

The Shining Star Above The Heaven

#Chapter 181: Gathering Information - Read The Shining Star Above The Heaven Chapter 181: Gathering Information

Chapter 181: Gathering Information

Aldrian and the group stepped out of the teleportation portal, immediately noticing a security checkpoint at the teleportation station plaza entrance. Six lines were set up to filter newcomers and prevent overcrowding. Soldiers, clad in armor bearing the symbol of the Rivas family, inspected each newcomer one by one with an artifact shaped like an Orb of Origin, which everyone had to touch before passing through.

Aldrian knows the sequence well, so he and his group join one of the lines, patiently waiting for their turn to pass through the checkpoint. While waiting, Aldrian sharpens his senses, listening closely to conversations around him to gather information. From his observations, he learns that much of the discussion revolves around the situation at the front lines. Although the war is distant, he can sense a deep unease among the people here, who seem all too aware that the situation isn't as optimistic as they would hope.

Many rumors are spreading—some say the empire is likely to lose the war, forcing its people to seek refuge in neighboring lands, while others claim that certain citizens have already betrayed the empire and joined forces with the devils. One piece of information, however, captures Aldrian's interest: news that his mother was recently seen in a certain part of the front lines. Now, he only needs to confirm her location through a trusted source.

Not long after, it was finally Aldrian's turn, and the soldier there instructed him to inject his energy into the orb. However, Aldrian looked at the soldier and asked,

"Do you have another orb like this here? Or is this the only one?"

The soldier, confused by the unusual question, replied nonetheless,

"Of course, we have more. There's no way we wouldn't have a spare. Now hurry up and inject your energy; don't make the others wait."

"Good," Aldrian responded.

As Aldrian injected his energy into the orb, the reaction from the soldier and onlookers was shocked. A sudden, blinding golden light erupted from the orb, illuminating the entire teleportation plaza in an intense glow that could be seen from a great distance. Expecting only the usual energy response, and primarily on guard for signs of devil's

characteristic, the people were caught completely off guard by this unprecedented display. After the light faded, the orb cracked sharply and, just as Eleine and Sylphia had anticipated, the orb shattered into countless pieces, leaving those around stunned and speechless.

Many people widened their eyes in shock, stunned by the sight before them. None of them had ever seen or heard of an Orb of Origin being destroyed simply by checking someone's properties. The radiant golden light was unlike anything they had witnessed, leaving them to wonder about the identity of this young man and the type of cultivator he might be.

The soldier conducting the check seemed uncertain about how to handle the situation and looked at Aldrian with hesitation.

"Uh, please wait a moment. I'll need to ask my superior about this."

However, he didn't have to search for his superior, as one of them was already approaching. Aldrian observed the middle-aged man with a mustache, emanating the aura of a low King stage cultivator—a level that seemed overly qualified for merely overseeing these checkpoints. However, this also demonstrated just how seriously the Rivas family was taking this matter.

"What happened, Private? What was that golden light?" the superior asked the soldier.

"Well, sir, here's the situation..." The soldier then explained about Aldrian and the surprising outcome of the check, glancing between Aldrian and the shattered Orb of Origin. When the soldier finished recounting the events, the superior looked at Aldrian thoughtfully before taking out another Orb of Origin.

"Please inject your energy once more," he instructed.

Aldrian did exactly as the commander instructed, injecting his energy into the orb once more. As expected, the result was the same—the golden light blinding everyone present before finally destroying the orb. The commander stared at the shattered remains of the orb solemnly, then turned his gaze to Aldrian's serene expression.

"The energy you just released... what kind of energy is that? It exerted pressure on my own energy, but it's definitely not devil energy or demonic energy so I think he is good. There's no trace of excessive negative energy either."

He silent for a moment before addressing Aldrian directly.

"I apologize, young master. You may pass. I hope you understand our caution, and I'm truly sorry for the inconvenience."

"It's okay, sir. Actually, it's a usual occurrence for me to be checked like this, which is why I asked this soldier if he had a spare orb," Aldrian said.

"Then please enjoy Rivas City, young master. Although the situation here is quite tense, I assure you, you are safe," the commander replied.

As he watched Aldrian walk away, the commander couldn't help but think to himself...

"I have to inform Lord Rivas about this and ask for his opinion. How could the Orb of Origin, which can even check Emperor stage cultivators, be destroyed just by checking him?" The commander's face then furrowed, a sense of uncertainty washing over him. *"But why... when I look into his eyes, do I feel like I'm seeing Lady Irene in them?"* He felt a strange sensation but quickly pushed it aside, focusing on Xin Haotian and the others still waiting their turn.

Aldrian walked away and waited for the others to finish their checks. Many people continued to watch him with curious gazes, wondering who he was. They couldn't sense his cultivation, but they didn't underestimate him. After all, someone who could shatter the Orb of Origin, something no one else could do, was not to be taken lightly.

After a few minutes, Aldrian's group finally stepped out of the plaza. Their first priority was to gather more detailed information about what had happened in the territory and to find a way to reach the frontline as soon as possible. Aldrian turned to Eleine and asked,

"Eleine, you know this place the best. Where should we go to find reliable information so we can understand the real situation on the frontline? And if possible, somewhere that can also arrange for us to be brought to the battlefield." Although Aldrian had the assassins from the Thunderous Shadow Pavilion as his informants, he also wanted to gather information here to deepen his understanding of the situation.

"If we exclude the Rivas family directly, the only place that can provide us with accurate information in this city is the Information Guild. What most people don't know is that the information guild of the Doria empire is still under Rivas family management. However, despite this connection, the guild operates independently in most cases. This setup should work for us, it will allow us to avoid direct interaction with the Rivas family while still obtaining the information we need." she replied.

"Although I am sure what you did earlier in the teleportation station will reported to the main family or worse to the lord Rivas." She added in her mind.

"Then what are we waiting for? Let's go there."

Eleine then guided them to the large building with the sign of the Information Guild above its grand entrance, not far from the teleportation station. The building was packed with people, as it was an important place for newcomers to the city and even the Doria

Empire. The constant activity here never seemed to cease. In addition to offering common knowledge about the city and empire, the Information Guild provided details that not everyone knew— though access to such information required payment, and the cost depended on the level of the information.

This is the way the Rivas family controls information while also profiting from it. As long as the information doesn't pose a threat to the Rivas family, they can inquire about anything within the Doria Empire. In a sense, this is one of the Rivas family's intelligence networks.

After entering the building, they made their way to one of the fortunately vacant counters, where they were immediately greeted by the receptionist.

"Welcome to the Information Guild. How may I assist you today?"

"I would like to know about the situation on the front lines, where the Rivas family is battling the devils, particularly regarding the condition of the young miss of the Rivas family, Irene Rivas," Aldrian replied.

The receptionist looked at Aldrian for a moment before asking,

"I'm sorry to ask, but may I know why you need this information?"

"We wish to assist the Rivas family in fending off the devils. I've heard that the situation is quite dire, so we want to offer the Rivas family a helping hand," Aldrian replied.

The receptionist thought for a moment before replying,

"Are you affiliated with any faction, or are you registered with a mercenary or adventurer guild? If you want to help the Rivas family, you can simply go through those guilds. Right now, all their forces in the Rivas Grand Duchy have been dispatched to the front line."

"No, we don't have any affiliations. We're just vagabond cultivators and unregistered adventurers, but we still want to offer our help on the front line," Aldrian answered.

"Then I'm sorry customer, but you'll need to be registered with at least one of the guilds in order to help battle the devils. The Rivas family is cautious about who they allow to assist them, as they are wary of devil infiltrators. So, you—"

Before she could finish her sentence, Eleine suddenly pulled something out to show her. The receptionist's eyes widened as soon as she saw the token.

"The Rivas family direct bloodline's retainer token!"

Chapter 182: Finding a Way to the Battlefield

The direct bloodline of the Rivas family personally selects retainers to assist them in daily matters and even provide protection. Each chosen retainer receives a token signifying their status within the family. For the retainers serving the direct bloodline, their role is more than mere support, they are considered extensions of their master's hand.

In the current generation of the Rivas family, there is only one child—Irene Rivas. As the sole heir, Irene holds a unique position, not just as the family's successor but as the cherished daughter of Grand Duke Rivas. He deeply values anything connected to her, including her retainers. Grand Duke Rivas highly appreciates those Irene has personally selected and ensures they receive the utmost respect and the finest treatment.

The token that Eleine shows signifies her status as Irene's retainer—something only a truly crazy person would dare to counterfeit. Even if someone attempted to create a fake, it would be quickly exposed, as each token carries a unique aura tied to the specific member of the direct bloodline it represents. This aura, known only to the Rivas family and their associates, left no room for doubt. Seeing the token, the receptionist was instantly shocked and bowed her head in respect.

"I'm sorry, miss. I didn't realize you were Lady Irene's retainer," she said, though inside her mind, she was in shock.

"How can Lady Irene's retainer be here? Could this be a group brought by the lady's retainer to assist with the battlefield? If so, Lady Irene must be aware of it, but why didn't she contact the Rivas family directly? Why did they have to go through the Information Guild?"

"You don't need to be so formal," Eleine said. "I'm here on a mission from Lady Irene to bring this young man's group to the front line. However, I prefer not to involve the Rivas family directly, and I don't want Lord Rivas to know about our presence. This is a top-secret mission from Lady Irene, and I hope you can assist me with this."

"Oh, yes, miss. Let me report to the guild mas—"

"No, you don't need to ask the guild master. We're in a hurry. Just tell us how we can reach the front line without drawing attention to the Rivas family. You understand, don't you? This is an important mission from Lady Irene, and everyone involved will be rewarded for their help. I will make sure your contribution is recognized," Eleine said.

The receptionist wore a conflicted expression but still nodded her head in agreement.

"Alright, however, this is a rather troublesome route. Today, another batch of reinforcements and logistical support will be sent to the front line. The nearest group is a band of mercenaries, departing in 45 minutes at noon. We can use the Information

Guild's connection with the Mercenaries Guild to have your group follow them. As for Lady Irene's location, the last I heard, she was dispatched to Ilyon Town, but I don't know after that."

"Good, let's get going. Time is of the essence, and I don't want to keep Lady Irene waiting," Eleine said. The receptionist then closed her counter and led Aldrian's group to the back of the Information Guild building, where they exited through a back door.

They stood in the middle of the alleyway as the receptionist took out a communication artifact to contact someone. Not long after, a cloaked figure appeared and revealed his face. Aldrian could see that the man had a Low Marquess stage cultivation, and from the looks of it, he seemed to be the contact the receptionist had mentioned. She whispered something in his ear, and the man's eyes widened as he turned to look at Aldrian and the others.

"Follow me. The group is about to depart for Ilyon Town, where the devils are increasing their attack intensity," the man said. Without hesitation, Aldrian followed him, and the group covered their faces with their hoods. After they left, the receptionist returned to her counter, only to be stunned when she saw the manager already standing there, as though waiting for her.

"Damn it, of all times, the manager had to do a check right now," she thought.

"Where were you during work hours? You left the counter without any notice. If you don't explain yourself, I'll have to report you to the guild branch's master for employee indiscipline," the manager said.

The receptionist's face turned pale at the manager's words, and she immediately bowed her head in apology.

"I'm sorry, manager, but I had to leave the counter for an urgent matter. It's connected to the Rivas direct bloodline's retainer," she explained.

The manager frowned at the mention of the direct bloodline's retainer. What was this sudden twist? Why was the direct bloodline's retainer here?

"Tell me what happened," the manager demanded.

In the middle of the road, Aldrian's group continued following the man as he explained things to them through voice transmission.

"Young masters and young misses, you can call me Pac." The man said. *"I hear you're in the middle of a mission to the front line. Luckily for you— or maybe unluckily— after this, we're being sent to Ilyon Town, which is currently in the process of evacuation due*

to the devils' attacks, already close to the town. The Rivas family has already sent reinforcements, and they've also paid us mercenaries to support the town and ensure the evacuation goes smoothly. We'll only need to fight if the devils breach the town before the evacuation is complete."

"However, since you are unregistered with the Mercenaries Guild, you'll need to stay close to me. I'll include you in my group and act as your guarantor. I'll inform the guild leader that you're my external helpers. Don't worry— given the current situation, the rules are more flexible, and we need as many people as possible to help on the front line," he said.

Hearing that they were headed to Ilyon Town, Aldrian felt a slight sense of relief, knowing that he would be heading to the same destination as his mother. Still, he couldn't help but ask Pac,

"Is the situation really that bad? For the Rivas family to call in mercenaries Guild for help?"

"The situation is much worse than we imagined, Initially, the Rivas family could hold their own against the devils along the border. However, for some reason, the devils suddenly seem to have identified and targeted the Rivas family's weaknesses, causing significant losses."

"Is there a traitor?" Aldrian asked.

"Possibly," Pac replied. "That's why the Rivas family is currently investigating, but it comes at a cost. They have to split their focus between searching for the traitor and coordinating the battlefield, which has reduced their overall effectiveness in battle. As long as the traitor remains uncaught, the Rivas family can't move their troops recklessly."

Aldrian nodded, and soon they arrived at a different teleportation station where thousands cultivators from various factions were already waiting. This teleportation station wasn't the same as the one Aldrian had used to enter the city. In large cities, there are usually multiple teleportation stations to accommodate the population, and Rivas City was no exception. Pac then guided them to his group, it was then that Aldrian realized the man held quite a high position within the Mercenaries Guild and commanded his own team.

Aldrian watched as Pac spoke to one of the strongest man in this place, a figure at the Low Emperor stage. Aldrian guessed that he must be the guild master of the Mercenaries Guild of the Doria Empire. While waiting for their departure, Aldrian glanced at Eleine.

"It's thanks to you, Eleine. If you hadn't shown that token, we would've had to go through all those bothersome procedures. Now, we can directly enter the red zone where Mother is located," Aldrian sent via voice transmission to Eleine.

"It's nothing, young master. But the thing is, once I show my token, sooner or later the Information Guild will find out who I am, and they'll investigate our group. No doubt Lord Rivas will learn about this as well. So, while it's the most effective way, it also comes with the worst setback," Eleine replied, her face showing an anxious expression. She felt truly conflicted. On one hand, she didn't want the Rivas family to find Aldrian, but on the other hand, she wanted to ensure that his journey progressed smoothly. This was her way of serving Aldrian, just as Irene had asked her to.

"It's okay, Eleine. I'll handle things when the time comes. But the most important thing right now is to reach Mother as soon as possible. I have this uneasy feeling in my heart," he said.

After a few minutes, Pac returned, but his expression was grim.

"There's been a slight change in the plan. We're not going to Ilyon Town anymore. Instead, we'll be sent to another town, 800 kilometers south of Ilyon, to assist with the evacuation there. And if things worsen, we'll have to fight alongside the Rivas family's forces."

Aldrian frowned. "Why the change in destination?"

Pac looked at Aldrian and sighed.

"Ilyon Town has already fallen. We received confirmation from our last contact that the devils breached the town before we lost communication with our post there."

Chapter 183: Vicanti Town

"The town of Ilyon has fallen?" Aldrian frowned.

"Is there any news about what happened to the young miss of the Rivas family, Irene Rivas? I heard she was dispatched there to help fight the devils," he asked.

"I'm not sure. We've lost all contact with Ilyon, and there's no report on Miss Irene's situation. We can only hope for the best, as it would be truly devastating if something happened to her," Pac replied.

"We have to go to Vicanti Town, where the devils are moving south right now. The evacuation order has already been given, so we need to assist the Rivas family with the evacuation. Let's hope we can hold the devils there, otherwise, the entire northwestern part of the Rivas Grand Duchy will fall completely under their control."

Aldrian's anxiety was rising; his mother's fate was unknown, and they had to go to another town unrelated to her.

"What about Grand Duke Rivas? Where is he right now?" he asked.

"The Grand Duke is in another sector, positioned in the northeastern region of the duchy, where reports say the Wrath Devil has appeared. He's there with the imperial army, defending the fortress city of Karak, this city is of great strategic importance, serving as a stronghold that protects much of the Rivas Grand Duchy's northern territories. He must have already received word of Ilyon's fall. He must have already heard of Ilyon's fall and is likely in a frenzy over his daughter."

Aldrian pondered for a moment before asking Pac,

"When we arrive in Vicanti, I want to head to Ilyon. This is an important part of my mission—I need to meet with Miss Irene," Aldrian said.

Pac frowned at Aldrian. "Are you serious? The devils are relentless, and they're incredibly strong. How do you plan to get past the approaching devils? I don't mean to underestimate you, but these devils seem crazier than ever, to the point where even king-stage cultivators hesitate to face them without support. And yet, you want to go to Ilyon, a town that's already fallen? For all we know, the devils may have already reduced it to ashes," Pac said.

"It's okay, I have my own ways, and I have to meet her, no matter what it takes. I'm telling you now—once I take care of the devils in Vicanti, I'll head straight to Ilyon," Aldrian said.

Hearing Aldrian's confident words about handling the devil problem, Pac couldn't help but think Aldrian was an arrogant fool who didn't understand the devils' true power. He saw Aldrian as a pampered young master, unaware that such arrogance and ignorance could easily lead to his death. Pac wondered which family had raised Aldrian and why a direct bloodline's retainer would bring such an ignorant and arrogant man to the battlefield.

By the looks of it, Aldrian seemed to be the leader of this group, and Pac couldn't help but think he really didn't understand the gravity of the situation. With a leader like this, the group would meet their end much faster on the battlefield. Still, because they were connected to the successor of the Rivas family, he felt the need to persuade Aldrian. But before he could speak—

"We are changing our plan. We've just received a report that Ilyon has fallen to the devils, and our new task is to assist Vicanti. The devils will arrive in approximately six hours, close to the town's vicinity. Our mission is to help evacuate the town, which has a population of six million. Many will be moving south, deeper into the territory. We will manage the evacuation, ensuring it's orderly. If it comes to the worst, we'll have to fight

the devils." The leader shouted, his voice amplified by energy so it could be heard across the entire plaza.

Aldrian recognized the man. He had already heard from those around him that this was Ryusei Collins, the guild master and leader of this mercenary group. Aldrian was somewhat surprised to see the guild master himself involved in the effort, which made him realize just how dire the situation truly was.

"Remember, don't sully the name of the Mercenaries Guild! Each private must obey the orders of their captain and refrain from being conceited toward other factions. This time, we are working alongside the Adventurer Guild and a few cultivator families. You must show the discipline and strength of the mercenaries!" he added, his words met by a resounding war cry from the mercenaries.

Aldrian found their spirit admirable, especially how they could unite, at least outwardly. The Mercenaries Guild was made up of cultivators from various races, usually, they are not part of any faction, but rather cultivators who seek to earn wealth through their power. With such diverse backgrounds and characteristics, it was already a great feat that the guild members maintained harmony and discipline.

Aldrian then looked at another group standing nearby, the Adventurer Guild. The two guilds were not all that different; the main distinction lay in how they operated. The Adventurer Guild was more flexible and individualistic, taking on 'safer' tasks compared to the mercenaries. While adventurers might be tasked with hunting, scouting, or finding something, the mercenaries handled more brutal, large-scale tasks—such as subjugating groups of bandits or criminals, escorting, or even fighting devils, as they were doing now.

The division of tasks helped minimize overlap between the guilds. However, due to the special circumstances, all of them would have to move to the frontline as reinforcements.

After the speech, Ryusei Collins shouted again.

"Let's go! We can't let our brothers and sisters wait out there!" With that, he stepped into the teleportation portal, followed by some of the Mercenaries Guild's executives. Then, it was finally Aldrian's group's turn.

"Just stay close to me for now. We still need to adapt to the real situation in Vicanti before you decide on your next move. Although I've only been tasked with getting you to the battlefield, I hope you don't die in vain because of your arrogance," Pac said to Aldrian.

Aldrian felt confused by Pac's warning, but eventually, he understood what he meant.

"He thinks I underestimated the devils and don't understand their power." Aldrian appreciated the man's concern, so he simply nodded.

After Aldrian's group stepped into the teleportation formation and arrived in Vicanti, they exited the portal. What Aldrian saw was a large crowd of people waiting in line to enter the teleportation portals. Just as the leader had mentioned, the evacuation of the town had already begun earlier, prompted by the news of Ilyon's fall.

There were two methods of evacuation: through the teleportation stations or by using carriages and traveling south on foot to the next city. If everyone relied solely on the teleportation stations, there wouldn't be enough time, so some would have to use the traditional method. Someone might ask, why not evacuate before the devils got too close, long before the fall of Ilyon?

The reason is that evacuation isn't as simple as just moving people. It requires huge resources, and coordinating millions of people isn't an easy task. They can only act when the place that serves as their 'buffer' has truly fallen. Once that happens, the town mayor will issue the evacuation order. In the end, it comes down to the effectiveness of resource allocation.

Aldrian could already sense the anxious and tense atmosphere from the people around him. He glanced at Pac, who was leading them to the Mercenaries Guild branch in the town. The scale was obviously not as grand as in Rivas City, but for now, this place had become the mercenaries' base of operations.

Aldrian and his group stood there, waiting for Pac to assess the real-time situation by coordinating with the local branch. Once Pac had gathered all the information and understood what needed to be done, he relayed the task to Aldrian.

"We will protect the citizens from the town wall. Until the evacuation is complete and everyone has left the city, we will need to defend the wall. As for the Rivas family's cultivators, they will handle the devils outside the wall. Our job is to eliminate any devils that slip past their defense line. Also, it looks like we have some bad news."

"What is it?" Aldrian asked.

"The devils will arrive much faster than predicted. Our scouts observing their movements report that the devils are using summoned beasts, not just marching on foot or running."

Aldrian nodded. After that, Pac led his group to the town's wall, where they would wait for the devils. The time was near—they would soon face the devil army!

Chapter 184: The Battle Begins

The situation in Vicanti grows more tense as devils approach the town. Many people begin to cause a ruckus, but thanks to the mercenaries and adventurers, they are able to prevent further chaos. However, everyone is aware of the dire situation and the anxiety felt by the people, which is why the disturbances are occurring. The local prominent figures can use the teleportation station, while most commoners will have to walk south under protection.

Aldrian watched all of this with a serene expression, but beneath that calmness, there was also anxiety due to the uncertainty of his mother's fate. He hoped that he could dash north to find her, but he wasn't reckless. He knew this was war, and it was his first time being involved in it. He wanted to understand how the devils fought, as they had managed to breach the empire so deeply. Usually, the fighting was confined to the border and could only be considered skirmishes.

He wondered what made the Devil Lord decide to attack the empire, as a full-scale invasion like this was not common. The last time it happened was thousands of years ago. However, the situation then was not as dire as it was now, with the empire seemingly losing to the devils on all fronts. What made the devils feel different this time? What made them feel confident? He wanted to find out through this battle.

He had already created his domain here, standing atop the wall and gazing at the horizon, waiting for the incoming devils. He closed his eyes in meditation, his mind working through many scenarios. He also decided to create a formation within his domain to cover a small part of the town. With his domain extending over more than 3 kilometers, he couldn't cover the entire town. If he wanted to cover the entire town, he would have to create the domain inside the town's mayor's mansion, where he believed the faith or karma of the people must be gathered.

An hour passed, but there was still no movement on the horizon. However, the Rivas family's thousands of soldiers had already established a defense line 500 meters in front of the wall. The average cultivation of these soldiers was at the Baron stage, and all of them wore Earth-grade armor, showcasing how wealthy the Rivas family was in nurturing so many of their cultivators to this level and even providing them with artifacts for protection.

After another hour, they finally saw something on the horizon. At first, it appeared as a tiny dot in the sky, and not long after, they spotted a dot on the ground. Soon, they could clearly see a massive number of devils approaching them at high speed.

"Many of them are riding wyverns! Cultivators of the wind element, use your wind to prevent the wyverns from attacking! Kill as many as possible! After I give the signal, strike them! Use your energy wisely—don't waste too much of it!" the commander of the Rivas family shouted. He then stood at the forefront of the defense line and raised his hand, his aura blaring with the power of his middle Grand Duke stage cultivation.

He then created a giant fire ball on top of his hand, the heat of which could be felt from inside the town. Many people who saw it were amazed by its power. When they saw thousands of wyverns, with devils riding on them, coming their way at full speed, they felt nervous but remained steadfast in their positions.

They also finally saw the main army of the devils on the ground, advancing with movements that created a rumbling sound and even made the ground tremble. This was one of the devils' tactics to shake their opponents' morale, and it was quite successful. Some of the mercenaries began to tremble when they saw the massive number of devils, their forces so numerous that they seemed to blacken the sky and the ground.

The devils utilized many kinds of beasts, including a few giant snakes that radiated a Grand Duke stage aura, causing the defenders' bravery to waver. The devils' war cries could be heard from afar as they charged toward the defense line like crazed animals.

"Kill! Kill! Kill!"

"Don't let even one escape—kill them all!"

"The ones who've comprehended 'Lust' can capture them as slaves! Don't let them escape!"

"I need women! I need more women!"

The crazed expressions of the devils as they charged into battle were finally visible to the defense line, as cultivators had better sight than ordinary mortals. When the commander judged the distance to be right, he finally released his technique.

Blazing Sun Arrows.

He then threw the giant fireball into the air, directing it toward the incoming devils. However, they seemed to ignore it, unmoved by its presence. Suddenly, the fireball erupted, shooting a barrage of fiery arrows toward the devils. Each arrow instantly incinerated anything it touched, burning anything in its path. The barrage created a massive blaze in the center of the devils' formation. Finally, the fireball plummeted into the packed ranks of the devils, exploding with a thunderous blast.

BOOM!!!

The ground shook violently as the explosion reverberated across the entire battlefield, killing many devils in its wake.

"NOW!"

After the commander shouted, the wind cultivators instantly unleashed their wind techniques, creating powerful gusts that swept the wyverns and devils in the air. However, not all of them were knocked down, as there were simply too many. The devils riding the wyverns retaliated by releasing their own technique. Fire rained down from the sky like a storm, but the men on the ground had already anticipated the attack. They raised their energy shields, protecting themselves from the firestorm with their own techniques.

The fire met many obstacles, causing it to deal minimal damage to the defense line. The wind element cultivators continued to target the wyverns, using techniques like wind slash, swirling wind, and powerful gusts. At times, they even combined their abilities with fire element cultivators, creating a massive fire net in the sky to burn the wyverns.

The combined techniques were quite effective, but the numbers were still overwhelming, and the devils on the ground had already begun releasing their own techniques. The devils unleashed their earth element abilities, causing the earth to split toward the defense line. The Rivas family's earth element cultivators confronted this, using their own techniques to prevent the earth from splitting further and countering the various earth-based attacks.

The devil army on the ground finally reached the defense line, triggering numerous trap formations that caused explosions or trapped them in sucking sand. However, like an unrelenting wave, the devils continued to push forward, using their horned beasts to ram into the defense line. Despite the reinforcement of many formations and artifacts, the sheer number of devils was overwhelming, and all of them seemed to be in a frenzied state.

Finally, the first casualties from the Rivas family fell as the defense line was breached by the beasts' attacks. Many tried to slay the beasts, which served as the vanguard units for the devils, but the beasts striking them were silver-armored rhinos, most of which were at the Viscount and Earl stages. The beasts acted like unstoppable battering rams, smashing through the defense line. Parts of the defense line began to break, but it was still contained as the support units behind them continued to eliminate any devils that slipped past. However, the beasts were incredibly ferocious, killing anything that stood in their path.

The commander stood at the forefront, having already battled numerous devils with his halberd. Now, he was locked in combat with a giant snake, its devil rider already in their devil form. Other giant snakes were still slithering toward the defense line, but all he could do was hope his comrades could hold them back. Fortunately, several Grand Duke stage cultivators stood alongside him on the defense line.

"How on earth do they have so many high-level beasts—and even managed to tame them?" the commander wondered.

"Give up, you Rivas family dog! You won't win against us. This is only our greeting, and you're already in this pitiful state. Soon, your empire will be finished!" the devil's commander taunted.

"You love to blabber nonsense, you devil scum. Die!" he spat, swinging his halberd and unleashing his halberd technique. The devil and the snake blocked the attack with ease, though the force spread out, tearing up the ground around them.

"You're dead!" the devil shouted, laughing crazily.

Their clash crushed the surrounding devils, scattering blood and body parts everywhere, creating a grisly battle arena around them. The devil commander expected the other snakes to breach the defense line and break through the town wall, but he felt a twinge of confusion as some of the snakes seemed hesitant, not attacking as they should.

He had brought over a dozen giant obsidian-backed snakes at the low Grand Duke stage—beasts renowned for their powerful control over earth element—to breach the defense line. But now, as he watched, he noticed that some of these formidable creatures were trembling in fear, seemingly beyond the devils' control.

The beasts began trembling, and devils dropped dead the moment they entered this area, their bodies forming piles of corpses. The devil commander's heart trembled. What was happening in that part of the

Chapter 185: Testing in the Midst of Battle

In one part of the battlefield, the cultivators holding the defensive line prepared for the incoming devil attack. However, they were stunned when all the beasts, whether flying or charging toward the defenses, suddenly began trembling uncontrollably and stopped in their tracks. The wyverns in flight immediately plummeted to the ground, their devil riders struggling to control them. Even after falling, the wyverns refused to rise. Similarly, the silver-armored rhinos halted and sat down, trembling, showing no intention of getting back up.

The strangeness didn't stop there. As the devils stepped into this area, they trembled for a moment before dropping dead, like puppets whose strings had been cut. Everyone could see it—the moment before their death, their crazed expressions shifted to ones of pure horror, as if they had seen something unimaginably terrifying. With the sheer number of devils falling, their bodies quickly formed small piles, which continued to grow into a small mountain.

When the giant snakes entered this area, they also stopped, their ferocious expressions turning to ones of sheer fear. Now, in the midst of the battle, everyone realized that something very strange was happening in this part of the battlefield—it had become too conspicuous to ignore. The soldiers were equally confused, unsure of what was

happening; it felt as though their job was being completed without them needing to lift a finger.

Atop the wall, Aldrian looked at the approaching invasion army with a serene expression. What others did not know was that the hostile devil forces were entering his domain—the designated killing zone for the devils. So, what exactly did Aldrian do to all these devils and beasts? In truth, he barely paid any attention to the beasts, doing nothing specific to them. He simply released a fraction of his aura into his domain, which alone was enough to make these beasts, none stronger than the Earl stage, tremble in fear.

His aura had a tremendous effect on the beasts that had yet to fully develop their intelligence. The moment they sensed his aura—which could even affect high-level beasts like those in the Forest of Despair—they immediately trembled in fear and reverence. Their instincts and bodies warned them not to act in the presence of this overwhelming force, as their very existence felt insignificant, unworthy of being before him.

As for the devils, they had entered Aldrian's formation, unknowingly triggering illusions within their minds. This formation was entirely under his control, allowing him to dictate precisely what each devil would see. But these weren't ordinary illusions; he had mixed his death laws into them to test their effect on the devils. As expected, the results did not disappoint. These illusions, infused with the power of death laws that only a divine being could comprehend, were nothing short of a death sentence.

What they saw inside their minds was the essence of death, something so horrifying that it struck them with pure terror. There was no way these low-level cultivators, even having become devils, could suppress their primal fear. Though they were in a frenzy, there was no defense against the death laws. They could reduce their fear, but they could not completely erase it.

The death laws, the very laws that became the bane of all beings and existence, magnified their fear to such an extent that it shattered their souls the moment they glimpsed death within their minds. It was literally scared to death. Because of the immense power of the illusion and the death laws, even though they saw it only for a moment, it felt as though they had witnessed it for eternity. It took but a second to see the illusion, and death was the inevitable result.

Aldrian then saw the three giant snakes approaching his position. Once they entered his domain, he merely needed to look at them, and they instantly stopped. Because the snakes were much stronger, being at the Grand Duke stage, Aldrian intensified his aura, making them feel the crushing pressure and his dominance. This part of the battlefield soon garnered the attention of others as they felt the weight of Aldrian's presence. When they looked at him, they were shocked to see him floating, as though a god observing his subjects. He swept his gaze across the battlefield.

"He's floating! Is he a King Stage cultivator?"

"No way, his cultivation is only at the peak Earl Stage."

The devils attempting to breach the town wall looked toward the area where Aldrian was. Some instantly dashed toward it, sensing the trouble in this part of the battlefield. Aldrian calmly stared at the swarm of devils before stretching his hand forward.

"I want to test if I can use a large-scale technique from within my domain."

He always used his large-scale techniques within his domain, where the destruction was entirely under his control and never left his domain. The only exception was when he used artifacts, like his sword, which allowed him to unleash attacks such as the Slash of the End, destroying everything outside his domain, even beyond his reach.

Now, he wanted to test whether he could use his large-scale technique outside of his domain while still remaining inside it, without relying on any artifacts. Within his domain, he could control everything smoothly and freely, allowing him to create powerful attacks by combining all of his domain's power. But what if he was still inside, yet wished to activate his technique outside his domain? Would his technique retain the same power as when activated within his domain?

Looking at the many opponents before him, it seemed like a good time to test his ability. After floating and observing the incoming foes, he closed his eyes. His senses expanded to their maximum, reaching beyond the confines of his domain. He then attempted to activate the technique he had developed during his meditation, one that was well-suited for this large-scale battle.

Suddenly, in the sky outside his domain, the small space began to crack, as if something were trying to break free from the void behind it. Then, multiple cracks appeared in the sky, continuing to increase and extending as far as five kilometers in front of Aldrian.

He sighed, realizing that this was as far as he could control the space outside of his domain. Suddenly, strands of lightning began to appear from his body. At first, they seemed no different from ordinary lightning, but then they grew exponentially in strength. To make matters even more terrifying, the lightning was infused with the aura of the heavens.

"Who is he?! Why does he have a heavenly aura?!"

"What terrifying power! But he's still only peak Earl stage."

Pac looked at Aldrian's floating figure, his eyes and heart trembling at the sight.

"Who is this man?! How can he exude the heavenly aura?"

The power of the heavenly lightning could be felt across the entire battlefield. At that moment, Aldrian was like the god of lightning, his heavenly might radiating throughout the battlefield. He then looked at all the space cracks and smiled.

"First test."

He then opened a space crack beneath his feet, and without hesitation, struck it with a full power of the bolt of lightning. At this moment, he was only using the power of his small domain, but even then, the strike was powerful enough that even a middle King stage cultivator would have to avoid it. Following that, lightning erupted from each of the spatial cracks outside his domain, striking the ground and obliterating everything in its path.

The battlefield was instantly transformed into a field of lightning and destruction. All beings beneath the spatial cracks were obliterated by the power of the lightning strike that Aldrian unleashed using his comprehension of heavenly lightning. The devils stood no chance, their bodies and souls destroyed by the lightning without any resistance.

The booming sound of thunder followed, causing the ears of lower cultivation level devils to bleed. When the lightning strike subsided, all that remained was five square kilometers of destruction and carnage. The power of the heavenly lightning Aldrian had conjured left everyone wondering what kind of monster he truly was.

The devil commander widened his eyes as he gazed at the destruction in one area of the battlefield. The strike had obliterated everything, leaving only ashes as a testament to the power of the devastating blow—one that could rival the full might of a high King stage cultivator!

Even his battle with the commander from the Rivas family had come to a halt due to this absurd situation. To be honest, he wasn't shocked by the scale of the destruction—he could achieve the same with his own cultivation level. What truly shocked him was how this human could exude heavenly might, and more importantly, that he was only at the peak Earl stage! It was absurd and beyond comprehension!

He immediately transmitted an order to some of the devils, his voice filled with urgency.

"Use Plan B now! We have to kill that man!"

After giving the command, he resumed his attack on the Rivas family's commander, who was still in disbelief from what he had just witnessed. However, sensing the devil commander's continued assault, he parried it with his technique, and the battle between them raged on.

As for Aldrian, he looked at his handiwork with a satisfied expression.

"Now, the second test."

Chapter 186: The Devil's Plan B

After Aldrian's display of power, the devils finally regained some clarity. Although those with lower cultivation levels struggled to control the nature of their negative energy, they weren't entirely foolish. Watching Aldrian hover in the air, effortlessly dominating the battle, they hesitated to charge recklessly. There was something about Aldrian that felt distinctly off to them.

However, Aldrian didn't wait for them to approach. After devastating everything within a five-kilometer radius in front of him, he prepared to unleash another technique outside his domain. This time, he created a massive spear using the fire element, combining it with the power wind laws. Once the spear was ready, he aimed it at the distant devils who were reluctant to come any closer.

The devils who saw the spear aimed at them felt a chill and began to flee frantically to avoid the impact. Watching their retreating figures, Aldrian didn't give them another chance. He immediately sent the giant spear hurtling toward them, which instantly breaking the sound barrier before it struck its target.

BOOM!!!

The spear exploded on impact, with flames spreading outward like ocean waves. Fire engulfed a vast area of the battlefield, but it was clear to all that its power was weaker than the lightning attack, reaching only the strength of a low king stage. Aldrian nodded at this second test, beginning to understand how his techniques and domain functioned together.

The first test was to see if creating his technique within the domain and then sending it outside would allow it to retain the domain's power. The result showed that it did indeed maintain the domain's strength, even beyond his domain.

The second test was to see if he could create his technique outside of his domain from the beginning, while he remained inside the domain. The result showed that he couldn't transfer his domain's power to the technique this way, making it significantly weaker.

With these two experiments, he now had a better understanding of his ability and how to utilize it in the future. He then looked toward the devil army, which seemed to be preparing something in the distance. Suddenly, the entire battlefield trembled as a pillar of red light erupted from the center of the devils' army. Everyone's eyes widened as they looked at the light, realizing exactly what the devils were trying to do.

The Rivas family's commander looked toward the red light, feeling his heart tighten with unease. He could also sense a pressure stronger than any being on the battlefield. With a swift slash of his halberd, he struck the devil's commander and then put some distance between them.

Rumble!

In the center of the red light pillar, a giant silhouette appeared. The Rivas family's commander widened his eyes as the aura of a low emperor stage spread across the entire battlefield, even reaching the town itself and when the red light pillar finally dissipated, the Rivas family's commander's eyes dilated in shock.

"Low Emperor stage Black Rock Snake."

Shriieekkk!!!

The snake's voice echoed across the entire battlefield and the town, the pressure it exuded causing panic among the people. The evacuation process quickly descended into chaos. The morale of the soldiers plummeted as they witnessed an emperor-level entity and its Black Rock Snake. This beast, infamous for its potent venom and formidable strength, appearing here was a clear sign of the devils' unwavering determination to attack this region.

The devil's commander grinned, feeling that the outcome of the battle was already decided. Even though the Doria Empire had a man like Aldrian, it wouldn't change anything. With the appearance of the Black Rock Snake, the battle would end much faster than they had predicted. However, summoning such a giant beast had drained a significant portion of the devils' resources—resources they would need for a prolonged war.

"You are all dead," the devil's commander said before striking again at the Rivas commander with his sword. The snake beneath him seemed to grow more energized with the appearance of the low emperor-stage Black Rock Snake. The Rivas commander countered with his halberd, but he had already lost some of his momentum.

The Rivas family's commander was nearly in despair at the situation, but he gritted his teeth and ordered his men.

"Activate the town's last barrier! Though it won't hold the snake's attack for long, it's better than nothing!"

However, a few seconds later, he received a report from one of his underlings.

"Sir, it's not good! The operator of the city barrier has already fled! We'll have to activate it manually!" the soldier shouted as he grabbed the communication device.

"Those bastards!!" The commander muttered in frustration, knowing exactly why they had run away. He understood that they stood no chance against the low emperor-stage Black Rock Snake. Not only did they lack an emperor-stage figure here, but they also had no formation or barrier that could withstand an attack from such a creature. In fact,

even if they had a low emperor-stage figure, it wouldn't guarantee they could hold off the Black Rock Snake.

The snake's strength and venom were dangerous even to middle emperor-stage cultivators, so it was no wonder the Black Rock Snake was one of the most feared beasts on the continent. The Rivas family's commander gritted his teeth, deciding to use a secret technique that would temporarily boost his power. This was the same technique Eleine had used when she battled the devils alongside Aldrian a few years ago.

However, he knew that using this technique came with a side effect: it would leave him much weaker for sometime. The technique pushed his body and dantian beyond their limits, and after its use, a cooldown period would follow. During this cooldown, his cultivation and strength would temporarily decrease before gradually returning to normal. The duration of the cooldown depended on how long the technique was used, but at most, it would last for two minutes.

The side effect wasn't deadly if the situation weren't so dangerous, but this time he was in the middle of the battlefield. Even though he could kill his opponents, he knew he would be dead for sure afterward, as there was no way he could battle effectively in a weakened state. He also knew that even with his secret technique, he couldn't defeat the Black Rock Snake. But at least he could kill the devil's commander, the snake, and as many of the enemy forces as possible. In the end, it would be his sacrifice.

"I hope my sacrifice will bring a change in this battle," he thought to himself. But he knew he was only fooling himself. With the appearance of the Black Rock Snake, he was certain Vicanti town would fall shortly after.

Before activating his secret technique, he glanced at Aldrian to see what he would do, but he was stunned to watch Aldrian take out a sword. The sword was of peak heaven grade, causing his eyes to widen, as not everyone could afford such a weapon. Though Aldrian's expression was serene, like a calm surface of water, the commander couldn't shake the feeling that there was a quiet confidence in Aldrian's demeanor.

The soldiers that were already trembling in fear also looked at Aldrian's figure with confusion, but they were also shocked when he drew the heaven-grade sword. The soldiers, already trembling in fear, looked at Aldrian's figure with confusion, but their shock deepened when they saw him draw the heaven-grade sword. Aldrian focused on the giant snake, which locked eyes with him before letting out a shriek and charging toward him with full power. The devils, whose morale had been boosted by the snake's appearance, followed suit, intensifying the battle. Fear had completely vanished from their eyes.

The devils, having regained their momentum, began to push back the defense line, their morale bolstered by the appearance of the Black Rock Snake. Aldrian, watching the giant snake charge toward him with incredible speed, followed by the devils with crazed

expressions, simply ignored them. With his mother's fate still unknown, he needed to end this battle quickly so he could finally search for her.

While floating, he took a stance and slowly unsheathed his sword. With each inch the sword moved out of its scabbard, the swords across the entire battlefield and in the town—trembled. The powerful sword intent and sword will radiated from him. In some parts of the battlefield, the fighting seemed to halt as soldiers' swords trembled uncontrollably, rendering them unable to use them.

The devil's commander felt a foreboding sense as he watched Aldrian's technique, instantly dashed toward him, leaving the Rivas family's commander behind.

"STOP HIM! DON'T LET HIM UNLEASH THAT TECHNIQUE!!"

Trusting his instincts, the devil's commander instantly ordered the devils in the surrounding area to charge at Aldrian, each unleashing their own technique to disrupt him. However, it was already too late by the time Aldrian began to unsheathe his sword. He glanced at the incoming waves of the devil's army rushing toward him, but his focus remained on the Black Rock Snake—it was his main target. As for the others, he considered them nothing more than ants.

At that moment, he decided to use his technique, one that may not be the greatest, but powerful enough to end the battle with a single slash.

Slash of the Vanguard

Chapter 187: The End of the Battle

Aldrian unleashed a slash that covered the entire battlefield—a strike he named *Slash of the Vanguard*, as it would pave the way for his own series of sword techniques. After developing a few techniques, he realized he needed to arrange them in a specific order. *The Slash of the Vanguard* would serve as the opening strike in his yet-unnamed series of sword movements, and ending with *The Slash of the End*—just as he envisioned.

However, at this moment, the *Slash of the Vanguard* proved to be devastating for the devil army, as this single attack alone could bring about their end. Once Aldrian completed his slash, the arc of energy stretched across his entire line of sight, traveling at more than three times the speed of sound. The swing of his blade sliced through the air itself, cutting it before reaching the charging devils army who attempted to advance toward him.

The giant Black Rock Snake could only watch the incoming energy slash. As an Emperor-stage beast with developed intelligence, he sensed the immense power within this attack. But because he was charging forward at full speed, he couldn't halt in time.

The devastating energy slash split his massive body horizontally from mouth to tail, killing him instantly.

In the moments before his death, the Black Rock Snake was gripped by shock at the sudden turn of events, unable to comprehend how this young man could unleash such a powerful attack. Initially, he had fixated on the young man, sensing he was the strongest here, especially as he floated above the battlefield. Acting on instinct, the snake had dashed toward Aldrian. As a beast that can grow stronger by devouring others, it was natural for him to target the strongest opponent.

He didn't even have time for regret as his body was split in two, and the slash continued its path, flying toward the devils behind him. The energy of the slash destroyed all incoming attacks aimed at Aldrian and cleaved through the bodies of the devils. The slash severed various body parts—many were decapitated, others split from the upper body or the belly, and for the luckier ones, it only took their lower halves.

The devil's commander, seeing the incoming slash, managed to dodge by a split second, but both of his legs, from the upper thighs down, were still struck. Blood splattered everywhere as he fell to the ground, grunting in agony from the loss of his legs. The slash energy continued its path, forming a crescent moon shape as it swept across the battlefield, killing all the devils charging toward the town. Fortunately, the Rivas family's soldiers never broke their defensive line to charge into the devils, so the attack only claimed the lives of the enemy forces.

Behind the devils' rear line lay a vast grassland, and beyond that, a forest stretching toward the horizon. The slash flew in that direction, heading toward the horizon until it disappeared from Aldrian's sight. However, he knew the slash's energy would dissipate somewhere between the initial border of the Doria Empire and the devil territory, based on his estimation.

The people who witnessed the execution could only widen their eyes in silence. They had just seen the darkness of despair, but suddenly the battle ended with a quiet stillness, leaving only a small number of devils who could be easily dealt with by the Rivas family's forces. Even the remains of the devils' wyverns, who had observed the strike, began to retreat north, intent on reporting the situation. Amid the scattered corpses across the battlefield, sounds of pain-filled grunts could be heard. Not all of the devils had died instantly from Aldrian's slash; some had only been struck in non-fatal limbs, like their legs.

However, witnessing this display of power, some soldiers began to question Aldrian's actions. *"If you have such power, why not unleash it from the start to avoid unnecessary casualties?"* Some felt anger toward Aldrian, frustrated that he had held back despite his obvious strength.

Aldrian could sense the displeasure among them, understanding that their frustration and anger stemmed from the loss of their friends and comrades. He knew why they felt

this way. However, he had his own reasons for this—he wanted to observe how the devils fought against the empire and how the empire's forces fared against the invasion. He needed to understand why the empire was losing ground, aside from the presence of the devils' spies. After watching the battle unfold, he finally grasped the differences within the devil army, drawing on his own experiences.

"They seem stronger and more ferocious. There's something strange about them," Aldrian thought. He had already fought devils before, and from all his experiences, this one felt different. It was more like fighting a ferocious beast than a human. He had heard that devils with lower-level cultivation struggled to control their desires, depending on the nature of their negative energy.

This was also one of the reasons why all devils infiltrating other territories had a minimum cultivation requirement—to make their infiltration easier, as they could control their tendencies and negative energy much better. It was evident that all of Aldrian's encounters with devils had been with middle to high-ranking ones.

Devils who chose to cultivate the energy of Wrath would have tendencies toward anger, while those who cultivated the energy of Lust struggled to control their desires, and so on. However, Aldrian didn't expect it to be this bad, he couldn't believe that they would disregard their own lives and deaths.

"The devils... they must have done something inside their territory to make them like this."

He could only put that aside for now and teleport to one of the devils still alive. To be exact, he teleported beside the devil commander, who had already lost both of his legs. The commander dragged his body with his hands, leaving a blood trail on the ground. He couldn't use his escape talisman, as it had already been destroyed by Aldrian's sword strike, which had split the pouch containing the talismans.

He had already spent too much energy, and his mount, the snake, had been killed by Aldrian's sword slash. He could only hope to escape from this place as quickly as possible and recuperate.

But unfortunately for him, Aldrian suddenly appeared beside him. He raised his head to look at Aldrian's calm expression.

"Wai—" Before he could say anything, Aldrian already grabbed his head and touched his forehead. The devil commander could only helplessly stay still as Aldrian to look through his memories. Aldrian, not wanting to face the devil lord's presence, instantly destroyed the seal and the seal's mindscape before the devil lord could appear. He didn't want the devil lord to know he was here; after all, there would be a right time for their meeting.

The Rivas family's commander watched as Aldrian suddenly appeared and touched the devil commander's head. He thought it must be some kind of mind-reading technique. Earlier, before Aldrian unleashed the Slash of the Vanguard, he had received a voice transmission from Aldrian telling him to lie down. He didn't know what would happen, but he trusted Aldrian's words and immediately complied.

Fortunately, he had followed Aldrian's instructions to lie down, or else he would be dead like the other devils—or at least have lost some body parts. The terrifying sword strike and all those abnormal techniques made him want to know the identity of this young man. He then saw that Aldrian had finished with the devil commander, and without hesitation, he decapitated the devil with his hand coated in sword intent, instantly killing him.

The Rivas family's commander decided to approach Aldrian and ask him. However, as he drew near, he noticed Aldrian's expression was frowning. He thought that whatever information Aldrian had gathered from the devils must not be good. Still, he bowed and said to Aldrian,

"Excuse me, sir. I want to thank you for your help. Because of your efforts, we were able to minimize the casualties in this battle and secure a victory here."

Aldrian then looked at the man, the brave commander who had fought at the forefront, battling the devil's commander even while surrounded by devils. For him to have held his ground against the devil's commander and his mount, he must be a powerful cultivator within the Rivas family.

"You're being too modest, Commander Krul. It was the effort of many soldiers who sacrificed themselves that gave me the time to unleash my technique. You should be thanking them," Aldrian said. Of course, he knew the commander's name, as he had just seen his information.

Commander Krul smiled and nodded, appreciating Aldrian's humility. Despite such immense power, Aldrian didn't downplay the efforts of the soldiers. However, Krul couldn't help but harbor doubts. How could someone so young possess such strength? Was this man using a disguise to appear younger? Or perhaps he had concealed his true cultivation level so others wouldn't realize his true abilities?

"By the way, Commander Krul, which way to Ilyon Town from here?" Aldrian asked.

"The Ilyon Town is that way," Commander Krul said, pointing in the direction. "If someone uses traditional methods or flying, just keep heading that way, and you'll find Ilyon Town about 800 kilometers away."

He wasn't sure why Aldrian asked this, but he answered anyway.

"Alright, thanks, and by the way, I got some information from this guy—looks like the Lust Devil is in this region." He gestured toward the dead body of the devil commander.

Chapter 188: Depart to Ilyon Town

Commander Krul widened his eyes.

"What?"

"Yes, the Lust Devil appeared in the attack on Ilyon Town, leading to its fall," Aldrian said.

"How is that possible? Our sources reported no members of the Seven Deadly Sins in this region and the only one spotted within the Rivas Grand Duchy was the Wrath Devil."

"Is your information source reliable?" Aldrian asked.

"Yes," Commander Krul replied, but Aldrian could sense the hesitation in his voice.

"Are you sure?"

"..."

"That's all. I hope this new information helps the Rivas Grand Duchy and the empire as a whole. I'll return to the town wall now." With that, Aldrian disappeared, leaving Commander Krul alone amidst the corpses of devils. He sighed, looking around at the tens of thousands of bodies of the devils.

"What a strange man," he thought. Then, suddenly remembering something, he facepalmed.

"I forgot to ask his name!"

Back on top of the town wall, Aldrian reappeared beside his group. Pac, still in a daze, was stunned by Aldrian's sudden arrival. The man he had thought to be an arrogant young master had shown a strength beyond anything he'd ever witnessed—to kill tens of thousands of troops with a single slash? Was he actually an Emperor-stage cultivator? No wonder his words seemed arrogant; he had the power to back them up.

He now looked at Aldrian in a new light, his eyes full of reverence. Although some of the Rivas family's troops felt frustrated or even resentful toward Aldrian, most shared Pac's sentiment. Many even saw Aldrian as the hero of the battle—thanks to him, the fight had ended quickly, leading them to victory.

Aldrian ignored their reverent gazes and looked at Xin Haotian and the others.

"I have to go north—my mother needs help," he sent through a voice transmission.

"Do you need someone to accompany you?" Sylphia asked.

"No, I don't need it. This time it's quite tricky, and I don't want to put any of you in danger. You all can stay here—Xin Haotian can protect you," Aldrian said. However, he noticed Sylphia's hands trembling slightly. He reached out, gently took her hand, and channeled his energy into her body. He could sense what she was feeling. This was her first time seeing a real war zone; the massive army advancing toward them and the many casualties had left her shaken and a bit traumatized.

Although she was an adventurer, she was still a princess at heart. She had seen terrible things before, but this was her first experience with something as devastating as war. Her mind raced, imagining what might have happened if Aldrian and the others hadn't been there. What would have been the fate of this town and its people? With the appearance of that giant beast, there was no way the town's forces could have held out even for a minute—they would have been slaughtered.

Sylphia felt warmth as Aldrian's golden energy soothed her, and her trembling hand finally stopped as she regained control over her emotions. However, there was one person watching Aldrian hold Sylphia's hand so intently—Baek Ji-Min. For the first time, she felt an unexpected pang of jealousy. Of course, she didn't need comforting for what she had just witnessed. She was a demonic cultivator after all, and had witnessed many cruel scenes during her time within the sect.

As for Sylphia, she smiled at Aldrian, who was still holding her hand, while he looked at Xin Haotian.

"Like I said, you will stay here. Please guard this place, as I'm not sure if the devils have another trick up their sleeves. Even though I've already read the memories of the commander of this attacking force, I still don't feel assured."

"Is something bothering you in the information you gathered?" Xin Haotian asked.

"The Lust Devil was in Ilyon Town before its fall, and I don't know the situation with my mother, even after reading the memories of that devil. Now, with the appearance of the Lust Devil, I have to go there as fast as possible. That's why I need to go alone, that's also why I need you to stay here. The devils' movements are unpredictable, so you'll need to protect this place to ensure its safety."

The four of them widened their eyes, not expecting the Lust Devil to make an appearance. No wonder Aldrian wanted to go alone; with the danger involved and the urgency of reaching Ilyon Town as quickly as possible, bringing them along would only be a burden. Aldrian then looked at Eleine.

"Eleine, rest assured, I will save my mother if she needs help. I will make sure she comes back here," he said reassuringly. He could feel the worry she had for his mother. She had been with his mother the longest here and was one of her closest confidantes, so her worry was not exaggerated.

Eleine simply nodded. "Just be careful, young master. Although I'm worried about Lady Irene's situation, please don't forsake your own safety."

Aldrian nodded in return and looked at Pac, who was watching him. He knew they were communicating via voice transmission, so he waited for them.

"Pac, I will be heading north to Ilyon Town. I hope you can help look after my group while they stay here," Aldrian said to him.

"Oh yes, yes, it would be my honor to help you and your group," Pac replied. He no longer thought Aldrian's decision to go to Ilyon Town was suicidal. With his power, Aldrian had more than enough qualifications to go there alone.

Aldrian then released his hand from Sylphia and smiled at her.

"I'll be back." Before he disappeared, leaving many people in awe of him. Sylphia simply smiled at his vanishing figure, confident that whatever he did would succeed. Although Xin Haotian and the others had anticipated it, this moment marked the beginning of Aldrian's figure becoming known to others. His legend would spread far and wide because of this battle.

The devils who managed to escape the carnage on wyverns numbered in the hundreds. When they saw how their entire force was swept away by the slash, they decided to retreat without waiting for their leader's order. This was the first time they had witnessed something so devastating and absurd from an orthodox cultivator. Heavenly lightning? A sword strike powerful enough to sweep the entire battlefield?

Heck, they could still see the trail of the slash, even though they were already quite far from Vicanti Town. Large parts of the ground's surface were slashed. From the hills and small mountains to the trees, there were traces of the slash everywhere, making their scalps go numb. The most important thing now was to report that there was someone so powerful they could handle the entire invading force alone. A new strategy would be needed to face this region.

They had been flying at full speed on their wyverns, but they still couldn't shake the feeling of unease.

"Where do you think you're going, hm?" True to their fears, a voice that didn't belong to any of the devils suddenly echoed from one of the wyverns' backs. The devil rider on it had already been killed by this intruder.

Aldrian, using his repeated teleportation, quickly caught up with the group of devils riding wyverns at full speed. The moment they saw a man they dreaded, their faces turned pale. Without hesitation, they scattered in an attempt to confuse him so he couldn't catch all of them. However, they only saw him glance at them before they suddenly plummeted from the sky.

They couldn't control the wyverns as they continued to fall, eventually dropping to the ground like raindrops. Many didn't have time to reinforce themselves with defensive techniques, so when their bodies hit the surface, they were instantly destroyed along with the wyverns. They died on impact.

For the lucky ones, they were still alive, but their bodies felt heavy and they couldn't move. They didn't know what had happened, but they still tried to escape. Aldrian simply glanced at them while floating in the air, then teleported to each survivor one by one. What he did next was read their memories before killing them. He wanted to gather as much information as possible about the devils in Ilyon Town first.

However, perhaps because they were mere 'cannon fodder,' Aldrian couldn't gather any useful information from them. With nothing of value to learn, he quickly resumed his journey toward Ilyon that still hundreds of kilometers away from his current position.

After half an hour of continuous teleportation, he finally saw smoke rising in the distance. At that moment, he was atop a tree in the forest near Ilyon, just before the town itself came into view. From his vantage point, he could see multiple plumes of smoke rising into the sky, and though the buildings were unclear, he could make them out. Without hesitation, he teleported again, to reach the place where his mother had last been seen!

Chapter 189: The Condition of Ilyon Town

When Aldrian teleported near the town wall, he saw numerous blood trails and signs of fierce battles scattered everywhere. Corpses of townsfolk lay across the forest edge leading to Ilyon Town—men, women, the elderly, and children, none spared by the devils. Aldrian's face darkened as he took in the horrific scene. After a brief moment of silent lament, he teleported again.

When Aldrian arrived at the edge of the destroyed town wall, he noticed a few devils acting as sentries. However, with his abilities, these low-level devil cultivators posed no threat to him. Using his illusion technique, Aldrian killed them from a distance without needing to make physical contact or eye contact. His illusions technique now were so

complex that for those with a lower cultivation level, he only needed to look at them to cast an effect. This was possible because he had fused his technique with his mastery of karma laws, creating a deadly technique that was remarkably easy to use even broken.

If he wanted to use this technique on stronger cultivators, he would need a more potent karmic connection, such as the target looking into his eyes or even physical contact. The required connection depended on the opponent's strength.

After killing the devil sentries, he leapt onto the ruined town wall. Only when he stood atop it did he fully see the extent of the town's destruction. Most of the buildings were reduced to rubble and ash, with civilian corpses scattered here and there. Devils were everywhere on the streets below, patrolling what was left of the desolate town.

He killed those devils and teleported again. At this point, he was on a killing spree, every devil he saw fell instantly, one look from him and that was it. There were no high-level devil cultivators in this area, but he knew the stronger devils were all gathered in the town lord's mansion. Taking his time, he searched for any trace of his mother while also cleansing the town of devils along the way.

Everywhere he passed, buildings lay in rubble or were engulfed in flames, with civilian casualties scattered around. Each time Aldrian saw this, his rage grew stronger. He had long despised the devils for their actions and their connection to 'that' creature, but he had never directly witnessed such mercilessness before.

At one spot, where he had thought a beautiful park once stood, he now found a gruesome crucifixion field. Dozens of people were nailed to crosses, some of them children. Blood flowed from the poles, and many bodies were scattered around. Among them, he saw what he assumed to be their mothers, also slain in the same horrific manner.

In some places, he found many dead, naked women, and he couldn't bring himself to imagine the horrors they must have endured before their souls departed. He also saw numerous heads impaled on poles throughout the town, a chilling sight among many other brutal scenes he encountered during his killing spree.

"The devils slaughtered all of them. The evacuation was not yet complete when the town was breached, and there was no chance for these poor people to escape."

He sensed a thick presence of death laws throughout the town, which he thought will increase his comprehension of the laws of death. However, he also felt an overwhelming aura of negative energy—resentment and wrath—pervading the area. It was as if he could feel the emotions of the people before their deaths, and he knew this was the lingering remnant of their souls' suffering.

It made his blood boil, and his hatred toward them grew with each step. Throughout his journey, he had found no reason to spare even a single one of them. The brutality he had witnessed nearly triggered his strong killing intent, but he managed to calm his mind. Taking a deep breath, he focused and continued his mission of cleansing the town.

With his speed and teleportation, he moved like a grim reaper, reaping the souls of every devil he encountered. His speed increased even further, hoping to visit the town lord's mansion—where the high-ranking devils resided much faster. His plan was to cleanse the entire city first before visiting the mansion last. He would give them a surprise, but not the kind they would enjoy.

Inside one of the finest buildings in Ilyon town, numerous devils patrolled the area. The average cultivation of these devils was much higher than those wandering the streets. The weakest among them were at the Earl stage, while the stronger ones could be sensed within the mansion itself.

Inside the mansion, more specifically in the dining room, the scene was one of utter disarray. Bloodstains were splattered everywhere, and scattered limbs lay in various parts of the room. In the center, around the long table, six devils were gathered. They sat in their seats as though it were just another dining session—and indeed, the long table was filled with numerous dishes. Red meat and crimson sauce dominated the feast, and the devils appeared relaxed, enjoying their time as if nothing matter to them.

All of them, exuding the auras of the Grand Duke and King stages, were engaged in conversation.

"Ah, what a delightful taste. It's been so long since I had human meat," one of them said, chewing a piece of meat.

"We've been confined in the devil's territory for far too long. I envy those tasked with infiltration missions in other territories," said another.

"By the way, I've been wondering—what made our lord decide to attack the Doria Empire? Has the prophecy already arrived, or what?" asked the third devil.

"I don't know, but it seems it has to do with the disappearance of Lord Greed. After that, our lord seemed eager to begin the invasion of the Doria Empire."

"I think Lord Greed didn't just disappear—he was killed," said the strongest devil in the room, a middle King-stage devil.

All the devils stopped talking and turned to look at the one who had claimed that Lord Greed had been killed.

"Are you serious?"

"Yes, I overheard from the higher-ups that Lord Greed's life signs dissipated, and maybe because of that, our lord decided to attack this empire. But this is just my guess, as I really don't know what's on our lord's mind," he replied.

All of them raised their eyebrows. If this news is true, then a new Greed Devil will be appointed, and they all knew that the successor of the Greed Devil is his right-hand man. The situation in the Devil Territory will change because of the death of the old Greed Devil.

"Who could kill Lord Greed? Is it one of the Ten Great Swordmasters? Or perhaps the bald donkeys from the Buddhist sect?"

The King-stage cultivator snorted. "There's no way those weaklings of the Great Swordmasters could match Lord Greed's strength. It must have been someone else."

They continued talking, and before they knew it, the food was gone as they had finally eaten their fill. However, the King-stage devil frowned when he looked at the communication device in his hand.

"It's strange that we still haven't received any update from the invasion force that attacked Vicanti Town," he said.

"Maybe they ran into some obstacles. Let's wait a little longer. Even if something is blocking their way, there's no way they'll fail with Plan B as support," another replied.

However, the King-stage devil still felt something was off. Those devils should have at least given him an update or report on what happened in Vicanti. He was certain they had arrived there a long time ago.

He suddenly felt uneasy and looked at the others.

"Have you received any reports from the patrolling devils?"

The others were stunned but shook their heads. They finally sensed that something was wrong. They walked toward the door to leave the room, intending to check outside. But as they reached for the door, they sensed something strange—there were no living beings around the mansion!

"You sure are enjoying yourselves here. What a good time for you." Suddenly, they heard a voice that didn't belong to any of them. Instantly, they turned around and assumed a wary stance as they saw a young man sitting in the middle seat at the long table.

"Where did this man come from?" the King stage devil thought to himself. To appear here without making any of them, not even the 'one' in the bedroom, aware of his presence—this young man is an expert! The others reached the same conclusion as they focused on Aldrian, circulating their energy to unleash their own techniques.

However, suddenly, they found it difficult to control the energy around them, causing their eyes to widen. Then, they heard the young man's voice again.

"Let's play, shall we?"

At that moment, they didn't know why, but they could feel that his smile was like that of a true devil itself.

Chapter 190: Torture Session

The king-stage devil tried to unleash his technique, circulating his energy to the maximum to break the influence of whatever Aldrian had just done. The energy surrounding them felt heavy and couldn't be absorbed. At their cultivation stage, they could typically use the surrounding energy as a boost to strengthen their techniques. This ability is inseparable from the fact that high-level cultivators can perceive the energy of heaven and earth more easily and effectively.

However, Aldrian did not give them a chance, as he teleported to one of them and delivered a punch to his middle dantian, where the energy was stored. The force of this punch was enough to shatter the dantian instantly, leaving him crippled. Not stopping at just destroying the dantian, Aldrian also infused his golden energy into the devil, imbuing it with a poisonous property that inflicted agonizing pain.

When the others finally managed to unleash their techniques, Aldrian simply created a space crack to swallow their attacks and looked at them with his piercing gaze. The grand duke-stage devils who met Aldrian's eyes felt as though they were staring into the eyes of death itself, as if they were falling into an abyss of darkness—an abyss of death from which there was no escape.

They tried to resist it, to fight the fear seeping into their hearts. The king-stage devil realized that Aldrian was using some kind of illusion technique on the others, but, quick-thinking, he dashed to escape the room. However, this was a mistake in itself, for the moment he turned his back on Aldrian, it would mean his end.

Before he could reach the outside of the room, he felt an immense weight and dropped instantly to the ground, as though the weight of an entire mountain pressed upon him. He trembled at the power he sensed, realizing that this man had been toying with them from the very start! If this young man had truly wanted to, he could have killed them long ago—but by choosing to play with them, it was clear they meant nothing in his eyes.

He saw Aldrian's foot from the corner of his eye as Aldrian stood there. Suddenly, he felt intense pain and coughed up blood as Aldrian's fist struck his lower back, directly at the middle dantian. He knew instantly that his dantian had been shattered.

"NO!" His cultivation he had painstakingly gathered over a long lifetime, slowly dissipated from his body. An extreme weakness spread through him, unlike anything he had ever felt before. Gritting his teeth, he struggled to look up at Aldrian's face from the ground, but all he could see was Aldrian's smile—a smile that seemed more demonic than human.

"Isn't it ironic that you would call my smile demonic after the acts you've committed in this town?" Aldrian said. "Come on now, I want to see the devils struggle. Stand up. Your friends seem unresponsive, so I hope you can give me something interesting, Rex Yarin."

The king-stage devil trembled when Aldrian called his name. He didn't know how this young man knew his name, but he forced a smile and said to Aldrian,

"Who are you to dare barge into this place? Do you know that you will regret it once the one truly in charge here comes out to hunt you down?"

Aldrian tilted his head. "Do you mean the man inside the main bedroom? Don't worry, his turn will come. Unfortunately, you won't be around to witness it." He smiled. "Wait here for a moment."

Aldrian then moved toward the other devils, still frozen in place. They were still resisting the illusion, so Aldrian simply woke them up by punching each of their abdomens, shattering their dantian with ease.

Once they woke up from the illusion, the only thing they could comprehend was that their cultivation had already dissipated, slowly draining from their bodies, and before them was the smiling face of Aldrian. All of them instantly collapsed to the ground with a loud thud, the sudden shift in gravity so heavy they couldn't even lift their heads. They desperately wanted to see Aldrian's face again, so they forced their heads up, just as Rex had done.

Clap!

"Gentlemen, let's go with this rule," Aldrian said. "I will ask the questions, and you will answer. If anyone catches a lie, or if no one gives me an answer, you will be punished. Is that clear?" He looked at the devils, who were arranged in a circle, ensuring they could all see each other clearly. The devils remained silent, listening to Aldrian's playful tone. They already had a hunch of what he would do to them.

However, they only grinned, for they had already endured many kinds of torture as devils. Their lives as devil cultivators within the devil territory had been cruel. They had

experienced various forms of torment from their superiors, and some had even been tortured by members of the Seven Deadly Sins. Confident that no method of torture could make them yield, they faced Aldrian with a defiant resolve.

"First question: Where is the Lust Devil?" Aldrian asked, his gaze fixed on them as he waited for an answer. After ten seconds of silence, he still hadn't heard a response.

As soon as the words left his mouth, the devils were overwhelmed by an intense, all-consuming pain throughout their bodies. It felt as though they were being ripped apart a thousand times over, their skin being flayed alive again and again. The excruciating physical pain was compounded by a searing agony in their souls, making their heads feel as if they would explode.

"I...I don't know, whe...where Lord Lust...went! Bu...but I heard he's still...targeting the Blizzard Witch," one of them finally stammered, his voice filled with difficulty. He never imagined the pain would be so extraordinary—he felt as though he was trapped in an eternal torment, both inside and out.

As soon as the words escaped his lips, the pain suddenly ceased for him. He gasped for air, his body drenched in sweat, his face pale. The veins all over his body were swollen, threatening to burst as he tried desperately to withstand the excruciating agony.

"One of your friends has already answered. Do any of you have information you'd like to share?" Aldrian asked as the others still writhed in agony.

"I don't know either!" another one answered quickly.

"I don't know!" One by one, they all spoke, and Aldrian could sense they weren't lying.

To break these high-ranking devils, he had prepared a far more lethal and effective method of torture. It was more agonizing and efficient than merely cutting off their limbs or skinning them alive.

That is, Aldrian injected his golden energy into them at their weakest state and controlling their pain with it. Without their cultivation to protect their inner and outer bodies, they would experience a level of suffering they had never known before. The agony in both their bodies and souls, within mortal body without cultivation, was something that could not be endured. It was more excruciating than having their limbs severed.

"Good! It would've been better if you had just answered earlier, wouldn't it?" Aldrian said with a smile. "Now, second question: What happened to Irene Rivas?"

"We don't know the details, but the only ones who know are Lord Lust—I mean, the Lust Devil and the members of the Seven Devils of Disaster, Rexith and Karius," one of them replied.

Aldrian didn't find any lies in his words, but he waited for the others to give their answers. One by one, they spoke, their responses more or less the same as the first. But when he heard Rex's answer, Aldrian couldn't help but grin.

"What did I tell you about liars?"

Rex's body suddenly curled as he endured the intense pain.

"Do you think I can't detect lies? Do you think you can lie to me, Rex? What a bad boy you are. I think you deserve some special treatment."

"The... The Blizzard Witch... is... on the run... the Lust Devil... to the north... that's what... I know." He finally said it, and only after ten seconds did the pain stop. Aldrian didn't want to kill him too quickly, as the pain could cause the soul to collapse and kill him instantly. However, hearing Rex's answer made him abandon that idea.

The answer Rex gave him made Aldrian sigh in relief, at least his mother still had a chance to escape. But once he learned that the Lust Devil was after her, he decided to end this quickly. The Lust Devil was not someone his mother could defeat. Aldrian then walked toward Rex and touched his forehead. Rex could only endure Aldrian's memory-reading technique as his eyes rolled back.

The others felt their hearts tremble as it seemed Aldrian was using a memory-reading technique. If he had something like that, why had they gone through all of this? He could have just read their memories and been done with it, but no, he was playing with them, clearly enjoying it. They had no rebuttal because this was what they had done to the weak, to the losers. But for them to experience it themselves, they still couldn't swallow it.

Aldrian didn't care about their opinions and simply read their memories one by one. Once he was done, he glanced toward one part of the mansion where the main bedroom was. He then intensified the pain for the devils, amplifying it to unbearable levels, until it finally killed them, as the pain exceeded both their bodies' and souls' limits.

"The successor of the Lust Devil, huh." He muttered.