

The Shining Star Above The Heaven

#Chapter 201: The Last Attempt - Read The Shining Star Above The Heaven Chapter 201: The Last Attempt

Chapter 201: The Last Attempt

The people Aldrian saved in Ilyon Town gaze at the golden light pillar reaching high into the sky before it falls in the direction of the eastern side. From afar, they hear only a rumbling sound, a sign that something significant has occurred in the region where the Sazim Fortress is located. All of them conclude that their savior is battling someone and can only pray for his safety.

The people of Vicanti could also see the golden pillar rising on the horizon. Many were curious and wondered what it was, but a group of onlookers stationed atop the town wall watched it with particular fascination. The sight of the golden light piercing through the clouds and reaching the boundless sky was both beautiful and awe-inspiring to them.

When the golden pillar descended to the land, creating a distant rumbling sound, they immediately realized it was the sign of a battle. The brilliance of the golden light and the distinctiveness of the technique left no doubt in their minds—there was only one person they knew who could unleash such overwhelming power.

The devils attempting to attack Sazim Fortress abruptly halted their actions when they saw the sudden appearance of the golden pillar. Despite their relentless efforts, they couldn't breach the fortress vicinity due to the intricate killing formations that instantly annihilated any who dared to approach. Yet, they had continued trying, driven by their higher ups order. However, the blinding brilliance of the golden light forced them to stop and shift their focus entirely. From their close proximity, they could feel the immense power emanating from the golden pillar.

Despair

The only thing they felt was an overwhelming sense of hopelessness—there was no way devils of their level could contend with something like that. The unmistakable *holy* aura emanating from the technique confirmed it wasn't one of their own. Instantly, they realized the person responsible was the same individual who had recently passed some of them, pursued by countless others. Their morale and spirit plummeted, even if they weren't the intended target of this devastating technique, death seemed inevitable.

And true to their fears, when the golden light slammed into the ground, many of them were caught in its devastating impact. They had little time to react before the pillar

struck, and thousands of devils, ranging from the Disciple stage to the Earl stage, were killed in the blinding light. The deep chasm left behind after the strike radiated thick, pure holy energy. It would not be an exaggeration to say that, if someone from the church were present, they would worship Aldrian.

At Aldrian's location, he simply observed the aftermath of his newly created technique. This technique was inspired by Arthur's sword technique, which he had witnessed during their battle in the Ivory Empire a few years ago. While Aldrian's usual techniques were dominated by slashing motions, this one incorporated a chopping motion, delivering a pillar of light that struck down his opponent with immense force.

He simply needed to form his own concept of the technique and implement it with his comprehension. And voilà! He had created a technique he called the *Pillar of Heaven's Judgment*.

The result was satisfying. Aldrian observed the straight chasm extending toward the southwest horizon. The chasm itself contained not only many sword intents and wills but also a pure, holy aura from his golden energy, as he had imbued the technique with the concept of 'purification.' This technique was not purely destructive; it also served as a purifying strike. If an opponent somehow managed to block it, the holy energy would weaken them to a certain extent. It was a perfect technique for opponents who cultivated too much negative energy, like the devils.

Aldrian then looked at the Lust Devil, who was already on his knees in a worn condition. His handsome face was marked with wounds, and it was paler than usual. His hair was disheveled, and his noble-style clothes were in disarray, as though he had just been hit by a storm. His breathing was unstable, with shallow inhales and exhales, as if he had exhausted all of his strength.

Aldrian then walked toward the Lust Devil until he stood right in front of him. The Lust Devil looked up at Aldrian, still smiling.

"You are truly a monster. I have to admit, you are far stronger than me. Even after unleashing that kind of technique, you seem unaffected by it." The Lust Devil believed that what Aldrian had just unleashed was a divine technique, something that had only recently resurfaced, thanks to the mysterious swordsman. Suddenly, something clicked in his mind, and the way he looked at Aldrian changed.

"Ah, I see. You're that person—the one who ruined our plan in the Ivory Empire," the Lust Devil said with an exhausted voice.

Aldrian simply ignored him, though he was genuinely surprised that the Lust Devil had defended better than expected. While his previous attack wasn't his strongest, as he had only used a portion of his domain's strength, it was still admirable that the Lust Devil remained in full shape. However, he recalled the Lust Devil's actions just before being struck. Those desperate actions were notable, prompting Aldrian to speak to him.

"You... you unleashed all of your elemental defenses—earth, fire, water, air, space—even combinations of some elements. I have to say, you're truly a genius," Aldrian said. In a short time, the Lust Devil had cast all of his strongest defensive techniques based on the elements he had comprehended and using every defense talisman he possessed.

What Aldrian wondered was how the Lust Devil had managed to comprehend all these elements and use them so practically.

He knew that there were geniuses on the continent who could comprehend multiple elements, and even some rare ones. However, from what he had witnessed in the Lust Devil's desperate actions, it seemed the Lust Devil surpassed them all. Was the Lust Devil truly the most genius cultivator of this era? Aldrian didn't want to sound arrogant, but the Lust Devil was not like him, someone with his own secret and origin that made him different from others. He doubted the Lust Devil possessed any kind of secret or origin like his own.

Aldrian continued to look into the Lust Devil's eyes with curiosity, but then he felt his soul and mind tremble as the Lust Devil unleashed his illusion technique through their eye contact. The Lust Devil grinned, knowing he had infiltrated Aldrian's mind. Many people forgot that his most proficient technique wasn't elemental—it was mental. This was his most powerful hypnotic technique, capable of affecting people's personalities without them even realizing it.

Earlier, when they had battled, the Lust Devil had repeatedly tried to affect Aldrian with his illusion, not just once. However, it had not worked on Aldrian, as he was always on high alert and his mental fortitude was exceptionally strong. The Lust Devil wondered what kind of experiences Aldrian must have had to develop such strong mental resilience. Realizing this, the Lust Devil knew the only thing he could do was make Aldrian believe he had already won and let his guard down. Even with such strong mental fortitude, there was no way Aldrian could resist this technique.

The Devil Mind's Curse

This technique, which combined illusion, hypnosis and even karma laws, could directly affect the soul and mind. The Lust Devil could even alter their memories with it. It was more or less the same as Aldrian's memory reading and erasing technique, but slightly more advanced, as it could create new memories. Inside Aldrian's mindscape, the Lust Devil grinned, finally able to infiltrate this place. Once he gained access to someone's mind, there was no stopping him—it was his playground.

"Now let's change your mind and make you go crazy. This is going to be interesting." If he could turn Aldrian into an enemy of the entire continent, it would be a valuable opportunity. The Lust Devil had finally realized that Aldrian was the mysterious swordsman. With this kind of power, if he could make Aldrian fight against the other

forces on the continent, it would benefit the devils. It could also serve as a substitute for the failed plans in some places caused by this young man.

"But what kind of place is this?"

Surrounding him was a vast expanse full of stars, and he could even see many galaxies—too many for him to count. This was the first time he had encountered a mindscape like this. Usually, when he entered someone's mindscape, he would find dark space filled with memories and knowledge. From there, he could manipulate their memories and even absorb their knowledge.

He looked at his surroundings, but all he could see, as far as the eye could reach, was the vast expanse of the cosmos. He didn't understand it, but suddenly, he sensed a danger. His spiritual body felt a pressure as if he were holding an entire mountain with his body. He gritted his teeth and tried to look upwards. That's when he saw something he hadn't noticed before—a single star shining brightly, positioned above all the others. It seemed to hover high above the cosmos, so far away that he couldn't tell if it was even part of the cosmos itself.

"You're quite brazen to come to this place. This is my domain, my world." Aldrian's voice resounded.

Above the lonely star, the Lust Devil saw a silhouette beginning to take shape—a giant figure of Aldrian. He was so immense that his form covered the entire cosmos. The Lust Devil's spirit couldn't withstand the pressure, and his spiritual body began to disintegrate. However, before he fully dissipated, his eyes, filled with fear, locked onto the regal figure of Aldrian.

"A God."

Chapter 202: The Lust Devil's Past

Splurt!

The Lust Devil's true body coughed up a mouthful of blood, his eyes losing focus. He fell to the side, feeling the severe damage to his soul. He had never imagined that, even inside Aldrian's mindscape, Aldrian would be aware of his presence, remain in control, and possess such an uncommon mindscape. Usually, when he used the Devil Mind Curse, he would infiltrate the victim's mindscape with his spiritual body, completely blocking the host's control over it. In fact, the host wouldn't even realize that he had entered their mindscape.

The process was so quick that by the time he saw the victim's eyes, he could already infiltrate their mindscape, needing only a few seconds at most to act before recalling his spiritual body. However, for Aldrian to not only notice his intrusion but also shatter his spiritual body was beyond his imagination. This instantly inflicted severe damage on

both his soul and body, as the spiritual body was an extension of the real body but created using a fragment of his soul.

This could be considered a significant drawback of the technique—if the spiritual body were somehow destroyed, it would directly harm the caster's soul and body. He trembled as he recalled the sensation within Aldrian's mindscape: a power unlike anything he had ever encountered. The overwhelming aura and presence made him feel an irresistible urge to prostrate under its pressure. It was as if he were utterly unworthy to exist in that place. No, it was presumptuous of him to have dared to intrude into Aldrian's mindscape at all.

"You've got another interesting trick. Did you really think I wouldn't know what was on your mind? I only let you proceed because I was curious about what other tricks you had. To be honest, I'm really surprised—but thanks to you, I've gained some new inspiration."

The Lust Devil heard Aldrian's voice, but he continued to writhe in pain. Yet, as he recalled the overwhelming sensation within Aldrian's mindscape, a long-forgotten emotion gripped him—fear.

"He's not human!" That was the only conclusion he could draw from his "visit" to Aldrian's mindscape. His presence, his abilities, his aura—everything about him was beyond comprehension, far out of the Lust Devil's reach.

"Let's end this, I have to return to her. Goodbye, Lust Devil—Rodwin Romano."

The Lust Devil was stunned when Aldrian called out his true name. A wave of nostalgia washed over him, as that name had been forgotten by almost everyone—he was known now only as the Lust Devil.

"Ah, when was the last time someone called me by my true name?" he wondered, his mind suddenly conjuring the faint silhouettes of people he had long forgotten.

With both his body and soul injured, he was in the worst possible situation for any cultivator. A wounded soul was especially dire, as it could destabilize the mind and even weaken the physical body. Healing such an injury was far more challenging and costly, requiring rare resources and the assistance of high-ranking physicians or alchemists to craft the necessary pills or elixirs.

Aldrian then grabbed the Lust Devil's head. As he often did before killing devils, he prepared to read the Lust Devil's memories. He wanted to uncover any secrets the devils or the Lust Devil himself might be hiding. Being one of the Seven Deadly Sins, the Lust Devil was bound to possess critical information. He examined the devil's memories, and as was typical for high-ranking devils, a Devil Lord's seal was present within his mindscape.

After destroying the seal, Aldrian was finally able to see part of the Lust Devil's memories. However, he accidentally stumbled upon the Lust Devil's past, before he had become a devil cultivator. Buried deep within the Lust Devil's mind, Aldrian saw a young man—ordinary in every way. He had a normal face, average talent, and nothing about him stood out. He was like any other young cultivator, aspiring to become great, hailing from a humble family in the Doria Empire.

One day, a flower bloomed in his heart when he met a woman. He was smitten by her grace and kindness; she was from a noble lineage. However, he knew he was not worthy of her because of his humble background, and he lacked the confidence to approach her. Then, as if by divine intervention, she noticed him while he was training in a secluded spot. From that moment on, she began watching him, intrigued by his dedication. She continued to observe him as he trained, and gradually, they got to know each other. Their relationship grew closer and closer, and eventually, they developed romantic feelings for one another.

Their relationship was free from problems at first, but their happiness was short-lived when news of it spread. How could she, a noblewoman, have a relationship with an unknown man from an unknown family? Many sneered at them, especially at her. Among the nobles, they mocked both her and her family for allowing their daughter to be with someone of such humble origins. Her family also pressured her, but she remained steadfast, always standing by his side and never letting go of him.

As the man, he felt grateful that she had chosen him, but he also hated himself for being unable to do anything due to his humble background and lack of strength. Thankfully, his parents and the rest of his family always supported him. However, one day, after returning from training in a secluded spot, he heard news that left him in shock. He rushed home, only to find that his house had been destroyed and his family slaughtered. He stood there, as he saw his family's bodies already hanged in front of their ruined home.

They claimed that his family had committed an unforgivable crime by scamming a noble family, but he knew that wasn't true. There was no way his humble family would dare to scam a noble family—especially since they had no connections to any noble houses. Was it because he had a relationship with the noblewoman? Was that the reason they took his family from him?

He cried, consumed by a rage he had never felt before. But then, he also heard the devastating news that the woman he loved was going to marry the young master of another noble family. Shattered by these two pieces of news, he ran towards her, towards her mansion. But as expected, her family drove him away. They beat him up and told him to never see her again.

He was devastated and in despair over the situation. He didn't know the woman's condition or circumstances, but he believed she was still with him in heart. He continued to wait for her in the shadows, hoping for a chance to speak with her. A few days later,

he finally saw her, but she was with the young master of the noble family who had claimed they wanted to marry her. Trembling in shock, he still clung to the hope that there was an explanation. He wanted to hear the truth from her.

One day, he met her alone and asked for the truth. However, the reality was cruel. It seemed she couldn't do anything—after all, the young master had a higher rank and status than her family, and if she refused his proposal, her family would suffer. He felt devastated, as though he were falling into an abyss. He told her about his family's fate, and she was shocked. She had no idea, and guilt consumed her, as she felt responsible for his suffering. But it was too late. She had already accepted the young master's proposal, knowing it was for her family's safety.

As he watched her figure left him alone, something snapped inside his mind. If I were stronger, could all of this have been avoided? If I had status, would things have turned out differently? If I had something to be proud of, would it have changed anything? These thoughts swirled in his mind, he had no choice but to carve his own way. In that moment, he found a single path to achieving the strength and status he desperately sought—the path to great power and success.

He went to the devil territory—the place all cultivators on the continent despised. But now, this place was the only one that gave him hope—hope for revenge against those who destroyed his family, hope to break the chains of his cursed fate. No challenge within the devil territory could stop him. And when he finally got his hands on the devil cultivation manual, it marked the beginning of his journey as a devil cultivator—the beginning of his journey as the Lust Devil.

He chose to cultivate the negative energy of lust because, to him, it was the right path—one that allowed him to fully embrace his lust: lust for power, lust for women. By succumbing to lust, he would no longer be underestimated. He would gain power, have any woman he desired, and avoid the fate of being trampled upon.

The devil cultivation was easy to comprehend, and it granted him immense power. He cultivated relentlessly, and soon, the higher-ups of the devils took notice of his talent, bringing him to the headquarters of the devil territory. There, for the first time, he met the Devil Lord—a figure feared across the continent, a being who had become a nightmare for any orthodox or unorthodox cultivators, someone beyond his reach.

He continued to demonstrate his talent to the higher-ups of the devils, and eventually, he was chosen as the successor to the Lust Devil and in the end, he became the Lust Devil himself.

Chapter 203: Their Greeting for Each Other

Aldrian also witnessed how Rodwin, the Lust Devil finally exacted revenge for his family. However, by that time, the Lust Devil seemed deeply corrupted by negative energy, and his purpose for revenge was no longer pure.

Having already been confirmed as the Lust Devil's successor, he visited the noble family that had framed his family long ago. Though his revenge had been delayed for thousands of years, he finally reached that moment. In a single night, he slaughtered the entire noble family. During his rampage, he also encountered his former lover, who now had a son with the young master of that family.

The young master couldn't do anything as he watched his family being slaughtered, just like the fate of the Rodwin family. Rodwin understood that his family was massacred because he stood in the young master's way of obtaining the woman he desired. Rodwin was seen as a pebble that had to be removed, and they ensured it was done thoroughly, affecting his entire family.

When Rodwin finally saw his old lover again, her face was filled with resignation. There was no anger, only sadness over the changes in him. She still carried the guilt of what happened to his family. However, all of that was in the past, as he ultimately killed her too by piercing her heart with a single stab. In her final moments, she seemed relieved, as if she had always known this day would come. She had expected this ending, especially since she had never revealed his location to anyone, ensuring he remained safe from the assassins sent by her husband's family.

In the end, their love story turned tragic, after he killed her, he then killed her son with the young master. Though he had completed his revenge, he still felt unsatisfied. Driven by his wrath, he turned to her family and slaughtered them as well. By the end of his rampage, his hands were stained with the blood of two families. From that moment, his identity as the Lust Devil's successor became widely known among both orthodox and unorthodox cultivators. It was not long before he took on the status of the Lust Devil himself.

Aldrian could only sigh at his past. In the end, he had become that way because of the injustice he endured in an environment that was supposed to uphold righteousness and justice. He knew he couldn't generalize orthodox cultivators as entirely good. He understood that even those among the orthodox cultivators, who often preached righteousness, could harbor their own problems and corrupt individuals.

Once again, he remembered what that monk had said: *not every being's heart can hold righteousness, and even if they have a righteous heart, not all of them can bear the weight of that righteousness*

It comes down to the individual, whether they have righteousness or not, regardless of being orthodox or unorthodox. Aldrian continued to observe the Lust Devil's memories, but a few moments later, a tingling sensation swept over him. Without hesitation, he stopped looking at the memories and withdrew his hand from the Lust Devil. In that split second, something struck the place where he and the Lust Devil were located.

BOOM!!!

It happened so fast that he didn't have time to teleport both himself and the Lust Devil. He could only teleport himself away and watch as a sudden intrusion unfolded—a booming explosion that destroyed the very spot where he had just stood. He looked at his spatial barrier, which, though not his strongest, had been created to withstand the powerful attacks of a peak Emperor-stage cultivator. Now, however, the barrier had a hole, caused by whatever had just struck the ground.

That only showed that its power had already surpassed the peak Emperor stage. When he looked at the place where it had hit, he saw a massive crater, and the Lust Devil's body was completely destroyed, with limbs scattered everywhere. The Lust Devil had been killed in an instant by the force of the attack.

Inside the crater, he saw a spear. However, it wasn't an artifact; it was actually an amalgamation of energy shaped into the form of a spear. He examined the energy composition of the spear and raised his brows in surprise. This spear was made up of a complex combination of energies, with devil energy being the most dominant. He could feel that this devil energy was the strongest he had ever encountered. Just sensing it made him feel as though he could be consumed by the overwhelming negative energy.

Aldrian's eyes then turned toward the direction where the spear had come from. He tried to look into the distance, but he couldn't see anyone. All the surviving devils who had tried to catch him had already fled in different directions, leaving him alone in the area. However, the devil energy emanating from the spear made him guess the identity of the person.

The Devil lord.

He believed that this was the Devil Lord's doing and thought that, after this war, the Devil Lord had finally seen his face, or at least his disguised one. But now, he too had finally seen the Devil Lord's face, thanks to the memories of the Lust Devil. From this spear, it felt as though the two of them were greeting each other.

Aldrian then disappeared, leaving behind the devastation of his battle with the Lust Devil.

In the headquarters of the Devil territory, the Devil Lord stood outside the massive dark castle that had long since become his palace. Just moments ago, he had thrown a spear in the direction of the Lust Devil. Yes, the Devil Lord had thrown the spear from his headquarters to the place where Aldrian and the Lust Devil were located, a distance of tens of thousands of kilometers.

When he received a report that an unknown faction had taken over Sazim Fortress, he felt confused. Which faction had the power to seize one of their border fortresses? He already knew something was going on near Ilyon Town, especially after losing many of

his underlings, and suspected that a mysterious swordsman was behind it all. The way some of his high-ranking devil seals had broken only strengthened his belief that it was truly him.

After some consideration, he decided to abandon that area and instructed the Lust Devil to go to the Wrath Devil, to support him in finishing off the main force of the Rivas Grand Duchy. This would make the future plans much easier to execute.

However, when he saw the golden light on the horizon, he knew the 'unknown' faction was battling someone. From his deduction using his Karma Laws, he realized that someone was the Lust Devil. He knew the Lust Devil's obsession with the Blizzard Witch, and from the last report, he had been near the Sazim area. After the strike that descended upon the land, creating massive destruction, he decided to pull back the Wrath Devil and all of his army to the Devil territory.

Then he sensed that the seal inside the Lust Devil's mind had broken, and finally, he could 100% confirm the identity of the person who had come to his territory. There was only one person capable of killing a member of the Seven Deadly Sins in recent years—the one who had become his obstacle in every plan over the past few years. The person who had comprehended the Death Laws, a laws even he could not comprehend.

That mysterious swordsman.

From the look of it, the Lust Devil had already lost, and he could predict that his memories had been read by this mysterious swordsman. To prevent bigger trouble in the future, he decided to kill the Lust Devil with his own hands. He created a spear from his energy, and with his physical strength, he threw it in the direction of the Lust Devil. This spear was like a homing projectile, moving toward its target due to the Karma Laws he had imbued within it, and the target was the Lust Devil.

With the power of his throw, he sent a spear strike beyond the strength of a peak Emperor stage attack. Once he sensed the Lust Devil's life signs vanish, he considered it done. However, from this, he had already lost a few of his strongest underlings. He had lost two members of the Seven Deadly Sins along with their successors. It was a great loss, and though it was a pity, that was as far as his emotions went. His purpose in this war had already been achieved. This was his greeting for what was to come!

Aldrian teleported back to Sazim, where the devils had already stopped their attack and retreated deeper into their territory. He had gathered much information from the Lust Devil, though not the most recent, as many of the Lust Devil's memories were intriguing. He had immersed himself in them, even those from the distant past.

"It's a pity that the Devil Lord killed him before I could read more of his memories," he thought.

Now, he could finally check on his mother's condition. He had already teleported her to a safe place inside one of the buildings here, so he walked there. Right now, he felt quite nervous, unlike his usual character, which was to be expected, as he was about to meet his mother face to face after such a long time. But he was determined and ready for whatever was to come.

Chapter 204: Found Out?

Aldrian entered his mother's room and saw her still sleeping peacefully on the bed. Even as he approached, she remained motionless, a testament to how drained her strength was. He could only imagine the desperation she must have felt when facing the Lust Devil. Sitting beside her bed, he gazed at her exhausted yet beautiful face and gently touched her hand. Emotion welled up within him, this was the first time he had touched his mother again after so long.

He then checked Irene's condition while channeling his golden energy into her body. True to his guess, her dantian was completely drained of energy, and even her muscles were too exhausted to support her. He surmised it was due to the Rivas family's secret technique, whose side effects had already taken a toll on her body. She would need an extended period of rest—not only because she had used the secret technique, but also because she had pushed herself beyond her limit by unleashing that huge ice-element technique despite already lacking energy.

However, his golden energy possessed healing properties, which would at least alleviate her exhaustion and mend her injuries because of the side effect. He continued channeling his energy until he noticed her expression becoming more relaxed. Smiling softly, he remained by her side, healing and guarding her like a devoted son.

At the Vicanti, Xin Haotian and the others had already arrived in Ilyon town after receiving information from multiple sources that both Ilyon and Fanalis had been liberated. The news shocked the entire guild and coalition forces—how could the towns have been freed without any plans for their recapture? However, after examining the traces left behind and hearing the testimonies of those Aldrian had saved, they finally identified the person responsible.

For now, the Mercenaries' Guild had been tasked with assisting in establishing security in Ilyon and Fanalis. The teleportation station connecting the two locations had finally been reactivated after being shut down for obvious reasons. They had previously disabled it to prevent the devils from exploiting it—it would have been disastrous if the devils had used the teleportation station to launch a surprise attack from behind.

After Xin Haotian, Sylphia, Eleine and Baek Jimin arrival, the situation in Ilyon was "much better" than when Aldrian had first arrived. The bodies of the war victims and devils had already been moved to designated areas, so the gruesome scenes that

Aldrian had witnessed were no longer present. The survivors among the town's residents, who had been prisoners saved from the devils' grasp by Aldrian, were also being treated with care.

From the survivors' accounts, they learned that Aldrian was now in Sazim—a place they never expected him to go. Had Aldrian really invaded the devil's territory alone? However, when they saw a brilliant golden light pillar in the distance, they felt reassured that Aldrian could handle it. Even so, Eleine remained somewhat worried about her young master and Irene. If Aldrian was in the devil's territory, it meant Irene was there as well. She was well aware of the challenges Sazim posed—the harsh terrain, the unforgiving environment, and the oppressive effects of the negative energy.

They continued helping the Mercenaries' Guild members clean up the town and heal the people Aldrian had saved. At that moment, a group of individuals emerged from the town's teleportation portal. When the people saw them, especially the person leading the group, they immediately bowed in respect.

"Grand Duke Rivas! Welcome. I apologize that the cleanup isn't yet complete; we still need time to reorganize the town," said Ryusei Collins, the guild master of the Mercenaries' Guild, to the man leading the group.

"No, it's alright. You can continue with your work. I only came to inspect. Do you know anything about my daughter's situation?" Grand Duke Rivas asked, his face etched with worry.

"We haven't received any information about Lady Irene yet, but we've already dispatched my men to search for any trace of her," Ryusei replied.

Grand Duke Rivas gritted his teeth, still unable to find any positive news about his daughter, but he maintained a tough expression.

"Good. Thank you for your hard work. I hope you can continue to help us. From here, the Rivas family will begin the rebuilding process of the town, and we will need a lot of manpower," he said.

"Yes," Ryusei replied.

Grand Duke Rivas then walked around, inspecting the area and even speaking to the people Aldrian had saved. He was shocked to hear that someone had the power to subdue Sazim, and that the person seemed to be the same one who had helped them defeat the devils in the Battle of Vicanti. Not only that, but this individual had also gone on to liberate Ilyon and Fanalis. He wasn't sure if these people were exaggerating, but all their testimonies were the same.

"Where the hell did this man come from? To have this much power despite being only at the Peak Earl stage... Aldrian, huh? I'll remember that name," Grand Duke Rivas thought to himself.

He continued walking when suddenly he stopped and looked in the direction of a woman he had spotted.

Eleine, who was still helping mend some of the people's injuries, suddenly felt a gaze from behind and turned to look at its source. To her shock, she saw Grand Duke Rivas staring at her with narrowed eyes. She quickly turned her face to hide her expression, never expecting Grand Duke Rivas to be here at this time. Trying to act as naturally as possible to avoid drawing his attention, she knew she couldn't run or hide, as that would only make her seem more suspicious.

"Why is Lord Rivas here?! Damn it, I'm screwed!" Eleine thought.

She sensed Grand Duke Rivas walking closer to her, but suddenly she realized that Xin Haotian was already beside her and speaking to her.

"Miss, please help at the northern camp. We're lacking people there. Let me take care of things here," he said to her.

Eleine felt confused, but when she saw the knowing look in Xin Haotian's eyes, she understood that he was trying to help her.

"Alright." She then walked further away, leaving Grand Duke Rivas to watch her retreating figure.

"Strange, why do I sense a familiar aura from that woman? Ah right, that's the aura of Eleine, Irene's retainer! But I've never seen her face before. Wait, what if it really is her? Is she in disguise?" Grand Duke Rivas thought. He had heard from Irene that Eleine might still be trapped inside the Everlasting Silent Forest, as they had been separated. He hadn't yet received any reports from Rivas City regarding the appearance of the Direct Bloodline's Retainer token, so at this point he couldn't be sure or connect the dots to confirm if the woman was truly Eleine.

He wanted to speak with her, but he noticed a man had already approached her, and she seemed to be heading in the opposite direction. He considered following her, but then the man came toward him and cupped his hands in greeting.

"It's an honor to see Grand Duke Rivas here. Can I help you with something?" Xin Haotian said.

Grand Duke Rivas looked at the man, and although he sensed that he was a Marquess stage cultivator, his instincts told him that this man was not simple. He then asked him,

"Do you know who that woman is?"

"Oh, she is my friend. She has been with me and my group for a long time. Is there something wrong, my lord?" Xin Haotian answered.

"No, I just felt she was somehow familiar, and I wanted to make sure. But since it seems she's busy, I'll speak to her another time."

"As you wish, my lord. Thank you for your understanding." Xin Haotian cupped his hands and went on with his own activities.

Now, Grand Duke Rivas turned his attention to observe Xin Haotian.

"The way he stands and the way he looks at me... he doesn't regard me as someone of higher status. His eyes don't show the nervousness that is usually visible in those who speak to me. Instead, they are serene, full of confidence. He is an experienced cultivator, and an expert at that." Grand Duke Rivas continued observing Xin Haotian until he disappeared from sight.

"Ah, right. I can always ask the Mercenaries' Guild master about it later." He said, resuming his inspection.

While Grand Duke Rivas was inspecting Ilyon Town, still worried about his daughter, Aldrian remained by his mother's side, continuing to channel his golden energy into her body. After a few moments, Aldrian noticed his mother's eyelids flutter. Seeing this, he felt it was enough and gently released her hand, preparing to stand up. However, he was surprised when he suddenly felt a grip on his wrist. His body tensed as he tried to move, but his mother's hand tightened around his wrist. He could have easily freed himself, but it seemed his mother was already half-awake, responding with her grasp.

He watched as her eyelids slowly opened, revealing her blue eyes that shimmered in the dark room, illuminated by the faint light of the night. Her gaze settled on his face, devoid of expression, yet her eyes as clear as water, held a quiet clarity.

"Aldrian?"

Chapter 205: The Mother and Son Talk 1

"Aldrian?" she said.

Aldrian tried to calm himself as his mother called out his name. Gently, he tried to shake her hand off his wrist while responding,

"Aldrian who? Did you mistake me for someone else?"

He did his best to appear confused, but his racing heartbeat betrayed him. Her gaze felt like it was piercing into his very soul.

"Listen, miss, I just happened to pass by when I heard the battle nearby. It so happened that you were fighting a devil—one of the Seven Deadly Sins, no less. I had to prioritize getting you to safety. Luckily, I have a high-level escape talisman with me, so we can get away from the Lust Devil."

Hearing his explanation, Irene frowned, but she still tried to position herself to sit up.

"Since you seem fine and out of danger, I'll take my leave," he said, walking toward the door.

"Wait. Did I say you could go?" Irene's voice was firm, leaving no room for negotiation. "Do you really think you can fool your mother, Aldrian? Or have you underestimated me this much?"

Aldrian felt a bead of sweat roll down his forehead, but he still answered her without turning his head.

"I really don't know what—"

"Your energy! Do you think I wouldn't recognize the energy my son possesses? I already know how special it is. There's no energy like his—his golden energy is one of a kind," she said, standing up. Though she still felt stiff from the lingering side effects of the secret technique.

"How could I mistake the child I raised since he was in my womb? How could I doubt my senses and instincts when I look into your face, when I look into your eyes? Even if you've altered your appearance with some kind of disguise technique, I can still see my eyes in yours. Do you truly underestimate me this much, Aldrian?" she asked again.

A heavy silence hung between them for a few moments.

"Aldrian, can you turn and look at me?" she asked, her voice now soft.

Aldrian's body trembled at the sound of his mother's gentle tone. Suddenly, his black hair began to change, revealing his natural red hair. His disguised, handsome face shifted into a more dazzling visage, bearing Aldrey's unmistakable features. Turning to face his mother, he offered a wry smile, now fully revealing his true self to her.

Irene's body trembled as she looked at Aldrian's face. Though much more mature, she could still see the little Aldrian who once followed her inside their small house in the secret realm. She remembered the child talking to her about his activities with his father, asking her to tell stories, and the times when he had nightmares that made her stay and help him fall back asleep. So many memories resurfaced at that moment.

Unconsciously, tears welled up in her eyes as she walked toward him. Aldrian's own eyes began to water as he gazed at his mother's beautiful face, seeing the deep longing in her expression.

"Mother, it's good to see you again," he said softly.

Irene stood before Aldrian, who had grown slightly taller than her. She couldn't believe how much he had changed in just five years. For cultivators, five years might be short, but for her, it felt like an eternity since she last saw him. She had missed him every day, and now, seeing him again, she marveled at how much he had developed in that time—even to the point where he was now slightly taller than her.

She immediately hugged her son, and Aldrian could hear her sniffing as he felt the wet sensation of her tears on his clothes. Aldrian smiled softly as he embraced her in return. They held each other for several minutes, saying nothing, simply savoring the moment of their reunion with a quiet hug. After a few more minutes, Irene regained her composure and gently took Aldrian's wrist, guiding him back to the bed and making him sit beside her.

She looked at her son again, this time more intently. He was more handsome, and now, at 15 years old, he had grown so much since the last time she saw him. Despite his age, his growth and strength would make anyone doubt he was only 15. Though inwardly she was shocked to see he had already reached the peak Earl stage, more than anything, she felt a deep sense of pride for him.

She touched his face, stroking it softly, her eyes filled with a thousand emotions. In that moment, she felt that her life had been worth everything, simply to have a son like Aldrian.

"Now, would you tell me why you're here? More specifically, why are you outside the secret realm?" she asked. "To be honest, I planned to visit the secret realm a few weeks ago, but suddenly the area around the spatial entrance became filled with natural phenomena that even I couldn't pass. I had to give up my plan, and then, coincidentally, the devil's invasion happened."

"Well, I'm sorry, mother, but I'm the one who created the natural formation to hide my departure from the secret realm," Aldrian thought to himself, though his face only smiled at her.

"If I have to tell you everything that happened since I left the secret realm, it might take quite some time," he said.

"I will gladly listen to every word of my son's story," she replied with smile.

Aldrian then began telling her the story of when he decided to leave the secret realm. Of course, he didn't explain the real reason for his departure; instead, he fabricated a lie that his mother would trust. He spoke of his time in the Ivory Empire and how he came to know the imperial family. He then shared his experiences in the demon territory, mentioned the Forgeheart Kingdom, and finally, he told her about how he arrived at this place.

Aldrian deliberately left out certain parts of the story, as they touched on secrets he couldn't yet share with his mother, or at least not at that moment. Irene, listening attentively to her son's stories, displayed a wide range of emotions. Sometimes she frowned, other times she showed anger or shock, and occasionally she even laughed. However, most often, her face bore an expression of immense pride. Aldrian spent hours recounting his experiences, and for both of them, time seemed irrelevant. In that moment, all that mattered was their cherished bond, mother and son.

He wasn't sure if his mother believed every part of his story, but he continued to recount the main events of his journey up until now. However, what he saw in Irene's eyes was unwavering trust and pride. There was no doubt in those eyes, even when he told her about the more absurd moments.

"You're already this strong, despite your age and cultivation level. I'm so proud of you," she said.

Seeing her unconditional trust, Aldrian's eyes reddened once again, overwhelmed with gratitude for her unwavering belief in him.

Initially, he had planned to avoid meeting his mother and father, fearing he would cause them worry. However, fate wouldn't let him remain hidden from his parents, and he had to come to his mother himself to save her. All the thoughts of "avoiding father and mother" were eventually cast aside, but he was glad he made that choice. It allowed him to save her and bring them together in this moment. Seeing his mother so happy was all that mattered to him now.

Suddenly, he felt his mother's hand gently guide his head to rest on her thigh as she stroked his face. In that moment, a wave of nostalgia washed over him, as it reminded him of when she had done the same thing when he was just a small child.

"You've been through so much all these years, pushing yourself so hard. I feel like I missed a part of your life's journey, and now I see my son has become so powerful. I've always known you were special, but to think you've accomplished all of this so soon

after leaving the secret realm... you make me prouder than I can express," she said, her hand still gently stroking his forehead.

"Aldrian, you are my pride, the pride that carries both my and your father's bloodline. I know your personality, and I understand the way you think after hearing about all your experiences. But listen to me, Aldrian, I believe in you. I believe in all of your stories, even if they sound absurd. As your mother, this is the least I can do. But I also hope for your happiness and safety. Even if you're the strongest person on this continent, you'll always be my son, the child who used to follow me around in our house in the secret realm. I can't help but worry about you, about your well-being, about your safety."

"If the heavens push you into the limelight, as if it's your fate, then I can only support you. You don't have to worry about me or your father. You can pursue what's best for you, and I'll still support and believe in you—even if we don't have the backing of our family, our empire, or even the entire continent. I've always believed that you are destined for greatness, to be the brightest star, whose light will blind all other beings."

Chapter 206: The Mother and Son Talk 2

Hearing his mother's heartfelt words, he closed his eyes and pressed the back of his hand against them. A single tear finally slipped down his cheek, though he didn't want his mother to see it. He thought that, in front of her, he always became a crybaby, unable to hold back his tears. Irene gently stroked her son's forehead with all the affection of a loving mother. Watching him cry like this reminded her of when he was a child, sobbing in her arms.

After a few moments, Aldrian wiped away his tears and looked at his mother again. This time, he seemed to understand something.

"Yes, it seems I've been overthinking. Mother will always trust and support me," he thought, initially, he was afraid that if his parents learned about what he had done and what he planned to do, they would worry, potentially limiting his actions in the future. However, he had momentarily forgotten that his parents were both renowned and powerful cultivators with strong upbringings rooted in noble families.

Although his parents had their own opinions about their families, they could not deny their noble heritage and the strong personalities it fostered. Despite his mother's worries, he knew she wouldn't be soft on him even if he had to fight the strongest devils. If he could prove himself, she would believe in his strength. He felt certain his father shared the same mindset.

Irene smiled gently as she looked at Aldrian's face, his eyes still red from shedding tears. In that moment, she wished time could stop forever, allowing her to hold onto this peaceful feeling.

"It would be so much better if Aldrey were here too," she thought wistfully.

For now, though, this moment was enough for her. She had finally reunited with the son she had missed so dearly. Letting out a soft sigh, her thoughts drifted to her parents. How would she break the news to them about Aldrian? What would she say?

As if sensing her thoughts, Aldrian spoke to her.

"Mother, please don't tell your parents about my existence just yet," Aldrian said calmly. "I will reveal who I am to them myself when the time is right. When that time comes, I'll make sure that, once everyone knows about me, you won't face any backlash or humiliation from others. In fact, by participating in this war, I've already started laying the groundwork for my plan. My future appearance as your son will only bring you honor, not disgrace."

Irene was momentarily stunned by his words but quickly pulled him into a loving embrace, cradling his head tightly against her ample chest. Aldrian struggled to breathe for a moment, caught in the affectionate yet suffocating hug.

"You've really grown up," she said warmly, finally releasing him from her hold. "You're even trying to help your mother with her concerns now."

Aldrian could only offer a wry smile, realizing she still didn't seem to care how she acted around him, even though he was no longer a child.

"Well, as she said, I'm still the child of the secret realm from back then," he thought to himself.

"So, Eleine is now in Vicanti? I've placed so much burden on her by having her follow you around. She's been with me for such a long time, and I hope you understand her situation and treat her well." Irene said.

"No, Mother, I take care of Eleine too, she's been a tremendous help on my journey. After you and Father returned to the outside world, she was the one who took care of me. When I came out of the secret realm, she guided me and taught me how the outside world works. I'm deeply grateful to you for sending her to be my guardian, and I'll never forget the effort she's put into looking after me." Aldrian replied earnestly.

"That's why I always make sure she's taken care of as well. Whenever I find something useful for her, I make sure she gets it. Thanks to that, Eleine has grown much stronger—she's even reached the High Earl stage now, Mother. She's become one of the closest people to me."

Irene nodded, satisfied with Aldrian's words. She understood Eleine's dedication all too well. That was why, when Irene had instructed her to take care of Aldrian, Eleine had obeyed without hesitation, even though her duties extended far beyond what her role typically required.

Technically, Aldrian should have had his own retainer, as he was a direct bloodline descendant of the Rivas family. However, that was obviously impossible for obvious reasons.

Eleine had always followed Irene, even when she was trapped alongside her and the others in the secret realm due to the machinations of the devils. The order to stay with Aldrian was the first time she had been separated from her master for such a long period. Since that day, Eleine had acted more like a retainer to Aldrian instead. Irene was glad to see that Aldrian also took care of Eleine, just as she had.

"From your stories, it sounds like you have your own group now—consisting of the princess of the Ivory Empire, the Sword Saint and the daughter of one of the sect masters of the three great sects of the demon territory. I really want to meet them. I want to see your friends. You know, when you were in the secret realm, you had little to no friends because of how different you were," Irene said, her curiosity piqued.

"Yes, they're with Eleine now, so we'll have to go back to Ilyon first," Aldrian replied.

"We're still in the devil territory, without a teleportation portal, we can only reach the closest town from the border, Falanis, in about a week—more or less. That is, if we don't encounter any problems, like those devils, on our journey." Irene said.

Aldrian smiled, "You don't have to worry, Mother. Those devils won't be a hindrance to us anymore. No, even if they try something funny, I'll take care of them. So you can just watch and relax." He reassured her.

Irene smiled warmly as she pinched Aldrian's nose. "Alright, alright, my son is really dependable now," she said, her tone filled with affection. However, her expression quickly shifted to one of worry.

"But are you sure? You really killed that Lust Devil? I don't want to doubt you, but that man was really cunning and troublesome. What if he escaped and comes back for revenge?"

"No, Mother, I can confidently say that he's really dead," Aldrian replied. "But unfortunately, he didn't die by my hands. It was the Devil Lord who killed him instead."

Irene's eyes widened in surprise, hearing a name she hadn't expected to be involved.

"The Devil Lord? Why would the Devil Lord kill the Lust Devil? What did you do to make the Devil Lord make that decision?"

"Well, I guess he tried to keep the confidential information that only the Seven Deadly Sins knew, it's a pity that I only managed to gain part of his memories before the Devil Lord killed him." Aldrian said as he closed his eyes.

Irene sighed as she looked at Aldrian. Her son had already attracted so many strong enemies, and many of his stories were mind-blowing to her. From killing numerous high-level cultivators to unleashing techniques that sent shockwaves across the continent, the scale of his actions was overwhelming.

To think that her son was actually the mysterious swordsman—the very one who had already gained enough strength to be considered among the great swordmasters of the continent, his power even rivaling that of the Sword Saint.

She felt like she was dreaming. Her son was already famous, even though the people of the continent didn't know his true identity. However, it was also a good thing. The stronger and more famous he became, the easier it would be for her to convince her parents about Aldrian.

"Ah, right, then you must know what kind of gift I want to give you, since you said that you already saw us in the Forgeheart Kingdom." With that, Irene took out a small box from her storage ring. Aldrian, already knowing what his mother was about to give him, sat back and simply nodded his head, waiting for her to present it.

"What an embarrassing thing," Irene said with a slight blush, her tone playful. "I wanted to give you a surprise, but since you already know, take this now. It will help you immensely."

She handed the box to Aldrian, who took it carefully. Once he opened the box, the fragrant scent of spiritual herbs instantly filled the entire room. As the aroma wafted through the air, Aldrian's senses sharpened. He gazed at the pill inside, marveling at its complexity.

Unfortunately, Aldrian knew that the pill would be useless for him, given his unique circumstances. But regardless, he would accept whatever his mother gave him with gratitude.

"Thank you, Mother. I really appreciate it," he said sincerely, closing the box and storing it in his storage ring.

Irene smiled warmly at him before standing up and looking at him with a thoughtful expression.

"This is Sazim Fortress, right? I want to take a walk and look at it before we head back. This place has really caused a headache for the Rivas family." Irene asked, her gaze sweeping over the surroundings.

She and Aldrian stepped out of the room, and as they did, they noticed that the sun was beginning to rise over the eastern horizon. They hadn't realized how quickly time had passed as they'd talked to each other, completely absorbed in their conversation.

They walked through many parts of the fortress, taking in the surroundings. Aldrian had already disposed of the devils' bodies, so the fortress was now free from their presence. However, the remains of what they had done inside the fortress couldn't be erased. The torture chamber and the prison dungeon, places that had claimed many victims, still stood as grim reminders of the horrors that had taken place there.

As they walked, Irene suddenly asked Aldrian, "Then when are you going to meet your father?"

Chapter 207: Return to Ilyon Town

Hearing his mother's question, Aldrian pondered for a moment before answering.

"I don't have a plan to meet Father yet. I haven't found the right time to meet him directly. Even now, if there hadn't been a war, I might not have been able to see you like this, Mother. Maybe, when the opportunity arises, I'll meet Father."

Irene nodded, understanding that Aldrian needed to plan thoroughly to avoid any setbacks. After they finished inspecting the entire fortress, Irene decided it was time for them to return. In truth, she simply wanted to spend more time with her son and had created an excuse to walk around the fortress. She genuinely wished to stay longer with Aldrian, but she knew she couldn't leave her family unaware of her situation. She didn't want to risk causing unforeseen trouble because of her absence.

After returning to the Rivas Grand Duchy, they wouldn't be able to openly display their bond as mother and son. Irene could only hope that a time would come soon when they could interact freely, like a normal mother and son.

"Let's go back. I need to inform my father about the situation. I can already guess he's been stressed, unable to determine my status or whereabouts," Irene said.

"Yes, Mother. I'll send you to Ilyon, where there are many people. There are even members of the Rivas family there," Aldrian said. However, Irene responded with a puzzled expression.

"Send me? What do you—" Before she could finish her question, Irene suddenly vanished, leaving Aldrian alone. He simply smiled and moments later, he summoned someone else—a figure in a pathetic condition, naked, with his manhood shattered. Who else could it be but the successor of the Lust Devil?

It seemed the man had already died while Aldrian had left him for some time. The combination of his severed manhood and relentless torture had caused his soul to collapse not long after. Despite Aldrian having administered 'first aid,' the man couldn't endure the overwhelming pain.

He had wanted to humiliate him before his death, but it seemed the man had already died. Aldrian merely shrugged. Even in death, his message would still be conveyed to the devils, their fate would be the same if they crossed paths with him. He then crucified the body and placed it atop the fortress wall facing the deeper part of the devil territory. The devils would constantly see this grim reminder—a high-ranking devil under the banner of the Seven Deadly Sins was not safe from him. If even they could fall, no devil was truly safe from him.

If he could, he would have done the same with the bodies of the other members of the Seven Deadly Sins he had killed, but their bodies were always destroyed.

After he finished, he disappeared, leaving the deserted Sazim Fortress behind. Even without his presence, he doubted the devils could breach the formation he had set up around the fortress. The formation was so powerful that even peak Emperor stage cultivators would have to avoid it. Unless they could break or decipher the formation, they could forget about reclaiming the fortress.

And even if they managed to deal with the formation, once they entered the fortress, they would find an environment no longer suitable for them, devoid of the thick negative energy that once filled it.

In Ilyon Town, the reconstruction work was still ongoing, but suddenly, one of the people there spotted the unexpected appearance of a woman atop the town wall. When he saw her, he was struck with shock, recognizing who she was. Without hesitation, he quickly informed his friend and the people of the Rivas family.

Irene that stunned by the sudden change in her surroundings, could only remain speechless at her son's ability. She didn't know how he did it. She looked around but couldn't find him, thinking that he had already gone somewhere.

They had already made a plan for how she would handle things after returning here: to hide Aldrian's location from the Rivas family for some time. Irene would tell the truth—that she had been saved by someone, and that person was him, or more specifically, him in disguise. By then, he would already be gone, somewhere with his group. This would create a mysterious impression until he could return here in the future.

Aldrian needed to gather more achievements and connections within the Doria Empire, which could serve as his help when the time came. He appeared in a part of the town where he sensed fewer presences and then walked toward his group, blending in like an ordinary person. From his position, he could see his mother surrounded by many people from the Rivas family. He smiled at the sight and then walked in a different direction.

Sylphia and the others, while still helping those in need around the town, heard a commotion and asked someone about it. They were stunned to learn that Irene Rivas had already returned, safe and sound. If his mother was already here, then didn't that mean Aldrian was here as well?

"Thank you for waiting. Now we can leave this place," Aldrian suddenly appeared beside Sylphia, Baek Ji Min, and Eleine. They were shocked, but it seemed they had already gotten used to Aldrian's ability to appear and disappear without any warning. He looked at their relieved expressions and smiled. As for Xin Haotian, he was stationed in another part of the town, acting as a guard.

Aldrian then looked at Eleine, who also seemed relieved to see him and his mother in good condition.

"Eleine, I'm sorry, but can you stay with me again? I know you want to talk to my mother, but she and I have plans for our future, and I need someone who knows this empire well. You're the perfect guide to help me navigate here," Aldrian said to Eleine through voice transmission.

Without hesitation, Eleine nodded in agreement.

"I will do my best, young master. I will follow your arrangements. It's good that you finally met Lady Irene and spoke with her. She must be relieved and happy to see you," Eleine replied.

Aldrian nodded and then looked at Sylphia.

"Is everything already taken care of?" Sylphia asked him with a smile.

"Yes, now for the rest, I only need to do something for the future, and it will be quite some time before we can return to the western region," he replied, while looking around at his surroundings. As expected, most of the people here, who were the ones he had saved from Sazim, instantly recognized him and began to kneel.

"Savior, you're back! Thank you for saving us," one of them said.

The people nearby also looked in Aldrian's direction, puzzled by who he was. Was he really the one they said had saved them? As the situation became noisier, Sylphia and the others simply followed Aldrian and teleported to Xin Haotian's location.

When Xin Haotian saw Aldrian appear, he didn't even have a chance to ask anything before Aldrian and the others had already disappeared.

Eleine, who had already met with the people of her family, was now being escorted back by the Rivas family's guards to the tent that had been set up on the flat land between the rubble of the buildings. However, just before she could approach the tent, she suddenly felt a hug around her.

She couldn't react quickly enough to the sudden embrace, but she smiled, realizing her father must have been truly worried about her condition. She simply returned the hug.

"Thank heavens. It's a relief to know you're safe," Grand Duke Rivas said, his tone filled with relief.

"I'm home, Father," she replied with a smile.

"Come, come, let's get inside. You must be tired after such an experience. I want to know what happened to you, as there has been no news since the fall of Ilyon," Grand Duke Rivas said. She also greeted some of the elders of her family before entering the tent. Inside, her father gave her a hot drink before sitting face to face with her.

"I nearly went crazy when I heard you were lost after the fall of Ilyon. Where were you? Why didn't you contact the family?" Grand Duke Rivas asked.

"Sigh... the situation was dire, Father. I had to face the Lust Devil, so I had no choice but to escape with all my might. I didn't even have time to contact the family."

Hearing Irene's answer, Grand Duke Rivas gritted his teeth, his eyes turning cold.

"I heard from Commander Faris that the Lust Devil was in the Ilyon region, and it seems that information was true. We were lacking intelligence, which allowed the Lust Devil to slip into that area and endanger you. I'm sorry, my dear. Had I known the Lust Devil was there, I would never have sent you," Grand Duke Rivas said, regret evident in his voice.

However, Irene smiled at her father. *"No, Father, thank you for sending me there. Because of that, I was able to meet Aldrian,"* she thought but answered him,

"No, Father. If I hadn't arrived at that time, Ilyon Town would have fallen even faster, and there would have been more casualties than there are now. So, your decision back then was the right one."

Grand Duke Rivas could only sigh as he looked at his daughter. She was a strong character, and he knew she would never allow those people to be slaughtered by the devils. If not for the appearance of the Lust Devil, she would have held the line in Ilyon to the best of her ability.

"So now, tell me—how did you manage to escape from that crazy bastard? It must have been a terrifying experience. I know how obsessed he is with you, and he would pursue

you even with all the escape talismans you have," Grand Duke Rivas said, his voice filled with concern.

However, he was confused when Irene smiled instead and began recounting her experience.

Chapter 208: To the Capital City

Grand Duke Rivas listened to Irene's story, and it left him shocked. He truly felt that the heavens had aided his daughter's escape. However, the repeated mention of a man named Aldrian only deepened his curiosity. Who was this man who had suddenly appeared out of nowhere and left so many people astonished? Yet, more than that, he was also irked by seeing his daughter speak about this man with a smile that could captivate any man. He had never seen her talk about another man with such an expression before.

"Don't tell me, Irene has already been captivated by that man?"

As he reached that conclusion, his heart ached. Even though that man had saved his daughter, he couldn't shake the feeling that something precious had been taken from him.

"Dammit! Who the hell is he?! How dare he captivate my daughter?" he thought, clutching his chest as if in pain before turning to Irene.

"So, where is this man? I want to meet him," he demanded.

"I don't know. He just disappeared after saving me. It's a pity I only know his name. I can only hope we meet him again in the future—he was my savior, after all," she said with a radiant smile.

"No!" Grand Duke Rivas thought, his heart sinking as he saw his daughter smiling like a lovestruck woman. He truly felt as if something had been stolen from him.

Suddenly, a guard's voice echoed from outside the tent.

"My lord, we have news that the person who saved Lady Irene was spotted in the southern part of town."

Hearing the report, Grand Duke Rivas immediately stood up and strode outside, while Irene simply smiled.

"Where is he? I want to see him!" he demanded, though his tone sounded more irked than excited about meeting his daughter's savior, leaving the guard confused.

"That... he suddenly disappeared with a group of people, my lord. We couldn't track his movements, so we'll need to wait for reports from the other sectors," the guard replied.

Grand Duke Rivas gritted his teeth, his frustration mounting as he fought the urge to chase down that man himself. He glanced at his daughter, who only smiled at him, calm and unbothered. In the end, he could only sigh and address the guard.

"Alright, keep me informed if you find his traces or location. I want to know who this person is that everyone keeps talking about."

"Yes, my lord!" the guard responded before leaving.

Once the guard was gone, the grand duke turned his attention back to his daughter.

"Dear, I need to visit Fanalis to check on things. I think it's better if you rest here or return to Rivas City to recuperate," he said.

"I will go back to Rivas City, Father. I need some rest after such an experience," she replied, her expression showing no signs of trauma or distress but instead radiating happiness.

"Damn it! I'll find you myself, bastard!" he swore silently in his heart.

As for the man Grand Duke Rivas swore to find, he had already arrived in Vicanti and was on his way back to Rivas City. From there, he intended to move on to another destination in line with his next plan.

"Since we're already here, we might as well root out the devil infiltrators and traitors while we're at it. We need to act efficiently and as quickly as possible," Aldrian sent a voice transmission to the others.

"What do you have in mind?" Xin Haotian asked.

"We need to visit the capital of the Doria Empire, or more specifically, the headquarters of the Alchemist Association," Aldrian said.

"The Alchemist Association headquarters? What do you plan to do there? It's the largest alchemist organization on the continent, with the most influence and connections. I hope you'll be careful about what you do, young master." Eleine cautioned.

"Of course I'll be careful. Don't you see? I always do everything with careful calculation," he answered. However, the others wore doubtful expressions, as he always brought chaos wherever he went. It seemed that more chaos was on the horizon for the Alchemist Association.

"Anyway, as you already know, there are traitors hiding within the Alchemist Association, and from the looks of it, they are high-ranking members. If we want to flush them out, I'll need to infiltrate it. I also need to make sure they lose all possible escape routes. After what happened to Duke Badin in the Forgeheart Kingdom, these traitors will surely know that they'll be found sooner or later and begin planning their escape with the devils' help," Aldrian added.

"What if they've already escaped?" Eleine asked.

"We'll find out soon after we arrive in Tania. If the traitors have already escaped, then there's nothing we can do. But I have a feeling they haven't escaped yet. However, this war will likely hasten their departure," Aldrian replied.

Aldrian's group then stepped into the teleportation portal to Rivas City, the transit point to the capital of the Doria Empire—Tania City!

The city of Tania, the capital of the Doria Empire, was already bustling with activity on an ordinary day, but today, it was even more lively, as if there were a festival. People flooded one of the main streets to cheer for the soldiers returning from the frontlines. The long line of soldiers and knights created a spectacular sight, and the spirits of the people were at an all-time high, with many shouting victory chants.

All of the soldiers walked toward the largest structure in the city that could be seen from afar—a massive white castle. Even those who only caught a glimpse of it could sense the aura of sovereignty emanating from this place. It was the place where the Doria imperial family resided, the imperial palace of the Doria Empire. Now, the palace was open to greet the heroes of the empire that had successfully thwarted the devils' plan to dominate the empire.

Inside the throne hall of the castle, many nobles from the empire had gathered to witness the return of the soldiers from the frontlines. At this moment, three knights with the most impressive cultivations stood in the hall. All were at the Middle Emperor stage, kneeling before the middle-aged man with the strongest cultivation present. His mere presence commanded attention and his aura was like that of a sleeping giant. He was Durand Doria, the emperor of the Doria Empire.

"The commander of the First Brigade, Antonio Luka, has returned with victory."

"The commander of the Second Brigade, Giovanni De Calin, has returned with victory."

"The commander of the Third Brigade, Carlo Farmoni, has returned with victory."

The three knights spoke one by one. They were the spearheads of the empire in times of war and the most prominent generals of the imperial family. Emperor Durand nodded

with a satisfied expression, but as the emperor, he knew the truth behind their victory. Instead of seeing it as a true victory, he believed that the devils had simply given up on their invasion on their own and retreated to their own territory.

It was fortunate that the devils had retreated, but it also sparked many questions in his mind. Why had they retreated? If they were retreating, what had caused them to do so? Was this war just a game to them, or was something brewing behind the scenes that he didn't know about? However, he couldn't reveal these doubts to the people of the empire, so the imperial family claimed that the devils had been successfully repelled back to their own territory.

All of the nobles also knew that something was wrong with the devils' invasion and retreat, but they could not understand what was in the Devil's mind. Because of this war, they also knew there were traitors within the empire, but they could not pinpoint them, as everything was still unclear. Suspicion lingered among them, as there were many channels through which the traitors could take advantage.

So, while the atmosphere was festive, it was also quite awkward. In the end, though, the devils had retreated, and the empire had successfully avoided a greater loss, so it was still a positive outcome.

"Thank you for your hard work. You will be rewarded immensely. I know you are all tired after a long battle, so rest easy. The rest of the ceremony can wait until later."

"Yes, Your Majesty!" the three commanders shouted.

"We have successfully defeated the Devil's threat. This is proof that our nation will always stand strong. Even if they come at us with all their power, we will show them that we are not weak. We will face everything they throw at us to keep our glorious empire standing tall!" The emperor's voice resounded throughout the entire city, which responded with cheers and shouts from the people.

The people's spirits burned like fire after the emperor's speech. Some said that this war had been particularly fierce, with the battle leaning toward the devils' victory. They also noted that the devils' attack on the Doria Empire was unlike any previous invasion. But in the end, they emerged as the victors, and the people remained optimistic that the future would be just as triumphant.

Aldrian and his group had just stepped out of the teleportation portal, and although he heard the emperor's voice, his interest was more focused on exploring the city. It was time to commence his plan!

Chapter 209: To the Alchemist Association

Aldrian walked through the bustling streets, surrounded by the cheering of people and an atmosphere brimming with positivity. They decided to look for a place to stay first,

and Eleine mentioned that if they wanted excellent service, the *Diamond Inn* was the best choice. It offered accommodations fit for nobles and a strategic location, though it came with a high cost. Aldrian had no objections, wealth was not a concern for him, especially since he possessed an entire vast hall filled with peak energy stones from Emperor Thonias's inheritance.

After that, they walked toward the area where many wealthy establishments were located. True to what Eleine had said, the area was conveniently close to the imperial palace and several major associations, such as the Mercenaries' Guild, the Adventurers' Guild, and his target, the Alchemist Association.

Upon arriving at the *Diamond Inn* and securing their rooms, Aldrian stood on the balcony connected to his room on the fourth floor. From there, he could see the towering structure of the Alchemist Association rising prominently in the distance.

"Like Eleine said, I have to be cautious if I want to uncover the traitors in that place, especially if the traitor is a high-ranking member of the Alchemist Association," he thought.

A few moments later, he glanced back into his room from the balcony.

"How is it? Do you already have the information I asked for?" Aldrian asked into the seemingly empty room. However, a voice responded.

"Yes, Master. From our intelligence gathering, there have been no high-ranking members of the Alchemist Association who disappeared from the time of Duke Badin's execution until today. We received confirmation from one of our trusted informants within the Association," a voice replied.

A silhouette emerged from the shadows, kneeling before him. It was none other than the First Finger.

"And from the higher-ups to their disciples or any of their close associates, no one has disappeared. However, this is as far as our information goes. We couldn't delve deeper into their activities due to a lack of manpower. My apologies, Master," the figure reported.

"Good. That means they haven't escaped yet," Aldrian thought.

As for the lack of manpower, Aldrian could understand that. They not only had to monitor the nobles with a grudge against the Rivas but also observe those who could potentially become traitors.

"Also, here is the list of nobles who harbor grudges against the Rivas, along with the potential traitors we consider the most suspicious within the empire. We've also included a list of nobles who have good or neutral relationships with the Rivas," the First

Finger said, handing Aldrian an information crystal, which he took. Aldrian was truly satisfied with the Thunderous Shadow Pavilion's work.

"Good job. Keep watching them, especially after today. If anything unusual happens with the higher-ups of the Association or any other noble family, report it to me immediately. You may go."

"Yes, Master." The First Finger then disappeared. Aldrian glanced at the Alchemist Association once more before sitting on the bed. He began to introspect, reflecting on all the chaos of war he had just experienced. The meeting with the Lust Devil had given him a new perspective on the people who suffered due to their lack of strength.

The cruel fate awaiting the weak can drive them to the same path as the Lust Devil. Aldrian knew they chose that path because it was the only option available to them. He didn't blame them for becoming what they were due to the circumstances. He didn't condemn them, but he understood that every decision shapes their karma.

To become a devil, they must be ready to face him and perish. He, too, was doing his part as a man who still held onto his morals, a righteous heart, and had strength—the bigger fist. This also aligned with his interest in facing *that thing* he believed to be the devil's God, or something akin to it, which made the devils have him as their enemy as well.

He now also knew that something like what the Lust Devil did was possible. At first, he was surprised that the Lust Devil could comprehend so many kinds of laws, but it seemed to be linked to his technique. Rodwin had been fortunate enough to comprehend this technique, and it appeared that the Lust Devil of the past could also use it. There were two techniques that allowed the Lust Devil to grasp multiple laws and gain others' comprehension or knowledge: the Devil's Mind Curse and the other technique, which was...

The Dual Cultivation technique, a technique used by cultivators during intercourse with the opposite sex. The purposes of this technique are many: it can be used for energy transfer, energy circulation, boosting cultivation, enhancing physical strength, and more. The benefits of this technique can either be directed to just one party or shared between both, depending on the specific dual cultivation technique they used.

Now, in the case of one of the Dual Cultivation techniques that he knew from the Lust Devil, after reading his memories, Aldrian discovered that the Lust Devil mostly used this technique. It was the technique that allowed him to gain the comprehension of various laws from the women he had intercourse with. Aldrian was truly surprised, this particular technique could connect two minds into one, and in this case, the Lust Devil benefitted more from the connection. The good thing about this technique was that it did not kill the woman.

He was truly enlightened by this technique; it also gave him inspiration for future use—yes, for future use. He nodded repeatedly before moving on to other matters. He checked the storage ring of the Greed Devil, which contained many artifacts. That devil had stolen so many things from noble families and stored them inside his storage ring. Aldrian didn't know if the Greed Devil still had more items hidden elsewhere, but from the information he gathered from these artifacts, some of them came from noble families.

Aldrian then took out the information crystal that the First Finger had given him and began to read its contents. After a few minutes, he was done, and as he had suspected, some of the nobles in the empire had lost artifacts stolen by the Greed Devil, and now these artifacts were in his possession. Aldrian smiled, seeing this as an opportunity to use to his advantage. It could serve as a bargaining chip in the future, should he need it.

He then looked into his own being's essence. When he appeared inside it, he gazed at the distance and saw that the star seemed closer. He thought it might have something to do with the last time he saw the figure in the symbol—a figure that felt familiar, yet unfamiliar at the same time. He sigh and pushed the thought aside, realizing it was useless to dwell on it right now.

He then comprehended this place and himself more. This place was deeper, more mysterious, and more profound than his mindscape. His mindscape had long been shaped like a vast cosmos, and he knew it was not common compared to others. He had left it that way, not knowing the reason, simply attributing it to his origin. However, he remembered what the Lust Devil had said before he crushed his spiritual body within his mindscape.

"A God, huh."

Well, he didn't blame the Lust Devil for thinking he was like a God inside the mindscape. That place was his own world, where he held absolute control. The vast cosmos, with him as the sole existence, made him seem godlike. But this was the first time he had received such a perspective from someone who had infiltrated his mindscape and called him a God. It stirred something deep within his heart.

"I have a mindscape resembling the vast cosmos, and a strange form for my being's essence. Could it be true that I was a God in my past life? What kind of God was I?"

He shook his head, pushing the thoughts aside as he continued his meditation. However, he didn't meditate for too long. The next day, he woke from his session, knowing he had to move quickly with his plans. Today, he would visit the Alchemist Association!

After Aldrian informed the others that he would be visiting the Alchemist Association, Eleine decided to accompany him, ready to help if needed. As for Sylphia and Baek Jimin, they chose to explore the city. Aldrian simply nodded at them, knowing they enjoyed discovering new places. With that, he began walking toward the Alchemist Association headquarters, which was not far from his inn.

As Aldrian and Eleine walked toward the Alchemist Association, they noticed a group of individuals wearing distinctive attire. On their chests, they bore a special badge, a circle with stars inside. As they passed by, people around them would glance their way with respect, stepping aside to give them space.

"They are alchemists from the Association, and their badges represent their level in alchemy. The more stars they have, the higher their level and achievements," Eleine explained through voice transmission to Aldrian.

Aldrian nodded in understanding, continuing to walk alongside her. Before long, they finally arrived at the grand headquarters of the Alchemist Association.

Chapter 210: His Plan in the Alchemist Association

Aldrian and Eleine now stood in front of a tall building, its air filled with the rich fragrance of spiritual herbs. Many people were entering and exiting through the grand main gate, guarded by Earl-stage cultivators, a level of strength seemingly excessive for mere door guardians. However, this was the Alchemist Association's way of showcasing their dedication to security and their power.

Aldrian and Eleine entered the building, and as they stepped inside, the strong fragrance of spiritual herbs that was already noticeable from outside instantly filled their senses. It was both refreshing and calming, creating an urge that made them want to meditate on the spot.

Aldrian glanced around, taking in their surroundings. Inside was a vast hall that was divided into various sections, each designed to cater to the needs of guests and customers. There were areas that allowed customers to commission alchemists to create pills, sections that offered ready-made pills for purchase, and many more.

However, those were not what Aldrian was looking for. His gaze shifted to one particular section, where a sign above it read, "Test Registration for Alchemists" He turned to Eleine.

"I want to become an alchemist. How do I do it?" Aldrian asked through voice transmission.

Eleine widened her eyes, looking at Aldrian with a shocked expression. He hadn't revealed his intentions for visiting the Alchemist Association, leaving her and the others to assume that he wanted to visit the headquarters to gather information or conduct

intelligence work. They had interpreted "infiltrate" to mean entering the place unofficially. After all, he had emphasized that he wanted everything to be efficient and fast.

To think that, in Aldrian's mind, being efficient and fast meant becoming an alchemist made Eleine want to facepalm. However, she looked at him and said,

"Are you sure, young master? Have you ever studied alchemy or anything related to it before?" she asked.

"Actually, I've only studied spiritual herbs during my time in the Forest of Despair, and I've read about them in the Evergreen Imperial Family's library," Aldrian replied. *"But I haven't delved deeper into practical applications."*

"Alright, at least you have some knowledge of spiritual herbs," Eleine said. *"But that's still not enough, young master. To become an official alchemist through the association, you'll need to pass several steps. First, they'll check your compatibility with the fire element, which you already have. Then, you'll be asked many questions related to alchemy to test your knowledge. Finally, you'll undergo a test to control fire—not like when crafting artifacts as a blacksmith, but to control it delicately enough to avoid destroying the ingredients while creating a pill."* She paused.

She looked at Aldrian's face, but he only had a calm and serene expression. She sighed and continued.

"Then, the last test is to create a pill. You'll need to at least create one stripe pill, which is the minimum requirement for it to be considered a success. Only after that will you be registered as an alchemist of the association."

"But usually, those who try to register here already have some experience, at least in handling a cauldron. But I don't think you've ever even touched a cauldron, have you, young master?" Eleine asked, to which Aldrian responded with a shake of his head.

"That is the problem. Without someone to guide you, it will be difficult. You at least need someone who can teach you," Eleine said. Aldrian understood what she meant. This time, he didn't have someone like Duke Valiard, who had taught him how to become a blacksmith, starting from the basics all the way to the point where he could create a divine-grade artifact. Here, he would have to do it alone, without any support or teacher.

He could do it by himself if given time, but after hearing Eleine's explanation, he realized he needed to find another way to make this infiltration more effective and faster than if he had to do it alone. If he wanted to carry out this operation efficiently, the only option was to have a connection, a helper. He would need someone of the same caliber as Duke Valiard here.

He couldn't rely on a connection from the Thunderous Shadow Pavilion right now—or rather, he wasn't sure if using that connection would alert the traitors, causing them to escape earlier. He needed to approach them as naturally as possible.

He pondered for a moment, glancing at his surroundings. His gaze then landed on the section where all items related to alchemy were sold, and an idea came to mind.

"To catch a big fish, you need extraordinary bait," he thought to himself.

Without hesitation, he began walking toward that section. Eleine, puzzled by his sudden direction, still followed him.

Upon arriving and being greeted by the receptionist, Aldrian didn't beat around the bush. He immediately purchased a basic alchemy book and a cauldron—one that was considered cheap by alchemist standards.

The receptionist didn't find his actions particularly noteworthy, assuming that Aldrian, like many others, simply wanted to study alchemy.

After that, he stood in one corner of the hall and began reading the basic alchemy book. Those who noticed Aldrian merely gave him knowing looks, assuming he was just another beginner starting to learn about alchemy. They paid him no further attention and left him to it.

However, a few moments later, they became puzzled by Aldrian's actions. They noticed how quickly he was reading the book, flipping each page every few seconds. The book was quite thick and contained a wealth of knowledge essential for beginners. It even included a few simple recipes for basic pills that could be created by any official alchemist. One needed to read this book thoroughly to fully understand and comprehend its contents, avoiding any mistakes.

A few people glanced at him, and after a few minutes, they saw Aldrian close the book. This raised questions in their minds—had he actually read it, or was he just playing around?

What they didn't know was that Aldrian had indeed read the entire book and memorized its contents the moment his eyes scanned each word and symbol. With his exceptional comprehension and the help of the Eyes of the Heaven, he could grasp and memorize the content at an astonishing speed.

Aldrian then headed to the herbs section to buy a few ingredients for pill creation. After that, they watched as he moved to another section to rent a room for his alchemy work. Naturally, this place had many such rooms, and Aldrian ordered the most expensive one to avoid waiting.

Watching Aldrian's actions, Elaine more or less knew what he intended to do. She was truly amazed by her young master's approach. It could only be done by her genius young master.

By this point, the people who had been curiously watching Aldrian also began to understand his intentions, and many thought he was either crazy or arrogant. Did this young man think alchemy was like cooking, where you just read the recipe and follow it? Truly arrogant!

However, Aldrian continued with his actions. After entering the special room designed to accommodate alchemists creating high-level pills, he inspected the room's layout. In the center was a large cauldron, surrounded by several seating pads. Aldrian could also sense that the room was protected by a few formations, designed to prevent any mishaps during the pill concoction process from spreading outside.

The outcome of the pill concoction can vary depending on the tier of the pill being created. For lower-tier pills, there are no serious consequences if the concoction fails—at most, the pill will be burned, and the ingredients will be lost. However, for higher-tier pills, there's a risk that the concoction process could go wrong, potentially causing the cauldron to explode. Without proper precautions, the alchemist could suffer serious injuries or, in the worst case, death.

Now, Aldrian wanted to try concocting one of the simple pills that beginner alchemists typically create for the first time: a supplement pill. The effect of this pill is to help cultivators replenish their stamina. It is commonly used by lower-level cultivators during their training or in situations where a quick stamina boost is needed.

Aldrian had already purchased several sets of spiritual herbs to practice with, so he wasn't worried about failure. If needed, he could simply try again. He carefully arranged the herbs and, with a wave of his hand, ignited the fire beneath the cauldron using his fire laws. The intensity of the flame depended on the cultivator's own abilities. Those with a strong flame or special flame were fortunate, as it allowed them to concoct pills more efficiently and quickly, significantly reducing their workload.

If they had an ordinary flame, they would have to work much harder. Sometimes, the heat from an ordinary flame wasn't enough, forcing them to drain more energy to intensify the flame.

For Aldrian, he didn't possess a special flame, but he had his golden energy, which could amplify the strength of any element several times over. He also created his domain here to make his work easier, and with his self-taught methods, he was now ready to concoct his very first pill!