

The Shining Star Above The Heaven

#Chapter 211: Concocting His First Pill - Read The Shining Star Above The Heaven Chapter 211: Concocting His First Pill

Chapter 211: Concocting His First Pill

After waiting for a while, Aldrian thought to himself.

"Let's see if my Eyes of Heaven can work here like it did in blacksmithing."

With that thought, a screen suddenly appeared before his eyes, displaying numbers, steps, and instructions to achieve the most perfect result.

"Good," he smiled. He was not surprised that his Eyes of Heaven could do this much, as it wasn't all that different from creating an artifact.

The screen displayed complete information: the precise temperature of the cauldron, the sequence in which the herbs needed to be added, and the methods he needed to use.

After the cauldron's heat reached the temperature indicated on the screen, he immediately picked up one of the herbs and placed it inside.

Elaine, watching from the side, quickly realized from Aldrian's movements that he had never handled a cauldron or anything related to alchemy before. His actions seemed rigid, unlike the fluid motions of the alchemists she had observed at the Association long ago.

She wondered what kind of result Aldrian would achieve. She wasn't worried about him failing; at worst, he would end up with a burned pill.

He then added another spiritual herb into the cauldron. Each time he introduced a new ingredient, the temperature displayed on the screen changed accordingly. He extracted the essence of each herb in its liquefied form with the help of the cauldron's heat.

At this moment, he finally realized that making a pill was far more delicate than crafting an artifact. Unlike the materials used for artifact creation, spiritual herbs were much more fragile and prone to burning. He had to adjust the fire's temperature several times to accommodate the new mix of ingredients.

However, because he was already accustomed to playing with fire and could control it seamlessly, he still found the process manageable. He also had to ensure that each herb blended perfectly under his control.

It was only after doing the steps himself that he noticed the difference between the instructions from the alchemy books and those from the screen. To him, the guidance from his Eyes of Heaven was much easier to follow, as it provided precise details and directly directed him on how to proceed.

Elaine, who watched every step of Aldrian's concoction process, was amazed. Perhaps it was because her young master was already an expert at controlling fire and had an understanding of spiritual herbs, he seemed to instinctively know how to proceed and handle each herb with precision.

She could feel and begin to smell the fragrance of the mixed ingredients. There was no hint of anything burning—just an aroma that seemed to affect the very spirit, invigorating and boosting one's vigor.

Aldrian then added the final ingredient to the cauldron and finally came the most crucial part of the concoction process: hardening the mixture of ingredients into a pill.

He increased the heat and controlled the mixture with his energy, carefully trying to condense it. This was the moment of truth for any alchemist—would they succeed or fail?

Aldrian's entire focus was on the mixture of ingredients, and he could feel the pill starting to take shape. A few more seconds, and he would succeed!

Elaine was left speechless. From her experience watching alchemists at work, she was certain Aldrian would succeed—and even achieve a satisfying result. The fragrance grew stronger with each passing second, and at that moment, she knew her young master had already succeeded.

After a few seconds, Aldrian finally dissipated the fire under the cauldron and opened the cauldron's lid to inspect the result. As the lid opened, the strong fragrance of herbs hit their faces, revealing three white, milk-like pills. However, to Elaine's shock and confusion, the pills had six stripes. Each of the three pills had six golden-colored stripes. She couldn't understand—wasn't five stripes considered the most perfect?

"As expected, there's no one but the young master who could accomplish this," she thought.

For it to be his first time concocting a pill, and for him to succeed instantly while creating something she didn't recognize, she believed this was the first time anyone had ever done such a thing.

Aldrian couldn't understand the meaning of the six stripes, but from the looks of it, he had succeeded. He picked up the pills and examined them. As soon as he touched them, he could feel his spirit being affected—it was as if he wanted to run outside and deplete all his strength. These pills were also different from the usual supplement pills found in the market or described in books. They were white and milk-colored, rather than the typical brownish. He could make a guess as to why his pills were different.

In each concoction process, there is a certain level of impurity that affects the pill's effectiveness and overall quality. During the process, the impurities of each spiritual herb are extracted, leaving only the pure composition.

However, it is not as easy as flipping a hand, because the impurities within the herbs are intertwined. Extracting them without damaging the herbs themselves is a challenging task. It requires precise control and focus. If the alchemist makes even a small mistake in their judgment or control, the herbs could be damaged, and even worse, the spiritual herbs could become unusable.

The purer the mixture of ingredients, the "cleaner" the color of the pills that the alchemist concocts. He didn't understand the meaning of the six stripes, but on the Barisan continent, only five tiers of pills have been known since ancient times. These are marked by stripes on the surface of the pills, indicating their quality and effectiveness. The tiers are as follows: one stripe for Crude, two for Normal, three for Half Excellent, four for Excellent, and five for Unblemished.

The appearance of the six stripes was beyond his expectation. He would need to ask someone who understood this matter. Nevertheless, he was satisfied with the result and turned to Eleine.

"Eleine, eat this." Aldrian handed her one of the pills.

Eleine was stunned as she received the pill. She looked at it again and could feel the cool sensation in her hands. It was refreshing, and without hesitation, she swallowed it. If it were anyone else, she would have refused to become a pill tester, as there was much at stake. But because it was Aldrian, and the pills seemed perfect, she trusted him.

After she swallowed the pill, she suddenly felt a surge of power in her muscles. She felt rejuvenated, and even her soul felt refreshed. A cool sensation spread through her entire body, lifting her spirits. She felt as though she could run around the city several times without feeling tired. She was in shock, at her cultivation level she shouldn't be able to experience such effects from a supplement pill, which is typically consumed by cultivators below the Baron stage.

"How is it?" she heard Aldrian ask.

Eleine looked at her young master with amazement.

"It's amazing, young master. It's the best feeling I've ever had from a supplement pill. It's been so long since I last consumed one, and I can guarantee that there is no supplement pill with an effect like the one you concocted here."

Aldrian nodded in satisfaction. However...

BAM!

Suddenly, the door to their room burst open with a loud bang as an old alchemist with a white beard strode in, hurriedly stepping forward. His gaze was fixed on the pills in Aldrian's hand, completely ignoring his surroundings. When he stood in front of them and examined the pills, his eyes trembled, and he spoke with a trembling voice.

"How can this be? How can such pills exist?" The old alchemist then looked at Aldrian.

"You... you concocted this?"

Aldrian, however, regarded the old man with interest. On his chest was a badge with 10 stars, the highest level an alchemist on this continent could attain. Aldrian checked his information, and true to the badge, the man was someone already famous within the Association—his name was known even across the continent.

"Marco Vilares."

He really did not expect that the one who took the bait would be him—the one often considered one of the top three alchemists on the continent. He, along with the other two alchemists, always competed with each other to become the best, so there was never a clear winner. Some said Marco was the best, while others claimed it was one of the others.

To be honest, everything was beyond his control and plan. He hadn't expected to concoct a six-stripes pill, let alone attract someone like Marco. Initially, he had intended to practice here for a while, then take his cheap cauldron outside to create pills of at least the excellent tier, drawing attention to himself. As for an unblemished-tier pill, he hadn't hoped for much. From the book he had studied, he knew how difficult it was for an alchemist to create a unblemished pill.

Basically, it was almost impossible, as each ingredient mixture would contain impurities, even if only a small part of it. To purify it, one would have to sacrifice some portion of the ingredients, which would damage the herbs and reduce the effectiveness of the pill. The last time a pill of unblemished tier was created was millions of years ago, when someone with cultivation above the Emperor stage concocted it.

With his ability, he was confident that he would attract the higher-ups of the Association, as he had managed to create a high-tier pill using only a cheap cauldron in his beginner

phase as an alchemist. To think that he had created something beyond unblemished and attracted such a big shot—he was truly lucky!

Chapter 212: The Grandmasters of the Alchemist Association

"Yes, senior, I'm the one who concocted it," Aldrian said.

"How did you do it? This kind of pill is unheard of—the purity, the smell, the energy it exudes—there's nothing like other pills," Marco said as he took the pill, gazing at it as though inspecting a treasure. He then looked at Aldrian.

"May I consume it?"

Before Aldrian could answer, someone had already entered the room.

"Damn it, Marco got here before us."

"That old man is really fast."

Two people entered through the door—a man and a woman of the same age as Marco. They walked inside and immediately glanced at the pills in Marco's and Aldrian's hands. They wore the same robes and badges, each adorned with 10 stars, signifying that they held the same status as Marco.

"Aberin Louise and Maria Valentina."

Aldrian glanced at their information before answering Marco.

"Of course, senior. You can consume it. It's only a supplement pill—I can make more if you need," Aldrian replied.

Hearing his answer, the three alchemists widened their eyes in disbelief.

"This is a supplement pill? Not some kind of complex pill meant for Emperor-stage cultivators?" Marco asked.

The other alchemists also examined the pill, now noticing its six distinct stripes. Their reactions mirrored Marco's when he first saw it. They wanted to ask Aldrian more questions, but Aldrian turned to Marco and said to him.

"Of course not, senior. You can see the ingredients over there—these are just ordinary supplement pills," Aldrian said, gesturing toward the cauldron with his thumb.

The three elderly alchemists turned to look at the cauldron, and, true to Aldrian's words, the ingredients beside it were indeed for supplement pills. Marco was utterly

speechless. To think he had assumed this was some kind of revolutionary pill, only to find out it was just a supplement pill.

However, they were confused. The ingredients were the same as those used to create regular supplement pills, so how could the final product be so vastly different?

Without hesitation, Marco swallowed the pill in his hand. Instantly, he felt his body rejuvenate. His muscles grew a little stronger, his spirit was revitalized, and his stamina surged by 100%, making him feel as though he had returned to his younger days.

"This is incredible! How can a supplement pill have this kind of effect, even at the Emperor stage of cultivation?!" Marco thought.

"How is it?" the other elderly man, Aberin Louise, asked Marco.

Marco snapped out of the effects of the pill and looked at Aberin.

"It's amazing! I can feel my stamina increase by 120%! It's 120%, you know! And the effect doesn't stop at stamina—it's also strengthened my muscles! This is something worth celebrating! I've never tasted anything like it!" Marco said, his expression filled with amazement.

The other two were in shock at Marco's testimony. If a supplement pill could affect even an Emperor-stage cultivator with the same ingredients, it would become a sensation and surely make waves across the continent!

There was only one more pill left in Aldrian's hand, and he knew that the other two senior alchemists also wanted to try it. Aldrian, of course, gladly offered it to them.

"Seniors can have this pill. I can concoct another batch, and you can watch how I make it," Aldrian said, handing the last supplement pill to the other two.

Aberin took it without hesitation and swallowed it instantly. His expression shifted to one of shock as he felt the effect of the pill.

At that moment, a commotion broke out outside the room due to the appearance of the three alchemists. People were eager to see what was going on and why the three most prominent alchemists of the association had come to this room.

Noticing the growing bustle, Marco glanced at the door, where he could see many people trying to peek inside. The door then shut on its own.

"Finally, it's serene again. What is your name, young man?" Marco asked.

"My name is Aldrian Aster, senior."

"Do you know me, young man?" Marco asked again.

"Of course I do, Senior Marco Vilares. I've heard your great name in the alchemy world, along with these two seniors, Aberin Louise and Maria Valentina," Aldrian said, bowing his head toward them.

"Oho, you certainly have composure, even in my presence. Not bad, young man. Now, you said you want to concoct another batch of these pills. Are you sure you'll let us watch?" Marco asked.

He asked this because, usually, an alchemist would hide their concoction methods and the ingredients of their pills to prevent others from duplicating their process—unless they wanted their method to be widely known.

"Of course, senior. There is nothing special about my concoction method anyway, and anyone can do it too," Aldrian said as he walked toward the cauldron and sat down in front of it.

The three alchemists watched Aldrian intently, not wanting to miss anything. Shortly after, Aldrian began the concoction process. The three alchemists quickly realized from Aldrian's movements that he was in the beginner stage of becoming an alchemist. They were confused by this, as they had thought Aldrian was an expert in alchemy with years of experience. However, his rigid and unnatural movements suggested otherwise.

They set aside their thoughts and continued to observe the concoction. After a few steps, they finally noticed something different compared to the usual method of creating supplement pills. Although they recognized the new method as genius, it still didn't make sense how such an extraordinary pill could be created with these methods—something that had never happened before. They still believed that it wasn't enough to produce something like six stripes pill.

Another thing is that Aldrian's control of fire could be said to be flawless. He seemed to know exactly how much temperature was needed at each step, like an experienced alchemist. They were truly confused—on one hand, Aldrian's movements were awkward and unnatural, like that of an amateur. On the other hand, he handled the herbs and mixed them with the precision of an expert.

They didn't know how to assess Aldrian—was he a beginner or not? As they were thinking this, Aldrian had already reached the condensing pill phase. After a few seconds, Aldrian finally finished and opened the lid of the cauldron. The three alchemists rushed over to inspect it, and they saw three exact replicas of the pill they had consumed earlier. They were truly astounded. What Aldrian had said was true—there was nothing special about his concoction method. While there were some differences from the usual method, they still couldn't explain how Aldrian had managed to create a six stripes pills.

Seeing their confused expressions, Aldrian simply smiled. The method could be followed, and the ingredients were the same, but there was something others didn't have—that was his golden energy. In every step of the concoction process, he added his golden energy to the mixture of herbs. This was also what his Eyes of the Heaven had shown him.

The three alchemists continued to search for the special method in Aldrian's concoction process that could raise the pills' tier. They brainstormed but still couldn't figure it out. In the end, they decided to look Aldrian.

"Young man, we really don't understand how you did it. How did you completely erase the impurities from the ingredients and the mixture without damaging the herbs themselves? We've watched your concoction process, but it seems the impurities dissolve on their own once you control it," Marco said.

"I myself really don't know, senior. This is also my first time concocting pills. I just followed the basic rules of the process and tried to purify the ingredients as best as I could, and this is the result," Aldrian answered.

"Wait, you said this is the first time you've concocted pills?" Maria asked, her eyes wide. The others were also in shock at what they had just heard.

"Yes, well, I did just do it for the second time in front of you," Aldrian said.

The three alchemists' bodies trembled as they looked at Aldrian like he was a monster.

"You... you must be lying," Marco said, his voice trembling.

"Why would I be lying? You've already seen for yourself how I concoct pills, and you must have noticed something. Also, I came to the Alchemist Association to take the test to become an alchemist today. I'm here in this room to practice before I attempt the test. You can ask the receptionist in the sales section for alchemist supplies. I just bought the cauldron and the beginner's book on alchemy," Aldrian answered, tilting his head.

Without further ado, Marco dashed outside. The crowd waiting outside the room was stunned by his actions. They watched as he rushed toward the section where the association sold supplies. After a few moments, he returned with a blank expression. The onlookers had never been so confused by the Grandmaster of the Alchemist Association. What had happened inside? Many of them pulled their hair in frustration, unable to contain their curiosity about what had made Marco and the other Grandmaster alchemists gather in this room.

Chapter 213: 10 Stars Badge Alchemist

After closing the door, Marco looked at Aldrian with a blank expression. He had just asked the receptionist who attended to Aldrian, and true to Aldrian's words, he had

indeed only purchased a cheap cauldron and a beginner's book on alchemy. Marco had also contacted the registration department through a communication artifact, and they confirmed that there was no one named Aldrian Aster in their records.

Did Aldrian come from another alchemist association? If they had someone like Aldrian, they would surely boast about it to the entire continent and make the Alchemist Association eat their dust. Aldrian's mere appearance had already shifted the balance of power among the alchemist groups on the continent. But even if Aldrian truly belonged to another association, what purpose could he have in joining the Alchemist Association? To steal recipes? No, with Aldrian's capabilities, there would be no need to steal anything.

He couldn't make sense of the situation. Did Aldrian really achieve all of that on his first attempt at concocting pills? It was utterly ridiculous. If Aldrian had already succeeded and even created something unprecedented, wouldn't that make him the most genius alchemist to ever appear? As he arrived at this conclusion, he began to look at Aldrian differently.

The other two alchemists reached the same conclusion. When they saw Marco return to the room with a blank expression, they knew that what Aldrian had said was true. He truly was new to alchemy and simply wanted to begin his journey in the field. He said he wanted to become an alchemist? Then they would grant him that status! A test? Fuck that—he had already created something unprecedented, what more could a test prove? However, they still wanted to watch Aldrian concoct pills. They were eager to see if his miraculous abilities would work with other recipes as well.

"Aldrian, I want you to create a different pill. Can you do that? Don't worry about the ingredients; I'll take care of them," Marco said, anticipation shining in his eyes.

"Of course, senior. Just show me the ingredients and the steps to create it, and I'll do my best to concoct it," Aldrian replied confidently.

After that, Marco selected a recipe for an energy replenishment pill designed to restore the energy of Viscount-stage cultivators. This pill was more complex than the supplement pills, requiring precise control to ensure the replenishment dose met the necessary requirements and contained no defects. It was one of the essential pills often carried by cultivators to restore their energy during battles.

Aldrian read through the steps quickly and carefully, leaving the three grandmasters wondering if he had truly absorbed the instructions. Afterward, Marco handed him the ingredients, and Aldrian began the concocting process. The three elders watched intently, their entire focus on the concocting process. Once again, they wore astonished expressions as they observed Aldrian's method of concoction. There were subtle differences in Aldrian's methods that made them realize they could incorporate similar adjustments to improve the quality of their own pills.

It felt as though they had returned to the learning phase of their younger days. At their age and level of experience, there were little to none new things that could astonish them. Yet today had brought them one surprise after another.

After a few moments, Aldrian finally finished. When they examined the final product, they were truly shocked—it had yielded four energy replenishment pills. Normally, the same amount of ingredients would produce only three pills. To their further amazement, all of the pills bore six stripes on their surfaces.

The appearance of four pills instead of the usual three, all of the highest quality, demonstrated just how effective Aldrian's concocting process was. There was no waste of herbs, no impurities, and no unnecessary or excessive steps in each phase. Everything was perfect, without a single flaw! Furthermore, Aldrian's process was much faster than that of a normal alchemist, making it all the more impressive.

The three grandmasters then consumed the pills to test their effects, and to their shock, the pills replenished about 5% of the energy in their dantian. Although their dantian wasn't severely depleted, they were able to gauge the effectiveness of the pills simply by the feeling they had after swallowing them.

5% may not seem like much, but it's important to note that the recipe for these energy replenishment pills is designed for cultivators up to the Viscount stage. Normally, if consumed by an Emperor stage cultivator, the pills would have no effect whatsoever. To increase energy by 5% in emperor stage is a miracle in itself and has never happened before.

Their obsession suddenly awakened, and they looked at Aldrian like hungry beasts. Their gaze made him shudder, as he knew what they were about to do. The moments that followed were what Aldrian would later call the "marathon concoction." Blinded by their obsession, they asked him to create several more pills with different recipes. It seemed they had forgotten that Aldrian was still a beginner and had only intended to take a test to become an alchemist. The success of each end product, always of the highest quality, had made them forget that Aldrian was still in his learning and beginner phase.

Each pill was more complex than the last, and before they knew it, Aldrian had already been asked to create a pill recipe for King stage cultivators! Despite the increasing difficulty, the end product remained the same as before, with the six-stripe pills. There was no denying it—this young man was the greatest of all time!

For Aldrian, this was also a learning experience. With each repeated concoction, he began to grasp the art of the concoction. His movements became less rigid, and he learned about new herbs he had never encountered before. The three grandmasters also helped him by explaining things he didn't fully understand. It could be said that this time, he gained a tremendous amount of benefit.

After Aldrian had successfully concocted pills suitable for King stage cultivators, the three grandmasters finally came out from their obsessive state. They looked at Aldrian as if he were one of their own. More accurately, Aldrian had become one of their colleague, and they were learning from each other. Aldrian didn't feel bad about it at all; after all, the grandmasters treated him very well.

Marco looked at Eleine, who had been silent by the side all this time.

"Young miss, what is your relationship with Aldrian?" he asked.

"I'm just his elder sister, senior," Eleine replied.

"Sigh... Your younger brother is truly a great alchemist. I really wonder how I never met Aldrian earlier. He is really a hidden gem, no, he is a singularity. There has been no one like him in the history of the continent," he said. If he had read all the records of alchemy's history on the continent, he would find that no one had ever achieved what Aldrian just did.

Eleine smiled upon hearing Marco's compliment. The praise from one of the grandmaster alchemists on the continent would bring tremendous benefit to Aldrian. Given the situation, she could consider Aldrian's operation a success—they had successfully infiltrated the Alchemist Association through the three grandmasters.

"You said you came to take the test to become an alchemist of our association, right? Come with me. We can discuss your official badge while we eat something. Forget about those tests—I'll give you the badge, even a 10-star badge," Marco said to Aldrian with a smile.

"When someone rises in rank to become a 10-star alchemist, we conduct the test directly and serve as the assessors. But as we can see, you're more than worthy to wear a 10-star badge." He added.

Hearing Marco, Aldrian raised an eyebrow, while Eleine was shocked. To grant Aldrian a 10-star badge, the highest rank of alchemist on the continent, when he had just started practicing alchemy not long ago—it was unbelievable. He hadn't even experienced being a one-star alchemist, and now her young master was jumping straight to 10 stars! There no more than 30 people with a 10-star badge across the entire continent. While the number might seem many, when compared to the continent's population of hundreds of billions, it was like searching for a needle in a haystack.

Aberin and Maria also nodded in agreement.

"Yes, there's no way we would give you a badge from the bottom rank with your capabilities. That would be a humiliation to you and your capabilities. You're already worthy of wearing that badge. Heck, if there were more stars than 10, I'd say you deserve them," Aberin said.

"Agreed, you are the greatest alchemist to ever appear, and we've learned so much from you. Consider the 10-star badge a gift from us," Maria said.

"Aish... if only the Association Master were here, he would instantly agree and give you a 10-star badge himself. But it's okay; he'll understand if we decide to give it to you," Marco said.

Aldrian, however, felt confused.

"Association Master? None of you seniors here lead the association? I thought people on the continent considered you three the best alchemists around?" Aldrian asked.

The three grandmasters were stunned for a moment, then they laughed.

"Being the best alchemist isn't the only requirement to become the Association Master. Anyway, we usually need his approval to make someone a 10-star alchemist in the Alchemist Association, but he'll understand if we give you the 10-star badge. Come with me, let's discuss this matter in a more comfortable place."

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Chapter 214: Officially an Alchemist

They emerged from the room under the watchful eyes of many onlookers. The three grandmaster alchemists had been inside the room for over three days, and this was the first time they had come out. Following them were a young man and a young woman, leaving the crowd wondering about their identities.

The three grandmasters appeared to be escorting them as they made their way to the upper floor. Those who had previously seen Aldrian buying a beginner's book felt as though they were dreaming. Who was this young man, that even the grandmasters of the association would personally escort him?

Many people murmured among themselves, speculating about what had happened and questioning Aldrian's identity to warrant the privilege of meeting with the three grandmasters of the Association. Ignoring the chatter, Aldrian and the others continued walking toward the topmost floor of the building. As Aldrian ascended, he observed the various sections on each floor, noticing that the higher floors held increasingly valuable items.

Upon reaching the highest floor, Aldrian sensed the sparse presence of people, likely only those closely associated with the three grandmasters. He was then led to a luxurious room typically reserved for receiving VIP guests. Aldrian and Eleine took seats

opposite the three grandmasters. Moments later, a variety of snacks and drinks were served before their conversation began.

"So, Aldrian, as I mentioned, I will grant you the 10-star badge, which you can wear as soon as you leave this room. Regarding the official documents to register you as an alchemist of the association, leave that to me. All I need is your name, which you've already provided. As for the rest, you can verify it with this. Of course, this is just a formality—if you'd prefer not to, I'll handle it myself," Marco said, taking out the Orb of Origin, which had a similar function to the one used by the Forgeheart Imperial Family.

Aldrian glanced at the orb for a moment before letting out a bitter smile.

"I'd rather not use the Orb of Origin, Senior," he said. "Let's just say I have... special circumstances when it comes to anything that measures aspects of myself."

The three grandmasters wore puzzled expressions, but before they could respond, Eleine spoke up, her voice tinged with concern.

"My younger brother has unique circumstances with any artifact that attempts to measure him. If you don't want the Orb of Origin to be destroyed, I suggest you refrain from checking him with it."

Now, the three elders were genuinely curious about Aldrian's circumstances. Could he truly destroy this modified Orb of Origin, which could even assess the age and potential of Emperor-stage cultivators?

"If you're curious about what might happen, I'll entertain you, but don't blame me if the Orb of Origin gets destroyed, Seniors." Aldrian said.

After a moment of contemplation, their curiosity got the better of them, and they decided to proceed with checking Aldrian. The mystery surrounding him was too tempting to ignore.

"If that's the case, then there's no need to worry about a destroyed item. We can simply order another from the Forgeheart Kingdom," Marco said confidently.

Such was one of their personality as grandmaster alchemists—their curiosity knew no bounds. And, as had been experienced by everyone who attempted to measure Aldrian, the moment the Orb of Origin was used, a blinding golden light filled the room, followed by the orb's complete destruction. The three grandmasters could only stare in shock at the remnants of the artifact.

They were stunned, experiencing something they had never encountered before. Their eyes shifted between the shattered Orb of Origin and Aldrian, struggling to process what had just happened. From their perspective, even the Orb of Origin was unable to measure his talent or potential.

And then, the revelation hit them—Aldrian was at the peak of the Earl stage at just 15 years old?! The sheer absurdity of it left them on the verge of fainting. Even the most celebrated genius in the empire, the first prince—who was said to have started cultivating at the age of 12—had only reached the Low Baron stage at the same age.

Had Aldrian been cultivating since he was in his mother's womb? As they thought about his origin, they almost wanted to facepalm in frustration. In their excitement, they had completely forgotten to ask about his parents or family.

"My parents left me and my elder sister when I was a child, so I don't really know much about my origin," Aldrian said when they asked.

The grandmasters accepted his answer without question. His elder sister showed no reaction either, so they decided to leave it at that.

After the process and a brief hour of conversation, the three grandmasters finally handed Aldrian the 10-star badge and the official robes of the Alchemist Association. Aldrian gladly accepted them, and not long after, he and Eleine excused themselves and left the Association. Once the two had been gone for some time, the three grandmasters exchanged looks.

"What a peculiar young man. Today has truly been a shocking day. First, I felt a disturbance in one of the concoction rooms, and then to think there was something like the 6-stripe pills... it still baffles me. What do you think?" Marco asked the other two.

"True, he's truly a greatest genius of all time. There's no doubt about that. Also, that golden light that shone from the Orb of Origin is something I've never felt in my life," Aberin said.

"Same here. I've never met someone like Aldrian. He seems mysterious, and he can't be grasped by common sense," Maria added. "However, regarding his origin, I think he was lying to us."

Marco and Aberin nodded in agreement, both sharing Maria's suspicion about Aldrian's origin.

"I think he's trying to hide his origin by concealing his parents' identity. The most noticeable thing for me is his 'elder sister.' Even though she tried to hide it, I can sense an aura from the Rivas family on her," Marco said.

"True. So, does that mean he has some connection to the Rivas family?" Aberin asked, pondering the idea.

"If he's somehow related to them, the status of the Rivas family that already soaring high, will rise even higher, like a phoenix. I think even the imperial family will be alarmed

by this," Maria offered her opinion. In the end, all of this was just their speculation, with no concrete proof.

"Anyway, the Association Master is visiting the imperial palace, right? Why is he meeting with the imperial family at this time?" Aberin asked.

"I don't know, but it seems he's been visiting the imperial palace more often recently," Marco said.

While the three elders continued talking among themselves, Aldrian and Eleine were already outside the headquarters. The people who saw them could only watch with curious gazes, but none dared approach them directly. Someone capable of attracting the attention of the three grandmasters was not someone they could casually approach or offend.

In the middle of their walk, Eleine spoke to Aldrian through voice transmission.

"Your operation was a success, young master. Now, what are you going to do next?"

"I'll stay here for a while. It wouldn't be wise to rush telling them about the traitors. Not only would it raise suspicion, but it could also alert the traitors. We still don't know who the traitors are. Even if we do find out, we can't just kill them, especially if they're high-ranking members of the Association. We need proof to justify our actions," Aldrian answered.

"Do you also suspect the three grandmasters?" Eleine asked again.

"Of course. As long as there's no definite proof, they're included on my list of suspects. Even if they seem innocent on the outside, we still don't know their full activities."

They continued walking until they finally returned to the Diamond Inn. They hadn't expected to be away for three days, but they were still glad that Aldrian's objective had been achieved.

Inside the imperial palace hallway of the Doria empire, an alchemist in a robe walked alongside a young man dressed in the imperial family's attire. The alchemist wore a 10-star badge on his chest, his face like a wise old man. As for the young man, his handsome and sharp features drew the attention of anyone who saw him, his elegant attire only adding to his charisma. At that moment, they seemed to be engaged in conversation.

"I feel bad for you, having to come to the palace, teacher. You don't have to come here; I should be the one visiting the Association," the young man said.

"No, your highness, it's I who wanted to meet you. I know you've been busy after returning from the frontline, so you don't need to tire yourself by coming to the Association," the old man replied.

"Sigh, you're right, teacher. This war is truly bizarre. We don't know what those devil bastards are thinking. They seemed to be winning, but then suddenly retreated without achieving anything. And then there's the mysterious person who can face so many devils and liberate towns under their control in the Rivas Grand Duchy. Many things have happened recently, and there's also the problem of spies in our ranks. We're truly in a bind right now."

The old man nodded in understanding.

"What a chaotic situation, your highness. I guess that's why the first prince still hasn't returned, even after the devils retreated. His majesty seems to have assigned the first prince another task to ensure there are no problems."

Chapter 215: First Prince and Second Prince

The young man kept walking but glanced at the old man for a split second before saying,

"Yes, elder brother is still on the frontlines. He is in Karak now, inspecting the remnants of the battle. The simultaneous appearance of the Wrath Devil and an Emperor-stage Hydra is no simple matter, so father has asked him to stay there for some time, just in case something happens."

This young man was none other than Alderia Doria, the second prince of the Doria Empire.

"He is also there to investigate the sudden appearance of a golden light, which was revealed to be a technique—a powerful one at that. The problem is, we don't know anything about the person who unleashed it. Is he a friend or a threat to the empire? We are still investigating whether this could also be one of the reasons the devils retreated. That said, with my elder brother's instincts and sharp senses, I am confident he will uncover something," Alderia added.

"By the way, let's put that aside for now, teacher. I must thank you for the Association's help in supplying pills to the soldiers on the frontlines. You must be under a lot of pressure as the Association Leader," he said to the old man, who was, in fact, the leader of the Alchemist Association.

The old man smiled and stroked his beard.

"It's nothing at all, Your Highness. The threat of the devils is immense; it is merely our duty to assist the soldiers in this way," he said. "It is also the Association's way to

support Your Highness in his endeavors. Because of the war, it seems His Majesty's decision to appoint the Crown Prince has been accelerated. If you need anything from me, Your Highness, I will gladly assist you as your teacher."

Alderia stopped walking and looked at the old man.

"Teacher, thank you for your support, but please refrain from speaking about this matter. I do not want anyone who overhears to misunderstand," he said, bowing his head. "I apologize for my rudeness, but the topic of the Crown Prince's appointment is premature to bring up right now. To me, the position of Crown Prince is not something that requires attention at this moment. Please excuse me, Teacher."

He then walked away, leaving the old man alone in the hallway of the imperial palace. The old man's face remained calm as he watched Alderia's retreating figure. His thoughts were unknown as he eventually turned and walked in the opposite direction.

In the Rivas Grand Duchy territory, the remnants of the battle in Karak were still scattered across the vast battlefield, not yet fully cleaned. With the battlefield's immense size, the cleanup process was ongoing. The bodies of the coalition forces had already been taken away, and the devils' corpses burned to ashes. Many artifacts had also been recovered, including useful spoils of war that they could still use for themselves.

However, the most striking sight on this battlefield is the chasm that stretches toward the northwest horizon. This deep chasm also contains a holy aura and a strong sword will. Those who saw it believed it would greatly benefit the people of the Church and sword cultivators, given how rich the holy aura and strong sword will are here.

At this time, atop the chasm, a group of knights stood, gazing into its depths. Among them was a handsome man with the same features as Alderia, though more mature. He exuded a charisma that would compel any soldier to follow him. Clad in his knight's armor, which only added to his gallant appearance, he resembled a hero of the generation.

"Your Highness, we have already sent some people to follow the chasm, and it seems it stretches beyond the Grand Duchy's territory. We are not following it into the devil's territory, however, if we follow its direction, it stretches all the way to the region where the Sazim Fortress is located," one of the knights reported.

The handsome man is Hector Doria, the first prince of the Doria Empire. He raised his eyebrows when he heard the report, his gaze fixed on the depth of the chasm that the bottom visible from his position.

"If it stretches that far, then it's over 10,000 kilometers long! Ridiculous. Is this what a divine-grade technique looks like?" he thought.

When he received his father's order to investigate the events in the Rivas Grand Duchy, he didn't understand the full intensity of the problem. However, after arriving and hearing the people's testimonies, he realized that this unknown factor in the war was crucial. Was this the reason the devils retreated?

He found nothing noteworthy along the border between the Doria Empire and the devil's territory, except for here. He couldn't understand why the devils suddenly retreated after taking part of the territory. They seemed to achieve nothing besides the destruction of the territory near the border. It was as if they considered this war a mere game.

They had lost so many people, yet the devils acted aimlessly, as if they were just playing with them. However, not everything was certain, like this unknown factor in front of him that still needed to be studied. If the devils retreated because of it, why did they retreat? Did they feel threatened?

What kind of person could unleash such an attack? Was this person a friend to the empire or a threat? Just because this person might be the reason the devils retreated, it didn't automatically mean they were an ally. Based on their strength alone, they could be a threat to the Doria Empire. Hector wanted to ensure that this person wouldn't turn their sword against the empire. If such power were directed at the empire, there would be no way they could resist it.

To determine whether this person was a threat or not, they first needed to identify who they were. Was this the same person who liberated Ilyon and Falanis towns? From the information Hector had gathered over the past few days, it seemed so. But why was this person heading toward Sazim Fortress? Was it simply to save the people who had been taken there, or did they have another objective in entering devil territory? The people saved by this person only knew his appearance and name.

Aldrian

The name that always resonated among those who had been saved by this person. They claimed his power was god-like, with a heavenly aura that punished the devils. The devils couldn't do anything to him, even emperor-stage devils seemed like children in front of him. The most ridiculous part was that they said he was only at the peak Earl stage. Hector initially thought they were joking, but every eyewitness recounted the same story.

So, they're saying that a peak Earl stage cultivator can do all of that?!

The only possible explanation is that Aldrian is hiding his true cultivation, which must actually be at the Emperor stage. Hector wasn't sure if the people were exaggerating, but in the end, all he had was a name and a description. Appearance can be deceiving, and a name means nothing in this context. So, in reality, he had no useful information about Aldrian. All he could do now was slowly piece together his identity through the testimonies of others.

"Is he from the church? This technique exudes the strongest holy aura I've ever felt," he thought, but then shook his head. If Aldrian were really from the church, they would have already been notified about such a powerful reinforcement. The empire has a good relationship with the church and an agreement in place. There's no way someone of this caliber would come on behalf of the church without informing them first.

"Then, is he someone with holy energy, but outside of the church?" He could rule out the Buddhist sect, because although the monks of the Buddhist sect also use holy energy to some extent, it is different from that of the church. The holy aura he felt here was more similar to the aura of the followers of the Heavenly Direction Church.

Moreover, from the lingering sword will, it's clear that this Aldrian is a sword cultivator. There's no one in the Buddhist sect that he knows of who uses a sword as their weapon. He touched his chin in thought before looking at his knight.

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

"Grand Duke Rivas is currently in Falanis Town, overseeing the situation. The town is under reconstruction, and it seems the Grand Duke is there to ensure everything is in order," the knight answered.

"What about his daughter?"

"Miss Irene has been in the Rivas family mansion since she returned from the frontline. She hasn't left yet, as it seems she is still recuperating," the knight replied.

"Let's go to the Grand Duke first. We need to find out what he knows about this," Hector said.

With that, Hector and his knights departed, heading toward Falanis, where Grand Duke Rivas was located.

Chapter 216: A Little Problem

The next day.

Aldrian sat in his room, a cauldron placed in front of him. After returning from the Alchemist Association headquarters, he had delved deeper into his knowledge of alchemy. He purchased advanced books on alchemy, the most expensive cauldron available in their store, and ingredients for concocting pills. All of these purchases were but a drop of water in the ocean of his wealth, so he spared no expense.

Just as he had done when learning blacksmithing, he was eager to practice his concoction skills. Inside his luxurious room, he had already created formations identical to those in the Alchemist Association's concoction room. Anyone passing by his room would neither smell nor sense anything unusual.

Aldrian seemed lost in his own world as he immersed himself in practice, already having produced several pills using new recipes. He resembled a child with a new toy, his enthusiasm for learning alchemy reaching new heights. After several hours, he finally stepped out of his room, deciding to take a walk before continuing his work.

Coincidentally, in the inn's hall, he saw Sylphia standing outside her room. He decided to greet her and ask if she would like to join him for a walk, to which she responded with enthusiasm. He simply smiled, thinking it was a good opportunity to stay connected with those around him rather than remaining entirely absorbed in his own world all the time.

They strolled through the city, taking in the scenery and exploring various entertainment spots. The sun had been high in the sky when they left the inn, but before they knew it, it had shifted to the western side of the sky. Aldrian, who had initially planned for just a short walk, chose to keep going. Seeing Sylphia's joyful expression, he couldn't bring himself to cut their time together.

"Hey, did you hear that the Alchemist Association is going to auction pills next week that are said to have never been seen before on the continent?"

"Never been seen before? Aren't they exaggerating? What kind of 'never before' are we talking about?"

"They claim the pills have six stripes, and it's already been confirmed by the three grandmasters of the association."

"What? Six stripes? How is that even possible?!"

In the midst of their walk, Aldrian overheard some people talking about the Alchemist Association and immediately realized they were discussing his pills. The announcement made by the association this morning had already caused a sensation.

The previous day, during his conversation with the three grandmasters, they had asked him what he planned to do with all the pills he had created. He had simply given them to the association since the ingredients had come from them. If he wanted to make more for his group, he could always purchase the ingredients himself and create another batch.

They then asked if he wanted to spread these revolutionary pills, and he simply told them to do whatever they wished. With that, they decided to auction one of each pill from the different recipes. This was the Alchemist Association's way of introducing his work to the outside world. They wouldn't announce his name, but they would reveal that the association had another 10-star badge alchemist.

Although the pills they were going to auction weren't particularly rare or special, the six stripes alone would be enough to attract attention, even from the imperial family.

This could benefit him as well. The higher his products soared, the easier it would be to resolve his parents' problems. His parents' families would be forced to listen to either his parents or him. He would crush their pride and any hidden cards completely, leaving them no choice but to obey. He was even prepared to go all out for this—if in the end his name were to echo across the entire continent, so be it.

As his mother had said, if the heavens were pushing him into the limelight, then he would take full advantage of it.

While they were walking along the canal leading to the plaza, Aldrian suddenly sensed that a few people were following them. There were about a dozen or so, maintaining their distance and hiding their presence within the crowd and small alleys, but they couldn't escape his senses. There was also an ill intent directed at him or Sylphia. He glanced at Sylphia's joyful face, it seemed she hadn't noticed them. However, he chose to ignore them and continued walking with her.

As they were about to reach the plaza, a smoke screen suddenly erupted, followed by the startled gasps of many people. The smoke blocked Aldrian and Sylphia's view, and in that split second, Aldrian sensed that the people who had been following them were finally making their move. By sensing the direction and intent of their actions, he quickly realized who their target was.

"They are targeting Sylphia."

Sylphia, still in a stunned state, finally realized they were being ambushed. She quickly dropped into a wary stance, but when she looked to her side, Aldrian was no longer there.

Thud! "Argh!"

Clang "Argh!"

She could only hear the sound of painful cries coming from different directions around her. Her senses seemed blocked by the strange smoke screen, leaving her unaware of what was happening.

After a few seconds, the smoke dissipated, and she finally saw that 14 people were lying unconscious around her. They all wore black masks, so their identities were hidden.

The people, still in shock from the sudden chaos, could only look in the direction of the commotion. They didn't know what had happened, as everything unfolded so quickly. All they saw was the smoke screen, followed by the sounds of painful cries. They hadn't even seen anyone run into the smoke screen.

Aldrian glanced at the ambushers before turning his attention to Sylphia.

"It seems we have to finish our walk here. These guys seem to be targeting you." He said, grasping her hand.

In an instant, they disappeared, leaving behind a confused crowd.

Not far from the inn, Aldrian and Sylphia appeared on a pathway, surprising some people with their sudden appearance. Sylphia looked around, sighing, then turned to Aldrian with a confused expression.

"They're targeting me?" she asked.

"Yes, they've been following us for some time. In the split second of the smoke screen, they moved towards you. Is there someone you know, or someone you've offended in the empire?" he asked, noticing that Sylphia seemed nervous.

He smiled gently and tightened his hold on her hand.

"It's okay, Sylphia. You can tell me anything. What are you so nervous about? Whatever it is, I'll listen. Do you have a problem with anyone in this empire?" he asked again.

Sylphia finally sighed before speaking.

"Three days ago, when Baek Ji-Min and I were walking through the city, we ran into a group of nobles at a restaurant. We didn't have any issues with them and just minded our own business. The problem started when one of them came over and began bothering us. We tried to ignore him, but he kept pressing. We lost our patience when he tried to touch me," she said, her head lowered so that Aldrian couldn't see her face.

"I beat him and a few of his men. It caused chaos, but we managed to run and lose them, then went back to the inn, which felt like the safest place. I haven't left since, until you asked me to go for a walk earlier. I think they might be people connected to that noble, looking for me and Baek Ji-Min." Her voice grew smaller, and there was a hint of guilt in her tone.

"I thought we wouldn't run into problem. I'm sorry, I didn't tell you because I was worried it would affect your plans. At the time, I thought I'd just stay inside and wait for your business here to be over. But it seems I've brought unnecessary trouble to you."

After she finished, she waited for Aldrian's response, but he remained silent. She felt a wave of guilt wash over her, thinking he was disappointed in her. Her heart felt heavy with the weight of that thought.

"Sylphia, look at me."

Suddenly, she heard Aldrian's soft voice, and she felt his hands gently touch both of her shoulders. When she lifted her head, she didn't see disappointment in his eyes. Instead, he smiled at her—a smile that always warmed her heart.

"Good. If you ever experience something like that again, it's okay to tell me. Don't worry, Sylphia, your actions won't affect my plans in the slightest. In fact, I'm glad you're safe. If you ever find yourself in a situation like that, you have the right to defend yourself, to defend your dignity. I will support you."

His confidence in his strength and ability was evident in his words.

Sylphia was stunned by Aldrian's words, but after a moment, she sighed in relief and smiled at him. She was glad he wasn't disappointed in her and, instead, supported her. Her pride as a princess flared at that time, and she would never allow anyone to humiliate her like that.

"Mhm." She nodded.

"So, tell me, Sylphia, which noble family does the man come from, the one who dared to disturb you?"

"He is the young master of the Lucard family, Danius Lucard, one of the duke houses here."

At the mention of the family's name, Aldrian was stunned inside, though he still smiled at her.

"Lucard family, huh."

Chapter 217: Interrogation

Aldrian recalled one of the names from the list of noble families that have a 'not harmonious' relationship with the Rivas family: the Lucard family, led by Duke Lucard on the eastern side of the empire. In the Doria Empire, there are four grand dukes, each with their faction, particularly when it comes to matters concerning the throne.

The Rivas family remains neutral, showing little concern for the empire's succession struggle as they are more focused on the border's situation. However, the Rivas family is renowned as the strongest noble house, making their position strategically significant in any political movement. For instance, their alignment with one faction could disrupt the balance of the political landscape.

The Lucard family, as part of a faction under one of the grand dukes who has chosen a prince, views the Rivas family as both an obstacle and a threat. Although the Rivas remain neutral, many factors could lead to changes in the future.

Now that fate had brought them to him, he could take advantage of it.

"Good. Can you make it back to the inn yourself? There's something I need to do, so I think I'll be late," Aldrian said.

"Are you sure about this? I mean, is it okay for your plan? You don't have to face them if it affects your plans later. I can just hide at the inn until your business in this city is done," Sylphia said, her worry evident.

"No, it's alright. This is what I want as well, so you don't have to worry," he replied, gently stroking her golden hair. She blushed deeply, unable to believe that Aldrian was bold enough to touch her hair, yet she felt a surge of happiness that he did. With each passing moment, her relationship with him grew closer and more intimate.

"I'll go ahead now. See you later," Aldrian said before disappearing from Sylphia's sight. She smiled warmly as she gazed at the empty space where he had stood. Today had been one of the best days, a rare opportunity to spend time with him since their time in the Ivory Empire. Her heart felt like it was blooming with flowers, and even as she walked back to the inn, she couldn't help but smile to herself, replaying each moment they had shared. All these signs only deepened her realization of her feelings for him.

"So this is what love feels like, huh?" she thought. She couldn't remember exactly when her feelings for Aldrian had changed. At first, she had seen him as a friend, someone with vast experiences from beyond the Ivory Empire, much like her own love for adventure. She had always kept their relationship that way, but as time passed, it shifted into something else. She began feeling jealous when he was close with other women, desiring his attention, eager to learn his secrets. Each time they met, she felt bolder, and he too, reciprocated her, entertaining her every action and question.

How could her heart not melt? How could her heart not be touched?

"Or maybe he's just that irresistible?" she thought, joking as she walked happily toward the inn.

The people who witnessed the chaos earlier had already called the city guardian to the scene. The city guardian, whose command chain is under the imperial family, received the report and immediately moved to the location. However, to their confusion, the scene was already clear of any disturbance. Still, they could see that the people present seemed equally confused.

When they asked what had happened, the eyewitnesses claimed that all the unconscious people had disappeared at once. The city guardians could only scratch their heads, as they found no traces or clues at the scene. In the end, they concluded that the disturbance was just a normal brawl, nothing more.

However, in an empty alleyway 2 kilometers away, the bodies of the 14 unconscious men lay tied by their hands and feet. They had yet to wake up after Aldrian struck them hard. Not only had he physically attacked them, but their souls had also trembled, causing them to faint instantly when he struck. Now, Aldrian stood before them after moving them to this location. If these men were truly sent by Danius, he could use them to draw the Lucard family to him.

He wanted to grasp the families opposed to his mother's family in his hands, and the Lucard family could serve as his starting point. This would also grant him access to the deeper circles of the empire's nobility. With noble families within his clutch, it would be much easier to flush out the spies or traitors who sided with the devils hiding among them.

He unmasked one of the unconscious men, touched his head, and injected his golden energy into him.

"Wakey wakey."

"Aarghhh."

Aldrian used his energy to inflict pain inside the man's body. The intense pain instantly woke him up, and the first thing he saw was Aldrian's smiling face. He tried to move, but was shocked to find his body bound by ropes covered in energy that even he couldn't break. Aldrian woke all of them using the same method. Once they were all awake, Aldrian took out a chair from his storage ring and sat down in front of them.

Aldrian looked at these people, the strongest among them only at the Marquess stage. But to ambush Sylphia, even with someone at the Marquess stage, it seemed that the young master—or whoever sent them—was really pissed.

"Alright, gentlemen, I want you to answer my questions, and you'll be good to go. That's easy, right? Believe me, I don't want to inflict more pain on your bodies, so I hope for your cooperation," he said to them. He could see their stiff expressions. They seemed to remember the pain that had woken them up and hesitated.

"First question: Who are you?" Aldrian swept his gaze over all the men. After waiting a few seconds without any answer, he asked again, "No answer?"

Suddenly, all of them felt as if their bodies were being ripped apart from the inside, and their souls shook with torment. They wanted to thrash their bodies about, but because they were all tied up, they couldn't move freely. After two seconds, Aldrian stopped his torture. They weren't emperor-stage cultivators with strong souls and mental fortitude—if he inflicted any more pain or prolonged it, he could truly kill them from the intensity of the suffering.

"Still not answering?"

"I'll talk, I'll talk! We're from the Lucard family, the shadow group that guards the Lucard family's members," one of them said.

"So, they are indeed from the Lucard family," Aldrian thought. "Why are you targeting my friend?" he asked. Without waiting for any of their responses, Aldrian inflicted pain on them for a second and then stopped.

"Young Master Danius! He ordered us! He wants to make that woman pay for humiliating him in front of many people. He wanted us to bring her to his place, that's all we know."

However, after he answered, the wrenching pain returned. They felt as if their souls would collapse under the agony, but then, finally, the pain stopped.

"Wh-why do you... I already answered your question?" he said, still lingering in pain, feeling as if his body were on the verge of collapse.

"Hmm, why?" Aldrian said with a smile. "I just want to do it."

The men shuddered when they saw that smile. What they saw was nothing short of a demonic grin, one that would haunt them for a long time. They then watched as Aldrian stood from his chair and walked toward one of them, starting from the edge. He touched the man's forehead, and the others could see that the man was powerless to move and his eyes rolling. After a few moments, the man fainted again, leaving the others confused.

They then saw Aldrian move to the next man and do the same. They didn't know what Aldrian was doing, but it seemed like he was checking something through their foreheads. One of them suddenly remembered something and thought to himself.

"If you have some kind of technique that can read memories, why are you torturing us? You could just read our memories and be done with it!" he shouted inside his head. But Aldrian looked in his direction and smiled.

"Well, because I want to talk to you guys. Is there any problem?" Aldrian said, walking in front of him. The man's eyes trembled as he looked at Aldrian's figure from his kneeling position.

"Psycho!" he shouted inside his mind before receiving the same treatment as the others. After Aldrian was done with all the men, he woke them up again and spoke to them.

"From this moment on, you will become my eyes and ears in the Lucard family. I have already planted slave seals in your souls. Forget about erasing them or doing anything funny with them. Well, you can't do anything about it anyway— even peak emperor

stage cultivators can't erase them. But, of course, you don't want to feel that pain again, right?" Aldrian asked, to which they all responded by shaking their heads.

"Good, you don't have to do anything special. Just continue with your usual activities, but if something interesting comes up, make sure to tell me. That's easy enough, right? Now, let's go to your young master. We can't keep him waiting," Aldrian said.

All the men could do was lament their young master's fate for offending this crazy man!

Chapter 218: New Friend

In one part of the city, a grand mansion stood surrounded by a vast garden. Guards and maids moved busily here and there, tending to their duties. Anyone passing by this mansion would immediately recognize its owner because of the symbol on top of its main gate, the Duke Lucard. This mansion served as his residence whenever he or any member of the Lucard family visited the capital.

Right now, inside one of the rooms in the mansion, a man sat on a sofa dressed in casual attire. He held a glass of wine in his hand, his expression relaxed as he gazed at the crimson liquid within. Slowly swirling the glass, he caught a glimpse of his own reflection in the wine. However, as memories of the humiliation he endured a few days ago resurfaced, his expression became twisted.

"That bitch! I'll make sure you beg me to stop," he thought to himself.

This man was none other than Danius Lucard, the young master of the Lucard family. A few days ago, while he was with his group of noble friends, he had spotted two beautiful ladies visiting a restaurant. Among them was an elf, a sight that immediately caught his attention, as elves seldom ventured out of their own empire.

Desire ignited within him, and he believed that his status would allow him to have his way with her. After all, she was just an elf, one person. Surely the Ivory Empire wouldn't bother paying attention to an individual like her, right?

However, she was truly stubborn, and when he tried to force her, she retaliated with strength beyond his expectations. Despite her cultivation being only at the High Viscount stage, she managed to overwhelm him, even though he was at the Peak Viscount stage. To make matters worse, her companion, a female demonic cultivator, defeated his guard, who was at the Middle Earl stage.

The onlookers were stunned, but before Danius or his other men could react, the two women vanished without a trace.

He had never felt such humiliation in his life. To think that those two women dared to make him, the young master of the Lucard family, look like a fool in front of his peers.

However, earlier, he received a report that the elf had been located. Without hesitation, he ordered his shadow guards to capture her. The thought of torturing that elf and making her beg for mercy filled him with anticipation.

Knock, knock.

Suddenly, the voice of a maid could be heard from outside the room. "Young master, they've returned."

Hearing this, Danius instantly stood up and strode to the door, opening it with haste. "Bring them here!" he ordered, his excitement barely contained.

Finally, he had her!

After waiting for a few moments, the masked men he had ordered to capture Sylphia entered the room. Danius grinned with victory, but as time passed, confusion began to settle in. He couldn't see any elf among the group. Furrowing his brows, he turned his gaze toward the leader of the shadow group.

"Where is she?" he demanded, his voice tinged with irritation. "I thought she had already been found. You were just supposed to bring her back here." He set his glass down on the table, frustration evident as he realized these men hadn't brought the woman he had imagined.

However, Danius was confused by their silence, as they seemed to be avoiding his question. Suddenly, a voice echoed from one of the masked men—a voice he had never heard before.

"All of you, go outside. Don't let anyone enter while I'm speaking with the 'young master.'"

With that, all the masked men stepped outside and closed the door behind them, leaving Danius shouting angrily.

"What is the meaning of this?" Danius demanded, but then he froze as his eyes met the blue gaze of the last masked man.

Before he could ask any more questions, the man removed his mask, revealing a handsome young face—one far more striking than Danius's own. It was then that Danius realized he had never seen him before!

Feeling that something was wrong, Danius immediately tried to activate an emergency talisman in his pocket. However, he was stunned to find that he couldn't move his body! It was as though he had turned to stone. He wanted to scream, but no sound escaped his lips, he couldn't even move his mouth!

Fear began to creep in as he realized he had no idea what the man's intentions were. Did he want to kill him? The man seemed incredibly strong, and to his horror, even his shadow guards had betrayed him!

He then saw the man smile, his smile only enhancing his handsomeness. However, instead of feeling reassured, Danius had a bad premonition.

"So, young master Danius, it seems you've been waiting for something here? Oh, waiting for those men to bring you a woman, perhaps?" the young man said, walking toward him. "I wonder what you'll do to her, hm?"

This young man was, of course, Aldrian. His blue eyes locked with Danius's, as if staring directly into his soul. There were no secrets, no thoughts, no intentions hidden from him. Those eyes seemed to read every single thing about Danius.

Aldrian casually embraced Danius's shoulders, as if they were close friends.

"Oh, you can't talk or move?" Aldrian said with a grin. "I'm sorry for that. The moment you looked into my eyes, it was enough for me to paralyze you. All I had to do was combine karma and illusion to make you immobile. What you're seeing now is an illusion—the me standing before you is not real."

Aldrian paused for a moment, as if toying with Danius.

"Well, whatever, it'll be hard to explain in such a short time, so let's move on, shall we?"

Aldrian then stepped in front of Danius, his height matching his, their gazes locking on the same level.

Danius was so terrified that he felt like he might piss himself, but he couldn't! He didn't understand how this illusion worked. Everything seemed so real, and he felt no disturbance in his surroundings. He was still in reality—that's what he wanted to believe.

"You're targeting my friend," Aldrian said. "I have to say, you're bold enough to disturb someone without even knowing who she is or what her background is. It seems your arrogance comes from your family, huh? I wonder if they've spoiled you so much that you've developed such a reckless personality."

Aldrian then sat down on the sofa beside him.

"Anyway, I'll let you talk so we can have a civilized conversation. It wouldn't be fair if it's just me doing all the talking, right?"

After that, Danius found he could finally move his mouth and even turn his head. However, he didn't dare meet Aldrian's gaze. Still, as the young master of a Lucard family, his arrogance lingered within him.

"Do you understand what you've done? I'm the young master of—"

Suddenly, an intense pain seared through his soul, and he screamed at the top of his lungs.

"Aaargghh!"

He tried to touch his head to ease the pain, but all he could do was move his head and mouth.

"You know, young master, that's not very good, I don't like it when someone boasts about their family's name in my face, so I'd appreciate it if you didn't do that." Aldrian said still with his smile.

After two seconds, the pain stopped, but Danius's eyes had already rolled back. He fainted from the intense agony. However, Aldrian didn't waste any time. He sent another surge of pain to wake him up.

Danius gasped, his breath becoming erratic. He felt like he might die.

"Now, young master," Aldrian said casually from his seat, "I came here with only one purpose: to meet you. I want to know more about you, young master. Perhaps we could become friends."

"We'll be the kind of friends who tell each other secrets, yes? You'll share your family's secrets, and I'll share mine. How does that sound?"

Danius finally understood what Aldrian meant by his words.

"He wants me to be his spy!" Danius thought, shocked.

"Yes, young master, you are correct, you will become my spy within the Lucard family. I want you to provide me with any information about your family's movements, even the hidden ones, or anything related to it."

Danius was stunned. He tried to glance at Aldrian, realizing with a jolt that he could read his mind.

"Do you want to feel more pain?" Aldrian asked again, his voice calm.

"No... no," Danius responded, his voice trembling.

"That's good, young master. I don't want you to be in pain either. We're friends now, right? And what kind of friend would want their buddy in pain?" Aldrian said, standing up and casually embracing Danius's shoulders.

"Now, I will give you a slave seal called the Everlasting Demonic Follower, it will provide an easy way for us to communicate. If you want to contact me, all you need to do is think of me and use voice transmission, and I will immediately hear your voice. Is that clear?"

Danius simply nodded. Aldrian smiled, then gave a light tap to his back.

"But I must warn you, young master. This seal will inflict pain on you if you even think about betraying me or even attempting suicide."

Danius felt as though his mind was on the verge of breaking. After the pain he had just endured, there was no way he wanted to experience it again. In that moment, he knew his life was now firmly in the grasp of this young man!

Chapter 219: Meeting with the Association Master

Danius remained silent, too afraid to speak, fearing that he might slip and anger this man. To think that woman had someone like him as a friend—he was utterly screwed!

"Yes, my friend, you're absolutely screwed," Aldrian said with a casual wave of his hand. "You and your shadow guards are in deep trouble because of your arrogance. Fortunately, you met me. If it had been someone else, you might have lost your life for offending the wrong person."

Danius wanted to curse Aldrian in a thousand different ways inside his mind, but even that seemed impossible—this man appeared to know exactly what he was thinking.

"Anyway, you and those shadow guards of yours already have slave seals. I hope you'll work well together," Aldrian said, walking ahead. Then, with a smile, he added, "Oh, as a thank you, I'll give you a clue about my secret: I'm the one so many people are looking for."

Danius didn't understand what Aldrian meant, but he didn't care at this moment. All he wanted was for this man to leave as soon as possible.

"Now you're good to go," Aldrian said, snapping his fingers.

Snap

Suddenly, Danius felt as though something in his surroundings had changed yet hadn't at the same time. He was stunned to realize that Aldrian had suddenly disappeared. Moving his hand, he pushed himself up from his lying position. A strange sensation washed over him, he couldn't explain why he had been lying down, but at least he could finally move his body.

His eyes darted around the room, searching for any trace of Aldrian. After confirming that he was truly gone, Danius slumped back onto the sofa. His body was drenched in sweat, and he felt as though he had just woken up from a nightmare.

He seemed disoriented and on the verge of vomiting, the sting of the pain he had just experienced still fresh in his senses. As the young master of a noble family, sheltered and protected by his kin, this was his first time enduring pain that struck directly at his soul, leaving him shaken and traumatized.

He had no idea what the future held for him now, but deep in his heart, one thought persisted, he wanted to escape Aldrian's grasp.

"I'll talk to fath—" However, the moment that thought entered his mind, Danius felt a rising pain coursing through his body and soul. Panicking, he hurriedly stopped the thought and tried to empty his mind.

As the pain gradually subsided, he gasped in relief. What that man said was true! Even harboring ill intent brought pain—acting on it was unthinkable. Grabbing his head in frustration, he cursed his helplessness.

"If only I hadn't approached that elf... if only I hadn't given in to my desire... if only I hadn't been so arrogant!" His mind was consumed by endless "if only" scenarios.

He appeared to be on the verge of a breakdown—this was the first time he had faced such a severe setback, and the consequences were overwhelming. Now, he had become a stranger's spy within his own family. He knew it was treason, and if any member of his family discovered the truth, he could be stripped of his position as young master—or even executed.

Meanwhile, Aldrian was already walking through the city streets as if nothing had happened. In truth, he had been walking for quite some time, not long after Danius first looked into his eyes.

As Aldrian had said, what Danius saw was nothing more than an illusion. The Aldrian he had spoken to didn't actually exist. His illusions were so powerful that they could even affect cultivators with stronger cultivation than his own. So it was no exaggeration to say that Danius, being much weaker, had no chance of realizing he was under an illusion.

The effect of the illusion on those with weaker cultivation was so profound that they would never realize they were living within it. This was what they called when an illusion turned into reality.

While Danius was trapped in the illusion, Aldrian placed the Everlasting Demonic Follower seal on him and accessed his memories. Now that he had spies inside one of the noble families and within the opposing faction, Aldrian had more room to maneuver.

"Well, let's continue my practice," he thought, blending into the crowd.

The next day, Aldrian was still in his room, practicing his concocting and memorizing recipes, when he sensed someone approaching the Diamond Inn. The man wore an alchemist's robe adorned with an eight-star badge, indicating a high status within the Alchemist Association. Aldrian recognized the face, he had seen it before back when he was on the top floor of the Association's building, where he and the three grandmasters had been in discussion.

Aldrian didn't know why the man was here, but it seemed like he was looking for him. True to his guess, the man asked the inn's employee about his room. He then came to Aldrian's door and knocked.

When Aldrian opened the door, the man was momentarily stunned, but he quickly bowed his head slightly.

"Forgive the disturbance," he said. "I've come only to deliver a message from my master. I am one of Grandmaster Marco's students. You can call me Carlo."

"It's okay, I don't find it disturbing. So, what does Grandmaster Marco want to tell me?" Aldrian asked.

"He asked if you have time today. He wants you to visit the Association; he'd like to introduce you to the Association Master."

Aldrian raised an eyebrow. If it was related to the Association Master, then he would have to go. He was also curious about this person who held the position of Association Master rather than one of the three grandmasters.

"Alright, thank you for informing me. I will arrive there shortly."

"Yes, we will wait for you, Grandmaster Aldrian," the man replied, bowing one last time before walking away.

Afterward, Aldrian decided to finish his concoction practice for the time being and clean his room before heading outside toward the Alchemist Association headquarters.

After he arrived at the Association's building, some people who recognized his face immediately began gossiping about him. Many were still guessing who Aldrian was and what his connection to the three grandmasters might be. His face had become quite famous within the Association, but he ignored the whispers and walked straight toward the top floor.

When he reached the top floor, he was immediately directed to a room by Carlo. Upon entering, Aldrian saw the three grandmasters and an elderly man he had never seen before. The old man's face, full of wisdom, was smiling at Aldrian with kindness. He rose from his seat and walked toward him.

Aldrian noticed the ten stars on the old man's badge, indicating that his status was same as that of the three grandmasters.

"So, this is the young man you were talking about? Truly extraordinary. I could tell from the first glance that he was no ordinary man," the old man said.

"Aldrian, this is the Association Master, Master Dan Vasily," Grandmaster Marco introduced.

Aldrian immediately bowed to the Association Master. "Master's compliment is too exaggerated. I'm just a person who likes to learn, that's all."

"Hahaha, don't be so humble. You've already created history that the people of this continent have never seen before. I've also seen the pills you concocted, and I have to say, you are the one who will pave the way for the next level of alchemy," Master Dan said, stroking his beard.

"I heard that the three grandmasters have already agreed to your position, making you an instant grandmaster of the Association. I too agree after seeing what you've accomplished. Even though there's no precedent for someone becoming an alchemist and jumping straight to the 10-star rank, there's no way our Association could give you anything less. You've earned it," he added.

"Thank you, Master," Aldrian said.

"Anyway, take a seat. I want to know more about you," Master Dan said. After they sat down, he continued, "So, I've heard you live only with your elder sister?"

"Yes, Master. I live only with my elder sister, as our parents left us when I was still a child," Aldrian replied.

"Such a pitiful experience, but despite that, you've become like this. You are truly a rare gem, a genius alchemist from birth," Master Dan said with an amazed expression.

"Anyway, may I ask where you come from before arriving in this city? I've heard you're from outside the empire, and I'm curious why you chose the Alchemist Association. With your abilities, you could even become part of the imperial family, holding a higher status than as an alchemist in this association, even surpassing the three grandmasters here."

"I'm just a vagabond cultivator, traveling with my elder sister. Wherever she goes, I follow her. The last place we came from before this city was the Ivory Empire," Aldrian said, lying without missing a beat.

"As for why I chose the Alchemist Association, it's because I didn't want to be tied to the imperial family's customs. While joining the association may offer less than what I would have had in the imperial family, I gain more freedom, though I still have privilege and status."

At that moment, Aldrian continued to look at the smiling expression of Master Dan, but inside his mind, he thought something else.

"Why do I feel irritated looking at this old man?"

Chapter 220: The Strangeness of the Association Master

He didn't know why, but he felt irritated looking at this old man. Although the man's face showed only the kindness of an elder and there was no ill intention he could sense, the irritation persisted. He didn't ignore his instincts, knowing that even the smallest feelings could be clues to something significant.

"What a difficult life you have, young Aldrian. May I call you that?"

"Of course, Master. You can call me whatever you find comfortable."

"Then, would you like a permanent place here in this city? It's unbecoming for someone of your status to be without one. Even if you don't intend to stay in one place for long, this could be a place for you to return to whenever you feel weary in the future," Master Dan said.

Thinking it would be rude to reject such an offer, Aldrian finally nodded.

"Alright, I will accept it."

Hearing Aldrian's answer, Master Dan smiled even more brightly.

"Good! I'll notify you when the place is ready. You just need to bring yourself, and you'll be all set to stay in your new home."

"Alright, Master," Aldrian replied.

Aldrian felt that something was off about Master Dan. When he tried to discern the old man's intentions, he was left perplexed. Master Dan wasn't thinking of anything malicious, nor did he harbor ill intent, yet there was an unmistakable wariness in his intent.

Why was Master Dan wary of him? Aldrian was certain they had never met before, and he was equally sure Master Dan didn't know him. So what was it that made Master Dan so cautious? What exactly was he wary of?

Suddenly, a thought crossed Aldrian's mind, but he kept his expression neutral. He continued his conversation with Master Dan and the three grandmasters as though nothing had changed.

"By the way, would you like the imperial family to acknowledge you?" Master Dan asked. "Usually, when a ten-star badge alchemist appears in the association, His Majesty invites them to the imperial palace. There, the alchemist is introduced to the entire empire and given rewards. With that, you could build connections with many factions throughout the empire."

"And I should tell you that the imperial family will become aware of your existence regardless, even if you decide not to announce yourself. In the end, they will still try to establish a connection with you. Their information network is vast, after all. They'll connect the dots and reach out to you, even without a formal introduction," he added.

Aldrian pondered for a moment. It was true that this seemed like the easiest way to gain fame and establish a connection with the central power of the Doria Empire. While he was prepared to announce his existence to the entire empire—and even the continent—he realized that doing so now would alert the devils and traitors within the empire.

If that happened, it would create unnecessary hassle for him to deal with. For now, he preferred to operate in "half shadows, half light."

If the situation eventually forced him to step fully into the light, he would adjust his approach. But for now, he preferred the way he was operating. After weighing the pros and cons, he made his decision.

"I think I'll pass on this one, or to be more precise, I'm not ready to be known by the masses yet, Master. I prefer the solitude, and I don't like the crowd that will inevitably gather around me if my appearance becomes known to the empire. I think I'll remain like this for a while. However, if the imperial family truly tries to reach me, of course, I won't reject them. In fact, I'll speak with them," Aldrian said.

Master Dan nodded, while the three grandmasters merely smiled at Aldrian.

"What a fine character. He's not blinded by his capabilities and status, and he wants to remain low-key. For a young man as talented as him to stay humble is truly rare," Grandmaster Marco thought.

"Alright, if that's what you want, I will respect your decision and act accordingly. But you must be ready in case someone from the imperial family comes for a visit. After all, the appearance of a ten-star alchemist is quite significant," Master Dan said.

After that, they talked for a while before Aldrian was finally able to leave the headquarters. As he walked toward the inn, he couldn't stop thinking about his meeting with the association master.

"The reason he's wary of me, I think, is because I'm a stranger who suddenly appeared. It's not specifically because of me, but because he knows nothing about me," he mused.

"Even if it were someone else, I guess Master Dan would still be wary of them due to their unknown origin. However, the question is: what is he wary of? Why must he be wary? Is someone trying to harm him? Is he hiding something from others? Which one is it?"

"He wasn't thinking about anything at that time, so I don't know which of these is the truth. But maybe I can deduce something from his question to me. Let's see. First, he asked about my family. Why would he ask about my family? It seems like a normal question, just to learn more about me, as he said. But for someone who's wary of a stranger's sudden appearance, this question could mean something more."

"It could be that he's trying to learn about my family in order to track them for some unknown purpose. Perhaps he's doing it to ensure that I'm not one of the people he considers a threat to him."

"Second, he asked where I came from. If I had to guess, he was trying to note whether I'm from a certain territory. If I came from a place he considers a threat, he would have to take action. But from what I can sense, it seems the Ivory Empire is not one of the territories he's wary of."

"He also asked why I chose the association and not the imperial family. I think this was to check if I had any hidden motives for applying to be an alchemist in the association."

"Next, he offered me a place to stay. It seemed like he was gifting me this place because of my achievements, but to me, it felt more like he was trying to keep me under watch in one location. It would be easier for him to keep an eye on me in a place where he could easily reach me, like the designated place he chose," Aldrian thought as he looked at the road.

"But if someone truly threatened him, then who could they be, daring to threaten the master of the Alchemist Association? He's a person of high status, respected even by the imperial family, and even under their protection because he is also a valuable asset to the empire."

"And another guess is that he's hiding something—something he doesn't want that stranger to know. Everything he's done also seems to be an effort to conceal something, to keep those strangers who fall within his criteria from discovering his secret," Aldrian thought, looking at the Diamond Inn, now in sight.

"What secret could he be hiding?" As he almost reached the front of the Diamond Inn, he suddenly stopped.

"Wait... all those questions... What if, what if it has something to do with the devils?" Aldrian pondered seriously.

"If it has to do with the devils, then if he's wary of someone from a certain territory or origin, it has to be...the Forgeheart Kingdom." This was because the recent chaos caused by the betrayal of several noble houses in the Forgeheart Kingdom had almost led them into civil war. The betrayal stemmed from their cooperation with the devils. The devils, along with everyone involved, knew that one of their secret infiltration formulas had already been discovered in the Forgeheart Kingdom.

It would be no wonder if someone from there, or someone who came from that territory, were viewed with suspicion by those in cahoots with the devils. Also, there is one thing that makes him feel this could be connected to the devils: the irritation he felt when speaking with Master Dan.

There is no doubt about Master Dan being an orthodox cultivator, as Aldrian had already seen his information through his Eyes of the Heaven. However, the feeling of irritation he experienced earlier only arises under one condition: when he encounters devils or something related to them, such as their energy, traces, and so on."

However, if Master Dan is truly an orthodox cultivator, how could he feel that way? Aldrian's guess is that, if Master Dan somehow has a connection to the devils, his karma might be so strongly bonded with them that it triggers Aldrian's senses and causes the irritation.

Aldrian frowned. If what he suspected was true, then this could lead to another chaos and a crisis for the empire!