

The Shining Star Above The Heaven

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Chapter 21 - The Devils Hunt 1

On the street, a few elves in their casual white and green clothes walked through the crowd. Their steps were a little rushed as they followed a human in front of them into a certain alley. When Eleine arrived at the mayor's mansion earlier, luckily, the mayor agreed to send his men; in fact, the mayor even came himself this time to see the evidence of the devils. Initially, he found her claims absurd—how could devils infiltrate Balin with all those checkpoints and guards? But he still remembered the words of Grand Duke Sylvaris before he departed for the capital.

"Give them the best service, they are important people and under the watch of the imperial family."

As the mayor of Balin, a city under the grand duchy of Sylvaris, he felt compelled to follow the Grand Duke's orders, especially since these people had the imperial family's attention. Without much delay, he ordered his men to follow Eleine. Due to the sensitivity of the information, the mayor decided to come himself to see the evidence of the devil cultivator. However, she mentioned that she only needed a small group of guards to accompany her in disguise to the location of the teleportation artifact, but the mayor insisted.

They finally arrived at the front of the house, and without hesitation, they rushed in. What they saw were a few corpses and two bodies of devils tied back-to-back using energy. A young man sat on a chair, looking at them. The mayor then looked at the young man.

"Are you Young Master Aldrian?" he asked.

Aldrian didn't immediately answer him. Instead, he checked his information.

Livrin Sylvaris

Age : 50.730 years

Race : Elf

Cultivation : Middle King

Cultivation technique : The world tree encompassing the world

Attack techniques : The Forest of Doom, The Wrath of The Forest Spirit, Wooden Dragon, Earth spike, Silent Arrow, Homing Arrow.

Defence technique : Earth Wall, Root of Death

Movement technique : Wind Breeze

Supporting technique : Blessing of The Forest

"Now this is the real one." Aldrian thought.

"Yes, I am. Thank you for coming, although it's surprising that the city mayor himself would come here."

Livrin was stunned.

"I haven't even introduced myself yet. How did you know?" he wondered but put it aside.

"I heard that you and Miss Eleine found evidence of the appearance of devils in the city. I will look into it myself seriously because it could cause widespread panic among the citizens if they find out." Livrin looked at the corpses and the tied bodies.

"Who are they?"

"They are the devils. We found this place, which hides the teleportation artifact inside one of the rooms. You can check it at the end of the last room from here." Aldrian explained.

Livrin then looked at his men behind him and nodded. They began checking each room, Livrin also inspected the bodies of the devils with his senses.

"They are really devil cultivators! Four Marquesses and two Earls—how did you defeat them?" Livrin asked.

"Well, we just defeated them. As for how, we fought them like any other cultivators." Aldrian answered. Livrin stared at Aldrian for a second.

"What do you mean by 'just fought them like any other cultivators'? They all have stronger cultivation than you—two realms higher! A Viscount and an Earl defeating Marquesses? Are you serious?" he thought but didn't show it on his face. Instead, he just saw Aldrian smile.

"This one succeeded, and he doesn't seem to detect my technique." Aldrian thought. He had used his mind and intent reading technique on Livrin to test it on a King stage cultivator. Now, he could confirm he could use it on King stage cultivators undetected, reaffirming that karma is something intangible and difficult to perceive.

The man who checked the inside of the house returned and started to report what he saw.

"Report, sir. It is indeed true that there is a devil's teleportation artifact in the last room. It's surrounded by an illusion formation and barrier, so we couldn't detect or see the artifact from outside."

Among the people Livrin brought was an elf qualified as a formation master, so he recognized the formation when he checked the room. Livrin, hearing this, turned solemn and walked toward the room to see it for himself.

A few minutes later, he returned with an ugly expression on his face.

"They have been operating for who knows how long, and I didn't know about it!" He felt rage and humiliation inside him. But he didn't blame any of his men—at least not yet—because he still needed to investigate further.

"Actually, when I saw their memory I got some information. They have been operating for ten years and have more than a thousand teleportation artifacts across Balin. Because they never got checked and never used their devil energy, their devil characteristics remained unknown," Aldrian said.

"They have more! Wait, you read their memories? Don't they have some kind of seals that need to be broken with a special method?"

"Well, I broke their seal."

"...." Livrin was speechless. He didn't know the full extent of this young man's abilities, but in the end, he sighed in defeat.

"No wonder the Grand Duke asked me to give him the best service and why he has the attention of the imperial family. He must have a noble background or something like that." he thought.

"I know all the locations of the teleportation artifacts and everyone connected to them. I don't know if they are devil cultivators or not, but let's expect there are traitors, just in case." Aldrian said.

"Yes but they already operated for ten years? that's quite a long time for infiltration. Damn it! *Sigh*, I'm sorry, Young Master, for my unsightly behavior. And I'm really sorry,

but can you help us in this investigation and operation to catch all those rats? I already feel like an incompetent mayor."

"No problem, Mayor. I'll help you uproot them from this city. In fact, I'm determined to complete this hunt in three days at the latest."

"Three days? How?"

"I have my ways." Aldrian smiled.

Livrin looked at Aldrian and sighed again.

"Alright, Young Master, thank you for helping us."

With Aldrian's help, they started planning how to catch the devils, dead or alive. When the elves heard that there were Duke-stage cultivators among the infiltrators, their faces turned grim, and they felt the need to plan meticulously. There were still some parts of Aldrian's plan that confused them, but seeing his confident face and Livrin's belief in the Grand Duke, they decided to go along with it. The mayor himself cannot move recklessly, as it could arouse suspicion among the devils and cause anxiety among the citizens.

When they were done, Aldrian teleported the two surviving devils to the mayor's mansion as prisoners. When they saw him use teleportation, they were shocked that he could use spatial energy and space laws. Cultivators who could use spatial energy and space laws were rare on the continent, making them highly respected experts, so their respect and admiration for Aldrian only grew.

They took the teleportation artifact and eradicated all traces from the place. Aldrian also cast an illusion formation to elude anyone entering the building, confident that whoever did would be involved in this case. They all returned to the mansion, and as the sun started to peek over the eastern horizon, Aldrian and Eleine were already in their room to rest. Especially for Aldrian, he had gained many new experiences and insights the previous night and needed to rearrange it all.

The sun was already 40 degrees up in the east, and the roads were more bustling than at night. Aldrian, however, paid no heed to all of this as he sat cross-legged on his bed. He was deeply immersed in integrating his imagination and concepts into his comprehension of energies, striving to create new techniques that would aid him in the future.

His encounter with the devils had provided him with numerous insights, and from the moment he returned to the mansion until now, he had been cultivating, sharpening his

techniques, and devising new ones. It felt as if an unending stream of creativity flowed from within him, driving him to constantly improve.

At this moment, Aldrian feels the entire city through his domain, focusing on those connected to the teleportation artifacts. He planned to identify every single one of them today to move to the next phase of his plan. First, he would precisely locate every artifact and everyone connected to them.

"Just as in their memories, there are more than a thousand teleportation artifacts across Balin. I can sense all of them—the illusions, the formations are exactly the same, but the locations they picked are places rarely passed or visited by people. No wonder they managed to slip past the guards for so long. They must have surveyed the area thoroughly before launching their infiltration," he thought. Yet, one piece still felt missing.

"Who was the first to infiltrate Balin, survey the area, and smuggle in the first artifact? Is there someone from the devil territory who can elude the Ball of Origin and pass the guards? Or is there a traitor among the elves? Or someone else who can move through the city unhindered?" He kept pondering, but with too many variables, he decided to put that aside for now and start his plan for the day.

"Let's take my ability within my domain to the next level."

Chapter 22 - The Devils Hunt 2

"First, I will try to upgrade my vision ability inside my domain." He closed his eyes and concentrated. Far above, on the ceiling of his domain, he created a kind of intangible eye. In his perception, his domain was shaped like a rectangular pillar with a height of 300 kilometers from the ground. Of course, no one knew or saw that there was a kind of domain enveloping them.

He kept concentrating until he could see the entire city as if it were a miniature model. He could see all kinds of activities in the city with his vision and not just sense them. After a few minutes of adapting to his vision ability, he frowned.

"It's still too much for me to watch the entire city at once. My brain and soul feel overwhelmed by the many views of living beings." He could see not only humans, elves, and other races but also the movements of animals like cats, dogs, and even ants!

"But I think the higher my cultivation, the better I will be able to perceive all these visions. I just have to get used to it in the future." He continued to train his vision for a few hours until he could focus on a specific target: the devils teleportation artifacts. With his combined vision and sense, he could see inside structures, rendering any obstacles to his view within his domain useless. Aldrian focused on one place first: the abandoned house in one of the outer districts close to the city wall. In one of the empty houses, there was a devil teleportation artifact protected by the same formations as the others.

"Now let's see if I can deactivate the formations from here." He then controlled the surrounding energy of the artifact to try to disable the formations. He meticulously controlled the energy to disrupt its flow and break the formations. After a few moments of silence, the barrier and illusion around the artifact were finally lifted.

"Success!" He smiled, satisfied with the result.

"Next, let's see if I can look for the karma from here." He once again focused his senses on the artifact, and soon the karma strings began to appear, branching in many directions. He felt truly grateful for his domain ability, which made his life easier.

"Now that I can break the formations and look for karma connections from here, I will take it to another level." He then located every single devil teleportation artifact in Balin more precisely. In the end, he found 1,034 teleportation artifacts across the city.

"I hope it's manageable. If I succeed, I won't have to break the formation and look for karma one by one from each artifact." He heightened his senses and domain's vision to focus on the artifacts. Many real-time views entered his line of sight and senses. Now, he saw different places inside Balin all at once, but the next step was more difficult because he had to control all the energy in different places simultaneously.

He took a breath and started to move the energy in one place, then kept increasing: 2, 9, 17, 25. He didn't stop until the last artifact. When he felt he could control all the energies, he immediately moved to break the formations. At many places inside Balin, the flow of energy moved on its own and broke many formations, revealing the mysteries hidden behind them.

Some of the artifacts were not in abandoned places but in hidden underground rooms under buildings with many visitors. Many infiltrators were still unaware that their teleportation artifacts could now be seen by passersby and their energy sensed when using the artifacts. Not waiting too long, Aldrian heightened his focus again and tried to see the karma all at once.

The branches of white karma strings started to appear from all the artifacts, creating a view of tangled threads for Aldrian. With this, he finally succeeded in solving the connections to the artifacts. He kept his eyes closed to adapt to this new sensation, feeling not only his new achievement in his ability but also a deepening comprehension of karma and energy.

A few minutes later, he opened his eyes and exhaled. "It's really refreshing. Every time I create something new, it feels so good. But come to think of it, I never give a name to any of my techniques because there are too many of them. Maybe I should name this vision technique inside my domain. Also that transparent screen that shows information, it's just not good to call it 'the screen' every time," he mused.

"Then it's decided. I will name this vision and eyes technique 'Eyes of the Heaven,' the eyes that can see anything, even the deepest secrets of the soul. Yes, that is my target for this technique."

He felt that the name was appropriate, even though it used the name "Heaven" which some people would consider blasphemous and fear that heavenly punishment would come down. There were not many things appropriate to attach the name "Heaven" to, after all.

"I hope those guys from the church 'Heavenly Direction' will not be offended by this." He just smiled. He could also see the branch of the church in the city. He didn't know the specifics of the power called the church 'Heavenly Direction' but he could see that the church had many followers, with many people from various races entering and exiting the church.

He looked at all the artifacts to ensure there was nothing wrong, but he suddenly caught an odd situation when he saw a congregation of karma branches converging in one place. He followed the strings until he arrived at a large building in the elite business district. This district was packed with people, and one of the buildings was a tall, ten-story tower, standing out due to its impressive status.

"Golden Swan Commerce," he read from the sign above the tower's giant entrance door. He didn't know who owned this place, but the karma branches converged heavily in this building, and he look in one of the rooms at the highest point. In the luxurious room, he saw 12 people, 8 men and 4 women, engaged in conversation. They were dressed in luxury clothes and seated around a round table.

"Ah yes, it would be better if I could also hear what people are saying. Yeah, let's do that. The concept is almost the same as my eyes, but it uses my ears." He connected with the energy surrounding those people, linking the vibrations from their voices to his ears.

"I....thi...ther..." Gradually, the sound from that place became audible to Aldrian. He kept listening to their conversation and as he suspected, they were discussing their plans for the future and the Devils operation from the previous night.

"We should look for them. If something happens, it will jeopardize our plan in the Ivory Empire," one of the women said.

"Yes, I agree with her, especially since he is one of Wrath Devil's disciples." Answered the other man.

"All right, tonight we will check the place where he came from first, and then we will decide our next move."

"Are they talking about that Arion guy? Tonight they will check that place?" Aldrian pondered. He looked at these people and tried to see their information while improving his Eyes of the Heaven. When all the information about the men and women appeared before his sight, Aldrian smiled.

"There you are. Is this all the Duke stage cultivators that infiltrated Balin, or are there more?" Aldrian kept listening to them until they dispersed an hour later. He confirmed that all these people were Dukes who had infiltrated Balin—a formidable number of Dukes, as it's not easy to cultivate to that stage. His fighting spirit ignited, and he was eager to try his many techniques.

"Let's move to the next phase of the devils hunt." he thought, smiling.

In his workplace, Livrin sat on his chair with his eyes closed, leaning back. Suddenly, he opened his eyes, looked around, and his eyes widened. His butler, who was standing behind him, was confused by the mayor's behavior. When he saw Livrin stand up and walk outside, he followed him. Livrin walked until he saw Aldrian in the hallway, standing and looking out the window.

"Young master, are you sure?" Livrin asked Aldrian with doubt. Aldrian then looked at him and said,

"Yes, we can start tonight."

Chapter 23 - The Devils Hunt 3

Livrin looked at the device in his hand. Known as 'The Information Recording' or 'Information Crystal' by many, the device functions to visualize images, recordings, or information stored in one's mind using their energy. In simpler terms, it can store all kinds of information.

The recording device fits comfortably in one's hand and is shaped like a hexagon with a white crystal in the middle. It is a common device that facilitates the exchange of information between cultivators and is one of the masterpieces invented by the Dwarves. However, many craftsmen from across the continent can now make this device.

Livrin frowned and occasionally massaged his forehead. Seeing the information contained in this recording gave him a headache, and he could already imagine the problems that would come his way.

An hour ago...

Livrin looked at Aldrian, baffled by his ability to send a voice transmission inside his workspace.

"How did he send the voice transmission from outside of my room? This room has formations that prevent outside transmission." he thought.

"Did you already know all the specific information, young master?" Livrin asked.

"Yes, mayor, rest assured. Every piece of information I will give you is true and confirmed. You can check it yourself later. By the way, do you have an artifact that records information from memories?"

"Oh, if you are talking about 'The Information Recording,' I have one in my storage ring right now." Livrin then handed the device to Aldrian.

"Uhhh, how do I use this?"

"You don't know how to use the Information Crystal?"

Livrin thought. "You just have to insert your energy and create your information in the crystal. It can be an image, something you saw, anything. It's a convenient device for exchanging information." he explained.

Aldrian then inserted his energy into the Information Crystal and transferred all the information he had about his discovery. After he finished and handed the crystal to Livrin, he asked, "Mr. Livrin, what is Golden Swan Commerce? What kind of place is that?"

"That is one of the biggest merchant organizations on the continent, led by the Harris family. Their headquarters is in the Atria Empire. Why?"

"The devils have a connection with that organization, or at least in this city. You will understand what I mean when you see the recording from my observation," Aldrian explained. Livrin trembled when he heard that.

"The Golden Swan Commerce is also involved in this vortex? If this is true, their reputation and image will take a huge hit!" Livrin said, looking at Aldrian.

"I will look into it first, young master. But regarding Golden Swan Commerce, we cannot act carelessly because this concerns the relationship between two countries. Furthermore, if Golden Swan Commerce is indeed connected to the devils, their reputation will be severely damaged, not just by the people, but also by other nations."

Aldrian pondered for a moment. "That's right. In the end, we will need to see if their involvement is limited to this city branch or if their headquarters are aware of this."

"If Golden Swan Commerce is really involved in this infiltration, then we might uncover bigger secrets that could cause an uproar across the entire continent. Let's adjust our plan a little. You should look at the information first."

Livrin then injected his energy into the crystal. He stayed silent for 10 minutes, his expression changing from neutral to frowning, and eventually, he gritted his teeth. He looked into Aldrian's eyes.

"This is big if it's true. 1,032,457 people, with an average cultivation level of Earls. If their purpose is to launch a surprise attack on Balin a few years later, we would suffer tremendous losses, leaving only me and a few great generals at the Grand Duke stage. It would limit the Ivory Empire's movement at the border of the Everlasting Silent Forest," Livrin said.

"Their number has slightly increased since last night due to new arrivals. It will increase again tonight if we keep delaying our action," Aldrian said.

"We might not lack manpower, but their average cultivation level is higher than ours. The situation will change if my generals and I also join the purge. But if some of them are hiding inside Golden Swan Commerce, it will put us in a difficult position until we have solid evidence of their involvement," Livrin said, worried.

"You don't have to worry about those hiding inside Golden Swan Commerce. I will take care of them. You just need to ensure the safety of innocents. When they realize they have been compromised, they might take extreme measures. If you decide to move, make it swift and clear. Their spies surrounding the mansion should be the first you take care of."

"I understand, young master. But how do you plan to deal with those hiding in Golden Swan Commerce? They are all at the Duke stage, after all."

"I have my own ways." Aldrian said with a smile.

Now,

Livrin still gave Aldrian's plan a go because, despite its ambitious nature, it seemed like a good idea to implement. Although he felt doubtful about Aldrian's methods, something compelled him to agree to the plan and give it a try, even though failure could result in innocent victims.

"Just in case, I will send one of my generals to follow him." Balin had six generals at the Grand Duke stage, each responsible for a different area. They had a few Duke stage subordinates to ensure the security and order of the entire city. This considerable force demonstrated how important Balin was to the elves.

He summoned all of his generals to his workroom to discuss the plan. The six generals guarded the north, east, west, and south sides of the city, as well as the security inside the city and the World Tree area. There were four males and two females, excluding Middle Grand Duke stage cultivators.

Livrin started to explain Aldrian's plan and how they would deal with the infiltrators. As expected, the generals felt doubtful about the plan.

"How does he plan to deal with 12 Duke stage cultivators? Why not send one of us to strike them? We can surprise them when their guard is down and take them out before they can respond," one of the male generals said.

"Yes, this plan sounds absurd. He is just at the Viscount stage. I don't know who he is but it seems like reckless planning to gain more merit" another general added.

"How about I check the Golden Swan Commerce building first to gather intelligence for future movements?" a third general suggested.

Livrin looked at his generals and spoke. "If we make our move later, it will be too late. I'm sure some of them already sensed the missing batch of infiltrators, and they will send a group of devils tonight to investigate. If they find even a hint that we know of their presence, the worst-case scenario is they will run amok in the city. Don't forget we still don't know the extent of Golden Swan Commerce's involvement."

The room fell silent for a moment. The tricky situation involving Golden Swan Commerce limited their options. If the elves took a wrong step, it would strain their relations with the Harris family and even the Atria Empire, even if they had a valid reason for their actions. In the end, they gritted their teeth and decided to follow the plan.

The generals started to disperse and gathered their subordinates to explain the night's operation. Balin's guardian force had an average cultivation level of Viscount stage. Because of their lower cultivation, the only chance for this operation's success was a surprise attack. Even with the blessing of the World Tree, it was still a challenging task to suppress the devils.

Each general gave their subordinates the information they needed to intercept their targets and eliminate them on sight. For the lower cultivation level, their orders were to kill on sight upon reaching their targets. This would undoubtedly cause panic among the people, but it couldn't be helped. As for the Duke and Grand Duke stages, they would try to capture some of them alive for interrogation.

As the sun set on the horizon, signaling the end of the day for most citizens, the city guardians prepared for their night's activities: the devils' hunt. Thousands of elves in

their thin armor made from composite materials stood in formation, presenting a show of force for those who could see it.

Their armor was specially customized to allow agile movement, even when moving from tree branch to tree branch. Most of them carried bows on their backs, a testament to their natural talent in archery. However, some had swords at their waists, usually indicating leaders or unit commanders, as elves relied more on their nature techniques and archery.

Aldrian stood in his room, looking at the sword on his bed, the same sword he had carried since the start of his journey. The sword exuded an aura strong enough to make others at the Viscount stage tremble, let alone withstand a strike from it. Already dressed in his white and black cloak, he imagined the scenario for tonight, where he would face Duke stage cultivators—a seemingly impossible task for a Viscount stage cultivator, but he was prepared to defy those odds.

Knock, knock.

"Young master, it's time." Eleine's voice came from outside the door. He smiled.

"Let's start our hunt."

Chapter 24 - The Devils Hunt 4

The sky returned to darkness after a long day, and night activities began to appear here and there, marking the start of the evening. People were going about their business as usual. For example, at this moment, a young couple was walking down the street, holding hands like any ordinary couple, smiling and joking.

They stopped at a food stall to buy food and enjoy the night when suddenly, a dagger pierced their chests, striking their hearts. They only struggled for a moment before the light of life faded from their eyes. Blood flowed onto the ground, followed by the screams of surrounding people who were shocked by the obvious murder in front of them.

But the murderer had already fled. Some people caught a glimpse of the soldier attire of the city guardians on the assailant, which raised doubts about why they killed these people. Their doubts didn't last long because, after their deaths, the corpses emitted an aura that most people on this continent knew all too well.

"The Devils."

The people who saw the corpses began to avoid the area and panic, but fortunately, the cleaning team from the city guardians arrived to control the aftermath. The corpses were quickly moved to a specific place, and the area was swiftly cleaned as if nothing had happened. However, many understood that there were Devils among them, and

they hadn't known. They also didn't realize that at that moment, similar ambushes were happening across the city.

"Area A4 clear."

"Area B6 clear."

"Area D7 clear."

"Area A8 clear."

Many reports came to Livrin's ears through the communication artifact in his hand. At this moment, he was standing in the night sky above Balin, directly supervising the operation. His eyes darted in many directions so he wouldn't miss the slightest disturbance and was ready to support if necessary. The cultivator from the duke stage could control their surrounding energy effectively enough to make themselves float and fly in the air.

There is a qualitative change in energy control when one breaks through from Marquess to Duke stage. The duke stage cultivators control their energy efficiently, allowing them to fly without wasting too much energy. Peak marquess stage cultivators can attempt to float in the air, but it's very limited, requiring intense concentration for energy control, which also drains their energy faster. That's why most of them avoid floating or flying until they reach the Duke stage, Livrin, who is at the king stage, can float naturally, as effortlessly as breathing.

Livrin floated in the middle of the city, still under the shade of the giant world tree. The light of the moon and stars couldn't penetrate the lush foliage of the world tree. After surveying all the places and noting that there were no problems, he turned his gaze to one room in his mansion.

"Let's see how you are going to face them— Hm? He already teleported? Where is he?"

Livrin looked into every nook and cranny with his king's sense. A king stage cultivator's senses could almost cover the entire city in one sweep. After a few minutes, he found Aldrian outside the city, in the middle of a vast field. Aldrian stood there with his eyes closed, his sword at his waist, his hair moving with the wind. His handsome face was serene, showing no movement. A few seconds later, he opened his eyes.

Inside a luxurious room in the Golden Swan Commerce, eight people whom Aldrian recognized from the day's reconnaissance had gathered. They sat in their designated seats, but there was one new face that Aldrian had just seen with his 'Eyes of The Heaven'

"Do you feel something odd? I can't reach the spies from my group in the surrounding mayor's mansion." one of the men said.

"Me too. I already sent a few men to check their situation, but they still haven't responded," another answered.

"Damn it! It's almost time to teleport a new batch. Without outer surveillance, this is a risky situation. What the hell are they doing?"

"Relax, we can also ask the commerce to act as our eyes. Isn't that right, Norman?"

The middle-aged man with blonde hair and a yellow mustache smiled and answered, "Of course, we can help with that."

The others gathered there showed mocking smiles.

"Heh, what a snake. Well, I'm not complaining."

"We only take what we need to support our families. There are no lingering feelings." Norman said.

"That includes betraying the orthodox cultivators?" one of them asked.

"Including that." Norman answered.

"I really like you. Maybe tonight I'll give you a reward." said a woman in scanty clothes.

"I wouldn't dare—"

Before Norman knew what had happened, the others suddenly disappeared from their seats, leaving him alone.

"What?"

On the vast field outside the city, Aldrian no longer stood alone. In front of him were twelve people, some of whom nearly fell to the ground as they suddenly lost their seats.

"How did we end up here? Where are we?"

"We're outside the city," one of them said, pointing at the city wall.

"Who is this Viscount?"

They exchanged confused glances before turning their attention to Aldrian. Although bewildered by their situation, they quickly suspected Aldrian had something to do with it.

"Hey kid, who are you? Why are we suddenly here?"

"Is this some kind of formation—"

"Wan Yang," Aldrian interrupted, naming one of them. The person he named was stunned.

"Liam Standstorm."

"Ivan Grikovich."

"Dian Stoneheart."

"Arman Ash."

"Jacques Bron."

"Louis Martin."

"Friedrich Wagner."

"Lin Mei."

"Lucy Miller."

"Lidya Balenova."

"Diya Givani."

"I'm seriously astonished by your method to infiltrate this place. Does Golden Swan Commerce have some kind of cone—" Before Aldrian could finish, three of them attacked him with enough power to cause serious injury. Fire, Earth, and Wind elements came straight at him.

"Don't kill him! We need to know how he knows our names and operation!"

But before the attacks could touch Aldrian, the Fire and Wind attacks were absorbed into a spatial crack that suddenly appeared, and the Earth attack, coming from underground, was blocked by a trench that materialized in front of Aldrian. He had created the trench as a barrier. Suddenly, a silhouette appeared behind him, wielding two small scythes. Aldrian blocked the strikes with his unsheathed sword. The silhouette kept attacking relentlessly, but Aldrian parried each move with precision and efficiency.

"They're on a different level from Marquess. No wonder Duke is categorized as one of the top experts on the continent." Aldrian could feel the weight of their attacks. Even though they held back from killing him, each strike could easily obliterate a Marquess like Arion. He opened a spatial crack to the others, who were already in position to attack him, and sent the earlier attacks back at them with higher intensity.

"He knows space laws! He can redirect our attacks using space laws! Be careful!" Liam exclaimed.

"You guys are really decisive. I haven't even introduced myself, and yet you attack me with enough power to reduce a Viscount stage like me to nothing, even though you're trying to interrogate me." Aldrian blocked another strike, this time from a flying sword aimed at his shoulder. The Devils remained silent, continuing their barrage of attacks and weapons.

"Viscount stage? Like we believe that!" Ivan thought.

"Your ability says otherwise!" Arman thought. They tried to severely injure Aldrian with one decisive strike, but once their techniques were blocked and he parried them evenly, they concluded that his cultivation level was fake.

"They're good, not blindly attacking but coordinating their efforts," Aldrian thought, dodging a dark spear that nearly grazed his cheek. He examined the spear. "Is that darkness or shadow? Shadow laws?"

While Aldrian continued to battle a few of them, the devil called Dian grew anxious.

"If we don't hurry, someone will notice the commotion here. Also what kind of barrier is that? That barrier can withstand our combined attacks! We need to use a teleport talisman to get out!" he thought, his heart racing. Unlike Aldrian's first fight with the devils, this time he had created the barrier more seriously, unaware of its true power. Duke stage cultivators have enough power to cut mountains, and their battles can reshape the landscape. The barrier Aldrian created could withstand their combined attack, suggesting he might also be a formation master.

Dian then used one of his techniques.

"Earth Prison!"

The ground surrounding Aldrian rose, forming a spherical structure to trap him inside. Lin Mei combined her wind and fire elements, shooting them inside the prison before it entirely closed on top, creating a giant purgatory oven. They paused their attacks to observe their work. Suddenly, they felt something from inside—

"DUCK!!" Arman screamed. Without hesitation, they ducked.

Swoosh!

A line cut the prison horizontally, causing it to crumble. The energy that cut through the prison passed the devils with tremendous speed. Had they not ducked, all of them would have been bisected. Aldrian stood there, his sword unsheathed, covered in wind energy and a unique aura.

"Sword intent!" the devils thought.

"Let's continue," Aldrian smiled, then dashed towards them, ready to continue his 'play'.

Chapter 25 - One Slash 1

Shocked.

That's the only thing that comes to Livrin's mind when he watches Aldrian fight the Duke stage devils. Although they fight inside the barrier and illusion formation created by Aldrian, it can't obstruct his kingly sight and sense. After all, Aldrian's formation isn't enough to block a King stage cultivator.

Initially, the plan to hold off the Duke stages depended solely on Aldrian. Livrin never took it seriously because, as a King stage cultivator, he believed he could handle all the Duke stages and just needed to be vigilant about any hidden tricks they might have.

He wanted to see what made Aldrian so bold as to suggest the crazy idea of fighting many Duke stage cultivators on his own. He was ready to intervene if the situation went wrong because he didn't want anything to happen to the person the imperial family had their eyes on. But what he saw was far beyond his imagination.

"There's no way he is at the Viscount stage, right?" Livrin began to doubt Aldrian's real cultivation level. At first, he couldn't believe Aldrian was only 12 years old, but now he suspected Aldrian had also faked his cultivation level. "The way he battles, he must have a lot of experience. If I had to guess, he's at least peak Duke stage." But he was far from the truth.

He kept his attention on Aldrian while occasionally checking on the others involved in the hunt operation. Every time the Duke stage devils unleashed their techniques to trap Aldrian, he always blocked or evaded them. Now that he fought with his sword, his fighting style was more refined and unpredictable. Every slash and stab he made was deadly and effective.

"What is he? A sword cultivator? But he can use many elements, even spatial laws. There's no way his name hasn't been heard across the entire continent—oh, those devils finally revealed their devil forms."

Livrin saw the devils finally show their devil forms to fight Aldrian, before flying to the northern part of the city to support his men. The battle became more sporadic and intense, destroying the surrounding landscape inside the barrier Aldrian had made.

Fire ignited in several places, some of it is black flames whose heat could be felt from kilometers away. The ground was marred with numerous slashes and craters, the aftermath of their clash. Residual elemental energy lingered in the air, a testament to the chaotic battle that had taken place.

Despite their numerical advantage, the 12 devils couldn't overwhelm the lone figure standing 500 meters away. Even in their devil forms, they couldn't gain the upper hand. Every time they boosted their power, their adversary seemed to grow stronger too. Their hurried breaths and haggard faces showed their struggle to defeat Aldrian. Realizing they couldn't capture him alive, they decided to kill him to eliminate any witnesses.

But to their frustration, Aldrian didn't appear tired despite facing all of them. There was no sweat or sign of desperation. In fact, a few of the devils had received fatal wounds from Aldrian's surprise teleportation attacks. To them, he was a formidable enemy who seemed to be toying with them. He stood there, sword in hand, with a serene but focused expression, his handsome face betraying no emotion.

"They are truly Duke cultivators." Aldrian thought. "Their experience, tactics, and techniques are refined and effective. I have to admit, because of those factors they've managed to escape my attacks several times, otherwise, they'd be dead by now."

Aldrian had attempted sneak attacks a few times, but the devils had sharp senses and backed each other up, thwarting his efforts. He realized his weakness: he lacked techniques to hold multiple opponents in place simultaneously and a technique with enough destructive power.

As he observed the devils, he noticed they were forming a new strategy. Six of them were creating a giant formation at the back, with two guarding them and the rest attacking Aldrian.

"That looks like a summoning formation," he noted, confused. "What are they trying to summon? With a summoning of that scale, they'll attract attention even though I've sealed this place with a barrier and illusion. Oh they are trying to drop their plan prematurely?" Aldrian read their thought.

In fact, that was exactly what the devils intended. They decided to summon their trump card, a move they had planned to execute years later when their scheme would have a tremendous effect on the elves.

The devils had already decided that their plan was compromised and that the elves had uncovered their scheme in the city. As a result, they decided to initiate their plan prematurely. They divided tasks: some were to inform their kin in the city, while others were to summon their trump card. However, as six of them began the summoning and the others tried to contact their men in the city, what they heard are—

"We are under attack! Argh!—"

"We've been compromised! Arrgh."

"The elves know our position! Ughh."

"We can't contact some of them!"

Their fears that their infiltration had been leaked were confirmed. The sounds of despair and their inability to contact the other devils in the city indicated that the elves had launched an operation to hunt them down tonight. Now, whether they liked it or not, they had to survive the night and cause as much destruction as possible in this part of the city.

"Hold him for a moment. Do whatever you can to prevent him from disrupting our summoning," Arman ordered. He, Dian, Lucy, Diya, Wan Yang, and Louis positioned themselves in a pentagram formation, creating a symbol in the middle to channel their energy. As their energy flowed into the formation, a dim red light began to appear.

Aldrian's face looked focused as he deflected and attacked the others who tried to distract him from the summoning formation, well not really focused because he wasn't entirely focused on the battle. He was also comprehending and creating a new technique, yes While fighting, he multitasked, a feat impossible for others. It was as if he had an innate talent for multitasking, achieving the same results as when he comprehended in silence. For him, it was easy to split his focus and tackle multiple tasks.

He dodged, slashed, blocked, stabbed, and unleashed his techniques, trying to kill at least one of his opponents. The ones who had received fatal wounds earlier had closed their wounds with healing pills and now stood behind the summoning formation, which was unfortunate. But Aldrian didn't despair and kept fighting. He tried to attack the summoners and disrupt the formation several times, but the guards always blocked him.

Aldrian was close to successfully creating his new technique when the summoning formation emitted a bright red light and shot a red pillar of light into the sky. Gradually, a large silhouette appeared within the pillar. Three giant heads with red eyes, a massive body, and a tail emerged into the world. The creature's entire body was nearly a kilometer long, and its aura made the space around it tremble.

The barrier itself rattled with its presence and seemed on the verge of collapsing. The illusion formation that Aldrian had created couldn't withstand the pressure and wavered, allowing people outside the barrier to see what was happening inside.

At this moment, Livrin was supporting one of the positions opposite to Aldrian. The elves were starting to feel overwhelmed due to their lower cultivation levels, and the surprise attack no longer seemed effective as the devils sensed something was wrong and had prepared for an ambush. Livrin decided to make his move.

Suddenly, he felt an intense aura emanating from Aldrian's direction and saw a massive shadow with three long necks and heads from his position.

"That's...! That's a Hydra!"

Without hesitation, he flew toward Aldrian at his fastest speed. At this moment, people could see the huge monster outside the city wall, its tremendous pressure and aura spreading over a five-kilometer radius. Many people close to the wall watched in terror as the giant three-headed Hydra made its appearance and let out a loud roar.

ROAR!!

The entire city of Balin heard the roar of the Hydra and felt its overwhelming aura. People near the wall began to panic and run. Meanwhile, all the devils in the city who heard the roar realized their existence had been discovered by the locals. They were about to start a mindless massacre, but before they could act, their bodies mysteriously disappeared from their locations. Each remaining devil, untouched by the hunting team, vanished without a trace.

Aldrian watched as the massive body of the Hydra emerged entirely from the red pillar. Each of its steps made the ground tremble, and each breath exuded heat that could kill a beginner cultivator. The aura and pressure the Hydra emitted could crush anything below the Baron stage.

"Middle King stage Hydra," Aldrian mumbled. How did he know what kind of monster this was? Because in one of the visions he had experienced, he had seen the same monster. That was also confirmed by the information he saw in front of him.

Three Heads Hydra

Age : 60,067 years

Race : Spiritual Beast (Hydra)

Cultivation : Middle King

Techniques : Fast Regeneration, Hell Flame Burst, The Hydra's Roar

"How did they summon a Mid King stage Hydra? Their entire energy wouldn't be enough to summon a Hydra of that caliber, or is it because of that red rock they placed around the formation?" he wondered. He put some distance between himself and the devils, closed his eyes, and sheathed his sword. Focusing on his comprehension, he felt a sense of serenity and fell into a state of deep concentration.

Before he entered this state, Aldrian teleported all the devils in the city who had not yet been reached by the hunters to a location behind the Hydra. Now, hundreds of thousands of devils were gathered in this vast field. The devils, still disoriented from the sudden teleportation, were stunned by their surroundings.

The Duke stage devils were also shocked by the sudden large gathering and looked at Aldrian, who had closed his eyes.

"I don't know how you did it, but gathering all of us here won't change anything! I don't believe you can defeat this Mid King stage Hydra! Even though our mission failed, we will make sure to kill you!" Arman screamed. He had depleted his energy to summon the Hydra and had no energy left to battle, relying on his fellow devils instead.

The Duke devils started retreating from the Hydra, afraid they would be caught in its attack. The Hydra's eyes locked onto the lone figure of Aldrian, and it began to unleash its attack. It gathered black fire in its mouths, preparing to release it upon the seemingly defenseless Aldrian.