

The Witch 81

Chapter 81: High Witches

Somewhere in the airspace above the clouds between Red Goblin Mountains and the Blackmoon Region, a black magic airship sailed through the sky.

Blue particles of mana were crazily swallowed by two spherical magic engines that transformed the blue mana into thrusting power and levitation, allowing the black magic airship to travel at great speed and high altitudes.

At the front of the open deck, two beautiful women stood side by side while looking ahead calmly without being bashed by the powerful winds. Even their hair did not flutter.

It was as if an air bubble protected the deck from the powerful wind pressure that hammered against the black magic airship.

The beautiful woman on the left had jade-like fair skin, blue eyes like the clear blue skies, and long silky blonde hair lace-braided into a bun at the back but left loose at the front. She wore a simple blue and white renaissance dress with protective silver-white armor plating attached and held a silver greatsword that was almost as long as her height and wide as half her waist.

Although the beautiful woman looked like a holy knight, the powerful aura of mana exuding from her body spoke otherwise.

On the woman's right, the other beautiful woman did not lose out to her in terms of aura. Both of them were High Witches, existences that were very few in the whole Kingdom of Black Rose.

Nevertheless, the second woman had short red hair, red eyes, a fair complexion, and wore a dark-red renaissance dress.

The second woman did not carry a weapon with her.

"Although a few idiots made the Wyvern-type Abomination flee from Red Goblin Mountains, we could have still caught up to it before it could get the chance to enter Thousand Fog Mountains—if we had pursued it at full throttle. I did you a big favor by leaving it be, Headmaster Astoria," said the woman with red eyes, possessing a mischievous yet energetic voice.

"And for that, I am grateful, Marquis Ember," replied the beautiful woman with clear blue eyes and a soothing voice.

"On another note, I am using one of the kingdom's top-quality magic airships to give you a lift back to Blackmoon City. That's another favor, don't you think so, Headmaster Astoria," Ember Killian continued to speak playfully with a smile.

Astoria Braveheart giggled soothingly with one hand over her hand mouth.

"Are you trying to take advantage of me, Marquis Ember? Going after the Wyvern-type Abomination was just your secondary objective. Investigating Lord Istana and the events in the Blackmoon Region is your primary objective, no?" Astoria Braveheart replied calmly.

Ember Killian smiled and didn't respond further as she focused her gaze on the area ahead.

Meanwhile, a group of Aura Masters and Senior Witches watched the two peerless figures from the back of the deck with awe, fear, and worship.

It was rare to meet a single High Witch, let alone two High Witches in the same place at once.

Nevertheless, they had the honor of meeting both High Witches as they accompanied their Grand Inquisitor, Marquis Ember Killian, on her inquisition trip.

"Our Grand Inquisitor, Marquis Ember Killian, the High Witch of Purgatory Flame, and Headmaster Astoria Braveheart, the Battle Maiden of Holy Light... Just seeing these two together makes me strangely excited," an Aura Master whispered with his eyes glued to the front of the deck.

"That aside, the situation must be quite serious in Blackmoon City for Her Majesty to summon a Marquis-rank Inquisitor to investigate. I wonder what happened, though," another Aura Master spoke quietly.

"We'll know once we follow our Grand Inquisitor to investigate."

"Right."

That being said, some of the Aura Master felt a little reluctant to reach Blackmoon City.

Once they reach Blackmoon City, they won't get to see Headmaster Astoria as they have to follow their Grand Inquisitor, Marquis Killian.

The Grand Inquisitor may seem approachable and playful, but she could be excessively cruel and mad once rubbed the wrong way.

All her enemies had suffered the inexplicable torment of burning to death.

On the contrary, Headmaster Astoria was friendly and pure. Just listening to her gentle and soothing voice was enough to invigorate their spirits and liven their moods. With her Specialized Light Magic, Headmaster Astoria was like a saintess.

This was the difference between an executioner and a protector. And yet strangely, the two got along just fine.

...

Sometime later, the magic airship arrived in Blackmoon City, drawing the attention of countless residents miles before it even arrived.

Whether it was the City Lord of Blackmoon City or people from Blackmoon Academy of Witchcraft, everyone expected the arrival of an Inquisitor and the return of Headmaster Astoria.

As the magic airship descended from the sky, it parked neither in the open courtyard of Lord Istana's castle nor the flat field in the Blackmoon Academy.

The magic airship landed on a designated landing platform specifically designed to receive magic airships. It allowed people to conveniently board and disembark from magic airships, especially if they carried large cargos.

"Looks like we will have to part ways here, Headmaster Astoria. Let us grab a drink together later after we settled our businesses."

"Of course, Marquis Ember. Since this is my hometown, the drinks will be on me."

After High Witch of Purgatory Flame and the Battle Maiden of Holy Light bid their temporary farewells, they went their separate ways.

Swoosh!

With a powerful step, Astoria Braveheart lunged in the direction of Blackmoon Academy while carrying her huge greatsword, flickering past numerous buildings and streets in a short instance.

Astoria Braveheart completely showcased the physical prowess of her slender body, which didn't lose out to Rank 4 Aura Lords.

Within a short time, Astoria Braveheart reached the entrance of Blackmoon Academy, where a row of Senior Witches and many more students and servants behind them lined up in waiting to welcome her.

"Welcome back, Headmaster Astoria!" the people of Blackmoon Academy's greeting resounded throughout the area with great vigor and joy.

Astoria Braveheart acknowledged everyone with a nod and strolled up to Senior Elaine and Senior Gwena at the front.

The mood quickly turned heavy as she felt the concern and sorrow in the two Senior Witches.

"Let us talk in the office."

"Yes, Headmaster!"

Chapter 82: Astoria's Arrangement

Inside the headmaster's office, Astoria Braveheart placed down her huge silver greatsword that seemingly weighed like feathers in her hand before it caused a heavy thud.

Then, with her back towards Senior Elaine and Senior Gwena, Astoria Braveheart looked up at a painting of Blackmoon Academy on the wall with a sentimental look.

Along the way to her office, Astoria Braveheart had seen the collapsed building of the library that was still in the process of rebuilding.

"So Wise Scholar Eniwse turned into the Wyvern-type Abomination..." Astoria Braveheart made a long sigh.

"I asked Marquis Ember not to slay her while we were on our way here, so Wise Scholar Eniwse was temporarily spared. However, Wise Scholar Eniwse headed straight for the Dark Zone, Thousand Fog Mountains, so her fate might not be any better."

"Thousand Fog Mountains...?" Senior Elaine and Senior Gwena were startled at first, but they sighed with relief the next moment.

Thousand Fog Mountains might be dangerous to most people due to its unpredictable terrain and weather, not to mention threats from unknown creatures that dwell within the territory.

However, Wise Scholar Eniwse had become a Wyvern-type Abomination almost comparable to High Witches and Aura Lords.

Escaping into Thousand Fog Mountains at least gave Wise Scholar Eniwse a chance of survival, even if she was destined to live as an abomination for the rest of her life.

On the other hand, being hunted by a High Witch bent on killing her was inevitable death.

"It's great that Wise Scholar Eniwse still has a chance to live her new life... But that makes me even more saddened by Servant Vaan's death. He didn't get that chance..." Senior Elaine woefully mentioned with a look of great loss.

"...Servant Vaan?" Astoria Braveheart turned around and looked at Senior Elaine with a raised brow. "Why are you mentioning Wise Scholar Eniwse's servant, Senior Elaine?"

"It was in the message we sent to you via the sound-transmission magic tool, Headmaster Astoria," Elaine stated.

"We mentioned the loss of a peerless genius who could have been the leading authority in the study of magic for the next two hundred years. However, the person we mentioned wasn't referring to Wise Scholar Eniwse, but her servant, Vaan Raphna."

"Please read through this notebook, Headmaster Astoria. It was found in the wreckage of the library. As Wise Scholar Eniwse's friend and peer, I am familiar with her handwriting. Thus, I can safely say this notebook didn't belong to her but Servant Vaan."

Elaine pulled out Vaan's notes from her Magic Domain and handed them to Astoria Braveheart to peruse.

After Astoria Braveheart accepted the notebook, she skimmed through the first few lines on the first page before it quickly grabbed her attention.

Astoria Braveheart immediately focused on reading through Servant Vaan's notes carefully.

"These magic theories and spells... They were all introduced by Wise Scholar Eniwse... It was what earned her the title of Wise Scholar. Her magic theories and spells were revolutionary in the study of magic... These were all invented by Servant Vaan?!"

Astoria Braveheart softly exclaimed with mixed feelings as she became more invested in reading through Vaan's notes. Eventually, she became completely absorbed, thoroughly fascinated by the contents as if she was peering into the truth of magic.

No, the notebook also contained Vaan's thoughts. As such, it was more like Astoria Braveheart was receiving a sermon from the person on the truth of magic.

At first, Astoria Braveheart expressed surprise, shock, and awe. But afterward, she showed anxiety, sorrow, loss, and fear—fear that the next page she turned would be the last.

Unknowingly, time passed, and before Astoria Braveheart realized it, she had already reached the end of the notebook.

A great sense of loss struck Astoria Braveheart as she blankly stared at the end of the notebook. After coming to terms with reality, she slowly but carefully placed the notebook down on her desk.

"Vaan Raphna... This servant—No, this young man wasn't just an unparalleled genius of matchless wisdom who could have been the led the advancement of magic for the next two hundred years... He could have been the hero the world needed to break the balance with the demons."

"Magic is still relatively new and full of unknown, but within one year... No, within less than a year, Vaan Raphna advanced the study of magic by fifty to a hundred years...! Who knew how much this person could have accomplished within the next hundred years, let alone two hundred years to come?"

Astoria Braveheart clasped her hand together to pray with a sorrowful look.

"Vaan Raphna's death wasn't just a loss for Blackmoon Academy or the Kingdom of Black Rose, but the whole world of witches and humans. The one responsible for his death has sinned against the human race and all academics across the seven kingdoms of witches..."

"However, I am not one to point fingers and hold the people responsible... All that I wish for right now is to pay my respects to the great man. I trust he was buried appropriately?"

"This..." Elaine revealed a sorrowful yet difficult expression.

"Vaan Raphna's body was thrown into the wasteyard before we found his notebook. By the time we realized and went to retrieve his body, someone had already incinerated his body and everything else within the wasteyard ahead of schedule..."

"I see..." Astoria Braveheart closed her eyes and shed a tear.

Senior Elaine and Gwena saw Astoria Braveheart shed tears for a stranger, but they didn't find it surprising.

Their headmaster wasn't just called the Battle Maiden of Holy Light for nothing. Her heart was pure and kinder than most.

Furthermore, Vaan Raphna's research made great contribution to the witch society, but they didn't even have a body to build a grave and honor him by.

It was just too sad.

After some time, Astoria Braveheart calmed down and asked, "What arrangements have you made for Vaan Raphna's notes, Senior Elaine?"

"None, Headmaster Astoria. We were waiting for you to return and make that decision," Elaine replied.

"In that case, please record all of the notebook's knowledge into a book that can be used for education," Astoria Braveheart requested and said, "The person is gone, but it will be selfish to keep such knowledge to ourselves."

"You can list your name as the publisher, but do remember to give just credits to the original author," Astoria Braveheart added.

"Of course, Headmaster Astoria. I am interested in the knowledge, but I still have my integrity and principles as an academic," Elaine swore before asking, "What should I call the book, Headmaster Astoria?"

After Astoria Braveheart paused to contemplate for a short moment, she replied, "Call it the Book of Solomon Raphna."

Chapter 83: Vaan's Immortalization

"S-Solomon Raphna??"

Senior Elaine and Gwena were shocked after hearing Astoria Braveheart's words.

"Are you sure about this decision, Headmaster Astoria? There will be a strong backlash of opposition and heavy criticism from other academics once we publish the book by this name," Elaine mentioned with concern before adding, "Furthermore, Her Majesty might disapprove of it."

"That's right, Headmaster Astoria. I agree that entitling Vaan Raphna as a Wise Scholar would not do him justice. However, the limit you can push for is Venerable Sage, which requires the recognition of six other headmasters of the High Witch rank and Her Majesty's approval," Gwena added.

"Solomon is pushing it too far, Headmaster Astoria. It won't be accepted no matter what."

"To entitle Solomon to Vaan Raphna, we don't just need the recognition of all headmasters of the High Witch rank across the seven witch kingdoms, but four out the seven Transcendent Witches have to approve on top of it," Elaine continued to argue reasonably.

"Solomon is the highest title a person can have in the world of academics. A person with the Solomon title isn't any less respected and authoritative than Transcendent Witches."

"Forget about there being no one worthy of being nominated for the Solomon title; even just nominating a man for any academic titles is something that hasn't been done before, Headmaster Astoria," Elaine mentioned.

"Just because it hasn't been done before doesn't mean that it shouldn't," Astoria Braveheart coolly stated.

Afterward, Astoria Braveheart glanced at the sky outside with a distant look and continued, "Just as you said, it is something that hasn't been done before. However, Vaan Raphna is also a man the world had never seen before. And in the future, a person like him may never appear again."

"With my authority as the headmaster of the Blackmoon Academy of Witchcraft, I can only grant the title Wise Scholar to Vaan Raphna. Granting anything higher would just be as you said. However, that doesn't stop us from naming the book as such."

"Even so, many witches will not view us favorably for using the title Solomon so lightly, Headmaster Astoria. They will lose all their respect." Elaine's brows scrunched together with worries.

"It doesn't matter. We can't let fear deter us from doing what is right," Astoria Braveheart said.

"We have read Vaan Raphna's notebook and benefitted from it, learned from it, and enlightened by it. It isn't farfetched to say that Vaan Raphna has become someone akin to a teacher to us. And when his knowledge spreads across the seven witch kingdoms, he will be considered the teacher of many witches."

"What I want to do is push forward an ideology. Witches may disapprove of the name, but they won't be able to deny the knowledge that the Book of Solomon Raphna will provide to them. If they have any integrity, they will acknowledge Vaan Raphna as their teacher and benefit from his knowledge."

"The name Solomon Raphna won't just be a mere name, but an officially recognized title granted to the person in time," Astoria Braveheart said.

After all, Vaan Raphna's knowledge will enlighten and guide countless witches in the next fifty years to come. He would be the great teacher of many witches.

Senior Elaine and Gwena quickly understood Astoria Braveheart's intention. She was trying to immortalize Vaan Raphna for his contribution to the study of magic.

Such a wise person had to be respected and remembered.

Astoria Braveheart shortly turned to Senior Gwena and politely said, "Can I entrust you with finding students in the academy who are familiar with Vaan Raphna, Gwena?"

"Of course, Headmaster Astoria," Gwena agreed before asking, "But may I ask why?"

"I want them to use Visualization Magic and create portraits of Vaan Raphna. I have learned much from Vaan Raphna—No, Teacher Raphna's notebook. As such, I want to hang one of his portraits in my office," Astoria Braveheart stated before she started pondering further.

"It's our negligence and fault that we did not uncover and recognize Teacher Raphna's unparalleled wisdom sooner despite living right under our noses. Hm... A portrait might not be enough for the future great teacher of witches."

"Maybe I should also find someone to erect a statue of Teacher Raphna in the academy's courtyard?" Astoria Braveheart wondered.

After Senior Elaine and Gwena heard that, their lips twitched.

"I understand you have a lot of respect for Vaan Raphna after reading through his notebook, but isn't this going overboard, Headmaster Astoria?" Gwena said bitterly.

To erect a statue of a man in the academy where new witches are trained and nurtured... It could be mistaken for a message to empower men and weaken the authority of witches.

"Hmm, I suppose you are right. We can't do statues," Astoria Braveheart nodded and said, "Just do the other thing I asked for, Gwena."

"Yes, Headmaster Astoria," Gwena nodded and left.

Shortly after, Astoria Braveheart turned to Senior Elaine and said, "After you finish compiling the Book of Solomon Raphna, please produce a copy for me, Elaine. I will personally make a trip and deliver it to Her Majesty."

"Understood, Headmaster Astoria," Elaine complied and left shortly after taking Vaan's notebook on the desk.

Once Senior Elaine and Gwena were gone, Astoria Braveheart sat down in her comfortable cushioned-wooden chair and rested with a sigh.

The peace and silence in Astoria Braveheart's room allowed her to think and reflect on everything she had learned.

"I am greatly saddened by Teacher Raphna's death before I could learn more from him... There's something wrong with the series of events leading to and after Teacher Raphna's death..." Astoria Braveheart thought.

Wise Scholar Eniwse's berserk transformation... Vaan's death... The wasteyard removal happening ahead of schedule... Isabelle Gleriath's assassination... And Lord Istana's inciting the Dark Hellhounds in the region...

"This seems like an elaborate scheme to remove Teacher Raphna's backing and eliminate him, followed by a clean-up of the evidence, which included silencing Isabelle Gleriath..."

Astoria Braveheart lined up the sequence of evidence and couldn't help but feel like demons were involved after realizing the potential threat Teacher Raphna posed.

"Is Istana Gleriath involved with demons? I should meet Marquis Ember. This information might help with her inquisition."

Chapter 84: Just Make Another One

...

Meanwhile, inside Lord Istana's castle, Ember Killian and her retinue of Senior Witches and Aura Masters arrived in the outer courtyard.

"Welcome to my city, Countess Killian. It's been a while since we last met," Istana Gleriath welcomed the guests with two rows of witches and servants behind her.

Ember Killian glanced at Istana Gleriath's slightly relieved expression as if Istana Gleriath had nothing to worry about. Her gaze quickly glinted with disdain.

"Eighty-seven years since we last met, to be exact. And it's Marquis Killian to you now, or Marquess Killian. Whichever you prefer to call me, Lord Gleriath," Ember Killian replied coolly, "I presume you know why I came."

"M-Marquis Killian?" Istana Gleriath was shocked before her eyes flickered with realization. "Then, you are the Inquisitor dispatched from the capital?"

As Istana Gleriath had yet to recover from her daughter's death, she was not in the best mood. When others heard her tone, it did not sound all that welcoming and friendly.

"Lord Gleriath, you better start speaking to me with some more respect. I am not your peer. I am someone higher than you in both nobility rank and power. Also, I'm not just any Inquisitor; I am the Grand Inquisitor!" Ember Killian sternly corrected.

Boom...

After hearing the shocking news, an explosion seemingly went off in Istana Gleriath's head, causing her expression to change abruptly as nervousness and fear quickly filled her heart.

Istana Gleriath's mind became wide awake.

"The Grand Inquisitor?! You became a High Witch, got promoted to the Marquis rank, and even became the Grand Inquisitor?! But how? Eighty-seven years ago, we were still around the same level and rank!" Istana Gleriath spewed with disbelief.

"No, more importantly, if you, the Grand Inquisitor, came here, then that means you received the direct inquisition order for Her Majesty! But why would Her Majesty dispatch a Grand Inquisitor instead of a normal Inquisitor for such a trivial matter?"

"I mean, my daughter's death is a big matter for me, but a trivial matter for others... Or did Her Majesty care that much about me and want to seek justice for me? Is that why Her Majesty sent Marquis Killian here?"

"Are you pretending to be ignorant, or are you genuinely stupid, Lord Gleriath?" Ember Killian asked with a dark look.

"Do you think a Senior Witch like you, who can't become a High Witch even with all the resources at your disposal as a Lord after so long, have much value in Her Majesty's eyes? Don't kid yourself. If it wasn't the Delarosa Household's complaint, do you think a Grand Inquisitor like me would even be here?"

"Your actions endangered Marquis Delarosa's daughters' lives as they passed through your territory. If you don't have a very good reason for inciting the Dark Hellhounds, no one will protect you from the Delarosa Household."

"Or are you going to tell me that you didn't know Marquis Delarosa's daughters were passing through your territory either?" Ember Killian gave Istana Gleriath a hard look to see how she would reply.

However, Istana Gleriath could only stand there with a dumbfounded look. She was completely caught by surprise.

"Judging by your dumb look, it is clear you acted without knowing anything about Marquis Delarosa's daughters," Ember Killian snorted and demanded threateningly, "You better start confessing everything now. Otherwise, if I start looking into everything and find faults with your territory management, you know what will happen, right?"

"I understand, Grand Inquisitor," Istana Gleriath replied with a sigh. She had no other choice.

Even though Marquis Killian behaved overbearingly without caring for her circumstances, she had no choice but to obey.

After all, Istana Gleriath couldn't win against a High Witch, and even her followers were inferior to Marquis Killian's retinue.

As Istana Gleriath truthfully recounted her findings into the cause of her daughter's death and mentioned her suspicions, Ember Killian's brows scrunched together.

"Because of mere suspicion, you dare incite the Dark Hellhounds in your territory to kill off everyone outside the city? Do you think this is something a City Lord should do?" Ember Killian coldly reprimanded.

"Bring me the report! I want a tally of how many people were killed during the Dark Hellhounds' rampage! Also, one of you head to Blackmoon Academy and fact-check with the people to see if it matches Lord Gleriath's confession!"

Ember Killian strictly barked out orders one by one, sending her retinue off with different tasks in small groups.

Nevertheless, it wasn't long before Ember Killian spotted Astoria Braveheart's approaching figure. Her strict look quickly turned friendly.

"Headmaster Astoria, what brings you here? Didn't we agree to meet after we settled our businesses?" Ember Killian inquired.

"That, you did, Marquis Ember," Astoria Braveheart acknowledged before saying, "However, I believe my business is also related to your business. I think you will be interested in what I learned after returning to the academy."

As Astoria Braveheart spoke, she swept a cold and unfriendly glance at Istana Gleriath, catching Ember Killian off guard.

"The kind and saintly Battle Maiden of Holy Light was capable of directing such a cold and unfriendly gaze at things other than demons and beasts?" Ember Killian wondered with astonishment.

Ember Killian wasn't sure what Istana Gleriath did to receive such a gaze from Astoria Braveheart, but she quickly believed that Istana Gleriath fucked up big time.

Nevertheless, Ember Killian replied with a smile after a bit of delay, "If you believe it will help with my inquisition, please tell me, Headmaster Astoria."

Sometime later, Astoria Braveheart finished sharing her knowledge and speculation on the series of events in Blackmoon City. She did not leave out a single piece of information.

Thus, Ember Killian quickly learned about Vaan Raphna's matchless wisdom and Astoria Braveheart's suspicion towards Istana Gleriath.

"That's an interesting assumption, Headmaster Astoria. After hearing your reasoning, I do find something strange about the turn of events," Ember Killian said before turning her head to Istana Gleriath.

"So? What do you have to say for yourself, Lord Gleriath? Do you have a relationship with demons?"

"A load of horse shit!" Istana Gleriath became livid with rage after overhearing everything.

"Does it even make sense for me to kill my precious daughter?! I didn't even know who the fuck Vaan Raphna was prior to my daughter's death, so how am I supposed to even know about his magic theory notes?!"

"Hm, true. But is your daughter truly that precious to you? I mean, if you lose one, you can just make another one, right?" Ember Killian nonchalantly said while secretly trying to read Istana Gleriath's true emotions.

When Istana Gleriath heard that, her rage peaked instantly; she exploded furiously.

Chapter 85: Butting Heads

"So what if you are a High Witch?! So what if you are the Grand Inquisitor?! It doesn't give you the right to make light of my daughter's death! You don't have any children! You don't know what it's like to lose one! Being able to make more doesn't make one any less precious!"

As Istana Gleriath roared furiously, her mana churned quickly and transformed into a great flame that threatened to swallow everything.

Within moments, a great blazing sphere of scorching-hot flames loomed over everyone in the outer courtyard, causing the surrounding temperature to rise.

Istana Gleriath didn't hesitate to shoot the great blazing sphere at Ember Killian once its power peaked.

"Lord Gleriath, you are mad! How dare you raise your hand against the Grand Inquisitor!" one of Ember Killian's people shouted with anger and fear as the great ball of flame descended upon them.

However, Ember Killian herself remained calm in the wake of the blazing fire's descent. Even Astoria Braveheart didn't flinch at the incoming attack.

Only people below Peak-stage Senior Witch would fear such an attack. Those above it had no such fear, especially for Ember Killian, the High Witch of Purgatory Flame.

"Playing fire with me?" Ember Killian smiled with a mix of ridicule and nonchalance.

With a single stomp, multiple pillars of blazing inferno burst out of the ground in Ember Killian's surroundings, seemingly uncontrollable.

But as they shot into the sky towards the giant descending ball of flames, Ember Killian's pillars of flames intertwined and transformed into a greater phoenix of fire with humongous wingspans that blotted out the sky above the courtyard.

Kree!

The flaming phoenix seemingly cried before it devoured the giant fireball, wrapping its wings around it and soaring higher into the sky.

Istana Gleriath's fire was quickly snuffed out before Ember Killian's flaming phoenix dispersed into the air.

Just as Istana Gleriath prepared to launch another attack, Astoria Braveheart closed the distance with a single decisive step in the blink of an eye and pressed her body and face into the ground with her huge greatsword, immobilizing her.

"Garghhh! Let me go!" Istana Gleriath roared with bloodshot eyes, a flushed face, and protruding veins.

But no matter how Istana Gleriath struggled, she couldn't break free from the crushing weight of the greatsword pressing down on her with Astoria Braveheart's superior physical might.

"Marquis Ember, please don't antagonize Lord Istana any further. We don't want any incident of mana deviation and berserk transformation to take place. We've already lost a few good witches in recent years; Wise Scholar Eniwse being the latest," Astoria Braveheart suggested with a sigh.

"Ptui! How can that brat Eniwse compare to me?!" Istana Gleriath spat.

"Don't put me in the same boat as her! Even if the world was destroyed before my eyes, I still wouldn't lose control and experience mana deviation like her!"

"You're right," Ember Killian nodded before saying with a chuckle, "How can someone who hasn't even lived half a century compare to a 300-year-old hag like you?"

"Marquis Ember!" Astoria Braveheart warned.

"Alright, alright," Ember Killian compromised with a shrug and said, "Even if you didn't tell me not to, I didn't plan on continuing further anyway. We've already gotten our answer."

"As you can see, Lord Gleriath is genuinely angry at me. Considering how much she cared about her daughter, she doesn't look like someone that would kill her own daughter. There's a high chance that she had been speaking the truth and didn't know about Vaan Raphna's excellence prior to the events."

"I'm sorry if I had offended you, Lord Gleriath. I hope you did not mind that I used unconventional means to test you. I did not mean what I said earlier," Ember Killian apologized to Istana Gleriath shortly after.

After Istana Gleriath heard that, she quickly calmed down and stopped resisting. Even so, she still expressed her displeasure.

"You were testing me? Sometimes, words are sharper than knives. Please don't use such a vulgar method on me, Marquis Killian," Istana Gleriath said snappishly.

"I am willing to take responsibility for inciting the Dark Hellhounds. Even if I didn't know Marquis Delarosa's daughters were passing through my territory, innocent lives were still lost due to my actions."

"I am also willing to cooperate with your investigation in any way I can; I only ask that you help me seek justice for my daughter," Istana Gleriath requested.

However, after Astoria Braveheart returned Istana Gleriath her freedom, her expression turned cold.

"Seek justice for your daughter?" Astoria Braveheart uttered unhappily.

"Your daughter committed a grave crime. She had no respect for academy teachers, did whatever she wanted, caused Wise Scholar Eniwise to turn, and got my teacher killed. Does she deserve it?"

"And if that isn't enough, you still dare to accuse the dead of murdering your beloved daughter. Even if you aren't related to Teacher Raphna's death, you don't need to twist the truth for your convenience to act atrociously."

"Have some shame, Lord Istana," Astoria Braveheart criticized, causing Ember Killian to smile wryly.

Who was antagonizing who this time? – Ember Killian thought ruefully.

Nevertheless, Istana Gleriath didn't explode with anger like last time. Instead, she met Astoria Braveheart's eyes directly without backing down.

"You have always been mild and approachable, Headmaster Astoria. However, the way that you are now is not your usual self. Why are you so bent on believing that servant is dead when he is alive? You don't think it's weird that his body disappeared the same night my daughter was killed?"

Istana Gleriath retorted with a sharp look.

"I find it weirder that you can claim someone is alive after dying. Do you think people can come back to life? If Teacher Raphna wasn't confirmed dead, do you think his body wouldn't have been dumped in the wasteyard to be incinerated?" Astoria Braveheart argued back.

The two witches butted heads and glared at each other fiercely, battling with words.

On the side, Ember Killian watched them argue for some time before deciding to step in and stop them.

"That's enough, you two. I have heard the argument from both sides. Each of you had reasons, but it is not enough to determine the truth of the events. I have to go back over the facts to confirm what happened," Ember Killian stated calmly yet firmly.

"Who was the one who confirmed Vaan Raphna's death, Headmaster Astoria?" Ember Killian asked shortly after while holding back her strong curiosity.

Just how great was Vaan Raphna's notebook for Headmaster Astoria to back him up so strongly in such a short time after returning to the academy? – Ember Killian wondered.

Chapter 86: Unexpected Conclusion

After Ember Killian suggested going back over the evidence and facts, Istana Gleriath and Astoria Braveheart compromised, taking a step back.

"The ones who handled the situation in the academy were Senior Elaine and Senior Gwena. One of them should have been the one to confirm Teacher Raphna's death," Astoria Braveheart replied.

"Then, let us head over to the academy to ask them," Ember Killian said with a nod before adding, "Since the events happened there, it will also be more convenient to investigate the scenes of the incidents."

"I will accompany the both of you. I don't want Headmaster Astoria feeding you with her biased opinions, Marquis Killian," Istana Gleriath stated.

Within moments, Istana Gleriath and Astoria Braveheart glared at each other again with strong dislike—not to the point of wanting to kill each other. Still, the smell of gunpowder was seemingly in the air.

"Fine," Ember Killian agreed.

...

Sometime later, the three witches arrived at Blackmoon Academy of Witchcraft with a few of Ember Killian's retinue. The rest of the retinue were left back at the castle to continue their designated tasks.

Astoria Braveheart and the others didn't expend much effort before they spotted Gwena Youngblood on the field with some witches-in-training.

"Senior Gwena, can I bother you for a second?" Astoria Braveheart kindly asked.

"Eh? Of course, Headmaster Astoria. What do you need from me?" Gwena Youngblood responded with surprise as she glanced briefly at Ember Killian and Istana Gleriath.

A tinge of dislike surfaced in her eyes when they moved to Istana Gleriath.

"I have questions regarding the incident between Isabelle Gleriath and Wise Scholar Eniwse's servants. Was it you or Senior Elaine that decided to dump Teacher Raphna's body in the wasteyard?" Astoria Braveheart asked.

However, Gwena Youngblood immediately froze when she heard Astoria Braveheart addressing Servant Vaan as Teacher Raphna. She quickly wondered if the headmaster was finding faults with the person who decided to dump the person's body in the wasteyard.

Nevertheless, Astoria Braveheart read Gwena Youngblood's thoughts and reassured her, "You don't have to worry, Senior Gwena. I'm not looking for someone to blame. I'm only hoping to understand the situation clearer."

"I see," Gwena Youngblood felt relief after hearing before she answered, "It was Senior Elaine who decided to dump Vaan Raphna's body into the wasteyard after confirming the person could not be saved."

"But before the body was taken away, I also had a quick look at the state of the person's body. My judgment was the same as Senior Elaine; the person couldn't be saved."

"Why couldn't he be saved?" Istana Gleriath asked with a firm tone before saying, "Even if he had a breath of life left, you should have been able to save him. Isn't Recovery Magic your specialty?"

"That is the thing. No matter how good my Recovery Magic is, it is only effective on living things," Gwena Youngblood replied unhappily.

"Vaan Rapha had a punctured chest and a ruptured heart. He lost too much blood, and his heart had already stopped beating. I can only heal living people; I can't bring back the dead. That is God's domain, Lord Istana."

"Even my Senior Gwena, someone with Recovery Magic specialty, confirmed Teacher Raphna died. Do you have anything else to add to that, Lord Istana?" Astoria Braveheart questioned.

"Impossible...! That' can't be true! It has to be a lie! How else can we explain his missing body?! If Vaan didn't murder my daughter, then who did?! Who?!" Istana Gleriath replied hysterically while grabbing her head in denial.

"Calm down, Lord Gleriath. I have something interesting to say," Ember Killian said coolly before continuing, "Vaan Raphna died, and Isabelle was killed shortly after. Lord Gleriath wasn't involved, and Vaan Raphna's body went missing."

"If we add to the fact that Vaan Raphna's wisdom was as incredible as Headmaster Astoria claimed—to the point that she was willing to recognize him as her teacher after reading his notes, then the answer is pretty clear."

"It was done by a third party," Ember Killian concluded.

"A third party? Of course, it has to be a third party if it wasn't Vaan Raphna. My daughter had her mana deprived. It can only be done by a demon," Istana Gleriath guessed.

"Oh? Mana was deprived?" Ember Killian raised an eyebrow with interest before saying, "However, you're wrong. A demon in the middle of Blackmoon Academy of Witchcraft? You're looking down on the academy too much."

"It doesn't necessarily have to be a demon. A demon's scent is too noticeable and easy to track. However, it's a different story for humans with demon blessings. The third party could have also been a rogue witch."

"Either way, this third party must have known about Vaan Raphna's unparalleled wisdom and suspected something was special about his physique. It must have been a rare physique that allowed Vaan Raphna to possess unmatched learning capabilities."

"But before the third party could learn more about the Vaan Raphna, he was killed by Isabelle's servant. This angered the third party into taking revenge by murdering Isabelle. If we follow this train of thought, we can assume that the third party also took away Vaan Raphna's body to study and made it look like the wasteyard was cleaned up ahead of schedule."

"After all, this isn't exactly hard to do for Senior Witches with Spatial Magic or pretty much anyone with a spatial-type magic tool with a large storage space in their possession," Ember Killian stated.

"This doesn't give us much of a lead," Astoria Braveheart said with a frown.

"On the contrary, it actually does, Headmaster Astoria," Ember Killian smiled mysteriously before mentioning, "I heard the Assembly of Silent Night was active in Blackmoon Region and its surrounding territories."

"Though I can't say for certain that it was done by Assembly of Silent Night, they might know something."

Boom!

Shortly after Ember Killian mentioned the Assembly of Silent Night, Istana Gleriath and Astoria Braveheart exploded with powerful mana pressure.

The Assembly of Silent Night!

It was an unexpected conclusion, but it made so much sense to them!

"It must be the Assembly of Silent Night! No, it has to be them!" Istana Gleriath spat with absolute certainty as she directed all her hostility at them for her daughter's death.

"Their people are all skilled in the art of stealth, spying, and assassination!"

"I have to retrieve Teacher Raphna's body from them and give him the proper burial he deserves! How dare these desecrate his body for research!"

Astoria Braveheart swore to hunt down the Assembly of Silent Night.

Chapter 87: First Lesson

"Do you know everything about your city, Lord Gleriath?" Ember Killian turned to Istana Gleriath.

"Haa... If I did, there wouldn't be problems in my city, Marquis Killian," Istana Gleriath sighed and suppressed her rage.

Even though Istana Gleriath wanted to raze the whole dark organization to the ground, she didn't know where to start looking.

"My territory is barren and offers little profit. Besides mining minerals and collecting taxes, I don't have any other major sources of income. Where would I get the money to buy those city management-type magic tools, let alone maintain them?"

"I wouldn't know who enters and leaves the city unless they are a demon," Istana Gleriath stated.

"In that case, we will have to manually search the city and surrounding areas for the Assembly of Silent Night's hideout," Astoria Braveheart suggested with a determined look before adding, "I don't believe that they don't have one hidden somewhere within the Blackmoon Region."

"That is an option, but I don't believe we need to go through that much trouble. We just need to find someone who had secret dealings with them," Ember Killian mentioned before suggesting, "We should look into the wealthy households in the city."

"Good idea, Marquis Killian. Let us go with that."

"Right."

...

...

...

Redpine City, Helia's Castle

While important events took place in Blackmoon City, unbeknown to the Assembly of Silent Night, a whole night went by in the blink of an eye.

Overnight, Vaan went through all of the medical information provided on Cyrena Ashenborn and pondered on her condition.

Although Vaan failed to draw a conclusion from the medical records, he came up with several possibilities regarding the root cause of Cyrena Ashenborn's inability to use magic.

Nevertheless, the medical insights of other people could only provide him so much knowledge, given they were authentic information.

Vaan had to meet the patient before he could draw a definite conclusion.

...

Shortly after Vaan left the room, he was greeted by Hester Thornton, who had stood guard outside his room overnight.

Due to her presence outside his room, Vaan couldn't do anything besides study Cyrena Ashenborn's condition and prepare for his lesson with Cyrena Ashenborn.

After a light morning greeting, Hester Thornton guided Vaan to see Helia Ashenborn in Great Hall, where the person was having breakfast with her children.

All seven daughters were present, including Cyrena Ashenborn.

Almost immediately, their attention was directed at Vaan, some with curiosity, some with doubt, and even some with disdain.

At the same time, Vaan also determined which of the seven beautiful young ladies sitting at the long table with Helia Ashenborn was Cyrena Ashenborn.

Cyrena Ashenborn's snowy-white hair distinguished her from the rest; it also alienated her from her elder siblings and mother.

Although Helia Ashenborn's daughters all appeared young and beautiful, almost like younger versions of herself, Vaan didn't doubt that some of them were at least triple his age.

Helia Ashenborn herself was someone who had lived through the Holy War between witches and demons three hundred ago.

"I trust you had a good rest, Vahn Cadieux," Helia Ashenborn smiled and said, "If you don't mind, you can join us for breakfast. There's a spare seat for you besides—"

Creak...!

Cyrena Ashenborn's chair scraped the ground as she suddenly stood up to leave after sensing her elder siblings' ridicule and snide thoughts.

'A male teacher is just perfect for someone like you. You should thank Mother for her thoughtfulness. Don't you see how much Mother cares for you? Why aren't you quickly thank her?'

Even without mind-reading abilities, Cyrena Ashenborn was sure that her elder siblings were thinking something along those lines. After all, their ridicule and contempt toward her wasn't something new.

"I'm done eating. You can find me in the library," Cyrena Ashenborn said apathetically.

Without waiting for anyone to reply, Cyrena Ashenborn left the Great Hall. But before she left, she briefly glanced at Vaan's calm expression, and her eyes flickered with disappointment.

...

"I apologize for my daughter's rudeness, Vahn Cadieux. But as you can see, that is how she is. And as things stand, it might be more difficult for you to teach her like this."

"Not at all, Lord Ashenborn. It didn't bother me," Vaan calmly smiled before saying, "Nevertheless, I will have to politely decline your kind gesture. Since there are only seven days, I would like to begin teaching Lady Cyrena as soon as possible."

Vaan had quickly read the atmosphere and noticed the majority of Helia Ashenborn's daughters didn't view him favorably in terms of his teaching capability and looked down on him.

He would rather avoid the troubles that may arise from sitting at the same table as them.

"I understand your eagerness and look forward to the results after a week, Vahn Cadieux. Very well, you can ask Hester to guide you to the library," Helia Ashenborn said with a nod before turning to Hester Thornton. "Please watch over them and ensure nothing goes wrong, Hester."

"Yes, my Lady," Hester Thornton complied, completely understanding Helia Ashenborn's intentions.

Nevertheless, Vaan wasn't stupid. He quickly picked up the meaning behind Helia Ashenborn's words. They were meant for both Cyrena Ashenborn and him.

It was clear that Helia Ashenborn had seemingly placed greater importance on Vaan but didn't completely trust him, which was also understandable.

Trust was to be earned, not given.

...

Sometime later, Hester Thornton and Vaan reached the castle's library, containing Helia Ashenborn's private collection of knowledge.

Vaan was quickly barred from entry by two combat witches guarding the entrance.

"Please remove all your weapons and tools before entering the premise, Sir Vahn," one of the combat witches requested.

Vaan complied without a complaint. He unstrapped his utility belt, which held the two fang daggers and several small powder pouches.

Hester Thornton and the two combat witches were curious about the usage of the small powder pouches, but they decided not to pry.

After entering the library full of large wooden bookshelves, all filled with rows of books, Hester Thornton led Vaan to Cyrena Ashenborn, who sat at a round study table, reading a book on exotic plants.

"Are you ready for our first lesson, Lady Cyrena?" Vaan politely asked with a calm smile.

However, Cyrena Ashenborn immediately snorted upon hearing Vaan address her by her first name and on their first meeting, no less.

Chapter 88: Potioneering Quiz

"Don't get chummy with me, Vahn Cadieux. We are not that close," Cyrena Ashenborn said indifferently before ignoring Vaan and continuing to read her book.

Hester Thornton immediately wanted to admonish Cyrena Ashenborn, but Vaan gestured her to not intervene.

"It's fine, Lady Thornton. I will handle this matter. There's no need for you to intervene," Vaan calmly smiled before turning his attention back to Cyrena Ashenborn.

"We might not have a close relationship personally, but formally, I have been assigned as your teacher. Addressing you so is my privilege, Lady Cyrena. You may refer to me as Teacher or Mr. Cadieux."

"My teacher? I don't acknowledge you," Cyrena Ashenborn said coolly before continuing with zero expectation of Vaan, "You are younger than me, so what can you even teach me? It would make more sense if my mother just hired you to spite me."

"A teacher's qualification isn't decided by age; it never was. Only the more skilled or educated one becomes the teacher, Lady Cyrena. In that regard, I believe I am qualified to be your teacher," Vaan replied with a calm smile, indifferent to Cyrena Ashenborn's cynicism.

"Are you saying you know more than me?" Cyrena Ashenborn frowned and said, "I may be incapable of magic, but that doesn't mean I've slacked off in my other fields of study. I've worked harder than anyone else!"

Cyrena Ashenborn's indifferent emotion was stirred by Vaan as she believed he was looking down on her too much. It was as if he had discredited her effort.

Nevertheless, Vaan could understand Cyrena Ashenborn's boiling emotion.

Anyone else would also feel upset if they had worked their ass off and be proud of their achievement—only for someone to claim they know more than them despite being younger and a man, no less.

"I understand the injustice you feel, Lady Cyrena. However, people aren't born equal in this world," Vaan calmly said.

"Talent and hard work guarantee success, while hard work without talent won't amount to anything—at least, not without luck. Such is the way of the world. I'm not trying to discredit your talent and hard work by saying this."

"I'm just trying to say that even among geniuses, there is a gap in their talents. After all, genius is such a vague term we use to define talented people above a certain threshold from the general mass, not the peak."

"And whether you like it or not, I am someone with more talent than you," Vaan stated indifferently.

"That being said, you wouldn't believe my words nor acknowledge me as your teacher unless I genuinely convince you, Lady Cyrena. So without further adieu, let us start with a quick quiz in your best field of study."

Vaan continued to speak before Cyrena Ashenborn could retort his blatant boasting.

Nevertheless, when Cyrena Ashenborn heard Vaan mention a quiz, her eyes flickered mischievously. There was a way to embarrass him and expose the fraudster.

Vahn Cadieux was simply asking to be called out for his lies – Cyrena Ashenborn thought.

"I excel in potionneering, so ask away, Mr. Cadieux. What will you quiz me on?" Cyrena Ashenborn asked impassively.

"Potionneering, huh? I guessed as much," Vaan muttered with a nod before saying, "I'll be testing how firm your foundational knowledge is."

When Cyrena Ashenborn heard it was about foundation knowledge in potionneering, she became even more convinced of her doubts.

'Of course, you can only test me on basic knowledge since you, as a man, don't know anything about advanced potionneering,' Cyrena Ashenborn thought smugly.

Alas, Cyrena Ashenborn's smile quickly froze when she looked into Vaan's intrigued eyes. It was as if he had seen through her thoughts, causing her heart to be slightly shaken.

However, Cyrena Ashenborn quickly convinced herself that Vaan was just faking it.

"Alright, let's start with the most basic potion among Sense Enhancers, the Rank 1 Pore Stimulation Potion. Tell me its effects, the number of standard ingredients needed to make it, and name all of them," Vaan quizzed.

"Heh," Cyrena Ashenborn snickered before she replied with a nonchalant shrug, "The Rank 1 Pore Stimulation Potion, like all other Sense Enhancers, is used to enhance the natural mana absorption ability in a witch's body."

"It's an alternative for witches who do not wish to sully their bodies with dirty practices such as copulating with men... or women. I don't judge. Anyway, the Rank 1 Pore Stimulation Potion's exact effect is to excite all the pores in one's body and leave them open for mana to smoothly flow inside."

"A standard Rank 1 Pore Stimulation Potion requires seven ingredients to make, two of which are the main ingredients, and the other five are supplementary ingredients. In order of main to supplementary, they are Zapper Eel's Eye, Darkray's Tail, Dragon Grass, Ruby Paprika, Pearl Ivy, Wolf Seed, and Flaming Root."

"Since Mr. Cadieux only asked to name the ingredients, I didn't mention the specific quantity required to make a standard Rank 1 Pore Stimulation Potion. Should I list them now?" Cyrena Ashenborn asked with a sly look.

However, Vaan smiled with amusement and said, "No need. Given your confident look, I am certain you've already learned the exact quantity by heart."

"Your answers were correct—all except one ingredient, that is. You've replaced the Summer Avens with Ruby Paprika," Vaan calmly added, causing Cyrena Ashenborn's expression to freeze with surprise.

Even so, Cyrena Ashenborn still had an ace up her sleeve.

But alas, before Cyrena Ashenborn could argue in her defense, Vaan calmly continued, "Although it is true that the Ruby Paprika can be used to substitute Summer Avens, it is not part of the standard ingredients."

"Considering you have already learned about substitute ingredients for the Rank 1 Pore Stimulation Potion, there's no way you would have made such a mistake unintentionally."

"However, you need to remember something, Lady Cyrena; I am the one testing you, not the other way around. Got it?" Vaan lectured with a solemn look, which made Cyrena Ashenborn subconsciously obey despite being dumbfounded.

"Yes, Mr. Cadieux," she replied blankly.

But after a moment, Cyrena Ashenborn quickly shook her head and recovered her wits.

Seeing how Mr. Cadieux saw through her little trick, he was much more knowledgeable than she gave him credit for. His earlier words might not be empty boasts after all.

Even so, it would take more than that for her to acknowledge him as her teacher!

Chapter 89: Equilibrium Principle

"Anyhow, since we are on the topic of substitute ingredients, we might as well continue from there," Vaan stated.

"How many ingredients can be used to substitute the Summer Avens? Of course, you have to name them all as well."

After hearing Vaan's next question, Cyrena Ashenborn's eyes quickly turned serious.

"Including the Ruby Paprika, four other supplementary ingredients could be used to substitute for the Summer Avens. They are Tiger Pepper Leaf, Red Pygmy Caraway, Three-Petal Volcanic Flower, and Sanguine Lotus."

"Did I answer everything correctly, Mr. Cadieux?" Cyrena Ashenborn asked shortly after listing the ingredients.

"You did; you answered very well. No doubt you have memorized the contents of Devonshire's Book of Hundred Substitutions," Vaan calmly nodded with acknowledgment.

Cyrena Ashenborn felt strangely proud to be praised by Vaan.

But before Cyrena Ashenborn could stay proud for long, Vaan suddenly added, "However, you said you excelled in potioneering, Lady Cyrena. I expected more than a textbook answer from you."

"If you've read Maleficum's Book of Potions and Umbra's Study of Myriad Herbs, you should know countless more possibilities than those recorded in Devonshire's Book of Hundred Substitutions exists."

"If we are just looking at Umbra's Study of Myriad Herbs and no other books on potioneering ingredients, I can very well tell you that there are still another four possible ingredients that you could use to substitute the Summer Avens."

"Can you guess what those ingredients are, Lady Cyrena?" Vaan calmly asked shortly after.

"Another four possible ingredients?" Cyrena Ashenborn furrowed her brows with surprise and doubt.

Cyrena Ashenborn wanted to retort Vaan's claim, but she had underestimated him once. Thus, she didn't want to repeat the same mistake and embarrass herself further. She decided to give Vaan the benefit of the doubt.

"Another four ingredients, huh?" Cyrena Ashenborn pondered hard. Hundreds of herbs and rare plants flashed across her mind before she paused on an ingredient. "Sunglazed Rockflower?"

"Anything else you can think of?" Vaan casually asked with an unreadable expression, neither agreeing nor denying Cyrena Ashenborn's answer.

Nevertheless, Cyrena Ashenborn felt like her answer was, more or less, correct.

But no matter how much she pondered, she couldn't think of any more possible ingredients to substitute the Summer Avens without altering the effects of the Rank 1 Pore Stimulation Potion.

"If you have any doubts, feel free to mention them. I will answer them all at once. After all, it is my role as a teacher to enlighten you, Lady Cyrena," Vaan stated.

Cyrena Ashenborn pondered a bit longer before eventually shaking her head in defeat.

"I can't think of any other ingredient, Mr. Cadieux. The Rank 1 Pore Stimulation Potion is a potion that uses two lightning-attribute monster ingredients as the primary ingredients, three fire-attribute and two ice-attribute herbal ingredients as supplementary ingredients to make."

"Summer Avens is a fire-attribute herbal ingredient, so it makes sense to substitute it with other fire-attribute herbal ingredients like Ruby Paprika and the like. Although Sun glazed Rockflower is a bit more intense than the other fire-attribute ingredients, it's still a fire-attribute ingredient with stimulating properties."

"I've thought of other fire-attribute ingredients in Umbra's Study of Myriad Herbs, but the effects of those fire-attribute ingredients are too potent to be used as supplementary ingredients for the Rank 1 Pore Stimulation Potion."

"If we try to use them, say, the Fiery-Heart Lotus, for example, it would overpower the primary ingredients and alter the desired effect," Cyrena Ashenborn mentioned.

In such instances, the potioneer is more likely to ruin all the ingredients than to create a new potion as a byproduct of their failure.

"Are there really three other ingredients that can be used as a substitute for Summer Avens from Umbra's Study of Myriad Herbs?" Cyrena Ashenborn doubted.

"Of course," Vaan slightly smiled and said, "You can't think of them because your mind is only set on fire-attribute ingredients."

"It is as you say before; the Rank 1 Pore Stimulation Potion is a potion that uses two lightning-attribute monster ingredients as the primary ingredients, and three fire-attribute and two ice-attribute herbal ingredients as supplementary ingredients to make."

"However, this is actually an unbalanced recipe," Vaan continued.

Although the additional fire-attribute ingredient enhances the effect of the Rank 1 Pore Stimulation Potion, it also has the side effect of making the body heat up like adrenaline. Normally, this side effect can be ignored if the Rank 1 Pore Stimulation Potion is taken moderately. But if you abuse it, it will harm the body like poison."

"If you want to remove the side effect while keeping the primary effect of the Rank 1 Pore Stimulation Potion, you can use wood-attribute ingredients like Edia Leaf, Mellow Cilantro, Sirre Root, or Spring Lotus to replace Summer Avens," Vaan calmly listed.

"Edia Leaf, Mellow Cilantro, Sirre Root, or Spring Lotus..." Cyrena Ashenborn muttered softly with a thoughtful look as if she was trying to absorb the information.

Although the information was new to Cyrena Ashenborn, Vaan spoke methodically with reason, making a lot of sense.

Cyrena Ashenborn was quickly absorbed in Vaan's lecture.

However, Cyrena Ashenborn suddenly paused when she realized Vaan listed four ingredients. She quickly raised her head to look up at him with doubt.

"Was my answer incorrect, Mr. Cadieux? We can't use Sun glazed Rockflower as a substitute ingredient?" Cyrena Ashenborn asked sincerely with the intention to learn from Vaan.

"Your answer was correct, but at the same time, not exactly either," Vaan replied vaguely with a smile before explaining, "We were only looking at single-ingredient substitution for the Rank 1 Pore Stimulation Potion."

"If you want to replace Summer Avens with the Sun glazed Rockflower, you will also have to replace Wolf Seed with a more potent ice-attribute ingredient like Winter Thyme or Mountain Frostflower."

"Of course, there are many more combinations for you to play with. The purpose is to create harmony in the ingredients. As long as there is harmony, your potion will succeed—even if it isn't the potion you intended to make. I call this the Equilibrium Principle," Vaan stated with a calm smile.

Whether it was Cyrena Ashenborn or Hester Thornton who was listening on the side, they both had their minds blown away by Vaan's profound lecture.

"The Equilibrium Principle..."

Chapter 90: Brewing Chamber

"Well, I call it the Equilibrium Principle, but it's still a theory at this stage. There aren't enough opportunities to test its authenticity," Vaan shortly added.

After Cyrena Ashenborn heard that, she paused in surprise again.

"Mr. Cadieux, are you saying you were the one who came up with this Equilibrium Principle?" Cyrena Ashenborn asked with astonishment.

"Well, if you haven't heard of it before, then it should be true," Vaan casually said, but his casualness confused Cyrena Ashenborn and Hester Thornton.

"What do you mean by 'it should be true,' Sir Vahn Cadieux?" Hester Thornton voiced her doubt, subconsciously addressing Vaan in a more respectful tone again.

"It is as I said; I might have been the one to come up with the Equilibrium Principle theory, but there's no telling if someone else had come up with the idea before," Vaan shrugged nonchalantly and added, "I haven't traveled enough to know everything there is to know, Lady Thornton."

Hester Thornton gaped for a moment before she quickly shook her head. She definitely hasn't heard of the Equilibrium Principle before. Thus, she highly doubted someone else had come up with it earlier.

After all, the Equilibrium Principle would shake the world of potioners if it was proven true.

"Please, just call me Hester, Sir—No, Teacher Cadieux. I have also benefited from your lecture," Hester Thornton said, placing great importance on Vaan's status as her teacher.

"Even though nothing from my lecture had yet to be proven?" Vaan slightly smiled.

"While it may be true that we haven't proven whether the ingredients you mentioned could be used to substitute the original ingredients, your words were logical and made perfect sense, Mr. Cadieux," Cyrena Ashenborn stated.

Shortly after, Cyrena Ashenborn stood up from her seat to face Vaan and cup her hands together for a bow of apology.

"I apologize for not recognizing your great wisdom and acting disrespectfully to you earlier, Mr. Cadieux. I am convinced that someone of your caliber is more than qualified to be my pioneering teacher."

Cyrena Ashenborn sincerely apologized while fully acknowledging Vaan as her potionneering teacher.

Vaan slightly smiled.

Although he had succeeded in gaining Cyrena Ashenborn's acknowledgment, he could see that she was still a stubborn and prideful person despite her poor environment.

Nevertheless, Cyrena Ashenborn would eventually learn that Vaan was qualified to teach her more than just potionneering.

"Hahaha... I won't just be teaching you about potionneering, Lady Cyrena. I will be covering all your fields of study at the academy, including magic," Vaan claimed, not minding Cyrena Ashenborn's previous misbehavior.

After experiencing such situations frequently, men will eventually become numb to them. Only men with weak minds are easily provoked and offended by the slightest issues.

Nevertheless, the same could also be said for women.

"Now, before you refute me, I just want to say that I don't have complete confidence in resolving your inability to cast magic."

However, since you recognize me as your teacher, even if it's just as a potionneering teacher, I will not give up on you so long as you believe in me," Vaan said seriously, striking Cyrena Ashenborn's weak spot as her eyes slightly welled up with emotions.

Memories of the past flashed across Cyrena Ashenborn's mind.

The repeated diagnoses from famous healers and medicine masters and the repeated disappointment as they all threw down the towel and gave up on her treatment was a sore spot in Cyrena Ashenborn's heart.

Cyrena Ashenborn was forced to bury the dream deep inside her heart.

Although Vaan didn't promise to cure her inability, promising not to give up on her treatment meant so much more—enough to shake her heart.

Nevertheless, Vaan casually planted his seed; he continued, "Anyhow, I will teach you other things another time. Since we are still on the topic of potioning, we should continue with something more practical."

Shortly after, Vaan turned to Hester Thornton.

"Since Lord Ashenborn promised to provide the resources I need for Lady Cyrena's education, would it be too much trouble for me to request a suitable environment for potioning with all the ingredients aforementioned, Lady Hester?" Vaan asked.

"Not at all, Teacher Cadieux. I can guide you and Lady Cyrena to the Brewing Chamber right now," Hester Thornton said while feeling strangely excited with anticipation.

"Fortunately, we are only dealing with Rank 1 ingredients. The Brewing Chamber should have most—if not all of the ingredients you need, Teacher Cadieux. However, if you require Rank 2 ingredients and above, I will have to inform Lord Helia and make the arrangements."

"Understandable," Vaan acknowledged with a nod and gentlemanly gestured, "Please lead the way, Lady Hester."

"Of course."

Nevertheless, as they left, Vaan paused his steps and turned his head back to face Cyrena Ashenborn, who had yet to move.

"Lady Cyrena? Are you coming?"

"Ah? Y-Yeah! I am coming!"

Cyrena Ashenborn quickly snapped out of her momentary daze and caught up to Vaan and Hester Thornton with hurried steps.

...

A few moments later, they headed upstairs and left the library from the second floor before making their way to a reasonably large stone chamber reinforced with defensive enchantment spells.

Inside the Brewing Chamber were several large black cauldrons, tables with mortars, and tall cabinets lined up against the walls, filled with hundreds of drawers containing herbs, plants, and common monster ingredients for making potions.

"Rank 1 supplementary herbs and plants for the Rank 1 Pore Stimulation Potion are quite common and easy to obtain, but Zapper Eel's Eye and Darkray's Tail are not as common. Do we have an inventory of those two?" Vaan inquired shortly after admiring the Brewing Chamber.

It was mostly neat and tidy, except for one wooden table in the corner, which still had some unreturned potioneering books from the library.

Furthermore, there was no heavy scent from the various ingredients gathered in one place. They were all tightly stored away in their respective drawers.

"You're underestimating the Ashenborn Household too much, Teacher Cadieux. For a simple Rank 1 potion like the Pore Stimulation Potion, how can we not have an inventory of all the ingredients?" Cyrena Ashenborn replied, revealing her familiarity with the Brewing Chamber.

At the same time, Cyrena Ashenborn tried to suppress her excitement regarding the practical lesson. She was looking forward to confirming Vaan's Equilibrium Principle theory.