

The Witch 621

Chapter 621: Preparing for Departure

In the history of the Great Ratholos Empire's Ten-Year Glory Evaluations, every champion of the Rising Dragon Division had always been in their late thirties. It was very rare for someone in their early thirties to win the championship.

After all, no matter how talented a young warrior was, they didn't have enough time to cultivate compared to their older opponents.

As for those below thirty, it was unthinkable.

Duke Zaahir found himself strangely excited to see everyone's expressions when they found out the next champion of the Rising Dragon Division was only twenty years of age.

The glory would be shared with his domain.

'This year's Ten-Year Glory Evaluation is going to be exciting,' Duke Zaahir thought with a smile.

The previous champions of the Rising Dragon Division had always been around Low-level Rank 4 to Mid-level Rank 4 in battle power, whether from body refining, aura cultivation, or a combination of both.

It was impossible for someone from the younger generation to cultivate both body refinement and aura to Rank 4 under the age of forty. After all, it was already difficult enough to cultivate even one path to Rank 4 by age forty, let alone two paths.

There simply wasn't enough time to cultivate both paths to great success unless one was a monstrous genius who defied all common sense.

As such, this year's Rising Dragon Division champion spot was guaranteed to belong to the Dukedom of Dragonmoor with Young Master Vanderlin's help.

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Three hours after Duke Zaahir informed his men to prepare for their trip to the capital, a group of ten warriors gathered in the castle's main courtyard, packed and ready to leave at any time.

These men were all below the age of forty and possessed roughly Low-level Rank 4 battle power.

Among them, three were Low-level Rank 4 Body Refiners, four were Peak-level Rank 3 Body Refiners with Early-stage Aura Master cultivation, two were High-level Rank 3 Body Refiners with Peak-stage Aura Master cultivation, and one was a Rank 2 Body Refiner with Peak-stage Aura Grandmaster cultivation.

If Duke Zaahir had not learned about Vaan and succeeded in hiring him as a guest fighter for the Dukedom of Dragonmoor in the Ten-Year Glory Evaluation's Rising Dragon Division, the Rank 4 Body Reformation Pill would have originally been given to one of the three Low-level Rank 4 Body Refiners.

Unfortunately for them, Vaan existed.

Thus, not only would none of them get the chance to obtain Duke Zaahir's Rank 4 Body Reformation Pill, but their upcoming training time on the Black Mountain would also be shortened. Their lost time was given to Vaan.

And yet, despite all that, they still had to head to the capital two days ahead of the original schedule.

"Did you guys hear? Our Lord hired a guest fighter to participate in this year's Rising Dragon Division with us."

"Of course, I've heard about it. How could I not be aware of such an abrupt change? Our Lord is pinning all his hopes on this person. Because of that, our original one-day training pass at the Black Mountain had been reduced to sixteen-odd hours."

"What?! We all lost eight hours because of this new guy?! How amazing must this person be for our Lord to wrong us like this? I won't be convinced unless I experience his strength for myself!"

"Don't say you heard this from me, but I overheard a rumor from one of the servants this morning that Sir Bakram challenged the new guy to a duel and lost."

"What?! Is that true, Raaj?! Sir Bakram lost to the new guy in a duel?!"

"Oh my god, Judani, you bastard! What the hell are you shouting for? What if Sir Bakram heard you? Are you trying to screw me over?!"

The angry Dunean Warrior, Raaj, grabbed the other Dunean Warrior, Judani, by the collar as he cursed at him. However, Judani did not put up any form of resistance as he remained in a state of shock along with the rest.

Raaj's information was like thunder to their ears.

After all, who among them didn't know about Sir Bakram's true strength? They had all been trained by Sir Bakram before. Sir Bakram was only half a step from becoming a High-level Rank 4 Body Refiner.

Yet, Sir Bakram lost to the new guy!

Did this mean the new guy's battle power was at least High-level Rank 4?

Everyone couldn't help but have this thought.

During this sensitive moment, Vaan entered the main courtyard and caught everyone's attention immediately.

"I don't think I've seen you around here before. Are you lost, young man?"

The group of ten warriors all looked at Vaan with doubt. They found it weird that someone unfamiliar would stumble into the main courtyard, which was currently being used to prepare the participating warriors of the Rising Dragon Division.

It did not cross their minds that someone so young-looking would be exactly the hired fighter they were discussing.

"Lost?" Vaan took a moment to glance around the courtyard before nonchalantly asking, "Is this not the gathering spot for the participating members of the Rising Dragon Division?"

"It is... but what does that have to do with you being here?" a Low-level Rank 4 Body Refiner named Gurken asked with a frown.

"I am Duke Zaahir's guest fighter for the Ten-Year Glory Evaluation's Rising Dragon Division. You tell me whether I should be here or not?" Vaan replied with a shrug.

Gurken went blank for a moment before he burst into laughter, "Hahaha, that's a good one. You're funny, but this Big Brother has no time for your jokes."

"The participants for the Junior Dragon Division don't gather here until two days later. You should leave before you get in trouble," Gurken kindly suggested, but then he added, "It's impossible for someone as young as you to beat Sir Bakram."

"What's impossible?" Bakram asked with a gloomy and depressed look when he stepped into the courtyard shortly after Vaan did.

Duke Zaahir had sent Bakram over, knowing the ten warriors may not believe Vaan was his hired fighter.

"This kid really did beat me in a duel," Bakram admitted in a low tone.

In that instant, Bakram felt like he had lost all his face in front of the younger generation. It was really embarrassing to lose to someone half a century younger than him.

"Hahaha... Nice one, Sir Bakram. I didn't know you were also in on the joke," Judani laughed.

Bakram felt even more gloomy and depressed. He really didn't want to deal with the current situation if he was given a choice.

And yet, no one believed him even when he told the truth!

Bakram suddenly gritted his teeth angrily and cursed at the warrior who had last spoken, "You goddam brat! Is your butt itching for a beating?! If I said he beat me, then he beat me! Who has the time to joke with you?!"

Judani almost sh*t himself. He didn't expect Sir Bakram to erupt in anger suddenly, and much less for him to bear the brunt of it.

But why did Sir Bakram suddenly become angry? Or maybe it was still part of the joke?

"Hahaha... Sir Bakram, we've already seen through your joke... You can stop now," Judani laughed nervously.

"Scram!" Bakram barked.

Chapter 622: Departure

The moment Bakram barked, "Scram," Judani finally realized the person was completely serious. As such, his repeated doubt must have angered the person. Bakram's furious aura was real.

'Oh sh*t,' Judani suddenly thought with a paled face.

Peng!

Just when Judani turned around to run, Bakram also lifted his leg and gave him a kick on the butt. The force sent Judani flying a few meters before his face sprawled on the ground.

Meanwhile, the rest of the warriors in the group finally let the truth sink in before they became shocked. Then, they immediately did a double-take on Vaan before becoming even more shocked again.

Such a truly young man really did best Sir Bakram in a duel?!

Even if the truth was before them, the group of talented warriors still couldn't believe it. And yet, Sir Bakram had already vouched for Vaan's strength.

Everyone wracked their brains to make sense of the reality with their own logic.

Surprisingly, they all came to the same conclusion – Vaan was not actually as young as he looked. He was most likely in his late thirties and not some kid in his early twenties. He must have taken a youth potion to retain his young look.

Yes... That must be it.

A youth potion.

Once everyone thought that far, they became more accepting of the situation.

After all, comparing a forty-year-old High-level Rank 4 Body Refiner and a twenty-year-old High-level Rank 4 Body Refiner was like comparing heaven and earth; the latter was too heaven-defying.

If the young-looking man were truly as young as he seemed, no genius in the empire would dare claim to be a genius in front of him. His talent was simply unmatched and absolutely terrifying.

Nevertheless, regardless of Vaan's true age, everyone gave up the thought of causing him trouble. Sir Bakram had already testified his strength.

So what if they were unsatisfied with Vaan taking away some of their precious training time? What else could they do? Ask for a beating?

They couldn't defeat someone who could beat Sir Bakram.

...

A few minutes after everyone settled down and accepted Vaan's special position, Duke Zaahir was notified of their ride's arrival. It was a magic airboat pulled by two adult wyverns, each possessing Low-level Rank 4 battle power.

Only a person of Duke Zaahir's status could own such a fancy ride in the empire.

When the two adult wyverns descended in the main courtyard with the magic airboat in tow, Duke Zaahir also came out to see the group off.

"Make use of your time in the capital to improve your strength as much as possible before the competition. We will see each other again in a few days."

"Yes, my Lord!"

Duke Zaahir exchanged parting words with his men as he watched them board his magic airboat. Then came Vaan's turn.

"Young Master Vanderlin, I will be counting on you. The future of the Dukedom of Dragonmoor and the western region is in your hands. Please don't disappoint me."

"Rest assured, Duke Zaahir. Since I have agreed, I will naturally honor my end of the deal."

Vaan calmly boarded the magic airboat last before he thought of something and glanced back at Duke Zaahir.

"Duke Zaahir, if you are lacking intellectual talents to help you manage your domain, you should consider looking for a little seven-year-old boy named Theo in the western lower-class districts. He might be young, but he has the gift of memory. So, if you are willing to invest, he will undoubtedly become an irreplaceable asset to the Dukedom of Dragonmoor in the future."

Vaan thought it would be a pity if Theo couldn't nurture his talent due to his environment and background. Thus, he decided to give him the opportunity he was lacking.

"Oh?" Duke Zaahir was astonished for a moment before decisively agreeing with a nod, "Since Young Master Vanderlin said so, I definitely have to go and look for this boy."

Vaan's words had caught his interest.

"Go, take them to the capital. I will also be counting on you two to take them there safely," Duke Zaahir said to the two adult wyverns as he caressed their heads intimately.

The two wyverns had been his lifelong companions since the time they hatched from their eggs.

Shortly after, the two wyverns took off, dragging the magic airboat along. They soared into the air and soon became a tiny dot in the distant eastern sky.

Afterward, Duke Zaahir glanced at Bakram, who had remained behind in the courtyard alongside him.

"Go, find this boy named Theo for me, Bakram."

"Yes, my Lord!"

...

In the sky above the clouds, the magic airboat continued to be pulled along by Duke Zaahir's two lifelong wyvern companions.

Due to the limited space on the deck of the magic airboat and the pressure of the grand competition in the coming days, the group of ten warriors meditated in solemn silence. No one had the mood to talk and only focused on conditioning their mind and bodies.

On the other hand, Vaan stood against the edge and calmly took in the view below.

He had already studied the nature of the magic airboat. Thus, he found it quite impractical for the magic airboat to be driven by two wyverns when it had its own flight functions. After all, given there were enough mana stones as fuel, the magic airboat could quite possibly even achieve greater speed than the two wyverns' top speed.

However, Vaan could also understand why the wyverns were still used to drive the magic airboat.

Given the tension and rivalry between the western and eastern regions, Duke Zaahir's coffers must have been strained quite a fair deal. As such, the wyverns were used to lessen the consumption of mana stones required for long flight trips.

Nevertheless, what would have been a month-long trip by foot for most people heading to the imperial capital from Dragonmoor City was reduced to a one-day flight.

Of course, if Vaan wanted to, he could reach the imperial capital in mere seconds.

That said, Vaan didn't intend to waste any time by taking the slower path. He had plenty of precious resources to help him cultivate anywhere. Furthermore, the dragon elites were secretly keeping him updated on the situation in multiple countries.

'Anything interesting happening back in the Black Rose Kingdom lately, Verun?' Vaan inquired.

Chapter 623: Sealed Memories?

'I'm not sure if it counts as interesting since you should already be aware of some of them. But since the Supreme Leader asked, I will mention them,' Verun replied via mental transmission.

'Queen Henrietta had recently finished stabilizing her power at the middle stage of the Transcendent Witch rank, demon activity had been increasingly sighted near the mouth of Gehenna's Gateway, and a group of spatial-attribute witches belonging to the Great House of Caelestis appeared in Blackthorn City on the same day you left, Supreme Leader.'

'Based on our observation of their interaction, there also seems to be some relationship between Queen Henrietta and the one leading the group,' Verun added.

'The Great House of Caelestis...' Vaan's mind blanked for a moment before he started frowning.

He had long suspected he had some blood relations with the Great House of Caelestis when he first learned about them. However, he never bothered getting to the bottom of it. After all, even if he was related to the Great House of Caelestis, it had nothing to do with the current him.

It was the original owner of the body that was possibly blood-related to the Great House of Caelestis. He was just a soul that took possession of the body—or at the very least, that was what Vaan believed.

However, Vaan couldn't be certain.

There was something strange about his reincarnation – something that even he, with his genius mind, couldn't completely figure out due to a lack of clues.

From a logical perspective, he should have inherited the memories of the original owner. After all, the memories were supposed to be stored in the brain. For the higher-level existences, their memories could be bound to their souls.

However, the original owner was very unlikely to be a higher-level existence. He was just a mere mortal. That was why he could die in the slums of Blackmoon City.

As such, he should have inherited all of the original host's memories when his soul took possession of the body. Unfortunately, not only did he not inherit the memories, he didn't even receive a fragment.

It was like his soul took possession of a doll that had never been alive to begin with.

It was a clean slate.

Nevertheless, after pondering this matter thousands of times, Vaan started thinking in another direction.

What if he, himself, was the original owner of the body?

This thought opened up a list of possibilities that could make sense where the first eighteen years of memories had disappeared.

For example, what if the current life's memories in the first eighteen years were completely sealed the moment he awakened his past life's memories?

The complete disappearance of the current life's memories would make it seem like the previous life's memories had overwritten the current life's memories. Thus, it would seem like the current life's memories never existed.

Under such a situation, it would just seem like his soul immediately possessed a new body right after dying in his previous life, which was exactly what he felt when he first gained awareness of his new life.

There was no gap between the time of his death and the time of his reincarnation. There was no process of his soul ferrying through spacetime to enter this different world and body.

But assuming all that was true, it raised an even bigger question – why were his first eighteen years of memories sealed upon awakening memories of his past life?

What did he need to do to unseal it?

Become more powerful?

Vaan believed all his questions would be answered as long as he reached the prerequisite level of strength. As to what level that was, he did not know. But as long as he kept advancing, he would find the answers—or the answers would find him.

'If a portion of my current life's memories are truly sealed, it's definitely not an ordinary seal. It would also mean there's a big secret behind my origin and past,' Vaan thought.

If he started believing his memories were sealed, then it would also mean he couldn't pretend he had nothing to do with the Great House of Caelestis.

'Arrange a group of suitable dragons to investigate the Great House of Caelestis. I want to know where their ancestral home is, what they have been up to in the past twenty years, and why their members have suddenly appeared in Blackthorn City.'

'Understood, Supreme Leader.'

Shortly after Verun complied, Vaan no longer sensed her nearby presence. Thus, he had to inquire about the situation in the Holy Knight Empire from another nearby dragon hiding in stealth mode.

He soon learned Astoria was still doing well developing the Holy Knight Empire, according to the notes he left behind. At the same time, the Shadow Witch Order under Eniwse was rapidly expanding its branches throughout the empire.

Supposedly, the Shadow Witch Order had also commenced extending its network to some small kingdoms and city-states south of the empire and encountered minor resistance from the local powers.

Nevertheless, everything was on the right track, and his women all had something to do.

Vaan also listened to the Red Dragon Tribe's progress.

The dragon lords had finished designing their space helmets and building their space gate to the sea of stars. Furthermore, they had already started sending dragons into the sea of stars with the new space helmets to commence the first stage of the space station construction.

'The Great Ratholos Empire has many Perilous Lands, possibly filled with precious resources and hidden opportunities. Don't just focus on intel-gathering. Go and explore some Perilous Lands. Seek out your lucky chances and plunder everything of value. The Thousand Fog Mountains' resources will never be enough to develop the Red Dragon Tribe to greater heights.'

'Yes, Supreme Leader!'

Within moments, Vaan no longer felt the presence of the other dragon elites in the area. They had all left in different directions in search of opportunities and treasures.

As such, Vaan meditated in silence and tempered his meridians.

However, there was a limit to how much he could temper his meridians in a session. Thus, after that was completed, Vaan researched the potential of applying his unique tempering method to other parts of his body.

He decided his next focus would be his bones.

Chapter 624: Imperial Capital

If Vaan consumed more of the Divine-rank Stalactite Milk, the potency would be mostly absorbed by his meridians and five viscera before he could direct it into his bones.

Thus, oral consumption wasn't effective if he wanted to temper the bones solely.

Fortunately, Vaan had comprehended the Spatial Law and overcome his limitations with the Heaven-Swallowing Space. He could open a small portal and directly infuse the Divine-rank Stalactite Milk into his bone marrows.

Nevertheless, the bone marrow was different from the meridians and five viscera. Without any records of the Stalactite Milk being used on the bone marrow, it was difficult to determine the exact effect it would have.

As such, Vaan infused the diluted version, the Transcendent-rank Stalactite Milk, into his tailbone, which was considered the most useless bone in the human body. As such, even if something went wrong, he wouldn't suffer any loss.

Nevertheless, reality proved Vaan had been overly cautious.

The Transcendent-rank Stalactite Milk miraculously blended with his bone marrow and strengthened his tailbone. At the same time, the newly produced blood cells in the bone marrow appeared to be more potent.

Ding!

<You have successfully fortified your tailbone>

<You have successfully strengthened your bone marrow>

<Your affinity to earth has increased>

<Your lifespan has slightly extended>

...

Once Vaan confirmed the positive results of his experiment, he began infusing more Transcendent-rank Stalactite Milk into the rest of his bone marrows. At the same time, he also commanded the Fire Law to temper his bones.

Even if no visible change could be seen on Vaan's body, he was burning from the inside.

Ding!

<You have successfully fortified your bones>

<You have successfully strengthened your bone marrow>

<Your affinity to earth has increased>

<Your affinity to fire has increased>

<Your lifespan has noticeably extended>

...

Vaan was pleasantly surprised by the results of this self-tempering method. He didn't expect his elemental affinity to improve at their current level. At the very least, it was still understandable for his earth affinity to increase since the Stalactite Milk was a miraculous elixir born of the earth.

However, it was surprising that even his fire affinity could still be increased through the tempering of his own flames!

This proved that there were still some remaining parts of his body that had yet to be tempered by the flames.

Vaan was curious to see how far he could raise his affinity to earth and fire once he completely tempered all his bones.

What would happen to his body once he raised his elemental affinity to the limit?

Although Vaan wanted to find out immediately, he had to execute self-control. There was a time and place for everything and now was definitely not that time. He had already limited his tempering session by a great deal.

Otherwise, he could improve even faster!

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"Is it just me, or is it getting a little hot around here?" the only Late-stage Aura Grandmaster in the group broke the silence on the deck with his question.

"Oh? It wasn't just me?" Raaj expressed his surprise before adding, "I have also noticed that the surrounding temperature has been steadily increasing for some time now."

"That shouldn't be right," Gurken frowned before saying, "Given our traveling speed and altitude, the strong breeze should be quite cool. Furthermore, we are heading in the Eastern Sea's direction, so if anything, it should be getting colder, not hotter."

While the group of warriors was growing doubtful over the weather, the temperature steadily started dropping back to its expected level. As a result, the group became even more puzzled.

"What region just passed just now?"

"It should be the Sleeping Mountain... Don't tell me...the dormant volcano erupted? But that can't be right either... We would have already known if a volcano erupted. Maybe it's a sign that the Sleeping Mountain is going to erupt soon?"

Although one of the warriors made a bold yet unlikely assumption, the others felt startled.

The Sleeping Mountain was one of the largest mountains in the entire empire. If the Sleeping Mountain truly were going to erupt, it would be an earth-shaking, sky-rending event that would shock everyone.

None of the warriors realized Vaan was the true culprit behind the temperature change. He had skillfully dispersed his internal heat into the surroundings before the heat concentration on his body drew their attention to him.

Over time, everyone's curiosity died down as they all went back to silent meditation.

After all, even if something big was about to happen to Sleeping Mountain, they couldn't go back to investigate it. There was nothing they could do until they reached the capital.

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In the blink of an eye, the one-day trip neared its end as the two wyverns pulling the magic airboat roared. Based on the warriors' past experience, the wyvern's sudden roar was the sign that they would reach the imperial capital within another thirty minutes.

This half-hour timeframe was for them to enjoy the view while they could.

The imperial capital of the Great Ratholos Empire was unlike any other city Vaan had come across. As it was a coastal city, its size and population were on a completely different level. Even the Holy Knight Empire's capital city couldn't compare to it.

The Great Ratholos Empire's imperial capital was home to over thirty million people. Furthermore, with the upcoming grand event, it wouldn't be a surprise for this number to inflate to thirty-five million people.

And this was only one coastal city.

Considering the entire eastern coast was completely occupied by several human cities, the total population of the people living on the east coast broke the hundred million mark!

However, this also contributed to eighty percent of the population living in the whole eastern region.

The sheer number of tall buildings lined up on the eastern coast formed an enormous crescent moon and looked like a great wall that was built to fend off tsunamis.

"We're finally here. No matter how many times I visit this city, I am always awed by this spectacular sight!" Judani said emotionally as he appreciated the view.

'So this is the Great Ratholos Empire's imperial capital...' Vaan quietly thought.

Just by looking at the grand city in the distance, one could easily tell how much effort the Great Ratholos Empire had invested in the Eastern Sea and where its focus lay.

It was no surprise that it was not interested in the resources and territories of other countries.

Chapter 625: Elder Severus

As their magic airboat drew closer to the imperial capital, Vaan marveled at the intricate system of rivers and water channels flowing through the city like veins, supplying it with life. Many rooftops were used to grow crops and medicinal herbs.

The entire city was simply overflowing with flora.

As far as Vaan could see, there wasn't a single building that wasn't covered in some form of vegetation.

If Dragonmoor City were comparable to a ruined ancient city, the imperial capital would be comparable to a very developed city that had been abandoned for hundreds of years, allowing it to be covered in vegetation, except it wasn't an abandoned city.

On the contrary, the imperial capital was very lively.

Nevertheless, it wasn't difficult to discover where the main location of the Ten-Year Glory Evaluation was held in the imperial capital.

It was an amphitheater.

However, this amphitheater was just like the imperial capital – incredibly enormous and grand. Its sheer size and seating space allowed it to hold well over a hundred thousand spectators comfortably.

That said, if people didn't mind squeezing, the spectator capacity would be even higher.

The battle arena itself in the center was also very large, enough to let hundreds of warriors fight in it simultaneously.

Given the large number of participants that joined whenever the grand event was held, it wasn't strange for the organizer to have several rounds of free-for-all battles in order to thin the number of participants.

Nevertheless, a capacity of a hundred thousand was nowhere near enough to accommodate every spectator.

There were also dozens of sky-scraping buildings around the enormous amphitheater. Each of these tall buildings had large balconies with great viewing space for the amphitheater.

Unfortunately, this amount of viewing space was still limited.

It was clear that not everyone in the imperial capital would get the chance to spectate the battles between the greatest talents in the empire.

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The magic airboat soon landed in an open space commonly used as a docking bay for the wealthy and powerful figures who could afford flying vessels.

Vaan and the ten warriors immediately received the highest level of respect and hospitality when they disembarked the magic airboat. At the same time, they also received wary and probing stares from their competitors.

Everyone nearby had recognized the unique emblem of Duke Zaahir on the magic airboat. As such, they also recognized Vaan's group as one of the biggest candidates for winning the competitions.

Around this time, with the grand event only six days away, there wasn't a single inn that wasn't booked out. Hoping for vacancies was like expecting the sun not to rise the next day – it just wasn't possible.

Many people were prepared to sleep on the streets until the grand event ended.

Fortunately for Vaan's group, Duke Zaahir had a private residence in the imperial capital, which was arranged to accommodate them.

As such, the ten warriors intended to head there first to unload their belongings and rest.

However, Vaan had other plans. Thus, he separated from the group and headed straight for Martial Hall's main school to hand in Duke Zaahir's recommendation letter.

The Martial Hall had branch schools in many large cities across the empire, but they were nothing compared to the main school. The Martial Hall's main school occupied an entire district itself and possessed many training grounds and facilities.

It was the best place to nurture talent.

Even the current emperor had been a student of Martial Hall at some point in his life when he was young and learning. In fact, the previous emperors had also been students of Martial Hall. The Martial Hall was an integral part of the Great Ratholos Empire.

Many of its members grew to take up important positions in the empire.

There were two great forces in the Great Ratholos Empire, which even the ruling emperor could not control, and the Martial Hall was one of them.

The main school alone had at least two hundred thousand members staying within its grounds.

When Vaan arrived at the southern main entrance and showed Duke Zaahir's seal on the recommendation letter, a core member personally escorted him to the elder in charge of the Registration Hall.

He didn't encounter any trouble, and everyone was respectful of one another.

The environment within Martial Hall's school grounds was surprisingly harmonious despite the competitiveness. Supposedly, the Martial Hall didn't just produce martial talents but also good characters. Or at least, it seemed that way on the surface.

Perhaps there were strict punishments for bullies who affected the mood and learning experience of other members.

"Elder Severus, I've brought a person with Duke Zaahir's recommendation letter," the core member informed a grey-haired old man full of wrinkles and battle scars.

After the core member finished handing Vaan over to the grey-haired old man, he stood to the side and didn't leave the building.

"Oh," Elder Severus uttered without a change to his calm expression while accepting the letter from Vaan.

This grey-haired old man gave the impression that even if the capital fell the next day, he would still face it calmly; nothing could affect his tranquil state of mind, be it wind or rain, death or destruction.

Furthermore, his aura was so withdrawn that he seemed like an ordinary mortal who had never trained. However, his extraordinary state of mind and frightening scars showed he was anything but an ordinary, untrained mortal.

Elder Severus studied Vaan's features multiple times while reading Duke Zaahir's recommendation letter. It was like he was verifying something each time.

After he finished reading, he took out a blank nameplate and casually carved Vaan's alias into the piece of white metal with his bare hands. The letters that appeared were surprisingly neat, thin, and well-written.

The strength behind Elder Severus's fingertips was impressive, but their dexterity was even more so.

"This is proof of your status as an honorary core member of our Martial Hall. Be sure not to lose it," Elder Severus said as he handed the engraved nameplate to Vaan.

Afterward, Elder Severus returned to his rocking chair to laze and no longer paid Vaan any further attention.

Vaan was surprised by the simplicity of the registration.

He became an honorary core member of the Martial Hall just like that? No questions asked or anything?

Vaan couldn't help but feel a little speechless.

However, his complicated mind believed the registration couldn't possibly be so simple.

There had to be a hidden trick waiting to surprise him if he was careless.

After all, if it was so easy to acquire the status of an honorary core member, it must be just as easy to lose it.

Chapter 626: Berucha Shadi

What was the privilege of being an honorary core member of Martial Hall?

The privilege of an honorary core member was mostly the same as the privileges of a regular core member but without the responsibilities that came with it. In other words, an honorary core member would have access to the same cultivation resources and facilities but would not need to carry out any compulsory missions on behalf of the Martial Hall.

Although the Martial Hall would give honorary core members missions to perform, honorary core members also had the right to reject all of them.

If nothing else was considered, being an honorary core member was much better than being a regular core member.

However, honorary core members couldn't enjoy such great benefits without any responsibilities attached. At the very least, there should be some price for it.

"Is there a guidebook on the 'can do's' and 'can't do's' of an honorary core member, Elder Severus? I want to read one if possible," Vaan politely requested.

"Oh?" Elder Severus lazily glanced at Vaan from his rocking chair before nodding, "You can find what you need on the back bookshelf. As long as you don't take any of the books outside the Registration Hall, you can read anything on that back bookshelf."

Shortly after Elder Severus said his piece, he resumed his business, flipping open a worn-out book to read. Occasionally, he would scribble something inside it, correcting and altering some flawed content.

With Vaan's Omni-Sense and short observation, he quickly discovered the worn-out book was a low-rank martial art with an ordinary name – Mantis Chop.

Elder Severus's hobby was finding flaws in existing martial arts and improving them in his spare time.

But although Elder Severus's hobby caught Vaan's interest, he did not disturb the grey-haired old man. Before doing anything, he had to gain a complete understanding of the Martial Hall's rules and customs.

Only when Vaan knew what he could and could not do in the Martial Hall would he be capable of avoiding all meaningless troubles and inconveniences that could affect his plans.

It didn't take long for Vaan to locate the guidebook about honorary core members and finish it.

The content was just as he suspected – there truly was a price to pay for being an honorary core member.

While it was true that an honorary core member had access to the same resources and training facilities as regular core members, their priority was at rock bottom.

For example, if all the gravity chambers for core members were in use, an honorary core member would have to end their training and give up their gravity chamber when another core member needed it.

Furthermore, at the Mission Hall, core members also had priority in choosing newly posted missions. Honorary core members had to wait for all the core members to select their missions first. On top of that, honorary core members received twenty percent less contribution points from the same mission given to core members.

Inside the Martial Hall, contribution points were the only acceptable currencies. It was used to exchange for cultivation resources and reserve training time in special facilities like Gravity Chambers and Black Mountain.

Thus, even if honorary core members weren't forced to complete a fixed number of missions for the Martial Hall each year, they still needed to complete missions anyway—that was, unless they didn't care about earning contribution points.

Vaan looked through the catalog of exchangeable rewards and noticed even a heaven-defying pill like the Rank 4 Body Reformation Pill was on the list.

So long as one had enough contribution points, even a Rank 4 Body Reformation Pill could be theirs.

However, the staggering amount of contribution points needed to exchange for one Rank 4 Body Reformation Pill was enough to shatter many warriors' dreams.

The pill was listed for two million contribution points.

It wasn't an amount a warrior could get from completing ordinary missions, even if they kept completing them for their entire life.

Nevertheless, Vaan wasn't concerned about the disadvantages of the resources or the training facilities.

After all, most honorable core members were young masters with powerful, noble backgrounds. Normal core members wouldn't dare to offend them by snatching their training spots or a mission they were interested in.

On the contrary, they would be buttering up honorary core members and trying to build a good relationship with them. After all, if they had mediocre power after graduating from the Martial Hall, they could at least rely on these connections to secure stable positions such as personal guards for nobles or royalties.

However, the real problem for Vaan was that he became an honorary core member under Duke Zaahir's recommendation. As such, core members affiliated with the other dukes would try to screw him over.

If he were found guilty of three offenses, such as intentionally causing trouble for other students in the Martial Hall and affecting their learning, his honorary core member status would be revoked.

'I don't want to look for trouble, but trouble will definitely come knocking. What can I do to remedy this situation?' Vaan pondered.

He only came to the Martial Hall because he was interested in reading its accumulation of martial arts. Thus, he didn't want his reading time to be disturbed by flies.

However, in order to deal with flies, he would have to sacrifice some of his precious reading time.

As for the methods to deal with flies... He could think of many ways.

"Thank you, Elder Severus. I have finished reading and will be on my way now," Vaan informed the grey-haired old man after returning the last book to its shelf.

"Go on then," Elder Severus waved Vaan off without looking, eyes still fixed on the content of his book, Mantis Chop Technique.

Vaan silently nodded and took his leave. The core member who escorted him to the Registration Hall also left to follow him shortly after informing the elder of his departure.

Sometime later, after two had long left, Elder Severus glanced at the back bookshelf with some doubts.

Although all the books had been returned neatly to the shelf, Elder Severus could still tell which book Vaan had read within the half hour of his stay. After all, it had been a long time since a person was bothered to read the Martial Hall's introductory guidebooks.

A lot of dust had gathered on the back shelf, and they had been recently moved.

'That kid read all of that in half an hour?'

Elder Severus tried to maintain his aloof and calm outer appearance, but he was dumbfounded inside his heart.

He quickly recalled how fast the pages had been flipping and figured Vaan might have just been skimming the pages. He felt a little disappointed at that thought.

Nevertheless, it had been a long time since someone had shown interest in reading the introductory guidebooks. Thus, he was a little interested in this new student.

'Vanderlin Pendragon, was it? Someone with a name like this had certainly left behind quite an impression,' Elder Severus mused.

However, he suddenly thought about the complications that came with such a name. This new student would have no shortage of trouble and only had an honorary core member status.

"This kid wouldn't get expelled from the Martial Hall on his first day, would he? Hm... I will look after this kid for a little bit. I want to see if this kid is a true dragon or a paper tiger,' Elder Severus decided.

...

Meanwhile, after Vaan left the registration building, the core member who escorted him earlier quickly caught up to him.

"Young Master Vanderlin, you must not be familiar with our martial school yet. Where do you want to go? I can show you the way," the core member offered with a friendly attitude.

Vaan glanced back at the core member and briefly studied him.

This person was a thirty-year-old Dunean young man with only the strength of a Low-level Rank 2 Body Refiner. Compared to Jihaad, who was both a Peak-level Rank 2 Body Refiner and a Peak-stage Aura Master with a similar age, this person's martial talent was considered mediocre.

As such, it was also clear why this person approached him enthusiastically.

Since the person could be used, he should use him.

"Sure, I'm heading to the Martial Arts Repository," Vaan calmly replied.

"Great!" the mediocre core member exclaimed excitedly before taking the lead, "You're heading in the right direction, Young Master Vanderlin. Please follow me. It's not too far from here, only about fifteen minutes walking distance away."

"I'm sorry, I haven't caught your name yet. This Senior Martial Brother is...?" Vaan sought out the person's name.

"Ahh, pardon my late introduction, Young Master Vanderlin," the mediocre core member smacked his forehead before introducing himself, "I am Berucha Shadi, but you can just call me Berucha or Martial Brother Berucha, Young Master Vanderlin."

"I don't dare to be a senior martial brother and pull my weight in front of you," Berucha added with an awkward smile.

Even if Berucha's martial talent was mediocre, he still had some awareness. He could tell that Vaan's strength was above him despite being younger.

Thus, as someone who had spent fifteen years studying at the Martial Hall yet only managed to be a Low-level Rank 2 Body Refiner, he didn't believe he was qualified to be anyone's senior martial brother.

"Martial Brother Berucha it is then," Vaan calmly nodded.

Berucha immediately felt relief after seeing that Vaan didn't look down on him and still gave him the basic level of respect as a fellow martial brother of the same martial school.

Meanwhile, Vaan figured he couldn't be too casual since he was still new. He didn't want to give others a reason to find fault with him.

Chapter 627: Not Afraid of Death, Only Afraid a Mediocre Life

While Berucha was leading Vaan to the Martial Arts Repository building, he suddenly had a feeling that Vaan already knew the way to it.

"Young Master Vanderlin, could it be that you already know the way to the Martial Arts Repository?" Berucha asked with a wry, awkward smile.

"Mm," Vaan admitted as he casually replied, "There was a detailed map with explanations in one of the guidebooks."

When Berucha heard that, he couldn't help but feel embarrassed.

So it turned out that Young Master Vanderlin already knew the way to the Martial Arts Repository, and he still allowed him to lead the way instead of rejecting him. Berucha felt grateful once he understood that.

Young Master Vanderlin was giving him a chance to be acquainted with him.

Nevertheless, Berucha also couldn't help but feel shocked in his heart. He had seen Young Master Vanderlin flipping through pages in the Registration Hall like he was only skimming them.

Who knew he would actually memorize anything from it?

'Geniuses are made from a different mold,' Berucha thought self-deprecatingly and sighed at his only mediocre talents.

"Thank you, Young Master Vanderlin."

"What for?"

"For giving me a chance to make your acquaintance, Young Master Vanderlin. I don't want to hide it from you. My talents are mediocre, and I am unlikely to become a powerful Body Refiner in this lifetime unless I get an opportunity. That's why I approached you."

"Since you are honest, I will also tell you something, Martial Brother Berucha. I am just a guest fighter hired by Duke Zaahir. There will be many people who will come to make trouble with me. As such, you will not have peaceful days being around me and will even suffer alongside me. Despite that, do you still dare to stick around me?"

Berucha was quickly surprised but he quickly understood Vaan's meaning.

Although the truth behind the western region's plight wasn't widespread, any knowledgeable person could guess it had something to do with the rivalry between the three dukes. And while these three dukes wouldn't kill each other due to their brotherhood, it was different for the people working under them.

Considering Duke Zaahir was in a disadvantageous position, his people were more likely to suffer and face dangers.

Furthermore, Vaan wasn't Duke Zaahir's son or anything, just a hired outsider. Thus, even if Berucha wanted to align himself with Duke Zaahir's faction, he was unlikely to receive any support from Duke Zaahir.

In other words, associating with Vaan won't give Berucha any benefits from Duke Zaahir and might even make his life miserable due to Duke Zaahir's rivals.

A normal person would have shied away after weighing the options, but surprisingly, Berucha didn't fall into this category.

"I'm not afraid of death, Young Master Vanderlin. I'm only afraid of being mediocre my whole life!" Berucha firmly stated, gritting his teeth with a determined look.

It was do or die.

Berucha decided to take a big gamble by associating himself with Vaan. Despite what Vaan said to him, Berucha had a faint feeling that he wouldn't regret his choice. Berucha had no confidence or basis to back up this thought.

However, looking at Vaan's calmness gave Berucha an unfathomable feeling, like he was looking at a tall mountain that wouldn't bend to wind or rain.

Nevertheless, Berucha ultimately chose to associate with Vaan because he had no other choice.

No one else would take Berucha due to his mediocre talent and looks. He was a nobody with nothing special. In the eyes of other strong factions, there was no benefit to taking him in.

'Young Master Vanderlin is the only person who hasn't looked down on my mediocre talents, and he is even younger and more powerful than me. Young geniuses are naturally arrogant, but not Young Master Vanderlin.'

'Since Young Master Vanderlin seems reliable, I should put my trust in him,' Berucha thought. He made his choice with zero expectations of receiving Duke Zaahir's support.

Although Vaan had only spoken a few words, Berucha went through a great deal of thinking before making his ultimate choice.

"That's good," Vaan casually smiled and said, "I don't care about people's power or background anyway, only their character."

"I don't care about people's power or background anyway, only their character..." Berucha quietly repeated before his eyes lit up.

Only a strong person would dare say such a thing.

Nevertheless, Berucha was fearful that their words might have been heard by others and offended some people. Thus, he cautiously studied his surroundings. After seeing no one around, he sighed with relief.

They were passing through a small lake called Coldmoon Lake, a serene place where few people come to meditate. Compared to practicing martial skills, surpassing physical limits, or completing missions, spiritual meditation was an unpopular activity.

Sometime later, Vaan and Berucha eventually reached the Martial Arts Repository, a grand nine-story round pagoda building with an additional eighteen underground floors.

Dozens of martial students could be found constantly entering and exiting the building at any given time. There were more people entering than leaving the building. But from time to time, a large number of martial students would leave at once.

The rules of the Martial Hall did not permit anyone to take out the martial arts and cultivation methods stored inside the Martial Arts Repository.

However, there were some exceptions for martial instructors when they wanted to use a specific book as lecture material for their class. Even so, they still had to go through the proper procedures before they could borrow the books.

Otherwise, they could only peruse the martial arts and cultivation methods while they were staying inside the building.

When Vaan entered the building, he found all the bookshelves arranged along the walls while the central area of each floor was used as reading space.

As an honorary core member, Vaan was permitted to peruse any martial art book and cultivation method found on the top nine floors free of charge. He also had access to the first six underground floors, but contribution points were required to learn anything there.

Nevertheless, Vaan was eager to absorb all the knowledge the Martial Arts Repository had to offer.

"I will most likely spend the whole day here," Vaan calmly stated before turning to his side, asking, "What about you, Martial Brother Berucha?"

"Huh?"

Chapter 628: Martial Arts Repository

Berucha's mind quickly went blank after hearing Vaan's intention. Since the latter was still new to the martial school, Berucha figured he could improve his image by showing Vaan around the school grounds.

However, Berucha had only just realized Vaan was only interested in reading books. The latter didn't care about exploring the other facilities at all.

Suddenly, Berucha recalled Vaan's behavior back at the Registration Hall.

Afterward, he glanced at the several hundred thousand pieces of martial knowledge waiting to be read in the Martial Arts Repository, and the corners of his lips immediately twitched.

'Don't tell me, Young Master Vanderlin intends to read everything here?!' Berucha cried in his mind.

He soon fell into depression when he discovered Young Master Vanderlin was actually a super big bookworm.

Berucha couldn't imagine how many books Young Master Vanderlin had already read in his life.

If Young Master Vanderlin hadn't been such a bookworm and spent more time on training, wouldn't he have achieved much more in his cultivation?

'Oh god, how long would it take Young Master Vanderlin to read everything in the Martial Arts Repository?'

Berucha was startled at the thought but quickly recovered shortly after. It might not be as bad if the person only skimmed through the books.

But then again, if the person wasn't actually reading, what was the point in skimming through so many books?

Berucha was baffled.

It seemed all geniuses were eccentric people who couldn't be easily understood for their actions.

"There's a martial art I've been trying to learn lately. So, I will probably look for it and review my knowledge. As for after that, I haven't decided yet, Young Master Vanderlin," Berucha replied to Vaan's previous question.

"Alright, I'll see you around then," Vaan nodded.

Shortly after, he fully entered the building. Upon his entry, he immediately noticed the first floor was quite crowded, whether it was martial students browsing the bookshelves or reviewing the martial knowledge in the central reading space. As such, he decided to head up to the next floor.

However, a grey-haired old man in scholarly clothes obstructed his path before Vaan could get very far inside the building.

"Nameplate?" the scholarly old man casually demanded.

"This is Elder Rahim, the librarian in charge of the first floor. Everyone has to show their nameplate to prove their identity before they can use the Martial Arts Repository," Berucha quickly explained.

However, Vaan had already placed his nameplate on Elder Rahim's extended palm.

Naturally, the customs of the Martial Arts Repository were something he had already learned from one of the introductory guidebooks back at the Registration Hall.

"Vanderlin Pendragon... Honorary core member, huh?" Elder Rahim confirmed Vaan's identity before studying his figure with a deep look.

Although Elder Rahim seemed to have something to say, he did not comment. He simply returned Vaan's nameplate and got out of his way.

"You can peruse any piece of martial knowledge on the top nine floors of the Martial Arts Repository. If there is anything you don't understand or are not sure about, you can ask a fellow martial student or the floor elder in charge."

"I understand. Thank you, Elder Rahim."

Shortly after the brief exchange ended, Vaan took the stairs to the second floor. Although the second floor also had an elder in charge, the person did not interfere with his business. The person only glanced in his direction briefly before continuing his own reading.

Nevertheless, Vaan still found the second floor somewhat crowded. Thus, he took the next set of stairs to the third floor.

This repeated until Vaan ended up on the seventh floor, where there were finally fewer martial students around. He knew his reading was bound to draw attention. Thus, the fewer people around, the better.

'The seventh floor upward only contains mid-rank martial arts and cultivation methods,' Vaan recalled.

...

Cultivation methods of the seventh floor consisted of both body refining and aura training methods.

Body refining methods were divided into breathing, physical, extreme, medicinal, and mental exercises. Breathing exercises were further divided into explosive, stable, and recovery breathing, each with a different focus.

For example, explosive breathing focused on supplying large amounts of oxygen to relevant body parts, ensuring warriors could perform intensive moves with their full might.

Meanwhile, stable breathing focused on a consistent supply of oxygen to ensure warriors could train for longer periods before their muscles were worn out.

Lastly, recovery breathing was focused on supplying exhausted muscles with adequate amounts of oxygen to maximize their recovery and growth rates. Too little oxygen would naturally limit the recovery and growth of muscles, but too much would also burden the exhausted muscles and slow them down. An optimum amount was required for an optimum result.

Everyone knew how to breathe, but not everyone knew how to breathe well.

Non-martial artists think little of breathing exercises due to their limited effects and underestimate their value, not understanding their long-term benefits. But to a body refiner, mastering a good breathing exercise was just as important as any other body-refining exercise.

A split second saved on recovery and growth was a split second of extra training to greater heights. It was not a lot of time, but after countless repetitions, the meager amount of time would snowball into days, months, or even years.

Body refining was a difficult path, and every bit of time counted for a body refiner determined for greatness.

Even ordinary people did not know that one could simply improve one's quality of life just by knowing how to breathe well.

...

As Vaan read through the books in the breathing exercise section, he was amazed by the level of sophistication.

The attention to detail was simply staggering.

If even breathing exercises were developed to such a degree, it was easy to imagine what it was like for the other sections of body refining.

Nevertheless, such an advanced level of development seemed almost unnatural when compared to a rivaling country like the Holy Knight Empire. It wasn't something the Holy Knight Empire could achieve even if they were given thousands of years to develop on their own.

Vaan wondered if the Great Ratholos Empire's advanced martial development was caused by a reincarnated cultivator or an undying ancient like Empyrean Scarletsea.

Chapter 629: Essence of Martial Arts

Thinking about reincarnation, Vaan wondered how many others in Pangea were like him or Empyrean Scarletsea – souls from another world.

He recalled Astoria once told him she heard about at least three self-proclaimed Reincarnators in the Holy Knight Kingdom of the past. It was hard to say whether any more had appeared in the last three hundred years since then.

Furthermore, the Great Ratholos Empire had also shown signs of foreign interference from higher-level beings, whether they were Reincarnators or not.

Nevertheless, it was safe to say at least five known Reincarnators or remnant souls of high-level beings came to Pangea from another world. Furthermore, this only came from three countries – the Black Rose Kingdom, the Holy Knight Empire, and the Great Ratholos Empire.

There were likely more in the other countries as well, and even then, these would only be the known Reincarnators or high-level remnant souls. It was hard to imagine how many more had remained hidden and unknown from the world.

Vaan used to think reincarnation cases like his, where he could retain memories of his past, were extremely rare. After all, it only took one Reincarnator to alter the course of destiny, steering the world's development from its original intended path.

As such, it was even far rarer for there to be two or more cases of people reincarnating to the same world, let alone during the same era. There were countless trillions of stars and even more worlds in the universe.

Logically speaking, the probability of having more than one Reincarnator in the same world and era was close to zero. However, not only did Pangea have more than one Reincarnator in roughly the same era, but in fact, there were possibly several dozen of them.

If such reincarnation were so common, it would have been widespread knowledge long ago.

Thus, the fact that it wasn't proved that such a frequent recurrence of reincarnation in Pangea was definitely unnatural.

However, what was causing so many souls to reincarnate to Pangea?

Vaan thought of many possibilities, but only two stood out. Furthermore, one of them made him feel concerned for the future of all life.

The first and most plausible reason was that Pangea possessed a mysterious force or power capable of attracting lost souls from the universe towards it.

The second reasonable explanation was that a cataclysmic event resulted in the death of countless lives and worlds. When these deaths reach a higher enough count, even something that was originally improbable could become a hundred percent probable.

Honestly, the second possibility was the most plausible due to Empyrean Scarletsea's story. But it was also precisely because of this that made the thought terrifying.

The destruction of the universe was preordained but also a gradual process. It was all part of the natural cycle of life and death.

Narvim had said so before.

However, this natural cycle of life and death had been disturbed by an unfathomable force that sought to accelerate the destruction of the universe.

But why did this unfathomable force desire the destruction of the universe?

What would it gain from this?

What was its purpose?

Although Vaan had planned to improve his martial knowledge, his mind was preoccupied with the looming dangers hidden in the sea of stars. He had so many questions but no one to give him the answers.

Compared to the vastness of the boundless expanse, he was still pitifully small and insignificant.

'Empyrean Scarletsea said True Divinities were peak-level existences in her era, but they were all helpless against the foreign invaders... However, according to Narvim, Chaos had existed far longer than the current universe.'

'In that case, if there's any place that could possibly have Beyond True Divinity-level existences, it would have to be Chaos. It seems I will need to have a talk with the dragon lords,' Vaan decided.

He figured the knowledgeable dragon lords might have an idea as to what was going on in their current universe. He had his own guess but needed to consult the dragon lords.

Moreover, if he was not wrong about his suspicion, Gehenna might not be the greatest threat they were facing.

Nevertheless, it was inconvenient to return to the Red Dragon Tribe and seek out the dragon lords in his present situation. He would have to find a private living space or training room before making the quick trip back.

'Whatever. I'll figure that out tonight. For now, I need to focus on this wealth of martial knowledge,' Vaan considered.

Shortly after putting matters of the universe's destruction aside, Vaan focused wholeheartedly on reading each piece of martial knowledge. He went through each piece of martial manual, scripture, scroll, and book in a matter of minutes.

'Here it is, here it is! Dammit! He really is planning to skim through all of them!' Berucha cried in his mind as he secretly observed Vaan from the opposite side on the seventh floor.

Nevertheless, Vaan didn't concern himself with the eyes of the onlookers nor their thoughts.

He simply kept going.

Ding!

<You have learned the Mid-rank Martial Art, Rippling Sword Art>

<You have learned the Mid-rank Martial Art, Broken Moonlight Steps>

<You have learned the Mid-rank Martial Art, Severing Wind Palm>

<You have learned the Mid-rank Body-Refining Method, Fire-Forged Body Method>

<You have learned the Mid-rank Breathing Exercise, Breath of Tyrant Waves>

<You have learned the Mid-rank Breathing Exercise, Great Turtle Breathing Technique>

<You have learned the Mid-rank Martial Art, Bear-Wrestling Fist>

<You have learned the Mid-rank Martial Art, Flying Comet Spear Art>

...

...

Ding!

<You have compiled all your sword arts into Essence of Sword Arts (Mid-rank)>

<You have compiled all your spear arts into Essence of Spear Arts (Mid-rank)>

<You have compiled all your fist arts into Essence of Fist Arts (Mid-rank)>

...

There were countless mid-rank martial arts in the Martial Arts Repository. However, many of them had repeated concepts despite possessing different names.

As such, Vaan mastered the related type of martial arts before he even came close to reading every piece of martial knowledge of the said type.

That said, it wouldn't have been possible for him to master each type of martial arts so quickly if he didn't already have a solid foundation in them. All of his previously learned and related self-created mid-rank martial arts had all been integrated into these three essences of martial arts.

Moreover, it had taken him six hours of reading to achieve. It was hard to say how long it would take him to master everything else.

Nevertheless, it became pretty clear that some martial students' patience had expired after watching his mischievous behavior for six hours.

"Oi you," a stern male voice called out to Vaan.

Chapter 630: Vaan's Theatrics

After six hours of speed-reading through the martial knowledge found on the seventh floor, Vaan's luck finally ran out. Even Vaan himself found it surprising that no one tried to start anything with him earlier.

Vaan turned his head and glanced at the person who called out to him.

The owner of the stern voice belonged to a fifty-six-year-old Dunean male dressed in white gi-like clothes. This Dunean man had been a core member of the Martial Hall for forty years and achieved the strength of a Low-level Rank 4 Body Refiner and Mid-stage Aura Master.

His combat power was not weak compared to most Martial Hall members.

But when comparing his strength to the regular top contenders in the Rising Dragon Division of the Ten-Year Glory Evaluation, his martial talent was not worth mentioning. Thus, there was no need to even mention the Senior Dragon Division.

However, this Dunean man had a special identity.

"Young Master Vanderlin, this man is Senior Martial Brother Acharon, the eldest young master of the Evron family, and the Evron family serves Duke Gamliel," Berucha surprisingly informed Vaan in a timely manner after making his way over at the first sign of trouble.

His martial talent was mediocre, but his character was pretty solid. He did not shy away from the trouble.

Nevertheless, Vaan quickly understood why Acharon dared approach him with hostility – he belonged to a rival duke faction and was a person of nobility.

Vaan's eyes gleamed with a cold light.

'You want to mess with me? Watch how I screw you over!' Vaan thought.

"Do you need something from me, Senior Martial Brother?" Vaan shortly asked affably with a cordial smile. His mannerisms were impeccable, like that of a model good student.

"You..."

Acharon suddenly lost his words, facing such friendliness from Vaan, and forgot to criticize him harshly. In fact, he found it difficult to antagonize him in the present situation.

After all, a gentleman does not slap the face of a smiling person.

"Ahem!" Acharon loudly coughed before criticizing in a milder tone, "Are you aware that what you are doing is very disruptive of other people's learning, Junior Martial Brother? The Martial Arts Repository is not a place for you to act wildly..."

"You need to watch your man...ners... and be mindful of others. Otherwise, you could get yourself in trouble," Acharon said as his eyes started twitching.

He obviously came to get the person in trouble. Yet, it somehow ended up with him only mildly criticizing the person and even giving the person a word of advice. Moreover, his word of advice was like a fart; it was pure nonsense.

What did he mean by watching his manners?

The kid was so well-mannered that it couldn't be more perfect. As such, it seemed more like he was finding random excuses to oppress the kid to the spectators.

After all, he had unwittingly lost his justifiable reason!

Thus, his oppression would only make him look like a plain bully instead of a righteous senior martial brother. Such a thing wasn't good, whether it was for his image or Duke Gamliel's faction, which he represented.

"What? I was disrupting other martial brothers and sisters' learning? How can that be...?" Vaan put on a shocked look, full of disbelief, before saying, "Senior Martial Brother Acharon, you can't blindly accuse me like this."

"I am aware my behavior may have seemed odd, but I am genuinely here to learn martial arts. More importantly, I have been very quiet in doing so. Someone would have already said something to me if I was truly disrupting other people's reading experience. Not even the floor elder said anything to me. So it wouldn't be your turn to say something."

"On the contrary, I think your loud voice had disturbed quite a few people and interrupted their train of thought, Senior Martial Brother Acharon...?" Vaan added with an innocent look, seemingly unsure and naïve.

"Bullsh*t—!" Acharon barked.

Vaan's counter-accusation made Acharon erupt furiously before the latter quickly covered his mouth in shock. His loud shout only served to prove Vaan's point further.

However, as angry as he was, Acharon forcefully calmed himself down. He had made a mistake and put himself in a disadvantageous position. Even the seventh-floor elder had started looking his way with disapproval.

After calming down a bit, Acharon realized he had been tricked. Although Vaan put on an innocent, naïve look, he was actually full of schemes. Everything was just an act to make him drop his guard and screw him over.

When Acharon understood that, he stopped underestimating Vaan. No matter what, Vaan was a person from Duke Zaahir's faction and his opponent.

More importantly, Vaan left a big flaw in his counter-argument.

"Junior Martial Brother Vanderlin said you were genuine about learning, but what have you actually learned? You've been skimming through books for hours without picking anything. The way I see it, you are not serious about learning at all!"

Acharon wore a smug look before he turned to the seventh-floor elder and stated, "Elder Yorem, I believe this person, who is not serious about learning, should be banned from the Martial Arts Repository immediately. Otherwise, his presence will continue hindering other students from learning martial arts."

Acharon firmly believed Vaan couldn't have learned anything from skimming pages faster than one could blink.

"Oh?" the seventh-floor elder, Elder Yorem, appeared interested but not in a hurry to judge.

Elder Yorem calmly glanced at Vaan and asked, "Martial Student Vanderlin, was it? Do you have anything to say in your defense regarding this matter?"

"Replying to the elder, I truly was genuine about learning martial arts," Vaan replied with a fist-palm salute before adding, "If you doubt my words, you can test my martial knowledge. In this section, I have already learned everything from these three bookshelves."

On the three bookshelves Vaan pointed to, there were roughly six to seven hundred books.

"Interesting..." Elder Yorem smiled thoughtfully.

Elder Yorem didn't think much of the situation at first, but now he was quite intrigued.

After all, a normal person wouldn't have been able to read so many books so quickly. Thus, Vaan's claim would be no different from digging a bigger pit for himself if he truly lied.

However, he appeared very confident – that was the interesting point.

"Very well. Let this old man test your martial knowledge," Elder Yorem agreed before adding, "If you prove to be true to your words, I will not punish you. On the contrary, I can even grant one of your requests as long as it's within my power to do so."

Boom...!

Elder Yorem's words rang like thunder in everyone's ears as he shocked them with his promise to Vaan.