

The Shining Star Above The Heaven

#Chapter 321: Emperor Herman's Concern and Anxiety - Read The Shining Star Above The Heaven Chapter 321: Emperor Herman's Concern and Anxiety

Chapter 321: Emperor Herman's Concern and Anxiety

Inside the imperial palace, Emperor Herman sat in his office with an expressionless face. His gaze was blank as he stared outside, faint signs of fatigue evident in his eyes. His condition stemmed from the events of a few days prior, when their dungeon, which held a devil captive, was infiltrated by an unknown individual. This intruder managed to kill the devil inside her cell.

This event caused a significant disturbance within the imperial palace, as the dungeon had been under heavy security ever since the devil was held captive. For the intruder to infiltrate it and possess knowledge of the dungeon's structure and trap formations, they must have been intimately familiar with the dungeon's layout. While many people in the imperial palace are aware of the general structure of the dungeon, due to the heightened security measures since the devil's captivity, only a select few have access to the layout of the security points.

This was to ensure there were no leaks or gaps in the security or information regarding one of the Seven Devils of Annihilation held there. As a high-ranking devil, Elis was a valuable target and an essential source of information. The devils would undoubtedly prioritize rescuing her to protect their secrets.

The assassination of Elis threw him into a rage. How could the most secure place, with multilayered security, be breached without anyone noticing? He immediately ordered an investigation into the matter. The most pressing concern was how the intruder knew the structure of the dungeon, the security measures within it, and the location of the trap formations—since the traps had not been triggered. Such information couldn't have been obtained from the outside, leading to the conclusion that there must be a traitor among the cultivators within the imperial palace.

After three days of investigation, there was little evidence about the intruder, as no suspicious activity had been reported by those with knowledge of the dungeon at the time of Elis's assassination. However, on the third day, his son suddenly contacted him with findings related to the investigation into Elis and how his identity as prince Claude might have been compromised.

According to his son's investigation, the source of the information about the young master of the Larson family visiting the brothel was someone connected to the imperial

family. Upon further investigation, it was discovered that this individual had ties to Klain Ronald.

Hearing the name, the emperor was stunned, his body freezing momentarily at that time. From Claude's tone as he reported his findings, it was evident he was suppressing many emotions. Klain Ronald was the guardian knight of Princess Loraine. If the source of information had a connection to Klain Ronald, didn't that mean he was the one who leaked the Claude's presence in Larson City to Elis?

Didn't that also mean he was the one who released the information about the young master of the Larson family, hoping Claude would tail him to the brothel where Elis was located?

However, the emperor and Prince Claude both knew that Klain was unaware of Claude's operation in Larson City. This could only mean that Klain was acting under the orders of someone who knew about Claude's operation—someone other than themselves and the informants in Larson City.

Princess Loraine.

When Emperor Herman reached this conclusion, his mind went blank. It felt as though his heart was being crushed under a heavy weight, making it difficult to breathe. But then, he tried to think positively. What if Klain had acted on his own intent, without orders from his daughter? What if Princess Loraine had accidentally let it slip, revealing Claude's operation in Larson city to Klain?

He tried to stay positive. There was no way his sweet daughter would deliberately harm her own brother. However, when the investigation team sought to question Klain, he was nowhere near his daughter and had gone elsewhere. When the emperor asked his daughter about Klain's whereabouts, she appeared genuinely unaware.

He wanted desperately to ask her about the matter with Elis, but as her father, he felt afraid. As an Emperor Stage cultivator, he could easily detect changes in someone's demeanor if they were lying—especially someone with a lower cultivation level than his own.

But what if, after questioning his daughter, the truth wasn't what he expected?

What if he was wrong about his daughter?

What if...

A headache began to throb as he dwelled on the thought. Frustration bubbled within him, and he felt an urge to unleash it on someone—but he couldn't. In that moment, the image of a woman surfaced in his mind.

"Amanda, what should I do with our daughter?"

Amidst his troubled thoughts, a knock came at the door. After granting permission for the visitor to enter, a man stepped inside, bowing slightly. Dressed in knightly armor, he exuded the commanding presence of a middle Emperor Stage cultivator.

"Your Majesty, I have come to deliver the report," the knight announced.

Emperor Herman nodded.

"We've received information that the Larson family seems unwilling to back down. Based on their troop and logistics movements, they appear to be preparing for a rebellion."

"What?" The emperor frowned, taken aback. He hadn't expected the Larsons to be so bold as to start a rebellion. No matter how powerful their family was, could they really challenge the full might of the imperial family? From his perspective, that was nothing more than an act of suicide. He was already aware of the incident that had plunged the Larson family into chaos a few days ago.

To be honest, he was surprised that the young miss of the Duclan family was still alive. At that time, Lorraine had been the one to handle the matter, stating that she had decided to execute the entire Duclan bloodline. The information he had received then had been very convincing.

But now, with the young miss still alive, he was left confused about the true fate of the Duclan family. And once again, this confusion had something to do with his daughter. Had she really told the truth back then?

"And also, the Flamecrest family just released a statement claiming that the incident involving the devils in the Flamecrest Grand Duchy was the work of the Larson family and the devils. The Flamecrest family's envoy is on their way to the palace as we speak to present this matter to Your Majesty. They're even prepared to escalate it to a nobles war."

Hearing the mention of a nobles war, Emperor Herman stood up and walked toward the door.

"Dammit, a nobles war at a time like this would be nothing more than a waste of the empire's manpower and resources."

A nobles war is a conflict agreed upon by the involved parties and the imperial family. It serves as the final option for nobles to resolve their disputes through large-scale warfare. Nobles wars are more common among lower-ranking nobles, such as barons or viscounts, but for high-ranking nobles like grand duchies, they almost never occur.

Battles between grand duchies can be devastating and have a significant impact on the entire empire, so such wars are not easily approved by the imperial family. What worried him most about the nobles war right now was the timing. With the prophecy looming ahead a nobles war would severely weaken the empire's stability and strength. He did not want his empire to waste its manpower and resources fighting amongst themselves when a prophecy lay ahead.

If the Larson family was at fault, then he wanted to punish the higher-ups and all those responsible within the family, without involving the lower-ranking individuals under them. Their lives were crucial to the future of the empire. He wanted to avoid an unnecessary war as much as possible.

As Emperor Herman and the knight made their way toward the throne room, the knight suddenly received another call on his communication artifact. He held it to his ear, and after hearing the information from the other side, his eyes widened. He looked at Emperor Herman.

"Your Majesty, there's been a development in the Larson Grand Duchy. A group of people has attacked the Larson family mansion."

Emperor Herman halted in his tracks and turned to his knight.

"Did the group from the Duclan family finally make their move?"

"We're not certain yet, Your Majesty, but there's a strong possibility that it's them."

After a brief moment of contemplation, Emperor Herman spoke to the knight.

"You are to go to the Larson Grand Duchy with the Blue Dragon Battalion and bring the situation under control. If the chaos spreads to the common people or beyond Larson City, I want you to stop it from escalating any further."

"Yes, Your Majesty."

With that, the knight turned and moved in the opposite direction while Emperor Herman continued toward the throne hall. Truly, he hadn't had a moment's rest since the intruder incident a few days ago. Now, with the added turmoil in the Larson Grand Duchy, it felt as though misfortune was relentlessly crashing down upon him. He couldn't help but wonder if he had done something wrong, as all these problems seemed to crash down on him at once, like karma striking back.

Chapter 322: The Attack on the Larson Family's Mansion

Fifteen minutes ago, while the tension in Larson City was still high, a group of cultivators gathered in a private residential building near the Larson family mansion. There were

dozens of them, all dressed in black robes, their gazes directed toward a woman who stood at the forefront.

Carol, standing under the weight of their determined gazes, finally spoke.

"My friends, my brothers and sisters in arms, today is the day the Larson family pays for what they did to ours!" she shouted, her voice ringing out to ignite the spirits of her followers.

"For many years, we have endured the humiliation and slander to our family's name. Because of them, we cannot even use our family name. We cannot take pride in the name of Duclan, which was once our home and honor," Carol declared, her voice filled with emotion.

"So remember this day, my friends—the day that marks the beginning of a new dawn for our family. After today, the noble family of Larson will be no more. Their era will end, and our family will rise again!"

"Uwoo!" All the men and women shouted in unison, their excitement surging like a tidal wave. This was the moment they had waited for—the moment they would set foot in the Larson family's mansion and shatter their arrogance.

"Alright, let's get started. Let's give those Larsons a surprise they'll never forget," Carol said as she covered her beautiful face with a white mask. All the members of the Duclan family followed suit, donning identical masks before stepping out of the building.

Outside, they gathered in a quiet alley, a place rarely frequented by passersby. From there, they moved toward the Larson family mansion, about a kilometer away.

When they reached the bustling main road, filled with people going about their day, they split into smaller groups to avoid drawing attention to themselves.

Although a few people noticed their large group, Carol didn't mind. After today, the news of their actions would cause an uproar, and everyone would know about the event they were about to unleash.

The members of the Duclan family approached the mansion with careful coordination, ensuring they didn't attract attention. Once the mansion came into view from various angles, they stopped. This was the moment they had been waiting for.

At this moment, there was no longer a congregation of cultivators in front of the mansion. The Larson family had forced them all to retreat. They just forced them to retreat because they understood that if they began slaughtering those protesting at their gates, it would spark chaos.

Such an action would draw the wrath of countless cultivators from across the grand duchy. The bold and daring cultivators would begin attacking, seeing the Larson family as tyrants who needed to be overthrown.

Added to the matter of the devils, the Larson family might even attract nearby noble families looking to take advantage of the situation.

Carol gazed toward the mansion, her expression calm and unreadable, before turning to the man beside her.

"I'll begin," she said, retrieving a talisman from her storage ring.

The moment she broke the talisman—

Boom! Boom! Boom!

"Arrgh!"

Explosions reverberated across the outer walls and parts of the mansion, including the gardens and guard posts. Screams of agony echoed from the mansion's grounds, spreading panic like wildfire.

Nearby passersby were stunned by the sudden blasts, their attention instantly drawn to the aftermath of the explosions.

Before they could wonder what had happened, they saw dozens of people rushing toward the mansion with blinding speed. The number reached into the hundreds—far greater than the group that had gathered with Carol earlier. All were cloaked in black robes, their identities hidden.

The explosion had destroyed the high wall and damaged some of the defensive formations.

"What the hell is going on?!"

"The explosion! Someone's using explosive powder!"

"Someone's attacking us!"

The guards of the Larson family, still in shock, watched in disbelief as countless black-robed, masked figures charged toward them. They scrambled to defend themselves.

The Duclan family, already prepared for this moment, launched a coordinated assault on the mansion. The marquess-level cultivators swiftly engaged the guards, using effective techniques that killed them instantly.

This operation required speed and precision. They were deep in enemy territory and had to capitalize on the element of surprise, striking quickly before the high-ranking Larson cultivators at the duke stage and above, could react.

In this operation, the Duclan family had a total of 68 members, with only one person at the grand duke stage—the highest stage among them. The rest were mostly at the earl stage, meaning they were both outnumbered and outclassed by the mighty Larson family, which boasted thousands of cultivators, including two at the emperor stage.

To close the gaps, Carol enlisted the help of mercenaries from the Mercenary Guild at a high price. High-ranking cultivators weren't cheap and didn't always accept certain tasks. Invading a powerful noble family, especially one like the Larsons, was typically not the kind of mission they'd take on.

However, with Aldrian pulling some strings behind the scenes, mercenaries from the guild were eager to take on the task of attacking the grand duchy. His name and face were already well-known among the higher-ups in the mercenary guild, making it easier for him to get these people to move.

In the end, Carol successfully gathered 3 at the king stage, 5 at the grand duke stage, 7 at the duke stage, and hundreds of cultivators ranging from baron to marquess stage from mercenary guild. All of this, of course, was paid for with the resources Aldrian provided for the operation. Although the numbers still fell short compared to the vast forces of the Larson family, this strength helped close the gap between them.

The sounds of battle and chaos erupted within the mansion complex as hundreds of attackers began to rampage. They slaughtered or held back any guards trying to block the main force, which consisted of cultivators above the duke stage, as they advanced deeper into the mansion. Their objective was clear: to capture Grand Duke Larson.

The path to the main mansion had already been cleared by the explosions. Every defensive and trap formation had collapsed as the foundation points of the formations detonated. Thanks to Ghulani, who had planted explosive powder at each key position, the attackers encountered no obstacles until they reached the main door of the mansion.

Once they arrived, they found tens of Larson family cultivators waiting for them in front of the door. Judging by their discipline and swift reaction time, it was clear that these cultivators were the elite of the Larson family. The king stage mercenaries then began their work, targeting the king-stage cultivators among the Larson guards standing in their way.

"Attack! Don't let them pass this line!" shouted the king-stage cultivator from the Larson family. The combined attacks of various elements destroyed the area surrounding the main mansion.

"Young miss, go ahead. We'll handle them here," one of the elders of the Duclan family said to Carol through a voice transmission. Carol nodded, and without hesitation, dashed toward the main gate.

However, one of the king-stage cultivators from the Larson family attempted to block her from entering, launching an earth-element attack at her. The earth trembled as a giant wall began to rise in front of her and the main door.

But then, the wall was slashed and split in two, collapsing to the ground. The slash also destroyed the main door and the interior beyond it. A high king-stage mercenary, wielding his sword, effortlessly cut down the earth-element technique.

"Go! I'll take care of him," he said, then dashed toward the king-stage cultivator from the Larson family. As if by tacit agreement, they both flew into the sky, engaging in a fierce battle above the mansion.

The clash drew the attention of all the king-stage cultivators from the Larson family. With seven king-stage cultivators positioned around the mansion, some of them had not yet been engaged in combat, so they quickly decided to intervene.

However, before they could offer help, they suddenly sensed danger. Out of nowhere, an attack with shadow and lightning elements struck them. The king-stage cultivators' instincts kicked in as they blocked the attack, catching a glimpse of shadows before they vanished. Given the strength of the shadow, they knew the assault had been dangerous.

"Assassins! And with those lightning and shadow elements, there's no doubt these assassins are from the Thunderous Shadow Pavilion!" one of the commanders of the Larson family thought.

With their stealth techniques and cultivation at the king stage, the assassins posed a threat to any king-stage cultivator here, prompting them to prioritize locating the assassins before offering help.

Meanwhile, with the combined efforts of the Duclan family, mercenaries from the guild, and the assassins from the Thunderous Shadow Pavilion, they managed to hold off most of the Larson family's cultivators, preventing them from interfering with Carol's group, which was now inside the mansion. Carol was accompanied by only one king-stage mercenary from the guild and one marquess-stage cultivator, who served as her guardian.

As they drew closer to the grand duke's room, they encountered another king-stage cultivator stationed within the mansion. The king-stage mercenary immediately clashed with the Larson family cultivator, causing destruction in that part of the mansion.

With the king-stage mercenary holding off the Larson family cultivator, Carol was left to continue on, accompanied only by the marquess-stage man by her side. The situation quickly turned grim. On their way, they encountered several cultivators at the marquess stage, and to make matters worse, some grand duke and duke-stage cultivators followed closely behind them.

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Chapter 323: Finally Meeting Grand Duke Larson

"What is this? There are only two at the Marquess stage here. I thought more would come," one of the Duke-stage cultivators said. He was a platoon commander in the Larson family, his aura overbearing as if he was ready for action.

"Just kill them and move on to help the others," the other Duke-stage cultivator replied.

While they were speaking, their goons had already begun attacking Carol and her guardian. However, the assault was suddenly engulfed by shadows and lightning as, one by one, the Marquess-stage cultivators of the Larson family were slain by a shadowy figure that had appeared without warning.

"Assassins!" one of the Grand Duke-stage cultivators shouted, but before he could react further, an assassin had already appeared in front of him and slashed at him with a dagger. He tried to block the attack with his sword, but the dagger unleashed a bolt of lightning that struck him directly. The lightning shattered the middle-heaven-grade sword in his hand, leaving him defenseless.

The Grand Duke-stage cultivator was momentarily stunned and attempted to retreat, but it was already too late. With swift and precise movements, the assassin stabbed him in the head, killing him instantly.

By the time anyone could respond, the rest of the group was already dead. Another assassin stood silently beside one of the corpses. Without saying a word, they vanished into the shadows as if they had never been there, leaving only the lifeless bodies behind.

Carol watched the swift battle in amazement. Even though she had witnessed this kind of scene many times before, she was still impressed by the assassins' effectiveness. She already knew of the renowned Thunderous Shadow Pavilion and felt fortunate to have their assistance. It was a relief that the pavilion was under Aldrian's command, allowing him to aid her through this ordeal.

With the obstacles taken care of, Carol and her guardian continued toward the room where Grand Duke Larson was likely located. Each time cultivators from the Larson family attempted to stop them, the assassins swiftly eliminated them with surprise attacks. However, the maids and butlers who posed no threat were spared and left unharmed.

As they neared their destination, they encountered four elders at the high and peak King stage cultivation. The assassins lurking in the shadows seemed to hold back from attacking. These were King-stage cultivators—formidable opponents not easily subdued, even with the advantage of surprise. Moreover, the elders appeared aware of the assassins' presence and refrained from attacking recklessly.

The assassins accompanying Carol suddenly stopped. After a brief pause, they retreated from the mansion, heading outside to assist in the ongoing battle.

"Hmm? They're gone? Were they afraid?" one of the elders remarked.

"What a letdown. But what would you expect? They're assassins—their advantage is gone once the element of surprise is lost," another elder said with a sigh. "We've been waiting here, but we won't be the ones to act first." He then turned his gaze toward Carol.

"You sure are brave, attacking the Larson family with your meager strength. I'll make sure to skin you alive for disturbing the peace of the Larson family, you damned Duclans," another elder at the peak King-stage elder sneered.

With a mere wave of his hand, he unleashed a casual wind-element attack aimed at Carol. The attack targeted her legs, intending to amputate her. Their objective was to keep the one of them alive, as one of them seems to be the leader and mastermind behind the recent mayhem within the Larson Grand Duchy.

Judging by her appearance, they assumed the young woman seems to be the Duclan family's young miss. As for the man accompanying her, they dismissed him as an insignificant existence.

But before the attack could reach their legs, her guardian stomped his foot, and the wind dispersed like a gust. The elders were shocked, as they hadn't expected a Marquess-stage cultivator to block a casual attack from a King-stage cultivator—an attack powerful enough to kill them a thousand times over.

Their shock didn't end there. Suddenly, her guardian appeared in front of one of the peak King-stage elders and stabbed him with his sword. The peak King-stage cultivator dodged in the split second, but the strike still pierced his chest, and that was enough for the guardian to finish the job. With a swift slash, he created a massive wound that nearly severed the peak King-stage cultivator's body.

The other three elders didn't remain silent either. They attacked the guardian with their elemental powers. A burst of fire shot toward him from their palms, turning the situation catastrophic as the combined attacks of the three King-stage cultivators instantly obliterated the area within the mansion.

The three elders believed they had him when the fire split into two, revealing the blue eyes behind the guardian's mask, still gazing at them with calm composure.

They were shocked to realize that something was protecting the guardian. The fire blazed his surroundings but didn't touch him. Their flames, capable of even burning through space, seemed powerless against him as if the very fabric of space itself was shielding him.

Then, with a swift slash of his sword, the three elders felt the full might of the strike and scrambled to evade it.

However, suddenly, they felt an overwhelming heaviness in their bodies, making their movements sluggish. The sudden difficulty in moving left them unable to defend themselves in time, and the slash's energy instantly decapitated them with a clean cut, killing them in an instant.

The guardian then sheathed his sword and glanced at Carol, giving her a nod. She responded with a nod of her own, and they continued toward Grand Duke Larson's location.

After a few turns, they finally arrived at the double doors. Carol didn't hesitate to open them. As she did, she saw three figures inside—one of them seated in the leader's chair. The one sitting in the leader's seat was someone she knew all too well, having met him many times in the past.

Grand Duke Larson looked at the two figures in white masks. He had sensed their arrival even before they entered the main mansion building. He was truly surprised by the guardian's strength, especially since the woman, whom he believed to be the young miss of the Duclan family, in no way had someone as capable as him by her side. How could a Marquess-stage cultivator so easily kill King-stage cultivators? Had this man concealed his true cultivation level? He then looked at Carol again.

"You, child of the Duclan family, I know it's you," Grand Duke Larson said. "You don't have to hide your face anymore. Whatever the case, I will ensure that you are captured after this and the situation of the Larson family is restored. You will pay for your crimes against my family."

With a swift movement of his will, his domain immediately enveloped the entire mansion complex.

Everyone inside the mansion complex could feel the domain, which was far stronger than any domain activated by cultivators engaged in battle. The temperature seemed much hotter within the domain, causing the fighting to pause for a moment.

Carol, still a Marquess-stage cultivator, felt as though her body were inside a raging fire. She suffocated, struggling to breathe. But then, her guardian waved his hand, and the effects of the domain on Carol disappeared. She could feel a foreign energy soothing her body, realizing that her guardian beside her was helping her.

Feeling relief from the domain's effects, Carol then removed her mask, revealing Carol's true face—a cold expression, filled with killing intent directed at the Grand Duke.

"You are the one who will go down!" she said with a hateful tone. "I will make sure your family feels the same way my family did."

Grand Duke Larson frowned, staring at her. She was truly still alive. It seemed the devils had been keeping her alive all this time, and somehow she had escaped from them, causing all this trouble for his family. Before he could say anything further, a figure suddenly appeared beside the guardian. It was a young man, covered in wounds and blood, seemingly dead with no movement, though he was still breathing—albeit shallowly. Her guardian grabbed him by the collar as if he were a worthless bag.

When Grand Duke Larson saw the young man, who was actually his son, Clark Larson, he instantly lost his patience. His aura blared with intensity, sweeping outside the mansion's complex. Her guardian waved his hand, creating a barrier to protect Carol from the overwhelming aura that threatened to slam her against the wall.

"You bastard! I'll make the rest of your life worse than death!" Grand Duke Larson roared. After saying this, the man beside him, also an Emperor-stage cultivator, used his technique to seal off all exits from the mansion. Suddenly, a wall of fire appeared around the mansion, blocking any view from the outside.

Many took a step back from the fire, its heat intense, as expected from an Emperor-stage cultivator's technique.

"Get ready for—" Grand Duke Larson stopped mid-sentence when he saw the guardian beside Carol remove his mask, revealing a handsome face. His expression was emotionless as he looked directly at Larson, seemingly with little regard, which only irritated him further.

"Kill him," Grand Duke Larson ordered.

Following the command, the Emperor-stage Grand Elder attacked the guardian with the intent to kill, unleashing a blazing flame. However, he was stunned when the fire was suddenly swallowed by a crack in space that appeared out of nowhere. Another crack then appeared beside the three figures of the Larson family.

"I return it to you," the guardian said.

Whoooz!

Chapter 324: Beating Grand Duke Larson

Grand Duke Larson was stunned, but with his quick wit, he countered with his own technique. A purple flame burst from his palm, colliding with the flame that emerged from the spatial crack.

Clap, clap!

"Well, it's better for you to act yourself and show your true self," Aldrian said while clapping beside Carol. From the start, he had been with Carol, acting as her guardian. None of the Duclan family members knew his identity, but Carol insisted that he would protect her. Many doubted that a marquess-stage cultivator could keep Carol safe, yet she stood firm in her belief in Aldrian.

If she doesn't believe in the person who saved her and destroyed Boraz Fortress, then who is she supposed to believe?

Right now, Grand Duke Larson was blocking the fire from the spatial crack with his own flame. However, from his flame, everyone could sense an energy that was all too familiar to the populace of the continent.

The devil energy

Grand Duke Larson had already turned into a devil! His purple flame was so intense that it caused the spatial crack to wobble slightly, the heat distorting the space itself. After successfully blocking the attack, Grand Duke Larson decided to target Aldrian personally. Joined by the Grand Elder, they unleashed another powerful technique together.

The Grand Duke unleashed his purple flame while the Grand Elder summoned his original dark red flame. The combination of red and purple flames formed a terrifying vortex, surging toward Aldrian and Carol.

However, Aldrian calmly unsheathed his peak heaven-grade sword—a sword he had forged back when he was in the Forgeheart Kingdom—and slashed it toward the flaming vortex.

Unknown to his opponents, Aldrian had already established his domain within the mansion earlier, allowing him to stand against these emperor-stage cultivators.

Within his slash, Aldrian infused the combined power of several domains he had created inside this empire. The force was overwhelming, powerful enough to cut the flame vortex that holding the strength of a high emperor stage cleanly in half.

Grand Duke Larson and the Grand Elder were stunned by Aldrian's sheer strength. They then prepared to follow up with another strike, but Aldrian had no intention of letting the battle drag on. He decided to unleash the greater power of his domain.

Channeling the Forgeheart Kingdom's domain into his body, Aldrian sheathed his sword. If he combined this attack with the power of his artifact, it would be far too much for Grand Duke Larson to withstand. He couldn't risk killing the Grand Duke unintentionally. He needed the Grand Duke alive, after all.

Sparks of heavenly lightning erupted from Aldrian's body, growing larger in an instant before he unleashed them toward Grand Duke Larson and the Grand Elder.

Grand Duke Larson, who was combining wind and fire in his attack, widened his eyes in shock as he sensed the heavenly lightning approaching. He never expected such lightning to come from a human! The lightning tore through his technique effortlessly, rendering it useless.

The Grand Elder, reacting quickly, summoned an earth wall to shield himself as the lightning spread in their direction. He could feel the overwhelming power of the heavenly lightning—it carried the strength of a peak emperor stage! If he didn't defend with everything he had, he knew he wouldn't survive.

Realizing his own technique wasn't enough, the Grand Elder decided to use a one-time talisman capable of blocking a full-power strike from a high emperor stage cultivator. Though he knew it wouldn't fully stop the heavenly lightning, it could at least weaken its force.

The overwhelming heavenly lightning struck the earth wall directly, shattering it with little effort. It then collided with the defensive talisman, breaking it just as effortlessly. Finally, the lightning hit the Grand Elder. The Grand Elder had already equipped himself with a defensive artifact, a protective armor, it was directly struck by the heavenly lightning.

The Grand Elder felt as though he had been electrocuted, but the sensation didn't end there—it was as if his body had been struck by a giant boulder weighing a hundred tons. He was instantly thrown out of the building, his peak heaven-grade defensive artifact instantly shattered. However, the artifact had saved his life, though his organs were severely injured, leaving him coughing up blood.

As for Grand Duke Larson, he unleashed his overwhelming devil energy and hastily retrieved a sword from his storage ring. Combining his devil energy with his blade, he executed a desperate sword dance to fend off the relentless lightning bolts. Moving with

the fastest speed he could muster, he skillfully deflected each bolt, preventing them from reaching him at the very last moment.

The lightning relentlessly struck every part of the Grand Duke's body. It was as if the lightning itself had become a massive net, tearing through the entire room and spreading outward.

Outside the mansion, where the battle was already raging, everyone was stunned by the sudden appearance of the heavenly lightning and the man thrown from the building.

"Shit!"

"Evade!"

Mercenaries, Duclan family members, and Larson family cultivators alike scrambled to put distance between themselves and the lightning. They knew that once the lightning touched them, it would be the end.

The lightning didn't travel far from the mansion before it vanished, but the devastation it caused was immense. Half of the vast mansion collapsed to one side. People were horrified by the sheer power of the heavenly lightning, thinking that emperor-stage cultivators must have been fighting inside.

Where Aldrian stood, the room was completely destroyed, the roof gone. Though he had controlled his strength to prevent killing Grand Duke Larson, he couldn't help but be impressed by the Duke's resilience.

Despite the futility of his efforts, Grand Duke Larson had managed to block the heavenly lightning, but the result was devastating. His body was covered in wounds and burn marks. His bloodied appearance and disheveled hair served as grim testimony to the hellish assault he had just endured.

Grand Duke Larson remained standing, gripping his sword, but then the blade shattered into pieces. Its durability was no match for the overwhelming lightning that had struck it repeatedly. He didn't even have the chance to enter his devil form to boost his power.

After standing motionless for a few seconds, his body finally gave way and collapsed.

Seeing this, Aldrian turned to Carol.

"You can bring this man out first. I'll follow you later," he said.

"Do you still have something to do here, young master?" Carol asked.

"Yes, and this is something you'd better not get involved with. It's beyond what you can handle," Aldrian said as he walked toward Grand Duke Larson's body. He then sealed his cultivation, ensuring the Grand Duke wouldn't resist when Carol took him.

Upon hearing Aldrian's answer, Carol didn't ask any further questions. She immediately lifted the Grand Duke's body using her energy and activated the teleportation talisman. However, before retreating, she instructed all her forces.

"Mission success, retreat!"

As soon as her voice echoed through their minds, every member of her force crushed their teleportation talismans to escape the mansion complex. There was no point in staying and prolonging the battle—it would only lead to more harm if it continued.

"Wait!"

"Fuck, they're escaping! Pursue them! Don't let them get away! Seal off the entire city!"

Larson family cultivators scrambled, desperately trying to track down the fleeing forces. Their losses were significant, especially due to the surprise attack by the group they had believed to be responsible for their recent misfortunes.

What stung even more was the humiliation—despite their efforts, they had only managed to kill a few of the intruders, and the number wasn't even enough to be considered a true loss. They had only killed a handful of low-level cultivators, fewer than 20. The attack had been so well-coordinated that, despite their far larger numbers, they struggled to eliminate many more of the invaders.

All the guards stationed at the city walls received the order to seal off the city. They moved swiftly to close the massive city gates and activate a large formation designed to protect key areas within the city.

The people who had heard about the sudden chaos at the Larson family mansion began to wonder if the family was finally facing their retribution. Many believed a war was unfolding within the mansion complex, as the battle's aura could be felt for kilometers. The concentrated presence of high-level cultivators and their techniques in one place was undeniable.

While the Larson family cultivators were in hot pursuit of Carol's forces, Aldrian remained inside the mansion complex, walking in one direction. He had locked onto another presence earlier that piqued his interest.

There were three figures in the room with Grand Duke Larson earlier. One had escaped when the battle reached its peak.

As Aldrian moved through the mansion, he encountered a few of the Larson family's cultivators. With a mere flick of his will, he put them to sleep using his illusion. He continued onward until he reached a separate building behind the back garden.

There were still many people gathered there, recovering after the attack. But as soon as they saw Aldrian's attire, they immediately attacked him.

However, Aldrian merely ignored them as they suddenly fainted. Even a King Stage cultivator dropped to his knees and fainted after Aldrian punched him in the dantian using his lightning energy.

This King Stage cultivator was much weaker than some of the others Aldrian had faced in the past. He thought it must be because this king stage cultivator lacked battle experience and had relied too heavily on pills or other methods to boost their cultivation.

When Aldrian arrived at the isolated building, he sensed a thick, ominous aura emanating from it. Without hesitation, he destroyed the entire structure with a slash of his sword. The building instantly collapsed, revealing what lay inside.

Aldrian saw a large, dark red glowing formation, with the person he had been looking for standing atop it.

That person grinned at Aldrian.

"You're late!"

Chapter 325: A Brief Presence from the Underworld 1

A few moments ago, at one of the teleportation stations in Larson City, a large group of armored figures emerged from the teleportation portal. The aura emanating from their armor revealed that each piece was an artifact, and their average cultivation level was no trivial matter—most of them were at the marquess stage. Among them were individuals above the marquess stage, with the strongest, their leader, at the middle emperor stage.

The moment people noticed the group, they instinctively stepped aside, unwilling to obstruct their path after recognizing the symbol on their armor—the emblem of the imperial family. From their armor and the badges on their chests, it was apparent that this was the renowned Blue Dragon Battalion, an elite unit of the imperial family composed of powerful knights, where only the most exceptional individuals were selected to serve.

Many speculated that the arrival of the Blue Dragon Battalion in this city was related to the Larson family, whose actions seemed to grow more erratic by the day. The Larson family appeared unable to extricate themselves from the accusation, prompting the imperial family to dispatch one of their most formidable battalions.

At the forefront of the group, the commander scanned his surroundings as he stepped out of the teleportation portal. His gaze fell upon the numerous Larson family guards, who stood frozen in shock at the sudden appearance of the battalion. Expanding his senses to their limit, he swept the entire city, his focus soon reaching the Larson family's mansion complex.

What greeted him there stunned him—a scene of utter devastation and an ominous aura hung heavy in the air. A wave of energy radiated from the site, one he recognized all too well.

"The energy of devils," he thought grimly.

One of the men standing beside him, a cultivator at the low emperor stage, spoke urgently.

"Commander Shang, there's a massive concentration of devil energy in the Larson family mansion! This isn't something that could come from ordinary devils!"

"I know," Commander Shang replied. "Then the plan will change. We will—"

Before he could finish, the ground trembled violently, and the ominous aura of devil energy erupted from the mansion complex. A pillar of crimson light shot into the sky, splitting the clouds above. The devil energy spread rapidly, engulfing not only the mansion complex but also spilling out into the entire city.

The moment the residents felt the overwhelming devil energy, panic swept through the streets.

"The devil energy! It's so thick and terrifying!"

"So it's true—the Larson family is harboring devils!"

The ground shook violently, as if the region were struck by a massive earthquake. From within the mansion complex, a colossal silhouette emerged from the crimson pillar of light. Its size was so immense that the surrounding buildings appeared like mere miniatures in comparison.

With a deafening crack, the red pillar shattered, revealing a monstrous three-headed creature.

"ROAR!!!"

The creature let out an earth-shaking roar, reverberating throughout the entire city as if announcing its arrival in all its terrifying glory. Those near the mansion complex were struck by the sheer force of the sound, many coughing up blood from the impact alone.

Fortunately, Aldrian acted swiftly, erecting a protective formation around the surrounding area to shield the populace from the devastating effects of the roar. Without the formation, countless lives would have been lost in an instant, claimed by the creature's overwhelming presence.

Commander Shang of the imperial family stared at the creature, his eyes widening in shock. Its enormous size and overwhelming strength caused a bead of sweat to roll down his forehead. The creature resembled a three-headed fierce dog with a giant snake as its tail, and its presence was the embodiment of a living nightmare.

"What the hell is that?" he muttered, his voice trembling.

In all his years, he had never seen a creature like this, nor had he ever felt such an intense sense of intimidation. The aura of a high emperor-stage being radiated from the creature, surging into the sky with enough force to scatter the clouds into the distance. Waves of pressure from its aura swept through the city, leaving many reeling in its wake.

"A monster!" someone exclaimed.

"It's a devil's monster!" cried another, their voices filled with terror.

"Run!" The cry of panic spread like wildfire among the populace as people began fleeing in the opposite direction of the creature. A beast as massive as a hill had suddenly appeared in their city—how could they not panic?

The entire city was blanketed in suffocating devil aura and energy, leaving many gasping for breath and teetering on the brink of madness.

But then, the oppressive aura receded at a remarkable speed, allowing the citizens to breathe freely once more. Aldrian's formations worked tirelessly, containing the creature's presence and aura within the confines of the mansion complex.

From a distance, Aldrian stood, his gaze locked onto the monstrous creature, ensuring its influence did not extend beyond the barriers. Its immense size nearly filled his domain, which spanned a five-kilometer diameter within the mansion grounds.

He was genuinely surprised by the appearance of this creature. Many might not recognize it, as it had never been recorded in the history of the continent or anywhere else. Even he had never encountered any descriptions resembling the being before him.

Yet, despite never having seen it in this life, he felt an uncanny familiarity with the creature, as though they meet countless times. That was because, in several of his visions, this very creature had appeared.

"Cerberus."

This was truly unexpected. Based on his visions and prior interactions, this creature was said to reside exclusively in the Underworld—a realm where the souls of the dead gathered. It was known as one of the guardians of the Underworld, never stepping foot into the mortal world or beyond.

So why was Cerberus here? What had happened?

Aldrian could sense the dense aura and death laws radiating from the creature—a hallmark of its kind. Yet, something felt off. While the Cerberus before him bore the same shape as the one in his visions, it exuded a distinctly different presence. Deciding to probe deeper, he activated his Eyes of the Heaven.

Cerberus (Clone)

Age: 3,012,034 years

Race: Spiritual Beast (Cerberus)

Cultivation: High Emperor

Techniques: The Underworld's Aura, Hell's Torment, Hell Flame

"I see... this one is just a clone."

This one was much weaker than the Cerberus he had seen in his visions. And more troublingly, it appeared to align itself with the devils, which was completely unnatural. A creature like Cerberus was supposed to serve only the ruler of the Underworld.

From the memories he had read from Elis, Aldrian knew that the devils had a trump card hidden within the Larson family's mansion complex. However, even they seemed unaware of the creature's true nature. All they knew was that it could be summoned through a ritual provided by the Devil Lord.

The Devil Lord had only shared the method to summon Cerberus's clone and establish a connection with it, nothing more.

But how did the Devil Lord know of Cerberus, a being whose existence should be unknown in the living realm? And how could he possibly possess the knowledge to summon something from the Underworld?

"I've heard of you!" the devil sneered, standing atop the center head of the Cerberus. "You must be the one warned about by our lord—the cultivator with strange abilities that

don't match your cultivation level. A strong cultivator always in our way, always disrupting our plans. Because of you, everything we've meticulously planned for thousands of years is crumbling piece by piece!"

Though the devil's cultivation was at the Grand Duke stage, he seemed to wield control over the Cerberus with ease.

Ignoring the devil's words, Aldrian focused his attention on the creature, using his karma laws. What he discovered was a strong bond tying Cerberus to the devil. From this connection, Aldrian concluded that the creature was bound by a slave seal, with this devil as its master.

He truly couldn't comprehend how it was possible for a creature as powerful as Cerberus to be cloned or enslaved by someone like this devil. How had the Devil Lord managed it?

To summon such a creature, the devils must have made enormous sacrifices, given that Cerberus resided in the very realm of death itself. The amount of sacrifice required had to be staggering.

Seeing Aldrian ignore him, the devil atop the center head of Cerberus roared in rage.

"Attack him! Kill him with everything you've got!"

Hearing the command from its master, Cerberus let out another deafening roar before charging toward Aldrian. Despite its massive size, the creature moved with surprising agility, each step creating gusts of wind powerful enough to destroy the surrounding buildings.

Aldrian's domain already covered part of the surrounding area. With a swift thought, he teleported all the people to safety. Just as the Cerberus seemed poised to strike with its sharp claws and teeth, Aldrian drew upon the power of the Forgeheart Kingdom's domain. He conjured a massive spatial shield, the largest he had ever created, to protect himself.

The Cerberus collided with the spatial shield, letting out an enraged roar as it felt the sharp pain from the sudden impact. The devil atop its head was nearly thrown off by the force.

"What the—" The devil's words trailed off as he saw Aldrian draw another sword from his storage ring. In an instant, the devil felt an overwhelming pressure—a mighty presence unlike anything he had ever encountered before. The aura of a middle divine-grade sword spread across the vast area, as Aldrian revealed the Eternal Spirit once again to the world.

Chapter 326: A Brief Presence from the Underworld 2

The presence of the middle divine-grade sword, combined with Aldrian concentrating his domain's power into his body, made him appear like a god descending to the mortal realm. His aura was overwhelming, demanding reverence from all who beheld him. Golden energy radiated from Aldrian, his body glowing with a brilliant golden hue.

Sensing Aldrian's intimidating presence, the Cerberus trembled. Though it was a creature of the death realm, it could feel the immense pressure and danger emanating from him. Its instincts urged it to prostrate itself in worship before Aldrian.

The devil atop the Cerberus fared far worse, feeling as though his body was being crushed under the weight of a mountain. He dropped to his knees, his energy circulation thrown into complete disarray. A powerful urge to prostrate himself before Aldrian overwhelmed him, barely allowing him to resist.

With Aldrian now at the Marquess stage, the synergy between his power and his domain had grown immensely. Even his mere presence became increasingly suffocating, an oppressive force that demanded submission.

"Wait, The Cerberus is a creature of the death realm...What if I use this..."

Aldrian then released the death energy that surrounded his body. The true essence of a deathly aura spread throughout the area, and the first to feel its overwhelming effect was the Cerberus itself. With the fusion of death energy and golden energy, the Cerberus felt as though it stood before the ruler of the underworld.

From Aldrian's gaze, he could see the karmic connection binding the Cerberus to the devil begin to waver. There were even signs that the Cerberus was attempting to resist the slave bond, causing a satisfied smile to spread across Aldrian's face.

"It seems my death energy is still stronger in the end," Aldrian thought, his gaze fixed on the trembling Cerberus. *"For a creature as sensitive to death as this one, it's impossible to resist. It's even rebelling against the slave connection. Even though this Cerberus is just a clone, its essence remains the same as the real one—bound to revere a higher being of 'death.'"*

Aldrian did not rush to strike the Cerberus with his sword technique, instead observing the scene unfold with calm expression.

Meanwhile, the devil, feeling Aldrian's death energy for the first time, was overcome with terror. It was as if his soul was being dragged into a boundless abyss of darkness, stirring a fear he hadn't felt in ages. The sudden rebellion of the Cerberus further shook his soul, leaving him teetering on the edge of madness. Yet, gritting his teeth, he forced himself to resist the overwhelming pressure. His face twisted with fury as he let out an enraged roar, shouting at the top of his lungs.

"You dare to rebel against me?! Against the devils?! The Devil Lord has already bestowed you upon me—you will obey my orders!" the devil roared, his voice filled with fury. Without hesitation, he activated the slave seal connection, inflicting excruciating pain upon the Cerberus.

Roar!

The Cerberus let out an agonized roar as the pain struck directly at its monster core. The slave connection binding it to the devil began stabilizing, forcing its rebellious instincts to subside. Watching this, Aldrian could only sigh. The slave seal's power was truly formidable, binding the Cerberus so tightly that it even suppressed its true essence.

"If it's come to this, then I have no choice but to kill this beast. The connection runs so deep that even killing the devil would result in the Cerberus's death." Aldrian thought.

The Cerberus's fierce eyes grew even fiercer as it let out a thunderous roar. In the next moment, Aldrian felt as though he had been transported to the heart of purgatory. His soul and body were enveloped by a horrifying realm filled with agony and overwhelming negative energy.

This place seemed utterly devoid of life—an environment so hostile that even the tiniest microorganism would find it impossible to survive. The scorching heat, the oppressive density of negative energy, and the complete absence of heaven and earth's natural energy made this realm a true manifestation of hell.

Aldrian felt his soul under siege, assaulted by the nightmarish illusion. For the first time, he experienced the terrifying depths of the Cerberus's abilities. The relentless torment attacked his very essence, even spilling over to affect his physical body. It was the kind of suffering that left its victim defenseless, unable to protect themselves, and at risk of being trapped in this tormenting illusion for eternity.

Cultivators could try to overpower the Cerberus, but how many beings could confidently claim they could face one of the guardians of the underworld? Only divine beings would dare to make such an arrogant statement. Although Aldrian felt shaken and uneasy—experiencing discomfort under an illusion for the first time—he remained composed.

Within the confines of this illusory space, he carried no sword. Yet, he concentrated as if the Eternal Spirit was still in his grasp. Closing his eyes, he envisioned the blade and its hilt, his fingers mimicking the gesture of unsheathing it. He had already begun channeling the power of the Forgeheart Kingdom's domain into the technique he was about to unleash.

Meanwhile, in the real world, back in Larson City, every sword in the city trembled and rose into the air, pointing toward the Cerberus. It was as if the swords themselves were welcoming the arrival of the sword god.

The moment Aldrian opened his eyes, he unleashed a powerful diagonal slash motion. In the real world, his hand had already grasped the Eternal Spirit. The illusion shattered, splitting apart as the real world came into view. However, the Cerberus's claws were already beside him, aiming to strike with its full might.

Before the claws could land, Aldrian's slash had already torn through the creature, splitting the entire Cerberus in two. The energy from the attack obliterated everything in its path, tearing through the air and soaring toward the sky.

The Slash of Vanguard was already a powerful technique, but when combined with his domain power, it became devastating. Though it lacked the strength and complexity of the Slash of the End, it was more than enough to handle a threat of this magnitude. Over time, as Aldrian's comprehension of sword techniques deepened, he found himself able to kill opponents far stronger than himself using simpler, more refined methods.

For Aldrian, the Slash of the End will be his trump card—a technique he would not use lightly. Its effects were far-reaching, and he had learned not to unleash it recklessly, as he had in the past.

The energy from his current slash cleaved through the Cerberus's body and arms, severing the limbs that had been poised to strike him. A powerful gust of wind followed in its wake, rushing past the massive creature and sweeping across the surrounding area for nearly a kilometer. Along the slash's path, cracks appeared in space, revealing a dark void. However, unlike before, no spatial storm erupted, only the silent, ominous emptiness of the void itself.

The slash continued its trajectory, soaring into the sky before finally dissipating into nothingness as its energy was completely spent.

Boom!

The massive body of the Cerberus crashed to the ground, sliding for several hundred meters before coming to a halt. Its blood, tainted with death laws, seeped into the earth, its corrosive properties corrupting the land it touched.

But how could Aldrian allow his domain—his own territory—to be defiled by such corruption?

Channeling his golden energy, he spread it across every spot where the blood had splattered. The purifying nature of his energy neutralized the contamination, returning the blood to an ordinary state.

Aldrian surveyed his surroundings, his gaze lingering on the widespread destruction. Ensuring he had missed nothing, he nodded to himself before turning toward the massive body of the Cerberus near a collapsed building.

He walked toward the three heads of the Cerberus, which remained still, their lifeless eyes a testament to the creature's death. Aldrian had struck straight through its beast core, instantly destroying it.

At a distance of about a hundred meters from the Cerberus's head, he noticed the twitching body of the devil. Approaching it, he inspected the fallen figure.

"His soul is gravely wounded from the Cerberus's death... His condition is akin to a vegetative state," Aldrian thought.

Aldrian grabbed the devil's head, performing the ritual he had come to repeat so many times—reading the memories. After a few minutes, he dropped the head, having crushed the devil's soul in the process.

The information he gained was great. From the devil's memories, he now understood the inner workings of the empire's secret network. This particular devil had served as one of the messengers, delivering information through a hidden channel connecting all of the devil's associates across the Vindas Empire.

However, the memories still did not reveal how the devil lord knew how to summon the Cerberus's clone. After this event, Aldrian began to suspect that the rare and powerful beasts he had faced in the past were tied to the devil lord. If all of these beasts were unleashed simultaneously when the prophecy began, he could only imagine the chaos and despair they would bring.

If that was the case, then Aldrian had much to be wary of when it came to the leader of the devils. The knowledge of the methods used to summon such powerful beasts—creatures capable of wreaking havoc across the continent—and his understanding of beasts that should not even exist in the living realm suggested that the devil lord had many unknown tricks up his sleeve. An opponent with both immense strength and cunning was the most terrifying kind.

However, despite this, Aldrian remained calm, waiting for the day he would eventually face the devil lord.

After confirming there was nothing else of immediate concern, Aldrian vanished from the scene. The appearance of the Cerberus would undoubtedly cause an uproar across the empire—and eventually across the continent.

The people who had fled from the battle zone halted their panic, having just sensed the overwhelming power of the sword technique. All the swords in Larson City flew into the sky, pointing toward the giant beast, before they felt the terrifying sword technique that split the creature in two, the slash even reaching toward the heavens.

Those who witnessed the technique and the phenomenon it caused couldn't help but recall one figure—a figure who was still the subject of much speculation.

The mysterious swordsman.

Chapter 327: The Flamecrest Family's Move

Some king stage and emperor stage cultivators flew over Larson City. What they had just witnessed sent chills down their spines. They were members of the Blue Dragon Battalion, tasked with controlling the crowd as panic began to spread earlier. Thanks to their efforts, the chaos did not spiral out of control, as the people felt reassured by their presence.

Little did they know, the commander of the battalion himself was terrified after seeing the Cerberus. The energy it exuded was unlike anything he had ever experienced. Many others felt the same—this was their first time encountering the horrifying presence of a creature capable of spreading the feeling of death, a feeling they couldn't control.

Commander Shang looked at the destruction caused by the battle. Since earlier, he had ordered his troops to assist in evacuating the people. Although he was deeply intimidated by the Cerberus's massive size and the ominous energy emanating from its body, he reminded himself of his duty to the emperor.

Earlier, he had prepared himself for the worst. However, despair overwhelmed him as he gazed at the giant creature and its deathly aura. It felt as if his soul was bound by something unknown, something that dragged him into the chilling grip of death.

However, as if heaven itself was aiding them, a person capable of overpowering the monster suddenly appeared and slew the creature with a single slash. It was a simple slash, yet it carried power far beyond what he was capable of wielding, a power he had already heard about from many accounts.

All the swords within Larson City unsheathed themselves and flew into the sky—a phenomenon that could only be achieved by one person in this era.

The mysterious swordsman.

The golden energy radiating from the slash confirmed his identity. Commander Shang wanted to approach the sensational and enigmatic figure, but the man had already disappeared from both his sight and his senses. All he could remember was the silhouette of the swordsman's back—the only glimpse he managed to catch.

"I must report this to His Majesty! That mysterious swordsman—we need to establish a connection with him!" he thought.

The people began returning to the battle area and when they arrived at the scene, they saw numerous dead bodies scattered across various places. Judging by their attire, they were all cultivators from the Larson family. These unfortunate souls had been caught in the crossfire of the battle, and they were also the ones Aldrian had deliberately left behind, choosing not to teleport them to the safe zone.

Not long after, news of the battle spread beyond the city and across the empire, eventually reaching the capital.

In the capital, the emperor had just received the envoy from the Flamecrest family and heard their intentions. However, what he heard was such a bold statement that he nearly broke the armrest of his throne.

"You are already attacking the Larson family's territory? And without even declaring a nobles war?! Do you understand what that means?!" Emperor Herman said, his cold eyes fixed on the man standing before him.

In front of him stood a middle-aged man with red hair, the envoy from the Flamecrest family. At that moment, he felt the full weight of the emperor's rage bearing down on him. He knew that his words had effectively disregarded the imperial family's rules and had the potential to destabilize the entire empire.

The Flamecrest family had suddenly attacked the territory of the Larson family, and that area was a mining site that had originally belonged to the Duclan family. The Larson family had obtained this land as part of the reward for uncovering the Duclan family's connection to the devils.

Although the emperor was starting to question the truth behind that event, the territory had already been granted to the Larson family by the imperial family. Attacking it without the formal agreement of a nobles war was a direct challenge to the imperial family's long-established rules.

"Your Majesty, please hear me out before passing judgment on our actions. If, after hearing my explanation, you still believe our actions are wrong, then you may punish us," the envoy said, beads of sweat rolling down his forehead. The pressure from the emperor's anger was overwhelming, and this was the first time he had truly felt it. Yet, he had to convey what his family had discovered and what they had to do, as it was in line with their principles.

"You'd better have a good reason," Emperor Herman warned. "Otherwise, I'll declare that the Flamecrest family has disregarded the rules and will be punished accordingly." With that, he eased the pressure and aura he had been radiating.

The envoy sighed in relief as the pressure lifted, then began to explain.

"Your Majesty, I know our family has been presumptuous by attacking another noble's territory without declaring a noble war, but we have a strong reason for that, and it is connected to the devils."

At the mention of the devils, Emperor Herman remained silent, his attention fully on the envoy as he continued to speak.

"As Your Majesty is aware, the recent news about the devils' activities within the Larson family has become increasingly difficult to ignore. The presence of the devils in the empire cannot be underestimated. This applies to all subjects within the empire. And the devils' presence in the Larson family's territory is not just a matter of infiltration."

"Based on our findings from trusted sources, the Larson family has not only allowed their territory to be infiltrated, but they are also working with the devils. One of the places where the devils have found a suitable location to establish a secret base is one that is inconspicuous, a place not many would expect. That place is the mining site that once belonged to the Duclan family, but is now under the Larson family's control, Your Majesty."

"That site, which was rumored to have traces of the devils when the Duclan family controlled it, was actually just a plot by the Larson family to make the Duclan family a scapegoat for their own actions when they took over the mine. What you will learn next, Your Majesty, will surely shock you."

"After the Larson family took over the mines, they actually used the site to connect the empire's territory to the devil's domain. Since the fall of the Duclan family, that place has become a hidden entrance for the devils to enter the empire undetected. The people wouldn't suspect anything, because they believed the traces of the devils had been cleaned up when the Larson family took control."

Emperor Herman's eyes widened slightly. Some of the information he heard confirmed what he already knew or had suspected, but there were other information he hadn't known—or rather, things that his imperial intelligence hadn't uncovered.

"How do you know all of this? Is your source reliable? If this information is wrong, it would be tantamount to indirectly slandering the imperial family for aiding the devils. Do you understand what that would mean?" Emperor Herman asked, his eyes turning sharp. Despite the pressure, the envoy nodded confidently.

"Yes, Your Majesty. I understand that this information could be as dangerous as a blade aimed at the imperial family, though that is not our intention. However, we cannot simply disregard the information shared by our source, for our source is the one who destroyed Boraz Fortress and the one who helped us uncover the devils' plot within the Flamecrest family—a plot orchestrated by the devils with the Larson family's help."

"The source of our information is the mysterious swordsman," the envoy said, his expression serious.

"What?" Emperor Herman replied, his eyebrows slightly raised in surprise.

"Yes, Your Majesty. The mysterious swordsman who has caused such a sensation and remains enigmatic is now in this empire—or to be precise, in our Flamecrest Grand Duchy. To be honest, Your Majesty, the destruction of Boraz Fortress wasn't carried out by the Flamecrest family, but by that person, who seems to always be fighting and targeting the devils. From him, we also gathered information about the devils' operations inside our Grand Duchy and how the Larson family has been plotting against us."

"Many of the devils' operations inside the empire trace back to Boraz Fortress, which is actually connected to that mining site. When we inspected the destroyed Boraz Fortress and matched the information we received from the mysterious swordsman, everything aligned."

"We cannot allow the devils' presence in the empire to linger any longer, so we've decided to strike now, especially with the incident in the Larson Grand Duchy happening at this moment," the envoy said.

"The incident in the Larson family? Do you mean—" Before Emperor Herman could finish his question, an imperial soldier suddenly approached, kneeling before him.

"Your Majesty, I bring urgent news!"

At this moment, in another location, battles erupted across many separated areas. The terrain was mountainous, with mining tools scattered throughout. The marks of battle had already spread across the surrounding mountain range. A clash of auras from both devils and orthodox cultivators filled the air, though it was clear that the devils were being pushed back.

Among the orthodox cultivators, all of whom had red hair, Aldrey could be seen fighting several devils on his own.

Whoosh!

Flames erupted from his body, severely injuring some of the devils and killing others.

"Damn it, how could the Flamecrest family launch a surprise attack?! What the hell is the intelligence group doing?!" one of the devils shouted.

Chapter 328: The Battle in the Mountainous Range

"Keep attacking those bastards! Don't let them escape!"

"Uwoo!"

The cultivators from the Flamecrest family roared their battle cry as they relentlessly pushed the devils toward their final stronghold—an underground mining base. The fierce battle raged across the mountainous range, with auras from cultivators of all stages colliding and causing the surrounding heaven and earth energy to become chaotic.

Aldrey, who had become one of the protagonists in this battle, displayed his remarkable ability and strength, truly worthy of the title "Fire Apostle." The flames emanating from his body radiated such intense heat that even marquess-stage cultivators would be forced to keep their distance, lest they risk being burned alive.

Aldrey's flames rampaged across the battlefield like a relentless rain, targeting the devils. Those unfortunate enough to be touched by the fire were instantly consumed. With a swift motion of his will, his sword ignited, the blade engulfed in roaring flames. As a devil launched an earth-element attack at him, Aldrey swung his blazing sword, countering with devastating precision.

The earth spikes that surrounded Aldrey, intended to pierce him, were destroyed in an instant by a slash of his sword. His flames continued to spread relentlessly, surging toward the devils' troops who had formed a defensive formation. The flames disrupted their ranks, killing many baron-stage devils and plunging their troops into chaos.

"Don't lose formation! Kill the 'Fire Apostle' first, and we can break through!" one of the devil commanders shouted. However, the devils' efforts were hindered by the Flamecrest family, who had meticulously prepared for this attack.

Although Aldrey was only a high duke-stage cultivator, the situation could have turned dangerous if devils with far greater cultivation had been sent after him. Fortunately, the Flamecrest family's preparation ensured that those devils with higher cultivation levels were occupied by others from the family who matched their strength.

The devils continued to pour out from the mining entrance, forming defensive formations. Their numbers had already reached thousands, though many had fallen at the hands of the Flamecrest family's cultivators.

Aldrey raised both hands above his head, claspings them together. Suddenly, flames erupted from his hands, forming a colossal fire blade that towered nearly a kilometer high. The intense heat radiating from the blade made it difficult for the devils to keep their eyes open, the mere sight of it causing them pain.

"That's young master Aldrey's 'Sky-Splitting Flame'! Be careful not to get caught in its sweep!" one of the Flamecrest cultivators warned.

As Aldrey brought his hands down—

Whoosh!

The impact caused the earth to tremble, and flames spread out to Aldrey's left and right. The inferno surged forward, extending up to three kilometers and engulfing devils in its path. Many devils scrambled to defend themselves, and while some managed to survive, most with cultivation levels lower than the earl stage were swept away by the fire, reduced to blackened charcoal and killed instantly.

The number of casualties quickly reached the hundreds, a testament to the devastating power of Aldrey's technique. For the low-level devils, there was no hope of withstanding such overwhelming force—even in their Devil forms. To a duke-stage cultivator like Aldrey, those souls were nothing more than ants.

Aldrey's technique left a blazing trail of fire across the mountainous region before him. He observed the destruction with a calm and composed expression, his handsome face unruffled. The devils, shaken by his overwhelming display of power, did not dare to recklessly attack him.

Above, in the sky, dozens of figures engaged in fierce combat, wielding a variety of techniques and artifacts. The auras of king-stage and emperor-stage cultivators clashed violently, each exchange radiating immense power. Had they been fighting on the ground, the mountains would have already been flattened.

Even the space around them struggled to contain their battle, cracking in many places. Yet, despite the fractured space, the intensity of the fighting showed no signs of diminishing.

"You Flamecrest bastards will regret this! When the time comes, the devils will dominate this land!" roared the strongest of the devils, his voice filled with venom. His cultivation is the middle emperor stage, and he had already used his Devil form to amplify his strength. However, his body was riddled with wounds—a testament to the fierce opponent he faced.

Standing before him was Grand Duke Flamecrest, his low divine-grade sword enveloped in an intense red flame. The grand duke gazed at the devil with a sneer, his confidence unwavering.

"Bold of you to make such a statement. Even if you believe it, you won't live to see that day!" Grand Duke Flamecrest retorted.

Without wasting another moment, he activated his movement technique, flames bursting from his feet as he closed the distance in an instant. The middle emperor-stage devil raised his broadsword, swinging it with all his might, but the grand duke intercepted the strike with his own sword. In a fluid motion, the grand duke unleashed a devastating flame-infused palm with his free hand, aiming directly at the devil.

The devil noticed the incoming flame-infused palm and quickly evaded, retreating to create distance from the grand duke. However, that decision proved to be his fatal mistake. As he gained some space, the grand duke was already poised in a striking stance, his sword ablaze with flames so intense that they warped the surrounding space. The air shimmered, and cracks began to form in the fabric of space, a testament to the heat's overwhelming power.

"Wrong move, devil," Grand Duke Flamecrest said, his voice laced with a mocking sneer.

"*Shit!*" Before the devil could react, the grand duke unleashed his sword technique.

Flame Dragon Sword Technique: Fourth Form—The Dragon Soaring to the Heavens!

The grand duke unleashed a relentless series of attacks, each movement flowing seamlessly into the next, leaving no room for the devil to counter. The devil attempted to parry, but it was futile against the sheer speed and overwhelming power of the technique.

With the final strike of the Flame Dragon Sword Technique, the grand duke slashed upward from below, unleashing a towering pillar of flame in the shape of a dragon. The fiery dragon soared into the sky, its searing heat engulfing the devil completely.

"Arghhh! The devils will still win!" the devil screamed at the top of his lungs as the flames consumed him. When the blaze finally dissipated, his charred, broken body was revealed. Parts of his limbs were missing, his flesh crumbling to ash like burnt charcoal.

With a resounding crash, his lifeless body fell to the ground, marking the end of the battle between the strongest cultivators in the area.

As the scene unfolded, the cultivators of the Flamecrest family erupted in triumphant shouts, their morale soaring to its peak. In stark contrast, the devils were shaken to their core. With their strongest figure fallen, their resolve crumbled, and they lost all will to fight. Panic spread through their ranks as they began scrambling for any possible escape from the mountainous region. The devils no longer cared about anything except fleeing from for their lives.

But the Flamecrest family had no intention of letting them escape. Many of the devils, turning their backs in desperation, were swiftly cut down.

"Keep attacking, don't let anyone escape!"

Aldrey, with his overwhelming technique, effortlessly cleared out the disorganized devils, his flames cutting through their ranks with ease. Meanwhile, Grand Duke Flamecrest, alongside the elders, took down the remaining emperor-stage devil, followed by the last of the king-stage devils.

Before long, the battle came to an end, with no devils left to escape. Every last one was slain.

"Uwool!" A triumphant roar echoed as all the cultivators of the Flamecrest family raised their hands in victory. They had successfully raided the devils' base, which had been established within territory controlled by the Larson family. All of them were aware of the family's higher-ups exact motives and the sentiment behind their actions after being informed of the truth behind Commander Marcus's case.

Before the battle began, everyone present had already been told the truth. Upon hearing it, all members of the Flamecrest family shared the same resolve—to strike at the Larson family. They were all determined, their passion burning fiercely, ready to attack without declaring a nobles war. Even though this might offend the imperial family, the Larson family's brazen actions had enraged them to the point where they could not remain passive.

Even the lowest-ranking members of the family understood their higher-ups' decision to strike at the Larson family's territory without formally announcing a nobles war. Especially in this place, where the devils had secretly established their base. Declaring a nobles war would have been pointless—it would have merely served as an announcement of their plans, giving the devils time to escape or prepare.

Grand Duke Flamecrest landed beside his son, his gaze scanning the devastation across the battlefield.

"That mysterious swordsman's information has been remarkably accurate and trustworthy. How did he come to know all of this? I still can't see any reason why he would help us without expecting something in return. With his power, he could demand whatever he wanted, yet instead, he continues assisting us without asking for anything."

"He destroyed the Boraz Fortress in our family's name, revealed the treasonous actions of the Larson family with irrefutable evidence, and even uncovered the devils' main base within this empire. After this, our family will have the highest reputation in its history. I'm even worried it might offend the imperial family." Grand Duke Flamecrest replied.

"Tell me, Aldrey, do you know anything about this mysterious swordsman? From the looks of it, that person seems to be closest to you, and it seems he only wants you and

you alone to act as a bridge to our family. Are you sure there's no relationship between you two?" Grand Duke Flamecrest asked with a smile, turning to his son.

Aldrey, seeing his father's smile, could only return it, though it was a bit awkward.

"Well, he is your grandson. Of course, he's helping our family," Aldrey thought to himself.

"Now, how am I supposed to answer him?" If he responded without something to back him up, his father would likely catch on to something strange or even realize he was lying!

Chapter 329: The Aftermath

"Well, maybe he just considers me trustworthy, so he wants me to be his bridge in connecting our family to him. Besides, he still wants to keep his anonymity, as he does not want too many people to know his appearance," Aldrey said under his father's stare. He was really nervous, but he tried his best to hide it.

As an emperor-stage cultivator, his father was highly perceptive and would detect any signs of dishonesty.

"Please move on and stop asking questions about Aldrian!" Aldrey thought to himself. But then, he remembered something and smiled at his father.

"Oh, and that mysterious swordsman said you can meet him soon after this event, Father. He mentioned that after today, news from Larson City will spread, and you can meet him if the time and place are right."

Grand Duke Flamecrest, who was watching his son intently, raised an eyebrow in wonder.

"Is that so? That is good. I am truly curious about this person. I might even learn something from him myself. Also, what was he doing in Larson City at this time? He said to us to strike this place today while he was in Larson City. Do you know anything about it?"

Aldrey shook his head.

"No, Father. He only told me that today was the best day to attack the Larson family's territory in this place and that he would do something in Larson City to ensure they have no chance of retaliation."

Aldrey himself was actually quite curious about what his son would do in Larson City. He knew he could trust his son's strength, given all the evidence of his achievements thus far, but as a father, he still worried for him. He did not want his son to make an

enemy of an entire empire by provoking the imperial family because of the Larson family.

Aldrey and Grand Duke Flamecrest then saw a peak Marquess-stage cultivator from their family rushing toward them. Upon reaching them, he straightened his body and said,

"My lord, I have important news."

For the next few hours, the entire empire was in an uproar over the events that had just taken place in Larson City—an event that once again elevated the figure of the mysterious swordsman, adding to his list of achievements.

This incident also made the Larson family the target of condemnation across the entire empire.

For weeks, their reputation had already suffered due to the widespread news, backed by irrefutable proof, that their territory had become a nest for devils. The Larson family had tried to deflect blame, claiming that the remnants of the Duclan family were responsible for it all. However, today's event was the final blow, solidifying their status as the enemy of the entire populace.

The central figure of this event, the mysterious swordsman, had once again made a great contribution to the continent. Since his first appearance in Balin City, he had already amassed many achievements in battles against the devils—from slaying the Hydra in Balin City to participating in the war between the Doria Empire and the devils, bringing down Sazim Fortress, and now defeating a monster unlike anything they had ever seen or known.

Many claimed that the monster was the strongest they had ever witnessed, so powerful that even the existence of emperor-stage cultivators seemed trivial in comparison. Its size was like that of a small hill, and its aura was said to make the entire city tremble. Some believed the reports were exaggerated, prompting people to flock to Larson City to see the aftermath for themselves. Besides that, many hoped to catch a glimpse of the mysterious swordsman and perhaps establish a connection with him.

Once people from various locations across the empire arrived in Larson City, they were convinced that the news had not been exaggerated. In fact, it might have been even worse than what the witnesses had described. The slashed, giant body of the Cerberus remained intimidating even in death. The lingering death aura from its corpse was so terrifying that no one dared to approach it.

The dense remnants of devilish energy in the Larson family mansion's surroundings further confirmed that the family had indeed been hiding this monster as their secret

weapon. Summoning such a creature would have required an enormous area and an immense amount of energy, making it impossible for the Larson family to be unaware of its existence. Additionally, the corpse of a devil lay nearby, further reinforcing people's assumptions and judgments.

Traces of the mysterious swordsman were evident in the battlefield—the giant body of the Cerberus had been cleanly cut in half, and his unique aura lingered in the air, powerful yet strangely comforting. Many wondered whether that figure was still in the city.

The Blue Dragon Battalion of the imperial family had already established a perimeter around the Cerberus's corpse and the entire battlefield, preventing the populace from getting too close. They were uncertain what dangers might still lurk within the creature's remains, as the traces of its deathly aura were still quite terrifying. Though it was not as overwhelming as when the beast had been alive, it was still strong enough to send chills down their spines.

Among those present was the leader of the Blue Dragon Battalion, Commander Shang.

"What kind of energy does this creature have? It's so terrifying and ominous. Necromancers also exude almost similar aura, but it's not like this. It feels like the energy they possess is just a weaker version of this one." Commander Shang thought.

As the strongest cultivator present, Commander Shang steeled himself to approach the corpse and examine the remnants of the battle. Though the battle had ended hours ago—no, he couldn't call it a battle. The mysterious swordsman had defeated the monster with a single slash, and it seemed he had done so effortlessly.

That sword strike was simple yet beautiful and powerful, its golden energy commanding reverence from anyone who witnessed it. Commander Shang wondered where the mysterious swordsman had gone. The only thing he had seen was the figure's back before it disappeared. Unfortunately, he hadn't had the time to see his face or speak with him.

While many were still speculating about the whereabouts of the mysterious swordsman, the very figure in question was in the same place where he had met Prince Claude. Aldrian sipped his tea as Prince Claude looked at him, his expression much different from when they had last met just a few days ago.

He had been in the city when Aldrian slew the Cerberus, and at that moment, he instantly recognized him. He was positioned on the opposite side of the battle area, where he had a clear view of Aldrian's face. Although the presence of the Cerberus was terrifying, he didn't flee like the others. Instead, he stayed, eager to understand what made Aldrian so calm in the face of such a monstrous terror.

Once Aldrian had finished defeating the Cerberus, Claude finally learned the true identity—or rather, the other identity—of Aldrian. His expression now was filled with respect and awe, his eyes shining as if he had encountered a living legend. The mysterious figure who had caused a sensation across the continent since his first appearance.

"So, what is it, Your Highness? That you called me here for?" Aldrian's voice broke through his reverie. Prince Claude sighed, looking at Aldrian again with renewed respect.

"Young Master Aldrian is truly a man worthy of respect and full of surprises. I never thought that I'd be saved by the mysterious swordsman that day, and now I have the chance to speak face to face with him. It's an honor for me, truly," Claude said.

"Well, people tend to give anything or anyone a lot of attention or titles when they believe it can accomplish something beyond their own abilities. For me, killing those devils is just part of my duty as a cultivator, and I don't think I deserve that much respect. Many others have already slain devils long before me, and in greater numbers," Aldrian replied with a smile.

"That is true, but no one has done it as spectacularly as you, Young Master. You don't need to be so humble. What you've done is worthy of being written in the history of this continent. No, your strength alone is enough to place you among the most powerful figures in its history."

Aldrian didn't refute Prince Claude this time. If that's what the prince believed, then he wouldn't argue against it.

"So, Your Highness, I know you didn't call me here just to praise my achievements, right? I can sense there's something weighing on your mind," Aldrian said.

Prince Claude was momentarily stunned, but then sighed.

"You're truly sharp, Young Master. Yes, I asked to meet with you to discuss something else." When Claude spoke, there was an unusual sadness and weariness in his eyes. He lowered his gaze slightly, trying to hide it, but how could Aldrian miss it?

Claude then looked at Aldrian again.

"It's about my little sister, Loraine."

Chapter 330: The Tough Choice

Once the princess's name was mentioned, Aldrian more or less knew what the prince wanted to discuss. With everything that had happened lately, Prince Claude or the emperor would have to be foolish not to sense that something was wrong. Various

events had occurred across the empire, some of which could not have been carried out without the involvement of someone from the imperial family.

Among the members of the imperial family, only one person stood out as the most suspicious. Someone who had connections to all of these incidents.

That person was the one he cherished most, the closest to him—even more than his own father. His little sister, Loraine.

The thought that his seemingly pure and kind-hearted little sister might be involved in such evil acts, even working with a family that had ties to the devils, made his heart crumble. He wanted to find another suspect, but he couldn't lie to himself. All the evidence pointed to his sister, and there was nothing he could do to refute it.

"Young Master, if my guess is correct, you are the one helping the remnants of the Duclan family, right?" Claude asked.

"That's right."

"Then, you must know the truth about them since you're helping them. From my perspective, based on your past, you've never done anything that would benefit the devils. There's no way you would help a fallen family that was judged for aiding them."

Aldrian nodded as Claude clenched his fist.

"Then, Young Master, do you think a member of the imperial family is involved in the past events that allowed the devils to operate freely within the empire? Do you believe the imperial family had a hand in the incidents that brought harm to innocent people because of the devils?"

Aldrian remained silent as he stared at Prince Claude. The prince, meeting Aldrian's gaze, suddenly felt his confidence crumble and lowered his head. Aldrian's stare carried the weight of judgment, even though his expression remained unchanged.

Claude gritted his teeth, knowing what that meant. He knew his question was merely an attempt to find another possibility—one that wouldn't implicate his little sister. It was a way for him to escape a reality he didn't want to face—the reality that he had to make a difficult decision about his own family.

Aldrian understood this, which was why he didn't answer Claude's question. The prince already knew the answer and what he had to do. However, when forced to choose between morality and law or his own blood, whom he deeply loved, the choice was far from a simple matter of right or wrong.

Looking at Prince Claude's miserable state and the turmoil in his heart, Aldrian suddenly found himself facing a question directed at himself.

If I were in Prince Claude's position, what would I choose? Would I choose righteousness, or would I choose my own family—the people who have been with me for so long?

He felt that, despite the weight of this question, he needed to have an answer if he didn't want to find himself in the same predicament as Prince Claude. What if someone closest to him made a mistake—a grave mistake that forced him to choose between that person and his own sense of morality? his own sense of righteousness?

Aldrian sighed inwardly. This was the first time he had felt this way. Although he wasn't facing this situation himself, it felt as though his heart was gripped, as if he were the one experiencing it.

What is the right choice?

Suddenly, he recalled the words of the monk he had met in the Forgeheart Kingdom:

Not every being's heart can hold righteousness, and even if they have a righteous heart, not all of them can bear the weight of that righteousness.

The situation he was thinking about now could also fall into that category. In the end, to uphold righteousness, one must have a strong heart and bear its weight. But how can one remain strong when faced with their own family—the people they love?

Aldrian felt unsure of his answer. He felt lost. A part of him wanted to seek out that monk and ask for his opinion on this matter.

Pushing aside his thoughts for now, he continued to watch Prince Claude. However, since the prince remained silent, Aldrian decided to speak.

"Your Highness, to be blunt, the imperial family has leeway in this situation. If you look back, don't you think all the blame has been placed entirely on the Larson family? Have you ever heard any rumors about the imperial family being directly implicated in this matter?

Even when the imperial family's name is mentioned, people simply dismiss it as 'the imperial family was deceived by the Larson family' or something similar."

Aldrian paused before continuing.

"Even though, the Larson family could use that information to drag the imperial family down with them, and the Duclan family could do the same to exact revenge. Why do you think they haven't?"

After a few moments, Claude raised his head and looked into Aldrian's eyes. His own eyes trembled when he realized something.

"You... you are the one who planned all of this, right? The Larson family didn't use that information to bring down the imperial family because they didn't have the time to spread it. You and the people from the Duclan family attacked them just now, causing their entire family to collapse. As for the Duclan family, they didn't drag the imperial family's name into their battle with the Larson family because of your intervention," he said.

Aldrian sipped his tea and put down his cup.

"Look, the imperial family must maintain its reputation and dignity if you want to keep governing this empire with stability. Once the imperial family's reputation takes a hit, and news spreads that one of its members is actually helping the Larson family, what do you think will happen, hmm? I think you know well what will happen to this empire, your highness."

"Vindas Empire is an important empire that borders devil territory. The last thing anyone wants is for the empire to plunge into chaos and instability, your highness," Aldrian said with a serious face.

Claude remained silent as what Aldrian had said sank in. From Aldrian's tone and response, it became clear that Aldrian was indeed the one who ensured the imperial family's name was excluded from the problem with the Larson family. Once the name of the imperial family was dragged into it, people would start questioning its integrity, and the populace would begin to distrust it.

No matter how much power the imperial family had, once the people of the empire lost faith in it, it was only a matter of time before the empire descended into civil war and collapse, splitting into smaller kingdoms with each noble as a new ruler. This was the worst possible outcome, especially for an empire that bordered devil territory. The devils could take advantage of it once the empire collapsed.

"Do you absolutely believe that my little sister is also responsible for the fall of the Duclan family and the devil's plot against the Flamecrest family?" Claude asked again. He decided to be more direct, but his face had already withered, as though he had lost the will to continue this conversation.

Aldrian, also decided to match his directness and nodded his head.

"Her involvement is deeper than you think, and that's because she has a personal connection to one of the devils. If you want to know more, then you'll have to be ready to learn about Princess Lorraine's true character," he said with a calm expression.

Prince Claude was stunned. A personal connection with one of the devils? He felt that what he was about to hear would break his heart, but he wanted to understand the reason behind all of his little sister's actions. From his understanding, there was no clear motive for what she had done, and that was the most puzzling thing for him and his

father. If she didn't have a motive, then what was the purpose of everything she had done?

Deciding to harden his heart, Claude chose to learn the truth from Aldrian. He believed that Aldrian, with his seemingly extensive knowledge, knew the reason behind his little sister's actions.

"Please tell me, young master. I want to know about my little sister," he said.

Aldrian finally shared the story of the princess's involvement with the Lust Devil, albeit with more refined words to keep the conversation civilized. Aldrian knew that it would break Claude's heart, but he decided it was the best course of action for now—at least it was better than him having to personally kill the princess.

Throughout the story of Princess Loraine, Prince Claude listened carefully without saying a word. But once Aldrian had finished narrating what he had discovered about the princess, Claude suddenly stood up from his seat and walked toward the door.

"Excuse me, young master. Let me step out for a moment; I need some fresh air," he said before leaving the room.

Aldrian sighed at the sight. This was truly a tough and painful situation for both the prince and the emperor, and he could only hope they would choose the best course of action, the one that had already formed in his mind. If they didn't, he would have no choice but to act personally.