

The Shining Star Above The Heaven

Chapter 36 - Forest of Despair 2

Sunlight tried to penetrate the forest but only cast shadows on the surface. The sound of wild beasts could be heard from afar, marking that those who entered this place were now in a realm where the law of the jungle was literally in effect. Aldrian stood on a tree branch, surveying his surroundings. He had been inside the forest for more than an hour and was nearing the inner section, moving at a mind-blowing speed that only an emperor stage cultivator could achieve.

Strangely, the spirits that everybody had warned him about were nowhere to be seen since he entered the outer section. *"Maybe they are in the inner section?"* he thought. Using his movement technique, which relied on wind energy to accelerate, he avoided teleporting to save his energy. This test also served as an experiment ground to check his limits. He reviewed his information:

Aldrian Aster

Domain : The secret realm and Balin city

Age : 12 years

Cultivation : High Viscount

Current energy : (Replenishment mode) 240,124 (+5/s) || (Halt) 253,672 (+1.3/15m)

Energy needed for the next stage : 270,001

"I have to be careful outside my domain, but my energy consumption is good despite using my movement technique and teleportation for more than an hour. 240,124 (+5/s)? So my energy replenishment speed is now 5/second? Well, that's quite fast. If only my cultivation speed could be as fast as this. And my original energy is 253,672 (+1.3/15m)? Then I can advance to peak viscount in a little more than 4 months." He pondered.

"But since when did my cultivation increase rate become (+1.3/15m)? Hmm, was it when I had that little epiphany while talking with the imperial teacher?"

He continued his journey towards the inner part of the forest, where emperor stage spirits dwelled. Moving at a fast speed, he eventually reached what appeared to be a river. "Across the river is the inner section of the forest," he thought. He looked at his wrist, now adorned with a bracelet, a device used to locate and detect his position.

At this moment, his position was being transmitted in real time to the tents of the watchers—in this case, the emperor and his group. With this, they could keep an eye on him. Aldrian couldn't remove the bracelet because it would transmit a signal if it ever detached from his wrist.

The inner part of the Forest of Despair was a special place because any individual who stepped inside would be automatically detected by the spirits. Emperor stage spirits would come after them. If the intruders turned out to be elves, they would mostly be chased away.

For other races, it depended on the circumstances, they might be chased out or killed. Humans, however, were mostly hunted down, except in very rare cases. But if they saw a devil cultivator, they would kill them on the spot, regardless of who they were.

Logically, a viscount stage cultivator shouldn't be able to reach this part of the forest. Even before reaching this area, Aldrian should have encountered a duke stage spirit. What Aldrian doesn't know is that even reaching the test area in the inner section is an impossible task for someone at the viscount stage, because they would almost certainly meet a duke stage spirit or, in very rare cases, a grand duke before reaching the river.

However, he hasn't encountered anyone or anything at all, just trees and occasionally the sound of wild beasts. In fact, he really wants to meet some spirits and try to battle them to test his ability.

Without much thought, he started running on the water's surface, hoping something might appear from beneath. But nothing happened until he fully crossed the river. "What is wrong with this place?" he wondered, feeling that something strange was going on as he hadn't encountered any spirits or beasts.

He dashed into the inner section, hoping to meet something, and kept moving until he finally saw a little movement in a bush. He teleported to it and found a small creature with wings hiding among the leaves. The creature looked at him with trembling eyes and a scared expression.

Vin

Age : 60.260 years

Race : Sylphid (Spirit)

Cultivation : Low Duke.

Techniques : Bellowing Wind, Tornado, Wind Storm, Wind Pillar, Wind Sword, Wind Slash, Wind Net.

"A *Sylphid*?" Aldrian thought, recognizing the spirit of air with a humanoid shape and insect-like wings on her back. The creature, the size of his thumb, looked at him with trembling eyes and a scared expression, which puzzled him. "*Why are you so scared when you are a low duke stage spirit?*" he wondered.

"Excuse me, miss?" He bent his knees to be more aligned with her, trying to appear friendly and polite. The little spirit still looked at him with trembling eyes and a scared expression, but she managed to speak.

"Y-yes?" she asked, trembling.

"I'm sorry to disturb you, but I want to ask, do you know what happened to the other spirits? Why haven't I seen them on my journey here?" Aldrian asked, noticing her hesitation to answer. He waited patiently for her response.

"They... they're hiding," she said.

"Hiding? Hiding from what?"

The Sylphid now looked like she was about to cry, making Aldrian feel bad even though he hadn't done anything. If someone saw them at this moment, they would misunderstand the situation and think Aldrian was bullying the little spirit.

"They... they are hiding from you."

"....." Aldrian was speechless, hearing the answer.

"*How am I dragged into this?*" Aldrian thought, wanting to drag his palm across his face. "I'm sorry, why are they hiding from me when they've never met me? I also did not come here with bad intent."

"It's... it's his majesty's notice that a 'higher being' will come to this place and venture inside it."

"*His majesty? Ah, it must be the king of this forest. Is it possible for Dahan to still be alive after millions of years? Also, higher being? Me?*" Aldrian thought. He considered other reasons and realized that his appearance seemed to have a more severe effect on other spirits than on the world tree spirit. He needed to meet other spirits to draw the correct conclusion.

"Why do they think I'm the 'higher being'?"

"It's because your presence, I mean your excellency's presence, even from afar, feels like we are in front of a being we have to worship."

"Is that so? Do you feel my energy then?" He asked, making sure he had concealed his energy and aura before coming here.

"No, but my body and soul react outside of my control."

"This means it's their innate instinct reacting to my presence." Aldrian thought. Initially, he believed Olivia's attraction to him was due to his energy and aura, but it seemed that was not the case here, even when he had concealed his energy and aura.

"Then may I know where his majesty is?"

"He is in the core section, inside his dwelling place."

"Alright, thank you, miss." Aldrian then disappeared, leaving the Sylphid alone. The little spirit, ensuring Aldrian was gone, sighed and stumbled down onto her butt. A few moments later, a few more Sylphids suddenly appeared from thin air and looked at her.

"Vin, I already told you not to peek. Really, your curiosity can kill you," one of them berated her.

"But his presence is really beyond my comprehension. Is he really human?"

"Whatever, just looking at him from afar causes my body to tremble uncontrollably and my feelings to be a mess." Not only them, but many other kinds of spirits also appeared one by one, even small wild beasts came out from their hiding.

Back at the main tents of the nobles, they watched Aldrian's movement with amazement. A giant paper map of the forest hung in front of them, showing a red dot moving at an incredible speed.

"Is he always using teleportation? How can a viscount stage move that fast? What technique is he using?"

"Incredible, as expected of the chosen one."

"Why does it look like he's smoothly crossing the forest without any hindrance?"

Many voiced their opinions based on the dot's movement on the paper. Emperor Ladwin and Imperial Teacher Elthar looked at the map with anxious and doubtful expressions.

"He's already in the inner section of the forest, but he seems to have met no hindrance. And his movement—oh no, is he heading to the core area?" Emperor Ladwin sent a voice transmission to Elthar.

"I don't know, but it's really strange. He seems fine after arriving at the inner section. Maybe there's something we don't know, but he must understand the danger if he moves deeper and even heads to the core area. I really don't know what he's thinking." Elthar replied.

They showed worried faces and kept looking at the map. Meanwhile, the nobles from the conservative faction felt doubtful, but when they saw Aldrian moving deeper into the core area, they grinned wickedly.

"Fool, what an arrogant bastard. You keep challenging us, and now you'll be dead for sure." Marquess Andra thought.

The idea of serving a human infuriated him. For an elf of his status to follow a human? He clenched his fists tightly, trying to contain his rage. While the others from the conservative faction felt thrilled by Aldrian's move, one elf watched the map without expression: Grand Duke Maelis.

Chapter 37 - Going Inside The Core Section

Each section of the Forest of Despair has its own natural border that marks its boundaries. From the outer section to the inner, there is a river, and from the inner section to the core, there is a valley surrounding the core region, which Aldrian can now see from the high ground. He saw that the core area was a vast hill covered by a thick, mysterious white mist that obscured his view. From the outskirts of the inner section to this place took him about two hours, evidence that the inner section is larger than the outer section.

Aldrian, who now rested after continuously using his wind-based movement technique, was amazed by the scale of the forest. During his journey to this place, he passed many dangerous areas like a poisonous swamp that could instantly kill a duke stage cultivator, a natural illusion formation that even grand dukes could get lost in, or man-eating plants strong enough to consume grand duke stage beings, which shrunk away from him to avoid his detection.

But not everything he passed was bad, there were some good things that caught his eye, and he also gained something new.

40 minutes ago

He was moving at a fast speed when suddenly he saw a lily plant in a natural pond that seemed to contain rich energy. He stopped and looked at the lily to assess it.

"I can feel rich water energy from this. If I give this to Eleine, it can help her cultivation," he thought. However, he didn't know if the lily was safe to consume, what if it was poisonous? At that moment, he regretted not studying alchemy to learn about spiritual herbs. The only thought in his mind was, "If only I knew what precious plant this is." Then he felt a strange sensation inside of him before an information screen appeared in front of him.

Celestial Silver Lotus

Age: 1550 years

Description : A lotus that absorbs a huge quantity of water energy. The silver color on the petals is a sign of its maturity, which takes thousands of years to achieve.

Effect: If directly consumed, it can tremendously increase the comprehension of water element cultivators and boost their cultivation level. If processed into pills with the right mixture of ingredients, the effect can be doubled.

How to pick: There is no special treatment required to pick this herb.

Note: It's better to store the herb in a special box for spiritual herbs to prevent the potential of their energy and efficacy from fading.

The change came as a big surprise to him because he didn't know that his Eyes of Heaven could be upgraded in this way.

"Wow, so my Eyes of Heaven can be used as an appraisal tool too." he marveled. But he wondered why it had just upgraded like that.

"Is it because I wanted this, so my Eyes of Heaven adjusted according to my will?" He shook his head, this was not the time to think about it yet.

The treasures, like spiritual herbs to help one's cultivation, were scattered in many places he passed. Luckily, the places he had passed had not been visited by many people, and some spots were untouchable to outsiders, so the herbs grew healthy without disturbance. Spirits only needed the richness of energy surrounding the spiritual herbs for their cultivation, so even though they wouldn't eat or take them, they would defend the herbs from anyone trying to take them.

Aldrian, who saw all those precious herbs, didn't want to pass up the chance, so he took them and put them in his storage ring. Spiritual herbs should be stored in special boxes

to prevent the potential of their energy and efficacy from fading, but since he didn't have those, the storage ring would do the job for now.

At the current time

All of the places he passed gave Aldrian new epiphanies and comprehension of the power of the emperor stage.

"It's amazing that this vast forest is the technique of a cultivator. Is this the true power of the emperor stage? Their techniques can really change the vast landscape. No wonder if the emperor stage battles each other, the destruction would be immense," he thought.

"Is it a divine technique? I know I can't create a technique on this scale at my cultivation level because I lack the energy needed to unleash it. 'Slash of the End' can produce that much destructive power because I pour the energy from my domain. I wonder how strong it would be if I poured my own energy into that slash. But whatever it is, this is also good; it gives me the inspiration to create a technique with a vast effect."

He knew he couldn't always depend on his domain, and there would be times when he had to fight outside of it. He believed his comprehension was enough to create such a technique, and the only thing he lacked was the energy. He believed he could create and unleash a technique of the same effect if he had that much energy on his own, and to do that? Of course, by increasing his cultivation.

He then stood up and dusted off his clothes. "Time to get back to business." He disappeared, moving towards the core region.

A few minutes later, Aldrian stood on the edge of the mist area. He tried to peer into what lay behind the mist, but his senses were obstructed by something as soon as they touched the mist.

"The mist can disrupt senses, and from what I feel, it also has a hallucination and disorientation effect for those who pass through this place," he thought.

"It has to be an artificial formation created by someone who can manipulate nature-based formations." This realization piqued his interest because he could learn how to create natural-based formations from it. So far, all of his formations were created by drawing the pattern using the energy of heaven and earth without the help of materials.

The weakness of these formations was that they would lose energy over time because they couldn't replenish their energy on their own, resulting in a reduced strength. However, if he could create natural formations, he could shape the surrounding environment into a formation that would hold for a long time, even forever, as it would continually replenish its energy—unless someone broke the formation.

"I have to pass through this place anyway."

Without hesitation, he stepped into the mist, and his body was slowly swallowed by its thickness. Aldrian walked for about 30 meters before his sight became disoriented and his senses could only spread about 20 meters, a distance more than enough to instantly kill him, especially in the core section where the king of this forest dwelled. He had never been this solemn since he emerged from the secret realm. Truthfully, he felt a little anxious now, but his innate instinct to face challenges, the feeling of "how dare you challenge me," and his excitement peaked in situations like this.

Was he reckless? Maybe. Was he walking to his own doom? Only time would tell, but he just wanted to challenge his limits, as he always did. He stopped for a moment to ponder.

"This can't go on. I have to know how to pass through this mist effectively." He looked around, trying to find a clue, but all he saw was thick white mist. He then closed his eyes to sharpen his senses. One minute, two minutes, five minutes passed, and he still hadn't moved.

After ten minutes, he sensed a slight fluctuation of energy 15 meters to his right. With his eyes closed, he moved toward the source of the fluctuation. He stopped at what he sensed was a small rock among many scattered rocks. There was nothing special about this rock, so if someone looked at it, they would just assume it was ordinary.

He stood in front of the rock, waiting again, and ten minutes later, the rock fluctuated with a little bit of energy. He touched the rock and tried to move it, but it wouldn't budge, as if it was embedded in the ground.

"As I thought, the formation utilizes the surrounding heaven and earth energy to replenish its energy and maintain the formation. It has a point where the formation gathers energy. If I disturb this—" he inserted his energy into the rock, and suddenly the surrounding 100 meters of mist became much clearer.

He opened his eyes and smiled. He teleported to the edge where he could see the farthest and stood still. A few moments later, the mist returned to its original state, and he closed his eyes to repeat the process of disturbing the formation. He kept doing this until he found a square cave with carvings and a head statue. The carvings depicted a creature like a lion with tree roots covering its entire body, and the statue was the head of the lion, with its mane made of tree roots.

Aldrian looked at it for a moment before heightening his senses again. With a solemn face, he entered the cave with solid steps.

Chapter 38 - Their Will

With careful steps, Aldrian walked slowly through the long, dark hallway. He created his own light using fire energy, forming flames in his hands. His senses functioned normally here, allowing him to spread them forward. What he found was a long hallway

descending underground, its end beyond his senses' reach. Always alert for traps or surprise attacks, he circulated his energy, ready to unleash a technique, and had his sword out just in case.

He kept walking until he saw light at the end of the hallway. Feeling the rich energy ahead, he quickened his steps and when he reached the light source, he found himself in a huge empty hall with stones producing light on the ceiling and walls. The hall was quite large for an underground structure, about 250 square meters. When he saw the stones, he was shocked—they were actually peak-level energy stones. After living in Balin for some time, he understood how precious these stones were.

Energy stones are special stones produced by large rocks called energy stone sources. These sources formed from the long-term concentration of heaven and earth energy, crystallizing into huge rocks. The presence of an energy stone source speeds up the production of smaller stones and increases their quality over time, and if all the energy inside is absorbed, the stones turn into a black stone or black rock.

Aldrian felt the urge to take the stones but restrained himself, aware of the potential danger. He marveled at their beauty before noticing three pathways leading in different directions—in front of him, to his right, and to his left. He considered them for a moment before deciding to take the path in front of him. With the path illuminated by the light of the energy stones, he no longer needed his fire and simply followed the path.

He walked along the hallway until he saw two huge doors. Pushing them open, he found another hall, this one with two statues in the middle. He recognized one of the statues—it was the lion statue whose head he had seen at the entrance cave. The other statue was of an elf he didn't recognize.

"Are they Emperor Thonias Evergreen and Dahan?" he wondered.

The statues had moss growing on some parts but were generally in good condition. He looked at the masterpieces for a moment before searching the hall for clues. After investigating every part of the walls, he found nothing. Confused, he thought,

"Is Dahan or whoever it is in another room?"

He looked at the statues again, assessing them one more time. Focusing all his senses on the statues, he touched them and felt a connection established. He inserted his energy into the statues and before he knew it, he was in a different place.

He found himself in the middle of a pond under the moonlight and thousands of stars, surrounded by different kinds of plants.

"Is this some kind of space law? There are also time and illusion laws in it."

He looked around and saw two beings sitting under a lush green tree. Recognizing their faces from the statues, he realized who they were. The elf had his eyes closed, playing a guqin, while the lion lay beside him, also with its eyes closed. Aldrian walked closer to them, stopping a few meters in front of them.

"It's really surprising that I can feel this kind of sensation from you," the elf suddenly spoke, stopping his playing. "Because of my connection to Dahan, I can feel his nervousness due to your presence. For someone who can make Dahan, the king of forest spirits, feel nervous, you must be extraordinary. Are you really human?" The elf scrutinized Aldrian.

"Some people have already asked the same question, but I am human," Aldrian answered, looking at the elf.

"Are you Emperor Thonias?" Aldrian asked.

"You could say that. I am only a remnant will from the past." Aldrian then looked at the lion.

"Then is he Dahan?"

"Yes," Emperor Thonias answered. Aldrian looked at the emperor again.

"Did he also?"

"Yes, he is also the will of the 'true' Dahan."

"The true Dahan? What do you mean, your majesty?"

"You will know in the future. At your current cultivation level, it's not good for you to know more."

"Is it?" Aldrian tried to read Emperor Thonias's mind, but his technique couldn't read him. At that moment, he understood the reason.

"I can't read him because he is only a remnant will, without a physical body. He is already dead." Aldrian thought. He looked at Dahan, who was still silent, and assumed it would be the same, so he gave up on his plan.

"Can you not do that? I can feel the sensation of something like karma laws brushing against me. I'm okay with your actions, but Dahan seems more nervous when he senses it."

"I'm sorry if my actions offended you, your majesty, but I am very curious and interested in mysteries," Aldrian said.

Emperor Thonias smiled.

"What is your name, young man?"

"My name is Aldrian Aster, your majesty."

"Good name, good name."

"Your majesty, I'm sorry, but what kind of place is this underground area?" Aldrian asked.

"Actually, it was Dahan who wanted to create this place."

Aldrian showed a confused expression.

"After I cast 'The Wrath of the Forest Spirit,' I felt like my time was near, so I came to this core region. Actually when Dahan formed a contract with me, he had his own mission. His true form is waiting for something or someone. I don't know the specifics of his mission, but because of the unfortunate event of the great war with the devils and my unexpected demise, Dahan felt rage because his mission was disrupted by the human devil cultivators who invaded my empire. Finding a body compatible with Dahan to form a contract is not easy. So you can see his hatred to this day." Aldrian nodded in understanding and continued listening.

"When I arrived here, Dahan asked me to build an underground place to store his will. He wanted the place to be avoided by others to keep his will as long as possible. With the help of other spirits, we created this underground place and all the obstacles in the forest. I also had my own intentions for this place, so I stored my belongings here and left my will," Emperor Thonias explained.

"Was it Dahan who sent notice to the inhabitants of the forest, your majesty? How did he contact the outside world? How did you know that the 'higher being' would come?" Aldrian asked, looking at Dahan, who still wasn't talking.

However, he could see that Dahan, lying on his stomach, tried to hide his nervousness with folded ears and a shrunken body like a scaredy-cat.

"Yes, it's Dahan who gave the notice. As for how he contacts the outside world, this forest was created with the combined power of mine and Dahan. Because Dahan's power is higher than mine and his remnant will is stronger, he can send his intent and messages through the forest inhabitants. Although it's rare, in fact, he has only given orders or conveyed his intent a few times since I died. We learned about the 'higher being' from the World Tree Spirit of Evergreen."

Aldrian was astonished by the unexpected name.

"She came to us a few hours ago to warn us about the arrival of the 'higher being.' She advised asking the inhabitants of the forest to hide because his presence would be too much for them to handle. Dahan couldn't take a risk because the notice from the World Tree Spirit of Evergreen is not a trivial matter. True to her notice, when you came from afar, even Dahan felt his innate instinct tremble. That's why I asked you if you are truly human and not some higher being or a higher being in the skin of a human," Emperor Thonias asked.

"To be honest, I am really human, but the strangeness inside me is still a mystery to me. I am still trying to figure out who and what I truly am. I can only keep walking towards that answer." Aldrian answered.

"I hope you find it," Emperor Thonias said while looking at his own hand.

"It looks like my time is almost up. Talking with you is also draining my energy fast, and I cannot maintain this form for too long. But it is fate that brought you here, and—" Emperor Thonias looked at Dahan, who was now already standing on all fours.

"It looks like his mission is also complete." Aldrian watched as their bodies started to fade slowly into particles of light from their feet.

"Aldrian, I will give you all my belongings, my treasures, my artifacts—everything. They are all stored in this underground place. You can use them as you wish; this is my will to pass down my inheritance to the fated one. After this remnant will is gone, the underground place and the forest will lose their sovereign, and the inhabitants will have to fend for themselves if something happens." Emperor Thonias looked at Dahan, who moved his mouth without a sound.

At this moment, the entire Forest of Despair—spirits and beasts—stopped what they were doing and looked towards the core section. Some wore solemn expressions, and some shed tears. They all then prostrated towards the core section.

Back with Aldrian, the particles of light had already reached the emperor's and Dahan's stomachs.

"There are many spirits and beasts living in this forest, some loyally following their ancestors to guard this place and the forest. I entrust them all to you. I hope you cherish them; they will be helpful to you on your journey."

At this point, the particles of light had already reached his neck.

"I hope your journey will shine for others like a torch giving light in the darkness." He smiled before disappearing into particles of light. Aldrian then looked at Dahan, who, for the first time, looked at him with a resolute gaze. Dahan suddenly closed his eyes and prostrated towards him, even though only his head remained. For the first time, Dahan spoke to him.

"Welcome back. We have been waiting for your true return."

After saying that, Dahan followed Emperor Thonias, disappearing into particles of light. Aldrian, who could only watch them disappear, bowed his head in silence, ushering in the departure of a legend.

Chapter 39 - Knowing His Domain

Unknown place.

A big mountain, its top piercing the clouds, could be seen from afar. The existence of the mountain, like a lonely giant embedded nail on the land, showed its majesty and beauty to the onlooker. The mountain surrounded by vast lush forests stretching towards the horizon, gave the mountain all the glory as the highest ground in this region.

On one part of the mountain, there was a giant cave so huge that even a creature as tall as a hill could fit in it. The cave emitted an eerie aura that would scare every soul who tried to challenge it or even those who only looked at it.

The cave extended for a kilometer, and at its end, there was a silhouette of a big creature whose body could crush a big village if he lay on it. The creature had four feet and seemed to lay with closed eyes as if still sleeping or taking a nap. Suddenly, it opened its eyes, and a blue hue emanated from them. He then sat on his back feet like a cat.

His silhouette became much clearer, revealing the shape of a lion with a rigid mane. "Hahahaha, I finally found him! He has finally returned."

He burst out laughing, making the mountain tremble and the wind blow towards the forest, causing all the beasts to panic. His voice could be heard far away, and even on the horizon, many flying creatures could be seen taking flight after hearing his laugh.

"Yes, finally, finally," he sniffed. His eyes suddenly became moist with tears, but before they could drop onto his cheek, he wiped them away. After controlling his emotions for a few moments, he grinned.

"Yes, with his return, our time to retake what is ours will not be long. Those fuckers will experience the true horror of ultimate power." He growled, releasing his frustrations while still grinning and closing his eyes again.

"Soon, soon."

After his talk with Emperor Thonias, he was brought back to the statues' place. He felt the energy from this place rushing towards him and slipping into his dantian. After he opened his eyes, a secret door opened on the wall behind the statues. When he entered, he saw a golden-brown bow on a stone table and a skeleton behind it. The skeleton sat in a lotus position, covered by roots and leaves. He instantly knew that this was Emperor Thonias and bowed towards the skeleton before looking at the bow.

Aldrian looked at the treasure in front of him, a bow with beautiful carvings and a strong aura that made him feel interested in it. Beside it, there were also some arrows inside a container and a box. He picked up the box first, and when he opened it, he found a book. After reading the contents, he finally knew what it was.

"This is a book containing Emperor Thonias' techniques. Some of them are the same as the techniques of the current emperor, but some are original techniques of Emperor Thonias." He returned the book to the box and stored it in his storage ring. He then looked at the bow and arrows and tried to examine them with his Eyes of the Heaven.

Earth Shattering Bow

Description: The bow that always accompanied Emperor Thonias Evergreen of the Ivory Empire. This bow was created from one of the roots of the World Tree and has been blessed to have strong power. The artifact has its own sentience and can choose its master. Only the fated one can pull its string and shoot the arrows.

Grade: Low Divine.

Wind Slasher Arrow

Description: The arrows that come in a set with the Earth Shattering Bow. These arrows were created from one of the roots of the World Tree and have been blessed to never miss their target. Emperor Thonias Evergreen of the Ivory Empire only used these arrows a few times.

Grade: Low Divine.

Aldrian gasped at the bow and arrow's level. A divine-level artifact is very difficult to make, even for dwarves, they have a small chance of creating one even with the right materials. He was sure that every nation on this continent had its own trump card with a divine artifact, but in front of him, there was one used by the legendary Emperor Thonias.

He then touched the bow to pick it up but felt it tremble and sensed its reluctance. Aldrian tried to inject his golden energy to make it accustomed to his touch. When the bow received his energy, it stopped trembling, and he suddenly felt a stronger connection to the bow. He could sense the bow's feelings—it felt happy to receive his energy and became as docile as a pet. Aldrian smiled when he sensed this and tried to pull the bowstring.

"Well, I never learned archery, but maybe I can learn it in the Ivory Empire. The elves are famous for their archery skills anyway."

He could feel the power of this bow and made a note to learn archery, for it would be a waste of this artifact if he didn't. He stroked the bow to reassure it, and the bow responded with a trembling of happiness before Aldrian stored it in his storage ring. He then looked at the skeleton, noticing the green clothes it wore were tattered and covered in roots. He stood in front of the skeleton and once again bowed down.

"I will make the best use of your treasures. I will even give some to the Ivory Empire. You can rest assured." He straightened himself and looked at the skeleton one last time before leaving the room.

After that, he returned to the first hall he came to and looked at the other rooms. The other two rooms were filled with mountains of peak level energy stones and artifacts, which shocked him. The accumulation of Emperor Thonias's wealth, kept undisturbed for millions of years, had turned this underground place into an energy stone mine of peak level.

"This many peak-level energy stones, it's enough to create a country."

Aldrian grinned with a satisfied expression at the new wealth he had acquired, imagining the many possibilities it offered for his future. Perhaps because this place had already changed ownership to him, he could start to feel a connection to it, sensing everything within and stretching out to the mist outside. It felt like a domain, but he sensed it was a weaker, downgraded version of his true domain ability.

"If I can make this place and the entire forest my domain, it will be good. I can have one more place as my safety guarantee and also protect this place and the forest." he thought.

"But how do I make it my domain?" He almost grasped the concept of his domain ability, but a few things still confused him. How could he make an area his domain? How could he determine the size of the area that would be his domain? He began to ponder.

"Let's see, the first time I got a domain was in the village in the secret realm after the sudden appearance of Eyes of the Heaven, but I had that domain without any intervention on my part. Let's say that is because the village is my birthplace and

became my first domain. But how about my domain in Balin? At that time, the only thing I did was cultivate my comprehension and—" Then he thought of something.

I'm tied to the universe.

I'm tied to nature.

All of this is my own karma.

Why I am different is also my destiny.

My domain encompasses all things.

There is nothing that can escape my view.

There is nothing that can escape my sense.

There is nothing that can escape my will.

"I tried to repeat those lines and engage in self-introspection. When I reached the sentence *'Why I am different is also my destiny,'* I suddenly integrated myself with Olivia, and Olivia's area of blessing is the entire Balin. So now that size is my domain. After it became my domain, the size steadily grew following my cultivation." He tried to remember the feeling when he integrated with Olivia's true body.

He returned to the statues' hall, where the statues had now become ordinary, and sat in front of them. He closed his eyes to test his conclusion and concentrated.

"Remember the feeling, I'm tied to the universe, I'm tied to nature, all of this is my own karma, why I am different is also my destiny." He repeated those lines in his mind, immersing himself in the sentences. The energy inside his dantian and meridians moved on their own, creating their own path of cultivation, responding to Aldrian's self-cultivation. Aldrian forgot about his surroundings for a moment before he opened his eyes and looked at the screen in front of him.

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He smiled and stood up. "I think I'm starting to get it now. I have to make myself blend with the universe and nature, and those lines are the key words. I can feel the connection to nature and the vastness of the universe. In the end, I got *'My domain encompasses all things'* and the lines after that as my ultimate ability because I connect to the universe and nature itself. If my hypothesis is correct, the domain will be created in every area I connect myself to nature and the universe using those lines."

"As for how big the domain is, it depends on the area itself. If the area is already in someone's territory, then my domain will encompass their entire territory. So I only got

Balin because the World Tree of Balin's blessing area is only in Balin. If I want to take the entire Ivory empire as my domain, then—" He paused for a moment.

"I have to cultivate in the World Tree of Evergreen, whose area of blessing is the entire Ivory Empire. If I create the domain in land without an owner, the size of my domain will really depend on my cultivation level."

He deduced this from what he had just felt and believed his hypothesis was correct. So he just needed to test it.

"I can do that after my test here. While we're at it, let's meet the inhabitants of this forest." He then walked towards the outside of the underground place, sensing many presences outside.

Chapter 40 - The Talk With The Inhabitants

Outside the cave, many kinds of spirits and beasts were already surrounding the entrance. Most of them looked nervous as they waited for the being to come out from the cave. Following their past sovereign's last will, they came to this place to meet their new leader.

The congregation of spirits and beasts created an unusual spectacle, and their sheer number was enough to form a large army. They kept waiting until they heard footsteps and saw a silhouette coming towards them from the darkness.

When the being showed himself in full display, some of the spirits bowed their heads, knelt, or even prostrated without hesitation. The beasts, varying in size from 60 meters tall to a little insect, also bowed their heads when Aldrian revealed himself. He looked at them with a calm face and inspected each one of them.

"The highest level spirit is middle emperor spirit and for the beast the highest is high king stage." Aldrian thought. He then asked them,

"Is there any higher cultivation level being in this forest than those already here?"

"No, young master. We who are gathered here already include the strongest," one of the spirits, the strongest one, answered Aldrian. He looked at this spirit with a fish head but a human body.

Farin

Age: 80,410 years

Race

: Piscanthropes (Spirit)

Cultivation: High Emperor

Techniques: Water Bullet, Wave, Water Pillar, Water World, Whirlpool, Water Wall.

"All right, but can you not call me 'your excellency'? I'm still not used to it. Just call me 'young master' or, if you want, you can call me by my name, Aldrian Aster," he said.

"I would not dare to call your name directly, so I will call you young master."

"Well, that's good. So, is there anything you want to talk to me about?" Aldrian swept his gaze towards the crowd. "Are there any complaints from you? I know it's sudden, but I'm a human who will take over this place. Is there anything you want to talk to me about? Whatever it is, I will accept it."

Aldrian kept waiting, and from his mind-reading technique, he knew that most of them were still reluctant to accept a human as their new ruler. However, the sensation they got from him was real, and their bodies couldn't resist the innate instinct to tremble and bow to him. They followed their instincts, but their hearts were still somewhat reluctant. Aldrian looked at one of the spirits.

"May I know this young spirit's name?" he asked the young humanoid-shaped spirit with horns while he read his information.

Dikan

Age

: 5,030 years

Race : Arborians (Spirit)

Cultivation : Low Marquess

Techniques : Root Whip, Camouflage, Tree Bobby Trap, Energy Sucker.

"My name is Dikan, young master."

"So, Dikan, what do you think of me?"

"You are the chosen one by our past leader, young master."

"Is that so? Then why can I sense your reluctance, Dikan?" Hearing Aldrian's question, Dikan and the others were stunned. Dikan forced himself to look Aldrian in the eyes, and when he met those blue eyes, he trembled and bit his lower lip.

"Is it because I'm human? Or is there something else?" Aldrian knew that this young spirit could not suddenly accept Dahan's will that an outsider, a human moreover, would take the reign of this forest. Most of them hated humans because of past stories about human devil cultivators making their king Dahan miserable and causing Emperor Thonias's demise.

"To tell you the truth, young master, I still don't understand why his majesty had to go just for you to replace him. Why does it have to be you, a human, the same race that made him miserable for a long time? I know his time had already come, but I still can't accept it. A human boy at the Viscount stage wants to be our leader? Give me a break."

Dikan blurted out all of his frustration and irritation, even though his body was trembling like crazy and his soul felt like it was being ripped apart. The other spirits who shared the same sentiment agreed with him in their hearts, while those who simply followed their past sovereign's will remained silent. They were truly astonished by Dikan's bravery and willpower to force himself to say something so outrageous despite his innate instinct.

Aldrian, as the target of their opinions, just smiled and walked towards Dikan, who dropped onto his butt when Aldrian approached. Aldrian stopped a few meters from Dikan and said,

"Yes, I am human, the race you hate. I don't blame you for thinking that way. I respect your opinion, but have you tried in your heart to see that not every human is the same? Have you considered that I might be different from them?"

"Humans can be despicable, and their greed knows no bounds. They will do whatever it takes to gain power. That's why most devil cultivators are human. I don't know about you, but I don't think you are different. Didn't you pick all those precious herbs because of your greed? Maybe it's only a matter of time before you take everything from us." Dikan responded.

"Okay, fair enough, but don't spirits also have such traits?" Aldrian asked. Dikan fell silent for a moment.

"Some of us do have such traits, but they must bear the consequences. Spirits are nature's creatures, created from heaven and earth energy. The law of nature's karma is more severe for us than for other races. If we do bad things, there will be punishment from heaven in some form and in unexpected ways."

"Well, in the end, some of you still have those traits even with your own cause and effect laws. But despite that, some of you still have ill intent. What do you think would happen if spirits didn't have strong karma tied to nature and were treated the same as humans?" Aldrian asked, to which Dikan had no answer. Aldrian looked at the others.

"This also applies to beasts. Even though you are not as tied to nature as spirits are, you still have bad traits and ill intent within you, am I right?" Aldrian swept his gaze over them.

"We all have those feelings and traits. Why? Because those feelings also shape us. We've had them since we came into existence, and in the end, we are all the same under the eyes of heaven. Is anyone brave enough to deny my statement from their heart?" The crowd remained silent.

"Then what is the difference between devils and us if we are not different? Devils can't control their greed for power. They let their negative traits control them and shake their morality. What about us? We can control those negative traits and tame them instead. Isn't that why you all remain in this forest, protecting this place and the forest out of loyalty? Even though King Dahan and Emperor Thonias have not cast any restrictions on you until now, you have not betrayed them. Even though there are many treasures in this forest, you can live in harmony without greed controlling you?" Aldrian paused and swept his gaze again.

"We can't remove the negative traits from our hearts because they're already there. What we can do is use them as stepping stones to reach our goals," Aldrian said. He then released his aura and energy, causing the surrounding spirits and beasts to tremble, suffocated by the pressure that came from their innate instinct. Fear started to creep into their hearts, but the golden energy from Aldrian also had a soothing effect. His aura instilled reverence in them for this young human.

"Am I the same as those devils?! Am I the same as those humans from your stories?! Am I the same as them?!" He then retracted his energy and aura and looked at Dikan.

"You see my difference, you see my journey here. You are beings of this forest, whom Emperor Thonias and King Dahan entrusted to me. Their will is my obligation after I received their legacy. If I were the same as those devils, if I were the same as those humans, I would just leave this place, and you couldn't do anything about it. After they are gone, this forest will lose its true guardians. With time, outside cultivators will learn about the change in this forest. They will flock here to plunder your treasures, driven by their greed," Aldrian said, looking at the others again.

"So, I stand here, bearing their will, to ask you: do you accept me as your own kind? Do you accept me as their chosen one? Do you accept me as your flag bearer?" Suddenly, Dikan kowtowed towards him.

"I will accept the young master as the chosen one and our sovereign," he said. His voice was followed by others.

"We will accept the young master as the chosen one and our sovereign." Their voices reverberated across the core section, even pushing the mist a little. Aldrian smiled, looking at them with satisfaction.

"Believe me, give me some time, and I will prove to you that from this moment forward, you don't have to worry about this place. You will have your own peace living here and won't need to guard this place anymore. You can go wherever you want; you don't have to be trapped here. You can adventure outside if you wish, and with me here, that's enough. But in return, I will need your help if I call for it."

Aldrian's declaration shocked many inhabitants. It was a truly bold declaration by their new leader, but Aldrian paid no heed to their astonishment and just smiled.

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