

The Shining Star Above The Heaven

#Chapter 271: The Doria Family's Legacy Treasure - Read The Shining Star Above The Heaven Chapter 271: The Doria Family's Legacy Treasure

Chapter 271: The Doria Family's Legacy Treasure

Inside the secret chamber lies a pond with a small platform at its center. The pond is filled with golden water, and atop the platform rests a stunning golden armor. The armor, adorned with a diamond-like gem in the center of its chest plate, radiates the power of a high divine-grade artifact. This marks the second time Aldrian has encountered an artifact of this grade.

The water is spiritual water, radiating an abundance of the energy of heaven and earth. Due to the combined presence of the armor and the spiritual water, this secret chamber has become a sanctuary for cultivation.

Irene was astonished by the richness of heaven and earth energy in this place. She had never experienced such a dense concentration of it before. She thought that cultivating here would multiply her cultivation speed many times over.

"This is our family's legacy treasure," Emperor Durand declared, his eyes glistening with pride. "The result of our ancestors' great efforts—their sweat and blood immortalized in the existence of this armor. The armor that can block any attack and protect anything: The Heavenly Guardian Armor."

"This armor was created by our first-generation blacksmith master using various materials gathered from across the continent, shortly after we first set foot here. Some of these materials were foreign, unlike anything we had ever seen before. It took more than a thousand years to craft this armor, and its completion came with the refinement of the mysterious crystal embedded in its chest plate. Refining that crystal alone required hundreds of years."

"The spiritual water is also extraordinary finds. Our ancestors discovered it near the Everlasting Silent Forest. This spiritual water is so rich in the energy of heaven and earth that it has not been depleted even to this day. We believe that this spiritual water, along with the other strange materials, originated from a higher realm. They were too bizarre and powerful for our ancestors to fully utilize, even though they were stronger than we are now."

Irene listened attentively to Emperor Durand's explanation, her gaze fixed on the armor and the spiritual water. The golden armor, complete with its helmet, not only radiated the presence of a divine-grade artifact but also exuded a heroic aura.

However, for Aldrian, his attention was not on the armor itself but on the diamond embedded in the center of its chest plate. The stunning blue diamond contained an immense amount of energy, far greater than any energy stone he had ever encountered. Yet, it wasn't just the energy of heaven and earth he sensed—there was also a foreign energy he could distinctly feel.

Although this was the first time Aldrian had seen this diamond, he was certain he recognized it. It was one of the materials used by the dwarves to forge the unnamed Divine Sword. To think that the Doria imperial family had also discovered it! This was a material from the higher realm.

The Crystal of Divinity.

Aldrian had also seen this crystal in one of his visions. The Crystal of Divinity—a crystal that contained an immense concentration of heaven and earth energy, as well as another energy originating from that realm.

The Divine Energy.

Aldrian couldn't help but admire the beings of this continent for their ability to refine something so extraordinary, even if it took them a long time. From his vision, he knew this crystal was one of the most valuable materials, even in the higher realm—something typically handled by cultivators of that realm. These cultivators were far stronger and more absurdly powerful than those of this world.

Then there was the pond, filled with the spiritual golden water. The gold here was different from the golden energy he possessed; the golden water here had a darker hue. This spiritual water was not like ordinary spiritual water; its origin came from the same place as the Crystal of Divinity. It was water formed from the condensation of dense divine energy. From the look of it, Emperor Durand and his ancestors seemed unaware of the existence of divine energy.

They could only sense the richness of heaven and earth energy in the water, but not the divine energy. After thinking about it, Aldrian realized it made sense—this energy came from a higher realm and could only be sensed by higher beings.

One thing that intrigued him the most was how the divine energy seemed to be drawn to his presence. It was as though the divine energy was being pulled toward him, like opposite poles of a magnet. It felt natural, as if the divine energy was simply attracted to him.

Aldrian walked closer to the pond and gazed at the golden water. He felt that this water—no, the divine energy—was calling to him, greeting his arrival.

It felt strange, as though he could "communicate" with the energy. It was like when...

"It's like when I faced the Heavenly Tribulation." He could feel the intent of the heavens, and now he sensed the intent of this energy. The overbearing divine energy, which was difficult to absorb even in the higher realm, was voluntarily greeting his arrival.

He then closed his eyes, feeling the energy. The divine energy seemed eager to greet him, rushing toward him like a child seeing their parent after a long time. He released his golden energy across his body in return. However, once he did, the divine energy paused, halting its flow and staying still.

He could feel the energy's reverence toward him. At that moment, he could not only sense the divine energy, but also the normal energy of heaven and earth, which seemed to bow to him in worship.

He could finally feel it—the difference between this divine energy and his own golden energy.

"My golden energy is still stronger than the divine energy. The divine energy seems tame in front of the golden energy," he thought.

"If these energies act like this in front of my presence, no wonder they are easy to control."

His being, his energy, was still a mystery to him. If even the divine energy was still inferior to his golden energy, then what exactly was this golden energy?

Emperor Durand and Irene also observed Aldrian, who had suddenly released his energy, closed his eyes, and stood still at the edge of the pond. The emperor still shuddered every time he sensed the golden energy. Now that his body had returned to full health, with dense energy in his dantian, he could finally grasp the true extent of how Aldrian's energy was affecting him.

The golden energy was instinctively suppressing his own energy inside his body—a shocking and absurd phenomenon. Doesn't that mean Aldrian's energy is of a higher tier or something? The golden energy was powerful enough to affect his own energy with just its presence. Emperor Durand then looked at Irene.

"Miss Irene, if I may ask, what happened to you or to young Aldrian to give him such monstrous abilities? His power is beyond this world, and he seems to be on a different level than us," he said through voice transmission.

"He is special, Your Majesty. Even from birth, he was already extraordinary," Irene replied proudly.

"Oh, then tell—" Before he could finish, he suddenly felt Aldrian's aura grow stronger and denser. Something was changing with Aldrian, but he couldn't sense what, aside from his aura and energy becoming more intense. For a split second, he felt a mighty

pressure like nothing he had ever experienced before, before it disappeared. Sweat rolled down his forehead.

"Truly a terrifying existence... What is he?" emperor Durand thought to himself.

Irene also widened her eyes. She, too, felt a mighty pressure from Aldrian for a split second before it disappeared. In that moment, she saw another side of her son—the side of him that possessed strange abilities and strength, something that no one else had. However, she still wore a proud expression.

Aldrian did not care about his surroundings, he was immersed in his meditation and creating his domain. This was also one of the reasons he wanted to come here—the place where the faith of the entire Doria Empire was gathered. Once he established his domain, he felt a surge of power like never before. He could feel the entirety of the Doria Empire, the vastness of its territory. His cultivation also began to progress much faster.

However, he didn't stop his meditation and continued to immerse himself. He focused, when suddenly, another vision appeared. In this vision, he seemed to stand atop space—no, he could say he stood on top of the universe, between the void. He could see many dimensions and different universes, all of them seeming small in his eyes. He then stretched out his hand, and suddenly divine energy appeared in his palm.

He then waved his hand as if sowing seeds, and the energy disappeared from his palm. Once again, he felt a sense of déjà vu as he experienced it. Then, his vision changed and turned to darkness, but he knew where he was. This place was his being's essence.

"The vision just now..."

Chapter 272: The Problem of the Flamecrest Family

The vision he just experienced—he can say that is the most powerful feeling he got from any vision he got. He saw numerous universes, each accompanied by countless realms and dimensions, all within his sight. Some appeared as large as his hand, while others were as small as grains of sand. They sparkled like stars in the night sky yet seemed like mere toys in his perception, as if he could play with them at will.

He couldn't fully comprehend what he had done in the vision, but one thing was certain—the power he wielded at that moment was immense.

He put aside that feeling and looked at the lone star that had moved closer again, although it was still far away. He decided to do what he usually did in this place—a comprehension session.

Emperor Durand and Irene, who were watching Aldrian remain unmoving for several minutes, chose not to disturb him. However, the emperor's gaze held admiration as he observed the surrounding energy converging toward Aldrian. The energy moved like tidal waves toward his body, gradually forming a vortex that began to take shape little by little.

"Miss Irene, you can try cultivating here. Although your son seems to be attracting most of the energy in this chamber, this place is still far better than anywhere else on the continent," Emperor Durand said.

"Thank you for your offer, Your Majesty. I will try to cultivate here," Irene replied. She certainly didn't want to pass up this opportunity; this was a cultivation sanctuary even superior to what her family possessed. Moreover, she didn't want to fall behind her son—she wanted to grow stronger too.

She looked at her son for a moment before picking a spot on the side, sitting in a meditative position, and closing her eyes. Emperor Durand smiled as he watched the mother and son, then quietly left the chamber, giving them time to cultivate in peace.

On the northwest border of the Doria Empire, there is a large noble family with a reputation rivaling that of the Rivas family.

The Flamecrest family, which borders the Rivas family's lands to the east, also serves as the spearhead for the Vindas Empire in facing the devil territory. Although the two families are not on good terms, they share the same stance on the importance of guarding their respective borders against the devil territory.

They are a well-known family but not overly involved in the empire's internal affairs. They do not indulge in the empire's power struggles or intrigues. Like the Rivas family, they are more focused on the security of the border, having no time to engage in the political struggles of the empire.

Their position and power at the border have made them highly popular among the populace. Many consider the Flamecrest family a role model for what a noble family should be—a power used for the people's safety and in the right cause.

However, in the past few days, the Flamecrest family had a stain on their name, as it was revealed that one of their commanders was actually a devil. This caused an uproar in the Vindas Empire, sparking many opinions on the matter. Some believe the news, while others remain skeptical. The Flamecrest family, famous for their loyalty to the empire and the people, harboring a devil? That doesn't make sense to many, but there is strong evidence spreading that is hard to deny, even for the Flamecrest family.

Due to the rising voices of the populace in the empire, the situation within the family has grown tense. At this time, inside the Flamecrest family mansion, Grand Duke Flamecrest gathered all of his family's high-ranking members to discuss the matter. Their faces were solemn, yet also filled with irritation.

"Those nobles dare to bare their fangs at a time like this! We cannot back down. If they want to provoke our family, we must show them that we are not pushovers!" said one of the elders.

"Don't act too impulsively. Responding with more hostility will only cause more misunderstandings. What we need to do now is find a way to explain our stance to the people of the empire," replied another.

"Explain? With that solid proof, it will be difficult! Even those on our side can't find a way to defend us from this. We're losing support with each passing moment!"

"Let's not concern ourselves with others' opinions. We just need to give them a satisfactory response, and it will recede on its own."

"No way it's that simple..."

Many voiced their opinions, but it seemed they weren't reaching any good solution at the moment. A number of those present wondered why this had happened to their family, or more specifically, how one of their trusted men could have turned out to be a devil. This was a massive question mark, and they still didn't know the answer.

If the news were fake, they could easily debunk it with their own proof; however, the problem was that the news was, in fact, true.

Yes, they didn't understand why one of their knights had become a devil. The proof spreading to the people outside was solid, making it difficult for them to debunk. There were several witnesses who saw a member of their family actually turn into a devil. All of them gave the same testimony about it.

Grand Duke Flamecrest, seated at the center, massaged his temple. He felt a deep headache as he faced the situation. It could be said that this crisis was far worse than when their family faced the devils on the frontline. To make matters worse, the man who had turned into a devil was one of their trusted commanders and one of the closest people to his son. This made the situation even more complicated.

Aldrey, seated on the right side of the table, was also thinking hard. The person who had become a devil was one of his trusted men. This not only made him feel betrayed but also left him with several unanswered questions.

Why had Marcus become a devil? Since when had he been one? Aldrey had known Commander Marcus for a long time and was well aware of the man's integrity and

strength. There was no reason for him to betray the family or become a devil. Just thinking about it gave him a headache.

While they were still discussing possible solutions, a butler approached the Grand Duke and whispered something to him. Upon hearing it, the Grand Duke's expression frowned, and he looked at all of his family members.

"The imperial family is almost here, it seems they are sending an envoy to investigate. The envoy is led by Princess Loraine."

When they heard the news, they fell silent. The worst had finally come. The imperial family was taking action, and it seemed they were treating the matter seriously by sending one of their descendants to personally lead the envoy. Although their relationship with the princess was good, and she shared a friendship with their young master, they didn't know if she would support them given the strong evidence against them.

Aldrey also sensed a larger problem with the arrival of the imperial family. He could only hope that Princess Loraine would understand their situation and explain to the imperial family that they had no knowledge of the devil's presence among their family members.

Not long after, a convoy of carriages arrived at the Flamecrest family mansion and stopped right in front of the main doors. Grand Duke Flamecrest and Aldrey were already waiting to greet the envoy.

The moment the carriage door opened, revealing the beautiful Princess Loraine, all the cultivators of the Flamecrest family straightened their posture. As for Grand Duke Flamecrest and Aldrey, they simply smiled and greeted her.

"Welcome to our humble residence, Your Highness. It is truly an honor for us to receive your esteemed presence." Grand duke Flamecrest said.

"I apologize for coming unannounced, Grand Duke Flamecrest. It is by my father's orders that I make this trip. I would have preferred to visit under different circumstances," Princess Loraine said, slightly bowing her head. However, Grand Duke Flamecrest quickly stopped her, not allowing her to bow.

"No, it's quite alright, Your Highness. I anticipated this. We, too, were shocked by this incident, and we are still investigating to determine if there are others like 'him'. There is still some uncertainty within our family."

"Thank you for your understanding, Grand Duke Flamecrest. The imperial family also believes this issue could cause bigger problems in the future, so I intend to assist the Flamecrest family. I personally find it hard to believe that the Flamecrest family would harbor a devil," Princess Loraine said before turning to smile at Aldrey.

"How are you, Young Master Aldrey?"

"I'm well, Your Highness. You've just arrived from the capital, and we have already prepared a room for you to rest before we continue with our business. Allow me to escort you inside personally," Aldrey replied. However, as he spoke, a thought crossed his mind.

"That strange sensation from Princess Loraine has returned again."

Chapter 273: Going to the Vindas Empire

Aldrey escorted Princess Loraine to her room. They were alone in the corridor when Princess Loraine spoke to him.

"Young Master Aldrey, you don't have to worry about this issue. I personally believe that the Flamecrest family is also a victim in this situation. I will do my best to explain this to the imperial family so that the Flamecrest will not face any punishment or backlash."

Suppressing his discomfort, Aldrey smiled at her.

"I'm very thankful, Your Highness. With the imperial family's help, we can ease our workload once the truth comes out," he said to her.

"Young Master, there is another matter I wish to discuss with you, and it concerns the imperial family's proposal."

Aldrey sighed upon hearing this before replying to her, "My apologies, Your Highness, but can we avoid discussing it at this moment? This is not the right time, and we have not yet made a decision about it."

Princess Loraine remained silent, deciding not to continue the conversation. Before long, they arrived at her designated room.

"Your Highness, this is your room. Please enjoy your stay. We will do our best to serve you," Aldrey said courteously.

"Thank you, Young Master. I'm sorry for taking up your time just to accompany me here," she replied.

"Not at all, Your Highness. It's my honor," he responded with a polite smile.

After that, Aldrey left Princess Loraine alone inside the room. Once the door closed, the smiling princess's expression suddenly changed. She became expressionless, a stark contrast to the warm demeanor she had shown earlier.

She glanced around the room, and after ensuring it was safe, she sat on the chair in front of the mirror and looked at her reflection.

"This is for his cause, even if I have to do this," she said with a determined expression.

The next day, Aldrian opened his eyes, having finished his comprehension session for now. He glanced to his side and saw that his mother was still there, cultivating peacefully. However, she seemed to sense that he had woken up, as she also opened her eyes. She smiled at him and asked,

"Done?"

Aldrian nodded, smiling in response.

"You are truly my genius son. You've cultivated for such a short time, yet you've already grown much stronger and faster than anyone else." She said.

"Well, I am your son," he replied with a grin.

They then stepped out of the secret chamber, and as soon as they emerged, they saw Emperor Durand already waiting for them outside the door, smiling warmly.

"How was it?" Emperor Durand asked.

"We are thankful for this opportunity, Your Majesty. My visit here has truly given me new insights, and I have gained much from it," Aldrian said with a slight bow.

"I'm glad it has benefited you. You've already done so much for us, and it's only right for me to repay you for all that you've done. However, even I feel this might not be enough. Sigh... If only I had another treasure like the Heavenly Guardian Armor, I would gladly give it to you. But unfortunately, I can't offer the legacy treasure—it's the last trump card we have," Emperor Durand said with regret.

"No, Your Majesty, you don't have to feel bad. The Heavenly Guardian Armor is truly a wonderful artifact and has protected the Doria Empire for so long, but I have no desire for it or any artifacts." Aldrian replied earnestly.

Emperor Durand, touched by Aldrian's modesty, replied,

"Yes, this artifact is the one that saved us during the dire situation of the empire. If not for the Heavenly Guardian Armor, we would have been wiped out during the Devil War three million years ago."

After that, they walked back to the surface and appeared in the room where the entrance of secret path was located. Aldrian turned to his mother and the emperor.

"Mother, Your Majesty, it looks like I have to go. The sooner I take care of Father's problem, the better it will be."

Hearing that, Irene showed a disappointed expression, but she then tried to give Aldrian her best smile.

"Be careful, child. Remember, your safety is the most important," she said to him. But then, she remembered something.

"And thank you for killing Wei Zhi. When I saw the faint trace of your energy lingering on his body, I knew instantly it was you. Although what you did to his body was truly horrifying, it brought me immense satisfaction."

Aldrian was stunned, but he smiled warmly.

"Well, he was a really irritating person, so I gave him special treatment. But I'm sorry about Cecile's mother—it must be really sad for you."

Irene nodded and hugged Aldrian warmly.

"Your presence is healing my heart, so I'm okay," she said. Aldrian also hugged his mother with full affection before releasing her and looking at Emperor Durand.

"Do you really not need any help there? You will be involving yourself with a troublesome problem, and from my prediction, it will involve the Avandi Imperial Family. I'm afraid your journey this time will not be any more 'peaceful' than your journey here," Emperor Durand said.

"Well, if the problem can't be solved peacefully, then I'll make them understand that it's not good to resolve it with violence," Aldrian said, shrugging his shoulders.

Emperor Durand just smiled. He was really curious about what Aldrian would do in the Vindas Empire.

"I hope you're all ready for whatever comes your way," Emperor Durand thought, his thoughts, of course, directed at everyone in the Vindas Empire.

"Then I will go first, Mother, Your Majesty. I will visit you again when I have the time," he said to them before disappearing.

Emperor Durand and Irene could only stare at the empty space where Aldrian had just stood.

Back at the mansion, he appeared again and gathered all the members of his group. He then proceeded to tell them about his father's problem and his intent to help his father's family resolve it. They had no issue with that. As for Xin Haotian, he considered it just another quick stop before they returned to the western side of the continent—it aligned with their destination, after all.

"Eleine, do you want to stay with us, or do you want to go back to Mother?" Aldrian suddenly asked Eleine.

Eleine was stunned for a moment, then she pondered briefly before, with a resolute expression, she said to him,

"Although I want to return to Lady Irene after Cecile is gone, I think it's better for me to follow you, Young Master. If I go back now, it will complicate things. Grand Duke Rivas will likely have many questions for me, or even investigate me once I return."

Aldrian nodded. That was true—Grand Duke Rivas must already know that Eleine is out of the secret realm and appeared in Rivas City with his group. It would be better for her to follow him to avoid further complications.

"Then let's prepare. I will visit the Alchemist Association first to say goodbye to the other grandmasters."

Afterward, Aldrian teleported to the front of the association and immediately walked toward the upper floors. The situation in the association, after the association master had left, was quite hectic. The three grandmasters who knew the truth couldn't stop thinking about the fact that their association master had actually been in cooperation with the devils.

To the outside world, the Alchemist Association had just announced that the association master resigned from his position due to personal reasons that could not be disclosed.

Thanks to the imperial family's understanding and generosity, the association master's name was not tarnished, and the Alchemist Association was spared from falling into crisis. The association's reputation would have been irreparable if the truth about the master's collusion with the devils had been revealed.

Now, the position of association master had been filled by Grandmaster Marco, who seemed to still be adapting to his new role as Aldrian entered the association master's room.

"Ah, Aldrian, you've come! What a surprise. Come, have a seat," Grandmaster Marco said, standing up from his master's seat.

"How is it, senior? You seem to be enjoying your position?" Aldrian asked with a joking tone.

"You jest," Grandmaster Marco replied with a tired sigh. "I'm the one who's not good with paperwork, and now I suddenly have to deal with all of this. It makes me want to just escape from this place."

Aldrian smiled before he said to Grandmaster Marco,

"Senior, I came here to say goodbye. I have to go somewhere, and it's quite urgent, so I don't think I can stay here for too long. After this, I'll leave immediately."

Grandmaster Marco was stunned and sighed.

"Although it's a pity that you can't stay longer, I understand. Take care of yourself out there. You are our precious alchemist. If you ever need our help, just say the word, and we'll do our best to assist you."

Not long after, Aldrian left the room and visited the other grandmasters to say his goodbyes.

Once that was done, he returned to the mansion and found that all of his group members had already gathered in front, waiting for him.

"Let's go," Aldrian said to them. With that, they made their way to one of the teleportation stations located not far from their district.

They walked at a normal pace, not drawing attention, but in the middle of their walk, someone nearby noticed them. He was dressed in noble attire, inside a carriage heading in the direction of the imperial family. He instructed the driver to stop for a moment and looked toward Aldrian's group.

"That person?!"

Chapter 274: Meeting Grandfather

The carriage came to a stop, and a person stepped down. Those who saw him instantly recognized who he was: Grand Duke Rivas, the most influential figure in the northwestern region of the Doria Empire. He was on his way to the imperial family after receiving information from Emperor Durand that he had concluded his business with Irene. However, he halted his journey when he sensed a familiar presence—Eleine's presence—coming from Aldrian's group.

Another carriage behind his own came to a stop, and two people stepped down from it.

"Is there a problem, my friend?" one of them asked.

"I think I sense an acquaintance. I'm going to meet her," Grand Duke Rivas replied before quickly approaching Aldrian's group. His attire and reputation immediately drew the attention of those nearby, including Aldrian's group.

Eleine, sensing someone approaching them, turned toward the source of the commotion and widened her eyes. Seeing Grand Duke Rivas drawing closer made her heart nearly leap out of her chest.

"Why is the Grand Duke here?!" she thought, panic setting in. She wanted to hide, but it was impossible now that he was so close.

Aldrian also watched as Grand Duke Rivas approached.

"Oh, Grand Duke Rivas. To think we'd meet in this place," he thought. He then stepped forward, positioning himself in front of Eleine to shield her.

"Relax, Eleine. You don't have to say anything. Let me handle this," Aldrian said through a voice transmission, reassuring her.

Hearing Aldrian's reassurance, Eleine felt a sense of security and tried to steady herself. However, she still used Aldrian's body to shield her face from the approaching Grand Duke Rivas.

When Grand Duke Rivas was about ten meters away from Aldrian, he stopped and narrowed his eyes at Aldrian. His gaze briefly shifted to Eleine, standing behind Aldrian. He was certain it was her—the same Eleine he had seen in Ilyon Town, accompanied by Xin Haotian at the time.

His attention then returned to Aldrian, a handsome young man with black hair and blue eyes that felt strangely familiar to him.

He couldn't sense any cultivation from Aldrian, yet he was certain this young man was the person he had been searching for—the one who had piqued his daughter's interest.

"Are you the one named Aldrian?" Grand Duke Rivas asked.

"What if I am?" Aldrian replied, his tone calm and composed.

Grand Duke Rivas narrowed his eyes at Aldrian's response. There was no fear or nervousness in his voice, only unwavering confidence. It was impossible that Aldrian didn't recognize his status and authority, given his attire and demeanor.

Before the Grand Duke could speak again, a voice suddenly resounded from behind him.

"How dare you respond to Grand Duke Rivas in such a nonchalant tone?! He asked politely, yet you answered as if it meant nothing!"

Aldrian turned toward the source of the voice and saw a handsome blonde-haired man whose face was twisted in anger, glaring at him as though he had committed an unforgivable act.

"Who is this clown? Dalwin Loraz? Ah, the young master of the Loraz family," Aldrian thought after having read Dalwin's information using his Eyes of the Heaven.

Seeing Aldrian's nonchalant gaze fixed on him, Dalwin felt deeply humiliated. He wanted to continue shouting, but Grand Duke Rivas raised his hand, signaling him to stop. Reluctantly, Dalwin complied, snorting as he glared at Aldrian.

"You're lucky that Grand Duke Rivas is magnanimous. Otherwise, I'd punish you in his stead," Dalwin said, his tone dripping with disdain.

Aldrian, however, paid him no mind. Instead, his attention shifted to another figure following closely behind Grand Duke Rivas. This man seemed close to the Grand Duke, and Aldrian instantly understood why after reading his information.

"Dian Loraz, ah, he is Duke Loraz," Aldrian thought, recalling information from the Thunderous Shadow Pavilion. The Loraz family was one of the families that supported the Rivas family. Grand Duke Rivas and Duke Loraz had a strong relationship due to their past, which made the two families close—something Aldrian didn't find surprising.

"Do you know this person, Giovan?" Duke Loraz asked.

The Grand Duke was silent for a moment before he responded.

"He is the one I mentioned to you—the one who saved Irene, the one who redirected the flow of the war in the Rivas Grand Duchy. Aldrian."

Aldrian's answer confirmed his guess that this young man was indeed the one he had been searching for. However, reality didn't match his expectations. Although the man was handsome, he was far too young! He appeared much younger than Irene and was still in his teens.

But Grand Duke Rivas did not underestimate Aldrian because of his youthful appearance. The stories from numerous witnesses had already made him something of a legend to the people of Ilyon and Falanis. Even his soldiers and knights regarded him as a hero. The Grand Duke did not want to take any wrong steps when it came to this young man.

Duke Loraz and Dalwin widened their eyes and looked at Aldrian again. This was the man who had saved Irene from the Lust Devil? The hero who had saved many lives

during the war and liberated the northern territories of the Rivas Grand Duchy? The one who had brought down Sazim Fortress?

A cold sweat trickled down Dalwin's forehead as he realized he had just shouted at this young man. His mind went blank for a moment—this man was far too young to have accomplished all that! He had imagined that the person responsible for such feats would be an older man with high cultivation. But in front of him stood a teenager, and Dalwin couldn't sense any cultivation from him.

"How is that possible? This young man, still in his teens, is the one who did all of that?!" Dalwin thought.

Aldrian maintained a calm expression as he looked at them, but he was genuinely impressed by the Grand Duke's temperament. He had answered rather rudely, yet the Grand Duke remained calm, assessing him without judgment. Aldrian inwardly nodded, acknowledging his grandfather's character. Deciding to be more polite, after all, this man was his grandfather, and he would have to face him in the future openly.

"It's truly an honor for the esteemed Grand Duke Rivas to know me. What business does your Excellency have with me to stop me here? There are already many bystanders looking our way because of it."

Grand Duke Rivas, aware of the attention they had attracted, responded to Aldrian.

"I wish to speak with you. Can you follow me for a moment? There's a quiet place nearby where we can talk."

Aldrian did not respond immediately. Instead, he glanced back at Eleine and the others.

"It looks like we'll have to postpone our departure for a while," he said before looking back at Grand Duke Rivas and nodding.

Grand Duke Rivas then turned and walked in the opposite direction, leaving his carriages behind. They headed toward one of the finest restaurants in the city, which was quite close by, so they didn't need to use the carriage.

Upon entering the restaurant, they reserved three private rooms—one for Eleine and the others, one for Aldrian and Grand Duke Rivas, and the last for Duke Loraz.

Inside the private room for Aldrian and Grand Duke Rivas, the atmosphere was quite awkward. A feast lay in front of them, yet neither had touched it. The Grand Duke frowned at Aldrian, but Aldrian remained calm, showing no concern for the presence of such a high-ranking noble as he casually sipped his tea.

After a few minutes of awkward silence, Grand Duke Rivas finally decided to break the tension.

"Aldrian, where are you from?"

"I'm just a vagabond cultivator, so I don't have a fixed place. I really can't answer that question."

Grand Duke Rivas fell silent for a moment, assessing whether Aldrian's words were true. However, Aldrian gave no reaction, leaving him uncertain about the truth of his answer.

"Do you know that someone from my family is in your group?" Grand Duke Rivas asked again.

"Yes, I know."

"How come she's with you? Did you meet her by coincidence?"

"I met her inside the Everlasting Silent Forest, and we got out together. We've been moving together ever since."

Grand Duke Rivas nodded. There was nothing wrong with Aldrian's answer, and it made sense. Irene had mentioned that she was separated from Eleine when she was trapped inside that forbidden zone. Perhaps Aldrian had met Eleine while they were both trapped there. Although it made sense, Grand Duke Rivas still found it strange that Eleine was following this young man instead of returning to the Rivas family.

He set that aside for now and asked his next question, his face turning solemn.

"Do you know my daughter—no, the correct question is, are you acquainted with my daughter, Irene Rivas?"

Chapter 275: I Hope You Will Stay True to Your Words

Aldrian glanced at the Grand Duke for a moment while sipping his tea, then set the glass down.

"If I had known her for a long time, is there any problem with that?" Aldrian raised an eyebrow.

Grand Duke Rivas clenched his fist under the table.

"As I thought, they know each other since long. Irene has just been hiding this fact from me," he thought. Although Aldrian now appeared to be a young man in his teens, he still saw him as a potential "threat" who could "take away" his daughter.

"Then what is your relationship with my daughter? How close are you to her?" he asked Aldrian again.

Aldrian smiled before replying,

"Let's just say I'm very close to her—much closer than you might think," he said in a slightly teasing tone.

Grand Duke Rivas clenched his fist so tightly that the veins on his hand bulged, nearly to the point of drawing blood. He couldn't determine what kind of Aldrian's relationship with his daughter, nor could he be sure if Aldrian's answer was truthful. Yet, the response still irritated him. Irene had already assured him that she didn't have romantic relationship with Aldrian, and yet this man claimed they were close.

If they weren't in a romantic relationship but were still so close, then what could it be? Friends? Best friends? No, from the way Irene behaved, they seemed to be more than just "friends." The ambiguity in Aldrian's answer made him want to pull his hair out in frustration.

Aldrian kept his smile, finding it amusing to tease his grandfather like this. However, he decided to put an end to it.

"Don't worry, Your Excellency. I don't have any romantic relationship with your daughter. What I can say is that our relationship is close— that's all I can tell you," he said, his tone light but reassuring.

Grand Duke Rivas loosened his fist and, after a few seconds, sighed. He took a moment to calm himself, refusing to let his emotions sway him. Narrowing his eyes, he chose to remain silent and focused on the feast before him.

Seeing his grandfather begin to eat, Aldrian followed suit. This was his chance to build a relationship with his grandfather, ensuring he wouldn't be too shocked when the truth eventually came to light.

In the room next to them, Duke Loraz and his son were also discussing the matter. Initially, Duke Loraz had come to the capital to demonstrate their support for the imperial family. However, with Irene accompanying Grand Duke Rivas, Dalwin Loraz decided to follow his father. After Irene's meeting with the emperor, he intended to approach her as he usually did.

Duke Loraz sliced a piece of meat while speaking to his son.

"Then, what if there is something between them? It would be difficult even for me, to prevent someone of that caliber if they have a special relationship."

Dalwin Loraz clenched his fist, feeling threatened by the sudden appearance of a man called Aldrian. Many said that Aldrian, the hero who saved many lives, was a handsome

young man with powerful strength. Well, that was obvious, considering all he had accomplished. People he met inside the Rivas family had mentioned that Irene's character changed whenever Aldrian was brought up.

They said that Irene, who had never shown any expression toward the opposite sex, suddenly changed, becoming like a captivated woman whenever she heard the name Aldrian. She didn't have a negative opinion of him and didn't hesitate to compliment or defend him in her own stories. He had already tried talking to Irene about Aldrian, but, as usual, she gave him the cold shoulder and didn't reveal much information about him.

After meeting Aldrian just now and seeing how young Aldrian still appeared compared to Irene, he felt a slight sense of relief. There was no way Irene could be interested in a younger boy, right?

However, if Aldrian did have a special relationship with Irene, didn't that mean he no longer had a chance? He gritted his teeth. No, it wasn't settled yet. He still didn't know what Grand Duke Rivas was thinking. Irene's status was special, and with Aldrian's unknown origins, even if Grand Duke Rivas agreed to their relationship, the imperial family would certainly have something to say.

The imperial family must know what Aldrian had done and would want to learn more about him. Dalwin believed that the imperial family was likely to interfere in this matter due to Aldrian's unknown origins. They would want to ensure that Aldrian wouldn't turn against them in the future. Once Aldrian entered the Rivas household, there would be a shift in power within the region that could threaten the imperial family.

"Yes, it won't be simple for the Rivas family. Maybe their relationship could work if the Rivas were a normal household, but they are a high noble family and must consider other factors, especially the politics of the empire," Dalwin thought.

Duke Loraz, seeing his son holding back his anger, sighed and spoke to him.

"Dalwin, although I would gladly have Irene as my daughter-in-law, we still have to consider the bigger picture. There are many unexpected things that might happen in the future. While we don't yet know what kind of relationship Aldrian has with Irene or what Grand Duke Rivas thinks of him, his achievements are enough to leave a favorable impression on many people in this empire."

"And before you dwell on the possibility of the imperial family's negative opinion, you must also consider their positive one. If they believe they can gain Aldrian's strength within the empire through the Rivas family, they may even set aside their petty suspicions and allow Aldrian to marry into the Rivas family."

It was as if Duke Loraz knew exactly what his son was thinking, so he offered his perspective.

"So, I hope you don't do anything stupid that would make the situation worse. However, all of this is still just an assumption, so don't dwell on it too much. Continue your cultivation, and you will be in a better position to elevate our family to greater heights," Duke Loraz said.

"Remember, son, in the end, the truth lies in your own strength. Even if we don't have a marriage alliance with the Rivas, we will have a strong position if you possess power of your own. So, don't let your emotions cloud your judgment," he added, his expression solemn.

Dalwin could only grit his teeth because what his father said was true. However, he had been pursuing Irene for a long time and still felt reluctant to let go of her. It was true that one of the main reasons he pursued Irene was to elevate his family, but he also had feelings for her. There was no way any man could walk away unaffected after seeing what kind of person she was.

Duke Loraz looked at his son for a moment before closing his eyes and sighing. He knew that it would take time for his son to forget about his plan to pursue Irene and move on. Pride and romantic feelings were not easy to set aside, especially for a man of his son's status, where most desires were easily fulfilled.

He could only hope that his son would take his words to heart and not do anything foolish.

After half an hour, Aldrian and Grand Duke Rivas finally emerged from the private room. There was no further conversation after they came out. Eleine and the others followed them as they exited the restaurant. Once outside, Aldrian looked at Grand Duke Rivas.

"Your Excellency, once again, I hope you will stay true to your words when the time comes," Aldrian said with a smile before he and his group walked away.

Grand Duke Rivas stood there, motionless, watching Aldrian's back. He glanced at Eleine for a moment before returning his gaze to Aldrian, watching until they disappeared into the bustling street.

"How did it go? Was your conversation with him good?" Duke Loraz asked Grand Duke Rivas.

The Grand Duke didn't answer, but he recalled their last conversation inside the private room.

"Your Excellency, between your daughter and your pride, which one is more important?" Aldrian had asked him.

Grand Duke Rivas frowned at the question, but he still answered it nonetheless.

"Of course, I will prioritize my daughter. She is my only child, the only hope and successor for the longevity of the Rivas family. Her existence is a blessing for my family. My job is to protect and guide her until she is fully ripe and ready to lead. Pride is one aspect that I should hold onto, but too much pride is dangerous and can bring about my downfall."

Aldrian smiled upon hearing the answer.

"Then I hope Your Excellency will stay true to your words and remain steadfast in the future. That kind of mindset, I hope you will always keep."

Grand Duke Rivas didn't fully understand what Aldrian meant by that, but it seemed as though Aldrian knew something he didn't.

"My pride or my daughter, huh."

"Our conversation went well. He is truly a formidable young man," Grand Duke Rivas said with a sigh.

"Let's go. Irene is still waiting at the imperial palace."

They then walked in a different direction, where their carriages were already waiting.

Chapter 276: Arriving at Flamecrest City

Flamecrest City is the capital of the Flamecrest Grand Duchy, a city that has stood for millions of years, rich with the history of its sovereign rulers, the Flamecrest family. The city is known by many nicknames, including the City of Heroes and the City of Fire Dragons, but its most famous title is the City of Fire.

Many cultivators compatible with the fire element come to this city to deepen their comprehension and advance their cultivation. The volcanic mountains visible in the distance provide an ideal environment for fire-element cultivators to practice. This is also why the Flamecrest family is renowned as a fire-element-based lineage in the region.

The sun had not yet reached its highest point when Aldrian stepped out of the teleportation portal into the city. The city itself was not so different from Rivas City or the capital of the Doria Empire, except for the noticeable presence of people with red hair walking here and there.

"So this is the place where Father grew up," Aldrian thought.

Without wasting any time, he decided to find a place for them to stay first. It was his usual procedure whenever he arrived in a new city. Since they didn't know anyone familiar with the area, they relied on the most common approach—asking the locals.

After finding what they were looking for, Aldrian's group headed toward an inn said to be located near the Flamecrest family mansion. It was reputed to be the best in the city. The inn was owned by the Flamecrest family, which worked in Aldrian's favor. At the very least, this gave him a legitimate entry point to approach the Flamecrest family—"legally."

Amidst their journey to the inn, Aldrian observed his surroundings. He could sense the awkward atmosphere whenever members of the Flamecrest family passed by. People didn't dare voice their opinions in front of them, yet the news of the family harboring devils had truly shocked the populace.

The people of this city, who had long regarded the Flamecrest family as their heroes, found it hard to believe what had happened. Some believed that even if devils were found among the Flamecrest ranks, it was merely an oversight or a misunderstanding. For the most part, the citizens still seemed to have faith in the Flamecrest family.

However, this was not the case for those who were not from the city. They seemed to condemn the Flamecrest family and held harsh opinions about them. The news of devils being linked to the Flamecrest was like a hammer shattering their faith in the family's integrity. They felt betrayed by the nobles who had produced so many heroes across generations for both the family and the empire as a whole.

The people demanded a solid explanation for why there was a devil within the Flamecrest family. However, the reasons provided by the Flamecrest seemed more like excuses meant to deflect backlash. Many remained unconvinced that the family was unaware of the devil's presence, especially when he was one of their trusted commanders and already well-known to many.

Aldrian finally arrived at the inn, and once they settled in, he began thinking about his next plan. He couldn't just barge into the Flamecrest family and announce that he wanted to help—that would only make them suspicious. He needed someone or something to make them accept his assistance. His focus was on his father first, and then the Flamecrest family.

"I have to gather information first to ensure my next step," he thought.

He then walked to the ground floor of the inn, where it was used as a restaurant. Besides a guild like the information guild, there was no better place to gather information than a place where people congregated and talked about many things like this place. He sat at one of the stands and ordered a drink while focusing his hearing on the conversations around him.

There were hundreds of people here, each discussing various topics, but Aldrian focused only on those connected to the Flamecrest family. Once he overheard a conversation about it, he listened carefully until he found something that he considered a starting point for his next move. Through all the discussions, he gathered a clearer understanding of why this matter had become such a stain on the Flamecrest family—one that was difficult to erase.

A few people saw one of the famous commanders of the Flamecrest, Commander Marcus, releasing his devil energy, with his skin turning reddish as if he were about to transform into his Devil form. From there, the news spread widely and was later confirmed by some who claimed to be members of the Flamecrest family.

Aldrian thought he could start making his move with this information, so he approached a group of people who happened to be discussing the topic. There were four of them, all at the Baron stage of cultivation.

"Excuse me, gentlemen, may I ask a few questions? I overheard something interesting," Aldrian said, taking out a small pouch of high-level energy stones from his storage ring. The four people widened their eyes when they saw the pouch and instantly grinned at Aldrian.

"Of course, young master, we'll gladly help. What questions do you want to ask?" one of them said.

Aldrian then sat beside them, placing the pouch on the table before speaking.

"I heard you were talking about the recent events involving the Flamecrest family and the devil. I also heard that the reason this news is spreading is because some people saw a member of the Flamecrest family exuding devil energy, and so on. How credible is this news? How can people believe it?"

"I have to say, this is mostly credible, young master. If the 'some people' you're referring to were just random individuals, the story might be different, and not many would take it seriously. But these people are members of the Golden Phoenix Commerce who happened to pass by Commander Marcus when he suddenly attacked them with his devilish characteristics. Fortunately, there were enough of them to outnumber him, allowing them to escape and tell the tale to the masses. To make things worse, some people from the Flamecrest family itself have confirmed that Commander Marcus is indeed the devil."

Aldrian then pondered for a moment before asking again,

"Do you know who the members of the Golden Phoenix Commerce were that were attacked by the devil? Or do you know who from the Flamecrest family confirmed that Commander Marcus is the devil?"

"As for the Golden Phoenix Commerce, we don't know the details about their identities. But I can tell you about one of the members of the Flamecrest family who confirmed it. He's a friend of a friend of mine, so I can guarantee the reliability of this information," the other replied.

"Can you take me to this Flamecrest family member? I have something to discuss with him," Aldrian said.

"If you want to talk to him, it can be arranged, but it depends on my friend and whether he can bring his friend. With the situation in the Flamecrest family right now, it'll be tricky to arrange a meeting, as they can't leave the mansion without companions."

"Please arrange it. I'll gladly offer more rewards if you can bring him here to meet me," Aldrian said, taking out a small pouch of peak-level energy stones, causing all of them to widen their eyes in shock.

"I'll wait at this inn until midnight. If your friend can't bring him here, I'll consider this deal a failure." Aldrian then returned the small pouch to his storage ring.

After seeing the wealth Aldrian displayed, there was no way these people would pass up the opportunity. The one who had given Aldrian the information immediately dashed outside to call his friend. The others stayed by Aldrian's side, engaging in conversation about various topics. Being from this city, they had a deep knowledge of its history and the many rumors circulating around it. This was a great opportunity for Aldrian to familiarize himself with the city.

About an hour later, the man who had gone outside to call his friend returned with another person. Aldrian, who had been watching, looked at the newcomer and waited for him to speak.

"Young master, are you the one who wants to meet my friend Jil, a member of the Flamecrest family?" the newcomer asked.

Aldrian nodded. "Yes, that's me."

"My apologies, but may I ask what your purpose is in wanting to meet him?"

"I just want to investigate the truth behind this devil story, so I need firsthand information from someone who knows the situation directly."

"Do you have any affiliations?"

"No, I don't have any. However, let's say I have a distant connection to the Flamecrest family, and this news about the devil is troubling me, so I just want to understand more or perhaps help in this case," Aldrian replied.

"I see. However, I'm afraid I have to disappoint you, young master. Since Jil told the others about the devil, I haven't been able to contact him until today. However, if you want to investigate this matter, I have another way for you to meet someone else who can provide you with good information about it. Perhaps he can even bring you inside the mansion."

Chapter 277: Infiltrating Flamecrest Mansion

Later that night, after Aldrian's discussion with the group of cultivators, he now found himself face-to-face with a cultivator cloaked entirely in black. They were inside his room, and the cloaked figure had revealed his face. His red hair marked him as a member of the Flamecrest family, and Aldrian had been informed that this man held a higher position than Jil.

The man observed Aldrian intently. He had come here after being informed by a friend about someone who wished to meet him. His friend had promised him a peak-level energy stone as a reward if he agreed to meet and cooperate with this person. To his surprise, the person he was asked to meet turned out to be this young man.

"So, Kroz, I want to ask a few questions regarding the recent issues within the Flamecrest family. I hope you can help me with this," Aldrian said.

Kroz frowned upon hearing the young man's purpose.

"I'm just a lower-tier soldier in the Flamecrest family, so I'm afraid I don't know much about this matter. The information itself is still unclear," he replied.

"No, I don't need detailed information," Aldrian said. "I just want to know a few things. For example, someone named Jil in your family—what is his relationship with Commander Marcus? How did he find out about Commander Marcus becoming a devil? And lastly, what happened to Jil?"

Hearing Aldrian's question, Kroz relaxed his frown.

"Jil is one of the soldiers in my unit, and my unit is directly under Commander Marcus. So, Commander Marcus is our immediate superior. As for how Jil found out about Commander Marcus becoming a devil—some time ago, Jil mentioned it himself. He and his friends saw Commander Marcus exuding devil energy and seeming to lose his mind. Marcus almost attacked Jil, but thankfully he managed to escape with his friends to a crowded area."

"As for what happened to Jil, he is currently under observation by the main family, confined to one of the rooms in the dungeon. I really don't know what's happening to him right now. He has no contact with the outside world and is completely cut off. I have no idea why he's under observation, nor do I know what the elders or Lord Flamecrest are thinking," Kroz said.

"Are all of Jil's friends who saw Commander Marcus also under observation in that place?" Aldrian asked.

"Yes, it appears so. They were all summoned by one of the elders and haven't been seen since. However, I heard from a friend who knows about this matter that they're all being observed in the dungeon within the mansion complex."

Aldrian paused, pondering for a moment, before asking again, "What about Commander Marcus? Where is he now?"

"He... he's dead," Kroz replied.

"What?" Aldrian asked, frowning.

"Yes. Not long after the news of him becoming a devil spread, the elders successfully subdued him. They intended to interrogate Commander Marcus, but shortly after that, he was found dead in his cell. There were no signs of assassination, so it remains a mystery to this day. I saw his corpse myself, so I can confirm that," Kroz explained.

Aldrian frowned deeper, sensing that something was amiss. The sudden death of Commander Marcus without any signs? He could sense a conspiracy at play. However, with the limited information he had, he couldn't draw any concrete conclusions.

"Where is Commander Marcus's body? There's no way you all just destroyed it, right?" Aldrian asked.

"Of course not. His body is still in the morgue, which is under heavy surveillance. There's no way the elders would destroy his body without understanding how Commander Marcus died. They're conducting an autopsy to determine the exact cause of his sudden death."

"Do you know where the morgue is?" Aldrian asked.

"Of course I know. It's located in the southwest part of the mansion complex, secluded and underground, right next to the dungeon. The morgue has only one entrance, which also leads to the dungeon. As I mentioned, the place is heavily guarded now, and only those permitted by one of the elders are allowed to enter," Kroz answered.

Aldrian sighed. He still couldn't find a breakthrough in this case. The good news, however, was that Commander Marcus's body was still there, so he could examine it himself later for any signs of strangeness.

"Can you show me the entrance to the dungeon? You don't have to take me inside, just point out the exact location of the entrance," Aldrian said, taking out a small pouch of peak-level energy stones from his storage ring.

Kroz's eyes widened. The aura of the peak-level energy stones spread towards him, making him feel a surge of greed. He had never touched high-level energy stones in his entire life, let alone peak-level ones. With his Earl-stage cultivation, middle-level energy stones had always been enough for him, and that's all the Flamecrest family had given him up until now. If he got his hands on the peak-level energy stones, he could use them in many ways, one of which was to accelerate his cultivation. This was truly a rare opportunity.

He knew what he was doing right now was risky and could be considered treason, as he was revealing information about his family to this unknown person. But the prospect of obtaining peak-level energy stones was incredibly tempting.

"What are you going to do, young master? I hope you don't do anything that will make the family an enemy of you. I could get dragged into this. Even now, I feel anxious because I'm here sneaking around behind the family's back," Kroz said, narrowing his eyes.

Although the prospect of getting peak-level energy stones was tempting, if he were found out for revealing crucial information, like the secret location, to an outsider, he could kiss his life goodbye. It could be counted as betrayal, and a traitor would be executed.

"You don't have to worry. I won't drag you or anybody else into this. I just need you to show me the exact location of the entrance, and your job will be done. And don't worry if you think I'll harm Flamecrest. No, it's actually the opposite—I want to help them solve this issue. But I can only do it this way because I don't want Flamecrest to know I'm the one helping them, at least not yet," Aldrian said, reassuring Kroz.

After weighing what Aldrian had said, Kroz finally made his decision. He gritted his teeth and said to Aldrian,

"Alright, I'll show you the location. When are you going to do it?"

"Anytime you're ready," Aldrian answered.

"Alright, let's go now. This is a good time because the shift change for the guards is almost here." After that, they left the inn and made their way toward the Flamecrest family mansion. The night life of Flamecrest city was still bustling with activity, so their movements weren't too conspicuous. After walking for fifteen minutes, they finally arrived at an area with a tall wall spanning across the sidewalk.

"This is the outer wall of the mansion. The dungeon and morgue are located inside the inner wall, the distance of the outer wall and inner wall is 600 meters, and the distance between the inner wall and the dungeon is 200 meters. Behind this wall, there are many detection formations, so you can't just jump in recklessly," Kroz said to Aldrian.

Aldrian spread his senses carefully inside, and true to Kroz's words, there were many detection formations placed on the ground and even on the walls themselves. Once something touched those formations, the nearby patrol would be immediately alerted. He was impressed by the mansion's security, but for him, formations were one of his fortes, and these kinds of detection formations were easy for him to disable.

"There is a gate 500 meters from here where you can enter, but I doubt they will let you in without an explanation to the guards about your purpose here. Heck, even if you have a valid reason, they won't let anyone enter. Moreover, with the imperial family's envoy here, the security is much tighter than usual," Kroz said.

"The imperial family is here?"

"Yes, the imperial family's envoy, led by Princess Loraine, arrived here yesterday. The devil case seems to have really disturbed the imperial family, and they are here to inspect our family. They also want to know what happened here in detail."

Aldrian narrowed his eyes. As Emperor Durand had said, the imperial family would be involved in this, but he wasn't surprised. This case was quite a big matter, after all. With the imperial family here, perhaps he could take advantage of the situation.

Aldrian then touched Kroz's shoulder, and suddenly they disappeared, only to reappear inside the area behind the wall. Aldrian had teleported them into a space between the gaps in the formations, ensuring they didn't trigger any of them.

Kroz, still disoriented from the sudden change in scenery, was shocked to realize they were already inside the mansion complex. They hadn't triggered any formations, and he now understood that Aldrian was an expert.

"Which way to the dungeon from here? The faster we move, the better. I've already detected a group of patrols moving toward this direction," Aldrian said.

Chapter 278: Entering the Dungeon

Aldrian disappeared from his initial position and reappeared 500 meters closer to the inner wall. He then teleported again, this time appearing inside the area behind the inner wall. Each time he reappeared, he made sure not to touch any formations to avoid alerting anyone.

Kroz, unable to resist Aldrian, felt deeply disoriented as the scene around him kept changing. This was the first time he had experienced teleportation like this, leaving him shocked even after they had already arrived inside the inner area. It was vastly different from the teleportation stations, where individuals would arrive in identical interiors designed to minimize discomfort and disorientation upon reaching their destination.

Aldrian appeared in an area filled with trees, resembling a miniature forest beside a beautiful, vast garden. He positioned himself in the shadows of tall trees and bushes, blending himself and Kroz seamlessly into the environment. He made certain that no one, not even those at the Emperor stage, could detect their presence. Aldrian remained extra cautious here, as he could sense many guards in this area, far more numerous than in the section he had just passed through.

The number of guards could reach dozens, patrolling and observing their surroundings with heightened senses. Aldrian noticed that their senses scanned the area every 30 seconds. The average cultivation level of the guards was at the Viscount stage, with the strongest among them reaching the Duke stage—a truly remarkable force for guarding a single location.

"Where is the entrance?" Aldrian asked through the voice transmission.

"There, about 190 meters ahead. The entrance is between two trees. You'll see it if you keep walking in that direction," Kroz replied, pointing toward the area. *"But as I said, the security is very tight right now, so it won't be easy."*

Aldrian did not respond as he closed his eyes, appearing as if he were meditating. Kroz wasn't sure what Aldrian was doing but chose to wait. After five seconds, Aldrian opened his eyes and looked toward the entrance.

"I've already grasped the entire area."

Kroz wore a puzzled expression before the scenery suddenly changed again. When he looked around after the abrupt shift, he was shocked to find that they were already inside the dungeon! He was astonished that Aldrian had managed to infiltrate such a highly guarded place without anyone noticed, and it seemed he had done it with ease as well.

He knew about the element of space and space laws. The cultivators who mastered it were powerful figures renowned across the continent. Their control over space was feared by many due to the vast range of abilities it granted them. However, he couldn't believe that the space laws could be this overwhelming. Aldrian moved without leaving a single trace. Normally, a movement technique would leave behind energy residue, but Aldrian seemed to bypass this limitation effortlessly.

What Kroz didn't know was that Aldrian's teleportation technique left no trail behind due to his deep comprehension and control over the energy in his surroundings. This was an incredibly difficult feat, even for space element cultivators, because it required multitasking: while teleporting, Aldrian also had to control the surrounding energy meticulously to ensure no traces were left behind.

Now that Aldrian was inside his domain, he could move anywhere he wished without any obstacles hindering him or leaving any signs at all.

"Where is the morgue?" he asked.

"It's on this floor. Just walk straight, then turn right, and you'll see it. However, we'll have to pass a gate checkpoint," Kroz replied.

Aldrian nodded. "You don't know the location of Jil and the others, right? Let me check their location. Is 'Jil' his real name?"

"Yes, Jil is his real name," Kroz confirmed.

After confirming Jil's name, Aldrian concentrated his senses within the domain he had created before entering the dungeon. His domain covered the entire dungeon, allowing him to quickly grasp its layout. The dungeon had three floors, and each floor was guarded by many guards.

He saw the morgue Kroz had mentioned, along with many cells where the Flamecrest family usually kept their captives or criminals. Some inmates were inside those cells, but he was searching for Jil. After a minute, he finally found the only person named Jil in one of the rooms on the bottom floor. The room resembled an interrogation room, with only a table and two chairs.

Jil was a young-looking man with features typical of the Flamecrest family, like their distinctive red hair.

Aldrian saw that Jil was in good condition, though he appeared tired, something Aldrian could discern from Jil's face. It seemed Jil had his head resting on the table, as if he were sleeping in that position.

After knowing the entire layout of the dungeon and identifying the locations he needed to reach, Aldrian disappeared with Kroz and reappeared inside Jil's room. Though Jil had his eyes closed, he was still awake and stunned when he suddenly sensed a presence beside him. He turned his head, his eyes widening as he saw his captain and a stranger.

Kroz was also stunned to find that they were already inside a room, with his underling, Jil, right in front of him.

Before Jil could ask anything, Aldrian blocked the entire room with a formation, ensuring that no sounds or anything else could enter or exit. Aldrian sensed that there were two guards at the Viscount stage standing outside the room's door.

"Captain Kroz, when did you...? Wait, what are you doing here? Did they also catch you and interrogate you?" Jil asked in a low voice. He couldn't believe his captain had suddenly appeared inside his room without entering through the door. Did he not hear them entering? No, that's impossible!

"No, I'm just here to give directions to this young man. He wants to meet you," Kroz replied.

Jil then looked at Aldrian with a puzzled expression. He had never seen Aldrian before, so he felt confused. From his features, it seemed he wasn't from the family. Aldrian then took a seat across from him and placed his hand on top of the table.

"Hello, Jil. As Kroz said, I'm here to meet you, and the reason I want to meet you is about Commander Marcus," Aldrian said with a smile.

Hearing it was about Commander Marcus, Jil released a tired sigh and looked at Aldrian.

"What do you want to know? I've already told you guys many times that I really don't know anything about Commander Marcus. At that time, it was just a coincidence that my group saw him in that condition."

Aldrian remained silent for a moment after hearing Jil's sudden words. From the way he spoke, it seemed the Flamecrest family was suspecting Jil.

"No, I'm not representing the Flamecrest family, so I don't really know what you're talking about. I move on my own, and I want to know what you saw in Commander Marcus that day. I need every single detail about that time," Aldrian said.

"You don't have to explain anything beyond my questions unless I ask. I just need some information to solve this devil problem because I find it strange, that's all."

Jil was stunned. He looked at Aldrian with confusion. If he wasn't from the Flamecrest family, then why would he be here? But he was with Captain Kroz, and his reason seemed believable. He hesitated for a moment, but in the end, although he still had some questions, Jil began recounting the story he had already told the Flamecrest interrogators who had come to him many times.

"The night of the accident, my group and I, consisting of five people including myself, had just returned from a stroll in the east district to have some fun. As we passed the road after Vardam Tavern, we saw Commander Marcus, his back to us standing in a staggered posture, leaning against the wall. At that time, we didn't find it suspicious, as we thought Commander Marcus was drunk. But then..." Jil exhaled.

"Then we saw Commander Marcus turn his head toward us. What we saw shocked us, because Commander Marcus didn't seem well—his face was extremely pale, as though there was no blood in his veins. His eyes had turned red, and he was exuding devil energy. Not long after, his pale skin turned crimson, like he was about to transform into his devil form. It seemed like he intended to attack us. Realizing what was happening, we immediately ran toward the nearby patrol, which had cultivators with higher

cultivation than us. Although we knew it would be futile, since Commander Marcus was at the King stage,"

"However, the strange thing was that he didn't pursue us. This gave us time to report it, and the elder came to subdue Commander Marcus, who had actually stayed in that same spot. The rest is history."

Aldrian pondered for a moment before asking again.

"Besides your group, it is said that there were others who saw Commander Marcus. Do you know who they are? How many of them?"

"At that time, we were passing that road, which is usually quiet with not much activity. There were just six people outside of my group. We don't know their identities, so I can't really give you any information about them. They were all coming from the opposite direction, that's all I can say," Jil replied, leaning back in his chair.

Aldrian sensed that all of Jil's answers were truthful, so he pondered again. From the information he had gathered, the most suspicious detail about Commander Marcus stood out. Pale skin, as if there was no blood in his veins? Suddenly exuding devil energy? Aldrian smiled with satisfaction. These could be the clues needed to solve the problem!

Chapter 279: Investigating Commander Marcus's Body

To confirm his suspicion, Aldrian had to check Commander Marcus's body himself.

"Then why does the Flamecrest hold you in this place? What do they hope to achieve by keeping you here?" Aldrian asked.

"The elders seem suspicious of me or anyone who became witnesses. However, since it's not certain, they can't act excessively and are just asking questions about that time. I don't know why they're thinking like that," Jil answered.

Aldrian narrowed his eyes.

"Suspicious of the witnesses? Could the Flamecrest already suspect this to be a trick from the devils?"

This was the only guess he could think of that made sense as to why the Flamecrest would hold these people here and interrogate them. They might suspect that these individuals could be part of a scheme to tarnish the Flamecrest's name in public. Although, from the outside, they appeared to have just coincidentally passed by, the Flamecrest had to investigate them thoroughly to ensure they weren't part of another ploy by the mastermind to divert their attention.

Aldrian then looked at Kroz beside him. He thought this information was enough for now, but to be certain, he needed to verify it with the others first.

"Let's meet with your other underlings then," he said before turning back to Jil.

"Thank you for your cooperation. I can't do much about your condition, but once I uncover what really happened in Commander Marcus's case, you'll be released from this place if nothing is found amiss in the investigation."

After that, Kroz told Aldrian the names of everyone besides Jil. Aldrian then extended his senses throughout the dungeon, and after a few moments, he located all of them, each confined to a different room on separate floors. They all seemed to be in the same condition as Jil. Without delay, Aldrian and Kroz vanished from Jil's room, leaving Jil stunned by their sudden disappearance.

Following this, Aldrian proceeded to question each of these individuals, asking them the same questions he had asked Jil. After more than an hour, he finally finished with them. The conclusion he reached was that all of them gave answers identical to Jil's, without any inconsistencies or suspicious behavior among them.

After confirming that all their answers aligned, he only needed to inspect Commander Marcus's body. However, this task wasn't as simple as asking questions earlier, where no one had been guarding inside the room. In the morgue, several cultivators were present, seemingly physicians examining Commander Marcus's body. Most of them were at the Duke stage, with one even at the King stage.

They used their techniques to search for anomalies within Commander Marcus's corpse. Each cultivator meticulously examined a specific part of the body, ensuring no area was left untouched. At the entrance to the morgue, four guards stood watch, all at the Duke stage—a formidable lineup to guard a single room.

Aldrian focused intently, carefully constructing a formation within the morgue. He crafted it with precision, ensuring it wouldn't disrupt the energy flow and alert the people inside. Only after completing the formation did he teleport into the room.

The cultivators inside the morgue were stunned by the sudden appearance of Aldrian and Kroz.

"Who are you?" asked the King-stage cultivator, an elderly man with a white beard.

Aldrian didn't answer immediately. Instead, he surveyed the group before speaking.

"I must apologize in advance, but I need to examine this corpse—"

Although they were physicians, all of them were high-ranking cultivators, so their instincts kicked in, and they attempted to use their techniques to subdue Aldrian.

However, Aldrian merely ignored them. With a shift of his will, their bodies collapsed to the ground. He altered the gravity, and before they could react, Aldrian teleported to the King-stage cultivator, who was still in shock, and touched his forehead.

"I'm sorry, but please sleep for now," he said before injecting his lightning, shocking the old man's soul, causing him to instantly faint. The rest of them received the same treatment, unable to do anything as Aldrian sent all of them into the Dream Realm.

Kroz, who could only watch in silence, was speechless at how easily Aldrian subdued these people. He knew all of them, as they were famous physicians from the Flamecrest family. Though Kroz sensed that Aldrian only had Marquess-stage cultivation, he was shocked by how Aldrian had subdued cultivators far stronger than himself.

"Is this Commander Marcus?" Aldrian asked, to which Kroz responded,

"Yes, he is. His condition is the same as when I last saw him—when he was brought to the cell and when he died inside it."

Aldrian looked at the pale corpse, preserved in good condition. He paused for a moment, then, with a shift of his will, Jil suddenly appeared beside him. Jil, who had no time to be shocked, remained disoriented by the sudden change in scenery. He took a few seconds to realize he was in a completely different room.

He finally had time to process his shock as he saw Aldrian and his captain again. His gaze shifted to the corpse of Commander Marcus, then to the few unconscious cultivators lying around them. It was at that moment he realized he was now in the morgue. Before he could ask any questions, Aldrian pointed at Commander Marcus's corpse.

"Is his body condition the same as when you saw him exuding devil energy?" Aldrian asked Jil.

Jil swallowed his words, then looked intently at Commander Marcus's body. After a moment, he answered Aldrian.

"Yes, this is the same as when I saw him on that road, where he suddenly exuded devil energy. The paleness of his skin is exactly the same."

Aldrian nodded, confirming another of his guesses. He then touched the corpse and began inspecting Commander Marcus's internal condition. He focused his energy, checking for anything like a *gu* or any signs of influence or control over him. After thoroughly examining the body, he didn't find any signs of the *gu*, but he did find something strange.

Besides finding residue of devil energy, he also discovered a trace of something that was already familiar to him. Inside Commander Marcus's soul space, where a

cultivator's soul resides, he found remnants of black energy and laws. Although it wasn't the same as *that* black energy, it had almost the same feeling and properties as his own.

His black energy, of course, referred to his death energy, or in other words, the death laws. He could sense the residual traces of a kind of death energy, but this black energy couldn't be called true death energy, as it didn't give him the same sensation of "death" like his own. The laws he sensed also couldn't be classified as true death laws, as they lacked the complexity of the death laws.

This was truly an interesting find, as he had never encountered anything like it in the corpses of those he had killed. However, this wasn't the only intriguing discovery. He also found the binding of the karma laws within Commander Marcus's soul space. He could see the long black karma threads, but he couldn't detect where the other end led. The threads seemed to vanish into the void, but that was enough of a clue for Aldrian to conclude that these karma threads were connected to something—or someone—even after Commander Marcus's death.

He then concluded that all of these traces were the residue of someone's technique. He wasn't sure if the Flamecrest could detect this anomaly, but based on his understanding of such residual energy and karma laws, it seemed they couldn't sense it. After a few moments of thought, he nodded in understanding. The death-like energy could not be detected through normal means, and he doubted that anyone other than him could sense this residual energy.

The karma threads couldn't be seen by anyone else as clearly as Aldrian saw them. With the binding of the karma laws, it only meant that something—or someone—on the other end of the threads still had influence over Commander Marcus's dead body.

Aldrian now confirmed that Commander Marcus was indeed under some kind of influence or control, but it wasn't from gu. It was something else—something that seemed to involve both karma laws and death-like energy. From his knowledge, there was only one technique with this kind of characteristic and property, and that was...

Necromancy.

Aldrian narrowed his eyes. If it's necromancy, then it could explain why Commander Marcus suddenly became strange, although he still didn't know why he exuded devil energy. If it's necromancy, it's safe to assume that when Jil and his friends saw Commander Marcus, they were actually looking at a dead man walking, controlled by someone. This also aligned with Jil's information—that Commander Marcus's current condition was the same as when he saw the commander that night.

Aldrian felt satisfied with this discovery. If it's necromancy, he had someone in mind who could be responsible for this high-grade technique—one that could only be mastered by very few individuals, even in the history of the Barisan continent.

After reading many memories of the devils, he knew there was one person who was the master of necromancy among the devil ranks: one of the Seven Deadly Sins.

The Sloth Devil.

No data found.

Chapter 280: Shock Therapy

The Sloth Devil—Aldrian had already seen her within the memories of the Lust Devil and the Envy Devil. A beautiful woman with extraordinary talent in summoning techniques, necromancy was also one of her fortes. From what he understood, she was a master of summoning techniques, as she preferred to make her summons or those under her control do the work for her.

As people called her—the Sloth Devil—she was too lazy to do anything on her own. To compensate for this weakness, she maximized her talent in summoning techniques and even necromancy. With those skills, she could accomplish tasks without needing to move around like others. She simply ordered her summons to do her bidding.

However, many people unfamiliar with her will misunderstand the Sloth Devil as being 'weak' among the Seven Deadly Sins because of her lazy nature. Such thinking is fatal to those who truly know her. She is called the 'One-Man Army' for a reason.

If Commander Marcus was actually killed by the Sloth Devil and turned into an undead by her, then all his strangeness could be explained. However, the problem remains that even though he has a suspect in mind, it still does not resolve the issue with the Flamecrest family. He lacks solid proof to completely exonerate the Flamecrest family from involvement in Commander Marcus becoming a devil.

All of his strong conjectures remained in his mind with no physical proof whatsoever. If he wanted to resolve the issue with the Flamecrest family, he would need to present his findings and let the Flamecrest family explain them to the public. Alternatively, they could simplify matters by involving the imperial family for support.

"Isn't the princess of this empire, currently in the Flamecrest family mansion?" With her presence here, perhaps he could do something about the situation and even compel the imperial family to act according to his plans. He looked at Kroz and Jil, who were gazing at Commander Marcus's corpse with sorrowful expressions. Aldrian approached them and asked,

"What kind of person was Commander Marcus?"

Kroz looked at Aldrian and sighed.

"He was a powerful cultivator with high integrity. He was also very disciplined but remained close to his men, like us. He never judged someone based on their cultivation or special abilities, and his loyalty to the Flamecrest family, especially to Young Master Aldrey, was unmistakable."

"That's why, when this guy said he saw Commander Marcus turn into a devil, I couldn't believe it. There's no way someone like him could be swayed to become a devil," Kroz said, gesturing toward Jil.

Jil wore a sorrowful expression, he also struggled to accept that the corpse before him was truly the devil.

"I see. After seeing Commander Marcus like this, do you have any regrets about placing your trust in him?" Aldrian asked.

Kroz and Jil remained silent for a moment before Kroz finally spoke.

"No. Even now, I still feel there's something strange about this whole devil situation. The years we spent together make me certain there's no way Commander Marcus would choose this path. There must be something I don't know—something amiss that caused him to end up like this."

"Same here. When I saw him exuding that kind of devilish energy, with an expression I had never seen on Commander Marcus, I felt that something was missing from this whole event. The last time I saw him was a day before that night, and he showed no signs of strangeness. That's why I believe it's not as simple as what I saw at the time," Jil said as well.

Hearing their opinions, Aldrian smiled.

"Good. After examining this body, I found something that confirms Commander Marcus was indeed being controlled by someone," he said.

Kroz and Jil widened their eyes.

"Is that true?"

"Yes, if even you feel there's something wrong with Commander Marcus, the higher-ups of the Flamecrest must have felt it too. I think that's why they've placed you under heavy security. There are many things that don't make sense to them, and they want to ensure that the witnesses are not part of the mastermind's play behind this event," Aldrian said.

Kroz and Jil narrowed their eyes.

"What play?" Kroz asked.

"The ploy is to tarnish the reputation of the Flamecrest family and even incite the families in this empire to pit themselves against each other. The fall of the Flamecrest would greatly benefit the devils, so there's that."

"However, all of this is still just my conjecture and not something I can prove with only words. It can't be shown to the outside world because it's something that can't be easily explained. If I recklessly spread it, people would only view it as the Flamecrest family's attempt to wash their hands of this problem," Aldrian said.

Kroz gritted his teeth, his expression resolute. He knew that this matter was tricky, and whatever the Flamecrest family said at this point would only come across as an attempt to save their reputation and avoid responsibility.

"Then, are we going to let this event continue to tarnish my family's reputation and allow those devils to succeed with their plan? It feels like we can't move forward and are stuck between a rock and a hard place," he asked.

"Of course not. Let me gather more solid proof, and when the time comes, we'll expose the devil's plan. For now, I need your cooperation. Although we can only help your family passively, it's better than doing nothing."

"What do you need us to do?" Kroz asked.

"Kroz, become my eyes and ears inside the Flamecrest family. Only provide me with information related to this devil event. I believe the family will be even busier with the imperial family's arrival. If you find something, come to the inn to report it."

"Jil, I want you to talk to your interrogator about what I'm about to tell you." Aldrian then explained to them the condition of Commander Marcus—that he was under someone's control. He told them that Commander Marcus had already been dead when Jil saw him, and what Jil had encountered was an undead. Aldrian wanted Jil to explain this to the interrogator if they came back again.

However, Aldrian gave the message that Jil must convey the information in a less direct manner, as being too blunt could raise suspicion. He wanted Jil to present the information in a roundabout way, allowing the interrogator to catch the meaning or clue without it being too obvious. Aldrian believed that the people of the Flamecrest family weren't stupid and would pick up on something from Jil's approach.

"Alright, is everyone clear?" Aldrian asked, to which Kroz and Jil nodded.

"Then I will send you back," Aldrian said. After that, Jil disappeared from the room and reappeared inside his interrogation room.

"Kroz, I will be waiting for any information," Aldrian said before Kroz disappeared and appeared beside the main mansion building, where there were no guards at this time. Kroz was stunned because he was already outside and then felt something inside his robe. When he touched it, he was shocked to find that it was a pouch full of peak-level energy stones. He hurriedly hid it and looked around to make sure there was no one near him.

Kroz sighed in relief after making sure there was no one around. However, only then did he truly realize what he had just done—bringing a stranger, someone he didn't really know, into one of his family's secret places. He felt guilt, but also something beyond greed for the energy stones when he spoke to Aldrian earlier. He didn't know why, but he felt he could trust Aldrian to help his family solve their problems.

Logically speaking, Kroz should never have told Aldrian anything. He didn't know Aldrian's origins, he didn't know what kind of person he was, and he didn't know if Aldrian was trustworthy—whether he was good or bad. Kroz didn't know anything about him. He just felt that, aside from receiving the peak-level energy stones, Aldrian could be trusted to resolve the devil matter.

Then, it raised the question: who exactly was Aldrian, and what was his relationship with the Flamecrest family?

Kroz sighed, hoping that his decision was the right one and that it wouldn't bring doom to the Flamecrest family.

Aldrian remained inside the morgue, staring at Commander Marcus's corpse.

"If there is still a karmic connection between this body and the supposed Sloth Devil, doesn't that mean her technique is still active?" This conclusion wasn't far-fetched, as he knew that necromancers could control dead bodies, even after the soul had departed for the underworld. The body, though an empty shell, still retained some of its original power, making it a feared technique. Aldrian suddenly grinned. With the karmic thread so clearly visible to him, he realized he could give the Sloth Devil a shock therapy.

"Well, let's try it. I've never used or created a pure karmic attack before."

In an unknown place, inside a comfortable chamber with a large bed, a beautiful woman lay upon it. Her long purple hair flowed across the bed as

she rested her head on the pillow, seemingly asleep. Her voluptuous body was clad in scanty attire, enough to stir desire in any man who looked at her, and it would come as no surprise if they were to instantly pounce on her.

Suddenly, her sharp eyes opened, and she instantly sat up in a meditative posture. She frowned, and not long after, a small trickle of blood flowed from her nose. Her expression revealed the pain she was experiencing. After a few minutes of stabilizing herself, she opened her sharp, beautiful eyes, her frown still unchanged.

"Someone has sent a karmic attack through one of my undead!"