

The Witch 671

Chapter 671: Clash of Powers (3)

"Ahhh—!"

A second round of painful wails resounded as Emperor Varan mercilessly butchered the Delarosan Shamans in the vanguard with several more sword waves.

The barrier-type totem powers simply could not withstand the tyrannical and sharp force of Emperor Varan's sword waves. As a result, three dozen of Delarosan Shamans were decimated in an instant.

The power of the barrier-type totems was, no doubt, strong. But unfortunately for the Delarosas, Emperor Varan was stronger!

The difference between them was no different from rats and a lion.

There was simply no competition.

"Retreat to the inner courtyard! We're no match for him!" Matriarch Laelana cried as she tried to conserve whatever forces she left from the slaughterer.

With their defenses breached and Emperor Varan personally taking action, they had no hopes of claiming victory. They could only retreat to the inner courtyard and hide behind their inner walls.

It was the only way to minimize their losses.

Matriarch Laelana felt pained by the deaths of Delarosan Shamans in the vanguard as they were all equipped with Peak Rank 4 Totems. And with the outer courtyard overrun with imperial troops, reclaiming them to strengthen her remaining forces was impossible.

"Witch Doctors, delay the enemy! We must give our vanguards the chance to retreat!" Matriarch Laelana roared as she also acted.

She used a black cross-shaped bone totem to rain curses on Emperor Varan with one hand and a ruby-colored ring totem to fire powerful flame lances with the other.

The power that came from surpassed all totem powers demonstrated thus far.

Even Emperor Varan sensed a slight threat from them as he didn't dare to block Matriarch Laelana's magical attacks with his aura alone. He was forced to rely on his sword to deflect her flame lances, as they could punch holes in his aura and allow her curses to slip through.

Thanks to Matriarch Laelana's intervention, Emperor Varan's swift advancement was delayed.

After Emperor Varan was delayed once, he did not pursue his targets. He frowned at Matriarch Laelana as she recalled her forces into the inner courtyard—or rather, he was staring at her totems.

He was beginning to understand the nature of the totems.

The totems were like magic tools for storing magic spells. No training was required to use them so long as one mastered the activation language. There didn't seem to be any other requirement.

In other words, anyone could use the power of the totems, even warriors like him.

'If I can equip every warrior in the army with such totems, my empire will become much stronger than before,' Emperor Varan thought as the desire to acquire such knowledge and magical equipment festered in his heart.

Suddenly, Emperor Varan's expression became more serious as he targeted Matriarch Laelana.

'If I defeat her, the rest will follow,' Emperor Varan's eyes glowed.

Just when Matriarch Laelana thought Emperor Varan had given up his pursuit, the latter suddenly lunged at her with full force.

The drastic burst in speed greatly startled her, but she still reacted accordingly.

All five totem rings on Matriarch Laelana's right-hand lit up as she activated all their magical abilities – the Flame Lance of a Magma Wyrn, the Water Bullet of a Sea Serpent, the Wind Blade of a Storm Garuda, the Shock Blast of a Lightning Sparrow, and the Gravity Suppression of a Giant Earthworm.

Emperor Varan had no idea where Matriarch Laelana acquired the materials of such creatures. However, he could still vaguely recognize them after seeing their faint manifesting spirits.

Matriarch Laelana assaulted Emperor Varan with every attacking totem in her arsenal, as she didn't dare to underestimate him.

However, she also knew that with Emperor Varan hot on her tail, she couldn't retreat to the inner courtyard without him following inside with her. As such, she could only draw him away.

"Shut the inner gates! Don't wait for me!" Matriarch Laelana barked before quickly chanting, "Arg, Lunos, Windr!"

Swish!

Two pairs of small white feathered wings of light appeared on Matriarch Laelana's ankles, allowing her to soar into the skies with a single step.

"You can fly as well?!" Emperor Varan frowned, finding the situation troublesome. But at the same time, he also became excited.

Who didn't want the ability to fly?

From the distant past to the present day, no Body Refiner or Aura User has ever experienced the freedom of flight like feathered birds. But now, there was an opportunity.

Emperor Varan's hot gaze fell on Matriarch Laelana's beaded ankle bracelets before he snorted, "So the wing bones of the Storm Garuda can give you such abilities, huh? How enlightening!"

"Hmph! But just because you can fly, it doesn't mean you can get away from me!"

Emperor Varan drove his sword into the ground before repeatedly flinging large pieces of the stone ground into the air with different amounts of force.

Afterward, Emperor Varan leaped into the air, using the flying stone debris as stepping stones to launch himself higher and higher into the sky, rapidly closing in on Matriarch Laelana.

His movements were incredibly swift and fluid, shocking Matriarch Laelana. And by the time she realized what was going on, it was already too late for her.

"Get down for me!" Emperor Varan roared, smashing down on Matriarch Laelana with the flat side of his sword.

Matriarch Laelana could only hurriedly summon a green barrier with her turtle totem to block the blow.

Boom!

The green barrier shattered after blocking most of the force before Matriarch Laelana slammed into the ground from a great height, causing a small crater upon impact.

Numerous bones in her body broke as she lay in a pool of her own blood, grievously injured by the fall.

Shortly after, Emperor Varan landed nearby before stepping on her, suppressing her into the ground to prevent her from resisting further.

"You sure have numerous abilities, Laelana Delarosa. It's too bad you lack the battle experience required to utilize them properly. Life has been going smoothly for you, huh?" Emperor Varan looked down on her.

Matriarch Laelana coughed up a mouthful of blood.

Given the terrible state of her body, she shouldn't have any more strength to resist. However, she soon activated the power within her bone necklace – wolf totem.

Red light quickly covered Matriarch Laelana, mending her broken body. The wolf totem actually possessed the power of rapid regeneration!

Emperor Varan was immediately stunned when he saw the faint figure of the manifesting demon wolf spirit.

"This is... the Demon Wolf King Fuhhengir..? No, it's only the remnant spirit found in its spine... Your family actually obtained a piece of Fuhhengir's spine bone!" Emperor Varan spouted gravely.

Chapter 672: Clash of Powers (4)

Emperor Varan didn't expect the Delarosas to have such a troublesome history.

Not only did they join the demons, but they also stole a piece of Fuhhengir's carcass, which the Black Rose Kingdom brought back from Gehenna at a great price!

It was no secret that Fuhhengir's carcass was robbed by numerous forces after it was brought back to the Black Rose Kingdom. That incident had always been a sore spot in the Black Rose Kingdom's history.

Now that the Black Rose Kingdom was on a fast rise and incomparably powerful to its past, it had become one of the few countries Emperor Varan least wanted to antagonize.

It was also for that reason that Emperor Varan chose to negotiate for true dragon blood instead of trying to seize it by force despite knowing how crucial it was for the Red Wyvern Ancestor's breakthrough and survival.

He would rather lose the guardian beast of their empire than provoke the wrath of enemies with strength far greater than his own empire. Unfortunately, it turned out that one of the forces that robbed the Black Rose Kingdom actually came from his empire!

If the Black Rose Kingdom found out and directed its anger at the Great Ratholos Empire, it was unknown what disastrous consequences would come of it.

"Damn you, Delarosas!" Emperor Varan growled in anger, stepping on Matriarch Laelana with increasing force until bone-crunching noises were heard.

He momentarily forgot his original reason for immobilizing Matriarch Laelana as he took his anger out on her.

"Ahhh—!"

"Matriarch!"

Matriarch Laelana cried out in pain while her people cried out of concern and helpless frustration.

"Don't come here! There's nothing you can do to save me!" Matriarch Laelana growled with gritted teeth, enduring the torment of pain as her body mended itself once more.

Crunch!

Emperor Varan broke Matriarch Laelana's back once more as he felt resistance from her, causing her to wail again.

"Ahhh—!"

Amidst her painful cries, Matriarch Laelana's eyes darkened like a bottomless black abyss.

She felt anger, humiliation, and despair.

"It's over, Delarosas. I have your Matriarch. Surrender now, and you will be granted fair judgment. Stay stubborn, and you will die a cruel death," Emperor Varan gave the Delarosas an ultimatum.

"Shit! What do we do?!" the Delarosan members panicked with helplessness and indecision.

In truth, they had yet to suffer much loss. Of the three thousand members within the territory, not even a hundred of them had died. However, the family head was in the emperor's hands.

"Emperor Varan is too strong! Our powers are not enough to save the family head! We need the elders to intervene! Only they can save her!" a Delarosan member spoke.

However, all the elders in the inner courtyard hesitated.

Although they all possessed Rank 5 Totems, they weren't as well-equipped as Matriarch Laelana. As such, even if they fought Emperor Varan altogether, they might not necessarily do any better than her.

Crunch!

As Emperor Varan grew impatient with the Delarosas' silence, he again crushed Matriarch Laelana's bones, shaking everyone's heart and will to resist.

Suddenly, a soft sigh was heard.

The sigh was so soft, aged, and feeble that it seemed like it had come from a dying old man with half a foot in the coffin. No one would think it belonged to someone powerful if they had heard it.

However, Emperor Varan felt a chill when he heard it.

The sigh came from right beside him when there was obviously no one there. He couldn't even feel any presence, which made him think it was a mistake, an illusion.

That said, Emperor Varan couldn't have heard wrong; he was sure of it.

"Your Imperial Majesty... Look ahead of you...!" an imperial guard pointed out with a look of shock and confusion as if he was surprised by what he saw but couldn't understand how it happened.

In front of the inner gates, Matriarch Laelana stood beside an elderly man with a pale face, still recovering from her injuries.

Emperor Varan was only distracted for a moment, but it was all it took for the elderly man to retrieve Matriarch Laelana from underneath his feet. More alarmingly, he did not even sense how or when it happened.

As such, Emperor Varan immediately viewed the elderly man as a great threat – the person's ability was too mystical and mysterious.

"Your Imperial Majesty, you are, after all, the dignified emperor of a great nation. It is not good for your image to bully my granddaughter like so. How about you play with this old man instead?" the elderly man spoke, his voice so feeble and lacking in strength that it sounded like a ghost's whisper.

"You... You are Galen Delarosa! But how? That's not possible! You are from my father's generation... How can you still be alive?!" Emperor Varan's expression twisted with sheer shock and disbelief.

Galen Delarosa was someone he did not expect to meet.

However, the person was, indeed, still alive, albeit barely with any lifespan left. The person was so thin and aged that he appeared to be comprised of decaying, old, wrinkly skin and bones.

Galen didn't look much different from a walking corpse.

"Kekeke, considering what you did to my granddaughter, I don't see the need to answer you. However, suppose you can escape from my cage. In that case, I don't mind answering a few questions as a form of reward," Galen gave a condition.

In the next moment, he opened his clenched fist and blew the black dust on his palm toward Emperor Varan.

Emperor Varan didn't dare slacken his vigilance for a moment – he kept his body cloaked in Aura and immediately cleaved apart the cloud of black dust with an enhanced sword wave.

However, it almost seemed as if Emperor Varan had cleaved apart the dimension itself as he saw his surroundings change.

The courtyard, the imperial soldiers, the Delarosas, and even Matriarch Laelana and Galen disappeared before Emperor Varan's very eyes, replaced by a desolate world of endless graves with a red sky, thunderous black clouds, and an eerie eye-looking moon.

"This... How can this be?" Emperor Varan immediately frowned. He thought he had blocked the attack but was still taken into this unknown world.

"This should be an illusion... Everything has to be fake," he guessed.

Chapter 673: Clash of Powers (5)

Although Emperor Varan believed everything he saw was an illusion, a fake, his belief was quickly shattered when he casually slashed an ancient tombstone. He actually felt the resistance of his sword slicing through the tombstone, even if it was only slight.

"No... This can't be..." Emperor Varan's heart shook.

He was certain that he had not been inflicted by any curse; his aura cloak had no opening.

But if he hadn't been cursed and brought into an imaginary world within the mind, it was also hard to explain the realistic feeling he sensed.

He could feel the sand-like gravel, the mournful cries of the wind, the deathly desolation of the world, smell the smokey ash in the air, and even the putrid stench of rotten flesh that oozed out of the cracked graves, not to mention sense the moon-eye that watched his every move.

Emperor Varan had a sense of unease from all this.

Suddenly, the cracked ground split apart as numerous corpses crawled out of the earth and endless graves. The wind howled with deathly despair in their place, seemingly voicing their indignance and fury at Emperor Varan for disturbing their eternal rest.

Moments later, the moving corpses' hostilities soared as they themselves at Emperor Varan with reckless abandonment, giving in to their innate violence and cruelty against all that was living.

Shing!

Emperor Varan waved his sword, conjuring numerous sword shadows and afterimages as he hacked away at the overwhelming swarm of moving corpses. Violent winds howled back at the moving corpses, reducing them to mutilated bits and pieces.

Reality or not, Emperor Varan had no intention of drowning in a sea of rotting flesh and decaying bones.

The dignity of an emperor could not be violated by such unholy and foul beings.

However, no matter how many undead Emperor Varan cut down, more would fill their place as they continued to crawl out of the earth and swarm him from all directions. The world's malice concentrated on him as he desecrated the corpses and their graves.

For every corpse he decimated, ten more would crawl out of the earth during the same period. The growth in numbers greatly surpassed the speed of killing.

Emperor Varan was outnumbered and overwhelmed; he wasn't given any quarters to rest.

'Death wishes to consume me, but I refuse to submit without a fight!' Emperor Varan silently roared in defiance, eyes reddened from desperation and unwillingness to accept the situation.

He wondered if his soldiers had also encountered such situations when they got inflicted with curses.

...

In the outside world, Emperor Varan's body remained stationary, engulfed in a cloud of black smoke. From time to time, a thin cut would appear on the skin, turning the flesh darkish purple and blood black with pus.

However, no one could see what was happening within the revolving clouds of black smoke as everything within had been obscured.

"Take this chance to eliminate the imperial soldiers and guards, Laelana. I will not be able to hold down Emperor Varan for long," Galen instructed, his eyes flashing with weariness.

"I understand, Honorable Grandfather. I will have it done immediately," Matriarch Laelana complied before inwardly sighing in her heart.

The family's strongest totems were no match for Emperor Varan, and even her grandfather's inescapable spiritual attack could only give him some trouble.

Emperor Varan's strength was certainly not to be underestimated.

"All members, your family head commands you to kill all these imperial troops who have trespassed into our sacred home!" Matriarch Laelana shortly ordered, eyes glinting with ruthlessness and determination.

"Elders, now is the time to contribute to the family! Its survival depends on it!"

"Yes, Family Head!"

As the Delarosas rallied their members to storm out of the inner courtyard and engage the imperial troops in a fierce conflict, the imperial guards were also making their own arrangements.

"These devilish sinners have ambushed our His Imperial Majesty and trapped him in their sinister black magic, his fate unknown! Who will follow me to save His Imperial Majesty?!"

"Is that even a question!? Everyone on me! We will save His Imperial Majesty, even if we must lay down our lives to do so! Nothing must happen to His Imperial Majesty! The empire's future depends on it!"

"For His Imperial Majesty, charge!"

"Kill!!! Slay all the sinners!!!"

Within moments, the imperial army and the Delarosian forces clashed in the outer courtyard.

All of the Delarosas circled the area of black smoke to confront the imperial army, while several groups of imperial guards and soldiers chose to charge through the black smoke to pull their emperor out.

Unfortunately, no matter who barged into the revolving clouds of black smoke, all signs of their movements within would cease to exist. The situation within remained unclear, and no one knew what happened to the men who entered.

However, Matriarch Laelana noticed her grandfather's weary eyes increasingly strained by a growing burden taxing his mind and soul.

"Stop those fools for me! Don't let any more of them interfere with my grandfather's spell! It's over for us if they free the emperor!" Matriarch Laelana urgently roared.

She gave up guarding her grandfather at his side and immediately joined the vanguard to confront the imperial army. The area quickly turned into a mountain of dismembered limbs and scorched corpses.

Wherever Matriarch Laelana directed her murderous intent, screams of fear and chaos quickly followed.

With the number of high-quality totems Matriarch Laelana possessed, she was no different from a Transcendent Witch. She rained hell on the imperial soldiers and guards without fear of exhaustion; her power seemed limitless.

"Arghh—! What the hell is wrong with these spells?! How can she keep using them!? Do their powers not deplete like magic tools?!!" an imperial guard cried unwillingly as his lower half crumbled into charcoal bits.

"Oh, sweet Pangea..."

The commander of the imperial guards trembled at the scene of carnage and prayed for the fallen souls before his expression contorted with endless fury.

"Evil creature, your madness ends here! I will have your head!" the imperial guard commander roared furiously, rapidly closing the distance on Matriarch Laelana with a single powerful step.

A transcendental power should be matched by a transcendental might!

Chapter 674: Spell Boosting

Black Rose Kingdom, Blackthorn City

Henrietta's palatial magic tower had been closed from the public for several days, refusing all guests and visitors alike. Furthermore, no information was provided for the palatial magic tower's closure, causing many people to guess the reason.

But no matter what kind of wild guesses they had, there was one common thought – the palatial magic tower's closure had something to do with the soaring sky phenomenon that occurred days ago.

That said, with no word from Henrietta, most visitors and guests gathered outside the palatial magic tower left.

However, Victoria Caelestis remained behind, waiting alone after sending off the search teams to look for her missing grandchild. She was unwilling to leave the place until she met with Henrietta.

Even when it rained, Victoria remained steadfast in her spot and permitted the pouring raindrops to soak her body.

It was a form of self-punishment to make herself feel better as her past guilt resurfaced.

Suddenly, the palatial magic tower's entrance, which had not been opened for many days, finally opened. A single maidservant emerged from it and met Victoria's surprise gaze.

"My Lady will see you now. Please follow me," the maidservant instructed.

"Y-Yes, of course...!" Victoria stuttered in response before recollecting herself. "I will trouble you to lead the way."

Shortly after ascending multiple flights of stairs and taking the magic elevator, Victoria reached Henrietta's room at the top of the palatial magic tower. An unknown pressure caused her heart to beat loudly.

At the same time, myriads of thoughts filtered through Victoria's mind as she pondered what to say once she met the witch queen.

But despite everything she came up with, her mind went blank the moment she entered the room. She was overwhelmed and awed by the majesty of Henrietta's aura – it was vastly different from what she remembered.

'She seemed to have shed the shell of her former self and become immensely more powerful...' Victoria thought, uncertain whether the feeling was real or just an illusion.

"Forgive me for not seeing you sooner, Sister Victoria. I have been busy consolidating my power and dealing with matters related to the other six witch kingdoms," Henrietta apologized with a friendly smile.

When Victoria saw that smile, she inwardly sighed with relief and guilt before replying, "Even if I have to wait several weeks, I still wouldn't complain. I deserve it, Your Majesty."

"Are you still beating yourself over that matter of the past, Sister Victoria?" Henrietta asked before shaking her head, "There's no need for that. We both know it couldn't be helped."

"Back then, we attracted too much attention when we brought back Fuhengir's carcass from the great expedition. Everyone wanted a piece of the pie, regardless of whether they deserved it or not. With pressure from all sides, I could only give in, causing my kingdom's security to be compromised."

"Given your family's special circumstances, it was only logical for the Great House of Caelestis to move far away from the center of attention. It was the only way to keep your family safe from your hunters. Furthermore, I also feel guilty for Vivienne's death."

"Perhaps if I had been adamant and strong-willed in resisting the pressure from the others, she would still be alive, and the Great House of Caelestis would have long established a solid foundation in my kingdom instead of withdrawing from the public and hiding away in a Perilous Land. As such, I cannot blame you or your family for pulling out all your people during a time of great unrest."

"After all, it was I who failed you first. I allowed your greatest talent to die under my watch. That is a mistake and a stain I can never absolve myself of, Sister Victoria," Henrietta spoke from her heart.

Victoria trembled, moved by Henrietta's sincere thoughts.

Before their meeting, she was afraid of Henrietta's condemnation yet also hoped the latter would blame her.

However, not only did Henrietta not blame her, but she even blamed herself.

"Your grace is something my family and I can never repay, Your Majesty. If not for your royal protection, the Great House of Caelestis wouldn't have been able to grow to what it is today. I can blame anyone but you, Your Majesty. Towards you, I only have gratitude and guilt," Victoria stated.

Henrietta and Victoria continued to speak back and forth for several rounds before they eventually glanced at each other and laughed.

Both sides were able to reach a tacit understanding and look past the regrets of the past. They were originally friends. Thus, they interacted with fondness and familiarity.

Henrietta and Victoria chatted over tea as they reminisced about the past and caught up with each other.

"By the way, Sister Henrietta... You said you were consolidating your power for the past several days. It truly wasn't because you were trying to avoid meeting me?" Victoria inquired with doubt.

"Of course not, Sister Victoria," Henrietta replied before asking with knitted brows, "Didn't we already clear that up?"

"In that case... how strong are you now? What level of power have you reached?" Victoria asked eagerly, unable to contain her curiosity.

Henrietta calmly sipped her tea before placing the teacup down, then smiled, "Why don't you see it for yourself, Sister Victoria?"

Swoosh!

The air around Henrietta suddenly blew outwards as eight mana rings with varying sizes and thicknesses expanded, manifesting outside her body – something no one had ever seen before.

The sight left Victoria shocked with wide eyes.

The eight mana rings were like stellar objects orbiting a star as they revolved around Henrietta's body in different non-intersecting paths.

As the eight mana rings reverberated and shone with divine blue light, the mana in the surroundings was drawn to them at speeds beyond the body's natural absorption capabilities.

"This... This... is the middle stage of Transcendence?" Victoria was stunned for words.

Henrietta indirectly admitted with a smile, satisfied with Victoria's dumbfounded reaction, before explaining, "After I consolidated my eight rings, I discovered the ability to manifest them outside my body."

"Doing so naturally allows me to absorb and recover mana much quicker than before. But its greatest advantage is to support higher-rank spells, which wouldn't be possible to cast normally due to insufficient mana."

"In other words, this ability allows us witches to use magic beyond our standard level. For now, I call this Spell Boosting," Henrietta said.

She discovered that in the latter stages of Transcendence, one would acquire vastly greater mana control to keep up with their power level as they drew closer to the next rank – Divine.

The difference between mortal and divine wouldn't be small.

Chapter 675: Henrietta's Realization

Henrietta gave Victoria some time to process reality before speaking her mind, "There's something I've been meaning to ask, Sister Victoria. Why did you suddenly decide to come back here? It wasn't just to see me, was it?"

During their interaction, Henrietta had noticed Victoria displaying great interest and surprise at her power. However, her mind seemed to be elsewhere, as if she had other concerns.

"I won't lie to you, Sister Henrietta. Actually, this time, I returned to the Black Rose Kingdom to resume my search for my missing grandchild and was hoping you could provide some information to aid my search. It wasn't my intention to catch up on old times," Victoria admitted.

"I see..." Henrietta was momentarily surprised before pausing to recall, "If I remember correctly... You ended your search two years ago because the fire of Vivienne's Soul Lamp was..."

"That little fire was rekindled," Victoria firmly stated.

"It was rekindled...? What?" Henrietta expressed her shock, asking, "How is that even possible? How can the fire of life be extinguished and rekindled? That would signify..."

"I don't know how or when it happened. However, the undeniable truth is that the tiny fire of life in Vivienne's Soul Lamp rekindled itself. My grandchild lives, and that's all that matters," Victoria stated with conviction but soon sighed, "This child has been lost for twenty years. I must find and bring this poor child home."

"Vivienne's child, huh?" Henrietta muttered thoughtfully.

"Hahaha, I bet their talent wouldn't be inferior to Vivienne's... Perhaps it is even greater. Wouldn't it be the Great House of Caelestis's greatest blessing if this child turned out to be the destined overlord that everyone feared, Sister Victoria?"

Henrietta was only casually chatting before sipping her tea and studying Victoria's expression when she noticed a vague resemblance, causing something to click in her mind.

Twenty years old? Victoria's grandchild? Vivienne's child? Peerless talent? Possible future overlord?

One person immediately came to mind!

"Pfft—!!!"

The intense shock of sudden realization caused Henrietta to spit out all the tea in her mouth. At the same time, Victoria, sitting opposite Henrietta, immediately became its victim.

Victoria stared blankly for a moment, face blathered in spit and tea, before asking with a wry smile, "Are you alright, Sister Henrietta? What's the matter?"

Cough! Cough! Cough!

Henrietta faked a violent coughing fit before replying, "I'm alright. I just swallowed tea down the whole hole, Sis... Victoria."

Suddenly, Henrietta found it difficult to address Victoria the same way she normally would. Simply thinking about it felt like a fishbone stuck in her throat.

Blood was drained from her face, making it look pale white.

"Are you sure you are alright, Sister Henrietta? You look like you just saw a ghost or something," Victoria mentioned with concern and doubt.

Henrietta's expression twisted, thinking to herself, 'Did I see a ghost? You are the ghost!'

'Oh, hell no... This can't be happening to me... I actually married and slept with my friend's grandchild. Do I still call her Sister Victoria or Grandmother-in-law? Oh, Pangea... How do I face her in the future? This is so shameful and embarrassing!'

While Henrietta's mind was in turmoil and panic, Emphyrean Scarletsea suddenly burst into laughter, 'Hahahaha! This... This is certainly an interesting situation and predicament we have here.'

'How could you just laugh like that, Master? I'm in this situation because of you!' Henrietta sobbed, feeling miserable and torn by stress as Victoria stared at her cluelessly, awaiting her answer.

'Hehehe, there's no need to feel trapped, my dearest disciple. What's done is done. The only thing you can do is move forward bravely and accept whatever is to come of it,' Emphyrean Scarletsea chuckled and said, 'Just tell her the truth.'

'Don't tell me you want to hide the truth and stop a bereaved grandmother from reuniting with her long-lost grandson forever? Are you going to be so cruel?' Emphyrean Scarletsea added, anticipating Henrietta's reply with great amusement.

'Victoria naturally needs to know the truth about her grandson...but I can't tell her about my relationship with him... I can't... I just can't. Where would my face be if I did? I wouldn't be able to face her,' Henrietta complained.

'Kukuku, if you can't move past such a small and insignificant obstacle, you won't go far in life, my dearest disciple. Don't let it hold you back forever. There are only two types of people who can live long lives—villains and shameless people.'

'Just thicken your skin and tell her the truth. Regardless of how she sees you, she would, no doubt, be overjoyed once she learns about her grandson,' Empyrean Scarletsea said.

Fuuu....

Henrietta calmed herself down with a long breath and steadied her turbulent emotions before facing Victoria seriously.

"Nevermind me for now, Sis... Victoria. I've just realized something and may know who your missing grandchild is. I can see some similar features between you two," Henrietta confessed awkwardly.

Victoria's eyes widened before she immediately grabbed Henrietta's shoulders with excitement.

"Really?! Please tell me, Sister Henrietta! Who is my grandson?! Where is he now!? Can I see him?" Victoria eagerly inquired while feeling her heart tearing apart. "Oh, how he must have suffered all these years!"

A granddaughter wouldn't suffer much since witches had statuses in the seven witch kingdoms.

On the other hand, what could a twenty-year-old young man without any backing do from infancy until now?

He must have suffered terribly!

Victoria's body trembled, and her heart chilled as she thought about her grandson's childhood.

"He left the seven witch kingdoms to do some things, so you can't see him now. But even if he is outside the seven witch kingdoms at the moment, there's no need for you to worry about his safety, Sis... Victoria."

"What?! He's just a twenty-year-old young man! What can he even do outside, where danger is aplenty?!" Victoria anxiously questioned in her shock.

"What can he do, huh?" Henrietta smiled wryly before saying, "I don't know about other twenty-year-old young men, but your grandson can do many things, Victoria."

"He changed the fate of the Black Rose Kingdom and annexed the Holy Knight Empire. It's quite possible that he currently wields the strongest power and commands the greatest military force in Pangea."

"I believe you should have an idea about who I am talking about. It's hard not to hear about him, especially here, with the Vaanatics singing his tales and legends every day," Henrietta said.

"Vaanatics...?"

Chapter 676: Shocking Announcement

"It's the name of his fan group, but this fan group is more like a cult than anything else. They welcome anyone who shares their view and destroys anyone who opposes it. You can die from simply badmouthing their idol," Henrietta casually explained with a wry smile.

The Vaanatics' extreme actions were causing countless problems. However, these troubled waters weren't something Henrietta wanted to dip her feet in.

She would rather deal with the Transcendent Witches than intervene in the Vaanatic's matters. After all, the Vaanatics were led by a troublesome witch with mental issues – Aeliana Leclair.

"I see..." Victoria uttered with a lost look, not knowing how to react to the news.

With the last piece of information, Victoria no longer doubted that her missing grandson was most likely Vaan Raphna, the young man who had been the center of attention and talk of the town in every witch kingdom.

She had seen the portrait of the young man once, and only after recalling it again with attention to detail did she notice the young man's stunning resemblance to her fourth daughter.

There were even some of her features in him, like Henrietta mentioned.

Perhaps she had already noticed these details the first time she saw the portrait. However, she had chosen to ignore and forget about them. After all, her grandchild supposedly died two years ago.

How could she dare to hold extravagant hopes when the fire of life was extinguished?

Nevertheless, the more excellence Victoria learned about her missing grandson, the greater her worry. It was a new type of worry that sprouted just after her longest worry was finally put to rest.

"He did not have his family's support when he was young and weak. The hardship he suffered as an orphan must have been unimaginable... Now that he has grown powerful all on his own, I'm not sure he will accept us..." Victoria expressed her concern with a helpless smile.

After all, besides the blood they shared, they were no different from strangers.

"As an out... outsider, I have nothing to say about that," Henrietta thought about what to say before continuing, "However, your greatest concern had always been his safety and well-being."

"Now that you know his situation, you should be overjoyed and proud, Victoria. Also, the sufferings he had experienced since birth were what shaped his being and aided his growth to become the man he is today."

"As such, while it was unfortunate to be lost at birth, it might not have been a bad thing. Real men are forged by hardship," Henrietta added.

"You might be right, Sister Henrietta. I shouldn't expect too much. My grandson being alive and well is already the best thing I could ask for," Victoria acknowledged and made peace with herself, becoming accepting of reality.

Shortly after, Victoria glanced at Henrietta suspiciously and mentioned, "By the way, you've been acting rather strange since a while ago, Sister Henrietta. What's up with that? Are you hiding something from me?"

Cough! Cough!

Henrietta used a terrible distraction to change the topic, "Never mind that, Victoria. There's something else I want to ask you. The current Black Rose Kingdom is no longer the same as it was in the past; it has grown far more powerful, just as I have. Have you no thoughts of relocating here?"

"Your family doesn't need to hide in that Perilous Land anymore. Furthermore, it might be easiest for you to meet your grandson if you move here," Henrietta added.

"You have a point, Sister Henrietta. I suppose I should consider it," Victoria neither rejected nor accepted Henrietta's suggestion before mentioning, "But while you and the Black Rose Kingdom had shed their former shells and grown much stronger, you have also attracted more attention and made more enemies."

"Forget outside threats; even your issue with the other Transcendent Witches remains unresolved. How do you plan to deal with them?" Victoria asked.

"That's a good question, Victoria," Henrietta's eyes flashed with a cold glint as she smiled. "I was actually settling my matters with them after this. If you don't mind sticking around, why don't I show you how I will deal with them?"

"Alright," Victoria agreed, thinking she had time to spare, not to mention she was curious what Henrietta would do.

Shortly after, Victoria followed Henrietta to a private meeting room, where the long-distance voice transmission crystal pillar used to contact the other six witch kingdoms was located.

Henrietta used the communication crystal pillar to summon the remaining five Transcendent Witches, and surprisingly, they answered her call in a matter of a few dozen breaths.

"That was surprisingly quick. I had assumed you would all take much longer to answer my summoning," Henrietta commented with ridicule.

"I didn't answer your call to listen to your ridicule, Black Rose. Quickly explain the reason behind your call, or this Queen will be hanging up. I have other things to do," the Scarlet Flame Transcendent Witch frowned with impatience and impertinence.

"I also have things to do, Black Rose. Please make it brief, if possible," the White Serpentine Transcendent Witch added with slightly creased brows.

"Frankly speaking, I'm sure Black Rose has nothing good to say, and I don't know why I even decided to waste my time accepting this call. So, hehe, I'll be off first, Ladies," the Darkwater Transcendent Witch spoke frivolously, hoping to escape the call quickly.

However, Henrietta's following words made her freeze on the spot immediately.

"If you dare to leave this call without listening to what I have to announce, I will pay your kingdom a visit, and I will end you—just like how I ended the Verdant Wood," Henrietta coldly stated.

"Well... It doesn't hurt to stick around and listen for a bit, haha..." Darkwater complied nervously, showing zero intention to refute and antagonize Henrietta as she was clearly intimidated by her threat.

Scarlet Flame, White Serpentine, Raging Tempest, and Everwinter also revealed signs of discomfort and unease in their breathing.

Evidently, Henrietta's threat didn't affect Darkwater alone. After all, even though Henrietta spoke to Darkwater, her threat was directed at all of them.

In a short instant, the group chat became ghostly silent.

"Since it's quiet now, I will announce a few things. In the future, the seven witch kingdoms will be unified under one rule – my rule," Henrietta announced.

"The Kingdom of Scarlet Flame, the Kingdom of Raging Tempest, the Kingdom of Everwinter, the Kingdom of White Serpentine, and the Kingdom of Darkwater will become vassal kingdoms of the Black Rose Empire."

"Each of you will turn in 20% of your kingdom's resource production annually as tax, in person, and at the same time. We will also use that opportunity to hold an assembly to discuss all affairs."

"All royal and noble offsprings must be sent to Blackthorn Royal Academy of Magic for education once they turn eighteen. Those who have already completed their study and are still under the age of thirty must also be sent over for re-education."

"Any and all discoveries pertaining to the new knowledge of magic, technology, potioning, mysteries, ancient inheritances, Gehenna, and Chaos, in general, must be shared with the Black Rose Empire."

"I will not be happy if you keep secrets, and when I am not happy, there will be severe consequences. So do your best to remember that~!" Henrietta warned.

Each of Henrietta's shocking conditions caused the five Transcendent Witches' expressions to darken until they couldn't tolerate it further and flush with anger.

"What the hell kind of announcement is this? There's no way I will agree to this! Black Rose, your joke went too far!" Scarlet Flame was the first to disagree, expressing her strong disapproval and dissatisfaction.

However, Henrietta remained indifferent to her protest.

"You must be muddle-headed and confused about something, Scarlet Flame. I am not asking you; I am telling you!" Henrietta coldly asserted.

Chapter 677: Talk Between Transcendent Witches

"It matters not to me whether you agree or disagree. If you are obedient, good for you; you get to keep your dog-lives. However, if you are disobedient, I will just kill you," Henrietta added indifferently.

"Do you think it is wise to offend all of us like this, Black Rose? If we all disagree, what can you do about it? Do you think you can defeat all of us if we join forces?" Scarlet Flame asked gloomily with a hint of threat.

However, such an insignificant threat was akin to the squeaks of a rat; it didn't affect Henrietta whatsoever.

"That's for me to know and you to find out," Henrietta coolly replied before smiling coldly, "However, do you dare to find out?"

Scarlet Flame immediately fell silent, unable to answer; she didn't dare to.

Although the Black Rose Transcendent Witch of the past was already strong, she wasn't this overbearing and unreasonable.

What changed? What gave her the confidence? What permitted her impertinence and disrespect?

"Why are you doing this to us, Black Rose? Although we haven't been quite friendly with each other, we have at least maintained a certain level of cordiality for the past three hundred years," White Serpentine reasoned, full of unwillingness to comply.

"Maintained a certain level of cordiality?" Henrietta scoffed with contempt when she heard those words. "My maintaining a certain level of cordiality, do you mean joining hands with other Transcendent Witches to pressure me for valuable resources you neither deserve nor have a stake in?"

"By maintaining a certain level of cordiality, do you mean secretly conspiring with each other to do harm to me and my kingdom? Where was this unity when the Holy Knight Empire invaded my kingdom? Where was help? If you can't even uphold the agreement of the seven witch kingdoms, your words are only fart to me."

"So do not speak to me about cordiality, White Serpentine, for my definition of cordiality seems very different from the 'cordiality' you speak of," Henrietta coldly rebuked.

White Serpentine was left speechless, unable to reply, and her face flushed with shame like she had been horribly slapped.

Her words tore into White Serpentine like a vicious knife and ripped out her guilty conscience, causing White Serpentine to become silent with a flushed face full of shame.

"I have tolerated you all long enough," Henrietta continued, "Not only are any of you grateful for my repeated concessions and benevolence towards your wilful selves, but you all even dare to stab me in the back."

"The fact that I am wasting my life speaking to you and not rushing over to take your dog-lives is already the greatest mercy I can bestow upon you! You only have this one final chance; it's your choice whether you want to squander it."

"You all have three days to think it over. If I don't receive an answer by the end of it, you can say goodbye to your lives."

With her final statement spoken, Henrietta decisively left the group chat.

"..."

Silence filled the group chat for a period of time as the five Transcendent Witches indignantly pondered over Henrietta's words.

Sometime later, Darkwater broke the silence, "What does everyone make of Black Rose's behavior today?"

"It has already been many days since the Black Rose Kingdom's crisis was resolved... If Black Rose had simply been furious at us for not sending help back then, she wouldn't have chosen to openly threaten us at this time," White Serpentine thought logically with a frown.

"Those were also my thoughts exactly," Raging Tempest admitted before adding, "Black Rose has always been the most powerful Transcendent Witch of us all, but since we are all at the same level, she wouldn't have the mana to defeat all of us if we band together."

"That was why we could repeatedly force her to make concessions – by abusing her soft heart and weakness. However, something has finally changed since then; she was cold, fearless, and overbearing today as if she no longer had such concerns."

"For her to openly challenge us like that... I just don't understand where this source of confidence comes from..." Raging Tempest frowned.

"Don't forget the Black Rose Kingdom today is not the same Black Rose Kingdom of yesterday; it has another existence that can suffocate us all – Vaan Raphna," Scarlet Flame mentioned before guessing, "Perhaps Black Rose is relying on his strength to dominate us?"

"That shouldn't be the case," Everwinter disagreed.

"Which of us Transcendent Witches haven't been a proud, lofty queen, lording over all witches and looking on men? I doubt Black Rose's pride would be so shallow that she would rely on a man's strength."

"Furthermore, if Vaan Raphna wanted something done, he would do it himself. Why would he give up the opportunity to increase his control and influence to someone else?" Everwinter questioned.

"True..." Scarlet Flame acknowledged before saying, "No man, after living under the oppression of witches for so long, would throw away such an opportunity. That said, he is no ordinary man – I've only heard praises of him. It's one thing for men to worship him, but even witches idolize him."

"That's not surprising at all, Scarlet Flame," Everwinter casually replied, "Witches who have received his blessings have all become High Witches, and those closest to him are even more powerful High Witches."

"I sometimes wonder if a new Transcendent Witch would arise soon due to him. Who wouldn't want to throw themselves at him in the face of such temptations?"

"Even I am tempted. Perhaps he can help me take the next step," Everwinter admitted.

"You? Tempted to serve a man? Am I hearing things right, Everwinter?" Scarlet Flame scoffed with doubt and derision. "An untouchable Ice Queen like you wouldn't even accept noble consorts to produce an heir in these past three hundred years."

"Don't tell me your frozen heart has finally been melted by that man's flames? I find that hard to believe," Scarlet Flame mocked.

"There's no need for a loose slut like you to act all lofty and noble in front of me, Scarlet Flame," Everwinter coldly bit back with her words, adding, "There's a rumor that Vaan Raphna possesses a Divine Body of Fire, something that may aid you greatly if your dual-practice with him."

"Even I know this, so there's no way you don't know this, Scarlet Flame. You can harp like a proud and pure swan in front of me all you want, but I know, deep down, you are just a bitch in heat!"

"Hah, and even if you are willing, it's not necessary that he will want to take you!"

Following Everwinter's sharp retort, Scarlet Flame's exasperated breath could be heard through the communication crystal pillar as her large mounds heaved up and down, trying to suppress her anger.

"You have a sharp tongue, Everwinter," Scarlet Flame said gloomily with a dark look, "But I wonder if you fight as well with your spells as you do with your mouth—"

"Enough!" Raging Tempest snapped impatiently, tired of listening to the two. "This conversation is getting nowhere, so I will be taking my leave! I don't care if you continue fighting after this."

"However, in these next three days, I will be investigating the source of Black Rose's confidence and sharing what I find; I expect you all to do the same," Raging Tempest solemnly stated.

"Sure," Darkwater acknowledged.

"I don't have a problem with that," White Serpentine added.

None of the five Transcendent Witches wanted to bow their heads to Henrietta and become her vassal if it could be helped.

As such, none of them would readily submit unless they truly saw no hope.

Chapter 678: Victoria's Plotting

Meanwhile, after Henrietta left the group call with the Transcendent Witches, her shoulders slumped down like a deflating balloon as her energy left her body.

All of her previous majesty and tyranny seemingly disappeared into thin smoke.

'Kukuku...'

Empyrean Scarletsea suddenly chuckled with amusement inside Henrietta's mind, causing the latter to be curious and confused.

'Why are you laughing, Master?' Henrietta asked.

'Oh, it's nothing much. I just find it quite funny that my dear disciple can be bold and tough in front of the Transcendent Witches but doesn't have the same courage to admit the deed she had done to an old friend's grandson. Kukuku...' Empyrean Scarletsea chuckled.

'T-This... and that are two completely different matters, Master!' Henrietta grimaced helplessly.

'Hahaha...!' Empyrean Scarletsea continued to laugh as she teased her disciple.

Meanwhile, Victoria was left completely shocked by Henrietta's discussion with the other Transcendent Witches. She didn't expect Henrietta to deal with them in such an overbearing and decisive manner.

There was no diplomacy involved, just blatant threats of violence and death.

Henrietta had torn apart every remaining façade of friendship and aggressively demanded the Transcendent Witches' subordination.

There was no turning back from that.

"This... This..." Victoria felt a little fearful of the future as she glanced at Henrietta with disbelief. "Do you think those five Transcendent Witches will really bow down to you, Sister Henrietta?"

"If they don't, they will become like Queen Sybil – a part of history. It's as simple as that," Henrietta calmly stated.

"But..."

"I understand your concerns, but they are unfounded," Henrietta shook her head and said, "Those five no longer have what it takes to compete with me. The promotion to eight mana rings isn't as simple as the advancement of a minor stage."

"The higher one's rank, the greater the difference between minor stages. This is especially true for the Transcendent rank. Although I've only advanced to the middle stage from the early stage of the Transcendent rank, I feel like my magical prowess has doubled."

"Perhaps this is also why it was so difficult for Transcendent Witches to advance," Henrietta guessed blankly, looking a little lost in thought.

If she had not dual-practiced with Vaan, it was uncertain how much longer it would have taken her to achieve eight mana rings.

'I wonder what he is doing now...' Henrietta couldn't help thinking for a moment before suddenly shaking the thought out of her mind. 'Pah! Why am I thinking about him? It can't be that I miss him, right?'

"I see..."

Henrietta's assurance helped Victoria understand the difference between her and the other Transcendent Witches. However, it still didn't free her from worries.

"I still fear things aren't that simple, Sister Henrietta. These Transcendent Witches have been enjoying the privileges of their rule for so long. They won't be willing to give it up so easily. There's a chance they may seek a third choice besides death or submission," Victoria raised her concern.

Henrietta's eyes flashed with coldness as she understood what Victoria hinted at.

Victoria was concerned that if she pushed the Transcendent Witches too hard, they would resist her with everything they had, regardless of their means and consequences, even if it meant joining hands with the devils.

"If they are foolish enough to go down that path, it would be even better! Getting the opportunity to remove hidden tumors and weaken Gehenna at the same time is not a disaster but a blessing!" Henrietta coolly stated.

"Recent events have already made things clear to me that they are all selfish and unrepentant in their ways. Everyone desires freedom, but uncontrolled freedom leads to corruption, turning even upright people into vile and immoral beings. This is what happens when humans believe their actions bear no consequences."

"That's why rulers create laws to govern people – we set clear boundaries and deliver appropriate punishments to control people's actions. However, the human world was originally one without law and morals; there were no distinctions between right and wrong or good and evil."

"When rulers lack self-discipline, they fail to heed their own laws and become the problem, a source of corruption by doing as they please. Since the Transcendent Witches can't be trusted to govern themselves, I will be the one to govern them."

"I will be the whip that keeps their leashes in line. If they can behave, then all is well. But if they can't, then we are better off without them!" Henrietta declared.

Since she had the power to be a dictator, she couldn't settle for diplomacy.

People only used diplomacy when they were of equal standing. They weren't. Not anymore.

Victoria had goosebumps as she listened to Henrietta's declaration. It was only now that she truly saw her changes and resolve.

Henrietta never desired the throne, but now, she was finally assuming responsibilities and acting like a true leader of the witches. As the strongest witch since the dawn of magic, who else but her deserved to rule over all witches?

Just as Victoria had that thought, she recalled that her missing grandson's influence was even greater than Henrietta's.

Henrietta was the nominal ruler of the Black Rose Kingdom, but her grandson's influence eclipsed hers. The contradiction of two leaders in one country would give rise to unease and fear for the future.

'Who should I support?' Victoria wondered.

One was her family's benefactor, to whom they were greatly indebted, and the other was her missing grandson, whom she owed twenty years of care and affection and had always felt guilty about.

'No, no, no, I should not think like that! Henrietta will rule over the witches, while my grandson is destined to rule over the whole world! Their positions do not conflict and could even be mutually supporting!'

'All present and future problems would be resolved if I pair the two together!' Victoria's eyes brightened at once before pondering, 'Hmm... How should I approach Henrietta regarding this matter?'

'Given our friendship, she might strongly oppose the idea of marrying my grandson... Ah, but my grandson might not necessarily like her and agree either... No, Henrietta is single, and she is also a natural beauty; my grandson will definitely like her...'

Victoria wracked her brain with worry as she tried to figure out how to bring the two together.

Meanwhile, Henrietta noticed Victoria's constantly changing expressions between frowns and foolish grins. She couldn't help but raise an eyebrow in surprise and unease.

'She's plotting something...' Henrietta thought.

Chapter 679: Absurd Possibility

Great Ratholos Empire, Imperial Capital

The battle between the Delarosas and the imperial army raged on as both sides fought hard to exterminate each other.

With Emperor Varan trapped in a spiritual land of the dead, the imperial army was forced into a disadvantageous and passive state, where it was hard to advance and difficult to retreat. They could only hold the stalemate until the winds of favor blew their way.

"Commander, the battle is steadily tilting in our enemy's favor! We will not last long at this rate!" an imperial guard alerted.

The Delarosian curses lacked killing power, but they were far more destructive in their ability to sow chaos within the ranks of the imperial soldiers, suppressing their morale and destroying their military unity.

The imperial guards were restrained from demonstrating their full fighting potential due to the disorder of the cursed imperial soldiers among them.

Under such chaos and disorder, everyone became free targets for offensive totem spells.

"To think the Delarosas could push us this far...! Without His Imperial Majesty, we, the imperial guards, are actually this pathetic! Arghhh! If only we had the Senior Guards with us!" the commander of the imperial guards roared with vexation and distress.

As the only other Transcendent-level warrior around, he was forced to face Matriarch Laelana and the Delarosan Elders alone.

Moreover, He was severely mismatched in abilities and terrain. The limited space within the crowded outer courtyard restricted his movements, and the unfamiliar magical spells suppressed his advances.

"Hahaha! Go to hell, imperial scums! Taste the fearsome might of my totem power! You fools trained like freaks all your life for a bit of strength. On the other hand, I only need to train overnight to acquire this power!" a young Delarosan member laughed hysterically as he burned the imperial soldiers with his fiery totem power.

At the same time, his words dealt a serious blow to some of the imperial soldiers' warrior's spirit.

"You can use powerful spells like that from a single night of training...? What the hell have I been desperately training my body for...?" a dispirited imperial soldier despaired amidst the fierce battle.

"Not good! Our morale is greatly dropping! We need our emperor's presence to re-ignite our fighting spirits! Imperial guards, on me! Even if we must die, we must bring our emperor out of that smoke cloud!" a captain-level imperial guard roared.

"Kill!"

Several nearby imperial guards charged with desperation in their reddened eyes as they slaughtered their way through the ranks of Delarosan Shamans and Witch Doctors with their captain.

Maiming, laceration, burning, cutting, piercing...

The imperial guards disregarded all risks of injuries along the way and threw themselves into the cloud of black smoke like mad beasts.

Such desperation and madness even shook the hearts of some Delarosans.

"So crazy... Is this the madness of war?"

While the imperial army fought out of responsibility, the Delarosans fought for survival. As such, the Delarosans had higher morale and advantage.

But as the blood of the fallen soaked the ground and the stench of death permeated through the air, the younger Delarosans cowered before the imperial guards' fierce gazes.

The inexperienced were all shaken by the horrors of war.

...

Meanwhile, Emperor Varan continued to fight off the endless horde of undead within the boundless world with the crimson sky.

Broken corpses littered the land and piled up like mountains wherever Emperor Varan moved. However, they quickly disappeared under the sea of swarming undead that followed after him.

Suddenly, Emperor Varan heard the cries of his guards and soldiers nearby as they were startled by the nightmarish environment they were thrown in.

"Ahhh—! Get away from me! Die, die, you undead bastard! Why the hell is there so many of them?!"

Chaos and panic quickly erupted among the imperial guards and soldiers as they found themselves in a more dangerous situation than the battle outside.

Nevertheless, they didn't lose their reason and fought off the swarming sea of undead beings to the best of their abilities.

"There's a battle of there!" the captain-ranked imperial guard noticed before spotting Emperor Varan. "It's His Imperial Majesty! It's great that you are safe, Your Majesty! But... What is this hellish place?!"

"That's what I also want to know!" Emperor Varan shouted back, surprised by the new faces.

He didn't expect to see his soldiers and guards in such a place.

Was this desolate world with the crimson sky not a figment of his imagination under the effect of a curse?

"How did you all come here?! What's the situation outside!?" Emperor Varan inquired.

"It's bad, Your Imperial Majesty! Your men need you outside! The commander is doing his best to fend off the enemy leaders, but he alone is not enough to control the situation for long!" the captain reported.

The group gradually met up with Emperor Varan and worked together to cover their blind spots. They slew every undead that came their way in every direction.

"We are also clueless about how we ended up here, Your Imperial Majesty. I only remember jumping into a cloud of black smoke with the others before finding ourselves in this strange world..." another imperial guard added.

"It doesn't feel like a dream or nightmare... Rather, it feels like we've been transported to another world... Ah! You're wounded, Your Imperial Majesty!"

Before long, the imperial guards noticed the nasty black flesh on Emperor Varan's body.

"Try not to get clawed or bitten by these vile creatures, or you will end up like me! Their bodies are laced with a special kind of corpse poison!" Emperor Varan warned with a frown.

Although Emperor Varan's wounds looked serious, they were only surface injuries. He was able to suppress the corpse poison from invading deeper with his aura.

"I understand, Your Majesty. You heard the emperor. Be careful, everyone!" the captain alerted.

As Emperor Varan and the imperial guards fought off the endless horde of undead that kept spawning, they faced a big question – if they weren't in a dream world, where were they?

"Quickly look for clues on how to leave this place! I fear we may have stumbled into some forbidden region of Gehenna!" Emperor Varan speculated.

Even he couldn't believe what he was saying, as the idea in and of itself was absurd. However, it was also the only plausible reason for his realistic wounds.

If he died in this desolate land of the dead, he may very well die for real.

"G-Gehenna?! How is that even possible!? What kind of power can connect Pangea and Gehenna like this?!" an imperial guard cried, alarmed by the horrid possibility.

Chapter 680: Change

What kind of power could connect Pangea and Gehenna just like that?

No one trapped in the desolate world with the crimson sky needed to answer such a question, for there was only one answer they could give – the power of a Great Devil.

After all, the Great Devils were existences with unfathomable might and capabilities. Gehenna was also a place where anything seemed possible through magic.

Emperor Varan and his guards believed if Galen truly connected Pangea and Gehenna, it could only have been done with the power of a Great Devil—at least, according to their limited and shallow understanding.

Furthermore, there was only one known way for a human to wield the power of a Great Devil – through a contract.

Emperor Varan started to suspect Galen Delarosa was a first-generation Devil's Contractor. It was the only possible reason he could think of as to why the latter could live for so long.

But while the identity of a Devil's Contractor could explain Galen's long lifespan, he still couldn't shrug off a feeling of doubt.

Could the power of a Great Devil truly connect Pangea and Gehenna so easily? If it was as simple as he was assuming, why haven't the Great Devils used it to conquer other parts of Pangea?

Since the contradiction existed, the reasoning must be flawed.

Emperor Varan wracked his brain for other possibilities that might have existed, piecing together the limited information he had one by one.

'The wounds are real, but the place may not be... Perhaps such a place truly exists in Gehenna. However, this shouldn't be it...' Emperor Varan pondered as he effortlessly slayed hundreds of undead.

Suddenly, he made an upward sword slash, shooting off his sword wave into the sky on a whim.

However, contrary to the sword wave growing distant into the vast sky, it abruptly disappeared after a short thirty-meter flight, like as if it had passed through some invisible barrier.

Emperor Varan narrowed his eyes at the sight.

In that instant, he was enlightened.

The seemingly boundless, desolate world with the crimson sky truly wasn't a place in Gehenna.

But while they weren't in Gehenna, they were still trapped inside an independent space – one that Galen Delarosa created and could spawn endless undead to attack them.

The undead themselves weren't strong. In fact, they were pitifully weak. However, their great numbers could still generate a sense of great threat.

"I understand now. We are trapped inside some kind of magical domain Galen created. Everything you see is just something he conjured with his imagination for us to see," Emperor Varan explained.

"However, don't be mistaken. Just because everything isn't necessarily real, it isn't fake, either. Reality and illusory are mixed in this temporary domain to hide the true dangers within—at least, as far as I understand."

"I could be wrong, but I shouldn't be far from the truth," Emperor Varan added.

The imperial guards felt their heads hurt listening to their emperor's analysis of the world they were trapped in.

In the end, they didn't understand anything and felt even more confused.

Reality and illusions were mixed? Not real, but also not fake? Fake could be real, and real could also be fake? What the fuck?

Who am I? Where am I? Where am I going?

"Basically, the real dangers are hidden within the illusions we see. These undead beings aren't real, but their attacks are—is what His Majesty is saying," the captain clarified.

"Such an unusual yet terrifying ability... I've never heard or seen anything like this before..."

"Never mind that, Captain. How do we leave this place, even if we know what it is? Don't tell me we'll be stuck here forever? These vile creatures aren't strong. But given time, we'll still be tired to death even if we aren't careless," an imperial guard said with concern.

"No, maintaining this domain definitely consumes a lot of magic and mental power. The one who summoned this slaughter domain shouldn't be able to hold it for long," Emperor Varan guessed.

"In fact, I reckon the faster we slay these undead beings, the faster Galen's magical and mental power will be consumed. This will allow us to escape his domain sooner."

Emperor Varan also realized the Delarosas were most likely doing their best to prevent others from entering the domain. After all, why would they only trap him if they could trap more?

Evidently, trapping more people inside the domain also increases the consumption of Galen's magical and mental power.

"Is that really it, though?" the captain doubted, thinking, "While this domain ability seems quite troublesome to deal with, it lacks real killing power. Using this ability only wages a battle of attrition to waste time."

"Thus, while the ability itself is quite magical, it doesn't make Galen seem all that powerful. Is this really all that a Devil's Contractor can amount to?"

"That's quite true. This Devil's Contractor doesn't sound all that impressive when you put it that way," Emperor Varan acknowledged.

Perhaps Galen's devil-bestowed abilities declined due to his old age?

...

Meanwhile, in the battle outside, the commander of the imperial guards found it increasingly difficult to cope with so many troublesome opponents at once as the battle dragged on.

With increasing fatigue, the imperial commander's speed and strength declined, resulting in him taking a Rank 5 Water Bullet head-on while in mid-air.

Bang!

Although the imperial commander blocked the magical spell with his sword, the impact flung him into a crowd of imperial soldiers, crushing them underneath.

"Quickly press the attack and take him down! Do not give him a chance to catch his breath! Emperor Varan will be released soon!" Matriarch Laelana roared.

The High Elders heeded her command and quickly activated their strongest totem powers. In the next instant, numerous powerful spells flew in the imperial commander's direction before he could recover.

"Commander!"

Many imperial guards quickly cried in alarm, noticing the situation had taken a turn for the worse.

At the same time, the imperial commander knew he was a goner when he looked up; he didn't have enough time to dodge all the incoming spells.

Boom!

Numerous Rank 5 magical spells barraged the imperial commander's location mercilessly.

Such small-scale yet concentrated destructive power was beyond lethal, leaving nothing left of the imperial commander and nearby soldiers and guards if it had made contact.

However, no one mourned for any losses—for they were all stunned and surprised.

At the very last moment, a barrier of blue light suddenly appeared, shielding the imperial commander, guards, and soldiers in the area. Not only did the blue barrier save them, but it also soundlessly absorbed every incoming attack.

It was as if the various magical spells had slipped through a crack in space and disappeared into the infinite void.

"Who?!" Matriarch Laelana roared into the sky with a nasty, grave look.

It was the perfect opportunity to eliminate a Transcendent-rank warrior, and yet they still missed it because of a third-party intervention.

More importantly, whoever intervened was unbelievably skilled in magic.

Matriarch Laelana was greatly alarmed by that fact.