

Spirit Sword Chapter 11

Ch. 11 Bad News

The rest of the road offered no troubles. Benjamin had brought along twenty soldiers, relieving Luke and Kurotan from having to be on guard.

Have there been any events in the territory?

I am sure you have heard through our messenger, but the Lord has retired due to his health and Sir Reynold has become the new Lord.

It looks like my big brother has finally inherited the territory.

Benjamin looked at Luke with pity.

You would become a big strength if you stayed with the House How wonderful would it be if you used the experiences you have built up during your service for the territory?

It cant be helped.

Luke smiled bitterly and shook his head. He had already decided his future would be outside of Esteban Earldom five years ago.

Lukes plan was to enter Lea Marquisate after retirement. He would have started a second life as a Knight of the Lea Marquisate.

Benjamin couldnt hide his disappointment, but said.

You have a calm composure and think things through thoroughly before you act. You will become a respected figure even at Lea Marquisate.

No one can know for sure, Benjamin.

I wish to plead for you to reconsider, but I will respect the decision you have made out of love.

Thank you, Sir Benjamin.

Lea Marquisate was the House of Lukes fiance, Isabelle. His becoming a Knight of the Lea Marquisate was the prerequisite for his marriage to Isabelle. Benjamin knew this and therefore held his tongue.

After a while, the familiar castle of the Esteban Earldom came into view. Lukes face filled with nostalgia.

Its been exactly five years since Ive seen that castle.

He couldnt help but feel relaxed in the place he had run around as a child. As they approached, the soldiers guarding the castle door by the moat smiled brightly and greeted Luke.

Congratulations on your retirement and return, Young Master Luke.

Thank you all.

The inside of the castle had barely changed since he had left. Luke gazed over the sights with a look of reluctance. Luke did not find it easy to leave the castle he had visited for five years for a new life as a Knight of the Lea Marquisate. Kurotan had been walking silently with the reins of Lukes horse in his hands. Luke dismounted from the horse when they reached the Lords residence.

Kurotan.

Kurotan bowed silently, and Luke pointed to the training field that stretched in front of the Lords residence.

I will go and meet with the Lord. You can train in the basics of the sword in the meantime

Kurotan saluted and ran towards the training field, sword in hand. Benjamins eyes shone at the sight.

Then, Sir Benjamin, I am off to see the Lord.

Yes. I shall have a stable hand take your horse.

The Lords residence remained the same as it had from Lukes childhood. Benjamin guided Luke towards the office of the Lord.

Knock. Knock.

A low voice vibrated out of the office at the knock.

Come in.

Luke opened the door and walked into the office. A middle aged man with sharp eyes looked up from his desk. It was Lukes older brother, Reynold.

Reynold stood up with a bright smile when he saw Luke.

Luke. You have finally returned.

Yes, Lord.

We are not in a formal setting, call me big brother. So, the past five years must have been rough for you? You have had a hard time, my brother, in faraway territories.

Luke scratched the back of his head as an awkward expression crawled onto his face.

It was not too difficult. It seems you have grown more white hairs?

There are a lot of things to worry about after becoming the Lord. Sit.

Luke sat on the sofa while Reynold called a chambermaid to prepare tea. Luke met eyes with his brother, older than him by more than twenty years.

They came from different mothers. Earl Esteban, their father, had lost his first wife to illness and remarried.

Reynold was the son of the first wife and Luke the second. That was why Luke and Reynold were born with twenty plus years between them.

However, the four sons and three daughters did not cause any chaos within the family and were close with each other. Reynold handed Luke a cup of tea as he asked.

I have heard you took in an apprentice knight?

Its true.

I am curious as to why you would take in an old commoner without even a payment from him, but I wont push. I believe that it was a well thought out decision, considering your disposition.

Thank you for believing in me, big brother.

That aside, let us talk about the sacrifices you have made for this House. Do you wish for anything from the House?

Luke swallowed.

I have something to report to you first.

What is it?

I have passed down the Houses sword art to my new apprentice knight, Kurotan.

You have probably passed down the basics, once again considering you dont make irrational decisions.

Yes.

Good. I wont make this issue a problem as you have reported it honestly.

Luke continued on carefully.

I ask this very reluctantly, but I do so anyways.

What is it? Speak.

I wish to pass down an Aura flow method to my apprentice knight Kurotan. Would it be possible?

What?

Reynolds eyes widened. From his perspective, Luke was asking something completely ridiculous.

An Aura cultivation technique did not get passed down to even the branch families of a House. How could it be passed down to a mere apprentice knight?

I dont understand what you see in a mere apprentice knight.

.

I trust you are not asking this without reason. Explain your reasoning to me.

Luke opened his mouth immediately.

I am not asking in regards to the Aura cultivation method of the Esteban House.

Of course.

It is to my understanding, however, that the House is in possession of other Aura cultivation technique. Those are the methods I was referring to.

Heum.

Just as Luke had said, the Esteban Earldom possessed multiple Aura cultivation techniques that were not the unique Esteban Aura cultivation technique. There were techniques that had been spoils of territorial wars that they had won, or techniques bought off of fallen Noble Houses.

Of course, this fact was a closely guarded secret of the Esteban House, but Luke was a direct descendant of the Esteban House.

I will need to considerate this issue carefully.

Of course.

What relation could you possibly have with the apprentice knight that you are willing to go such lengths for him?

There are no special relations between us. I just wish to raise him up properly.

Seeing as how you passed down only the basic swordsmanship to the apprentice knight, it doesnt look like he has been officially trained in the sword. The reports also say that he is a middle-aged commoner, which makes harder for me to understand this situation.

Luke remained silent without answering. Even he knew that Reynolds questions were not unfounded.

I wonder what kind of expression big brother would make if he knew that Kurotan was an Orc in the guise of a human?

Reynold nodded, oblivious to Lukes thoughts.

All right, I will look through the Aura cultivation techniques in the Houses possession. You have made a large sacrifice for the House, and I will try to grant this favor if possible.

Thank you. Big brother, also

Also?

Let me ask for a mid-level sword technique to pass on to the apprentice knight.

Reynold couldnt hold back the bitter smile and ruffled Lukes hair with a fist.

You bold bastard, is your plan to empty our Houses coffers?

I dont believe the Esteban House will go bankrupt from giving out one mid-level sword technique

Your military service has really changed you! All right, Ill try to make it happen.

Having accomplished his goals for the meeting, Luke made an apologetic expression.

Anyways, my apologies. I would like to lend you my strength besides you

Luke was referring to the fact that he would soon leave the House to become a knight of the Lea Marquisate.

Reynolds face turned serious.

Ah That brings up another issue that I wanted to talk to you about.

Luke realized that the situation seemed to be serious.
 Has something happened?
 Do not be surprised. A messenger arrived from Lea Marquisate a couple days ago.
 A messenger?
 Yes. The contents of the message
 Reynold hesitated as though it was difficult to start talking. But it could not be stalled forever.
 It was a request for breaking off your engagement with Isabelle.
 What?
 Lukes expression turned astonished. The news hit him like a lightning in the middle of the night.
 How-How could that be?
 Its true. This is the letter from the Lea Marquisate.
 Luke took the letter from Reynold with trembling hands. The letters contents confirmed what Reynold had just told him.
 Warak.
 The letter crumpled in Lukes hands.
 Thi-This doesnt make sense.
 Be calm, Luke.
 What reason did they give?
 The letter says Isabelle has had a change of heart.
 That cant possibly be.
 Luke shook his head with disbelief. Isabelle and Luke had continued to exchange love letters until just a month ago.
 If Fort Potellan allowed visitations, Isabelle would have run to me hundreds of times.
 The last letter Luke had received had contained the heartfelt wishes of Isabelle to see Luke. What could cause her to have had a change of heart and break off the engagement?
 Luke stood up in hurry, his disbelief of the story evident.
 I will go to Lea Marquisate to meet with her.
 Calm down, Luke. Nothing will be accomplished in a hurry.
 Reynold gazed into Lukes eyes.
 Do you truly believe that Isabelle has not had a change of heart?
 I do. She is not a woman that would change so easily.
 I will trust in your decision. There must be something else.
 Reynold patted Lukes shoulders calmly.
 Bide your time in the Earldom for now. I have already planted informants in the Marquisate. It will not be too late to act after receiving their report.
 Youve planted informants?
 They have already proven themselves capable. Their reports will be accurate.
 Luke finally calmed himself after listening to his brothers words.
 Thank you for taking care of me, big brother.
 Youve already served in the military for the House, how could I possibly be lax in taking care of you? Do not fret, and wait calmly.
 Luke looked at Reynold with shaky eyes, and pulled him into a bear hug.
 Thank you, big brother.
 You little rascal, huhu, its been a while since Ive hugged my little brother.
 Reynold smiled generously and patted Lukes back.
 Lukes expression, however, turned dark as he walked out of the Lords office.
 Why would Lea Marquisate request breaking off the engagement?
 No matter how he thought, he couldnt think of a reason.
 Isabelle was an illegitimate daughter, born from a mistress of the Marquis, not the first, official wife.
 Originally, illegitimate daughters were not targets of political marriages due to their low status. Instead of becoming wives, they tended to be married off as mistresses to already married and old Nobles.
 Because of this, Lea Marquisate had jumped at the opportunity to take Luke in as a Knight of the Marquisate by allowing him to marry Isabelle. It was not easy to take in well-educated Knights from the bloodline of a prestigious House.
 Why request breaking off the engagement now?
 When Luke had chosen to represent Esteban Earldom and serve in the military, Lea Marquisate had been even more thrilled. After five years, the Marquisate would have a Knight that was also a veteran officer.
 I just dont understand.
 Luke went out to the training field with complicated thoughts. It seemed as though only exhausting himself would allow him to suppress the rage and confusion boiling in his head.

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Chapter 12. Bad News -2-
TL: Warriormonk
Editor: Isleidir

Kurotan was swinging his sword fiercely in the training field. Luke had taught him well, and Kurotan was repeating the basic techniques he had learned with an accurate stance.

The other apprentice knights training in the field glanced at Kurotan with curious looks from time to time.

That's the apprentice knight Young Master Luke took in on the Eastern frontlines?

What a windfall for him, he looks like he's over thirty years old. I've heard he didn't even offer a payment.

Yeah, my stomach would cramp up if I just stood by and watched.

One of the apprentice knights was looking at Kurotan menacingly. Being the son of a successful merchant, he had only been taken in as an apprentice knight after offering up a large sum in payment.

Lucky bastard. He looks like a bandit, but he has virtually no muscles.

Look at the scars on his body, he's sure to have been through a lot of life and death battles.

You think so? No matter how I look at it, that's not a trained body. You can tell just by how he trains only the basics repeatedly.

The apprentice knights were talking loudly enough for Kurotan to hear. They were obviously trying to rile him up, but Kurotan only continued to swing his sword in silence.

Is he pretending that he can't hear us?

It looks like he's more of a coward than he looks.

It was then that someone broke in to the conversation.

The reason he's not responding, is because I assigned him to silent training. The bastard has no concept of fear.

The apprentice knights turned to face the new voice and paled.

Yo-Young Master Luke.

When did you arrive?

Luke received their greetings with a smile.

He's tougher than he looks, so try not to piss him off. Even I can't control him when he gets too excited.

Luke walked over to Kurotan after patting the apprentice knights' shoulders.

Your stance isn't half bad now?

Kurotan glanced at Luke before replying in a low voice.

I do not understand why I must repeat these basic movements for training.

Yeah? You're training pretty hard for not understanding why.

Because you told me to.

Luke explained after a smile.

It's because swinging a sword while maintaining this stance will amplify the sword's destructive power.

Really?

Without a doubt, Esteban's swordsmanship is acknowledged throughout the Hansel Kingdom.

Luke patted the sword strapped to his belt.

It seems like you have the basics down. Shall we give it a go?

Kurotan's eyes lit up immediately.

You wish to fight?

Yes. Come at me with what you've been training.

All right.

Kurotan proceeded to take a stance carefully. Having swung around his sword crazily in training for two months, the basics of the Esteban swordsmanship had been somewhat ingrained into his body.

Luke lazily unsheathed his sword.

Come at me.

Kurotan threw his body forward soundlessly. Luke blocked the first horizontal strike that viciously swung through the air.

Chwaang!

The sound of metals clashing spread through the air, and Luke's eyes narrowed.

Well, would you look at this?

The power and skill behind Kurotan's sword completely exceeded his expectations. It was only a basic sword move, yet the sword acted like it was alive and was trying to snake its way into his defenses.

Waaaak!

Kurotan roared and continued to slash his sword at Luke. Kurotan's sword attacks defied comparison to the first time that they had fought, and was accurate to a scary degree. Luke turned thoughtful as he noticed the difference.

I guess he wasn't a Great Warrior for nothing. He can pressure me this much with just the basics.

The techniques being used by Kurotan could only be called the basics of basics in swordsmanship. But the pressure felt by Luke was by no means ordinary. He had originally intended for this to be a light warm up exercise, but Luke had to change his mind not long after the bout began.

Kkaang. Kkaaaang.

Lukes hand began to go numb after the repeated clashes of swords.

It seems Im creating a monster.

The apprentice knights that had been harassing Kurotan earlier were watching on with astounded eyes.

What the hell? The bastard, he wasnt a pushover at all!

I cant believe it. How is he pressuring Young Master Luke that much with just basic sword techniques?

There were also apprentice knights that were trying to downplay Kurotans skills.

Psh. Young Master Luke is just going easy on him

However, the apprentice knights werent the only ones watching the bout. The instructors that had been training them also watched the fierce exchanges between Luke and Kurotan, exclaiming in admiration.

Young Master Lukes skills have increased incomparably since he has left. It seems he has built up a lot of experience on the Eastern front lines.

Not only that, that apprentice knight is not ordinary either. I can tell he has been through countless life and death battles by his movements.

It looks that way to me as well. Hes combining basic techniques into continuous attacks on instinct, not something anyone can do.

Disbelief spread over the faces of the apprentice knights that heard the instructors.

The bout between Luke and Kurotan did not go for long. Kurotans stamina had increased a lot with during the two months of hard training, but it was still far from complete.

Huk, Huuk.

Kurotan spat out deep gasps of air, and Luke sheathed his sword.

Luke seemed calm on the outside, but his mind was in disarray.

Shit

Luke had almost lost his composure on multiple occasions due to Kurotans unpredictable attacks. His sweaty palms gripping the leather handle of the sword proved this.

Your pressure was intense, but you over strained yourself in the beginning. You need to be able to control the strength behind each of your attacks.

.

Even so, you are much stronger than the first time we fought.

Really?

Kurotan seemed to be in a bit of disbelief.

He had trained mechanically under Lukes guidance without any large expectations, but the results of the training were significant.

Kurotan had abandoned the body of an Orc for a completely different body of a human. He had lost the majority of his battle prowess from his time as an Orc Great Warrior.

By training in the basics of the sword that Luke had taught him, he was slowly regaining his senses from back then. His body and reflexes had yet to completely catch up to his senses, but continued training would close the gaps between them.

Kurotans face blushed with excitement.

I will train even harder starting today. Wouldnt I become stronger faster then?

You moron Just continue to train at the intensity you have been training at. Your current training regimen is close to your bodys limits anyway. A humans body will break down if you overdo it.

All right, I will listen to your words.

Kurotan suddenly glared at Luke and smiled.

After my training and I defeat you, I will be the Great Warrior from then on.

This bastard?

Luke glared back at Kurotan in disbelief. Should that happen again, Kurotan would return to being uncooperative and giving Luke headaches.

You think Ill simply let you do that?

Luke silently tightened his hands into fists.

Luke promised himself then and there that he would put himself through intense training in order to keep Kurotan from surpassing him.

From that day, Luke began training alongside Kurotan in the training field. It also helped Luke distract himself from counting the days in agony.

It will take the informants planted in Lea Marquisate at least ten days to return.

Luke threw himself into his training, pushing his body to its limits in order to stave off the anxiety. The duels he held with Kurotan whenever he could always exceeded his expectations.

How in the How did you dodge that? I thought I had gotten past your defenses.

Kurotan bared his teeth in a savage smile.

I have battled countless human Knights. Compared to their techniques, dueling you is like fighting a child.

Lukes face scrunched up with humiliation.

Hey, I did manage to scratch you.

That's only because I can't move my body freely yet.

Kurotan also had a hard time getting through Luke's defenses due to only carrying out his attacks with the basic sword skills he had learned. However, Luke's attacks were getting through Kurotan's defenses less and less. Kurotan had an abundance of experience in life and death battles with humans to draw from.

As the training continued, Kurotan gradually familiarized himself with Hals' body, and recovered his reflexes and power from his time as an Orc Great Warrior.

The training only ended when Kurotan became so exhausted that he fell to the ground and could not move. Because Kurotan was improving so rapidly, Luke could no longer land that many hits on him.

Shit, if he's this hard to handle with just the basic sword skills I've taught him, how much stronger would he become if I pass on the next level of sword skills to him?

Kurotan had become fairly skilled with the basic sword skills Luke had given him. It was completely unheard of for a person unfamiliar with the sword to have mastered basic sword skills in two months. Apprentice knights usually took at least one year to master basic sword skills.

It was a feat made possible only by the fact that the soul of a veteran Orc Great Warrior resided in Hals' untrained body.

Luke had meant to begin training Kurotan in beginner level swordsmanship, a level higher than basic swordsmanship, but he couldn't help but feel a little nervous at the rapid speed Kurotan's swordsmanship improved.

I don't know if this is the right choice.

Luke was resting after the duel with Kurotan, when a maid servant approached him.

The Lord wishes to see you.

All right.

Reynold greeted him with a bright smile when Luke entered the Lord's Hall.

I'll bet you've been dying to hear that our informant has returned.

It feels like my blood is drying out.

It is good that you have self-control.

Yes, Lord. What did you wish to see me for?

I have something to give you.

Reynold took out three books from the drawer of his desk.

It's the mid-level sword techniques you asked for.

Luke swallowed unconsciously. Basic and beginner level sword techniques, he could teach personally to Kurotan. However, mid-level techniques and higher usually require written text to be mastered. Higher level techniques could not be taught simply by verbal coaching, but required self-study to be learned efficiently.

Thank you for listening to my request.

Reynold looked serious as he retorted.

These mid-level sword techniques were purchased at expensive prices by our House.

Yes, I already know.

Let me ask you one thing.

Anything.

Do you truly believe that your apprentice knight deserves to learn the mid-level sword techniques?

Luke paused for a little bit before nodding.

Yes, I do.

Equivalent exchange is a law of the universe. What has the apprentice knight promised to give to you for these mid-level sword techniques?

Luke answered without hesitation this time.

He will fight for me for the rest of his life.

A smile spread over Reynold's face.

Not a bad exchange, then. It is good news to hear that you have already taken a vassal.

Pick one book from the three. They all have different strengths and weaknesses, so you will have to choose wisely.

Yes, big brother.

Luke began to pore over the three books containing mid-level sword techniques. Two of them seemed to have come from fallen Noble Houses.

They balanced offense and defense well, while focusing on building a solid foundation of techniques. However, they were slightly lacking compared to the Esteban swordsmanship that Luke was training Kurotan in.

When Luke took a look at the third book, surprise came over his face.

This is.

Spirit Sword Chapter 13
Chapter 13. Bad News -3-
TL: Warriormonk
Edit: Warriormonk

The third book contained sword techniques that were completely different from the first two books. Reynold explained. The book is by an Aura Master that started off as a Mercenary, Beluche. The House purchased it during an auction in the capital with a rather hefty sum.

It concentrates almost solely on offense. It contains close to no defensive techniques.

That's exactly why I decided to refrain from teaching it to the Houses Knights. Some say that offense is the best defense, but that is a theory that can only be reinforced by extremely skilled people.

Luke could not take his eyes off of the third book.

How coincidental. This is a sword technique completely meant for Kurotan.

Kurotan was currently able to block or deflect Lukes attacks with basic sword techniques, thanks to his experiences as an Orc Great Warrior.

Although the defensive aspect of the Beluche sword art was definitely lacking, the sword techniques of Beluche were a massive improvement from the techniques that Kurotan was currently training in.

Luke ceased to think and chose the third book.

This is the one.

Surprising. You won't be able to choose a second one, so choose wisely.

I won't need to choose a second time.

A slightly surprised expression came over Reynolds face, but he silently collected the remaining books.

I will have to consider a bit more regarding the Aura cultivation technique.

Of course. I will wait.

I know you've been anxious, but wait a couple more days. The informant will soon return with information on why the Lea Marquisate requested a break off of the engagement.

Yes, big brother.

Luke bowed and walked out of the Lords Hall.

Luke and Kurotan continued to train until the informant finally returned from the Lea Marquisate. Luke couldn't hide the anticipation in his movements as he walked once more towards the Lords hall.

Finally

A sharp eyed middle aged man sat on the sofa of the Lords Office. His expressionless face did not reveal any emotions.

Reynold motioned towards the sofa at Luke.

Sit.

Yes, big brother.

Reynold glanced at the middle aged man once Luke had seated himself.

Garfield, report your findings.

Yes, Lord.

Garfield gave Luke a cursory glance before beginning his report.

Our informants and I started off by gathering the rumors that had been spreading around the castle, but found nothing substantial.

As expected.

However, we found a surprising amount of Holy Knights and Priests from the Church of Flora.

The Church of Flora?

The Church of Flora was a religious order dedicated to the worship of Flora, the goddess of earth, that made their headquarters in Hansel Kingdom. Their numbers within the kingdom outstripped any other Churches, and was known to have an influence even on the Royal Family.

So?

After a while, we succeeded in purchasing a maidservant from the castle.

As expected from you. So what kind of information did she give you?

According to the maidservant, Lady Isabelle seems to have awakened Holy power.

Garfield's words startled everyone present. To awaken to Holy power was no small happening.

Every human being had differing amounts of potential that they were born with. Even if two people trained in the same sword techniques and Aura cultivation method, one would become an Aura Expert, and the other would never break through the wall.

A person with no talent in magic would never be able to become a Mage, no matter how they tried. It was the same for Holy power.

Amongst humans, there were a few with an especially strong affinity for receiving the power and authority of gods into their bodies. When these people chose to voluntarily serve and worship a single god, an enormous amount of Holy power could be wielded.

About a month ago, Lady Isabelle was suffering from a serious flu. A Priest from the Church of Flora had been called upon to treat her with Holy power.

The Priest had been in for a surprise. While the Priest was sending his Holy power into Isabelle who lay sick in bed, a phenomenon known as Ecstasy occurred.

Ecstasy, or a massive heat flux, only occurred when an extreme talent for Holy power awakened. Isabelles flu disappeared without a trace, and the Priest immediately reported it to his church.

The Church of Flora was upturned in disarray.

She has the potential to become a Saint. We absolutely must take her in to our church.

The Church of Flora immediately sent out a party of Holy Knights and Priests to Lea Marquisate. They moved quickly to prevent other churches from discovering Isabelle.

The party was composed of high level church officials, and began to make offers of enormous amounts of money and other rewards as soon as they arrived at Lea Marquisate. In order for custody of Isabelle, that is.

Lea Marquisate accepted their offer.

IT makes sense. Thats why they sent a request to break off the engagement.

Reynold was frowning. Should Garfields report be true, Lea Marquisate had played the Esteban Earldom for a fool. Unfortunately, we cannot officially pursue this case. If we do, wed be making enemies out of not only Lea Marquisate but the Church of Flora.

The Church of Flora wielded enormous power within the Hansel Kingdom, and might as well be the official church of the Kingdom. Even a House with a history as deep as Esteban could not afford to turn the Church of Flora into an enemy.

Luke had remained silent the whole time. What kind of news was this, right before his marriage?

So, how did Lady Isabelle react to this?

According to the maidservant, the Lady was strongly opposed, but the leaders of the Lea House are too strict and domineering that she is unable to fight their decisions.

Poor girl.

Reynold shook his head with a bitter expression.

She does not have the power to resist.

Reynold looked at Luke with sympathy.

I know its hard to accept, but there is nothing we can do.

Luke raised his head to look at Reynold. His eyes were red from anger.

There truly is nothing we can do, Luke.

I cant do that.

Luke spat out in denial and jumped up from his seat.

Now that we have figured out the situation, I will go to Lea Marquisate. I need to meet her and talk to her.

I dont think that this situation will be solved by your visit to the Marquisate.

I cant do nothing.

Reynold reluctantly nodded his approval.

As you wish. I will send a messenger to Lea Marquisate informing them of your visit, and send soldiers to guard you. Please.

Luke returned to his room, and laid down with his head in his hands. Looking up at the ceiling, Luke pictured Isabelle, the beautiful face of his fiance.

Isabelle

He remembered when he first met her at the Academy for Nobles.

Fellow students called her the flower that cannot be plucked. Isabelle did not socialize, or talk to other students. She concentrated on her studies with an unmatched elegance, and many male students could only watch from afar with longing.

However, the flower that cannot be plucked, was plucked by Luke. She had opened her heart for the first time to Luke. Luke had grown up in a warm household, and had good people skills that made him popular amongst the students. Swordsmanship, or athletics, he excelled in every subject, was friendly and considerate.

He was of the direct line of the prestigious House Esteban, but did not use his status to lord over other students and remained humble, making many students like him. Female students were included, of course.

Surprisingly, the first to make a move was Isabelle.

It was a day of academic and sport competitions at the Academy. Luke had just finished an outstanding performance in the horse riding competition and was returning to his dormitory when Isabelle approached him.

After fidgeting for a long while, she asked Luke if he had any interest in dating her shyly.

Luke, charmed by her beauty, had immediately accepted. That was roughly how they had become a couple.

The first feeling that Luke had after starting to date Isabelle was a sort of sympathy. Isabelle had grown up in a household that was especially strict and domineering, and therefore lacked the people skills or initiative to befriend strangers.

She had not approached any other students at the Academy not on purpose, but because she did not know how to treat other people.

Luke realized this, and became even more considerate of her in their relationship, falling deeper and deeper into her hidden charisma.

However, as graduation approached, Isabelle gradually became more and more nervous.

Her sisters at the Lea Marquisate had already become sacrifices to political marriages, and it was a path she would likely have to follow.

I am not a legitimate daughter, so Ill most likely become married off to an old Noble.

Dont worry. I wont let that happen.

After consideration, Luke opened up to his father about his dilemma.

I have someone that I love. I am going to have to leave the House to marry her.

Lea Marquisate was a House that strictly calculated its gains and losses. If Luke went under their banner as a Knight, Lea Marquisate would most likely allow Luke and Isabelles marriage.

Earl Esteban, Lukes father, respected Lukes decision.

If thats what you wish to do, I will not stop you. Start a new life at Lea Marquisate.

Thank you, father.

Luke immediately left to Lea Marquisate, and received their blessings for marrying Isabelle.

Luke broke out of his reminiscence and smiled bitterly.

She was so happy back then

The image of Isabelle jumping up and down happily with Luke in her arms after her Houses blessings was still clear in Lukes mind. Luke gripped his fists tightly.

I cant just let her leave to the Church of Flora. I must find a way.

The situation seemed hopeless. Lea Marquisate was smaller and less powerful than Esteban Earldom, but the Church of Flora could not be taken lightly. Lukes bravery did not waver.

The next day, Luke went to Reynold with bloodshot eyes from a sleepless night.

I dont need any guards. I am planning on going with the apprentice knight I took in.

Its too dangerous. We dont know what they might do if you go without guards.

Our opponents are the Lea Marquisate and the Church of Flora. A few soldiers wont do anything to deter them. Also Luke lowered his voice.

In the worst case scenario, they may only get in the way.

Worry came over Reynolds face.

Please, keep a cool head before acting, Luke.

I will try, but I dont know how the situation will change.

Reynold accepted Lukes decision.

All right. Do as you wish. Thankfully Lea Marquisate is an ordered territory without chaos.

Thank you, big brother.

Wherever you go or end up, do not forget that you are the son of Esteban Earldom. And

Reynold took out a book from the drawer of his desk and handed it to Luke.

What is this?

Its the Aura cultivation method you asked for.

Luke gave a start and took the book into his hands. He had requested it, but without big expectations. Aura cultivation methods were extremely valuable.

I had originally meant to consider it a bit more. But with the situation you are in, I couldnt put it off any longer.

Luke felt a warmth in his heart.

I cant thank you enough, big brother.

I can give you even bigger things considering what youve done for the House. Anyways

Reynold lowered his voice.

Dont get your hopes too high. The Aura cultivation method has a single big flaw.

A flaw?

Its ability to circulate Aura is on par with the Houses Aura cultivation technique, but its an unstable technique.

According to Reynold, one of the trainers of the House had suffered from a rampaging mana and thrown up blood when he tried to train in the technique.

We do not have any records on where we acquired it from, but the level of the Aura cultivation technique should be fairly high.

Luke silently nodded. He understood now why Reynold would be willing to give him the Aura cultivation technique. Aura cultivation techniques could not be purchased even if you had the money, and required status and power as well.

Luke took the book and put it away into a pocket in his shirt.

Yes, big brother. I will be leaving right away.

Please, be careful.

You dont have to worry.

Reynolds eyes looked on with worry at the retreating figure of Luke.

Luke left on the same day with Kurotan in tow. Luke began to teach Kurotan horseback riding immediately.

Kurotan, you have to know how to ride a horse. Unfortunately, we have to move quickly, so you won't have time to take your training easily.

All right.

Horseback riding is rather challenging for new beginners, just consider it a way to train your reflexes and whatnot. Come, I'll teach you how to mount.

Luke taught Kurotan how to mount on the horse, and how to reign the horse as well. Kurotan nodded.

All right. I should be able to ride a horse now.

Hey, you bastard, don't look down on horseback riding. You'll regret it when you fall off your horse and become disabled.

Kurotan looked slightly confused when he approached his horse.

The horse isn't scared. How strange. When I was an Orc, I could not approach horses without them going mad and raising havoc.

Kurotan mounted the horse like he had been taught.

How do I make the horse run?

Dig into its side with the heels of your feet, but that's too much for you right now. Just push down slightly with your thighs and slowly start it off in a trot. Hey!

Luke gave a startled shout. Kurotan had kicked into the horse's side with his heels without a second thought.

Hihihiiing.

The horse gave a shout and started to run ahead.

This bastard! What if he falls?

The startled Luke hurried to mount his own horse, but his eyes soon widened in horror and amazement.

Wh-What the fuck?

Surprisingly, Kurotan was doing just fine above the speeding horse. His loose waist and upper body swayed in rhythm with the horse's movements, dispersing the shock from the horse's hooves hitting the ground. Apparently not satisfied with the horse's speed, Kurotan continued to kick the horse's side.

Dudududu.

Kurotan was riding a horse like he was an experienced Knight. Luke followed with disbelief showing on his face.

How? How is he riding a horse so well? I know for a fact that this is his first time.

His stance was a little awkward, but Kurotan was riding the horse at full speed like they were sharing one body.

Kurotan rode on for around thirty minutes before glancing back at Luke.

How do I stop the horse?

Pull the reins.

All right.

A little while later, Kurotan's horse slowed to a trot and finally came to a stop. Luke approached hurriedly to ask his question.

What the hell? I thought this was your first time riding a horse?

I have not ridden a horse before. I have ridden wolves countless times.

Luke understood how Kurotan was able to display such skill at horseback riding.

Of course. Orcs ride wolves instead of horses, right?

Yes, and I was an experienced Wolf Rider. Not just me, but most of the Orcs that were hiding out with me in the Eastern mountain ranges were Wolf Riders.

Kurotan took a look at his heaving horse.

A horse is easier to ride than a wolf. There is less shaking, and the horse follows orders well.

Is that so?

But their ability to jump and instant acceleration is far behind that of a wolf's. However, wolves get tired easily.

Luke smiled bitterly.

Well, it's a relief that you are so skilled at horseback riding. You should be fairly familiar with fighting on top of a horse as well.

Of course. I killed countless human Knights during my time as a Wolf Rider.

Hey, I'm a Knight as well, so stop saying such things. You're an apprentice knight, as well.

All right.

Kurotan continued to perfect his horseback riding, with Luke only having to tweak his stance from time to time.

Kurotan did not forget the things that he had been taught, even once.

How do you raise a wolf, anyway?

You catch one when it's young. You have to be prepared to be bitten a lot, of course.

Kurotan reminisced back to his days as a Wolf Rider.

Horses are not bad to ride, but they are not as good as wolves. Wolves are able to jump over most obstacles.

But you cant ride any wolves from now on. Humans have longer legs than wolves, making us too unbalanced to ride horses.

You are right. And the food on my plate decreased when I raised a wolf. I have to feed the wolf rather than myself.

Ah, wolves and Orcs both eat meat.

Luke and Kurotan rode side by side, conversing. It was interesting for Luke to learn about the previously hidden lives and culture of Orcs.

So, Kurotan.

What is it?

Lukes face darkened.

My fiance is currently in a dangerous situation.

Fiance?

The woman who has promised to marry me.

Ah, I see. What about it?

We might encounter danger when we arrive at Lea Marquisate. We have to be prepared.

Kurotan puffed out his chest, as if telling Luke not to worry.

Life as an Orc was constant danger. Danger does not scare me.

Ah, as expected from a former fearless Orc. All right. I will give you a good gift during dinner tonight.

Gift? Food?

Luke rolled his eyes in disbelief and muttered.

What did I expect? Anyways, you can be excited for this gift.

All right.

From a room in the rear garden of the castle of Lea Marquisate, a sobbing sound could be heard.

Luke, what do I do now?

A beautiful woman in her early twenties was using a handkerchief to wipe her tears. Her face was swollen, seemingly from the long hours of crying.

It was Lukes fiance, Isabelle. The unlucky woman who had awakened to her Holy powers by coincidence and was now being sold off to the Church of Flora.

Lea Marquisate had immediately accepted the offer made by the Church of Flora when it had been made. The House of Lea was a House that strictly calculated profits and losses, and had done so without hesitation.

It was true that Luke was a veteran officer from a prestigious House. The terms being offered by the Church of Flora were better.

Isabelle had been completely ignored during the decision making process.

Why did my affinity with Holy power have to be revealed now? It would have been better if all of this had happened before I met Luke, to save us the pain

Isabelle could do nothing but lament at her destiny.

Lea Marquisate was widely known as a domineering and strict House. Isabelle had grown up being unable to express her opinions, or whether she liked or disliked something.

Her time at the Academy for Nobles came as a shock to her. She had never seen someone like Luke, unafraid to speak his opinions and speak out, something completely unimaginable to her.

Luke, who made friends easily regardless of status and was not shy was like a completely new human specimen to her. She had become interested in Luke right away, and had worked up her courage for a long time before asking Luke out on a date. After they became a couple, it was as though a new world had been brought to life before her eyes.

Do you know how to ride a horse?

No. My father said women should be elegant and reserved, and forbid me.

Is that so? A noble woman should know how to ride a horse. Youll be able to travel here and there easily. Ill teach you, just dont tell your house.

Isabelle had learned horseback riding from Luke, and traveled the famous sceneries and tourist spots around the Academy. It was as though she was living in a dream.

What a beautiful waterfall! I had no idea that there were so many beautiful places near the capital.

You havent traveled a lot?

The women of Lea Marquisate dont get to travel without permission.

Ah, there are too many restrictions.

As time passed, Isabelle fell for Luke deeper and deeper. He was kind and energetic, as well as always considerate of Isabelle.

When Luke had gone to Lea Marquisate with his sleeves rolled up and succeeded in receiving permission to marry her, her heart was stirred with emotion.

When Luke enrolled to serve in the military as a representative of House of Esteban, Isabelle wrote letters every day and sent those letters to Fort Potellan once a month.

They had built their love brick by brick since they were young, but right before they could realize their love, tragedy had struck.

I dont want to go to the Church of Flora. I want to become a Saintess even less. I just want to marry Luke and live

happily.

She cried silently, and her words echoed in the empty room. Isabelle was going to be sold off to the Church of Flora, powerless to resist. Just like her sisters.

The door to the room opened suddenly.

Dulkuk.

Isabelle hurriedly smoothed out her clothes. The person who had entered through the open door was a strict looking middle aged man. It was her father, Marquess Lea.

He took one look at her swollen face, and clucked his tongue in disappointment.

Stupid fool, crying like a baby

Fo-Forgive me, father.

Guards from the Church of Flora will arrive within fifteen days. Finish your preparations by then.

Father.

Isabelle slowly looked up at her father and pleaded.

I sincerely do not wish to go to the Church of Flora. Please

Marquess Leas eyes shown fiercely.

Silence! It will treat you much better than becoming a mistress.

I want to be with

I dont want to hear it. Daughters of a Noble House must sacrifice themselves.

Isabelle silently lowered her head, defeated. Marquess Lea continued to glare at her with fierce eyes before remarking.

There was a message from Esteban Earldom. That Luke, hes just left the earldom to see you.

Isabelle gave a start and looked up once again.

Luke?!

Itll take him longer than fifteen days to get here, so hell arrive after youve left for the Church of Flora. I will make him understand the situation.

Ple-Please, let me meet him.

Do you not understand your situation? Meeting him will only complicate things, it is better to reduce the chances of uncertain outcomes.

Marquess Lea turned his back coldly.

Finish your preparations and wait. Like a woman of Lea Marquisate should.

Isabelle followed her fathers back with watering eyes.

The campfire was snapping at the night air.

Hwarerere.

Luke threw in a couple of branches into the flames and glanced at Kurotan. They had ridden for an entire day to make distance, but Kurotan was swinging his sword, fiercely training.

Uncertainty filled Lukes eyes as he watched on.

This is crazy, no matter who looks at it.

Luke slipped his hand into a pocket in his shirt silently. When he took it out, his hand held two books, the books containing Aura cultivation method and mid-level sword technique. To those who made a living by swinging their swords, the books were unmatched treasures.

Goddammit, I dont know if this is a good decision.

Luke swallowed and opened up a small leather bag. The bag held a scroll with strange characters, and a few glass bottles containing a blue liquid.

The scroll was a magic scroll that installed a formation that gathered and concentrated mana over a period of time. The glass bottles were mana potions.

Mana potions were known to be worth more than its weight in gold, and the magic scroll was even more expensive.

Both were critical in learning an Aura cultivation method, and so Luke prepared them, being scolded by his big brother in the process.

Luke put down the two books, magic scroll, and mana potions in an orderly fashion next to the campfire and looked at Kurotan. Kurotan had just finished his training, sheathing his sword and wiping the sweat his brow.

Spirit Sword Chapter 15

Chapter 15. To Lea Marquisate -2-

Editor: Isleidir

Come here, Kurotan.

Kurotan approached Luke and the campfire, glancing at the scroll and mana potions curiously.

What are those?

The gift I mentioned earlier.

Can I eat them?

You simple bastard.

Luke smiled and grabbed the scroll, holding it up.

Back up a bit.

All right.

Luke ripped the scroll, releasing a blinding light.

Paahhht.

The ripped remnants of the scroll burst into blue flames, disappearing without a trace. The light squirmed around, gradually taking shape before sinking into the ground.

Bunjjuk.

A geometric shape of around one meter in diameter was drawn into the floor. Kurotan looked at it stupidly.

What the hell is this?

Listen carefully. I am going to teach you an Aura cultivation method.

Aura cultivation method? Are you talking about Maals blessing?

Yes. I don't know what the outcome is going to be, but let's try it. Step into the magic formation.

All right.

Kurotan gingerly stepped inside of the formation with expectant eyes. He frowned the second he did.

Keuu, the pressure is almost overwhelming. Mother Nature's mana is extremely concentrated.

Yes, it's a formation meant to do exactly that

Luke opened up one of the mana potions.

Drink this.

Kurotan chugged the whole bottle without question.

It tastes really strange. Keuu, what is this?

Kurotan's face scrunched up in pain.

Mana potions were made by solidifying mana, then melting it into a liquid prepared by using many ingredients. When the mana potion entered the body, the concentrated mana spread throughout the body at fast speeds. The pain caused by the circulating mana was not easy to handle.

You have to bear with it, until your body is fully saturated with mana.

Al-All right.

Sweat poured out of Kurotan's brow as he answered through clenched teeth.

It's not going to be easy, but if it's you, it's possible.

Luke completely understood the pain that Kurotan was going through. He had been taught Aura cultivation method in the same way.

If one could not bear the pain and passed out or left the formation, everything was for naught.

Luke had only succeeded in awakening his Aura his fifth time, failing the first four times.

I only had that one scroll, so you must succeed. There won't be any second chances.

Y-Yes.

The mana in the air around Kurotan was extremely compressed and concentrated, due to the mana concentrating formation. Due to that, the mana released from the mana potion was unable to leave Kurotan's body and continued to build up inside of him.

The heart is the organ that receives and holds mana the best. The mana will begin to concentrate in your heart, so be prepared.

Kurotan nodded with visible effort, as though it was hard for him to even speak.

As Luke had said, mana began to concentrate in Kurotan's heart after some time. Since the mana inside Kurotan's body could not escape to the atmosphere, it was an obvious result.

Keeuuuuu.

A groan escaped Kurotan's lips.

Bear with it! If you lose consciousness, everything was useless.

Luke made an anxious expression. He had already acknowledged Kurotan's mental strength and endurance, but he could not help being worried.

Thankfully, Kurotan had not yet lost consciousness and was gritting his teeth through the pain. The mana that had been concentrating in the heart eventually reached full saturation, and began to squirm in an effort to find a path to leak through.

When the mana reaches full saturation in your heart, it'll start to move. Concentrate, and guide the mana. Here

Luke pointed at the place where Kurotans neck and chest met to form a dip. It was the beginning of the circulation pathway that made up the Aura cultivation method.

Guiding mana isnt easy. But try to concentrate.

Kurotans lips parted in a smile.

Im already guiding the mana to that location, do not worry.

Lukes mouth shut in surprise, and he remembered that unlike himself, Kurotan had already experienced the level of an Aura Expert.

I see. Its a path that youve already treaded once.

It wasnt easy for humans to sense mana. It was usually only barely possible with the help of a mana concentrating formation and a mana potion, at a highly concentrated level of ambient and internal mana.

It was simply impossible to suppress and guide the mana produced by such methods with a mediocre level of concentration. This was why, first time trainees of Aura cultivation methods usually failed a countless number of times before succeeding.

Kurotan, however, had already experienced the level of an Aura Expert. He was able to suppress his mana and send it through the circulation path that Luke pointed out relatively easily.

Its done. Where to next?

How surprising.

Luke pointed to the next spot in astonishment. Kurotan immediately guided his mana to the exact location.

The mana from Kurotans heart flowed endlessly through the path that had been recorded in the Aura cultivation method. However, something unexpected happened during the process.

Over here next.

Kurotan scrunched up his face when Luke pointed to the next circulation path.

Thats not the right path.

What the hell are you talking about? Listen, its difficult to turn back once you guide your mana through the wrong path.

Still, its not the right path.

It was now Lukes turn to scrunch up his face. Should mana flow through the wrong pathway, the mana could go on a rampage and disable the practitioner for life.

What do you know about the human body? Its an Aura cultivation method proven to be effective, so be quiet and guide the mana.

Kurotan looked at Luke.

I might not know a lot about the human body, but one thing is for certain.

What is that?

The flow of the mana must be natural. There cannot be any irregular flow patterns.

.

The pathway you pointed out just now is not natural. In other words, its the wrong path.

Kurotan turned serious.

Orcs might not have had a formal way of passing down knowledge such as Aura cultivation methods, but the older warriors would all tell us one thing.

What one thing.

That the flow of the mana must be natural, no matter what.

Luke bit his lips. There was nothing he could do, now that Kurotan was being stubborn at the most important part.

All right. Do as you wish, its your body anyways.

Where is the path after this?

Luke pointed towards a path further down than the wrong path, and Kurotans eyes shone with excitement.

I will leave it to the manas choices up to that path. The mana will find the most natural path.

Kurotan ceased speaking and closed his eyes. Luke looked on anxiously.

Its a pity, but there is no way I can beat his stubbornness at this point.

Kurotans eyes only opened after a long time.

Its done. I have guided the mana up to that path.

Luke shook his head and flipped through the pages of the Aura cultivation method book. He did not know what the result would be.

Its an unstable Aura cultivation method anyways. I suppose its a gamble worth taking, as the stability wont be too affected.

Kurotan continued to follow Lukes guidance in circulating the rest of his mana. Whenever he felt that something was off with the flow of the mana, however, he stopped immediately.

The flow of the mana is not natural over here either.

All right. The path after that is over here. You can guide the mana as you wish up to this path.

After guiding the mana through his body for a while, the effect from the mana potion began to fade. Luke opened up a second mana potion without hesitation and handed it to Kurotan.

Drink this, and itll revive the flow of the mana.

All right.

Luke grimaced slightly as he watched Kurotan chug the potion like it was a common beer.

You bastard, do you know how much a mana potion costs?

Kurotan does not know. I don't care, either.

Dammit, I'd hate you less if you didn't speak sometimes. I can't even complain.

Kurotan began to concentrate again after finishing the mana potion. Luke picked up the now empty bottle and continued to point out the following paths that Kurotan should guide the mana to.

It's not natural over there either.

All right. The path after that is here. You're on your own until you guide the mana to this point.

Kurotan pointed out a total of seven points on the path that seemed irregular to him. Luke marked down the rearranged pathways on the book, and glanced at Kurotan with curiosity.

How does he know that the flow of the mana is not natural? I can't tell at all.

Kurotan's first training of Aura cultivation continued for a long time. After drinking a total of three mana potions, Kurotan was able to circulate his mana around his body once before guiding it back to the heart in a complete circle. Luke's face brightened.

It's done. You've just succeeded in Half Rotation. Thank the gods that your mana didn't go on a rampage during the process.

Half Rotation? Don't use complicated words.

It means that you've built a foundation in your body for producing Aura.

Luke pointed towards Kurotan's heart with a finger.

You've completed a circulation once, so mana will be circulating throughout your body on its own, even without the help of a mana potion. After a while, the mana will transform into Aura.

All right. I will call Maals blessing Aura as well, from now on.

If you are able to sense the Aura being produced in your body, it'll mean that you've entered the level of an Aura User. The more Aura you possess, the sharper your senses will become.

Luke finished his explanation, and frowned. Unlike himself, Kurotan had succeeded in completing his Half Rotation in a single try.

I suppose it's to be expected from Kurotan, as he was able to become an Aura Expert without any help.

Luke was also an Aura User. He was able to sense the Aura in his body. It was impossible for him, however, to control the Aura at his level. It was common knowledge that Aura was even harder to control than mana, which was also known as being extremely hard to control.

He had tried countless times to control his Aura, but his Aura had undoubtedly escaped his grasp every single time, like a fish slipping through the nets.

It took me a long time to even sense Aura. It was a completely novel sensation that I had never even imagined, after all.

Kurotan's sudden laughter broke Luke out of his musings.

Keuhahahahaha! I have finally earned Maals blessing!

Luke's face twisted in horror as he looked at Kurotan.

What the hell do you mean? You've already produced Aura?

Kurotan smiled and nodded.

Yes. Ah, that's right. Aura, not Maals blessing. I can feel the Aura.

Ecstasy spread along Kurotan's sweaty face.

I am currently circulating the Aura through the pathway that you have taught me. If I continue to circulate the Aura, its amount will increase. I have experienced this as an Orc.

Luke coughed in disbelief. It was already amazing that Kurotan could sense the meager amount of Aura being produced right after its awakening, but he was horrified by Kurotan's ability to control the small amount of Aura and circulate it throughout his body.

I can't believe it.

Luke also knew that by circulating Aura through his body, he would be able to increase the amount of Aura. Unfortunately, it was not yet possible for Luke. How was he supposed to circulate Aura throughout his body when the Aura inside of his body avoided his every effort to control it?

Luke looked sadly towards Kurotan, who was concentrating wholeheartedly on circulating Aura throughout his body. I have less talent than an Orc. This is insane.

The morning sun had risen. They had spent the entire night while Kurotan trained in the Aura cultivation method. Kurotan finally finished circulating his Aura and opened his eyes.

Bunjuk.

A blinding light shone through Kurotan's eyes the second he opened them. A groan of ecstasy escaped his lips.

Finally, I have recovered Maals blessing. No, Aura.

An aura of domineering oppression poured out endlessly from Kurotan as he stood up.

Kurotan stepped towards the horse and gripped the battle axe hanging from its saddle. It was the weapon that he could not use previously because of his untrained body and lacking strength.

Shall we dance one more time?

As you wish.

Luke bit his lips lightly and unsheathed the sword from his waist.

The following spar was completely different from any of the previous duels.

Wh-What the fuck?

Lukes eyes almost popped out of his face in surprise. Kurotans movements had suddenly sped up by more than twice. His strength had also improved incomparably from his previous state.

Kaang. Kkaang.

Luke retreated while frowning after the swords clashed a couple of times. His hands were numb from the shock of Kurotans blows.

How is this even possible? Kurotan only awakened his Aura last night, and hes already using it to strengthen his strength and agility

Unlike Lukes frowning face, Kurotans face shone with ecstasy.

Good, it has been a while, this feeling.

Chwaang. Chwang.

It did not take a long time before Lukes movements became disorderly.

Kurotans attacks were simple and straightforward, because he had only learned basic sword techniques. The path of his attacks, in other words, was perfectly clear. However, it was difficult for Luke to keep up with Kurotan when he had almost doubled his physical abilities through his Aura.

Keeuk, En-Enough.

Luke raised his hand in a gesture, and Kurotan backed off reluctantly.

What is it? Youre already tired?

I was the one saying that, just yesterday

Luke sheathed his sword, and plopped himself down by the campfire, a spaced out look on his face. Kurotan squared out his shoulders with a confident look.

I cannot yet display my full abilities because I dont have enough Aura. Time will solve this problem.

Oh, great, it must be nice for you to have a genius level talent.

Kurotan glanced curiously at Luke, who was complaining.

You cannot yet control your Aura?

No, I cant.

Why not?

Luke spat back in annoyance.

How would I know? Every time I try to suppress it and bring it under my control, it slips away

Your method is incorrect.

Aura, or Maals Blessing, cannot be moved forcibly.

Then how can I control it?

First, you must become closer with the Aura. In other words, befriend it.

Luke rolled his eyes. How do you become friends with a non-living thing such as Aura, a form of processed mana?

It will all become clear once you befriend Aura. The process is a little bit tricky, but once you befriend Aura, it will entrust itself to you. You must wait calmly until then.

Luke swallowed in a sort of anticipation. He had never heard anything like this from his senior Knights. Until now, the only method he had been taught to control Aura was to forcibly suppress and then move it.

Is this how Orcs are able to control Aura so easily without even having a structured technique for Aura cultivation?

Luke looked at Kurotan seriously. Humans would not walk around blabbering about the secrets to controlling Aura. Even if a human was willing to share the secret, itd most likely be for a huge price. However, Kurotan did no such thing.

Luke listened intently to the rest of Kurotans explanation.

If I just befriend Aura, I can circulate it through my body, just like you?

Yes. But there is a single requirement.

What is that?

The circulation path must be smooth and natural. Aura and mana are very different. Unlike mana, Aura will stop and retreat to its original place if the pathway is not natural.

Is that so? So thats why you emphasized a natural pathway so much.

Yes. The ways that warriors earn Maals blessing, or awaken Aura, can differ. But one rule must absolutely be followed.

The flow of the mana must be natural?

Yes.

Luke tweaked his head in curiosity.

But how do I feel whether or not the flow of mana is unnatural?

That is up to you. As with Aura, you must first befriend mana for everything to be clear.

Luke frowned.

Isnt that too abstract?

I will tell you step by step, how to befriend mana.

Ok, Ill give it a shot.

Luke followed Kurotans instructions and tried to befriend mana. It was a method that demanded incredible patience from Luke.

Try to feel the flow of the mana, to become one with it.

How?

Kurotan bared his teeth in a savage smile.

The flow of mana becomes fiercer and faster the more you fight. It becomes easier to feel it then.

Unfortunately, Luke had to unsheathe his sword once more to duel Kurotan.

Chwang. Chwaaang.

The Kurotan who had awakened Aura had astonishing speed. In addition to his sharpened senses and reflexes, his strength and agility were now augmented by Aura. Luke ran out of breath soon after.

Huk, Huuk.

Kurotan, on the other hand, had barely changed his pace of breathing. It was a scene completely different from the duels not very long ago.

Damn Looks like your stamina is also helped by Aura.

Of course. I will not get tired so easily before my Aura runs out.

After fighting mindlessly for a while, the flow of mana throughout their bodies quickened. Luke began to sense things he had not been able to before when he tried to listen to Kurotans advice.

Its not perfectly clear, but I think I am feeling the flow of mana.

More. Concentrate.

How?

Kurotan bared his teeth in a smile once again.

If we fight even more, you will be able to feel it more clearly.

This god damned

Chwaaang. Chwang. Chwang.

Luke had no choice but to grit his teeth and jump at Kurotan.

Im going to die from the pain.

Luke massaged his aching sides and legs while looking very battered. They were places that hed taken pretty heavy hits from Kurotan.

You are too weak. Thats nothing

Look, Im not an Orc. Im not bad for a human, you know.

Unlike his snappy comebacks, Lukes expression was bright. He had succeeded in feeling the flow of mana by following Kurotans advice.

There were a total of three places where I felt that the flow of mana was unnatural.

Is that so?

I think I have to fix the pathway in those places first.

Luke glanced at Kurotan with a bright expression.

Will you help me?

Of course.

Lukes eyes shook a bit.

Thanks, Kurotan.

Kurotan frowned.

Do not thank me from now on.

Why not?

Friends do not thank each other.

Kurotan looked at Luke straight on.

You might be human, but I already consider you a member of my tribe. Tribal members do not need to thank each other.

All right. I wont say thank you from now on.

Not just me, but the tribal members who will be joining us from now on.

All right.

Luke sat down in a meditative position on the ground and took out the last mana potion. He was planning on using it to make adjustments to the Esteban Houses Aura cultivation method he had trained in.

Just yesterday, Luke would not have attempted such a thing no matter what. The Aura cultivation method of Esteban House was praised throughout the kingdom as being a stable and efficient Aura cultivation method.

However, Luke had seen Kurotan train in an unstable Aura cultivation method, make multiple adjustments, and jump immediately to the level of an Aura Expert.

This was why he was attempting something he could not have even imagined yesterday.

Kulkkuk.

Luke gulped down the mana potion and closed his eyes. Not long after, mana began to seep throughout his body. Paaat!

Luke frowned at the painful throbs coming from the inside of his body.

I can never get used to this pain. Its better than the first time, I guess

He had already located places in the pathway that felt like the flow was unnatural with Kurotans help. Unlike Kurotan, Luke was drinking a mana potion in a state where his mana pathway was already complete. The mana from the mana potion immediately began circulating this pathway as soon as it was released.

There are a total of three places where the mana flow is unnatural. I must fix them.

Luke was aware of how to guide mana, courtesy of Kurotan. Luke smiled bitterly.

I am probably the only human thats ever existed to try and adjust an Aura cultivation method using the ideas of an Orc.

The adjustment of the Aura cultivation method went smoothly. Luke had successfully guided his mana through new paths that closed down the unnatural paths that his mana flowed through. Guiding mana was a lot easier than controlling Aura.

Luke opened his eyes and lifted his sweat covered face.

I think its done. I no longer feel any unnatural spots in my mana pathway.

All right, now you must befriend your Aura. Dont try to control it, and try to approach it first.

How?

Just like you befriend mana. You must feel and become one with Aura.

Luke made multiple attempts, following the advice Kurotan had given him, but none were successful. It felt as though the Aura was angry for all the times that Luke had tried to suppress it.

However, the Aura was not reacting violently or fiercely towards Lukes advances as it had before.

Dont be in a rush, this will take time.

All right. I should be relaxed going about it.

Luke looked up to the sky.

Too much time has passed. We should get moving.

Kurotan frowned.

Kurotan hungry.

All right. Ill prepare some food really quick.

Luke smiled bitterly and hurried about to cook.

The distance between Esteban Earldom and Lea Marquisate took about fifteen days to travel on horseback. Luke and Kurotan trained bitterly throughout the whole travel.

They would spar fiercely every night, foregoing sleep, and traveled the whole day to make up for the time lost in their training.

Kurotans prowess increased daily. As he gradually cultivated his Aura, he was becoming closer and closer to the level of his past as an Orc Great Warrior.

Luke was also undergoing some changes. After he had adjusted the Aura cultivation method with Kurotans help, Aura had begun to circulate his body for the first time.

Of course, he had not befriended Aura yet. However, due to fixing unnatural spots in the pathway that the Aura would flow through, the Aura would no longer stop and return during its circulation as it did in the past.

Good. The Aura has flowed through the place I made the adjustment.

Luke examined the Aura that was coursing through his body anxiously, but the Aura safely circulated his body once.

It was his first time succeeding in Aura rotation since he had awakened Aura.

Kurotan laughed and patted Luke on the shoulder.

It will circulate continuously, now that you have succeeded. The amount of Aura will slowly increase.

Luke looked at Kurotan, his eyes shaking with emotion.

Its all thanks to you.

No. I was able to recover Aura thanks to you as well.

Their gazes met in the air, and Kurotan bared his teeth in a smile and lifted his axe.

If we fight without worry, the Aura will circulate even faster throughout the body. Shall we dance?

Good. Lets fight.

The sound of weapons clashing echoed through the night, by the campfire.

Spirit Sword Chapter 17
Ch.17 Looking for Isabelle
TL: Warriormonk
Editor: Isleidir

The two men traveled by day and trained fiercely at night, arriving at Lea Marquisate exactly fifteen days later. The only thing that awaited them, however, were shocking news.

What did you say? Isabelle already left, two days ago?

An old servant with a goatee was sweating fiercely with an uncomfortable expression. He was one of the butlers of the Lea Marquisate.

Yes, sir. Two days ago, the lady left the Marquisate under guard by the holy knights of the church of Flora.

Did they mention where they were headed?

I apologize, but I do not know.

Luke bit his lips. He had rode his horse here mindlessly, only to find that everything had been useless.

Looking at the situation, this was planned.

It was also out of order for a seemingly low ranking official, a butler, to greet Luke on his arrival.

I wish to see the lord of Lea Marquisate.

I apologize, but the lord has gone out on a patrol around the territory.

When will he return?

It will take fifteen days at the fastest.

Luke rubbed the back of his neck in frustration. How could he possibly find Isabelle now that the holy knights of the church had taken her? Luke gripped his fists tightly.

The bastards would have taken her to the main temple in the capital. No doubt about it.

Luke made up his mind to look through every road leading from the Marquisate to the capital to find Isabelle. The butler looked at Luke carefully and remarked.

Since the engagement has been called off, your knighthood in our House has been cancelled as well. The lord has entrusted me with the written contract to give to you.

Luke silently accepted the contract. The contents of the contract included permitting his marriage to Isabelle provided his swearing fealty as a knight to the Lea Marquisate.

All right. I have no more business here, so I will be on my way.

Please be careful on your long journey.

Luke walked out of the lords hall of Lea Marquisate with a stiff expression. Kurotan, who had been waiting with the horses, greeted him.

How did it go?

Not well.

Luke slowly shook his head and took the reins of his horse from Kurotan. He took a couple of steps before stopping. He had discovered a familiar face approaching him.

The man, clearly a knight, seemed to be in his thirties, with a kind face.

It was Isabelles brother, Robel.

It has been a long time.

Luke bowed his head stiffly, and Robel frowned with sympathy.

Im sorry that you came all this way for nothing.

Its all right. Then, I am busy so

Wait a second.

Yes?

Robel looked around to make sure no one was around before lowering his voice.

Are you planning on chasing after Isabelle instead of returning to your House?

Lukes face turned serious.

Yes but Do you happen to know which way Isabelle was headed?

Of course. I escorted the party until the edge of our territory.

Can you tell me where?

The child is headed for the Tranbel Kingdom. The church of Flora is planning on raising her into a Saintess in the main temple of Tranbels capital.

Luke frowned.

It seems the church wants to avoid any possible conflicts with our House, and sent Isabelle to another Kingdom.

The House of Esteban was counted amongst the most powerful of Houses in the Kingdom of Hansel, and would be a force to reckon with even for the church of Flora.

I am sorry about the whole ordeal. Even I cannot agree with my father on this matter.

.

This is the way it is with our House, so I can only ask for your understanding.

Not at all Thank you for telling me Isabelles destination.

It is not a problem.

Robel shook his head with a bitter expression.

Isabelle talked a lot about you. Thank you for making her happy until now.

No, sir. I was the one who was happy to be with her.

Even if you catch up to their party, it will be difficult to see Isabelle. The church of Flora sent thirty holy knights to escort her.

Lukes expression darkened at hearing that the church had sent a force of thirty holy knights. He had hoped that the escorting party was small enough for him to take out and safely escape with Isabelle.

Then I will be on my way. I will not forget your kindness today.

Kindness? Please, just be careful. I wish you luck.

Luke saluted once more and turned around. Robels sympathetic eyes fell on Lukes back.

Poor Isabelle, I had hoped for at least you to be happy This is the only thing your brother can do for you

Robel shook his head once more with a bitter expression and walked away as well.

Dagadak dagak.

An impressive procession traveled one of the streets leading to Tranbel kingdom. Eight horses pulled a large carriage that was surrounded by dozens of holy knights, dressed in pure white.

Pick up the pace. We must cross the boundary between kingdoms this morning in order to arrive at Amien Monastery, where we can rest.

The Captain stroked his beard as he ordered the rest of the party to speed up. The rest of the holy knights handled their horses extremely well, and was able to pick up the pace while remaining in a formation around the carriage.

Priests rode on the carriage, with the image of an ear of wheat sewn into the breast of their robes. The ear of wheat symbolized their Goddess of earth, Flora.

Unlike the priests, however, a single woman in the carriage wore a pure white robe.

The women looked on with empty eyes. Her name was Isabelle. Her eyes trembled slightly.

I was unable to see Luke, in the end.

Her eyes reddened, and a single teardrop rolled down her face. A strict looking old man sitting across the carriage saw and began to open his mouth. It was an Archbishop named Aznan, in command of the mission to secure the possible future Saintess.

Suffering from a lost affection passes in the blink of an eye.

When our Goddess Flora takes you into her arms at the main temple, your suffering will disappear completely without a trace.

When Isabelle turned to look at archbishop Aznan, it was not with kind eyes.

Words are easy to say, Archbishop Aznan.

The opportunity to be taken into the arms of the Goddess does not come to everyone. You must consider yourself as blessed for having such a talent and affinity towards holy power.

Isabelle was unable to contain herself and spat back.

Oh is that so? Unfortunately, I consider it a curse, not a blessing.

Archbishop Aznans eyes turned terrible even before she finished her sentence.

I will warn you now to watch your tongue. You are to become a Saintess, worshipping the great Goddess Flora.

.

Dont forget that your actions represent the honor of Lea Marquisate.

Isabelle shut her lips silently. She was not brave enough to rebuke him when he talked of her Houses honor. Archbishop Aznan snorted coldly when he saw Isabelle return her gaze to the window of the carriage.

Stupid young fools that dont know their place

Two holy knights also rode inside the carriage in case of unforeseen complications. Archbishop Aznan opened his mouth to address one of them.

Has there been anything out of the ordinary?

The helmeted holy knight shook his head.

There have been no such signs so far.

Hm I hope it remains that way until we reach the main temple.

Archbishop Aznan frowned with worry. His worry was not without reason.

Five years ago, there had been an incident he had been responsible for. It had been in the name of the Goddess, Flora, and for her honor, but something he should not have done as a priest.

Five years ago, he had caught wind of rumors, speaking of a woman talented in holy power about to enter a rival church.

We must absolutely take her in to the church of Flora.

Archbishop Aznan had immediately held a meeting with the leaders of the church. The conclusion reached by the end of the meeting was to employ violence to kidnap the woman. If the woman received a baptism at the main temple of Flora, she could be made into a Saintess of Flora.

The church in question is not very powerful, there will not be any repercussions.

Archbishop Aznan had taken twenty holy knights provided by the church of Flora and committed the crime. They

had massacred the four holy knights of the opposing church and kidnapped the woman. Unfortunately, a problem rose after the kidnapping. The woman absolutely refused to become a priest of the church of Flora.

Even if I die, it will not happen.

They had tried to coax and threaten her, but the woman did not budge. In order to keep the secret from leaking out, Archbishop Aznan had no choice but to kill her. There had been no other way, since the woman had been so adamant. Archbishop Aznan smiled bitterly at his memories.

I should not have even started it.

It was an incident that had already passed. And now, Archbishop Aznan was placed in the opposite side of the situation five years ago.

We have thirty holy knights, nothing will go wrong.

He glanced at Isabelle before biting his lips. He absolutely had to take her safely to the main temple of Flora located in the capital of Tranbel kingdom.

The holy knight in the carriage had been conversing with a fellow knight who rode outside, and turned to the Archbishop.

We will reach the border soon.

Hm, we should reach Amien Monastery by evening.

Archbishop Aznans expression softened. There would not be a problem crossing the border.

It helped that Hansel and Tranbel kingdoms were currently allied with each other, but no one would stop a party of thirty holy knights, especially of the church of Flora.

It was as he had expected, and the procession crossed the border without the soldiers guarding the border stopping them. But there was one thing that the party missed. That there were a pair of eyes studying them from far away.

Weve received a report from our agents stationed near the border. The party has crossed the border a little while ago, sir.

Is that so?

A man in looking to be in his mid-forties nodded his head. His face stiffened slightly as he entered the carriage standing next to him. An old man with snow white hair sat in the carriage with his eyes closed.

The middle aged mans face reddened with excitement as he lay his eyes on the old man.

The bastards have just crossed the border. They will arrive here very soon.

The old mans eyes snapped open.

Bunjjuk.

The middle aged man felt a shiver run down his spine. The light in the old mans eyes were terrifying to behold. A cold voice passed through the old mans lips.

Finally, I can ask for debts to be paid.

The price for my granddaughters life.

Earl Wellington, without a doubt, your vengeance is important to us as well. However, it is critical that we are able to take away the girl from Lea Marquisate, who has the potential to become a Saintess.

Earl Wellingtons, the old mans, eyes settled on the middle aged mans face.

Bishop Rain. I am aware of the situation of your church. However.

The light in earl Wellingtons eyes gradually became fiercer.

Is it not possible that the girl will refuse to become a part of a foreign church, just as my granddaughter Lena did?

Bishop Rain shook his head immediately.

The possibility of that is slim. According to our reports, the girl from Lea Marquisate is adamant in refusing to become a Saintess of the church of Flora. The only reason she is currently being escorted to the church of Flora is because of the House of Leas strict lord.

Even more so then, she would not be open to joining our church as well.

It will not be so.

Cold sweat formed on bishop Rains forehead as he continued to persuade Earl Wellington.

The girl from the House of Lea has a fiance. He is the reason she is so adamant about refusing to become a Saintess of the church of Flora.

Enough. Regardless, I will only ask her once. To forsake the church of Flora and become a Saintess of our church or not, and should she hesitate or stall her answer

Killing intent spilled out from Earl Wellingtons eyes.

I will seize vengeance for my granddaughter, Lena.

Archbishop Aznan was the one who planned for the kidnapping of your granddaughter, the girl from the House of Lea is not the target for your vengeance.

The mere life of Archbishop Aznan is nowhere enough to fulfill the vengeance of my granddaughter. Just pray that the girl will answer the only time I will question her.

Bishop Rain shook his head at Earl Wellington, who closed his eyes dismissively.

What crime did the lady of the Lea House commit, to deserve this? She was sold out by her house.

Although the Bishop remained skeptical, he could also understand how Earl Wellington felt about the whole matter and sympathized with him.

Of course, he did lose his precious granddaughter whom he doted on ever since she was a child, the vengeance is rightfully consuming him.

Rain was a Bishop of the church of Maal. He was also responsible for discovering Lenas, the granddaughter of Earl Wellington, talent in holy power five years ago.

Lena had been a faithful member of the church of Maal, and had gladly accepted Bishop Rains attempt to enlist her in the service of the church.

All right, I will do so.

The church of Maal had been wrapped up in festive moods as soon as Bishop Rain had reported his success in recruiting Lena. It had seemed like a blessing from the gods that the church of Maal, so few in number and lacking in high-level priests and priestesses, would receive Lena.

Rain had sent the holy knights sent by the church to escort Lena to the main temple of the church of Maal. Bishop Rain was also supposed to escort Lena to the main temple, but had needed to stay behind to help care for the victims of a sudden plague that had popped up.

Later on, Rain had received the news as he was preparing to embark after Lena. The escorting party had been annihilated in an ambush by unknown forces, and Lena had also been discovered as a corpse.

Bishop Rain had collapsed on the spot when he received the report.

Thi-This.. cant possibly be.

Bishop Rain had tried fiercely to get to the truth of whoever was behind the ambush. He had discovered that the ambush in question had been set up by the church of Flora.

The hateful bastards!

Unfortunately, it was extremely unwise for the church of Maal to bring up the issue publically with the church of Flora, which had tens of times more worshippers than the church of Maal.

Bishop Rain had spent every day suffering both mentally and physically due to the issue when someone paid him a visit. It was Earl Wellington, a warrior from the Sis Empire who had newly reached the level of aura master.

He had received his status as a high noble and a large territory once he had surpassed the limits of humans by becoming an aura master, and asked only one thing when he met Rain.

Do you remember a girl named Lena?

How could bishop Rain possibly forget the name of Lena? The words that followed were enough to shock the bishop.

Lena was my granddaughter.

Is-Is that true?

Yes. I was undergoing training behind closed doors, without food or any contact, so I have been unable to see her since she was young.

Earl Wellingtons eyes were burning with a desire for vengeance.

Who was it? The killer of my granddaughter

Our main suspect is the Archbishop of the church of Flora, Aznan. We do not have any solid evidence.

Earl Wellington had heaved a sigh upon hearing that there was no solid evidence to call into play. He wanted so desperately to avenge his granddaughter, but the Archbishop of the church of Flora was not a figure that could be touched without definitive evidence. Not even by an aura master.

Screw it all

Bishop Rain had watched on sadly as Earl Wellington walked away, defeated.

The chance for vengeance, however, came soon after. The news that a woman talented in holy power had been discovered in Hansel Kingdom and that the church of Flora meant to take her in, and raise her as a Saintess found their way into the ears of Bishop Rain.

Even better, the person in charge of escorting her to the main temple of the church of Flora was Archbishop Aznan, the target for the vengeance of Lena.

Yes. This is the time to act.

And what a vengeance it would be, to snatch a possible Saintess from the church of Flora and to make her a member of the church of Maal.

Of course, the church of Flora would be on guard, and send a large party of holy knights to escort the girl, but the Bishop did not worry. He had on his side someone who had surpassed human limits, an aura master.

Bishop Rain had approached Earl Wellington immediately.

Is that true?

Earl Wellington had jumped up from his seat the second that he heard that Archbishop Aznan was in command of the escorting party.

All right. I will take care of it.

You must prepare an alibi carefully. That you left your territory cannot be found out by anyone.

Do not worry. Knowing how to create alibis are a necessity for a high noble.

We will do the deed in a foreign country, so without solid evidence, the church of Flora will not be so quick to bring up the issue.

I am an aura master. No need to worry about such things.

This was the reason that Bishop Rain and Earl Wellington was sitting in a carriage now, in a country far away from their own. A holy knight knocked at the door of the carriage.

The bastards have approached us. We should make preparations.

Earl Wellington opened his eyes once again at the words.

Have you prepared the hershion?

Of course. Its brand new, without any engravings on it yet.

Good. Take it out.

Bishop Rain pulled out a large wooden chest from under the seats of the carriage. He opened the wooden chest to reveal a shining silver armor.

I am convinced of the influence of your church. For you to be able to actually procure the rare hershion.

It was procured with difficulty, with the donations of our hard working church goers.

Earl Wellington gingerly took out the armor from the wooden chest and put it on.

It must function the same way as the one I use?

Yes, we had it ordered so in secret from a mage tower.

Good.

Earl Wellington pushed a burst of aura into the armor. To manifest aura outside of their bodies was an ability only used by aura masters. An amazing thing happened next.

Charararak.

The armor began to expand rapidly, and spread out to cover the entirety of Earl Wellingtons body. Hershion was a name of a magic armor that automatically wrapped around its user when aura was pushed into it.

A little while later, Earl Wellington stood covered from head to toe in silver armor.

The armor seemed to be thinner than the armor usually worn by knights, but it was not a problem for an aura master. With aura backing it up, hershion was almost impossible to penetrate when compared to regular steel armor.

Earl Wellington unsheathed the sword from his waist.

Hm, very good.

A satisfied smile crept up on Earl Wellingtons face. The sword was well balanced, and was weighed just like the sword he was used to using.

Youve prepared well. Good. I will go now.

Please, take into consideration the will of the church.

I have already told you, that it depends on the girls answer.

Earl Wellington walked on after answering.

Dududududu.

Two horses fiercely galloped along, raising a thick cloud of dust behind them. Luke and Kurotan rode upon the horses, having rode nonstop in a pursuit of the escorting party of the church of Flora. Their bodies were covered in dust.

After they had departed from Lea marquisate, they had not stopped other than to rest the horses. They had literally wrung out the last of their stamina to chase after Isabelle.

Lukes face brightened when he saw the building marking and regulating the border.

Finally. We can find out whether or not the church of Flora has crossed the border if we ask the soldiers guarding the border.

Luke slowly reined his horse into a slower pace. The horse was foaming at the mouth and seemed to be close to passing out. Kurotan also slowed down behind him.

Whoa, whoa, slow down.

The two horses sides heaved as they slowed to a stop. Kurotan remarked in admiration.

Truly, their stamina is far more enduring than a wolfs.

Luke did not retort, as he had no energy left from riding the horses so hard. After drinking from a water pouch, he poured some out into his hand for his horse as well.

Chapchapchap.

The horses lapped the water up, and their breaths slowly began to grow calm. Luke threw Kurotan a piece of jerky he had pulled out from his bag.

We cannot rest long. Lets start off once again when the horses are recovered.

All right. What is the plan for when we finally do catch up to the escorting party?

Try to negotiate first. To allow me to meet Isabelle.

Do you think they will let you see her?

Luke smiled bitterly as he shook his head.

As a potential Saintess, the probability of them letting me see her is low.

Then why?

First, to let Isabelle know that I am here. It will help her to not lose hope

Kurotan chewed his jerky as he cocked his head in curiosity.

This is too complicated for me. Anyway, tell me if there is an opportunity for me to fight. I have recovered my aura, and I will swing my axe for you

Luke stared at Kurotan.

Kurotan. There are thirty holy knights. Its not a force that the two of us can handle.

I do not know such things. I will fight when you tell me to.

Ah, as simple as an orc.

The horses recovered soon enough, and the two set off. The soldiers patrolling the border far away seemed to spot them, as they raised their spears in preparation for their arrival.

Spirit Sword Chapter 19

Chapter 19. An Aura Masters Ambush

TL: Warriormonk

Editor: Isleidir

Chapter 19. An Aura Masters Ambush

The procession of holy knights climbed up a small hill. Captain Ronen, who had been leading the party, narrowed his eyes when he reached the top. A single armored knight stood in the middle of the path, blocking the holy knights from traveling further upon the road.

Everyone on guard

The rest of the holy knights immediately unstrapped the shields on their backs and equipped them to their hands. At the wave of a hand from Ronen, two of the holy knights spurred on their horses and approached the single knight.

Ronen watched on with interest. He did not know why a single knight would block their procession, but had concluded that it could not possibly be with good intentions. Ronen's face suddenly paled.

That armor

The mysterious knight was clad in a mysterious armor that seemed extraordinary. The armor seemed to be made from overlapping layers of thin metal plates.

Is that hershion, the magic armor of aura masters?

Terrible screams rang out before he could finish his muttering. The two holy knights that had approached the single knight fell to the ground with a massive spray of blood.

The mysterious knight began to rapidly approach the rest of the party after he cut down the two holy knights. Ronen's eyes began to tremble in terror.

Patsutsutsu!

The purple wisps of light being sprayed around by the mysterious knight's sword could only be an aura blade, something only an aura master could execute.

It's an aura master.

Ronen ordered the rest of the holy knights with a pale face.

Go block him. We must protect the lady who may become our Saintess no matter what.

Unlike his strict and calm order, Ronen's expression betrayed the despair he felt. If the mysterious knight was indeed an aura master, he and his thirty holy knights had no chance of winning.

Keuuakk.

Screams rang out one after another. The holy knights fell from their horse bleeding as they crossed paths with the knight. Ronen found that his hands were shaking in fear.

Why would an aura master be here?

An aura master was not feared only for his aura blade, which could cut through anything that it touched, but because his strength and agility far surpassed human limits. An aura master could be described as simply super human.

Kwaaang.

A single kick of the aura master sent a holy knight and his horse tumbling into his fellow knights, who also got pushed back by the force of the kick. The heads of the horses went flying with a horrifying sound of sword cutting flesh, and the holy knights' bodies dropped to the ground in halves.

Chwaak.

The earth turned red with blood. The remaining holy knights floundered about, unable to keep track of the aura master's movements.

This must be a nightmare.

Ronen gripped the handle of his sword with trembling hands.

It was right then calm voices began to ring out. The priests that had been in the carriage had run out, and started casting holy protective spells on the holy knights.

Oh, ever kind Flora. Please bless your servants with undying faith and bravery.

To your servants, may you bestow a lion's ferocity and the will of a rhinoceros

The holy knights, along with their armor, began to shine brilliantly white. Their physical abilities had been explosively increased by the holy spells.

We must protect the carriage at all costs!

No retreat!

The emboldened holy knights pounced once more towards the silver knight. However, holy spells were nowhere enough to even stall the footsteps of the aura master.

Bunjjuuk.

The aura blade shone purple once again, and the shining armor and the knights clad in it were cut in half, the white light fading.

The numbers of the holy knights were reduced at a rapid pace. When more than half of them died, the captain, Ronen, finally unsheathed his sword and pulled fiercely on the reins of his mount.

Giddiyup!

His strength and technique could not hold a candle to the aura masters, so he was trying to use his mount to an

advantage.

Dududududu.

Ronens battle horse galloped fiercely towards the entanglement of three holy knights and the silver knight. One of the holy knights fell with blood spurting from his chest before he could get there.

The silver knight turned his head at the sound of a galloping horse. His eyes, visible through the visor of the helmet, were smiling. Ronen bit his lips and charged for the knight.

Keuuaaak!

A scream and a bone chilling sound rang out.

Ronen rode past the entanglement of bodies, and turned his horse to face it once more. The dust clouds settled to reveal the scene.

Ronens eyes widened. On the ground were two of his holy knights, armors flattened by hooves and bones clearly broken, occasionally twitching.

You'd sacrifice your subordinates to defeat me? How unlike a holy knight.

Ronen jumped at the calm behind him and swung his sword. The sword caught nothing. He only caught a glimpse of movement before his neck turned hot.

He got me.

Ronens consciousness faded, and his body fell unceremoniously from the horse.

After the captain died, the rest of the holy knights ran about in confusion before being completely annihilated. The battle prowess of an aura master was truly bone chilling.

Ahhhhh!

De-Demon.

The priests screamed out in terror. There was nothing that they could do without the holy knights. The silver knight charged towards the priests without hesitation.

Euaakk!

The priests, trying to defend the carriage with their bare bodies, fell away one by one in a spray of blood.

Tulssuk.

Silence fell after the lost priest was bisected by the sword of the aura master. The aura master was Earl Wellington, his hershion red with blood.

Hwaaak!

Earl Wellington pushed a bit of aura in to his hershion, which shone purple and evaporated the blood in an instant. All traces of battle gone from his body, Earl Wellington yelled towards the carriage.

Come outside.

After a bit of waiting, Archbishop Aznan practically crawled out of the carriage.

His face was pale white with terror. Isabelle followed behind him, trembling in fear.

Heup.

Isabelle blocked the gasp coming out from her mouth when she saw the scene outside of the carriage. When could she possibly have seen another scene like this, when she had been treated like a flower inside of a pot?

Who are you? Why would you commit such a heinous crime

Earl Wellingtons eyes shone with killing intent at the Archbishops words.

Heinous crime? You dare to utter those words with your mouth?

It seems like you are an aura master, a superhuman beyond human understanding. Why are you opposing the church of Flora?

Earl Wellington smirked.

Every action has a reason behind it.

.

Do you remember the name Lena?

Archbishop Aznans face turned even whiter. He had just been reminiscing about the whole incident just hours ago, regretting the whole deed.

Are you from the church of Maal?

Lena was my granddaughter.

Aznan closed his eyes. How could he possibly have known that the woman he had murdered would be the granddaughter of an aura master?

I can say nothing to defend myself on that matter, so you may kill me. But please, do not touch the lady who may become a Saintess.

You pretend to be righteous until the end; how hateful.

Earl Wellington sprayed killing intent as he walked towards Aznan and pushed out his sword.

Peupeupeuk.

The Archbishops face scrunched up in pain. In the blink of an eye, his body was covered with tens of bloody holes, as blood dyed his pure white robe as it splashed down. Aznan dropped kneeling on the ground, as his knee joint had also been cut.

Earl Wellingtons burning eyes slowly turned to Isabelle.

Isabelle could only tremble at the fighting spirit that the aura master emitted. She felt as though she was barely holding on from fainting in fear.

I will ask you only one thing.

.

Will you turn your back on the church of Flora and become a member of our church?

The Archbishop screamed out as soon as the words left the earls mouth.

No! That will not happen.

I am just returning to you the consequences of your actions.

Ev-Even so, you cannot!

Archbishop Aznan, face pale from the loss of blood, tried desperately to convince Isabelle.

Re-Remember the honor of your house. Should you turn your back on us, the honor of the Lea House

I can no longer bear your voice.

A cold sound rang out along with a flash of purple light.

Kwadang.

Aznan fell backwards with his hands around his neck. There was a gaping hole in his neck that sprayed blood as he tried to speak, but the only thing coming out of his mouth were bubbles of blood.

Earl Wellingtons gaze turned once more towards Isabelle.

Answer me. Will you betray the church of Flora and become a member of our church?

Isabelle, still trembling, opened her mouth.

If I dont do so, will you kill me?

Earl Wellington did not answer.

I accept your offer. I never worshipped the goddess Flora in the first place, so it wont be a betrayal, but I will become a member of your church.

Archbishop Aznan squirmed at Isabelles words, arms and legs flailing.

Euah, euah.

Earl Wellington frowned and lifted his sword.

Bunjjuk.

His sword did not seem to move, but the Archbishops head fell to the ground, separated from his body.

Degururururu.

The head rolled on the ground, and Isabelle turned pale white. A chilling voice crept out from under the silver helmet.

You do not care about the honor of your house?

I think I have done enough for my house.

You wish to live that badly.

Tears began to fall from Isabelles eyes.

Its not because I want to live. There is someone I must meet before I die. If I cannot see him, then

She could not finish the rest of her words, as her throat locked up from emotion. Earl Wellington heaved a sigh and sheathed his sword.

You are lucky, Bishop Rain. It is as you wished.

Thank goodness.

Spirit Sword Chapter 20

Three people had appeared next to the carriage Isabelle had been riding. One was bishop Rain, and the two others were holy knights of Maal disguised as mercenaries. Bishop Rain approached the trembling Isabelle.

Do not be afraid. We are by no means the villains.

Isabelle looked at bishop Rain with fearfully.

Those words do not ring very convincingly to me.

Rain smiled bitterly as he glanced around his surroundings. The mangled pieces of human bodies littered the floor, and no amount of convincing would change Isabelles mind.

I understand completely. However, the first to initiate this feud was the church of Flora.

Bishop Rain pointed towards Earl Wellington, who was standing silently.

Five years ago, that persons granddaughter was discovered to have a high affinity for holy power. She had been a fervent worshipper of Maal ever since she was young and wanted to become a saintess of Maal. Unfortunately

Bishop Rain coldly stared at the beheaded corpse of archbishop Aznan.

The church of Flora wanted her for their own. They ambushed her and her escorts, an operation orchestrated by archbishop Aznan.

He could not fail to convince Isabelle to become a saintess of Maal, so he continued his explanation in an attempt to win over Isabelle.

Archbishop Aznan massacred all the holy knights escorting Lena, and tried to coerce her into becoming a worshipper of Flora. Lenas faith in Maal, however, remained strong and she adamantly refused to become a saintess of Flora.

Isabelle seemed to have calmed down at least a little bit, and stopped trembling

So, what happened to her?

That heinous criminal, Aznan, killed her to keep the ambush a secret.

Isabelles face paled as bishop Rain crossed his index finger across his neck.

He didnt seem like someone who would

Even we were surprised by the findings of our report.

Right then, Earl Wellington swung his head in a different direction.

Someone is approaching on horse. I can hear the horses galloping.

Bishop Rains expression changed. There could absolutely be no witnesses to the ambush that they had just finished.

The church of Flora was extremely powerful, and the small church of Maal stood no chance against them. Earl Wellington stepped forward, seeming to understand the bishops predicament.

It seems we should silence them?

Please, it will have to be you.

Do not worry.

Earl Wellington burst into a run towards the source of the sound. The holy knights of Maal could only watch as the aura master ran off at an incredible pace.

As one might expect from a superhuman. Neither of us heard anything

Yeah, youre right.

It was just as the earl had warned. Two horses with a figure upon them appeared above the hill. It was Luke and Kurotan, chasing behind the track of Isabelle. Their faces turned pale when a bloody scene greeted them on top of the hill.

Wh-What the hell?

A carriage stood at a stop on the road, around which lay butchered corpses of the holy knights. Before they could even recover from the shock of witnessing the aftermath of a massacre, a blurry figure speeded towards them at a rapid pace.

Blame your poor fortune for being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Earl Wellington spat coldly before releasing the full might of his killing intent. An intense force seemed to fall like a wave on Luke and Kurotan, binding them in place as a spiders threads would.

Paaht.

It was another skill unique to aura masters called fear, where they used their aura to stimulate the most primal sense of fear that all living organisms carried within them.

Hihihing.

The horses carrying Luke and Kurotan neighed out at the fear the earl was spraying out and collapsed. Luke and Kurotan both rolled to the ground unceremoniously. Lukes face stiffened.

Wh-Whats going on

The tendril of fear bound Luke, and he lost the feeling in his legs as his vision darkened. The aura masters fear was rendering Luke immobile. Earl Wellington suddenly appeared in front of Luke, having successfully bound him in place.

Good bye. I will send you off without pain.

A cold voice rang out as a cold white blur sped towards Lukes neck. Right then, a roar burst out from next to Luke. Wuuhk!

Kurotan roared like an animal and stepped towards the earl, swinging his axe. He was free from the effects of fear, unlike Luke.

Pukaang.

Kurotans body repulsed away from the aura master at the same speed he had been running towards him. However, the earls body also skid back a large distance from the shock of the impact.

Who is this bastard? Why isnt he affected by my fear?

Earl Wellington had no clue. The fact was that Kurotan was an orc in the guise of a human and orcs were a fearless race that did not cower even in the face of a dragon.

Kurotan regained his footing and lifted his axe. About half of the axe head had been severed in the clash with the earl. Had it been a sword, it would have been cut completely in half.

Kewaaak!

Kurotan ran at the earl once more, swinging his axe. A surprised earl nonetheless lifted his sword to parry. A disbelieving voice leaked through the earls helmet.

Ive never seen such a brute.

The earl parried Kurotans blows a few times, after which his sword burst into purple light of his aura blade. Once the earl had recovered from the shock of Kurotans brutish charges and focused his aura into a blade, he was able to cut through the rest of Kurotans thick axe.

Kurotans hesitation after a part of his weapon to the ground allowed the earl to savagely kick him in the stomach.

Kwadang.

Kurotan fell on his back to the ground, as a cold voice crawled into his ear.

Your bravery is commendable, but its not enough against me. Good bye.

Right before the earls sword fell onto Kurotans neck, Kurotan whispered silently.

Oh great Maal. Accept me into your kingdom.

What the hell? This bastard is a follower of Maal?

The earl twisted away his sword as well as dispelling his aura blade in a hurry.

Puuuhk.

Kurotans heavy body shot away from the impact and skidded to a limp position far away. Earl Wellington, who had dispelled his aura blade at the last possible second made a conflicted expression. He did not want to take the life of a fellow worshipper of Maal.

Damn, this complicates things.

Earl Wellington looked away from Kurotans limp body. Luke still stood paralyzed by the fear that earl Wellington had exposed him to.

Luke began to cough and gasp heavily as the earl withdrew his fear.

Kolok, kolok.

The earls heavy voice rang out.

Are you also a follower of Maal?

No-No.

Earl Wellingtons eyes seemed to become chillier. He had no reason to spare someone that did not serve the same god as him. He had already revealed that he was a follower of Maal, so he couldnt afford to leave any witnesses that might reveal his role in the ambush.

However, right before the earl swung his sword, something unexpected happened.

Luke!

A sharp voice rang out as a figure ran towards them. Earl Wellington stopped his sword on reflex, and stepped backwards.

What is going on? Why would she?

The figure belonged to none other than Isabelle. She ran in front of Luke without hesitation and raised both of her arms to her side in a protective manner.

If you dare to put even a single scratch on Luke

Isabelle showed no more fear towards the earl.

You will not be able to gain a saintess.

Bishop Rain and his holy knights ran forward in a huff. They had not been able to restrain Isabelle because she had acted so suddenly. The earls face scrunched up inside of his helmet.

Damn it

The situation had truly become knotted up for him. Bishop Rain looked around to gauge the situation before speaking. Well, I suppose the first thing to do would be to move to a different location.

The earl nodded. The bishop was right, they needed to leave the scene of the ambush before anyone else came along. He growled threateningly to Luke, who was holding Isabelles hands tightly.

There is no way that you can escape from me, so dont even think about running

Luke nodded with a pale face.

I have no plans of leaving Isabelle behind anyways.

The bishops eyes shone sharply at Lukes words. He had finally realized who Luke was.

Bring the rest of the people over

Yes, sir.

A holy knight speeded off to a side of the hill at the bishops orders. Kurotan seemed to have recovered his consciousness and raised his head.

Kurotan looked around in confusion for a while before his eyes settled hatefully on the earl. It was a behavior that could be expected from a fearless orc. Luke stopped him before he could jump towards the earl.

Stop it, Kurotan.

Kurotan audibly ground his teeth before picking up the pieces of his axe and standing behind Luke. The earl looked at him curiously.

You sure are one fearless bastard.

Anyone who experienced an aura masters fear would normally not have the courage to attack them again.

However, a brute that looked like a bandit was able to ignore the earls killing intent and fear, and did not lose his will to fight even on the brink of death. The earl felt an interest in Kurotan.

Basic swordsmanship as well as an aura that cannot hold a candle to mine, but the way you utilize these tools are that of a master. How unique.

Earl Wellington recalled the situation from just a few moments ago. It was only for a short while, but Kurotan had proven to be a slightly difficult challenge for him. It was unbelievable, especially because Kurotan only seemed to utilize basic swordsmanship.

Who are you?

Kurotan did not answer. He lifted his fist and put it to his mouth just as Luke had taught him, which baffled the earl even more.

Youre adamant about your silent training even in a situation such as this? I really have no answer for dealing with you.

It was right then that Luke interfered before the situation worsened.

Hes an apprentice knight that I took in.

The earls gaze turned towards Luke.

How is the apprentice knights skills higher than his lords? The so called lord couldnt even lift his finger against my fear.

Luke felt a sense of outrage at his words, but did not retort. The earl looked at Luke and Isabelle, who were holding hands tightly, and opened his mouth once again.

Are you her fiance?

Yes, I am.

You seem young, as well as reckless. Did you think that even if you chased her down, the church of Flora would just let her go? Very unwise.

The earl continued to taunt Luke, but Luke did not bite the bait. He had been educated in the court politics of nobles at a young age, as well as served as an officer on the eastern lines of a war for five years. He could control his emotions. It was better than doing nothing, sir. I only wanted to accomplish one thing, and that was to let Isabelle know that I had not given up.

Isabelle blushed at Lukes words and leaned into his chest.

I didnt know that you would come looking for me this quickly.

You didnt dare to think that I would give up on you so easily, did you?

Of course. I know what youre like better than anyone else.

The earls face scrunched up in displeasure at the sweet words being exchanged by the two love birds.

These rotten bastards

The earl had sacrificed his youth as well as his middle age for the sake of training. He had also cast aside the bonds to his family. This was the exact scene that would taunt him the most.

The holy knights returned from the distance, with their companions that had been waiting from a distance. The bishop gazed around once more.

Let us hurry and leave this place.

The crowd of people mounted their horses and began to gallop away. The earls strict gaze never left Luke and Kurotan, as Luke took Isabelle onto his horse and rode to catch up to the bishop.