

The Witch 701

Chapter 701: Fourth Dimensional Sense

The bats squealed, and the people screamed. Amidst a land of death and slaughter, Vaan glanced at his visitors with an air of indifference.

After absorbing the second soul fragment, a part of him seemed to have changed besides his newfound abilities and power elevation. The trivial lives of unrelated humans felt even more insignificant to him.

Although Vaan was never someone with a heroic complex, believing he should go out of his way to save people in need, he would at least do it as long as it served a favorable purpose or if the gains outweighed the losses.

However, now, he didn't feel anything despite the countless screams of terror, grief, and despair.

'I've changed... Is this the side effect of absorbing the second memory?' Vaan mused.

Indeed, he had experienced and seen far too much in the memories of his past lives. Even if he hadn't seen the full life of each reincarnation, he had at least experienced their birth and death.

What they had felt and thought in those moments, he had also experienced the exact same feelings and thoughts.

As such, it wasn't as simple as just seeing flashbacks of his million reincarnations. Rather, it was more accurate to say he had truly experienced death and rebirth a million times in that instance.

This kind of enormous information dump was no different from the highest level of torture one could experience. Any normal person would have their mentality and thoughts completely twisted, turning them insane.

However, Vaan only felt numbness and indifference.

This was most likely the effect of experiencing Varuna's three chaos cycles of lonesome travel first. Being alone for such an unimaginable long span of time was able to numb all feelings.

That said, this could also be the mentality of one who had stood above the heavens.

After experiencing the lowest and highest points in Varuna's life, death didn't seem as terrible. Life and death were just part of a cycle; death was not the absolute end, and life was just a test – if one failed, another chance to restart would be given.

Thus, while millions of lives were cruelly and mercilessly taken, Vaan wasn't affected by the losses. He did not grieve nor sympathize with them.

Unfortunate as it was, it wasn't something he could change. And since it was something he couldn't change, why bother fretting over it?

This world had never been kind to life, and living in it was to suffer.

In this kind of world, death may not have been a tragedy but a blessing in disguise. Even though many people were dying or have died, they would still be given another chance at life.

Perhaps the new world would be kinder to them in their next life, and they would not have to suffer as much.

Fate had different plans for everyone, and Vaan had his own role to play.

'Supreme Leader, there are sixty-six Demigod-level beings surrounding you. Should I call the others over to help?' Chaezi inquired, feeling anxious about the current situation.

Although Vaan seemed calm, his mind was constantly spinning for solutions to the current disaster.

He didn't have the luxury or spare energy to be weighed down by human emotions.

'No need. They have their own battles to fight,' Vaan calmly dismissed the idea before saying, "I have a different task for you, Chaezi. Go back and find Astoria and Henrietta. Report the situation to them and tell them to prepare troops for long-distance spatial deployment.'

'It's uncertain how many more demons will continue spawning from Gehenna, but we must contain the demons in this city to prevent the problem from spreading. There will be countless problems in the future if we give them a chance to establish footholds in this world.'

'Pay the clan a visit when you are done. We will also deploy some clan members since we lack numbers here. Dragon Lord Astarot will be in charge of the spatial deployment,' Vaan added.

'Understood, Supreme Leader!' Chaezi obediently complied despite her own desire to stay and fight.

...

While Vaan was instructing Chaezi, the sixty-six members of Great Devil Abaddon's Night Parade were studying the gravitational power of the Black Mountain.

It only took a few tests before they deemed it to be a no-flight zone.

Furthermore, they even felt threatened by the Black Mountain's gravitational pressure. As such, none of them dared to set foot on the Black Mountain.

Even the Vampiric Demon Bats only flew around the outskirts of the Black Mountain despite their desire to draw closer to Vaan.

"There's something strange about this iron mountain. Its gravitational power is ridiculously powerful! We'll be crushed before we can even reach the center!" the thirty-third-rank Noble Vampire, Grimbald, alerted.

"Tch!" the twenty-seven-rank Noble Vampire, Haera, clicked her tongue and said, "There are quite a few tasty-looking humans on this iron mountain. It's a pity that we can't reach them. How can they even withstand such terrible pressure?"

"Their body composition is different to ours; they are fully comprised of essence while we are part essence, part energy. This is why the Body Refiners of new chaosverses are said to be so fearsome and tenacious, Haera," the thirteenth-rank Royal Vampire, Dimitri, calmly explained.

"That's rather unfortunate..." The seventeen-rank Royal Vampire, Helena, licked her lips with pity before saying, "I bet that human standing at the very top of the iron mountain tastes very delicious."

"The scent of his blood is certainly irresistible... Ah, what should I do...? I want him," the twenty-first-rank Noble Vampire, Deidre, squirmed with uncontrollable lust.

Suddenly, a high-ranking vampire soared into the sky until his eye leveled with Vaan's.

"Human, seeing as you hide on this iron mountain, you must be afraid and aware of the situation. Although I wish to fight you, your blood is far too precious. Why don't you swear to become my blood slave and stay by my side? This Royal One will guarantee your safety in our new Blood Kingdom," the high-ranking vampire promised.

Vaan calmly studied the high-ranking vampire in the distance, and invisible pieces of information floating around the high-rank vampire quickly entered his mind.

Ding!

<You have read the target's information with your Fourth Dimensional Sense>

<Your proficiency in perceiving hidden information from the void has slightly increased>

<The Gehennan information has been translated and compiled>

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[Target's information]

Name: Lucien Bathory

Race: Vampire

Class: High Royal

Age: Over 9000 Gehennan Years

Position: Third rank in the Blood Ancestor's Night Parade

Existence level: Half-step Divine Being (Suppressed to Peak Demigod)

Abilities: [Blood Control] [Shadow Manipulation] [Regeneration] [Bat Authority] [???] [???] [???]

Chapter 702: Can See the Mountain, But Can't See the Peak

Fourth Dimensional Sense...

It was one of several other abilities Vaan received along with the Boundless Sea and Sky Aura after he absorbed the second soul fragment.

It was his second-greatest gain. But arguably, it could also be his greatest gain.

The true source of his unparalleled learning and thought-processing capabilities was made clear when his Wisdom From the Void and Omni-Sense merged to become the Fourth Dimensional Sense.

The doubts he had and the answers Varuna sought... Everything was made clear the moment he obtained it.

The Outer Beings that attacked Chaos and the foreign invaders that destroyed the Divine Realm all came from the same place – they were fourth-dimensional beings from the fourth-dimensional world, an infinitely vast world beyond one's imagination.

Recalling the unimaginably large celestial who caused Varuna's death in the fourth-dimensional world, it was clear that while the Outer Beings were extremely powerful in Chaos, the Outer Beings they had known so far were no different from bacteria in that place.

Nevertheless, the fourth-dimensional world was far more complex than the third one.

Vaan did not doubt that fourth-dimensional beings absorb information differently and far more quickly than third-dimensional beings due to the sheer amount of information needed to process.

It wouldn't be surprising if fourth-dimensional beings perceived time differently from third-dimensional beings because of that.

What could be unimaginably fast to third-dimensional beings would be incredibly slow to fourth-dimensional beings. Things that were too fast to be seen were virtually invisible. And if they were never seen, they were never known; that was the same as being non-existent.

As such, third-dimensional beings would never understand the world the same way that fourth-dimensional beings understood it—At least, that had been the case up until now.

Now, there was one capable of it – Vaan.

Even if Vaan's Fourth Dimensional Sense wasn't on par with the perception of true fourth-dimensional beings, it was still part of the fourth-dimensional world.

In a third-dimensional world, this kind of perception was unparalleled and unique – It shouldn't exist, but it did.

Nevertheless, Vaan could guess why he possessed such a godly talent – It was the cumulative luck of his past lives.

Varuna and Vanitas both died after stumbling into the fourth-dimensional world, and their souls—his soul was washed by the Fourth Dimensional Energy. That was the only reason why he could possess the Fourth Dimensional Sense.

Of course, the millions of reincarnations must have also played a major part in helping the soul assimilate the Fourth Dimensional Energy to give birth to this unique talent.

...

"I know you can hear me, Human. Give me your answer. My patience is limited," Lucien urged with a hint of warning.

Lucien had more to say, but before he could say them, several more high-ranking vampires appeared nearby.

Furthermore, they were all among the top ten demons in the Blood Ancestor's Night Parade.

"Lord Lucien, don't you think it was inappropriate to ask this precious human to become your blood slave before consulting us first? Do you think we will agree?" the elegant second-rank, Bertram, spoke with displeasure.

"That's right," the beautiful fifth-rank, Viessa, chimed before persuading Vaan, "You should become my blood slave instead, Human. I will surely treat you well—much better than this big oaf, at the very least. I guarantee it. What say you?"

"Lady Viessa, you are not being fair either. We have not decided who this human would belong to. So, it's not your turn to talk to this human," the authoritative first-rank, Fergus, spoke with a stern look.

Vaan glanced at the latest high-ranking vampire and read his information.

Ding!

<You have read the target's information with your Fourth Dimensional Sense>

<Your proficiency in perceiving hidden information from the void has slightly increased>

<The Gehennan information has been translated and compiled>

=====

[Target's information]

Name: Fergus Albatroz

Race: Vampire

Class: Highest Royal

Age: Over 15000 Gehennan Years

Position: First rank in the Blood Ancestor's Night Parade

Existence level: Early-stage Divine Being (Recently Ascended) (Suppressed to Half-step Divine Being)

Abilities: [Blood Control] [Shadow Manipulation] [Coercion] [Mind Control] [???] [???] [???] [???]
[???] [???] [???] [???]

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After seeing Fergus's information, Vaan was surprised by the royal vampire's true strength. However, that was all.

Given his current abilities, he was not afraid of an Early-stage Divine Being, let alone one that had been suppressed to a Half-step Divine Being due to Pangean Laws.

Nevertheless, it was clear that Pangea's suppression had weakened substantially due to the blood-sacrificial grand array. The Great Ratholos Empire's fate would not look bright if a Great Devil appeared.

"Something is not right. We've wasted so many words, but this human hasn't shown the slightest reaction. Could he be deaf and mute? Or is there an issue with this iron mountain that prevents him from hearing us?" Viessa doubted.

"I can hear you all just fine; I'm just too lazy to respond," Vaan finally spoke with an air of nonchalance, adding, "After all, do you talk to flies when they buzz at you?"

Vaan's words immediately offended the entire group of high-ranking vampires.

"What did you just say?" Lucien growled.

"We gave you such a great opportunity because we think highly of you. And yet, you dare to spit on our generosity? Human, you are far too arrogant! However, with your blood quality, you have a right to be arrogant!" Fergus acknowledged before his crimson eyes flashed with intensity, seemingly activating his mind control.

"I will give you one more chance. If you swear to become my loyal blood slave, I will forget all about your insults and won't let anyone touch a single one of your hair without my permission."

"Haha," Vaan softly chuckled before coolly stating, "You all look down on my arrogance, but none of you seem to be aware that your own arrogance is even more ridiculous."

"All this harping about making me your blood slave, but none of you have the slightest clue of your own limits. You are all overestimating yourselves and greatly underestimating me."

"Or... Could it be that you all are incapable of sensing my strength?"

When Vaan raised this question, he had, more or less, confirmed the high-ranking vampires couldn't tell how exactly strong he was, seeing how they revealed confusion and surprise.

Evidently, his Boundless Sea and Sky Aura was so dominant that the high-ranking vampires couldn't sense anything past it. They could see the mountain in front of them, but they couldn't see its peak.

They only knew he was special.

Chapter 703: Relevation

After witnessing Vaan's manner of speech and confidence, the leading Fergus and the rest of the high-ranking vampire group frowned at him in doubt. They re-evaluated his strength but noticed nothing besides his powerful physique and unique aura.

"It seems you are the one who doesn't know what you are talking about, Human. This Royal One admits your body is strong, and while you stay on this iron mountain, there's nothing we can do to you," Lucien calmly acknowledged before revealing contempt.

"However, once you leave the protection of this iron mountain, you'll quickly realize that this brute strength you are so proud of is nothing in front of our magic."

"This is rather disappointing... To think a Body Refiner this strong could be so ignorant about the power dynamics. But then again, what was I expecting from a low-life-value world in the new chaosverse?" the eighth-rank Royal Vampire, Faine, uttered disdainfully.

"We are wasting too much time here. We still need to complete the Blood Ancestor's task. If we don't finish subjugating this human settlement before the Blood Ancestor arrives, the Blood Ancestor will punish us," the seventh-rank, Duradel, reminded.

"That's true," Haera nodded in agreement before mentioning, "However, we can't catch this human while he is on this iron mountain. And if we let him be, it's uncertain what he could do."

"Should we try to force him out by threatening him with the lives of these other humans?" Haera shortly suggested.

However, her suggestion quickly received strong disapproval and disgust.

"Lady Haera, I can't believe you would utter something so distasteful," the elegant Viessa commented with discontent. "How could royalty like us resort to such low-life, disgraceful means? I will not allow such a stain on my honor."

"That's right!" agreed the refined gentlemanly Dimitri, adding, "Even when we face our enemies, we must act with class and never stoop down to the same level as ruffians and street rats."

"After all, such an act shames the entirety of our royal lineage, and our Progenitors might even condemn us to forced slumber," Dimitri stressed with concern.

After Haera received such strong criticism, even she felt ashamed of her suggestion. She had not given it enough thought.

Nevertheless, the attention was quickly shifted back to Vaan as Lucian apologized, "Please excuse kin. It seems she lacks education."

"That aside, do you dare leave the mountain to challenge us since you are so confident, Human?" Lucien goaded with a provoking smile.

Vaan knew he was being provoked, but he was also willing to fall for such provocations.

After all, there was no better way of confirming his strength than to test it in battle. And he had to admit the members of Abaddon's Night Parade were just the right opponents for it.

Conserving his strength for Abaddon was important, but thinning the vampires' numbers was also crucial.

"Why wouldn't I dare? I'm just afraid you will soon learn the word regret and flee faster than the time it takes you to ejaculate," Vaan coldly smiled.

He had, more or less, retrieved information on all sixty-six demons of the Night Parade, albeit limited. He couldn't read more detailed information until he improved his Fourth Dimensional Sense.

Meanwhile, Lucien's face completely darkened from Vaan's insult.

"Do not interfere! I will be this human's opponent! I must teach this arrogant human a lesson he will never forget!" Lucien furiously declared.

"Go on then, Lucien. Let him understand the great divide between our two races," Fergus finally spoke after an extended period of silence.

On the side, the second-rank Royal Vampire, Ozul, briefly glanced at Fergus with doubt but kept his surprise in silence.

However, it wasn't just him who noticed Fergus's unnatural behavior. Several other high-ranking vampires also noticed it. But, like Ozul, they chose to watch in silence.

After all, Fergus was the strongest vampire in their Night Parade and was the best candidate to show off the might of their race.

However, surprisingly, he was not keen on fighting and actually passed the opportunity on to someone else. After seeing Fergus act like that, naturally, the rest of them were even less eager to fight until they learned more about the human.

Meanwhile, Fergus was more than happy to see someone else test Vaan's power. He had grown wary after his mind control failed to produce its desired effect.

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Come, Human! Get out of your turtle shell and fight me! I will show you the difference between us!" Lucien roared with impatience.

Vaan smiled indifferently and said, "Since you are in a hurry to die, let me send you on your way."

In that instant, the Vampiric Demon Bats seemed to have sensed Vaan's intent; they immediately flew out of the way, making a clear sky path between him and Lucien.

However, Vaan didn't use it.

He took a step and disappeared in the blink of an eye, vanishing right in front of the high-ranking vampires' countless gazes. Such a sight immediately startled all of them as they heightened their senses with alarm, realizing Vaan truly meant business.

"Let us change the battle location. It would be a pity if the plants and herbs in this region were harmed because of our battle."

Vaan made a calm suggestion as he appeared behind Lucien. However, the latter wasn't even given a chance to respond or react before he was dragged into a spatial leap, disappearing from the airspace.

After all, Vaan hadn't even finished speaking by that point.

If Vaan had waited until he finished speaking before dragging the person away, Lucien would have long made a move against him.

"Where did they go? Quickly locate them!" Fergus urged with alarm, not expecting a male Body Refiner to possess such advanced spatial abilities.

Within moments, all sixty-six demons of the Night Parade split off in every direction to look for Vaan and Lucien. However, it didn't take long before they tracked his unique scent and headed in the same direction.

Meanwhile, the suffocating pressure of the vampires was lifted from the territory of the Black Mountain, allowing every martial warrior to sigh with relief.

The high-ranking vampires' intimidation was so great that many martial warriors didn't dare to let out a single squeak during their presence. But since the vampires finally left, the Black Mountain quickly erupted with heated remarks.

"Did everyone see that?! Sir Pendragon moved so fast that my eyes couldn't even keep up with his movements! I didn't even see his shadows!"

"That wasn't a high-speed movement; that was a spatial leap! I noticed the spatial distortions during Sir Pendragon's spatial leap!"

"What?! A spatial leap?! Sir Pendragon had such a spatial ability? No wait... Spatial ability?!"

Very shortly, Berucha and the other martial warriors quickly recalled a certain prophecy from the Sacred Tirtha, and their eyes instantly beamed with greater shock and excitement.

The destined overlord!

Chapter 704: Lucien's Fear & Desperation

"Martial Brothers, the destined overlord has appeared!" Berucha loudly announced with excitement and confidence, strongly believing in his statement.

"In the past, I have never thought the destined overlord would be someone I would strongly respect and admire from the bottom of my heart."

"After all, no matter who the destined overlord was, I believed that person wouldn't have anything to do with the martial way; I believed such a person would have been a spatial-attribute Transcendent Witch – someone blessed with strong magical powers from birth."

"However, I thought wrong, and I'm glad I did. Not only is the destined overlord a person of the martial way, but he is even the first person in history to climb to the very top of the Black Mountain!"

"If someone like that doesn't deserve your loyalty and worship, then I don't know who would ever will! However, I will tell you what, Martial Brothers – Sir Pendragon has earned by complete admiration and loyalty, and I am willing to follow him as he unites the continent!"

"Who else wants to join me in following Sir Pendragon?!" Berucha hollered at the crowd of martial warriors.

Ba-dump!

The blood of all martial warriors boiled as they listened to Berucha's speech. There wasn't a single warrior among them that would deny Sir Pendragon's achievements.

After all, they had all witnessed his glory in reaching the top of the Black Mountain. Even when his skin cracked, bones splintered, and organs ruptured, Sir Pendragon pushed on with sheer will and endured the Black Mountain's colossal pressure.

Such force of will from one who had reached the top and pursued the martial way truly deserved their utmost respect.

"This Old Man may be old, but he is not blind. I have never seen such a young man with such awe-inspiring talents and determination," an elderly Transcendent-rank Body Refiner descended the Black Mountain and sighed in admiration.

"Sir Pendragon is a role model for all warriors and deserves every bit of this Old Man's respect and loyalty. Truly worthy of the one who shoulders the great destiny of uniting Pangea!"

"Naturally, this Old Man is willing to follow Sir Pendragon on his conquest! However, who the hell are you to Sir Pendragon, Young Lad? Why should we follow your lead?" the elderly Transcendent-rank Body Refiner asked.

"Who am I to Sir Pendragon?" Berucha smiled and patted his chest, feeling a wave of honor and pride overwhelm him before stating, "I am Sir Pendragon's first follower! I had the honor of being his guide, then follower, even before he revealed his martial talent!"

Following such a declaration, Berucha immediately received countless gazes of awe and envy, just as he had hoped.

However, it only lasted a moment before they started cursing his dog-shit luck for receiving such an opportunity despite his trash martial talents.

Nevertheless, thanks to Berucha's incitement, the full force of martial warriors in the Black Mountain expressed their desire to follow Vaan and serve him.

"Let us move, brothers! Even if we can't help much, we must at least witness Sir Pendragon's glory! We, the proud warriors of the Great Ratholos Empire, acknowledge his right to rule the continent!" Berucha shouted excitement, completely absorbed in his role of convincing and leading Vaan's martial followers.

"Yeah—!!!" the martial warriors roared.

...

Meanwhile, in a seemingly abandoned slum district, Vaan blinked into view with Lucien in his grasp. He hurled the Royal Vampire into the ground with savage force, followed by a powerful drop.

Boom!

Vaan descended right on Lucien with a powerful stomp, crushing the latter beneath his feet. Lucien's head and the ground underneath him instantly gave way under the strong impact.

The ground shattered into a small crater while Lucien's head splattered, scattering blood and brain matter everywhere.

Any normal person should have been instantly killed under such a state.

However, a Peak Demigod-rank Royal Vampire like Lucien was especially tenacious, like a cockroach.

Lucien's whole body melted into a pool of blood before it gathered all the scattered blood and brain matter. A few moments later, Lucien completely reformed his body in its perfect state.

However, Lucien stared at Vaan from a distance with shock, disbelief, confusion, and a hint of fear. It was like he was still savoring the taste of dying and coming back to life.

Lucien had seen Vaan's stomp coming. But for some reason, his body's magical defense was completely ineffective in stopping the physical stomp.

There was so much mana in his blood that his vampiric body was naturally reinforced by magic. Logically, a Peak Demigod-level magic defense shouldn't have been shattered by an Early Demigod-level physical attack.

And yet, it did so as easily as squishing tofu!

"This doesn't make any sense! What the hell did you use in your attack, Human?! I demand an answer!" Lucien roared.

However, Vaan couldn't be bothered providing an answer; he simply responded with further violence, blinking behind Lucien with another spatial shift before raising one of his hands...

Poof!

Lucien's head splattered again with a single smack. His headless body plopped to the ground lifelessly.

Shortly after, Lucien's body turned into another pool of blood, then reformed itself once more. The fear in Lucien's eyes became even more evident.

This time, Lucien had tried further fortification magic to his head, but it still popped like a fragile watermelon.

"Weren't you going to teach me a lesson? Didn't you look down on my brute strength? Well, I'm using that exact brute strength to beat you!" Vaan stated.

In the blink of an eye, Vaan's figure disappeared into the void again. Lucien's expression instantly changed as he moved to dodge, knowing another attack was coming.

Unfortunately, no matter how Lucien evaded, he couldn't escape the fate of getting his head splattered by Vaan's seemingly almighty hand.

Plopped!

Lucien's headless body dropped to the ground, then reformed from a pool of blood a third time. Signs of exhaustion appeared on Lucien's face as restoring his head consumed a lot of energy. His movements also became sluggish.

Poof!

Lucien's head exploded again. After the fourth time came a fifth, sixth, and even seventh time.

"You savage simpleton! Do you not know how to use any other attack?!" Lucien cried with anguish and fear.

"If the same attack is working over and over again, why would I need to use something else?" Vaan casually replied before smiling coldly, "It seems you are at your limit."

Lucien's expression quickly turned ghastly pale. He wasn't sure he had enough blood energy to revive an eighth time.

Suddenly, he sensed Fergus and the other sixty-four members of the Night Parade flying over from a distance. Joy immediately flooded his heart.

"Lord Fergus, save me!"

"Stop!!!"

Fergus was shocked to see Lucien plead with utter despair and desperation. He immediately bellowed for Vaan to stop the moment he saw his attack.

Unfortunately, why should Vaan listen?

Splatter!

Lucien's head flew with a smack. After his headless body dropped to the ground, it did not stand up again.

"How dare you!" Fergus roared furiously.

He was a Divine Being with unparalleled authority and power. And yet, a mere mortal actually dared to defy his command and killed his kin in front of him so openly!

Chapter 705: Tremble

"Sir Lucien died...? How is that possible?" Seventh-rank Viessa stared at Lucien's shriveled, lifeless corpse with disbelief.

Lucien was a Half-step Divine Being.

Based on their information, even if his power was suppressed to Peak Demigod, there shouldn't be anyone in the Great Ratholos Empire capable of killing him.

After all, the Great Ratholos Empire was a country full of musclehead Body Refiners. Even if they dual-cultivated body and aura, they would only be a little more troublesome to deal with at best.

"Physical attacks shouldn't be able to break the magical defenses on a higher power... How in the world did Lucien die? Looking at his shriveled body, he must have consumed all his blood energy before dying... Unbelievable. Absolutely unbelievable," Seventh-rank Duradel commented with a hint of fear.

Unfortunately, he was not the one who challenged the human. Otherwise, the corpse on the ground would have been his instead.

"Attack together! Don't give this human a chance to retaliate. He must die for his sin!" Fergus bellowed with venomous fury.

A top-rank vampire with a royal bloodline had actually died under his watch! How could he face the Blood Ancestor if he did not offer him the human's head?

Nevertheless, Fergus's command surprised everyone.

"What? You want us to gang up on a single human, Lord Fergus? Are you serious? If word of it gets out, where will our faces be? How can we hold our heads up high in the future?" Thirteenth-rank Dimitri hesitated.

"Right?" Eleventh-rank Ulfred wholeheartedly agreed, adding, "Five dozen Demigod-rank vampires with superior bloodlines fighting one trifling Demigod-rank Body Refiner... I find it difficult to participate in such a shameless act."

"Trifling Demigod-rank Body Refiner, you say...?!" Fergus gnashed his teeth in anger after seeing the attitude of his peers.

"If he was just a trifling Demigod-rank Body Refiner, how do you explain Lucien's death?! Even my [Mind Control] has no effect on him! Otherwise, how could he possibly refuse me?!"

"Keep your useless pride back at home! This is war, not the duels back at home! We were proud because we could overpower our foes! If we can't overpower our foes, then what is there to be proud of?!"

"You better listen to me and do as I say if you want to live! There's something strange about this human!" Fergus strictly said with caution.

The high-ranking vampires all clenched their fists with anger. They did not like what they heard. Even so, they had to admit Fergus's words were correct.

They were at war, and completing the Blood Ancestor's mission should be their most important concern.

"Kill him!" Fergus barked, feeling a bit of heartache.

The human's blood was extremely precious. Unfortunately, he could not monopolize it. The person was too much of a threat to be left alive.

...

During this time, Vaan had actually taken the chance to collect his spoils of war – Lucien's corpse. The corpse of a Half-step Divine Being was practically a priceless treasure to most people.

Furthermore, the royal vampire bloodline seemed to have a lot of potential. Thus, only a fool would leave it to rot.

Even if Vaan couldn't use it for himself, he could still study it for others.

That said, there was a good chance that it would be useful to him. After all, it was unknown how long the war against Abaddon's forces would last, and conserving his energy for Abaddon was neither ideal nor viable.

He had to find another way and use all available resources if he wanted to have a chance at overcoming his tribulation.

If Vaan had wanted to, he could have killed Lucien in a single blow. He only needed to obliterate Lucien's soul instead of destroying his body over and over again.

However, if he had done so, he wouldn't have gotten to study Lucien's blood powers.

Bang, bang, bang!

Several volleys of blood spears bombarded Vaan's location relentlessly with the intent of impaling him to death. However, not a single blood spear hit its intended target.

Vaan was like a slippery snake; he effortlessly weaved through the volleys of blood spears without even glancing at them. Furthermore, he evaded them with minimal movements, as if he predicted where each shot would land ahead of time, and moved his body accordingly.

Although he made it look easy, it wasn't something that others could replicate. Predicting the trajectory of so many targets within such little time was something only Vaan could do.

His Fourth-Dimensional Sense was such a near-omniscient ability.

"Stop! Stop attacking! What the hell are you all doing?! Why are you only using range attacks and so recklessly?!" Fergus barked at his fellow high-ranking vampires with strong criticism.

There wouldn't be any blood left to savage if they skewered their target into a porcupine.

Furthermore, they had fired so many blood spears that they kicked up a storm of dust and soil, obscuring their target from view. Even their Blood Sense failed to detect their target in the dust cloud; it was like trying to look for a moving corpse without a heartbeat.

"Did fear make you forget all your abilities?" Fergus scolded his peers.

However, the high-ranking vampires couldn't be blamed for being afraid. After all, they had all seen Lucien's helplessness and despair.

If the third strongest vampire in their Night Parade could be reduced to such a state, who in their right mind would dare to engage in close combat with the enemy?

Even if some wanted to, they couldn't—not while others were bombarding the area with their blood spears.

Nevertheless, as the dust settled, Fergus and his peers stared at the beehive-like state of the ground with focus.

Their minds suddenly went blank.

Not only was their target missing, but even all the blood spears they had fired were also missing. There wasn't a single drop of blood within sight, and even their connection to this portion of their blood couldn't be sensed.

It was as if all their blood spears had disappeared from existence.

'Where did the blood go?' – Everyone had the same thought.

However, they didn't have time to dwell on their missing blood as they had bigger worries.

Their sixty-sixth-rank member, the weakest of them all, was soon found dead in the human's grasp without any hopes of reviving, silently and so suddenly.

His proud immortality did not save him from the clutches of death.

"I'm... actually trembling?"

Chapter 706: Failed Command

=====

«Soul»

Soul Trait: Dragon

Soul Cultivation Method: N/A

Cultivation Level: Peak Demigod Rank

Soul Strength: 6400

...

«Law»

Law Comprehension Method: N/A

«High Comprehension»

Fire Law: 7.5%

Space Law: 12.4%

Nihilism Law: 5.1%

Wind Law: 5.5%

Water Law: 5.4%

«Low Comprehension»

Earth Law: 0.97%

Death Law: 0.99%

Life Law: 0.99%

Infernal Law: ???

...

«Authority»

Fire Authority: Semi Divine-rank

Space Authority: Second-stage Divine-rank

Nihilism Authority: Peak Demigod-rank

Wind Authority: Peak Demigod-rank

Water Authority: Peak Demigod-rank

=====

Without a doubt, absorbing the second soul fragment had raised Vaan's abilities substantially.

Even killing a Peak Demigod-rank vampire was as easy as turning over his hand. All he did was introduce a wisp of nihilism into the vampire's mind, and the vampire would turn into a soulless corpse—one that was perfectly preserved for later study.

It would be strange if the other vampires didn't tremble in fear after seeing death claim one of their kind so easily.

Anyone would fear the unknown.

Nevertheless, Vaan had to admit that the Nihilism Law was undoubtedly the most tyrannical law in the universe. At the most basic level, it could convert all matter into its most primal and purest form of energy. At higher levels, it would destroy all forms of existence.

However, in the memories of Varuna's life, Vaan had also learned that the nothingness outside of Chaos was not truly 'nothingness.'

At the very least, it existed as something else to fourth-dimensional beings.

...

After Fergus and the other high-ranking vampires discovered Ulfred's corpse in Vaan's grasp, they witnessed Vaan tossing the vampire corpse into his private space.

In that instant, they immediately understood where all their blood spears went – they had all been pocketed by Vaan like they were some rare treasures or something.

In all their years of living, they had never encountered a situation where their enemy would loot their blood in the middle of battle. It was like rich men had walked into a dirty alley to fight with poor beggars – while they were trying to beat them, the other party was only thinking about how to rob them.

Fergus and several other high-ranking vampires overcame their fear as they wanted to cough up blood from anger.

However, when they thought they might also lose such blood, they forcefully rein in their anger.

"Mother fucker has been taking our blood! Who the hell even does that?!" an indignant royal-class vampire cursed without any regard for his image.

"Well, apparently, this human does..." Deidre replied with a dumb look, seemingly still unable to accept the situation. "And he seems especially interested in our blood."

Just a while ago, they were all harping over making the human their blood slave due to their interest in his blood. However, the human seemed to be even more interested in their blood.

Moreover, they weren't the hunters they thought they were; they were the prey.

Such a strange turn of events.

"Since you all know he likes to collect our blood, stop shooting them at him so recklessly like blind fools. You're just wasting your magic and blood energy," Fergus strictly scolded.

Shortly after, Fergus summoned a blood sword and equipped a sturdy crimson armor made of blood, which quickly turned pitch-black like it was wrapped in shadow power.

At the same time, endless darkness suddenly poured out from Fergus's shadow and covered a wide region.

Shadow Domain, expand!

Within Fergus's Shadow Domain, he could instantly sense the movement and location of all shadows. At the same time, he could freely summon shadow puppets and swap places with them.

Fergus was prepared to fight Vaan seriously.

Although he wished to use other vampires to gauge the extent of Vaan's abilities first, he couldn't afford any more losses. Every death of a member of the Night Parade reflected poorly on his ability to lead.

As the strongest and leading vampire in the Night Parade, he would surely bear the full weight of the Blood Ancestor's wrath if the losses made him unhappy.

"Be careful, he is coming!"

Fergus alerted the moment Vaan used spatial shift to target another weak-looking member of the Night Parade.

Swish!

Just as Vaan's palm was about to reach the back of a vampire's head, Fergus traded place with an incomplete shadow puppet that barely appeared beside Vaan. He instantly hacked down at Vaan's arm, intending to slice it off in a single clean motion.

However, Vaan reacted quickly and caught Fergus's sword with his bare hands. The two forces collided, and the ground rumbled.

Surprise and disappointment instantly colored Fergus's eyes. He didn't expect Vaan to catch his full-powered swing at such an awkward angle and with only three fingers, no less!

What the actual fuck!

How in the world did he train his fingers to be so powerful?!

Nevertheless, Fergus managed to achieve his initial purpose of saving his kin's life from Vaan's deathly hands.

"T-Thank you, Lord Fergus!" the sixty-second-rank Noble Vampire, Heskell, turned around in fright and realization.

"If you really want to thank me, then hurry up and get lost if you are not going to help me!" Fergus cursed, kicking Hesel away. He instantly retreated with Shadow Puppet Displacement right after.

Crack...

Right after retreating to safety, Fergus immediately noticed a few finger-sized chips on his blood sword. Furthermore, the chips were spreading under some unknown corrosive power.

Half a breath later, his blood sword actually snapped in half!

"What!"

Fergus was instantly shocked and fearful at the same time. He couldn't imagine what fate would have befallen him if he had lingered around Vaan for a bit longer.

The unknown corrosive power was precisely Vaan's nihilistic power, which he wrapped around his hand to protect it from Fergus's blood sword.

"Be careful! This human wields a strange yet very destructive power! Even if you are immortal, you will still die if it hits you!" Fergus quickly warned his peers while faintly guessing it was the same power that killed their kind.

Around this time, the large shadows of Vampiric Demon Bats could be seen flocking over in the distance.

The Seventh-rank Duradel immediately thought of using his [Bat Command].

"Everyone, focus! I'm going to limit his movements with the bats! If you see an opening, immediately strike him down!"

"..."

Seventh-rank Duradel transmitted his will to the bats. At the same time, he waved his hand down at Vaan, but what followed was absolute silence. His face quickly flushed with confusion and shame.

For some reason, the silence was especially loud.

After looking back, Seventh-rank Duradel noticed the Vampiric Demon Bats didn't follow his command at all.

"W-What? Why?"

Seventh-rank Duradel didn't understand why the bats weren't listening to him. In fact, they even seem to think he was stupid.

Chapter 707: Blood Lust

Seventh-rank Duradel suddenly thought he had lost his ability to command low-ranking bats. His ability would only fail if his command conflicted with the command of another person with the same ability of equal rank or higher.

However, it was unlikely for a human to have the [Bat Command] ability. Thus, Seventh-rank Duradel was completely confused.

"Watch out!"

A sudden warning quickly snapped Seventh-rank Duradel back to reality. He found himself just inches away from dying to Vaan's soul-perishing hand and was horrified.

Fortunately, he was saved by Lord Fergus in time.

"Do not get distracted over every little issue! I won't be there to save you every time!" Fergus roared.

Seventh-rank Duradel wanted to roll his eyes on the spot, wanting to scream, 'How is this a little issue?! This is a big issue!'

Fergus exerted all his strength to push Vaan back with his new blood sword.

However, such strenuous exertion only resulted in the hastened destruction of his new blood sword. The power of nothingness reduced all things from existence – the new blood sword was no exception, no matter how powerful it was.

The blade's surface, which came in contact with the concentrated force of Vaan's Nihilicity Law, disintegrated into nothingness directly. The less exposed areas to the Nihilicity Law turned into blood-crystal dust.

But some pure mana and blood energy particles were also among the piles of blood-crystal dust.

'So this is the power of nothingness, huh?' Vaan mused as he noted the results of the forceful clash.

The Nihilicity Law he wielded wasn't just a weapon of absolute destruction. It was also the most powerful grinding stone. With it, he would never lack energy. He just had to learn to control the right amount of nihilistic power.

Originally, he was still figuring out how he could make use of the vampire blood essence he collected. However, the issue had resolved itself with that last clash. As it turned out, the answer had always been with him.

Although vampire blood essence was full of blood power, which could be used to replenish blood energy, enhance healing, and reduce fatigue, it was also completely toxic.

As such, Vaan couldn't simply consume vampire blood essence in its raw state to enjoy its benefits. Even if the blood toxicity couldn't threaten him due to the system, it would still conflict with his body, resulting in loss of energy and, subsequently, minimal absorption and benefits.

However, the Nihilicity Law could remove the toxicity and turn the vampire blood essence into a miraculous elixir for recovery – something Vaan could use in a prolonged war.

Meanwhile, Fergus was aghast by the sight.

The new blood sword was created with mana and blood magic, but the blood produced through blood magic wasn't the same as the blood of vampires or any other living beings. It only had some blood energy and not the vital power of life.

However, Fergus was aware that if Vaan could decompose the blood of blood magic into raw energy, then he could also do the same for the blood essence of vampires.

Vampires were immortal-like beings with tenacious life force, strength, and stamina due to their ability to replenish their energy with the blood of other living beings.

They feed on the blood of other life forms to exist, but what if someone could feed on them?

They would no longer be at the top of the food chain.

'This person must die!' Fergus instinctively thought.

Shortly after Fergus used [Shadow Puppet Displacement] to retreat, he shouted, "Do not hold back anymore. Use all your power to destroy this human! He is too dangerous to be left alive!"

"Even if we have to die, we have to kill him at all costs! If we let him grow, he will threaten the Blood Ancestor!" Fergus stressed.

"Threaten the Blood Ancestor? There's no way that's possible..."

Eighth-rank Faine wanted to believe Fergus was joking with exaggeration. But when she saw his expression, she knew he was completely serious.

Furthermore, Fergus followed up on his words by activating [Blood Lust].

The [Blood Lust] ability granted vampires explosive power beyond their normal limits by burning their blood essence and putting them into a bloodthirsty, berserk state. It wasn't easy to maintain their reason under such a state.

[Blood Lust] was powerful, but its side effects were also severe.

Nevertheless, since Fergus was willing to use [Blood Lust], the other high-ranking vampires had no choice but to follow.

"Tch!" Eighth-rank Faine clicked her tongue.

Blood Lust!

Eighth-rank Faine and two dozen other members of the Night Parade activated their [Blood Lust] ability at once.

In that instant, their crimson eyes glimmered with intensity, their veins protruded, and their flawless skin dried. Their pale bodies seemingly came to life as their blood burned scorching hot.

Vaan's blood was already irresistibly temptatious to the vampires. Thus, after they lost a portion of their reasoning due to [Blood Lust], they failed to suppress their desire to feast.

"Blood! Delicious human blood! It's mine! All mine!"

The sixty-first-rank vampire completely lost control and lunged at Vaan with crazed hunger, exposing his sharp fangs and outstretched nails that could easily tear into tender human flesh.

"Fool!" Fergus cursed.

He knew he couldn't stop another vampire in the Night Parade from dying. Thus, he was prepared to use the vampire's impending death to his advantage and deal Vaan a severe or killing blow.

Without any surprise, Vaan split the sixty-first-rank vampire in half with a clean downward chop after it attacked him head-on.

It did not matter how sturdy the vampire's magical defense was nor how sharp his claws were – In front of Vaan's downward chop, everything had to give way. With his hand covered in nihilistic power, it became the sharpest of knives.

As the sixty-first-rank vampire split apart under Vaan's chop, several other vampires came within two meters of him with their attacks. Even Fergus appeared behind Vaan with a vicious glint, preparing to puncture his heart with a clean stab.

Vaan only made one attack but was immediately besieged on all sides. Even he would feel something from all the blood lust and killing intent directed at him under such a dangerous situation.

However, he had no opening.

Boom!

The tyrannical power of the Nihilism Law erupted from Vaan's body, surging out in all directions toward the incoming vampires, causing their expression to change instantly.

Chapter 708: Backfired

"Fall back—!!!"

Fergus roared in horror as he overdrew his strength to cancel his attack and retreat at his quickest speed.

However, the forceful change in movements was more than his body could handle. As a result, his muscles were torn, and his bones creaked. Despite the self-inflicted injuries, he managed to keep his life at least.

Shadow Puppet Displacement!

Fergus traded places with one of his many shadow puppets and escaped to safety in the nick of time.

Nevertheless, he had never been so close to death that his body still felt the lingering fear. Such an unpleasant feeling was no different from getting kissed by Thanatos; it was a horrifying experience no one would ever forget.

Meanwhile, several frenzied vampires were not so lucky and collided with Vaan's surging power of nothingness head-on. Their bodies scattered into nothingness almost instantly, leaving nothing behind.

The more fortunate ones retreated with a missing arm or leg.

Undoubtedly, Vaan's Nihilism Law was overpowered to the extreme. However, such reckless usage did not come without a price. The consumption of mental strength was not to Vaan's desired level of efficiency.

After all, the Nihilism Law destroyed space itself before erasing Vaan's enemies, and such destruction consumed his mental strength to maintain the same level of nihilistic power.

Furthermore, with the complete destruction of the vampires' corpses, how could he collect any blood essence?

His only compensation was the pure primal energy created from the destruction of the ground, albeit only a small portion of its potential amount. The nihilistic power was too strong and erased much of the ground from existence, bypassing the energy conversion.

The sheer destruction from the nihilistic power outburst also caused the space to become unstable, hastening the spread of Gehenna's domain.

Vaan's eyes flashed with insight as he refrained from using the Nihilism Law. He had, more or less, finished testing the Nihilism Law and weighed its advantages and disadvantages.

It wasn't the sort of power he should abuse, at least not with the current situation.

'In Varuna's life, I reached the peak of Wind Law and Water Law. So, there's no point in focusing on these two laws. My comprehension of them will gradually return as I recover more memories of Varuna's life,' Vaan mused.

On the other hand, he felt the Spatial Law and Fire Law deserved his attention and focus.

Although he had reached a high level of understanding of the spatial law in Vanitas's life, he fell short before reaching the peak. Thus, there was still room to grow there.

Meanwhile, the Fire Law was the opportunity and destiny of his current life – Vaan's life. As such, he couldn't ignore it.

Vaan encountered countless destinies and inherited different talents in each reincarnation and past life. But of the millions of reincarnations, only Vanatis and his current life stood out, ignoring that he had only seen half of his reincarnations.

Even so, the Spatial Law and Fire Law were undoubtedly intertwined with his current destiny. They could also be the answers Varuna sought to break free from his supposed 'limited talent.'

'Varuna's death in the fourth-dimensional world was not a tragedy but an opportunity,' Vaan strongly believed.

If he could take the Spatial Law and Fire Law to the peak, he would have achieved peak comprehension of four laws in his cumulative lifetime.

Furthermore, once he reached that step, he might have a good chance of achieving a greater height – one that Varuna pursued but failed to achieve.

Of course, that was also the only clear and logical path Vaan could follow.

He was not so arrogant that he believed he could surpass Varuna's accomplishments in the Wind Law and Water Law before reaching the same height of power. Even with Fourth Dimensional Sense, it was a foolish thought.

After all, he was not even Divine yet.

...

"Duradel, what's going on with you? Did fear make you forget how to use [Bat Command]?" Seventeenth-rank Gregory chose to taunt Duradel to hide his own weakness.

"Nonsense! There's no problem with my control over [Bat Command]! If there were a problem, it would have to do with the bats or that strange human!" Duradel furiously replied before urging Gregory, "If you are so confident in your own [Bat Command], why don't you try using it against him? Hmph!"

"Hahaha, just watch me, Duradel! I will make you acknowledge your ability is inferior to mine!" Gregory said, seemingly trying to convince himself.

They already knew engaging the enemy in close combat was too dangerous. Despite that, many vampires still chose to do so after using [Blood Lust].

Now that some vampires died, how could he still have the guts to do so?

Gregory would rather resolve the bat issue and then use the army of bats to exhaust the enemy.

That was the safest approach!

The Blood Ancestor's will was important but never as important as his own life. He hasn't lived long enough yet.

"Hear me, Lesser Servants of Darkness, and answer my call! I, Lord Gregory, command you to attack that human!" Gregory demanded with grandeur, brimming with confidence.

Unfortunately, the army of Vampiric Demon Bats didn't listen to him. At most, they just spared him disdainful glances.

"..."

The shame made Gregory want to dig a hole and hide himself on the spot. It was killing him.

He finally understood how Duradel felt.

Nevertheless, he had already ridden the tiger and couldn't back down. He could only press forward stubbornly.

In a battle between two vampires with [Bat Command], the one with the stronger will would assume command of the bats. But when he used [Bat Command] on the bats, he did not feel the clash of another will.

Instead, it seemed to be the wills of the bats themselves who were resisting his command.

How could such lesser creatures of darkness refuse and embarrass him? Were they trying to rebel?!

"Did you not hear me?! I command you to attack!" Gregory roared, exerting [Bat Command] to the fullest extent.

In the sky, the army of bats started bleeding from their red eyes as they resisted the powerful will flooding into their minds. Insignificant as they were, they couldn't follow an impossible command despite their inability to resist the powerful will.

In the end, the bats all went mad.

Screech!

Following the bats' frenzied screams, the army of bats descended upon the surface, attacking every vampire with the ability to lord over them.

"Who do you think you are attacking?! Ah, these lesser creatures have gone mad! How dare you rebel against me! Go to hell!" Gregory retaliated, killing the bats in his fury.

"Argh! Gregory, you blood fool!" an enraged roar resounded as Fergus scolded furiously, "Not only are you not helping us, but you are also hindering us! Just what the hell did you do to the bats?! Why are they attacking us!?"

"You're asking me, but who do I ask, Fergus? I would also like to know!" Gregory cried, feeling wronged as the bats dived him without any regard for their lives. "Argh, you pests! Piss off for me!"

The group of high-ranking vampires was quickly drowned in rage and frustration.

Although the bats couldn't threaten them, they were certainly a nuisance with their numbers.

Meanwhile, Vaan didn't miss the opportunity.

Amidst the chaos plaguing the high-ranking vampires, Vaan slipped through the void, appearing behind the vampires and extinguishing their souls with his deathly grip.

Chapter 709: Henrietta's Scheme

Black Rose Kingdom, Blackthorn City

Inside the palatial magic tower, Henrietta and Victoria silently enjoyed tea as they sat opposite each other. Victoria didn't think much of it as she believed Henrietta was such a quiet person in her spare time.

After all, the life of a ruler was a lonely one.

However, little did she know that Henrietta didn't want to talk because she felt uncomfortable facing Victoria, who was both her friend and her grandmother-in-law.

"Aren't you a little too free, Victoria? You've completely made yourself at home here. There should be other things you need to do, no?" Henrietta gradually broke the silence.

"Hehe, I do, but they are not so important that I can't postpone them to another time," Victoria smiled and said, "More importantly, it's been so long since we last met. We ought to catch up, no?"

"Furthermore, if I leave to do other things, what happens if I miss my grandson again? Or do you not welcome me anymore, Your Majesty?" Victoria asked shortly after.

Henrietta's expression fell for a moment before her eyes suddenly flashed with surprise as she received Chaezi's report via sound transmission magic.

Astonishment and shock quickly colored her face, subsequently surprising Victoria.

"What's the matter?" Victoria inquired.

Henrietta was silent for a moment as she absorbed Chaezi's information. After some time, she took a deep breath and sighed.

"A Devil's Contractor sacrificed around two million lives to summon an enormous blood portal connecting Pangea and Gehenna, and now the Great Ratholos Empire's capital city is getting swarmed by vampires."

Crack!

Victoria's teacup dropped to the ground and shattered into countless fragments, but Victoria didn't seem to notice as she stared at Henrietta with disbelief and doubt.

"You're joking..." Victoria forced a smile.

"I'm not kidding." Henrietta shook her head and added, "A red dragon just informed on your grandson's behalf, so it must be true. Furthermore, he asked me to prepare troops for spatial deployment—"

"I'm going!" Victoria strongly asserted, jumping straight to her feet.

After listening to Henrietta's news, she was so excited and concerned to meet her grandson that she did notice Henrietta's choice of words.

If Victoria had noticed Henrietta used 'ask' instead of 'request,' then she would have suspected their relationship.

Nevertheless, Henrietta was a little taken aback by Victoria's eagerness.

"You're going?" Henrietta flashed her a side eye and said, "You're not even a part of this kingdom's military. Heck, you're not even a part of this kingdom. If you want to go, no one will stop you. But you can only go by yourself. Don't cause trouble for my military."

"You want me to go alone to a place experiencing a huge vampire outbreak? Are you kidding me? Are you asking me to die?" Victoria glanced back at Henrietta incredulously before mentioning weakly, "Haven't I already decided that my family will move and settle down in this kingdom?"

"More importantly, what do you mean by making trouble for your military? If anything, they'll need my leadership and abilities. I believe I am qualified to lead your military," Victoria confidently stated.

However, Henrietta smiled slyly and said, "If you want to join my military, I can only let you start from the middle ranks at best. Even if you are my friend, I can't give you special privileges."

If Victoria joined the Black Rose Kingdom's military, she would become Henrietta's subordinate. If that happened, Henrietta wouldn't feel embarrassed once her secret was exposed.

After all, it was normal for rulers to marry some offspring of high-ranking officials or trusted retainers to ensure their loyalty.

However, Victoria's eyes twitched when she heard Henrietta's condition.

How could she accept that?

"My good sister, I am a rare spatial-attribute High Witch with hundreds of years of leading a great family. I possess both the skills and qualities of a leader. Will you really give someone overqualified like me a middle position if I join your military?" Victoria complained.

"Sister, please," Henrietta glanced at Victoria, seemingly helpless yet playfully, as she said, "A spatial-attribute High Witch is not that special these days."

"We have over twenty thousand High Witches in the military and dragon assistance for spatial deployment. In terms of magic, I believe the dragons are also unrivaled. So, while I have to admit that your qualities are desirable for the military, you are only an addition and not an absolute necessity."

"Giving you a middle position in the military is already very generous of me. That aside, you said you were overqualified. So, you shouldn't have any problem rising up the ranks quickly, right?" Henrietta grinned.

Victoria pointed at Henrietta with a trembling finger but couldn't find any words to refute her. Henrietta's words were very logical from the standpoint of a ruler.

"I did hear there was a big increase in High Witches, but to think it was actually true... Since when were High Witches so easy to become?" Victoria's lips twitched.

"Why don't you ask your grandson that question when you see him?" Henrietta replied, casually mentioning, "I heard he used a very special method to raise High Witches."

"Special method? What kind of special method?" Victoria wondered.

She suddenly thought of dual practice, and she couldn't help but feel weak and spooked with goosebumps at the same time.

How much stamina did her grandson need to have to raise so many High Witches through such a 'special' method?

Surely, that was not the case, right...?

"I don't know," Henrietta nonchalantly shrugged before giving Victoria another glance. "So? What will you do?"

"Fine..."

"Hm?"

"I'll do it!" Victoria gritted her teeth and said, "I don't care about the position anymore, so just let me join and go see my grandson. It's too dangerous for me to go by myself."

"Alright, it's settled then," Henrietta happily agreed as she clapped her hands together.

Victoria suddenly felt like she had fallen for Henrietta's scheme as her expression soured with somberness.

Unfortunately, she had already given her word, so she could only go along with it and slowly find out later.

After all, where would her face be if she took back her words and changed her mind just like that?

Chapter 710: Astoria's Headache

Holy Knight Empire, Holy Capital

Under Astoria's rule and the notes Vaan left behind, the Holy Knight Empire shed its former shell and was reborn anew. Although problems never ceased to exist, they were trivial compared to the future framework that had been established.

Under the new laws, discrimination against witches was met with strict punishment, just as witches committing crimes wouldn't be tolerated lightly. Regardless of sex, men and women were given equal rights and opportunities for education, resources, and jobs.

However, the countless years of oppression and discrimination against witches had left behind scars that weren't so easily removed.

In order to hasten the order of equal rights and balance in the country, most resources were allocated to witch sanctuaries, where witches were given extra care, trauma treatments, and assistance in searching their paths.

However, these witch sanctuaries were not much different from orphanages, as most witches were young girls with pure, untainted minds and spirited wills.

The older witches had long been brainwashed and broken by the empire's old system. As such, they didn't know how to think for themselves and could only continue to serve their masters as servants and slaves.

Nevertheless, the excessive investment in witch sanctuaries had given rise to many concerns from old nobles. They believed the hatred born from the difference in status and treatment couldn't be resolved with such simple care. Instead, it only gave the witches chances to grow and stab back at men for the past.

Astoria had also noted such concerns and acknowledged their possibilities. As such, as part of the education within the witch sanctuaries, the young witches were taught about the legendary feats of their savior – Vahn Cadieux, a man.

The witches were oppressed by men but were also saved by a man.

Astoria believed that by giving all the credit to Vaan, which was also the complete truth, the witches would learn to forget their grudges against men. Alas, other problems arose from such a choice.

Or rather, Astoria's biggest mistake was allowing Eniwse to be a part-time teacher at the witch sanctuaries. Eniwse was the leader of the Shadow Witch Order, and most of their new members were precisely recruited from these very witch sanctuaries.

However, Astoria's biggest headache wasn't Eniwse's blatant poaching of talents but the content of her lessons – she had practically turned all her students into cult members with strange obsessions and blind worship for the one who granted them salvation.

Vahnmaniacs...

It was the name of the fan group—or rather, the cult founded the young witches at the witch sanctuaries. Conflicts would always arise on the streets of the holy city every time their members heard words of disagreement or blasphemy against their savior.

However, that wasn't even the worst of it.

Ever since the Holy Knight Empire opened its borders and started trading with the Black Rose Kingdom, another fanatical group of witches would clash with the Vahnmaniacs every time they visited.

As Astoria sat in her chair, rubbing her temples, an official arrived with a knock outside her study room.

"Your Majesty, there's a civil dispute in the main square," the official messenger reported.

Astoria helplessly sighed before asking with a look of fatigue, "Are the Vaanatics and Vahnmaniacs engaging in their verbal war again?"

"... Yes," the official messenger answered honestly.

"I understand," Astoria acknowledged before gesturing the messenger to leave, "You're dismissed."

"Understood, Your Majesty," the official messenger complied.

Shortly after the official messenger left, silence returned to Astoria's study room. But a few moments later, the sound of eating grapes was heard.

Eniwse chewed on a piece of grape she plucked from the table as she lazed on a couch, casually reading a long list of names with high witch potential.

Astoria glanced at Eniwse and said, "You heard the messenger. Can't you do something to stop the Vaanatics and Vahnmaniacs from clashing?"

"And why should I stop them? It's not like they are killing anyone or destroying stuff. They are only arguing... I don't see the issue," Eniwse casually replied.

Astoria forced a smile while reining in her annoyance and said, "You don't see the issue? They are a public nuisance! They crowd the market, disturb store owners, and obstruct businesses!"

"The letters of complaints I receive each time they clash numbers more than several hundred each day!" Astoria said with frustration.

"That's not my problem, Headmaster Astoria," Eniwse laughed, shirking her hands of the matter before saying, "Complaints are just complaints. Besides, verbal clashes between the Vaanatics and Vahnmaniacs aren't entirely bad."

"They are basically spreading Vaan's tales and feats to the anti-Vaan and anti-witch factions in hiding. They are forced to listen even if they don't want to. Perhaps some of them will start getting swayed by the heated opinions and change their views."

"Something like that could be compared to passive brainwashing, don't you think? What seems like a problem now could be the key to avoiding bigger problems in the future," Eniwse casually asked.

"Ugh..." Astoria groaned before saying, "I understand your point and see the logic, but can't you think of my position a little? Why do you have to create problems for me? Like, seriously... Vahnmaniacs? You were meant to keep Lady Aeliana in check, not join her!"

"I didn't come up with that name," Eniwse chuckled with amusement before shortly shaking her head.

"I admit I'm at fault for the founding of the Vahnmaniacs. However, the Vahnmaniacs are exactly the kind of witches I need in my current line of work. Only this group of devoted witches will remain loyal to Vaan and the Shadow Witch Order and complete their tasks at all costs or die trying. They will never sell our information to the enemy."

"I know you are really busy right now, but so am I. We are all busy people, doing what we can for the man we love. At the very least, I believe you are having it easier than me, Headmaster Astoria."

"After I get the people I need, I have to go back to focusing on the southern expansion," Eniwse said with a sigh.

Hearing about the southern expansion, Astoria became serious as she inquired, "How's the situation in Divine Sword City?"