades sure is unlucky to run into an existence that is the bane of all undead beings," Balmodan commented with a frown before expressing his doubt, "But how in the world could Hades suffer such a devastating loss in the presence of you, Soul Kings?"

"The Spirit Sentinel of Fire could only be defeated, not killed. Every time a Soul King destroyed the Spirit Sentinel of Fire, it would reform itself and slaughter our undead soldiers. That's how Hades suffered such losses," Jade Soul King answered.

"I, myself, have destroyed the Spirit Sentinel of Fire over a thousand times while buying time for our forces to retreat back to Hades. So, trust me when I say this, but I don't think this was a normal Spirit Sentinel of Fire – it was created to eliminate all living beings."

"There wasn't a single sign of life discovered in the dead star realm during our exploration. I don't know what kind of existence created the Spirit Sentinel of Fire, but I'm certain it is anti-life. That's why Hades has already sent a representative to report the matter to the Domain Lord." Jade Soul King added.

"Domain Lord..." Balmodan uttered with a frown.

A Domain Lord was the ruler of a group of star realms. Such an existence was only a Rank 7 or Rank 8 Divine Being, depending on the strength of the collective star realms.

In the vast and boundless Chaos, such a level of existence was nothing.

That being said, a Domain Lord was still the highest level of existence that Rank 6 Divine Beings they could contact due to their limited power of travel and influence.

A Rank 9 Divine Being would not even look at them, let alone talk to them – and that was if they could even meet such a high-level divine being.

"I believe I've said enough, Immortal Lycan King. It's time for you to share what you know, as we have agreed upon," Jade Soul King urged before asking, "Why hasn't Gehenna conquered Pangea?"

"I doubt a Spirit Sentinel is guarding it if there's life on Pangea," Jade Soul King added as the two orbs of green flames in his eye sockets flickered.

"Pangea is..." Balmodan thought carefully about his choice of words before revealing, "Guarded by a Rank 8 existence."

Chapter 575: Busy Night

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Back in the sea of stars, Vaan quietly observed the beautiful blue planet of Pangea for some time after stabilizing his cultivation.

However, he still couldn't find any location of particular interest—or rather, there were too many points of interest on planet Pangea. Far too many regions were obscured from view due to natural and supernatural causes.

The remnants of the advanced civilization could be hidden anywhere.

Although the land of mist occupied by the mysterious Divine Serpent Empire appeared to be one of the most suspicious places, Vaan had a gut feeling the remnants of the advanced civilization weren't hidden there.

There were unproven speculations that most of the Darkans from the Great Darkan Empire fled to the land of mist and formed the Divine Serpent Empire after its fall.

Nevertheless, that only made it unlikely; Vaan still hasn't ruled it out of the list of possibilities.

Eventually, Vaan returned to Pangea and made trips between Sunpeak City and Red Dragon Clan, handling miscellaneous affairs and overseeing their development. Due to his status and period of absence, he invested more time in the Red Dragon Clan's development.

At the same time, he also used the opportunity to absorb more of the Red Dragon Clan's wealth of knowledge and history. As a result, he gained a deeper understanding of dragon magic, runic inscriptions, and the ancient language they were derived from.

Furthermore, his understanding of the Dragon Tongue and Dragon Physiology also improved.

Using his depth of knowledge in aura cultivation and dragon physiology, coupled with his abilities gained through the system and spirit contracts, Vaan developed a method to improve a dragon's innate talents.

Like humans, dragons weren't born perfect creatures; they also had imperfections.

Although adapting certain lifestyles, eating certain foods, and performing certain exercises could improve the body and make up for the imperfections of their bodies, they still wouldn't be as good as removing the imperfections through medical or magical means.

Vaan used his diluted Divine-rank Stalactite Milk and Fire Law to alter the internal pathways of a Peak Rank 4 young dragon elite to confirm his theory and met with overwhelming success.

By correcting the dragon's meridian channels and blood vessels by expanding and connecting new meridians and blood vessels, he succeeded in improving the dragon's blood circulation and mana flow, thereby enhancing their growth rate.

At the same time, he also raised the dragon's fire affinity, which didn't surprise him.

After all, the dragon was tempered by his Fire Law.

Two hours after fusing with two drops of the Fire Dragon God's blood essence, the young dragon elite achieved bloodline awakening and advanced to Rank 5 in its physical prowess.

The improved innate talents didn't just help the young dragon elite grow faster; they also allowed it to advance at the expense of less precious resources.

"Incredible..." Lord Astarot uttered with amazement from the sideline.

The first dragon lord had been on standby to provide immediate medical aid should something go wrong with the Supreme Leader's experiment.

However, everything proceeded smoothly.

"Garve was the youngest of the group and wasn't expected to advance to Rank 5 within the next three years. To think he would achieve a bloodline awakening and advance to Rank 5 so quickly after having his innate talents altered..."

"Supreme Leader, if it's not too much to ask, could I ask you to perform the talent-improving procedure on the others as well?" Lord Astarot sincerely requested.

"Everyone will get a chance. You don't have to worry about that," Vaan calmly assured before saying, "However, the dragon lords should have priority."

"As you will, Supreme Leader," Lord Astarot consented without objection.

Improving the talents of every dragon in the Red Dragon Clan wasn't an issue for Vaan. He had more than enough Divine-rank Stalactite Milk for everyone, even if he didn't dilute it. It was only a matter of time.

As such, it was better to help the dragon lords first.

The Red Dragon Clan was his main fighting force. While it was important to raise the power of the clan's lower strength, it was even more important to raise its upper strength.

A hundred Low-level Rank 5 Red Dragons wasn't comparable to a single Early Demigod-rank Red Dragon Lord.

Vaan could see that Lord Astarot's physical flesh was on the verge of advancing to the Demigod rank. The first dragon lord just needed a slight push in order to reach it.



He also suspected that besides Lord Narvim, who suffered a backlash from using forbidden magic in the past, the other dragon lords were in similar situations.

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Six hours later, Vaan finished improving the innate talents of all nine dragon lords and twenty-one other young dragon elites under three hundred years of age. During this time, Hester heard of his visit to the clan and came over to accompany him.

While it was fascinating to watch him at work, Vaan knew Hester had other thoughts in mind.

Thus, without needing to beat around the bush, he dragged her back to the guest building and banged her to her satisfaction shortly after finishing his business with the dragons.

Since Vaan had a promise to keep with the other ladies, he only spent two hours to completely satisfy Hester's carnal desire.

Unfortunately, whether it was Lineta, Lillias, or Hester, who had already become a Peak-stage High Witch with the dragons' assistance, none of them could give him any benefits from dual-practicing.

Given his present level of cultivation, he suspected only Transcendent Witches or above could help him improve. Everyone else below the Transcendent Rank could only raise his low elemental affinity or expand his Heaven-Swallowing Space.

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When Vaan returned to the new city lord manor in Sunpeak City, it was past dinner and late in the night.

As such, he retired to his arranged room.

When he did, Dahlia, Solana, and Aeliana shortly walked out of their rooms and met in the corridor. In that instant, everyone revealed a look of surprise.

At the same time, they secretly tried to guess each other's motives.

"Ahem, I'm just getting water. Don't mind me," Solana bailed from the confrontation with a slightly awkward cough.

She wasn't going to compete with her daughter.

Shortly after Solana left, leaving just Dahlia and Aeliana, Dahlia also bailed. She smiled wryly and made way for Aeliana to walk past her.

Meanwhile, Cyrena peeked outside her room through the slightly opened door before sighing. The competition for her teacher's affection was seemingly amicable but actually fierce.

She, who had no prior physical intimacy with her teacher, stood no chance.

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Shortly after Aeliana entered Vaan's room, her sweet yet temptatious moans resounded through the corridor, causing everyone else in the manor to blush from embarrassment and feel hot from strong arousal.

They secretly cursed Aeliana for her impatience and inconsideration. The least she could have done was cast soundproof magic on the room. Even though they thought that, they didn't cast sound insulation magic on their room to block out the noise.

Solana and Dahlia couldn't help but listen to Aeliana's bell-like moans while imagining themselves in her position.

However, simply listening and imagining wasn't enough for them; they couldn't resist reaching down to their fairy caves with their hands.

A moment later, Dahlia's soft, gentle cries and Solana's mature, womanly pants echoed in their respective rooms.

"Hnng~!"

Vaan had long anticipated a line would be waiting for him. The night was short but also a busy one.

Thus, he made Aeliana achieve climax repeatedly in a short time to wear her out and achieve satisfaction faster.

He aimed to finish his steamy session with Aeliana within three hours.

However, even after Aeliana achieved satisfaction in three hours, she still wrapped her legs around him and persisted with sheer will. In the end, it took him four hours before Aeliana passed out on the bed.

"Who's next?" Vaan's voice drifted through the empty corridor.

Almost immediately, Solana and Dahlia's hearts skipped a beat. They still had a chance to spend a night with Vaan, even though there wasn't much of the night left.

Alas, they were both considerate.

Solana and Dahlia waited in their rooms, intending to give up their chances and allow the other to take it. When they didn't hear any door-opening noise in the corridor, doubt filled their hearts.

Creak...

Solana and Dahlia ended up opening their doors at the same time and meeting each other face-to-face. Dahlia's face quickly turned red from embarrassment, prompting her to flee back into her room.

"Lady Dahlia, please wait! You can go first. I don't mind being last—" Solana stated before realizing the implication of her words. "Ah, sh\*t. I mean... Ugh, whatever."

Solana quickly gave up on an explanation.

Although everyone knew she also had a thing with Vaan, she hadn't been openly vocal in admitting to it. She had a sense of guilt towards her daughter.

Alas, she ended up letting the cat out of the bag with her own mouth anyway.

"Yeah... I'm also interested in Sir Vahn's affection," Solana admitted with a wry expression before reiterating, "But I can wait. So, please go first, Lady Dahlia."

"Thank you..."

Dahlia blushed heavily with her head buried in the pillow she carried with her. She hastened her steps to Vaan's room to get herself out of the embarrassing situation.

Chapter 576: Rising Sun District

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Blackthorn City

Ever since new laws and regulations were implemented, the capital city of the Black Rose Kingdom underwent rapid changes in the past several days.

Blackthorn City itself was already a highly fortified fortress with reinforced walls equipped with magic ballistae capable of ripping through long lines of demons below Rank 3 once charged with a High Witch's magic power.

However, a few kilometers of land north of the city had been cleared of its trees and replaced with three new defensive lines – heavily fortified ramparts equipped with new magitech weapons that weren't inferior to Blackthorn City's northern wall.

Furthermore, a Rank 5 magic barrier system capable of covering the entire city and blocking the magical attacks of Rank 5 transcendental beings was in the final stages of its development.

So much was achieved in a short time, but nothing was hastily and sloppily made.

There was nothing millions of witches couldn't do with their magic when they worked together under a clear, defined goal.

Nevertheless, the defensive measures against Gehenna weren't the only changes in the north.

A new district called the Rising Sun District had been formed on the eastern side of the capital city for the development of men and their rights. Incredible vigor was breathed into this city region as bustling activities could be found throughout its corners.

Although the development rate of Rising Sun District couldn't be compared to Blackthorn City's defense projects, it had the burning sweats of motivation and excitement that couldn't be found anywhere else in the capital city.

When the movement-impairing shackles left their ankles and wrists, and their skin no longer kissed the sting of flesh-tearing whips, the enslaved men breathed the air of freedom and tasted the beauty of life.

Their worlds suddenly became colorful.

Even if they carried the same stone, held the same shovel, dug the same soil, and performed the same labor, the feeling was completely different from the past. Without the witches' oppression, they no longer needed to slave away their lives to satisfy the witches' avarice.

They were building their homes with their own hands and feet!

"Lady Gwyneth!"

Dozens of men passionately greeted with heartfelt appreciation and excitement as a brunette lady with hazel eyes, wearing a casual brown-white dress, strolled down the busy street full of construction on either side.

Despite the men being stained in grime and sweat with their construction work, they still took time out of their busy activities to welcome Lady Gwyneth.

Evidently, Lady Gwyneth was well respected by these groups of men.

She was only an Early-stage Senior Witch but specialized in healing magic. Furthermore, she wasn't part of the supremacist witch faction. She had previously saved countless enslaved men with her healing magic, even though there was nothing to gain from it.

She only had done it out of the kindness of her own heart.

But as a result, she had won the hearts of countless men. Even if they became free men with rights, they would never bear any hostilities toward her.

As Gwyneth strolled past the busy construction area, she summoned a wide area of warm, cascading golden light on the workers.

Everyone caught by the warm, cascading golden light quickly felt their fatigue leaving their bodies.

"Everyone, don't forget we have class in half an hour over break."

"Yes, Lady Gwyneth!"

After hearing Lady Gwyneth's reminder, many men answered with excitement and anticipation.

Lady Gwyneth's lecture had become one of their favorite periods of the day since she had been assigned as their teacher.

Many young men had been born into laborious slavery without even a basic education. Thus, many men didn't know how to read and write. They only knew how to speak – something they picked up as they lived through hellish days under the supremacist witches' tyranny.

It was also precisely because so many men lacked basic education that the Prime Minister, Evanore Hallewel, had arranged over a hundred teachers through selective screenings to educate them.

Nevertheless, education was only one of multiple focuses in the Rising Sun District. Besides general schools for basic education, the Rising Sun District was also developing martial academies and scholar towers.

In particular, the martial academies, which trained aura users and body refiners, were the most popular among free men and male witch descendants. Everyone was inspired to become as powerful as Vaan after learning and benefiting from his magnificent feats.

Vaan had become their role model and their idol.

He was the reason why men had been freed from their slave status and were also given rights and opportunities.

Without him, none of it would have been possible.

The statue of a man holding up a huge sun in the palm of his hand could be found in the main courtyard of every martial academy. The man in the statue was none other than Vaan.

Even the name of the new district was specifically chosen in honor of his feats.

Many men aspired to become the next rising sun.

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Outside a martial academy's front entrance, two witches in black cloaks walked alongside each other down the bustling main street of Rising Sun District. Their facial appearance couldn't be seen behind the darkness of their hoods, but no one paid attention to their patrol.

In fact, none of the men in the new district seemed to have noticed them, not even when they subconsciously walked around the two black-cloaked witches.

Evidently, a high-rank invisibility and warding spell had been cast on the two black-cloaked witches as they made their rounds around the new district.

While the Rising Sun District was undergoing great changes, it was also an extremely sensitive area of the city. All ex-supremacist witches were prohibited from entry, and only a selective group of neutral witches were approved with access.

The Rising Sun District had become a place where witches had little influence.

"It looks like the development in the Rising Sun District is going well—or rather, too well, if I might add," Henrietta calmly remarked while looking around in her incognito mode. "Remember to assign more secret patrols to this district later, Prime Minister Evanore."

"Yes, Your Majesty," Evanore Hallewell acknowledged.

#### Chapter 577: Small Encounter

The hatred born from three hundred years of slavery and oppression was not easy to erase.

Freeing the enslaved men and giving them equal rights and opportunities as witches was no different from putting a dagger in the free men's hands.

If the matter wasn't handled carefully, the free men could stab the witches in the back.

Nevertheless, the number of men who actually bore deep-rooted hatred for witches should be a minority among the group of enslaved men. After all, many men had lost their own will when all they had known their entire lives was to obey the witches.

The absolute authority of witches was ingrained in the minds of many men living within the seven witch kingdoms. They were turned into simple-minded men due to their upbringing. As such, they were already plenty content with what they received and didn't greed for what they could get.

However, such simple-minded men were also the easiest to manipulate.

They could be influenced and incited to revolt by true insurgents who strongly desired the end of the witches' reign and waited for such an opportunity to realize it.

"We can't let insurgents ruin the future we are trying to build in this kingdom," Henrietta firmly stated before asking, "Do you understand me, Prime Minister Evanore?"

"Yes, Your Majesty," Evanore acknowledged resolutely.

Since the Black Rose Transcendent Witch placed such great expectations on her, she did not want to disappoint her.



Whether it was foreign or domestic problems, Evanore vowed to uproot them all.

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Meanwhile, in another part of Rising Sun District, Vaan stopped by for a visit shortly after he finished spending the night with Solana, Dahlia, and Aeliana back in Sunpeak City.

The lack of urgent news from the northern parts of the city allowed him to understand nothing big related to Gehenna's Gateway had happened during his absence.

Chaezi's report, which he received moments after his arrival, also coincided with his conclusion.

Since the fluctuations in Gehenna's Gateway had stabilized and no movements had been detected from Gehenna's side, the Black Rose Kingdom was safe for the time being.

All there was left to do was...

"L-Lord Vaan!"

Before Vaan could leave the area, an eight-year-old, naïve-looking boy in somewhat neat clothing rushed up to him after discovering him in a small alley with a passing glance.

"You're my idol, Lord Vaan!" the boy looked up at Vaan with sparkling eyes of worship as he asked, "What can I do to become like you?"

"I have someone I like, but I don't have the courage to confess... However, the person that I like also has a lot of suitors. I'm afraid if I don't confess soon, someone else will take her away."

"What should I do?" the boy asked with urgency, worry, and expectations.

Although Vaan felt like dealing with such a trivial matter was a waste of time, he also didn't have the heart to turn down a kid who came to him with such high hopes.

Perhaps shattering the little boy would turn into a villain if he shattered his hopes and dreams.

"If you want to be like me, you have to put in a lot more hard work than anyone else," Vaan coolly said before adding, "However, if it's just confessing to the girl you like, we can deal with it easily."

"First, we have to understand the kind of girl you like. Second, we have to understand your competitors. Only when we understand these two things will we hold the key to victory."

"So tell me, little brat. Where is the girl you like?"

Shortly after Vaan nonchalantly asked, the eight-year-old boy did his best to explain the location since he last saw her.

It had only been a few minutes since the little boy last saw the girl he liked.

As such, the girl had to be nearby.

After using Omni-Sense and locking onto a target that fitted the little boy's description, Vaan grabbed the little boy and relocated with spatial shift.

The location was just in the neighboring district beside the Rising Sun District.

The two stood on the roof of a building and gazed down at an adorable little girl of a similar age to the little boy being followed by a small group of other snot-nosed brats.

Vaan briefly observed the group of kids while explaining to the little boy what he needed to pay attention to. It was clear that the little girl didn't like any of her followers, but she did enjoy the attention.

"Alright, listen up, brat. You can't be like those other snot-nosed brats. Don't be a wuss like them. You need to be different from them to stand out. Being the head of that group isn't good enough. You have to set yourself apart from them completely."

"Also, everyone likes compliments. However, how we act when complimenting people can produce completely different effects. You have to drop the timid look and project yourself as a confident person. Only then will your girl catch some interest in you when you compliment her. Do you understand, brat?"

"Y-Yes, Lord Vaan... But what do I say exactly?"

"Anything positive about her. Her looks, her character, her smile, anything. For example, you can tell her, "You're beautiful." The key is to be confident and sincere. If you are awkward and timid, it will also make things awkward and weird for her."

"That's why, be confident and sincere. You already have all the advantages by looking better than those other snot-nosed brats. So, if you can add a confident smile, your sincere compliment will definitely make her heart skip a beat. Do you understand, brat?"

"Y-Yes, Lord Vaan!"

"Good! Nothing like the present to put what you just learned into practice."

"W-Wait, Lord Vaan. I'm not ready—!"

Vaan patted the little boy's back and sent him straight in front of his crush through spatial shifting.

The little boy was caught completely unprepared, but the other children were equally taken aback. At the same time, the little boy's sudden entry also surprised and amazed them.

Seeing the girl he liked right in front of him looking back at him full of curiosity, the little boy quickly mustered up his courage.

Vaan didn't intend to see how it unfolded. Thus, he prepared to leave and find Henrietta. However, he could still hear the children's conversation in the background.

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"Stacey, I have something to tell you."

"Y-Yes, Ron?"

"I'm beautiful!"

"..."

#### Chapter 578: Henrietta's Feelings

When Vaan heard Ron's compliment from a distance, he almost staggered and slipped off the building's rooftop. Although he had half suspected it, he was still surprised when he heard the little boy's compliment nonetheless.

It was a fifty-fifty chance. But regardless of the two possible directions, either would still make the little boy stand out from his peers.

Nevertheless, children always had a way of choosing the less expected and more surprising option.

"..."

"..."

"???"

Stacey and the group of little boys behind her were briefly dumbfounded by Ron's bold, narcissistic remark about himself.

Even so, Ron's sudden, dashing appearance and determined, passionate gaze caused the little girl's heart to skip a beat from shyness. No boy had made such an impact on her like that before.

Regardless of the original intention, Ron succeeded in capturing Stacey's interest.

"Pft, what was that?" Stacey giggled before saying, "We are going to play at Grandma Hylee's place. Do you want to join us, Ron?"

"Ah? Yeah..." Ron was quickly enchanted by Stacy's sweet smile as he stood blankly in a daze.

"Then, what are we waiting for? Let's go!" Stacey urged, feeling even more intrigued by Ron's reaction.

Vaan sensed the little girl grabbing the little boy's hand and dragging him off with the other group of jealous-incited little boys trailing not far behind them.

Ron had caught Stacey's interest and became a public enemy to the other little boys. In either case, he had successfully distinguished himself from the pack.

Even if he became the target of the other boys' bullying later, it would only make the little girl dislike them and become closer to Ron.

The rest was in the little boy's hands.

Vaan shook his head, silently reprimanding himself for being a busybody and wasting precious time. He had more important matters to focus on.

Shortly after, Vaan distorted the space before him and dashed through it.

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Meanwhile, Henrietta returned to her palatial black magic tower after finishing her incognito inspection of the Rising Sun District with her Prime Minister.

'You don't have any more matters to attend to today, and the defensive measures against Gehenna are on track. It's time to return to the sea of stars and cultivate, my dear disciple,' Empyrean Scarletsea urged.

'Yes, Master,' Henrietta complied before suddenly expressing her concern.

'However, no matter how potent our divine energy crystals are, we don't have enough of them, Master. I've already consumed a third of the first divine energy crystal to reach the Revolving Core Realm. There won't be enough divine energy to breakthrough to the Divine Origin Realm, Master.'

'I'm aware of that, my dear disciple,' Empyrean Scarletsea acknowledged, saying, 'But even if there isn't enough divine energy to cultivate to the Divine Origin Realm, reaching the Void Realm shouldn't be a problem.'

'Once you reach that realm and combine it with your magic power and law authority, it'll be possible for you to challenge Half-step Divine Origin Realm practitioners, even without my help,' Empyrean Scarletsea added.

'But a Half-step Divine Origin Realm practitioner is not even Rank 6. It's far from enough to challenge the Great Devils of Gehenna,' Henrietta argued.

'You are being too hasty, Henrie,' Empyrean Scarletsea stated with a soft sigh.

'You have to know that your progress is already very fast. Cultivation is a slow and gradual process; no one can ascend the heavens in a single leap unless they are born with heaven's blessings. I can confidently say your progress is already faster than most people from lower star realms.'

'But, Master, you told me lower star realms have limited spirit energy value. There's nothing to boast about when I am cultivating with the higher form of spirit energy. Given such an advantage, my swift progress is to be expected,' Henrietta retorted.

'Ahem, that's right,' Empyrean Scarletsea admitted awkwardly before saying, 'Anyway, what I'm trying to say is there's no point worrying over the limited resources. It's not too late to worry about it after you actually used up all the divine energy crystals, my dear disciple.'

'We will surely find a way to acquire more cultivation resources in the future—Oh, what do you know? Look, I told you there will be a way to acquire more cultivation resources.'

'What do you mean—'

Henrietta didn't finish asking when she suddenly felt a cool, unnatural breath of air on the nape of her neck, which sent a rush of shock up her spine.

"Kyaaa—!" Henrietta immediately squealed.

Her knees turned weak, causing her to fall forward. She landed on the smooth, marbled hallway ground on the third floor of her palatial black magic tower before quickly turning out and discovering Vaan's presence.

"Y-You...! What are you doing here?! Since when did you get there? Why wasn't I notified of your arrival? Y-You're doing this on purpose, aren't you!"

Henrietta pointed her shaking finger at Vaan as she hurled a series of questions and accusations while touching the back of her neck with the other hand.

Being caught off guard by Vaan's sudden appearance again, Henrietta's face flushed with a crimson blush as her heart raced wildly with agitation and anxiety.

Ba-dump! Ba-dump!

Henrietta felt like her heartbeat was so loud that even Vaan could hear it. As a result, she felt even more embarrassed and anxious around him.

"Oh? Doing what on purpose, Your Majesty? You'll have to state it clearly," Vaan asked, feigning ignorance with a dumb look while ignoring the rest of her questions.

He inched closer with his hands linked behind his back, continuing his charade of ignorance with an innocent look.

"Oh, did I interrupt your conversation with your master?" Vaan asked while extending a hand to help her up, seemingly concerned.

Nevertheless, Henrietta couldn't be fooled by Vaan's terrible act when he revealed such a mischievous smile, which conflicted with the rest of his facial expressions.

Vaan didn't try to hide it at all. He was clearly teasing her!

At the same time, there was also no need for Vaan to answer her questions; the truth had become quite obvious with his teasing.

Since every witch in Blackthorn City had sworn their allegiance to Vaan with the Oath of Magic, it was far too simple for him to enter and leave Henrietta's palatial black magic tower without any of her subjects notifying her.

Her orders would be overwritten by his.

In other words, Vaan had ordered the tower servants to keep silent so he could sneak up on her on purpose and see her embarrassing side!

Bam!

"Argh, dammit! I can't stand these unnatural feelings!" Henrietta banged the ground to calm herself forcefully instead of taking Vaan's hand to get up.

Her feelings and thoughts were in complete disarray.

It wasn't just her body that was naturally drawn to Vaan due to the high fire affinity and compatibility they shared; it was also to mess with her mind, making her think she was attracted to him as well.

Even so, Henrietta refused to submit due to such ridiculous reasoning. The person she liked had to be of her choosing, not due to the virgin lust of her teenage body!

Henrietta panted with some mental exhaustion due to the mental conflict of feelings between her body and mind.

"Yes, I was talking about energy cultivation with my master," Henrietta admitted shortly after regaining some calmness due to the pain in her forehead, feeling a little helpless from Vaan targeting her weakness.



Even if she didn't want it, she couldn't hate it.

In fact, she liked it.

Perhaps everything would be easier if she just resigned herself to the flourishing feelings in her heart.

However, she still didn't want to.

"Why did you come here?"

"To see you, of course."

Henrietta's body quivered with shyness and delight after hearing Vaan's answer to her question. She felt butterflies in her stomach, making her uneasy.

Still, she didn't hate it; she couldn't hate it, nor could she resist it.

If someone like Vaan actually pursued her with genuine feelings of affection for her, she felt like she could also fall in love with the person. It seemed distancing herself from love also made her yearn for it. And if someone desired her, it was hard for her to refuse.

No man had acted boldly in front of her like Vaan had. As such, it could be why she had little resistance to his advances.

However, Henrietta didn't think any other man could stir her emotions like Vaan, even if they were put in his shoes.

The more she pondered, the less she was certain about her own feelings.

Did she actually yearn for Vaan's love but didn't know what it was or how to deal with it? And if she already had some feelings for him before their first meeting, when did it first sprout in her heart? How did it happen?

Was it when she first heard about his theoretical achievements in magic study from Astoria?

Was that when his name caught her interest?

What about the time she heard about him subjugating the supremacist witches by beating them up with sheer violence?

Recalling how Vaan subjugated the supremacist witch faction with sheer violence immediately brought a smile to Henrietta's face again. Even if she only heard it and didn't actually witness it, she could still imagine it.

The satisfaction and happiness she felt from it couldn't be expressed.

Vaan had done something she had always wanted to do but couldn't.

Perhaps that was also what made her fond of him and caused these unfamiliar feelings to sprout in her heart.

'What a dangerous man he is. At this rate, you'll have your heart taken before your chastity. But... maybe this isn't a bad thing,' Empyrean Scarletsea, even feeling shocked with her opinion.

Despite that, having shared her disciple's body, she knew just how much indignance her disciple had suffered regarding the kingdom and the supremacist witch faction.

Chapter 579: Vaan's Spatial Affinity Doubt

"So why did you want to come and see me, Lord Vaan?" Henrietta asked again after recovering her calmness and adapting to Vaan's presence.

"That's a strange question to ask, Your Majesty, Henrietta," Vaan casually replied with a sly smile before mentioning, "Didn't you want to marry me and become my dual-practice partner?"

"What?"

Henrietta's mind went blank for a moment before her face turned bright red from surprise and embarrassment, causing her to stagger several steps backward.

"Y-You...! How do you know about that?" Henrietta pointed her trembling finger at him as she asked in shock.

But at the same time, she couldn't look him straight in the eye. Thus, she averted her gaze elsewhere.

"Once again, you ask something strange, Your Majesty," Vaan replied with a calm smile, suddenly taking bold steps forward.

He grabbed the wrist of her extended hand and pulled her into his chest, wrapping his other hand around her waist to prevent her from backing away. Then, he lifted her chin and forced her to look him straight in the eyes.

His sudden actions took Henrietta by surprise and made her unable to think.

But once she processed the situation that she was in, her blood pressure immediately shot through the roof. The steep rise made her face incredibly hot.

At the same time, the rising heat and manly scent of Vaan's body made her mind fuzzy.

"I-I'm not ready..." Henrietta replied timidly with a small voice, like she didn't want to be seen or noticed. Even then, she was still being evasive, with her gaze focusing elsewhere.

"But not being ready means you don't refuse, huh?" Vaan grinned before mentioning, "Although Gehenna's Gateway has stabilized, we don't know how the seven Great Devils act due to this incident."

"We should make use of the time we have to strengthen ourselves as much as possible to prepare for the inevitable war in the future. Why don't we start by becoming familiar with our dual practice?" Vaan suggested shortly after.

However, without waiting for Henrietta's reply, he forcefully stole a kiss from her.

After all, Henrietta appeared evasive, but she had not put any strength in trying to resist or break free from his hold. And given her present mental condition, he would have to wait a long time before she was finally mentally prepared.

As such, Vaan decided to take a more proactive and forceful approach to speed up the process.

When Vaan sealed Henrietta's soft, black-stained lips with his, Henrietta's entire body stiffened with tenseness.

In an instant, Vaan could see through her inexperience.

Although he had already learned and determined Henrietta never had an intimate relationship with any man, he wasn't completely sure until they kissed—or rather, he forced a kiss on her.

Nevertheless, the intimate contact of their lips didn't just tell Vaan about Henrietta's inexperience and innocence; the connection also allowed him to vaguely see through her heart and understand the life she had lived until now.

Unexpectedly, behind the greatness of the Black Rose Transcendent Witch, which instilled fear and respect in countless people across the seven witch kingdoms and beyond, hid a small girl who had only lived according to other people's expectations.

She didn't get the choice to live her life the way she wanted.

Burdened with heaven-blessed innate talent, Henrietta was chosen by Empyrean Scarletsea and became her disciple. Her swift rise to power made her an object of hope and expectations during a time of turmoil.

Without hearing what she wanted for herself, she was forced to lead a nation of people who selfishly pinned all their hopes and responsibilities on her.

Vaan's original impression of Henrietta prior to their actual meeting was, in fact, terrible.

After all, the supremacist witch faction exerted great influence over the kingdom and was practically given free reign. The supremacist witch faction enslaved men with terrible treatment and committed all kinds of atrocities as they pleased under the protection of their ruler's name.

As such, Henrietta, as the ruler who had allowed the supremacist witch faction to act so rampantly in the kingdom, was naturally assumed to be of the same character as the members of the supremacist witch faction.

However, Vaan only understood Henrietta was completely different from what he had previously imagined after they actually met and interacted.

At the same time, he could only imagine what she had to put up with.

Henrietta would have suffered less if she had been more selfish and decisive. Even so, the blame couldn't be put on her for the kingdom developing into such a state.

In fact, he should be blaming Empyrean Scarletsea, the one who turned a blind eye to everything.

Even Vaan couldn't be sure what Empyrean Scarletsea was thinking for allowing the supremacist witch faction to run rampant in the kingdom and treat men like animals. After all, given her age and wisdom, Empyrean Scarletsea should have been aware the supremacist witch faction was a tumor detrimental to the kingdom's growth and development.

Did she allow the supremacist witch faction to suppress men and destroy their self-esteem so the kingdom couldn't produce any excellent, daring men who could sway her disciple's heart?

Was it all done to keep Henrietta out of love?

Although Vaan didn't know what exactly Empyrean Scarletsea had experienced in her life to be against love, he guessed she would have stood between him and Henrietta if not for their body's high compatibility for dual practice.

It might have seemed like Vaan pondered for a while, but it all happened in a short instant.

Nevertheless, shortly after Vaan forced his kiss on Henrietta and stole her breath away, her body suddenly went limp in his arms.

She had overheated and fainted.

The stimulation of her first kiss with the person she couldn't be calm around was too much for her poor maiden heart to bear.

Vaan held Henrietta in his arms and shifted a few strands of hair out of the way with one hand for a better view of her sleeping face. While looking at Henrietta's vulnerable yet flawless, cute face, he fell into a trance as his mind wandered off.

He didn't know what kind of heaven-blessed innate talent Henrietta had, but he speculated it was an extremely rare and powerful soul constitution if she could share her body with a mighty existence like Empyrean Scarletsea.

'Between her soul constitution and mine, which is more powerful?' Vaan briefly wondered before shaking his head wryly.

He didn't even know what kind of soul constitution Henrietta possessed, so there was no point in comparing their innate talents.

Even so, he was still confident his soul constitution was one of a kind.

After all, despite possessing the Heaven-Swallowing Physique, besides granting a Heaven-Swallowing Space, the rest of the benefits were related to the soul.

As such, Vaan wouldn't be surprised if he possessed a peerless spatial-attribute soul constitution that couldn't be graded and determined by the system. It was also possible that such a spatial-attribute soul constitution was responsible for giving his body the Heaven-Swallowing Physique.

It would make more sense if he thought like that.

After all, Vaan had already experienced the flaws and imperfections of the Witch Hunter System on multiple occasions.

It wasn't omnipotent and all-knowing.

For a long time, he had doubted why the system didn't display his elemental affinity to space even though he had a spatial bloodline and comprehended the Spatial Law.

There was only one reason why the system failed to display his spatial affinity – it couldn't be calculated.

But why couldn't it be calculated?

There were a number of possible reasons that Vaan could think of for it.

It could be that his spatial affinity was unstable and constantly fluctuating. In that case, his spatial affinity wouldn't have a fixed value and thus resulted in failing to display.

Another possibility would be that his spatial affinity was so high that it was beyond the system's ability to calculate. However, this possibility was hard to believe, even for him. Even so, it was still a possibility nonetheless. He couldn't rule it out just because he found it improbable.

After all, he was still limited by his understanding of the system and himself. There were secrets in his body and soul that he wasn't privy to.

Vaan could think of several more possible explanations for the absent display of his spatial affinity, but they were even more improbable and hard to believe.

...

Suddenly, Henrietta's eyes snapped open while Vaan was holding her in his arms. As their eyes met in close proximity, he noticed a sharpness in her gaze that she normally wouldn't possess.

"Empyrean Scarletsea?" Vaan asked.

"Impressive. You noticed right away," Empyrean Scarletsea praised with a nod of acknowledgment.

She separated herself from Vaan's arms and then dusted her black dress. Once she finished, she returned her attention to Vaan.

"If you agree to marry my disciple through a contract magic, I can take my disciple's place to dual practice with you, Sir Vaan," Empyrean Scarletsea stated.

"I can agree, but... this doesn't seem appropriate, does it?" Vaan furrowed his brows.

"What's the matter? Didn't you come to find my disciple because you wanted to dual practice with her and reap the benefits you can acquire from it? Or do you have a problem because I am taking over for her?" Empyrean Scarletsea asked.

"Did Henrietta agree to this arrangement?" Vaan coolly asked.

"Oh my... So that's what you're concerned about," Empyrean Scarletsea chuckled before assuring Vaan, "You don't have to worry about that. She had already agreed to let me dual practice with you in her stead."

"After that bold stunt you just pulled, she is too shy and embarrassed to see you right now. She will only watch us and study how we dual practice."

"Is that so?" Vaan uttered as an inexplicable sense of amusement welled up inside him.

Henrietta was too shy to face him directly, but she was okay with him dual practice with her body while she watched?

How fascinating...

Chapter 580: Private Ceremony

Sometime later, Vaan followed Empyrean Scarletsea back to Henrietta's bedchamber on the top floor of her palatial magic tower.

All magic tower masters usually made their bedchamber on the top floor of their magic towers. Due to the higher density of mana in higher altitudes, it was easier to sleep pleasantly and enjoy the various benefits mana could give.

Skin beautification and lifespan prolongation were just some of the most general benefits.

Nevertheless, shortly after Vaan stepped inside Henrietta's bedchamber and shut the door on his way in, the atmosphere suddenly turned heavy and serious.



"Just like you said before, Sir Vaan, we do not know when the seven Great Devils will make a move on Pangea due to the fluctuations in Gehenna's Gateway. That's why it's imperative to increase our power as much as possible to prepare for the worst situation."

"However, a woman's chastity isn't something you can just acquire and throw away after you are done with it. No, you must take responsibility for it. That's why, if you want to dual practice with my disciple, you must marry her. Of course, you have already voiced your agreement, so there's no point asking you again."

"That said, hosting an official wedding ceremony with the whole kingdom as witnesses is just a waste of time. As such, I will hold a private one and act as the officiant to bear witness to your promise with my precious disciple."

"You don't have any objections to my arrangement, do you, Sir Vaan?" Empyrean Scarletsea asked.

"I do not, Empyrean Scarletsea," Vaan calmly answered.

Nevertheless, his mind briefly drifted back to a private conversation he had with Astoria prior to leaving the Holy Knight Empire.

Going back a few days in time, he wouldn't have thought he would be making Queen Henrietta his first wife, and one through an informal marriage ceremony with no feelings attached at that.

Even so, he still understood its necessity from a normal civilian's perspective.

Still, he wouldn't have readily agreed to make Queen Henrietta his first wife if he hadn't made a promise to Astoria. It was Astoria's sincere request that he marry her dear friend Henrietta and take her as his beloved wife.

She wished he could care for Henrietta like he cared for the rest of his women, even if the person might not reciprocate his feelings.

Astoria also understood it was a selfish request.

However, Henrietta was her closest friend and someone important to her. She wished Vaan could be the person who could fill her loneliness and let her experience the wonders of life – things in the world she never got the chance to experience.

Despite knowing Henrietta's throne and power were filled with loneliness, there wasn't much Astoria could do to help her.

"Don't worry, I'll take good care of her." – Vaan recalled his promise to Astoria.

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"Good!" Empyrean Scarletsea exclaimed shortly after hearing Vaan's agreement. Then, she stated, "Since you don't have any objections, I will start."

Within moments of Empyrean Scarletsea's statement, a magic circle appeared in front of her. At first, the magic circle seemed like a simple contract magic spell. However, more mana lines were added to the simple magic circle over time, turning it into a complex spell.

Vaan found several unfamiliar runes in the magic circle that he failed to comprehend completely. There were even unknown laws added to the spell.

Henrietta's nose started bleeding as her body couldn't handle Empyrean Scarletsea's power.

'Is there a need to go so far for a binding contract spell for the union of marriage?' Vaan silently thought with a frown as he witnessed Henrietta's body suffering the rebound of Empyrean Scarletsea's mighty laws.

Although he didn't completely understand Empyrean Scarletsea's spell, he could still tell it was a contract spell—and a high-level one at that.

"This is the strictest contract spell I know – it cannot be voided by any power or law below Rank 10. The two parties bound by this spell cannot intentionally harm, betray, or abandon each other. Even if one's flesh is destroyed and soul perished, their fate to each other will still be bound together, allowing the two parties to find their way back to each other."

"There's no penalty for breaking this contract because you won't be able to act on any ill or dishonest thoughts that go against the contract once you agree to it. On the other hand, if you honor the contract, there may be unexpected blessings," Empyrean Scarletsea explained.

"I see... So, it's like a geas," Vaan commented thoughtfully while studying the complex magic circle.

The longer he studied Empyrean Scarletsea's complex magic circle, the more he understood the intricacy of her contract spell.

It was just as Empyrean Scarletsea explained – her contract spell would compel the involved parties to honor their agreement when they try to break it.

Although it seemed like a shackle, Vaan didn't find it disadvantageous.

After all, it implied that once he entered the contract with Henrietta, she would also become his closest ally. Even if she hated him, she could never hurt or wrong him.

The bond he shared with Henrietta through this contract would become even firmer than his bond with Astoria, regardless of how they change in the future.

"It's exactly like a geas," Empyrean Scarletsea calmly admitted before saying, "Since you understand how it works, I will now officiate the ceremony between you and my disciple."

Vaan found it amusing that the one presiding over the wedding ceremony shared the same body with the one he was marrying.

They didn't really need the ceremony as long as they acknowledged each other as husband and wife.

Nevertheless, Vaan signaled Empyrean Scarletsea to continue with a simple hand gesture.

"Do you, Vaan Raphna, take my disciple, Henrietta Rosegarden, to be your wedded wife? – To share the good and bad times together, to care for, never betray, and never harm one another?" Empyrean Scarletsea asked, setting the terms of the contract spell.

"If you agree, place your hand on the magic circle with a drop of your blood."