

The Witch 851

Chapter 851: Vaan's Speech

"Not at all. The Heavenreacher has received the green mark in all areas," Lord Astarot answered before mentioning, "However, the people would love it if you personally introduced the benefits waiting for them in the sea of stars, my Lord."

"You know, many people look up to you, be they witches or men," Lord Astarot added.

"I see. I suppose I could do that," Vaan nodded.

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Sometime later, the news of Vaan making an appearance to give a speech quickly spread throughout Sunpeak City.

Men and women alike were immediately overwhelmed with excitement upon catching wind of the news. In fact, they were even more excited about Vaan's speech than the Heavenreacher's launch.

"Hey, have you heard the latest announcement from the City Lord's Manor? Lord Vaan will be giving a speech in the main square before the launch."

"Seriously?! Do you think there will still be space in the main square if we head there now? Oh man, I was pretty bummed to learn that Lord Vaan rarely visits this city. But now, I finally got a chance to see my idol!"

"Right?! Let's go quickly! If we are late, all the good spots in the main square will be taken up! Oh boy, I can hardly contain my excitement. I've only moved here after hearing Lord Vaan lives here. Now, I can finally see him and hear his speech."

"No doubt, Lord Vaan will reveal some shocking information. Nothing Lord Vaan had ever done has been ordinary."

"Right!"

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Countless women and men swarmed toward the main square ahead of time after hearing the latest news. Even store owners closed their shops early to attend the gathering.

None of them wished to miss out on Vaan's speech.

After all, he was a legendary existence who was hard to meet. Even if they could only catch a glimpse of his figure from afar, it would be more than enough to brag about on their travels.

Nevertheless, the main square was hardly big enough to contain a significant fraction of the city's population.

As such, many people also gathered on the balconies and rooftops of nearby buildings.

Moreover, the entire vicinity was completely crowded, three hours ahead of Vaan's scheduled appearance and speech.

Given such a large and crowded gathering, chaos and disorder were also to be expected.

"Hey, stop pushing! There's no more room here!"

"It's not me! It's the people behind me! I'm also being pushed around here!"

"Ahh! Who touched my butt?! We have a pervert around here! Help me catch the bastard!"

"Are you kidding me? In this kind of crowded space? Who would want to touch a man's butt anyway? It must have been a mistake!"

"Seriously, fuck! There's a real pervert in our midst! Someone just grabbed my balls!"

"It's true! Someone just tickled my balls!"

"Someone just... tickled your balls...? Can someone please tell me what the fuck is going on here?"

"Do you think I'm doing this on purpose?! Give some consideration to the short guys here, goddammit! I can't even see shit down here!"

"Holy smokes! Sorry, dude! Didn't see you down there."

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Despite the initial chaos and disorder, the crowd eventually settled their disputes and calmed down.

They only came to see their legendary idol and not to cause trouble.

Anyone who has lived in Sunpeak City for some time would know better than to cause trouble in Lady Aeliana's city.

Sometime later, Vaan made an appearance in the sky with Aeliana and multiple dragon lords. They were specifically positioned in line with the Heavenreacher on top of the Red Goblin Mountain behind them.

As such, most people would be able to see them and the Heavenreacher as long as they looked up in the northern direction.

"It's Lord Vaan! Lord Vaan is here!"

"Lord Vaan, please tell us! Why did you have the Heavenreacher built? Why are you trying to send people out into the stars? Are there things waiting for us out there?!"

"Lord Vaan, I heard it was a one-way trip to the heavens! That it was a death road to the stars! Is that true?! Can humans really survive in the domain of the primordial gods?"

Vaan's appearance instantly generated fervored cheers of excitement and heated questions of doubt.

Nevertheless, Vaan briefly waited for their energy to die down before signaling for their complete silence. Then, he gave the people below a sweeping glance as he studied their myriads of expressions and contained emotions.

"You all have your doubts, and I am here to answer them. Why did I build the Heavenreacher to send people into the sea of stars? The answer is simple – Countless opportunities await you out there," Vaan's seemingly casual words reached far and wide for everyone to hear.

"Pangea is only a single world; there are still countless worlds out there, filled with vast, untouched resources and waiting for us to explore and lay claim to. Being able to enter the sea of stars is only the first step toward humanity gaining access to that vast amount of resources lying out there!"

"I can understand everyone's fear of the void, and you are all right to fear it. The sea of stars is no place for mortal humans. It is a vast world of cruel emptiness. With no land, no air, and no water, you will not find what you need to survive out there."

"However, that doesn't mean mortal humans have absolutely no way of surviving out there before becoming Divine! It only means that we have been ill-equipped and ill-prepared to venture out there until now!"

"In the ancestral past, humans only knew how to live in caves and scavenge for food. It was with our ability to learn and the knowledge of our predecessors that we were able to cultivate sustainable crops and build extraordinary cities!"

"Through the passage of time, we have refined our knowledge and turned dangerous lands into human havens, wild beasts into domesticated livestock, and ruled the world!"

"With the coming of magic, even once uncultivable barren lands can be turned into green paradise! The sea of stars is unkind to life, yes; however, it is only a slightly bigger challenge than the Perilous Lands that have once barred human access!"

"There is nowhere in the vast universe that cannot be visited by humans as long as we cultivate our knowledge and maintain our persistence!"

Chapter 852: Vaan's Speech (2)

He briefly paused to let the message sink in before continuing, "Lucky for the first crew being sent to the sea of stars, we have already created a suitable and sustainable environment for them to stay in the sea of stars."

"While they are up there, they will also discover the hidden potential that had been previously sealed away when they were living down here like everyone else," Vaan mentioned.

"What kind of hidden potential is it, Lord Vaan?" an Aura Grandmaster loudly spouted out of curiosity.

Although his abrupt question interrupted Vaan, no punishment came his way. Vaan acknowledged him and proceeded with his explanation.

"The potential to cultivate another type of energy called spirit energy, something that generally exists wherever there is life. However, we have been deprived of this source of energy by an unknown force governing this world."

Shortly after, Vaan began displaying various abilities with the divine energy from his Heaven Ascension Realm cultivation.

"Though it is unclear where all the spirit energy is constantly flowing, spirit energy is something all life naturally produces in excess. By absorbing this energy and harnessing its properties, anyone can display abilities akin to the magic of the primary elements with practice."

"At higher levels of energy refinement, it is also possible to perform more advanced magic. However, there is also a greater demand for technical skills. As such, this type of energy could have been the predecessor of mana."

"The truth is there is a lot we don't know about. But if we do not explore the possibilities, we will never know about them. This discovery of spirit energy is only the first of many to come," Vaan stated.

Although he intended to make spirit energy accessible to many humans, he didn't actually plan to let humans explore the cosmos due to the hidden dangers posed by the Outer Beings.

Instead, they would be exploring Chaos.

That said, when Vaan thought back on it, he figured the Lord of Chaos might have already eliminated the biggest threats posed by the Outer Beings in Pangea's stellar region.

However, if Vaan kept moving forward under the belief that the Lord of Chaos took care of everything for him, it could become his undoing one day.

Furthermore, it wasn't beneficial for his growth either.

Nevertheless, after Vaan introduced the existence of spirit energy and explained its general possibilities, including increased lifespans, beautification, and simply raw power, a huge uproar erupted within the crowd.

Men who were born without the ability to cultivate mana and aura were the most affected by the world-breaking news.

Originally, they had no hopes of becoming powerful in life. After all, even if they all worshipped Vaan, they didn't believe they could become like him.

They just didn't have the talent.

However, the new information provided by Vaan opened up a new possibility and ignited their hopes.

"C-Could such energy truly exist?! Why didn't anyone know about it until now!?"

"Have you not been listening to Lord Vaan's explanation? Lord Vaan said some unknown force governing this world had been siphoning all our spirit energy! That's why no one could know about it!"

"But how could we not even feel it being stolen from us?"

"How am I supposed to know?! However, Lord Vaan said it, so it must be true! Are you doubting Lord Vaan's words?!"

"Of course, not... It's just a lot to take in at once."

Furious debates and gossip were spurred in every corner of the main city square. Countless doubts were raised, but they were also quickly drowned out by the people's blind belief in Vaan.

Even foreign visitors were shocked by the degree of his influence.

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Meanwhile, the foreign spies from other countries were dumbfounded and shocked senseless by what they had just learned.

As a result, they weren't sure how they should package the information and file their reports.

After all, many of their leaders believed the Heavenreacher Project was a dead-end, that it was no more than a gimmick to garner attention and nothing more. They didn't think humans could survive in the sea of stars.

However, Lord Vaan explained that such a suitable and sustainable environment for human living had already been created in the sea of stars.

If word of it reached the Freedom Federation, even the President would be shocked by their progress.

It was far beyond their imagination!

"This... is such shocking news... Once this information is spread to the rest of Pangea, everyone's belief will be overturned," a female spy from the Freedom Federation thought.

The world was changing, and the Black Rose Empire would be the center of it.

From the start, everyone had greatly underestimated the Black Rose Empire. No one could have mentally prepared them for what they were going to find out.

What they had assumed to be the boasting of a single achievement turned into a series of accomplishments!

They could still find a way to counter a single cannon shot, but how could they possibly resist a full barrage?!

When the Sword Lord of Divine Sword City first received the news, his face quickly paled.

"Contain this information! Do not let it spread to the public!" the Sword Lord thundered.

If he allowed such information to spread to his Divine Sword City, how many talentless men would immediately flock to the north to join the Black Rose Empire?

The Sword Lord didn't dare to imagine the consequences.

What he had feared turned out to be ten times worse than he had imagined. It was so bad that it was inconceivable.

He would rather believe everything was a lie made up by the North.

Nevertheless, when the Sword Lord summoned an urgent meeting with the other eleven city lords of the Divine League to deliver the news, the Divine League almost split apart on the same day due to conflicts of opinion and interests.

However, they ultimately didn't.

At the end of the day, it was their Divine Goddess who told them not to do anything to the North.

They had no choice but to accept the result and endure for the time being, even if it meant watching their cities decline in population.

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Back in Sunpeak City, Vaan suddenly released another piece of shocking information.

"Oh, yes. We have also colonized the moon and built a small city on it. In the future, all qualified personnel will be transferred there to cultivate spirit energy. Serve the country well, and you might earn yourself a spot on the moon," Vaan casually added.

Boom!

The new piece of shocking information rang like thunder in everyone's mind. It almost seemed like a daze or dizzy spell had struck the people. It was just one wave of surprise after the other.

At this point, they weren't sure what to think or how to feel.

"S-Such frightening progress...!"

Chapter 853: Pure Moon Palace

"Lord Vaan! Will the Heavenreacher be accepting more people in the future?"

"Is it also true that only a select few who meet the requirements will have the opportunity to be sent to the moon, Lord Vaan?"

Shortly after Vaan's shocking announcement of moon colonization, countless questions were raised by the excited mass.

Everyone wanted the opportunity, but they also knew not everyone would get it. Even so, they couldn't help but feel hopeful about the future.

"As you all know, while it is true that we have established habitable living spaces in the sea of stars and on the moon, it is still limited," Vaan calmly mentioned.

"As such, we will only prioritize those with outstanding contributions to the country or those who could assist with the expansion of space colonies and the moon base. Of course, the latter must still be a citizen associated with the United Nations."

"It is only right that our own people will be prioritized over outsiders. That said, the quota will naturally increase along with the expansion of the space colonies and moon base."

"Although it isn't possible right now, everyone under the United Nations will get an opportunity to visit the sea of stars and explore the moon base in the future," Vaan stated.

The crowd quickly became rowdy once more with fervored discussions and excited gossip after listening to Vaan's statement.

Nevertheless, they all had the same doubts and concerns.

"What is the United Nations, Lord Vaan?" a person asked.

"The United Nations is an alliance between countries under my control, and its current members include the Seven Witch Kingdom, now called the Black Rose Empire, the Holy Knight Empire, the Great Ratholos Empire, and the Red Dragon Clan," Vaan answered.

"In the future, the United Nations may have more members. But right now, this is all we have and all who will be granted access to the space colonies and moon base via the Heavenreacher."

"Of course, my United Nations welcomes all new members who wish to join and submit to my cause. However, don't expect to enjoy the same benefits for joining later than others," Vaan stated.

"Lord Vaan! Won't the other countries become jealous of the United Nations keeping a tight monopoly of this Heavenreacher and its associated benefits to themselves?" a humble farmer raised his concern.

"That's right!" a hot-blooded merchant chimed, adding, "It is unfair that only the United Nations gets to enjoy the benefits of the Heavenreacher! It should be equally shared with the rest of humanity!"

"..."

The moment the hot-blooded merchant uttered such words, it was as if the entire Sunpeak City went silent.

Even the people around him forcefully created space to distance themselves from him. They feared if they didn't do so, they would be associated with him.

As such, the hot-blooded merchant was instantly singled out, and all attention was fixed on him.

Many people frowned with disagreement, while others smiled with anticipation as if they were looking forward to a good show as they stared at the fool.

At the same time, the hot-blood merchant instantly cooled down as he realized he was in deep trouble. When Vaan's gaze rested on him, his heart shivered with trepidation.

"What a foolish thing to say, Merchant from another country," Vaan coolly uttered.

"It is unfair that only my United Nations gets to enjoy the benefits of the Heavenreacher? It should be equally shared with the rest of humanity? Such courage, such boldness, such audacity!"

"How dare you come to this land and criticize others on what is fair and what is right," Vaan spat.

Although his voice was not loud, it was clear to everyone. But to the hot-blooded merchant, his words shook like thunder.

"In your own words, you should offer all the rooms in your home to strangers and also split all your wealth with them because that is only fair and the right thing to do for humanity, right?"

"My dragons and people worked tirelessly to build the Heavenreacher and everything beyond this sky prison. Why should the fruits of their labor be enjoyed by others unrelated to them?"

"Do you think the rest of humanity has a share in what we build and own because we are all part of humanity? Your ignorance and entitlement astound me, Merchant from another country!"

"Just who the hell do you think you are to say others should have a share in what my United Nations has built and achieved? We may be of the same race, but you are not a part of us, and we are not running a charity!"

"So, go and preach your pretentious righteousness elsewhere. There is no place for you here, for you are no longer welcome. Your greed simply sickens me," Vaan coolly spat.

With each statement Vaan made, the hot-blooded merchant's face paled by a shade. His heart was filled with infinite terror, despair, and regret.

The hot-blooded merchant immediately knew he was done for.

Even if he were spared and allowed to leave the city, he would not make it far before someone else came to claim his life. His recklessness had incurred a frightening amount of disagreement and hate.

Furthermore, he didn't doubt that the people coming after his life would also do so to please Lord Vaan.

"L-Lord Vaan, please have mercy! I was blind! I take back what I said! Please don't kick me out!" the hot-blooded merchant immediately dropped to the ground and desperately pleaded for his life.

He knew it was the only way to survive.

However, his desperate plea did not earn any sympathy from anyone, and definitely not from Vaan, who had intended to make an example out of him from the start.

He had to kill the chicken to scare the monkeys.

"Remove this unsightly thing from my sight."

"Right away, Lord Vaan!"

Countless battle witches in charge of city security and even common folks jumped into action the moment they received Vaan's order.

Like that, the hot-blooded merchant was dragged away and thrown out of the city, his future fate unknown.

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The entire incident was recorded and spread to other countries like wildfire by the various spies planted in Sunpeak City.

Some took longer than others to receive the news.

Even the closest Divine League took more than three hours to receive the latest information from their spies, to say nothing in the least for the other countries.

However, there was one country that received the news even faster than any other country in Pangea. Furthermore, it was a country that the world knew little about.

The Divine Serpent Empire.

Nevertheless, the imperial family wasn't the only one that received the latest news quickly; several other major forces within the empire also did so.

Among the major forces of the mysterious Divine Serpent Empire was the Pure Moon Palace, a sect comprised of women possessing Lunaran ethnicity.

Although much fewer in number, the Pure Moon Palace's position as one of the Divine Serpent Empire's four major forces was firm and undeniable.

Within the endless fog and mist covering the Divine Serpent Empire, the Pure Moon Palace was founded on a snowy mountain peak in its northeasternmost region.

At that moment, the Palace Mistress and Nine Moon Fairies were gathered inside an ice room, watching a recorded scene of what happened in the Black Rose Empire's Sunpeak City on one of the large, runic-engraved ice pillars.

On the other large, runic-engraved ice pillars, texts quickly appeared, seemingly matching the words spoken by the person of focus in the projected scene.

Although each of the Nine Moon Fairies was breathtakingly beautiful, there were no men around to admire or appreciate them.

All of them wore high-quality white-robed dresses and possessed mixed hair colors of black and white and fair complexions. Some also had black eyes, while others had blue eyes, but none that were a mix of the two.

Only the Palace Mistress possessed full white hair and blue eyes among them.

Unlike the Nine Moon Fairies, who possessed mixed Darkan and Lunaran origins, the Palace Mistress was a pure-blooded Lunaran.

After they finished watching the scene between Vaan and the hot-blooded merchant, the seventh and youngest Moon Fairy, Sue Eversnow, frowned.

"That's the ruler of the northern countries? How could he let some nameless merchant ruffle his feathers so easily? He's more disappointing than I thought," Sue Eversnow casually commented.

"You can't say that about Lord Vaan, Sue. He is not as simple as you think," the third Moon Fairy, Levia Eversnow, chided before saying, "While it seems like Lord Vaan was scolding that foolish merchant, he was actually giving the other countries a warning."

"Those who wanted to pressure the North will have to think twice about the consequences of their actions before making them—That is the kind of message Lord Vaan was trying to deliver through the foolish merchant," Fairy Levia stated.

"Hm? Lord Vaan? Did I hear that right, Levia? Do you have the hots for him or something? Why are you addressing him like that and defending him?" Fairy Sue teased as she changed the focus of the topic.

"..." Fairy Levia stared at Fairy Sue speechlessly before refuting, "What nonsense are you spouting, Sue? I was just stating the facts."

"Levia is right. You are underestimating Lord Vaan too much, Sue. Do you really think a disappointing person could have achieved so much in such little time? He is definitely a shrewd person," Palace Mistress Celestia Eversnow calmly stated.

"Even you are calling him Lord Vaan, Palace Mistress?" Fairy Sue was astonished.

However, Palace Mistress Celestia didn't feel like she had said anything wrong. She calmly replied, "What's wrong with addressing someone stronger than myself, Lord?"

"Do you think Lord Vaan doesn't deserve such respect and recognition despite slaying a Great Devil, Sue?" Palace Mistress Celestia added.

"I..." Fairy Sue was tongue-tied, unable to reply.

She couldn't help but sigh and lament in her heart. It was so hard to crack a joke with her sisters when they were so serious all the time.

Such was her dull life in the Pure Moon Palace.

'Ah, woe is me,' Fairy Sue mourned.

Chapter 854: Excitement & Tremble

"Either way, everyone will have to address Lord Vaan as such in the future, whether they like it or not," Palace Mistress Celestia suddenly added.

Everyone was immediately startled by her alarming statement.

"What do you mean by that, Palace Mistress?" Second Fairy Ella Eversnow quickly asked with astonishment.

Although she could already guess the meaning, she still wanted to hear a clear explanation from the Palace Mistress.

"Exactly what you are already thinking, Ella," Palace Mistress Celestia replied before telling everyone, "You have all seen what is happening in Lord Vaan's domain – That is where our future lies."

"No, to be more precise, our future lies up there, in the heavens," Palace Mistress Celestia directed everyone's attention to the moon.

"You want to bring everyone in the Pure Moon Palace to the north and swear our allegiance to Lord Vaan, Palace Mistress? Are we really going to leave all of this behind?" First Fairy Iris Eversnow uttered in shock before arguing, "But this is our home!"

"Home?" Palace Mistress Celestia calmly glanced at Fairy Iris before asking her, "Can you really call this place our home, Iris? Think about the life you have lived before joining the Pure Moon Palace."

"Outside the Divine Serpent Empire, Darkans are ostracized, discriminated, or oppressed, while inside the Divine Serpent Empire, everyone who isn't Darkan faces the same fate."

"Wherever human society exists, hierarchies and comparisons will also exist, and the minority groups will always be subjected to unfair disadvantages to make the majority group feel more self-important and superior. Such is human nature."

"However, you and your sisters, who are neither fully Darkan nor fully Lunaran, are treated even worse than dogs by the Darkan supremacists. They see you all as a stain on their 'noble' bloodline and treat you like filth."

"When the Pure Moon Palace was founded, it was meant to be a sanctuary for all the bearers of the Lunaran bloodlines who have suffered injustice in the empire, and it still is. Nothing more, nothing less."

"That is why this place is no home; it is a refuge. Don't forget that. A true home should be one where we can feel comfortable outside without worrying about public scrutiny and unprovoked maltreatment."

"I can certainly tell you that the Divine Serpent Empire is not that kind of home," Palace Mistress Celestia stated.

"But Lord Vaan's domain is, Palace Mistress?" Fairy Iris rebutted.

"That, I do not know," Palace Mistress Celestia shook her head and said, "However, I do believe this is an opportunity we cannot miss."

"As Lord Vaan had said, those who join later will not enjoy the same privilege as those who join earlier. As such, we must be decisive and act quickly. Otherwise, our chances of visiting the moon will be delayed. Of course, I won't force everyone to follow me."

"However, you all must know that I won't be changing my mind, and without me around, the Pure Moon Palace here will lose its deterring force and might even attract troublemakers," Palace Mistress Celestia stated.

She was one of the few Transcendent Witches who was only known within the Divine Serpent Empire and not outside of it.

However, unlike true Transcendent Witches, she could only use Ice Magic.

She didn't have access to such versatile magic as other witches due to her difference in cultivation method and singular focus on Ice Magic.

Even the Nine Moon Fairies all managed to become Half-step Transcendent Witches for the same reason. Only by focusing on a solitary path would cultivation bottlenecks be looser to overcome.

Nevertheless, after Palace Mistress Celestia spoke, the Nine Moon Fairies in the ice room contemplated in silence.

"Is it so important to visit the moon that we have to make such a big gamble, Palace Mistress? No one actually knows if Lord Vaan's people have actually reached the moon and built a base on it. For all we know, it could be one big lie," Fairy Sue mentioned.

"Perhaps," Palace Mistress Celestia didn't deny the possibility and said, "That is why I am willing to wait and see if the Heavenreacher can truly send people beyond the sky. If they succeed in that venture, then that is all the proof I need to bet on their future."

"You asked what is so important about the moon, Sue? It seems you haven't been taking our Lunaran history lessons seriously. It is said that our Lunaran ancestors originated from the moon. That is why we Lunarans are called people of the moon."

"There must have been a point in time when all Lunarans lived on the moon before some unforeseen disaster struck and forced them to flee to Pangea. However, if the history of our people is true, then there should already be a city or colony on the moon."

"It wouldn't be difficult for Lord Vaan's people to create a habitable living space in a short time with that as the base since most of the work would already be done."

"Furthermore, don't forget what we practice is called the Divine Moon Arts. If we could return to our ancestral home and practice it, the effects would definitely be much greater," Palace Mistress Celestia stated.

After the Nine Moon Fairies heard that, they were immediately astonished. That single statement alone was enough to tempt all of them.

After all, if the Divine Moon Arts truly worked best on the moon, their transcendence would be much simpler to achieve.

Ultimately, the Nine Moon Fairies found themselves hoping the Heavenreacher launch would be a huge success.

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Back in the Sunpeak Region, the time of launch arrived.

At the same time, Vaan had already finished his speech. Thus, he spared a few departing words before leaving the scene and allowing the people in Sunpeak City to focus on the Heavenreacher in the distance.

Meanwhile, the security around the Red Goblin Mountain reached its peak. Dragons, battle witches, and warriors alike were all on high alert.

No one was permitted to enter the mountain, let alone come close to the Heavenreacher.

Even during normal times, few people were allowed to approach it.

"Cabin crew entered the Star Shuttle 1 – Checked."

"Zero-gravity system online – Checked."

"Magical energy at 100% – Checked."

"No irregularities detected – Checked."

"All system green – Checked."

"Cabin crew is seated, strapped, and ready for launch."

After going through all safety checks and risk assessments, the witch scholars working in the Heavenreacher eventually activated the launch sequence.

Large amounts of magical energy immediately gathered at the base of the Star Shuttle before erupting in a single instant. The Star Shuttle was instantly thrust into the zero-gravity sky by the propelling force of magical energy eruption.

Thanks to the two towering and sturdy rails that aligned the Star Shuttle, it was thrust perfectly straight into the sky.

Although the Heavenreacher made primitive use of magical energy to launch the Star Shuttle, it was still in the early stages of its design. However, the framework for its future use could already be seen by the twin conductive rails that guided the Star Shuttle.

Indeed, the Heavenreacher wasn't just an orbital launcher but a future giant railgun that relied on electromagnetic energy to propel objects, whether for transport or as a projectile weapon against outside threats.

Nevertheless, thanks to the magic barrier deployed within the Star Shuttle, none of the passengers and crew felt much of the g-force from the initial acceleration.

Furthermore, with the constant travel through zero-gravity space that followed, they couldn't even tell if they were moving while they were strapped to their seats.

They couldn't feel anything after the initial launch.

Countless people in Sunpeak City watched on as a black object soared into heaven with great momentum.

If nothing unexpected happened, the Star Shuttle would continue hurling through space at a constant speed after breaking free from the planet.

However, that would undoubtedly result in a powerful collision with the space station that would destroy it—if they were aligned. Fortunately, the space station was already shifted out of the trajectory path as a precautionary measure.

At the same time, the zero-gravity system also went offline, seemingly prematurely.

However, the return of gravity decelerated the Star Shuttle. Much of its velocity was lost by the time it entered outer space.

Just when the people of Sunpeak City felt uncertain about the fate that awaited the crew and passengers of the Star Shuttle 1, a large screen projection suddenly appeared on the Heavenreacher for them to see.

The sudden projection was certainly a pleasant surprise for everyone as it allowed them to understand the situation beyond their atmosphere.

Nevertheless, they saw the Star Shuttle 1 being received by dragons in weird bubble helmets before getting guided into an enormous metal structure that floated outside the planet.

For the first time, the people of Sunpeak City and possibly the world saw the face of the space station that had been hidden in the darkness of outer space.

"W-What the hell is that enormous structure?! Has that always been out there? Why can't we see it from here?"

"That must be the space colony that was mentioned earlier. I can't believe anyone or anything could have built such a large structure..."

"Right? It has to be multiple times larger than the Heavenreacher!"

Countless people exclaimed and commented with excitement and anticipation as they watched the scene unfold on the giant screen projection.

A few minutes later, Lord Astarot announced to the city that the Star Shuttle 1's crew and passengers had safely landed on the space colony.

In that instant, the entire city cheered in hot-blooded celebration and elation.

Although they knew Heavenreacher's launch day was a big event, they didn't expect that watching it would be a far more exciting and thrilling experience than they had initially imagined.

It was as if they had all been part of the momentous achievement and witnessed history being made together.

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After the breaking news spread like wildfire to the other countries, the rest of the world trembled in shock.

The events that unfolded were way beyond anyone's imagination.

"Send people to investigate that floating fortress immediately! I want to know how long they have been building that thing and how they did it!"

"How did they overcome every challenge and succeed? If our people could steal all that knowledge, it would be even better! I want to know everything! Everything, you hear me?!"

"But, my Lord! How are we even meant to send our people up there to learn about it?!"

"That's for you to figure out!"

The momentous reveal at Sunpeak City shook every world leader to the core and prompted them to launch desperate investigations.

Suddenly, it felt like a race between various countries to reach for the stars.

Those who could not keep up with the change would be left behind and become a part of history.

Chapter 855: The Miracle of Life

Sea of Stars, Lunar Base

Back in the moon colony, the dragons and witches suddenly encountered an unexpected disaster and blessing that no one could have seen coming.

The crops within the plantation section suddenly grew rapidly and uncontrollably as if they had undergone some incredible mutation.

Ordinary vegetables like potatoes only took a few minutes to an hour to grow to five times their mature size. Fruit trees were even more exaggerated, as fruits like grapes reached tenfold their normal maturity size.

As a result, the original spacious plantation quickly became overcrowded with vegetation as the overgrowing crops took up all the available space inside the region.

Everyone working on the plantation was forced to flee outside the affected area, fearing they would become entangled and trapped within.

"W-What the hell happened to the crops? Why did they suddenly grow so quickly?!" a wood-element High Witch exclaimed in shock.

At the same time, she stared wide-eyed at the lush vegetation that had sealed up the entrance to the plantation section and continued to expand outward at a slower rate.

"I-I don't know, but we better do something about the vegetation's expansion. We can't let it continue its growth and encroach on other sections of the colony!"

"R-Right! We need to seal off this corridor completely!" an earth-attribute High Witch stated.

Shortly after, a thick wall of earth was quickly summoned to block off the expanding roots and vines.

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When Vaan returned to the moon colony, he was quickly alerted to the situation. Even he was dumbfounded when he scanned the plantation section with Fourth Dimensional Sense.

He didn't expect the situation in the moon colony to change so drastically within a few couple of hours of absence.

"My Lord, it's great to have you back!" Fourth Dragon Lady Pedyssin rejoiced before informing Vaan, "We currently have a situation here."

"Un, I can see that," Vaan calmly nodded before asking, "What happened?"

"That is the problem, my Lord. We are still trying to figure out what caused the crops to overgrow so quickly," Pedyssin replied before mentioning, "So far, we have only managed to gather everyone in the agriculture division here."

"We are still questioning them, but I'm sure at least one of them will provide us with some insights into the source of the matter," Pedyssin believed.

The crops wouldn't just mutate and grow rapidly for no reason. There had to be a stimulus or source that fueled the uncontrollable growth.

As the activities of everyone in the agriculture division were being investigated, a dragon suddenly thought of something and mentioned, "Lady Pedyssin, do you think the change had anything to do with the new soil we used?"

"New soil? How could any soil trigger such miraculous growth in the crops?" Pedyssin frowned in doubt but still asked, "Do we know where this new soil comes from? And why was it used?"

"The new soil was recently obtained from deep within the subterranean region, Lady Pedyssin," the dragon answered.

"The mining division found it when they were noting down the locations of mineral deposits on the path opened by the Supreme Leader. The mining division members brought the new soil back because they thought the agriculture division could use its rich nutrients."

After Vaan overheard that much, he immediately knew which exact soil the dragon was talking about. At the same time, he concluded that the soil had triggered the change in the crops.

However, even he would have never imagined that the soil would have such startling effects.

It had completely defied all logic and reasoning.

"The soil obtained from the depths of the subterranean region, has it been sent anywhere else other than the agriculture division?" Vaan inquired.

"I believe most of the soil brought back by the mining division was sent to the agriculture division, and the remaining portion was left with the research division, my Lord," the dragon answered honestly.

"I see," Vaan nodded before instructing the dragon, "Inform the mining division to seal off the special soil region and not procure any more special soil for the time being."

"Understood, Supreme Leader," the dragon complied.

Shortly after the dragon's swift departure, Pedyssin quickly asked, "Do you believe the new soil was the source of change in the crops, my Lord?"

"Most likely," Vaan calmly nodded before informing Pedyssin, "We will head to the research division now."

"Yes, my Lord," Pedyssin readily agreed, as she was responsible for getting to the bottom of the investigation.

The research division was mostly made up of dragon members and only five other witch scholars. Its main responsibility was recovering lost technology from the old moon colony.

However, they had also been studying various minerals and soil obtained from the pure mana-rich subterranean region.

Ever since Narvim arrived on the moon, he has been spending his time here in the research division.

Vaan had also hoped that the pure mana environment of the subterranean region would help Narvim improve his strength and catch up with the other dragon lords, who had almost all entered the Demigod rank.

"Supreme Leader, what brings you here today?" Narvim warmly greeted.

"You might have already heard about the situation at the plantation section. We believe the rapid overgrowth was caused by the new nutrient-rich soil used for cultivating the crops, Lord Narvim," Vaan mentioned before asking, "I heard a portion was left here for study. Has it been done?"

Narvim was immediately startled before he replied, "The nutrient-rich soil had indeed been studied... However, our observations did not reveal anything special or unique about it."

"As such, we were planning to run a few practical tests on it soon... But after hearing what happened at that plantation section, perhaps this place isn't the best place to run some tests on it."

Vaan nodded before he demanded custody of the special soil. However, he was quickly surprised by the quantity when Narvim directed him to it.

"This is all of it?" Vaan asked with surprise, staring at the ten grams of special soil. Shortly after, he added, "If this is all of it, how much was used in the agriculture division?"

"That's right, Supreme Leader," Narvim answered Vaan's first question before saying, "I believe the amount of special soil used at the plantation wasn't more than a human fist's worth."

Vaan was even more amazed after learning about that.

In other words, it didn't take more than a fist's worth of special soil to turn the entire plantation section into a vegetation heaven that could supply a full colony at its present state with at least a hundred years' worth of food.

As long as the overgrown vegetables and fruits at the plantation were tested for safe consumption, it would be considered an extraordinary bumper harvest.

Nevertheless, although Vaan strongly believed the special soil was the root of the change, he still had to confirm with his own eyes.

As such, he took the special soil outside to the moon's surface and sprinkled a gram of it onto the ground. Afterward, he observed it for changes under the exposure of sunlight.

Pedyssin and Narvim had also followed him to witness the power of the special soil.

They were both dumbfounded when they saw the gram of special soil slowly transform the rocky surface into a small patch of grassland.

When Vaan dripped some water on the patch of grass, it expanded even more rapidly and covered over thirty square meters in a short instant. The grass roots even dug through the hard rocky surface of the moon.

"H-How can there be something so miraculous in this world?" Narvim exclaimed in shock.

The special soil had overturned all his knowledge of plants and soil.

After all, he couldn't even feel a shred of energy from the special soil before it received water or was bathed in sunlight for several breaths.

However, once it actually received water or showered in sunlight, extraordinary energy was rapidly produced and stimulated incredible grass formation and growth.

Neither Vaan nor the dragon lords had quite seen something so miraculous.

"We haven't seen the best of it yet," Vaan believed.

Shortly after, he continued with his tests by planting some magical plants onto the new grassland.

Moments later, the magical plants started growing bigger and faster.

The special soil didn't rob the life force of any of the magical plants but nurtured them alongside the grass that grew from them instead.

It was simply incredible.

Shortly after, Vaan glanced at the remaining special soil in his hand—or rather, he focused on the composition of humus in the special soil.

Ding!

<You have discovered the Essence of the Divine Tree of Life (Dormant)>

<The Essence of the Divine Tree of Life (Dormant) is in a state of deep sleep to preserve itself but can be quickly awakened with sunlight or water>

Vaan only managed to discover the secret of the special soil after focusing his Fourth Dimensional Sense to a greater extent.

However, that also showed how deeply hidden the Essence of the Divine Tree of Life had been. It had actually retreated into the subatomic realm to prevent itself from destruction.

Nevertheless, the discovery of the Essence of the Divine Tree of Life only further proved the subterranean region was a part of the Purpleflame Territory, which had once been a marvelous green planet full of miraculous plants.

In fact, the Divine Tree of Life might have very well been the source of all the excellent growth in the magical plants.

It was truly a miracle of life.

Vaan suddenly frowned with doubt.

If the existence of the Divine Tree of Life was known, how could any divine being find the heart to destroy it along with the rest of the planet?

Would they not have been tempted to uproot it and plant it in their own territory?

Upon asking himself these questions, Vaan had a strong feeling that Gehenna and the Skymagia Star Kingdom must have never known about the Divine Tree of Life.

It was the only plausible explanation.

However, that would also imply the Divine Tree of Life had remained hidden and undiscovered throughout the ages.

How was it able to achieve that? By being in an unreachable place or a place no one ever thought to look?

Vaan had a feeling the subterranean region was much, much deeper underground than he had originally presumed.

Chapter 856: Seed of the World Tree

After several minutes passed, the tiny wisp of the Essence of the Divine Tree of Life in the ground eventually exhausted all its power of life.

However, not long after, the grass and magical plants began producing small amounts of spirit energy.

Although the moon's surface was incapable of supporting plant life due to its barren soil and absence of water, the grassland and magical plants appeared vibrant and full of life force.

Even if they didn't receive attentive care, it didn't seem like they would wilt and die anytime soon. In fact, they were very tenacious and could survive in the unkind environment for approximately three months at the very least.

It was mind-boggling that a wisp of the Essence of the Divine Tree of Life could produce such extensive results.

As long as the new grassland and magical plants were provided with a stable source of water, their tenacious lifespans could increase to several years. During that time, the moon's surface would greatly change due to their existence.

If Vaan wanted to, he could completely transform the entire surface of the moon into a habitable and blessed environment, given the sheer amount of the Essence of the Divine Tree of Life that was still buried deep within the Purpleflame Territory's subterranean region.

At the same time, the stable source of air provided by the lush vegetation and plant life would allow dragons and humans to explore the moon freely.

They wouldn't need to be confined inside the moon colony or require special space helmets.

In other words, they would no longer be restricted by limited living space. As such, they could bring in far more dragons and people, allowing them to develop the moon countless times faster as well.

Nevertheless, they still had to be mindful of the moon's mass while terraforming and developing it.

After all, if the moon's mass increased too much, it would lead to catastrophic effects on Pangea, such as massive tidal waves, extreme climate changes, or even orbital instability.

Regardless of the effects, life on Pangea would become more difficult or possibly impossible.

That said, Pangea was already being split between a few territories of Gehenna. By the time the moon was developed to a substantial extent, Pangea may have very been fully integrated with Gehenna.

As such, it wasn't something Vaan needed to be very concerned about. The risks existed, but the chances were almost non-existent.

"Myuu?" Emerald suddenly emerged from Vaan's body.

The little Wood Spirit appeared to be attracted to the grassland with few magical plants. However, after sniffing around for a bit, she soon found her way back to Vaan's palm, which held the remaining Essence of the Divine Tree of Life.

"Myuu, myuu!" Emerald clamored around the special soil in his palm with excitement.

"How rare for you to come out, Mera. So you can smell the good stuff, eh?" Vaan softly chuckled before offering the special soil to his Wood Spirit.

However, Emerald quickly shook her head and pointed at the patch of grassland.

Clearly, she wanted him to use the Essence of the Divine Tree of Life on the grassland to develop it further.

"I see. You also wish to develop this land," Vaan nodded with approval before saying, "Since it is your sincere wish, I have no choice but to grant it. Say, how should we develop this place, Mera?"

"What type of trees or plants shall we use to cultivate this place? It can't just be a plain grassland, right?" Vaan mentioned, rubbing his chin with a thoughtful look.

At the same time, Emerald also mimicked his action of rubbing his chin. She appeared to be contemplating very hard.

"Myuu..." Emerald hummed deeply in thought, her head hanging down and with a small frown on her cute forehead.

Suddenly, she raised her head as if she had been struck with a great idea.

"Oh? You've thought of what to plant in this land, Mera?" Vaan asked with interest, curious to learn what she had thought up.

"Myu!" Emerald nodded vigorously.

Shortly after, Emerald brought her small hands together and concentrated her wood-attribute magical energy in the center of them.

Over time, the concentrated wood-attribute magical energy took form.

At first, it was only the size of a grain. But later, it quickly took the shape of an oversized, green-colored, sunflower-looking seed that was bigger than the Wood Spirit's head by threefold.

"Myuu!"

Emerald excitedly raised the big, green sunflower seed as if saying they would cultivate the land with it.

Although the seed seemed to have taken up all her power to create, she was also very proud of her creation.

"Oh? What kind of seed do we have here?" Vaan casually focused on the green seed.

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[Seed of the World Tree]

The Seed of the World Tree can be planted to grow a World Tree, which is considered the mother of all trees and the symbol of worship for all wood spirit races.

If the Seed of the World Tree can be successfully germinated, all plant life within its area of influence will flourish and become a blessed land.

=====

"..."

After looking at the information, Vaan blinked twice, rubbed his eyes, then looked again to confirm he was seeing it correctly.

The corners of his lips twitched shortly after.

"You had such an incredible thing hidden in your Plant Compendium this whole time, Mera?" Vaan felt a little speechless.

"Myuu?" Emerald replied with a smug look, asking if he was surprised.

However, a few moments later, she explained that it was the voices from the Essence of the Divine Tree of Life that taught her how to recreate the Seed of the World Tree.

Furthermore, it was also the wish of the Divine Tree of Life to be revived.

After listening to Emerald's explanation, Vaan quickly grasped the full picture regarding the Divine Tree of Life.

While the Divine Tree of Life could enter a dormant state to preserve its essence and avoid extinction, it could not revive itself without external help.

"I see. So that's how it is," Vaan nodded with understanding before softly stating, "Unfortunately, you can't plant that here, Mera."

"Myuu?" Emerald immediately looked devastated and betrayed.

However, Vaan shook his head and said, "This is not a suitable place for the World Tree. Look at how small the moon is. It will be too cramped for the World Tree to mature."

"So, let me onto that seed for now, okay? I'll promise we'll find a more suitable place for it," Vaan promised.

Emerald reluctantly handed the Seed of the World Tree over.

Vaan only felt at ease after he stored the Seed of the World Tree inside his Heaven-Swallowing Space.

If he actually let Emerald plant the Seed of the World Tree on the moon, the end of the world wouldn't be far away.

After all, it was said that World Trees could grow frighteningly big.

If the World Trees were also nurtured by the Essence of the Divine Tree of Life, one could only imagine how much bigger they would grow.

Nevertheless, Vaan already had a suitable place in mind for the Seed of the World Tree. However, it would also take some time before it could be realized.

More importantly, Vaan was surprised that Emerald could commune with the Divine Tree of Life through its essences when it wasn't anything different from being dead in its current dormant state.

He wondered if Emerald shared some special connection with the spirit of the Divine Tree of Life due to her high affinity with it as a member of the Wood Spirit Races.

Nevertheless, Emerald pouted on Vaan's left shoulder when she understood she couldn't plant the Seed of the World Tree and satisfy the wish of the Divine Tree of Life right away.

At the same time, she also became disinterested in cultivating the moon. In fact, she felt too sleepy and weak to do anything after using all her mana.

Thus, Vaan ultimately decided what to plant and grow using the remaining Essence of the Divine Tree of Life.

A much larger grassland region filled with trees and magical plants was soon created.

After Vaan was done, he left Narvim in charge of studying the plants in the new grassland region and assessing any potentially harmful effects they might have or develop.

As that was happening, Vaan took Emerald deep into the Purpleflame Territory's subterranean region, where the rest of the Essence of the Divine Tree of Life was located.

Originally, he had avoided investigating too deeply as he was cautious about getting too close to the surface and exposing the existence of the pure mana in the subterranean region.

However, now that he realized they were possibly far, far deeper underground than he had previously imagined, he wished to continue his investigation.

'If I'm not wrong, the Divine Tree of Life should have grown in a secret realm deep beneath the earth... That's why the beings of Gehenna never discovered it,' Vaan mused along the way.

Naturally, such a location was very out of place for a divine tree to grow.

However, Vaan figured a powerful being artificially planted it in the distant past. Although he didn't know the reason, it must have served some purpose.

More importantly, since it was where the Divine Tree of Life grew, there must have been countless miraculous and high-quality magical plants growing around it.

If Vaan could get his hands on such precious resources, he could further improve himself or even achieve the Wood Spirit Body for Emerald.

That said, Vaan wasn't hopeful.

After all, even the Divine Tree of Life was forced to give up its main body and enter a dormant state with its essence.

How could the rest of the magical plants around it survive?

However, since it was also located in a secret realm deep underground, the Divine Tree of Life and the other magical plants around it shouldn't have been destroyed by the Eternal Purpleflame.

If that was the case, why did the Divine Tree of Life retreat into a dormant state?

Vaan figured the Divine Tree of Life's overwhelming life force was the reason the Pure Earth Elemental Worm was attracted to the Purpleflame Territory's subterranean region in the first place.

At the same time, the Divine Tree of Life must have sensed the great threat from the Pure Earth Elemental Worm. As such, it chose to kill off its main body and retreat into dormancy with its essence.

As a result, the Pure Earth Elemental Worm lost track of its target after the powerful life force withered and disappeared. Since it couldn't sense any other life force, it ended up staying in the subterranean region.

That was until Vaan stumbled upon it and woke it up from its long slumber.

Chapter 857: Hidden World

After Vaan arrived in the depths of the subterranean region where the decomposed tree roots were located, he continued to travel through the earth as he traced the path of the root back to its source.

It was only a single tree root that had decomposed into humus-type soil with time, but it was incredibly thick and long, stretching for several dozen kilometers.

When Vaan thought about how much of the Essence of the Divine Tree of Life was hidden within the soil, he couldn't help but wonder how powerful the Divine Tree of Life was in its prime state.

Given a wisp of its essence could already produce such miraculous effects on barren land, he had a strong feeling that the Divine Tree of Life could have nurtured the life of countless star realms without an issue—had it not been hidden away in the depth of the underground world.

Nevertheless, realizing that only made Vaan more curious as to why the Divine Tree of Life was in such a secluded location in the first place.

Was it truly planted there for a purpose? Or was it miraculously born in such a place due to some favorable circumstances?

After Vaan followed the decomposed tree root soil for more than thirty kilometers, his astonishment grew greatly.

Just how deep underground was he?

Furthermore, just how big was the Divine Tree of Life in its heyday? Has it really evaded everyone's notice until now?

Even Vaan's Fourth Dimensional Sense could not see the end of the tree root in sight despite discovering countless other decomposed tree root soil within his detection range.

Nevertheless, since he was already picking up other decomposed tree root soil, it must mean he was getting close to the trunk of the tree.

However, since it still extended outside his detection range, wouldn't that mean he would have to travel another thirty kilometers upward to catch a glimpse of the tree trunk?

As several questions swam through Vaan's mind, he suddenly drilled into a vast underground realm filled with lush vegetation and fresh air.

At the same time, a thick wave of divine energy bombarded him harmlessly.

In fact, his body felt incredibly pleasant and invigorated as it greedily absorbed the divine energy in the air.

The spirit energy in the vast open space was so thick and concentrated that it had been condensed into its higher form—divine energy.

More importantly, up until Vaan drilled a hole into the vast underground realm, its existence had completely eluded his senses.

Even his seemingly omniscient Fourth Dimensional Sense had failed to notice it.

Did that mean his Fourth Dimensional Sense was not omniscient like he thought it to be?

No, his Fourth Dimensional Sense's omniscience wasn't flawed; he was simply too weak to fully utilize its sensing abilities.

Moreover, the fact that it had failed him now implied that the restriction or law imposed on the hidden realm was a level higher than his ability to see through it with his Fourth-Dimensional Sense.

At the same time, it also meant that everything he could detect with the Fourth Dimensional Sense until now had been too low-leveled.

"To think there was such a vast realm hidden in this place... Moreover, the restrictive barrier used to conceal this secret realm is even more impressive," Vaan muttered with amazement.

Not only did the restrictive barrier escape his detection, but it had been covering such an enormous realm this whole time.

Even he could not see how big the secret underground realm was at a glance.

If not for the vague earthen ceiling far above, Vaan would have thought he had suddenly reached the surface of the Purpleflame Territory.

"Such a big realm hidden down here all this time, and no one knew about it... I wonder what secrets it holds," Vaan softly muttered.

Although his awakened adventurous spirit was urging him to explore, he also had a vague sense of danger from all around him.

Such an extraordinary place having its fair share of danger was to be expected.

"Myu, myuu!" Emerald suddenly exclaimed with excitement.

After being exposed to the wood element-enriched environment for several breaths, the Wood Spirit was quickly revived and brimming with energy.

Emerald flapped her fairy wings and circled multiple laps around Vaan, urging him to explore the place with her.

However, Vaan quickly shook his head and said, "I know you're excited, but you need to tone it down a little, Mera. This secret realm is still unknown to us, so we don't know what kind of great danger is hiding in this place."

"Myu!"

Emerald's excitement quickly plummeted, replaced by fright after she listened to Vaan's words.

She quickly descended onto his head and buried herself inside his hair, disappearing underneath. Moments later, her timid head poked out. She looked around with a wary yet curious gaze.

"Myu, myuu, myuu!" Emerald said she would be on the lookout for danger and urged on with their exploration.

Vaan smiled wryly.

Nevertheless, he quickly did a second round of observation of his surroundings. The secret realm was brimming with the life of high-quality magical plants.

No matter where he looked, each magical plant was vibrant and full of vitality; it was practically glowing with a holy aura, which illuminated the place—a place where sunlight did not reach.

Vaan figured each magical plant within his sight was at least at the divine rank. Such potency wouldn't be easy to find anywhere else.

Meanwhile, the majestic and towering Divine Tree of Life was still standing tall and seemingly overlooking the entire secret realm with its enormous crown, which covered most of the underground sky.

However, it was also the only tree in the secret realm that didn't glow with a holy aura. In fact, no life emanated from it.

In other words, while the Divine Tree of Life's main body was still standing, seemingly for eternity, it was dead. After all, all of its essences had retreated to its roots and entered a dormant state.

As such, the secret realm's surface was glowing with the light of life, but the sky was shrouded in deathly darkness.

Such a clear contrast between life and death gave the secret realm an unfathomable sense of profoundness.

Although Vaan was tempted to pocket every magical plant he saw and came across, his Heaven-Swallowing Space didn't possess the conditions to sustain such high-quality plant life.

More importantly, he didn't want to upset the environment before he could finish assessing the potential danger hidden in the secret realm.

He couldn't let his greed attract avoidable disaster.

"Be sure to behave and stay close, okay?"

"Myuu!"

Emerald responded to Vaan's instruction with a Roger salute.

Chapter 858: Flower Spirit

Shortly after Vaan received Emerald's willing cooperation, he focused on sensing his surroundings for the hidden dangers lurking in the background.

However, he quickly realized that while his five senses worked fine, his sixth sense, like the Fourth Dimensional Sense, was greatly suppressed within the secret realm.

In essence, his Fourth Dimensional Sense was like a type of will.

As long as he willed it, he would be able to understand or peruse information about his target, or at least, that had always been the case until now.

However, it became clear to Vaan that there was a greater will within the secret realm that was able to suppress the will of his Fourth Dimensional Sense. As such, he had no choice but to rely on his basic five senses to navigate his way.

Nevertheless, Vaan didn't feel unfortunate about the circumstances. In fact, he felt fortunate for it.

After all, it helped him realize he had been too reliant on his Fourth Dimensional Sense.

Although the Fourth Dimensional Sense was awakened in his present life, it wasn't an ability that belonged to his current level. Moreover, he couldn't be over-dependant on the laws of his past lives either.

He could utilize them, but he shouldn't rely on them to solve all his problems.

Otherwise, he would only be revisiting the same feats of his past lives, which wasn't what the first-life him wanted when he ventured into the endless sea of nothingness.

Varuna left Chaos behind to search for answers, but he never got all his answers before his untimely death. He had only discovered the existence of the higher-dimensional world but never found a way to transcend beyond the level of Outerverse Originator.

That was why it was crucial not to walk the same path. It was to avoid the same bottleneck and explore a new possibility.

Even Vaan couldn't be confident he could live up to the expectations of his first life and surpass the Outerverse Originator Realm in his current life. In fact, he was more inclined to believe he would fail somewhere along the way.

However, it was the experience of his repeated failures that would pave the way ahead.

That was how humans have always grown to be as great as they were; they learned from their repeated failures before achieving success.

...

As Vaan carefully navigated his way around the foresty environment, he shortly discovered a patch of fresh tracks within a couple dozen meters of his location.

He immediately went over to investigate.

Upon careful inspection, he learned the footprint on the ground was shaped like a human's. However, it was too small to belong to an adult; it was around the size of a child's.

That said, the weight of a normal human child wouldn't be great enough to leave behind a deep imprint, let alone long enough to be noticed in such a vibrant green environment full of vitality.

Vaan immediately thought of multiple possibilities.

The human-like child could be very heavy or overweight, or the footprints belonged to an unknown larger creature with child-sized human feet.

Considering the possibility of humans being in such a hidden realm was quite low, Vaan was more inclined to believe there were other humanoid beings.

Nevertheless, while Vaan was studying the fresh tracks, Emerald's gaze wandered off to a nearby strange-looking, rose-like flower that exuded a holy aura like any other magical plant found in the secret realm so far.

Emerald couldn't help but feel drawn to its rich wood element and pleasant scent as she gave it a good sniff.

"Myu!" Emerald gasped with delight.

Suddenly, the strange rose-like flower wiggled, and a pair of human-like eyes underneath its rosy blue petals opened. It stared directly into Emerald's eyes before freezing.

At the same time, Emerald stared back at it and froze, too.

"Ahhhh!"

"Myuuu!"

Two separate screams followed before Emerald quickly retreated to Vaan's head and stared back at the startled flower spirit that had awakened from its slumber.

At the same time, its movements also exposed its small humanoid body, which its scale-like layers of leaves had camouflaged and made to look like stalks of grass.

Meanwhile, Vaan had already taken notice of the weird flower spirit the moment it opened its eyes.

However, due to its lack of hostility, he didn't take any immediate action to silence it. He only sensed surprise, fright, and curiosity in its eyes.

Since it wasn't an immediate threat, eliminating it wouldn't be the best course of action.

If Vaan had eliminated every unknown lifeform he encountered based on the unknown risk and variable they posed, he would have missed out on greater opportunities that could have been explored instead.

After all, coming across non-hostile lifeforms in an unknown land was a blessing that shouldn't be wasted.

If he could befriend the strange flower spirit, he would be able to learn more about the hidden realm.

"Myuu?" Emerald glanced at the flower spirit curiously.

After studying the flower spirit for some time, Emerald realized it was a type of wood spirit like her. As such, she felt relaxed and lowered her guard around it.

Wood spirits were innately good-natured and docile.

That said, the flower spirit appeared quite different from Emerald. It seemed to be some magical rose that had gained sentience and evolved into a flower spirit.

Moreover, it was a much higher-ranked wood spirit than Emerald.

As such, Emerald had a subconscious inclination to revere and respect the flower spirit as she was exposed to its holy aura.

"A fairy-type wood spirit...? Why are you so small?" the flower spirit unconfidently yet curiously asked in a language Vaan could understand, surprisingly.

Moreover, the flower spirit possessed a cute, childlike voice.

Despite being a divine-rank wood spirit that may have existed for a very long time as a magical plant, the flower spirit's intelligence seemed to only be at the level of a child.

"Myu, myuu, myuu?" Emerald tilted her head in confusion.

Why are you asking such a weird question? Are wood spirits supposed to be big like you? – Emerald seemingly asked the flower spirit.

Although they were both humanoid wood spirits, the flower spirit was five times bigger than Emerald.

"Huh? I'm actually among the smallest of all wood spirits here, you know?" the flower spirit replied with surprise and bewilderment.

Nevertheless, after Vaan quietly observed the brief exchange between the two, he concluded that communication wouldn't be a problem for them.

Chapter 859: Garden of Thyia

Meanwhile, Emerald's eyes widened with astonishment after listening to the Flower Spirit's statement.

"Myuu, myu, myuu?" Emerald uttered with surprise.

'If the Flower Spirit was among the smallest of the wood spirits, then how big was the biggest?' – Emerald asked.

"The biggest wood spirit, you ask? Hmm, that would be the Elder Spirit, the biggest tree you would see around here after the Mother Tree. The Elder Spirit also has the biggest say around here. Everyone has to listen to him," the Flower Spirit honestly answered.

She seemed to have no reservations about sharing information with a complete stranger she had just met.

Nevertheless, the Flower Spirit still had her curiosity.

"Where do you come from, Little Fairy?" the Flower Spirit asked curiously, adding, "You're not from around here, are you? Could it be that you are from the outside world?"

As soon as the Flower Spirit raised that question, her eyes lit with hopeful anticipation.

However, Emerald didn't answer immediately. She hesitantly glanced at Vaan for directions before receiving his nod of approval. Only then did she admit with a nod.

"Myu!" Emerald answered.

"Woah~!" the Flower Spirit quickly exclaimed with excitement before enthusiastically stating, "That's amazing! I always wanted to see the outside world one day! I just knew there was a wider world out there! There has to be!"

"But... the Elder Spirit forbids it," the Flower Spirit mentioned dispiritedly shortly after.

"Myu, myuu, myuu?" Emerald tilted her head with doubt.

She wondered why the Elder Spirit didn't let the Flower Spirit outside.

Although she hadn't had any interaction with other wood spirits before, she instinctively knew that wood spirits were very harmonious among their kind.

Thus, this so-called Elder Spirit shouldn't be able to hold the Flower Spirit back in the secret realm against her will if it was truly her wish to see the outside world.

"No one is allowed outside because it is very dangerous for wood spirits in the outside world. According to the Elder Spirit, wood spirits who wander outside will either get killed or live miserable lives," the Flower Spirit stated before asking, "Tell me, Little Fairy. Is it really that bad outside?"

"Myu?" Emerald pondered for a moment before replying, "Myuu, myuu, myu, myuu, myuuu~!"

"Ah? It is truly that bad outside?" the Flower Spirit exclaimed, feeling a little afraid after receiving Emerald's confirmation.

Emerald told her that the outside was full of bad people and that she had suffered a lot—to the point that she wished she didn't exist.

However, that was before she met her human master.

"Myuu, myu, myu, myuu~!" Emerald began praising Vaan in front of the Flower Spirit and telling her about how he had saved her from the darkness she used to be trapped in.

After hearing so much about Vaan from Emerald, the Flower Spirit re-evaluated him with a blank look.

"You are... a human?" the Flower Spirit asked in disbelief.

Vaan calmly nodded.

In that instant, the Flower Spirit froze, seemingly paralyzed in fear. Despite being close to him for so long, she only became afraid after learning he was a human.

Evidently, the Flower Spirit was not familiar with humans and didn't regard Vaan as a human until he acknowledged it. Or rather, she thought he was just another strange wood spirit and not some other being.

"Y-You... please don't hurt me," the Flower Spirit pleaded, looking pitiful.

"If I wanted to hurt you, I would have plenty of chances to do it already, don't you think so?" Vaan replied with an amused look before mentioning, "I have a few questions. You'll answer them, won't you?"

The Flower Spirit nodded obediently without daring to take her eyes off him. At the same time, her cute reaction amused him.

"Myuu, myuu!" Emerald clamored, claiming the Flower Spirit had no reason to fear Vaan.

The Flower Spirit nodded obediently again as if she was fully agreeing with Emerald to please her and not because she truly thought that.

"What is this isolated realm?" Vaan asked.

"U-Um... this isolated realm is known as the Garden of Thyia, or at least, that's what the wood spirits call it, Lord Mister," the Flower Spirit answered nervously.

"Lord Mister?" Vaan smiled with amusement before saying, "You can just call me Vaan. What is your name?"

"I don't have a name, Lord Vaan. However, the other wood spirits just call me Little Rose," the Flower Spirit replied honestly.

"Then, I will do the same," Vaan nodded before asking, "You won't mind, right?"

"N-Not at all, Lord Vaan," Little Rose answered.

After a few short exchanges, Little Rose's initial fear of Vaan died down as she became increasingly at ease with his presence.

Nevertheless, Vaan was quite curious about this source of fear that she and the other wood spirits seemed to have developed while living in such an enclosed realm.

"Well then, Little Rose, do you know why everyone calls this enclosed realm the Garden of Thyia?" Vaan casually asked.

At the same time, he harbored doubts in his heart.

If all wood spirits were timid and fearful like Little Rose in front of other races, then what was the vague sense of danger he felt from the hidden realm?

"Um..." Little Rose contemplated for a moment before saying, "It might have something to do with the Goddess of Life, Thyia, who was said to have planted the Mother Tree in the distant past..."

"However, no one actually knows if this is true," Little Rose stated.

"Is that so?" Vaan uttered.

"B-But! If there's someone in the Garden of Thyia who might know the truth, it would most likely be the Elder Spirit, Lord Vaan. The Elder Spirit is the oldest wood spirit around here."

"However, I don't recommend you to seek out the Elder Spirit for answers..." Little Rose hesitantly added.

"And why is that, Little Rose?" Vaan casually asked, but he could already guess the reason.

"The Elder Spirit is very strict and unlike other wood spirits. He wouldn't hesitate to punish a misbehaving wood spirit," Little Rose stated before saying, "If the Elder Spirit learns about you, an outsider, he might do something very terrible to you..."

"Oh? And why would you tell me this? Wouldn't it have been better if you didn't say anything?" Vaan calmly smiled.

Little Rose shook her head and said, "It's... It's because of the Little Fairy. If such a pure wood spirit vouches for you, then you must not be a bad person."

"It's not right for bad things to happen to good people," Little Rose added innocently.

Chapter 860: Crown's Nest

"Is that so? I'm happy to hear you think that way, Little Rose," Vaan said, reaching out his hand to pat the Flower Spirit's head.

However, Little Rose's neck quickly shrank in fear as she distanced herself from Vaan's hand. Clearly, she was still afraid of him to a certain extent because he was from another race.

As such, Vaan had no choice but to retract his hand.

Although Little Rose was a Divine-rank Wood Spirit, she did not seem to be as strong as other Divine-rank Elemental Spirits. Even Quasi-Divine Fire Spirit from the Red Dragon Clan was likely stronger than Little Rose.

However, this didn't mean Little Rose lacked Divine-rank offensive powers or that the Quasi-Divine Fire Spirit was as strong as Divine-rank spirits.

Instead, Little Rose didn't know how to fight since it wasn't in her nature to battle or commit violence.

As such, that also made Wood Spirits like her easy targets for greedy cultivators.

Vaan could see why the so-called Elder Spirit would prohibit the Wood Spirits from leaving, even though the threat of the Pure Earth Elemental Worm was no longer present.

If all Wood Spirits were like Little Rose, then they were no different from precious elixirs and magical plants with miraculous properties.

Cultivators would only see them as valuable resources.

They would only care about their use and sustenance and not their life or intelligence—just like how humans only care about rearing and butchering livestock for meat.

"Little Rose, are there only Wood Spirits like you in this Garden of Thyia?" Vaan asked.

However, Little Rose surprisingly shook her head and said, "Yes and no, Lord Vaan. At the very least, only Wood Spirits could be found on the ground level."

"But up there?" Little Rose directed Vaan's attention to the crown of the dead Divine Tree of Life and said, "There seems to be something else up there, but no one knows what it is."

Vaan tried to peer inside the crown of the dead Divine Tree of Life. However, his senses were unable to penetrate through the veil of darkness that covered it. It seemed to be protected or hidden by a stronger restrictive barrier.

Nevertheless, he could feel a concentrated sense of danger in the crown region.

"No one has ever tried to investigate that place?" Vaan inquired with interest.

"It's not that no one has ever tried to investigate Crown's Nest but that no one can. Crown's Nest is overflowing with deathly energy, which is fatal to Wood Spirits. That is why no one can ever get close for a look, Lord Vaan," Little Rose answered.

"However, the opposite seems to be equally true for whatever is living up there. The creatures hidden up there can't leave Crown's Nest or come down due to the rich spirit energy of life around here."

"Or, at the very least, that is what I would like to believe. I'm not exactly knowledgeable on this matter. The older Wood Spirits know more about Crown's Nest than little me," Little Rose stated.

"Myuu, myu, myuu, myuu!"

Emerald suddenly cried in protest, saying if Little Rose was considered little, then what about her?

"Um... Puny Fairy?" Little Rose gave Emerald a new nickname.

Unsurprisingly, Emerald disliked it very much and strongly objected. She wondered if Little Rose was trying to start a fight with her.

How dare she call her puny?

Vaan couldn't help but feel amused by Emerald's antics. Although she was normally timid around Topaz, this didn't seem to be the case with other Wood Spirits like her.

Meanwhile, Little Rose was a little lost for words. She wasn't sure how she should respond to Emerald.

There wasn't any ill intention behind her words.

However, another Wood Spirit found a problem with them. Something like that had never happened to her before, at least not with other Wood Spirits in the Garden of Thyia.

It seems the Fairy Spirit was more different from the Wood Spirits she knew than she originally believed.

Nevertheless, while Vaan and Emerald were interacting with Little Rose and building up their trust and friendship, other Wood Spirits in the Garden of Thyia suddenly closed in on their location from all directions.

At the same time, Vaan quickly sensed the danger and moved closer to Little Rose.

Although Little Rose was surprised by Vaan's action, she understood the situation the moment the other Wood Spirits appeared.

"A human!" an earthly senior Ginseng Spirit shrieked upon laying eyes on Vaan's figure. "I knew I sensed a strange presence around here, but to think it would be a human!"

"Our safe sanctuary has been invaded! Little Rose, quickly get away from that human! It's not safe there! That's a human, you know? A human! He isn't a Wood Spirit like us!" the senior Ginseng Spirit cried.

"What do you want, Human? State your conditions!" a senior Sunflower Spirit asked before pleading, "Please don't hurt Little Rose! She is still young and growing. If it's quality Wood Essence that you want, you can take mine!"

"Wait, everyone! Calm down! Lord Vaan is not a bad person!" Little Rose hurriedly informed the surrounding Wood Spirits.

Vaan was shocked to discover that a few of the Wood Spirits possessed stronger divine aura than the Great Devils like Abaddon and Hecate. Furthermore, they weren't even the oldest Wood Spirits in the Garden of Thyia.

In that case, how strong was the so-called Elder Spirit?

Vaan felt fortunate that the Wood Spirits were innately good-natured and not violent or cruel.

This could be observed from the Wood Spirits' current reactions as the Rank 7 Divine Spirits attempted to reason with him through words instead of subduing him with force.

After all, they had more than enough power—should they choose to do so.

Of course, it could be argued that they couldn't because they were concerned about Little Rose's safety, which Vaan would rather believe to be safe than sorry.

"Good person? Don't be fooled, Little Rose! Have you forgotten the words of the Elder Spirit?" a Kinggrass Spirit urgently mentioned.

"There is no good human in the face of temptation! Human greed is simply limitless! Humans are such insatiable beings, the worst of the lot! You'll never know when they will suck your Wood Essence dry for their selfish interest and leave you to die!"

"Why didn't you listen to the Elder Spirit's wise words? The Elder Spirit has told us more than once that humans are the most dangerous beings in the outside world!" the Kinggrass Spirit stated.

As Emerald listened to bad words directed at Vaan, her small cheeks became increasingly puffed up from indignance.

"Myuu, myu, myuu!!!"

Emerald scolded all the Wood Spirits for being short-sighted, ignorant, and scaredy-cats who had no idea who they were condemning without knowing the person at all.

She told them that they were all wrong and had no right to judge Vaan.

Nevertheless, after Emerald's sudden outburst of emotions, the area became dead silent.

The Wood Spirits all had their attention fixed on Emerald, seemingly affected by her words as they swayed some. Surprise, bewilderment, and astonishment colored their eyes.

The older Rank 7 Divine Wood Spirits were especially startled. They started evaluating Emerald as a Wood Spirit.

Emerald was only a Mid-rank Wood Spirit, and yet her opinions could even move Divine-rank Wood Spirits—That wasn't something just any lower-rank Wood Spirit could do.

After all, the Elder Spirit had long shaped their views. So, it wasn't easy for the conflicting opinions of a lower-ranking Wood Spirit to sway or even shake them.

Why were they inclined to give the words of this lower-rank Wood Spirit some serious consideration?

Just what kind of Wood Spirit was she? – Many Wood Spirits wondered.

When Vaan noticed the strange reactions of the Wood Spirits, his eyes flickered thoughtfully.