

The Witch 31

Chapter 31: Captain Rhys' Physique

"Aunty..." Linette's furrowed her brows, and memories of their once-loving aunty surfaced in her mind before she sighed, "Let's not assume things."

"We should just worry about getting out of this place alive first. Then, we'll look for the specialist healer that recently achieved her High Awakening to see if she can treat your condition. Everything else comes after."

"Mm. I will listen to you, sister."

Lillias obediently nodded before lowering her head in low spirits.

Her inability to wield magic since birth has always been a source of worry and disgrace for members of the Delaroa Household, a noble household with multiple High Witches.

She was but a mere mortal without her magic.

If not for the problem of too much cumulation of mana in her body, which put her in life-threatening situations rather than extending her life, people would have long suspected she was a child of another household.

...

Ding!

<You have selected the first reward option>

<Your outer body defense will increase by 3 points>

Shortly after choosing his reward, Vaan felt the lump of earth-attribute refined mana divide into minuscule particles and spread across his skin.

Vaan frowned slightly at the sensation of ants crawling across his skin and prickling his pores like needles, but he did not let it interrupt his movement as he continued to take the lead.

Swish, swish~!

With a quick step, Vaan closed the distance on another two hellhounds and drew an arc of red light with his twin fang daggers, slicing their necks at uncanny angles before he did a roll and lept back on his feet to continue the lead.

"All these hellhounds would have fetched a good price if we sold them at a city," Captain Rhys sighed at the number of bodies left behind. "Whatever, it can't be helped. Life is more important."

"Money is only good when you are alive to spend," Vaan casually remarked, but in truth, he was reminding them not to be greedy.

He did not want the escort group to become greedy for wealth that they lose sight of life and slow everyone down.

Awrooo!

Vaan gripped his twin fang daggers, ready to slay the incoming group of hellhounds ahead, when the sudden howl caused them to back off, ultimately saving their lives from the grim reaper that is him.

His pupils quickly shrank in that instance.

The hellhounds suddenly became smart, splitting into two groups, and circled to attack the young warriors in the rear.

"Ahh!" the young warriors cried.

"Be careful! That was the howl of a Rank 2 Dark Hellhound," Captain Rhys' expression turned serious as he solemnly warned the group. "They are capable of issuing commands to Rank 1 Dark Hellhounds!"

"We'll be relying on you to repel the Rank 2 Dark Hellhounds, Captain Rhys." Vaan entrusted the lead Captain Rhys, "Leave the Rank 1 Dark Hellhounds to me."

"That goes without saying." Captain Rhys nodded, heightening his senses to the peak to locate the Rank 2 Dark Hellhound.

As Vaan dashed past the Earth Salamander to assist the young warriors in the back, Linnete quickly conveyed her intent to help through her eyes.

"You must conserve your mana for the crucial moment, my Lady!" Vaan strictly reminded.

He couldn't care less for the young warriors' lives.

If sacrificing them to ensure Linette conserved enough mana to repel the potential threats of Rank 3 Dark Hellhounds, he would gladly do it.

"Ahhh!"

One of the young warriors on the left side rear was caught and mawed to death by three hellhounds as Vaan chose to assist the right side rear first.

Linette bit her lips and shielded Lillias's eyes from seeing the gruesome sight.

"Hervy!"

The young warriors cried at the loss of their comrade, but the immediate threat of the hellhounds in front of them gave them no time to mourn.

Vaan finished off the right side before rushing over to assist the left side, but the hellhounds immediately backed off under the Rank 2 Dark Hellhound's command.

Awroooo!

The Rank 1 Dark Hellhounds immediately chose a different target to attack, and Vaan reacted accordingly, rushing over to the Earth Salamander's middle right side.

Right at the instance of his arrival, Vaan saw the blur of a slightly larger shadow from the corners of his eyes, rushing at him with incredible speed and timing.

"Captain Rhys!"

"Right on it!"

Right after Vaan's call, the vigilant and battle-ready Captain Rhys roared as he rushed over at the right moment to block the Rank 2 Dark Hellhound's sneak attack with his greatsword.

Clang!

The clash of blows immediately repelled the two brutes apart.

However, Captain Rhys kicked off one of the Earth Salamander's moving legs and lunged back towards the Rank 2 Dark Hellhound with a follow-up attack.

"Haaaa!"

Captain Rhys roared, both hands tightly gripped on the sword handle, and the greatsword raised above his head for one big and mighty swing.

In that instance, the red aura around his body spiked, vibrated, channeled, and condense to form the shape of a bigger blade on the greatsword, making it look like a crimson buster sword.

Aura Armament!

It was the strongest form of attack power that Rank 2 Aura Masters could give to their weapon by investing all their aura in them and thereby abandoning all their body defense at the same time.

Shing!

Captain Rhy's attack completely overpowered the Rank 2 Dark Hellhound, directly cleaving its body in half; its fangs, claws, and all shattered in the process.

Boom!

The buster-form greatsword struck the ground right after, kicking up a storm of dust before the buster sword aura scattered back into Captain Rhys' body.

Vaan narrowed his eyes upon noticing the lingering tint of redness on Captain Rhys' skin.

Normally, Rank 2 Aura Masters could not overpower Rank 2 Demonic Beasts so easily—not unless they have special physiques that boost their attack power.

'Fire-attribute Berserk Physique, huh?' Vaan determined.

It was a much more common physique than the rare dual-attribute Giant Physique that Vaan didn't actually have.

Nevertheless, he did not have time to ponder on his real physique due to the howls of multiple Rank 2 Dark Hellhounds in the area, causing everyone's expression to change.

Awrooo!

Chapter 32: Narrow Escape

"Those were the howls of multiple Rank 2 Dark Hellhounds! Run!" Captain Rhys shouted.

In a short instance, the entire escort group began running at their quickest speed to escape the hellhounds' chase.

Vaan returned to the Earth Salamander and used Magic Vision to observe the movements of mana in the darkness.

A frown quickly appeared on his face.

"We won't be able to outrun the Rank 2 Dark Hellhounds; their strengths, speed, and defenses are superior to Dark Hellhounds in every way," Vaan mentioned before stating, "They will catch up to us sooner or later."

"Then what do you suggest we do?!" a young warrior spat venomously before shouting, "We are already doing our best to escape. What else can we do except run?!"

"We still have Lady Linette with us! We will definitely make it with her magic!" another young warrior said on the run.

Vaan's frown deepened.

It was as they said; Linette's True Magic was the only viable method to deal with a group of Rank 2 Dark Hellhounds.

However, that option was out of the question, for the predator of the night had made its move.

He could see a cluster of mana more compacted than Rank 2 Dark Hellhounds moving towards them, swiftly and without a sound like a ghostly apparition.

Vaan did not doubt it was a Rank 3 Dark Hellhound.

"We're in deep trouble now!" Vaan exclaimed and said, "We have killed too many hellhounds and attracted a Rank 3 Dark Hellhound!"

It was definitely the big leader of the pack they were facing.

"Rank 3 Dark Hellhound!"

Captain Rhys and the young warriors felt heavy.

Forget about the Rank 3 Dark Hellhound; the incoming group of Rank 2 Dark Hellhounds was already more than they could handle.

"Dammit! If we had a few more hours, we could have made it out of the Blackmoon Region!"

"Bah! Even if we made it out, it doesn't mean that the hellhounds would stop chasing us! We would still be doomed either way unless a Senior Witch intervenes!"

"How does Vaan even know about the Rank 3 Dark Hellhound?! I didn't hear any mighty howl!" someone raised the question.

Captain Rhys and the others immediately had their doubts.

"Vaan can see them!"

Lillias answered for Vaan, whom she had been silently and curiously observing amidst the dangerous chase.

It was not hard for anyone to arrive at the same conclusion.

However, only Lillias had the luxury to be idly studying Vaan's behavior to figure it out.

Nevertheless, Vaan continued to observe the hellhounds' movement without speaking, which was as good as silently admitting her claim.

"Not good!" Vaan suddenly exclaimed and said, "The Rank 3 Dark Hellhound is commanding the Rank 2 Dark Hellhounds to entrap us completely!"

"Everyone, head for the stream!" Captain Rhys quickly said.

There was no other way.

Although Vaan wanted to leave the Blackmoon Region within the day, the option to advance was no longer viable in the face of a Rank 3 and multiple Rank 2 Dark Hellhounds.

Forcing their way forward would only lead to death.

The young warriors showed evident exhaustion and did not have much stamina to keep up their current pace for much longer.

"The stream? Why the stream?" Lillias curiously asked.

While the two sisters were ignorant of the reason, the young warriors reacted knowingly after hearing the captain's order.

"There are points in the stream where the depths are as steep as rivers. Over the years, escort groups have made several safe zones underwater in cases of emergency like this one," Vaan explained.

They were fortunate to be so close to one such safe zone when the Rank 3 Dark Hellhound locked onto them.

Suddenly, Vaan's expression changed in the next moment.

"Lady Linette, it's coming!" Vaan warned, "The Rank 3 Dark Hellhound knows our plan to escape into the stream!"

The ghostly shadow in the distance shot over with incredulous speed that far outstripped Rank 1 Dark Hellhounds by several folds and reached the group's rear in the blink of an eye.

Linette knew it was time for her to use her magic.

Earth Wall!

Earth Shield!

Magic Barrier!

Linette invoked her defensive spells, but her expression quickly changed as the Rank 3 Dark Hellhound tore through her defenses like paper.

Ultimately, a True Witch could not stand up against a monster that required the power of Senior Witches to defeat.

"Earth Salamander!" Linette cried.

Bam!

The big familiar shielded the Rank 3 Dark Hellhound's attack with its body as a last resort, but a single collision immediately threw Vaan and the two sisters off the Earth Salamander's back.

"Ahhh!"

"Lillias!"

Vaan quickly reached out and caught both of them with his arms in midair whilst holding his daggers before landing by the shores of the streams.

"Lady Linette, quickly! Over here!"

Captain Rhys urged with his head sticking out from a part of the stream where the water appeared to be quite deep.

However, the Rank 3 Dark Hellhound quickly caught up after throwing off the Earth Salamander, clearly with a target in mind.

It was intelligent enough to know who to target first!

Earth Wall!

Earth Shield!!

Magic Barrier!

Linette emptied her mana in her final defense spell, invoking her strongest defense magic, an omnidirectional barrier composed of pure earth-attribute refined mana that covered them.

However, it was barely enough to block the Rank 3 Dark Hellhound's attack.

Boom!

Nevertheless, the Magic Barrier shook wildly with cracks under the Rank 3 Dark Hellhound's claws and flew, carrying the three flying into the stream.

Although the Magic Barrier absorbed most of the impact, the shockwave still passed through.

Pfttt!

Linette and Vaan's stronger bodies managed to endure the shockwave, but Lillias quickly sprayed a mouthful of blood from the shock.

"Sister!" Linette cried.

She carried Lillias's body with Vaan and followed Captain Rhys to the bottom of the riverbed before entering an underwater passageway.

The hellhounds did not enter the water and follow them.

Sometime later, they reached an underground cave where the other young warriors waited before Vaan helped Linette carefully lay Lillias on the ground.

Suddenly, a young warrior rushed up to Vaan and grabbed his collar with a vengeful look; his resentment exploded after they reached a safe zone.

"It's all your fault!" the young warrior glared Vaan in the eye and angrily shouted, "If you didn't stop Lady Linette, Hervy wouldn't have died!"

"Stop it, Caelan!" Captain Rhys barked.

Vaan stared back at the young warrior silently, letting the person vent his resentment before he asked with a look of indifference, "Are you done?"

The young warrior's mind gradually cooled down before he felt the sharp gaze of another person.

At that moment, Linette stared at the young warrior with a gloomy look while holding onto her unconscious little sister, who had a weak breath.

If she had not conserved her mana, wouldn't her sister have died instead due to insufficient mana supply in her final defense spell?

The young warrior slowly released his grip and retreated a few steps before Vaan fixed his collar with a composed look.

"It's your job to protect your client, but not only did you leave your client, but you also expected your client to save your comrades instead. Have some shame."

Chapter 33: Deceit & Misunderstanding

"Stand down, Caelan!" Captain Rhys firmly ordered before sighing, "It is as Brother Vaan said; we failed to carry out our escort duties."

"Not only did we run into the stream first, but we also left our clients behind to fend off the hellhounds. Even if we die, we shouldn't have left our clients in danger."

Shortly after saying that, Captain Rhys continued to speak with a solemn look, "Nevertheless, there are some doubts I hope Lady Linette can clarify."

"I don't mind, but it will have to wait," Linette said in a low tone while inspecting her little sister's condition.

At the same time, Vaan observed Lillias with Magic Vision to see if he could pick up any abnormalities.

However, he could see nothing wrong in a person with little-to-no mana besides her broken mana veins and disconnected magic circuit.

Vaan furrowed his brows and said, "Lady Lillias's vitals must have been significantly harmed from the shock, but... has she not received any bodily reinforcement from mana?"

"No, due to her congenital condition, her mana has to be regularly drained to prevent harm to her body," Linette explained.

Vaan immediately understood.

Without working mana veins to absorb and circulate the mana in Lillias's body, any and all mana entering her body is no different from poison if left unchecked.

"I need to cast a healing spell on Lillias, but blocking the Rank 3 Dark Hellhound depleted all my mana. My sister's body is already very fragile. I don't think she will last much longer if she doesn't receive immediate treatment."

After Linette said that, she sought the others for their help, "If anyone has a recovery potion to lend, I will be eternally grateful."

"If we had any, we would be glad to offer them... But, unfortunately, the recovery potions were left behind in the wagons we abandoned..." Captain Rhys expressed his regret.

Linette bit her lips, and her eye revealed gloominess and despair.

When Vaan saw this, he knitted his brows and felt compelled to offer his assistance before Linette's emotion worsened.

Another berserk transformation was the last thing he wanted in a small and enclosed underground cave.

"Don't fret, Lady Linette. If you don't mind letting your sister drink my blood, it can be used as a substitute for recovery potions," Vaan offered.

Linette's eyes quickly shone with life.

She glanced up at Vaan with heartfelt emotions and uttered her sincerest appreciation, "Thank you. I will remember this favor."

After receiving her consent, Vaan calmly slit his wrist without so much as a frown before feeding the blood to Lillias.

Gradually but surely, a rosy color returned to Lillias's pale cheeks.

Only after Linette saw her sister's breathing stabilized did she sigh with relief, finally feeling a huge weight lifted off her heart.

Generally, there were ways to mend broken mana veins.

However, such methods were also separated into the good and the bad and had much to do with the witch's future progress.

Only a set of good mana veins will allow witches to absorb and refine mana better, whether it is quantity or speed.

That's why they had to wait for a wood-specialized High Witch for the best treatment results.

While ruffling Lillias's hair with a warm yet calm look, Linette said to Captain Rhys, "Speak, what doubts do you have?"

"Our current situation, does it have something to do with why you hired our service instead of using guards from your own Delarosa Household?" Captain Rhys questioned.

Linette's eyes flickered and shot Vaan an accusive look, but he shook his head.

"There's no need to look at Brother Vaan like that, Lady Linette. It wasn't difficult to figure out your household origins, especially when you are using your real name, my Lady." Captain Rhys clarified.

Upon hearing that, Linette immediately flashed Vaan an apologetic look for doubting him.

However, Vaan's expression remained tranquil.

Such a small matter was not enough to cause a ripple in his heart.

"I see... I suppose I wasn't really trying to hide it anyway," Linette admitted to being a member of the Delarosa Household before apologizing, "I'm sorry for getting everyone caught up in this mess."

"There may have been some internal conflicts within my household ever since my mother, Belline Delarosa, fell ill, but I didn't think that my aunt would be this ruthless to her nieces."

"So we are being caught up in an assassination attempt being disguised as an accident, huh?" Captain Rhys muttered with confirmation before he suddenly said, "There's no need to apologize, Lady Linette."

"An apology won't get us out of this mess. Instead, if we make it to the next city alive, I hope you will be able to raise the payment we initially agreed on," Captain Rhys requested.

"Of course," Linette accepted.

After resolving the issue of payment, Captain Rhys and the young warriors felt relief. Even so, some doubts remained in the back of his mind.

"It's strange, though..."

"What is?"

Linette glanced at Captain Rhys after sensing puzzlement in his words.

"No matter how I look at it, I still find it strange that assassins would use this method to target milady," Captain Rhys mentioned.

"Everyone would have noticed such a large-scale movement and sensed something wrong. If they wanted to get rid of milady, they should have chosen a more silent and covert method."

"True..." Linette frowned before recalling, "I did hear rumors of the Assembly of Silent Night taking on a new commission, but this doesn't seem like their usual way of doing things."

"What do you think, Vaan?" Linette sought Vaan's educated opinion.

Of course, Vaan highly doubted it was the work of a Dark Organization, but such a misunderstanding was in his favor.

"We lack critical information regarding what struck the cliff wall, but everyone would be able to guess it is the work of a Dark Organization if a high-ranking noble witch's daughter were to die silently and suddenly."

"However, if they used this method, although the Dark Organizations won't be crossed off the list of suspects, it would undoubtedly put more options on the table; for example, the Delarosa Household's enemies and rivals will all be suspects."

"Thus, in my honest opinion, the assassin or assassins chose this approach to obscure their tracks and avoid bringing the wrath of High Witches upon their organization," Vaan lied as naturally as he breathed.

Chapter 34: Recovering Mana

"Brother Vaan's words are very reasonable," Captain Rhys agreed with Vaan's opinion.

"Although I don't know much about Dark Organizations, at the very least, I am aware that these Dark Organizations have tacit agreements with the upper-class witches to operate."

"If they want to continue operating in the kingdom, they have to avoid hits on members of the noble households. And in the unlikelyhood that they do accept the tasks, they have no other choice but to muddy the water to obscure their tracks."

Linette quietly listened before she appeared convinced that her aunt really did commission the Assembly of Silent Night to kill her and her sister.

Sigh...

Linette felt torn by the internal conflict in the family.

"Let us put aside this matter for the time being. We have a more pressing matter to deal with," Vaan calmly stated.

After getting everyone's attention, Vaan continued to speak, "Given the intelligence of the Rank 3 Dark Hellhound, it will not leave us be—not after we kill so many of its kind. Thus, it will most likely guard the stream until we reveal ourselves."

"However, the streams are shallow, and the small riverbed isn't big; it won't be possible to slip away under the cover of water, nor did we bring any ration to hole up here and pin our hopes on a rescue team."

"There's no way we can outrun nor defeat a Rank 3 Dark Hellhound," Captain Rhys frowned before asking, "Do we have no choice but to starve to death here or die trying to escape, Brother Vaan?"

"Well, if you believe we don't have a chance against the Rank 3 Dark Hellhound, then there really isn't any other way. As an Aura Master, you should understand the saying; as long you don't give up, the chances aren't zero, but if you do, it definitely is."

"But there needs to be a basis for us to even have a fighting chance!" Captain Rhys argued before stating, "We don't have a single Senior Witch nor Aura Grandmaster among us."

"We don't need one. We just need the fighting power of one," Vaan calmly stated.

Captain Rhys and the young warriors furrowed their brows with skepticism, finding Vaan's words too arrogant and contradictory.

"Without years of diligent training and a wealth of precious medicine, it'll be impossible for me to even touch upon the power of Rank 3 Aura Grandmasters. Thus, Brother Vaan must be pinning your hopes on Lady Linette."

"I don't want to sound rude, but do you really have that much faith in Lady Linette? Do you really think she can reach the same level as Senior Witches within the little time we have hiding in this cave?"

"I do," Vaan lied.

To be exact, he had faith in himself.

Nevertheless, Linette was touched by Vaan's words and felt warm yet astonished, not expecting him to have so much faith in her.

"Although I have no idea how I can reach the Senior Witch level in combat power, I want to live up to your expectations. You must have a plan, right?" Linette asked.

Vaan nodded.

"But first, we need you to recover some mana. Everything else comes after."

"Then... for me to recover mana quicker, I'll place myself in your care."

Linette slightly blushed and moved closer to Vaan, making Captain Rhys and the young warriors frown with envy.

"Lady Linette, I don't want to brag, but I have studied the pleasure course and attained first-level pleasure skills. I can also help you recover mana quicker," one of the young warriors said.

"Same here. I can also help."

"Me too. I have also attained first-level pleasure skills."

The young warriors began offering their services.

However, Linette refused them all with a frown, "Although I lack experience, I can tell Vaan's pleasure skills are higher than the second level. So if you're not even on his level, don't even think about touching me."

That being said, she didn't want to be touched by any other man either way.

After all, she was still the young lady of the noble Delarosa Household. She had to be somewhat mindful of her status.

The young warriors expressed their disappointment while Captain Rhys furrowed his brows with puzzlement over Linette's claim.

"Men with second-level pleasure skills or higher are highly sought after, even from Senior Witches. So Why would Brother Vaan brave the dangers of leaving the city instead of serving under a Senior Witch?"

Linette and the young warriors immediately glanced at Vaan with doubt.

However, Vaan calmly replies, "Because I seek a bigger stage. My skills shouldn't be confined to a small city like Blackmoon."

"Hahaha, even men should be a little ambitious," Captain Rhys softly laughed with respect.

No one doubted Vaan's reason.

After Vaan measured the vacant space in the cave, he spoke to Linette, "Let's take it somewhere more private. Lady Lillias could also use a more comfortable environment to rest."

Linette quickly understood his intention and tossed out her special tent box before watching it grow in size.

Shortly after, Linette carried Lillias and entered the tent with Vaan.

The entrance was sealed after they entered before Linette tucked Lillias into bed before turning her attention to Vaan.

"There's obviously a few days' worth of ration stored here, and I don't believe that you haven't seen them, so why didn't you mention it to the others?" Linette softly whispered.

"Without your permission, I wouldn't carelessly reveal it," Vaan calmly answered before adding, "But, more importantly, they need to feel the urgency to be more cooperative, my Lady."

"I see..." Linette nodded with understanding before saying, "I should reward you for your thoughtfulness."

Shortly after, she approached Vaan and wrapped her arms around his neck daringly before softly whispering with a slight blush, "I don't think a simple massage can satisfy me. I want the full service."

"As you wish, my Lady." Vaan smiled.

Although it was questionable who was actually doing the rewarding, he wasn't one to nitpick on the details when presented with the opportunity to grow stronger.

Without further adieu, Vaan tasted the supple cherry lips presented before him as he slid off Linette's wet dress...

Chapter 35: Underground Cavern

Linette's fair body laid bare before Vaan's eyes before he traced his fingers down her smooth skin and played with her honey jar of love nectar.

"Mm..."

The sensitive touch made Linette's body quiver with delight, increasing her heartbeat and anticipation for what was to come.

Despite blooming not long ago, she was already feeling the thrills and bliss of carnal pleasure.

"Give it to me now."

Linette sat on a luxurious marble table and spread her legs with a mixture of shyness and strong desires.

Without any extraneous techniques, her moist cave was already ready to accept Vaan.

Even the most reserved woman in the world can turn into a lustful nympho after spending a night of passion with him.

Nevertheless, Vaan did not forget their objective.

He starts stimulating the senses in Linette's supple mounds before working his way down to her cave and smooth thighs.

The pleasant sensation of mana rushing into her body makes her involuntarily hug Vaan's head close to her bosom before he uses his slithery tongue to play with her white rabbits.

"Ahh~! It's so good~!"

Linette moaned as she held more tightly onto his head.

Her overly sensitive body was already close to climaxing before they could start the main event.

"I can't take it anymore."

"I want it now—Ahhh~!"

Vaan gave Linette what she wanted, suddenly ramming his bulging rod into her pleasure cave like a powerful piston, rocking the marble table and scattering its contents to the floor.

Linette felt like she was riding on horseback as Vaan shortly lifted her and continued thrusting deep inside her, rocking her silly.

It felt rough, and it felt wild, but she loved every bit of it.

"Yes~! So good~!"

"Don't stop~!"

"Keep going~!"

Linette was euphoric, drunk on ecstasy.

Her body quivers with every thrust, and every wave of pleasure only serves to heighten her sensitivity to pleasure.

Her cells scream with joy.

Linette dug her nails in Vaan's back as her mind was on cloud nine, having lost track of the number of times she climaxed in a short time.

She couldn't get enough of it.

...

Captain Rhys and the others overheard the series of moans coming from the tent, and dark expressions quickly appeared on their faces.

"F*ck! It's happening again! I can't stand this mental torture!"

"Dammit, it's too stimulating! I'm getting out of here!"

Linette's erotic moans quickly gave the young warriors boners, causing them to complain before some of them decided to dive underwater to filter their hearing.

Splash! Splash!

Multiple young warriors followed suit and also dived underwater.

But no matter how good the sound filtering was underwater, they eventually needed to surface for air.

"Ahhh~!"

They quickly heard Lady Linette's moans as they gasped for air before they wore darker expressions.

"Goddammit!"

Splash! Splash! Splash!

The young warriors dive back underwater while Captain Rhys meditates in the cave, trying to achieve the state of Zen.

Fifteen minutes later, the erotic moans from the tent finally died down.

...

Inside the tent, Linette's mind was brought back to reality after Vaan suddenly stopped before she furrowed her brows with confusion.

"Why did you suddenly stop, Vaan? C'mon, let's continue~!" Linette coyly asked while rubbing her body against Vaan, urging him to continue.

However, Vaan shook his head.

"You should have recovered more than enough mana by now, my Lady." Vaan suddenly smiles wryly before adding, "Besides, your little sister is watching us."

"What?" Linette uttered with surprise.

She immediately shot a look at Lillias, and there, Lillias was staring back at them with attentiveness like a studious student taking notes for future reference.

"Ah? Am I busted? Hehe, please don't mind me and continue. I've never seen my sister act like such a nymph."

Lillias chuckled foolishly with a bleeding nose.

Swoosh!

However, Linette quickly rushed over with a handkerchief to wipe Lillias's bleeding nose before admonishing her, "What are you doing? Don't you know that you can't get overly excited?"

"Of course, I know that, but can you blame me when you were so loud?" Lillias pouted.

Linette felt embarrassed before making an excuse, "There's good reason for this..."

"Uh-huh..."

Lillias rolled her eyes.

She did not believe her sister.

Nevertheless, Linette and Vaan quickly dressed before leaving Lillias inside the tent to rest and meet outside.

"Now that I've recovered some mana, what do you want me to do with it, Vaan?" Linette asked with a hint of affection.

At the same time, Captain Rhys and the young warriors gathered with weary looks as they awaited Vaan's answer.

"For starters..."

Vaan suddenly paused his words before walking towards the wall at the back of the cave and pointing to it.

"I want you to use earth magic to remove this part of the cave, my Lady."

"You want me to use earth magic for digging...?"

Linette appeared confused.

"Un, exactly."

Vaan nodded.

Linette was even more confused after receiving his affirmation.

At the same time, Captain Rhys frowned before muttering, "This side of the cave should be facing the north... Don't tell me you want us to dig our way out of the Blackmoon Region?"

Although they were only a few hours away from exiting the region, that was only if they traveled on land.

"If we have to dig our way out of the region, it could take us months or even years!"

"Obviously, that is not the plan. The Rank 3 Dark Hellhound and its minions most likely have our current area under watch. We are simply repositioning ourselves in a better location," Vaan stated.

More importantly, his Magic Vision was picking up an enormous cluster of mana on the other side of the cave wall, too big and stagnant to be a creature.

Thus it can only be some natural treasure.

Linette shortly placed her hand on the rocky wall before she changed a spell, causing the rocky wall to turn to sand and crumble to the ground quickly.

After removing two yards of earth, she stumbled into a much larger cave leading deeper underground.

"Wow, there was such a big cave here?" a young warrior expressed his amazement.

There were stalagmites and stalactites everywhere, with the sound of dripping water echoing throughout the cave.

Vaan locked his eyes on the white liquid dripping down from the stalactites, sensing the concentration of mana to be coming from them.

Chapter 36: Stalactite Milk Pond

'Stalactite Milk!'

Let alone Vaan, everyone recognized white liquid dripping from the stalactites hanging down from the cave's ceiling at first glance.

The deep concentration of mana contained within the Stalactite Milk was not something easily overlooked by anyone with even the slightest sensitivity to mana.

"Oh my god! This cave has Stalactite Milk! A Stalactite Milk Pond must be nearby!" a young warrior exclaimed.

Upon hearing that, the eyes of Captain Rhys and the rest of the escort group beamed with excitement.

Suddenly, Captain Rhys recalls something before turning to Vaan unexpectedly.

"Did you already know there was such a large cave with Stalactite Milk, Brother Vaan?" Captain Rhys inquired expectantly.

However, Vaan shook his head.

"I did notice a high concentration of mana before we entered this cave, but it having Stalactite Milk was still beyond my expectation," Vaan calmly replied.

He intended to use the high concentration of mana to quickly restore Linette's mana pool, but he ended up striking the jackpot instead.

When mana reaches the saturation level of density, it condenses into a liquid form with miraculous effects on all lifeforms.

But depending on the environment in which mana achieves condensation, its miraculous effects vary and go by different names.

Stalactite Milk is the name of mana liquified in caves, full of earth elements.

"We don't know how big this cave is. I will go back and fetch my sister before we continue to explore the rest of this cave," Linette stated.

Vaan gave Linette a brief glance before he nodded.

Although the cave contained a high concentration of mana, it was mostly found inside the Stalactite Milk; thus, it wouldn't pose any danger to Lillias's life.

But even if Lillias drank the Stalactite Milk, it would only benefit her body instead of harming it.

Ultimately, Stalactite Milk is no longer a lump of earth-attribute mana but a miraculous medicine capable of increasing the body's affinity to earth and thereby improving the person's talents.

No doubt, Linette would reap the most benefit out of the Stalactite Milk out of everyone in the group.

'A fortuitous encounter amid a perilous danger... Is this a coincidence, or is Linette blessed by the heavens?' Vaan wondered.

Either way, Vaan was still going to hug Linette's thighs.

Linette returned with Lillias a few moments later and said, "I'm back. Let us continue to explore the cave."

"Yes, Lady Linette."

Captain Rhys and the rest of the escort group answered.

In the dark depths of the cave, the only source of light came from the reflective glow of dripping Stalactite Milk.

As the group descended the downward slope, the soft glowing light revealed a small pond of semi-transparent white liquid at the bottom of the cave.

"There really is a Stalactite Milk Pond here! And this amount... It must have accumulated for at least a hundred years!"

Everyone's eyes lit up.

Vaan and the others shortly arrived beside the Stalactite Milk Pond before assessing the area for hidden dangers.

"Be careful. Powerful magic beasts and monsters usually guard the natural treasures," Captain Rhys warned.

However, there was no such thing.

Vaan was the first to confirm it with his Magic Vision.

Even if magic beasts can camouflage into the background with complete stillness, they still wouldn't be able to hide the mana flow in their veins from his eyes.

But while everyone was inspecting the Stalactite Milk Pond's vicinity, Vaan studied the escort group's subtle expressions.

The young warriors could not hide their greed.

After finishing their assessment, the young warriors immediately rushed to the Stalactite Milk Pond before Captain Rhys angrily barked, "Stop!"

Caelan and the other young warriors quickly froze before facing Captain Rhys with confusion.

"Captain, why are you stopping us when there's enough Stalactite Milk for everyone?" Caelan inquired.

"Insolent!" Captain Rhys spat in anger, "The Stalactite Milk isn't yours! What gives you all the right to take it?!"

"But we obviously found the Stalactite Milk Pond together. So why wouldn't we have a share?"

Caelan and the other young escort warriors frowned, wondering if their captain was trying to monopolize their share of the Stalactite Milk.

However, their words only fueled Captain Rhys's anger.

"How disgraceful! Have you been blinded by greed?! We found Stalactite Milk Pond together? Don't kid yourself! Without Vaan's instruction and Lady Linette's earth magic, we wouldn't have discovered the cave in the first place!"

"Lady Linette has said anything, yet you are all busy dividing the Stalactite Milk among yourselves! Are you trying to embarrass me to death?!" Captain Rhys snarled.

"Even if you get a share, the amount will only be decided after Lady Linette has spoken!"

After being reprimanded by Captain Rhys, the young warriors regained their senses with startled looks while Vaan, Linette, and Lillias watched them bicker in silence.

Linette wasn't just a simple client; behind her was the behemoth known as the Delarosa Household.

A single bad review from her could decide the end of their Steelguard Escort Group's business. And even if they don't go out of business, the higher-ups will not spare them.

"I am deeply regretful for not disciplining my men properly. Again, I apologize for showing you such an ugly scene, Lady Linette. I hope you can be magnanimous and overlook their mistakes."

Captain Rhys apologized.

"I hope there won't be a second time," Linette coolly replied.

"There won't! I will make sure of it, my lady!" Captain Rhys promised before giving his men a stern look. "Did you hear that? Quickly apologize and beg for Lady Linette's forgiveness!"

After the young warriors expressed their apology, Linette sought Vaan's opinion, "How do you think we should divide the Stalactite Milk Pond, Vaan?"

Vaan could see that Linette valued his opinion.

After pondering for a short moment, Vaan answered, "Given the threat posed by the Rank 3 Dark Hellhound on the surface, I believe Lady Linette monopolizing the Stalactite Milk Pond will guarantee our survival."

"I don't think the Steelguard Escort Group will agree to this," Linette frowns.

Upon hearing her response, Vaan cracks a smile before adding, "Of course, if my lady wishes to pursue fairness, we could divide the Stalactite Milk Pond into three equal splits between Captain Rhys' group, Lady Linette's group, and myself."

Vaan didn't doubt his words would spark some disagreement from the young warriors, but it was the best way to secure his interest.

Chapter 37: Conflict & Resolution

"What do you think, my Lady?" Vaan sought Linette's opinion.

"I concur," Linette nodded with approval and said, "This does seem like the fairest way to divide the Stalactite Milk Pool. No one can deny your contribution to finding—"

"Be careful, my Lady!"

As Linette spoke in Vaan's favor, one of the young warrior's eyes flashed with cruelty and impulsively launched a sneak attack on her back as if the devil possessed him to do it.

However, Vaan quickly caught onto the young warrior's act and pulled Linette towards him before twisting his body around to shield her from harm with his body.

It never crossed his vigilant mind that such a situation could happen at any time.

Shing!

Under his calculated steps, the young warrior's fast sword aiming for Linette's heart barely grazes his shoulder but draws his blood, nonetheless.

Some of the blood splattered on the side of Linette's cheek and hair, while some landed on Captain Rhys's face.

In that instance, Captain Rhys exploded at once.

"Ingrate!"

Captain Rhys decisively drew his sword and hacked off the young warrior's head before the young warrior could beg for forgiveness.

Puchi!

Blood sprayed from the young warrior's neck as his head flew before landing on the ground some distance away, stunning the rest of the young warriors in the cave.

They never expected their captain to be so ruthless, but the problem was so much greater than that.

"Captain, you... how could you kill Gerhardt in cold blood like that?!" one of the young warriors questioned him with shock and blame.

However, Captain Rhys glared at the young warrior before sweeping his sharp gaze across the rest of them, studying them with scrutiny.

"You dare question my action? It seems like you don't understand the severity of this matter," Captain Rhys spoke in a low and gloomy tone.

"Do you understand what it means for a man to stab a witch in this country, a witch of noble status, no less?"

"But captain, men stab witches with their 'swords' all the time," the young warrior argued in a joking manner.

However, Captain Rhys exploded even more furiously, seeing that the young warriors were making light of the situation.

"I don't have time for your jokes! The last time a man attacked a noble witch, the witch's noble household executed all the men and reduced the women to slaves in the mines, witches included!"

"What do you think will happen when the Delarosa Household finds out a member of the Steelguard Escort Group attacked one of their members? It won't just be Gerhardt's family, but all our families will be affected as well!"

"Then all the more reason why we should silence the two ladies and everyone associated with her before word gets out. Didn't someone powerful put a hit on her? So we can blame it on them."

Once the young warrior uttered those words, a deathly silence filled the cave before the young warrior noticed all eyes shifted to Lady Linette.

At the same time, Linette wiped her cheeks and noticed Vaan's blood before a gloomy air suffused her immediate surrounding.

Her mana might be low, but she was still a Mid-rank True Witch.

"Lady Linette... I didn't seriously mean what I—"

"Rock Bullets!"

Puchi!

Fist-size rocks immediately broke off from the ground and shot toward the young warrior at incredible speed, punching a hole right through his head, heart, and several other places, killing him on the spot.

After witnessing that, Vaan's eyes flickered.

The speed of Lady Linette's Rock Bullets was leagues above the speed she reduced the cave wall into sands.

It should have something to do with her specialized magic.

Nevertheless, neither Captain Rhys nor the rest of the escort group spoke up about the young warrior's death.

Seeing that, Linette shortly turned to Vaan and inspected his wound with concern in her eyes.

"Are you alright, Vaan? Does it hurt?" she asked.

"It's just a shallow wound," Vaan casually shook his head with a slight smile and said, "It'll heal on its own shortly."

The wound had already stopped bleeding.

Even so, Vaan had to give some credit to the dead warriors for helping him build an even stronger relationship with Lady Linette of the Delarosa Household due to the event.

Meanwhile, Lillias gave him the thumbs up while expressing her gratitude for saving her sister, oblivious to his thoughts.

Linette gave her a slight nudge after she finished confirming Vaan's recovery.

"About Vaan's suggestion on the division of the Stalactite Milk Pond, you haven't voiced your opinion, Captain Rhys," she brought up their previous discussion.

"This..." Captain Rhys smiles wryly.

"I didn't have any problem with Brother Vaan's share of the Stalactite Milk Pond, but after what just happened, I'm too embarrassed for our Steelguard Escort Group to continue receiving a share of the Stalactite Milk Pond, Lady Linette."

"You're saying you don't want any of the Stalactite Milk anymore?" Linette sought the captain's confirmation with a serious look. "Are you sure?"

"Yes, my Lady. You should divide it with Brother Vaan. The two of you were the ones who found the Stalactite Milk Pond. I don't have any doubts that you both deserve all of it."

"You're too generous, Captain Rhys." Vaan smiled.

Seeing how Captain Rhys spoke up for him, Vaan didn't waste his effort in building a good relationship with Captain Rhys.

"Not at all, Brother Vaan. I am just assuming responsibilities for the faults of my Steelguard Escort Group's new recruits."

"Nevertheless, I'm sure Captain Rhys didn't wish for such a thing to happen. How about this, we'll lower the Steelguard Escort Group's share so that everyone will at least get a mouthful," Vaan suggested before seeking Linette's opinion, "What do you think, my Lady?"

"If you're fine with it, Vaan, then so am I," Linette stated before turning to Captain Rhys, "But will you agree with this arrangement or continue to decline it?"

"Since Lady Linette has already decided, how can I continue to decline? I wouldn't dare," Captain Rhys replied before expressing his gratitude sincerely, "I thank Lady Linette for your understanding and kindness."

He bowed with a fist-palm salute.

"Well then, let's end the matter there," Linette said before urging Captain Rhys, "Take your men to get your mouthfuls first. I'll divide the remaining Stalactite Milk with Vaan after."

"Understood, Lady Linette."

Once again, Captain Rhys bowed gratefully to Linette with a fist-palm salute.

Shortly after, he took the remaining young warriors to the Stalactite Milk Pond and strictly monitored them, making sure they took one mouthful and one mouthful only.

Chapter 38: Specialized Magic

"Sigh!" Caelan sighed despondently.

"It was true that Lady Linette and Vaan played a big part in finding the Stalactite Milk, but we obviously discovered it at the same time, and yet we only get a mouthful when we could have gotten three bowls worth each."

"Yeah... How is a mouthful enough? I really want to take another mouthful, sigh!" Reid grumbled.

Captain Rhys watched the young warriors with a gloomy and strict look as they complained over the Stalactite Milk Pond.

Even he was not immune to the temptation of the Stalactite Milk and felt sad over the reduced share.

But more importantly, the recruits' incompetence and lack of discipline infuriated him.

"Suck it up and be grateful that Lady Linette is generous enough to leave us any at all! If you still have a problem, then go and complain to Lady Linette! See if it doesn't get you killed!" he barked.

"Perhaps you have lived too comfortably in your households, or I have been too lenient on your training, but don't forget that you are on an escort mission! Lady Linette paid us to escort her to the capital, do you understand?!"

"She is not only our client but also our boss! She employed us to protect her! Other than our duty to protect and escort her, only the spoils of our hunts belong to us! Nothing else! So stop believing the Stalactite Milk is your right! It's not!"

Captain Rhys poured his hearts out, lecturing the good-for-nothing recruits harshly for them to understand.

Despite that, some of them remain unconvinced.

"When adventurers and mercenary parties band together, they split the rewards equally among themselves; how is our escort group any different from that? So naturally, we should have gotten an equal share..."

A young warrior beside Reid muttered quietly to himself, but alas, Captain Rhys still overheard the young warrior's complaint.

"You... little shit! Have you not listened to a word I said?!" Captain Rhys exploded with veins protruding on his forehead.

"Do you think we're the same as mercenaries and adventurers? We're nothing alike! They can share rewards equally because they have a cooperative relationship! As for us, it's an employer-employee!"

...

Sometime later, Captain Rhys's furious lecturing died down after being the last to drink a mouthful of Stalactite Milk.

The young warriors heard so much of their captain's thunderous lecture that their ears grew calluses from it.

"Seems like they've become a little more obedient after Captain Rhys's harsh lecture," Linette casually commented.

"Far from that, my Lady." Vaan shook his head with a smile and said, "They are just too busy absorbing the miraculous power from the Stalactite Milk. Nevertheless, it's finally our turn."

"Does that mean I can drink some now?" Lillias asked eagerly with sparkling eyes.

Linette hesitated for a moment, but she eventually gave her little sister the nod.

"Yes, but only take a little sip. And if you feel something wrong, stop and tell me immediately," Linette instructed her little sister.

She could not help but worry.

Lillias began taking several sips after the first one and allowed the Stalactite Milk's efficacy to flow through her body, improving her body's defense and sensitivity to mana...

Vaan studied Lillias's changes with Magic Vision before he suddenly paused.

"Hold on... Improving sensitivity to mana?" Vaan muttered before his eyes flickered solemnly. "My Lady, you better stop Lady Lillias from drinking any further."

"Why? Is my sister in danger, Vaan?" Linette's worried expression slightly deteriorated.

"Not yet, but if she keeps it up, she will be. The Stalactite Milk improves her body's natural ability to absorb the surrounding mana, and this cave is currently full of mana."

Linette's expression drastically changed from bad to worse in that instance.

"Lillias, stop drinking right now!"

Linette bellowed as she rushed over to pull Lillias away from the edge of the Stalactite Milk Pond, startling her in the process.

"Eh? Eh?! I haven't had enough yet, sister!" Lillias was startled.

"That's enough. It's not too late to drink the Stalactite Milk after your mana veins perfectly reconnect and work properly."

"Boo... Fine."

After Linette explained the problem, Lillias had no choice but to give up on the Stalactite Milk, albeit in a sulky and dispirited manner.

The Stalactite Milk wasn't just beneficial to people; it was very tasty!

"But how are we going to take all of this with us?" Lillias cannot help but ask.

"Have you forgotten that your sister is a True Witch?" Linette puffed her chest proudly and said, "I can mold the earth into portable containers to hold the Stalactite Milk."

"But how will we get out of the Blackmoon Region with the Rank 3 Dark Hellhound hot on our tails?" Lillias expressed her doubt.

"Oh yeah..." Linette recalled the matter before uttering softly, "We still have that problem to worry about..."

She had completely forgotten about it.

"What should we do?"

Linette pondered with a frown for a moment before subconsciously shifting her gaze to Vaan to seek his opinion.

She had unknowingly developed a dependence on him.

"I do have a plan that can resolve your dilemma, but I wonder if you're game, my Lady?" Vaan asked if she was up for the challenge.

"Let's hear it first."

"Fair enough," Vaan nodded.

"Originally, our chance of fleeing is higher than trying to kill the Rank 3 Dark Hellhound. However, since we found the Stalactite Milk Pond, we have an absolute shot at killing the Rank 3 Dark Hellhound."

"Are you trying to say that the Stalactite Milk will give me the strength to kill a Rank 3 Dark Hellhound? Surely not, right?" Linette doubted.

She was just a Mid-rank True Witch, while it would take the power of Early-rank Senior Witch-level magic at the bare minimum to kill a Rank 3 magic beast.

"Of course, I am saying this under the assumption that we have time to prepare. I wouldn't be this confident if it were just the Stalactite Milk, but my Lady's specialized magic is Earth Acceleration, is it not?"

"This... How did you know that, Vaan?" Linette was stunned.

Chapter 39: I'll Teach You Magic

"I noticed the mana movements of your magic spell, Rock Bullet, activated before you even started chanting the spell, my Lady. On top of that, it was incredibly fast, far superior to when you conjured the barrier and demolished the cave wall," Vaan calmly explained.

"Such sharp observation..." Linette expresses her astonishment with wide eyes. "With just those three instances, you were able to figure out my specialized magic?"

"Generally, it shouldn't be easy to guess, but the difference between the Rock Bullet and the other two instances of magic casting was too great not to notice," Vaan replied.

When Vaan said that, Captain Rhys' calm expression crumpled wryly while he meditated some distance away.

He didn't notice what Vaan noticed at all.

At the same time, Lillias's eyes sparkled. As expected of the man she was interested in, he was rather capable.

She wondered if he had other skills he had yet to reveal.

"However, there is something that I don't understand, my Lady," Vaan mentioned.

"What is it that you don't understand, Vaan," Linette stated before making a gesture for him to continue, "Please speak freely."

"From what I can see, your specialized magic enables you to perform powerful attack magic with lower mana consumption," Vaan mentioned.

"If you had used it on the Rank 3 Dark Hellhound, you would have injured it even if you couldn't kill it; why did you choose to expend all your mana on a barrier instead, my Lady?"

"I... I'm sorry. At that time, I thought that if I didn't use barrier magic, we would have all died under the Rank 3 Dark Hellhound's fangs," Linette lowered her head in apology.

However, Vaan shortly lifts her head back up before shaking his head.

"I'm not trying to blame you, my Lady. I wouldn't dare," Vaan smiled wryly and said, "I was just seeking to understand your choice of magic."

"Of course, using barrier magic to defend was not wrong, but sometimes, the best offense is the best defense, especially if your specialized magic leans towards attack magic, my Lady," Vaan inputted his opinion shortly after.

Nevertheless, it's not like he could not understand Linette's choices.

It was clear to him that she lacked battle experience, and she relied on her household's specialty, defense magic, even though her specialty differed from it.

Even so, the Delarosa Household's defense magic was nothing to scoff at.

The Delarosa Household's defense magic played one of the key roles in repelling the demons during the Great War against Gehenna Realm's invasion and allowed the Delarosa Household to rise as one of the kingdom's most powerful witch households.

Sometimes, the strongest witch isn't the witch with the strongest attack magic, nor the witch with the highest cultivation; the one who survives becomes the strongest.

"You've said something quite strange, Vaan. Our mother taught us that the Delarosa Household's strongest defense magic is the best offense, not the other way around," Lillias inserted her opinion with knitted brows.

Vaan's statement had completely reversed their mother's, the High Witch Belline Delarosa's teachings.

Nevertheless, Vaan responded to her doubt with a smile.

"That's right," he agreed with a nod before adding, "The strongest defense is the strongest offense, but the opposite is equally true; it depends on the witch's specialized magic. Marquis Delarosa's specialized magic is Earth Reinforcement; that's why the former applies to her."

It was common knowledge that High Witch Belline's specialized magic was Earth Reinforcement; the history books in the academy recorded many of her feats during the Great War.

"However, in Lady Linette's case, the latter applies to her. You can make something weak strong, but it won't be considered the strongest if you have something strong that can become stronger," Vaan stated.

The Delarosa Household's three-hundred years of rigid and traditional belief was not easy to change, but he wanted to point Linette in the right direction and give her god-given talents the chance to bloom.

"Weak can be strong, but strong can be stronger..."

Linette softly muttered before she seemed to have understood something, causing her eyes to shine like the starry sky.

"Thank you, Vaan. You introduced a different train of thought and broadened my horizons," she expressed her gratitude sincerely with a bow, giving Vaan the highest respect any man could receive in a witch kingdom.

"Sister, you..." Lillias uttered with surprise.

Witches can give a man respect where it is due, but they should never bow to one even when they are in the wrong, especially noble witches.

It wasn't just to uphold their reputable status but to cement their authority over men and extinguish any idea they had of rising above witches.

Nevertheless, Linette did not think much about it.

Respect is given where it is due, and gratitude must be expressed and conveyed sincerely when needed.

"Don't overthink it. Vaan's advice is invaluable. There is nothing wrong about a student bowing to her teacher," Linette said.

However, Vaan gave her a forced smile and said, "I'm flattered and honored for you think like that, my Lady, I really do. However, you shouldn't do that again, especially in public."

"If word of a witch bowing to a man ever reaches the queen, not the witch will be heavily punished, but the man will... Well, the queen will behead him. Hahaha, you won't mind if I take some sips to calm my tensed nerves, right, my Lady?"

Vaan made an excuse while pretending to be nervous due to Linette's action in order to move on from the topic and drink some Stalactite Milk.

He was quite curious about the Stalactite Milk's effects on his body.

'Given the system's ability to optimize rewards, I should be able to get something good out of it, right?' Vaan silently thought.

Linette was grateful to Vaan; thus, she saw no reason to stop him before the Stalactite Milk could be equally divided.

After all, her little sister had already taken some sips.

"Of course, please help yourself," Linette permitted with a gesture before suddenly saying, "But how can the Stalactite Milk and my specialized magic help me kill a Rank 3 Dark Hellhound?"

Typically, it wasn't easy for people to slay monsters above their level, let alone an entire rank.

"Oh, that?" Vaan smiled and said, "I'll teach you new magic that will make it possible, my Lady."

Chapter 40: Optimized Improvement

'How absurd!'

The moment Vaan spoke about teaching Lady Linette magic, not only did the two sisters of the Delarosa Household have that thought, but everyone in the escort group also felt the same.

"Oh? You'll teach me magic, Vaan?" Linette furrowed her brows.

She wanted to give Vaan the benefit of the doubt; she really did.

However, most men do not have access to learn about magic, let alone even use magic. Thus, they will never truly understand it.

On the other hand, witches immediately received their education on magic from an early age and had access to most magic knowledge stored in public libraries and academies.

Furthermore, they are taught by qualified teachers.

That is why the sheer notion of a man trying to teach a witch about magic is utterly ridiculous in and of itself.

As such, when Vaan said he'd teach Linette magic, it was not only an insult to her teacher and background but also to her.

'Your teacher is incompetent, your family background could not provide you access to proper magic knowledge, and your comprehension is lacking; thus, I will teach you magic!'

Others can easily misinterpret Vaan's words like that.

If he had said this to any other random noble witch, the noble witch would have executed him on the spot.

"Don't you think your jokes have gone a little too—"

Even Lillias, who had the most favorable impression of Vaan, could not help but voice her displeasure before she was interrupted by her elder sister.

Linette stared into Vaan's eyes seriously and could see the sheer confidence he had in himself.

"Can you really teach me magic? Magic that I, a Mid-stage True Witch, can use to kill a Rank 3 Dark Hellhound only Senior Witches can do?" Linette asked again.

"Of course," Vaan calmly nodded.

"Sister—"

Lillias uttered before she quickly stopped by Linette again.

"Don't say anymore," Linette said to her sister before returning her attention to Vaan. "I understand. What will you teach me, Vaan?"

"For now, let us drink some Stalactite Milk and improve our physiques," Vaan stated.

"Alright," Linette nodded.

Although she had her doubts, anticipation also sprouted in her heart.

If Vaan could really pull it off and teach her some amazing magic that enables her to kill a Rank 3 Dark Hellhound, it would make him an unrivaled prodigy in magic theory and application.

At the same time, others will also view her as a peerless genius.

...

Ding!

<A wonderful medicine has entered your body>

<Would you like to optimize its effect?>

<[Yes] / [No]>

Shortly after Vaan drank his first mouthful of Stalactite Milk, the system immediately sent him a message.

Although he expected more options from the system, the present option didn't disappoint him either.

'Generally, the human body cannot fully absorb any medicine without assistance; a portion of the medicine's efficacy will always be lost in the absorption process due to the human body's natural immune system...'

'But it seems like it might be possible to bypass the body's natural defense mechanism and absorb 100% of the medicine's efficacy with the help of the system...'

'Yes!' Vaan accepted without further thoughts.

Shortly after, he felt the cooling sensation of the stagnant Stalactite Milk in his stomach quickly spread to the rest of his body.

All his cells came alive and fueled his body with energy and comfort, especially on his skin, which felt like getting kissed by the gentle spring breeze.

Ding!

<Your Heaven-Swallowing Physique has improved>

<Overall defense increased by 10 points>

<Earth affinity acquired>

<Earth-attribute absorption increased by 10%>

<Earth-attribute resistance increased by 10%>

...

'Interesting... To think I'll get this much benefit from just the first mouthful,' Vaan silently mused to himself.

Although he had yet to gauge how tough his body has become, 10 points added to defense did not sound like a small improvement.

Vaan had the urge to take another mouthful, but he resisted the urge after seeing the changes to Linette; the very air around her changed as her body naturally drew more mana towards her.

He couldn't tell her exact improvements, but considering she was a True Witch with a natural earth affinity, there should have been other significant improvements.

When Linette opened her eyes, they glowed brightly like the starry night.

"I see you are delighted with your improvement, my Lady," Vaan commented with a slight smile.

"Mm, your improvement was also not small, Vaan." Linette glanced at Vaan's glossy skin with a bit of envy before saying, "But never mind that. Teach me magic now. I'm very curious about what you have to teach me."

"Alright," Vaan agreed.

Nevertheless, he could not help but reassess Linette; her will to resist the Stalactite Milk's temptation is worthy of his respect.

Perhaps, she was aware that consuming the Stalactite Milk consecutively would greatly diminish its effects.

"Then shall we find a more suitable spot for you to learn magic, my Lady?" Vaan sought Linette's opinion.

After she agreed, they only moved 10 yards away from the Stalactite Milk Pond, not too far away and still within its illuminated area.

"Then—"

"Ah, wait a moment, Vaan," Linette suddenly stopped Vaan from formally commencing his lesson.

"Although your qualification as a magic teacher is questionable, it is the kingdom's custom that students pay proper respects to their teachers. As such, I, Linetta von Delarosa, will be in your care, Teacher."

Linette spoke with a mixture of seriousness and teasing as she lifted the hems of her dress and curtsied to him.

"Well then, Student Linetta, please take your lesson very seriously."

Vaan replied to Linetta with a similar teasing tone and smile after he was briefly taken aback by her full name.

"Yes, Teacher!" Linetta answered.

As if someone had turned on a switch, the both of them quickly entered a solemn teaching-learning mode.

"Good!" Vaan nodded.

"I will teach you offensive earth magic with your specialized magic, Earth Acceleration, as the core. But since this is my first time teaching you, I need to assess your foundational knowledge first."

"Is that fine?" he asked shortly after.