

The Shining Star Above The Heaven

#Chapter 391: His Difficulty and Solution? - Read The Shining Star Above The Heaven Chapter 391: His Difficulty and Solution?

Chapter 391: His Difficulty and Solution?

"I'm good, all good. There is nothing more I could hope for. My cultivation is also progressing much faster than it did in my sect, which makes me wonder about the reason. All in all, it's going well," Baek Jimin answered with a soft smile.

Aldrian also smiled and took a sip of the tea prepared by the maids in the mansion. Some of the women he had saved a few days ago were, in fact, former maids of this mansion before the city's fall. Not only maids but also female knights who had served in the mayor's forces and female denizens who had caught the interest of the Marquess Parus's soldiers.

After he rescued them, they soon learned what had happened and felt grateful to him. The maids wished to continue working here to assist him, and he gladly accepted them, as they could help maintain the mansion.

"Do you have anything you want to do while we still have free time here before the second prince's forces arrive?" Aldrian asked her.

Although he could sense that her negative emotions had subsided greatly unlike when they were still in the Doria Empire, he could still feel that something lingered in Baek Jimin's heart, something that remained unresolved. He suspected it was a desire she had kept to herself.

Baek Jimin seemed to be lost in thought as she watched Sylphia, who appeared indifferent to their conversation and was happily strolling through the garden. After a few moments, she finally turned to Aldrian.

"Then... can you accompany me for a walk? I mean, to visit some places to relax? Just the two of us?" she asked, but then blushed and lowered her head.

Aldrian was stunned and kept looking at the shy Baek Jimin. He then sent a voice transmission to Sylphia.

"My love, Jimin wants me to accompany her for a walk. What do you think?"

Sylphia, still busy interacting with the plants in the garden, was momentarily surprised but quickly responded without looking at him.

"Go ahead, dear. Just accompany her, she needs some fresh air, after all."

Aldrian fell silent for a moment before asking again.

"Did you ever talk to Jimin about something in the past?"

"Something like what?"

"I don't know... maybe something about me?"

Sylphia simply smiled as she continued touching the flowers.

"What are you talking about? I don't understand."

Aldrian fell silent again. It seemed that Sylphia had indeed told Baek Jimin something in the past, and that was what gave Baek Jimin the courage to make this kind of request.

Baek Jimin and the others already knew that he and Sylphia were lovers. By making such a request, she was essentially asking her friend's partner to accompany her for a walk—without any fear of Sylphia finding out or objecting.

From his perspective, the only reason Baek Jimin would dare to ask this was that she and Sylphia must have discussed it at some point.

He sighed inwardly at this development. This was heading down a "dangerous" path, and he feared he wouldn't be able to handle the situation properly.

"Sure, I will accompany you. Just tell me where, and I'll take you there," he said to Baek Jimin. Her expression brightened, and she shyly nodded.

"Hmm." She then sipped her tea with a relaxed expression.

Seeing this, he sighed inwardly again. Activating his karma laws, he examined his karma thread with Baek Jimin to confirm his suspicions.

As he had thought, the blue thread that signified their friendship had begun to be tainted with red, the color of love! And all of it stemmed from Baek Jimin's own feelings.

From what he knew, Baek Jimin still seemed confused about her own feelings, just like Sylphia had been before she boldly confessed her love for him. She appeared to be in the phase of trying to understand what kind of feelings she had for him, so it was no surprise that she had made such a request.

"Aish, what am I supposed to do?" He thought to himself.

He was always willing to accommodate the requests of those close to him if he could fulfill them, but this situation required caution. He didn't want to hurt anyone he already considered dear to him, including Baek Jimin.

If she confirmed her feelings and even embraced the fact that she had fallen in love with him, then what? What was he supposed to do? What would she do?

He didn't have any special feelings of love toward Baek Jimin, but he had to admit that ever since he comprehended the Heavenly Demon's Scripture, he had felt a unique connection with her. This connection made him feel naturally close to her, and he suspected it had something to do with her karma being tied to the Heavenly Demon's Flower Scripture.

The creator of the Heavenly Demon's Flower Scripture was the wife of the Heavenly Demon, and since he had comprehended the Heavenly Demon's Scripture, a special karmic bond must have formed between them.

He then began thinking of a solution for this situation. If Baek Jimin eventually chose to embrace her feelings—which, in his view, was only a matter of time before she fully understood them—then he would have to act. If he failed to resolve the matter properly, he feared it could become her inner demon.

A solution came to his mind—one that had already been practiced by many men across the continent. A concept that was widely accepted in this land.

Harem.

He had never seriously considered it before, as his situation had always felt far removed from such things. The concept of a harem was not taboo in this continent, and many had already embraced it. However, now that a situation requiring serious thought had arisen, he would have to discuss it with Sylphia. Since she had likely said something to Baek Jimin in the past, she would also have to take some "responsibility" for how things had developed.

But for now, he set the matter aside. It was still something to consider only if Baek Jimin truly embraced her feelings. Until then, he would continue as usual.

With that, he changed the topic and continued his conversation with her, before long, Sylphia joined them, and the three of them engaged in a friendly conversation filled with smiles and laughter for the next few hours.

Just then, Aldrian saw a maid rushing toward him. Sylphia and Baek Jimin also noticed and wondered what had happened.

"Excuse me, my lord, milady, but an important guest has arrived for you. She is already at the mansion's main doors, waiting for your permission to enter," the maid said with a slight bow.

Aldrian tilted his head. "Who is it?"

"It's Her Excellency, Baroness Weilmар."

Aldrian raised his eyebrows slightly. He had expected that, at some point, nobles from the opposition faction of the second prince would try to approach him—but to think it would happen today. That Baroness Weilmар was the first to come was no surprise, as this city was under her barony.

The real question was—what was she planning? Did she want to negotiate for the city, or was there something else on her mind?

Aldrian nodded. "Thank you for informing me. Escort Baroness Weilmар to the guest room—I'll be there shortly."

The maid bowed once again before leaving to carry out his order.

"What do you think? Why has Baroness Weilmар come?" Sylphia asked.

"I'm not sure, but given her current war situation, I doubt it's a hostile visit. If she's smart, she wouldn't risk making another enemy," he replied.

"I'll go meet with her. Do you want to come?" Aldrian asked.

"No, I'd rather stay here and talk with Jimin. You can meet the baroness on your own," Sylphia replied with a smile.

Aldrian glanced at her and Baek Jimin for a moment before sighing.

"Alright."

With that, he turned and walked away to prepare for his meeting with the baroness. Once he was gone, Sylphia turned toward Baek Jimin.

"You're really bold, aren't you? Making a request like that even with his woman near him?" Sylphia said in a teasing tone.

Baek Jimin lowered her head, her face turning red with embarrassment. But at that moment, she had simply voiced what she wanted most. When Aldrian had asked her what she desired, she had spoken without hesitation, driven by her need to understand the feelings that had been lingering in her heart ever since the incident with the Envy Devil in the Doria Empire.

"Anyway, let's talk about something else. Forget about that man for a moment," Sylphia said, steering the conversation in a different direction. The two of them continued chatting, their discussion flowing naturally.

In the front garden of the mansion, Baroness Weimar stood before the main entrance, accompanied only by her personal guardian knight. She gazed at the familiar place she had visited several times in the past. As one of the most vital cities in her barony, she had often come here to conduct inspections.

However, to think that this time, she had to wait for permission to enter—it felt truly strange.

"Your Excellency, I will escort you to the guest room," said the maid from earlier as she returned. Baroness Weimar recognized her, having met her in the past. From the way the maid addressed her, it was clear that she already considered the person now residing in this mansion as her lord.

She was then led to a luxurious guest room, one she knew well from her previous visits. Nothing had changed from the last time she had been here.

After waiting for a few minutes, the door to the guest room opened, drawing her attention. However, as she turned to look, her eyes widened in shock at the sight of the person entering the room.

Chapter 392: The Frustration of a Knight

Before departing for Caritas, Baroness Weimar had expected to meet an adult man. However, reality shocked her when she found herself facing a young man who seemed no older than his twenties. He had handsome black hair and wore noble attire that exuded strong charisma, making those who saw him instinctively feel respect for him.

Aldrian looked directly at the baroness and offered a slight smile.

"What an unexpected visit from an esteemed guest. Welcome to Caritas, Baroness Weimar," he said, extending his hand.

The baroness snapped out of her shock upon hearing Aldrian's words.

"Ah, yes, my apologies for coming without prior notice. My circumstances required me to act quickly, so I hope Your Excellency understands," Baroness Weimar said as she accepted Aldrian's handshake.

They sat on the sofa, facing each other, while her guardian knight stood behind her, keeping watch. A maid served Aldrian another cup of tea as he turned his gaze toward the baroness.

"So, for an esteemed leader of a noble family to come to this place at this time, I suppose you've already heard the rumors about me. For Lady Charoline to make the trip here, despite being cornered in Weimar City, the situation must be dire. I won't beat around the bush, as I know you don't have much time—you have a war to fight. What is your purpose here, or more specifically, what do you want from me?" he asked with a calm expression.

Baroness Weimar nodded.

"Then I'll be direct as well, since I dislike dragging things out. But first, my apologies—please don't misunderstand, as this is truly a question that came to mind when I saw you, and I hope Your Excellency can satisfy my curiosity. Are you really the one who took over this city?"

"Well, that is a fact," he replied calmly.

"I see." Baroness Weimar sighed. Once again, she was amazed that someone so young had already done something as bold as killing many and seizing a city from the second prince's faction.

"The purpose of my visit is to seek Your Excellency's support for Weimar City. Our city has been under blockade for almost two weeks, and there are many people inside who need food. However, the blockade has made it impossible to supply them. We predict that if the situation doesn't improve within the next two weeks, our people will begin to starve. I hope Your Excellency can at least provide logistical support to prevent such a tragedy."

She paused briefly before continuing.

"Additionally, we hope that Your Excellency can offer a refuge for my people in case something worse happens to Weimar City."

Her gaze was full of hope, and Aldrian could sense that she genuinely cared about the well-being of her people. He smiled as he picked up his cup of tea.

"Is that all?" he asked before taking a sip.

Baroness Weimar was momentarily stunned by his question. She lowered her gaze to her lap for a moment before looking at Aldrian again.

"Actually... personally, I would also like to ask for Your Excellency's help in pushing back the second prince's forces at Weimar City. With your strength, it would be a great

help to us. Now that your warning has likely spread across the entire empire, the second prince will surely target Caritas even more. We can offer our support to help ease some of your burdens, as the second prince will have to send a massive force to reclaim this city."

She hesitated before adding, "However, that is merely my personal hope. I do not expect much from it. I know it's asking too much of Your Excellency, especially since you have no moral obligation to involve yourself further in this war."

Aldrian look at her eyes and keep silent. He can saw that she seems anxious waiting for his answer. He put down his cup of tea.

"I can provide your people with supplies, and I will also allow them to escape if something happens to Weimar City. However, I don't need your help regarding this city. I can take care of the second prince's forces myself," Aldrian said calmly.

Baroness Weimar was stunned, but she sighed inwardly. While she was relieved that Aldrian was willing to provide a way out for her people, she couldn't help but feel disappointed that he had no interest in aiding her in the war. She had already expected this—Aldrian didn't seem to be from this empire, and he had no obligation to save its people. Once he was done with his business here, he could simply move to another empire, leaving the second prince with limited options.

"I see, then—"

"Arrogant! With the second prince's massive forces, how can you possibly hold them off by yourself? There are even Emperor-stage cultivators among them! If they come for you, you'll be caught off guard, and that will be your end!"

Suddenly, her guardian knight's voice resounded through the room, causing Baroness Weimar's eyes to widen in shock as she turned toward him.

"Dan, what are you—"

"No, Milady! I can't stand his arrogance!" Dan interrupted. "He thinks that just because he liberated this city from the second prince's faction, he can hold off the second prince's forces by himself. He underestimates them far too much! I'm afraid he'll fall before he even realizes what hit him," he said, his expression filled with anger.

"SILENCE!" she shouted.

Her outburst stunned her guardian knight. He turned his head to the side as if trying to calm himself, but the fury in his eyes remained. Dan had followed Baroness Weimar for a long time, witnessing the countless hardships she had endured in this war. He knew firsthand how formidable the second prince's faction truly was.

If the second prince's faction were so easy to defeat, their alliance wouldn't be in this dire situation in the first place.

Baroness Weilmarr sighed and turned to Aldrian.

"I apologize for my—"

She stopped mid-sentence when Aldrian gestured for her to stop. She noticed the smile on his face as he turned his gaze toward her guardian knight.

"Is that so? And what makes you think I can't stop his forces? You've never seen me fight, nor do you know my strength," he asked calmly.

Dan, the baroness's guardian knight, looked at Aldrian again. He couldn't help but feel even more irritated at the confidence on Aldrian's face, which he perceived as sheer arrogance, as if he were underestimating everything.

"He has the support of many noble families, and if we count his entire army along with those nobles' forces, it numbers over half a million troops. And that's not even considering their qualitative superiority—with more than fifteen Emperor-stage cultivators among their ranks."

"Meanwhile, our combined opposition force amounts to barely half of that, and we've already suffered heavy losses. We have only six Emperor-stage left cultivators supporting us."

"If the second prince's forces could be held back by a single person, we wouldn't be in this dire situation, constantly on the brink of being wiped out," he said.

It was clear that he was pouring out all his frustration onto Aldrian. Aldrian could easily sense the deep frustration that had been weighing on his heart.

The long battles he had endured, combined with the constant retreat against the second prince's forces, had made him pessimistic. Despair continued to build in his heart.

So, when he first heard that someone dared to challenge the entire faction—boldly claiming he could stand against anyone who tried to take Caritas—anger surged within him.

And now, hearing how Aldrian seemed to dismiss his master's intent to form an alliance, rejecting the idea that they could help each other, and even arrogantly claiming he needed no one's help, Dan finally lost control. He felt as if his master's hope and goodwill had been carelessly brushed aside by this young man.

Aldrian simply smiled. This guardian knight had a point. After experiencing continuous losses, it was only natural for the opposition forces to harbor negativity. Aldrian understood what was going through Dan's mind and wasn't offended by his outburst.

He then turned to Baroness Weilmarr.

"You have a good guardian knight, Baroness Weilmarr."

Baroness Weilmarr, who had been on edge due to her guardian knight's outburst, was stunned by Aldrian's response. She had braced herself for a harsh reaction, perhaps even being chased away but instead, Aldrian remained calm and level-headed, showing no sign of being offended.

Dan, still seething with anger, grew even more irritated when he saw that Aldrian seemed completely unfazed by his words.

"You—"

"My lord, bad news!"

Before Dan could say more, a maid suddenly burst into the room, panting heavily as she frantically tried to deliver her message. Panic was evident on her face.

"My apologies, my lord, Your Excellency, but I bring urgent news!" she gasped. "They're here!"

"Who is here?" Aldrian asked, his expression unchanged.

"The second prince's troops! They're approaching the city as we speak!"

Upon hearing the maid's words, Baroness Weilmarr and Dan widened their eyes in shock. The second prince's troops were already here? That was fast!

The baroness instinctively turned to Aldrian, wanting to say something, but what she saw left her speechless. He was simply smiling—a calm, indifferent smile, as if it didn't matter whether the second prince's forces had arrived or not.

Aldrian then shifted his gaze to Baroness Weilmarr and Dan.

"Excuse me, esteemed guests, but I have something to take care of before we continue our conversation."

Chapter 393: The Incoming Army

At this moment, several cultivators stood atop the city walls of Caritas, their gazes fixed in the same direction. A chill ran down their spines, and sweat dripped from their

foreheads as they beheld the things approaching their city. Silence hung between them—they all knew what was coming.

At first, they saw only four black dots in the distant sky, emerging from the horizon. But as the dots grew larger, their fear intensified. When they finally discerned the approaching entities, terror gripped their hearts. The four objects had a rectangular shape with numerous sharp angles along their edges. Each object was a kilometer long and 500 meters wide. Their black surfaces were adorned with glowing runes, glowing as they advanced.

At the front tip of each flying object, a giant white sphere was embedded. On top of its body, there was a glass-enclosed area where the controllers of the flying object were stationed, allowing them to see everything below.

"Flying Fortress." Someone finally muttered.

A chill ran through their bodies as the four massive flying fortresses advanced in an arrow formation—neither too fast nor too slow. The forest beneath them was briefly cast into darkness as the enormous structures blocked out the sunlight. The sight was truly intimidating, and the deep humming sound they emitted as they passed only added to the oppressive atmosphere.

The people began to step back as the giant flying fortresses reached a distance of 15 kilometers from the city walls. They knew that the arrival of these fortresses was a clear sign—the second prince was serious about taking over the city. Many turned and fled in the opposite direction, fearing they would be caught in the impending battle.

Inside the control room of the leading flying fortress, a brown-haired middle-aged man gazed at the city, now fully within sight. His knight's armor, paired with the red cape draped behind him, made him appear gallant. A confident smile played on his lips, though there was a hint of mockery in it, as if he were looking at something unworthy of his full attention.

This man was Duke Alikin, the one tasked by Second Prince Wilmar to reclaim the city. His orders were clear—capture Aldrian if possible; kill him if not.

"My lord, we are now within range of the lightning cannon and ready to attack at any time," someone reported from nearby. The man stood in front of a spherical object embedded in a small pillar, which functioned as a control device to assist in maneuvering the flying fortress. Several others were stationed at similar controls, each responsible for steering the massive war machine.

"Begin preparations for the lightning cannon," Duke Alikin ordered.

"Preparing the cannon," the man responded.

Duke Alikin then turned to the man beside him, an emperor-stage cultivator like himself, clad in knight's armor.

"Harison, I will deploy your troops here. Be ready to breach the city if that bastard refuses to surrender."

"As you wish, my lord," Harison replied with a slight bow before departing.

Duke Alikin turned back to gaze at the city. With his sharp eyesight, he could see many people fleeing from the city walls. A mocking smile curled on his lips as he watched them.

"You all in this city will serve as an example to anyone who thinks they can escape His Majesty or oppose him," he thought.

His orders were simple—retake the city and capture the man who dared to mock their power after challenging the second prince's authority. As for the citizens or anyone seeking refuge within the city? He didn't care. He would make an example of them, sending a clear message to other factions: defying the second prince would not be tolerated.

Not long after, the three flying fortresses behind the lead fortress descended, landing in the forest below and flattening the entire area beneath them. As they settled, massive doors on their undersides opened, extending pathways to the ground.

One by one, troops marched out in neat formations, their numbers rapidly increasing. In no time, their ranks swelled beyond ten thousand, yet the deployment did not cease.

Twenty thousand. Thirty thousand. Finally, the number reached forty thousand before the three fortresses sealed their doors and ascended once more, taking position behind the lead fortress.

On the ground, the troops were led by General Harison, one of Duke Alikin's most trusted men. Hovering at the front of his vast army, he was flanked by ten king-stage cultivators, who floated behind him.

Surveying his troops, he raised his voice and shouted.

"We will trample anyone who stands in our way! We will raise the glory of His Majesty, and we will show those rebels that His Majesty's authority cannot be challenged!"

Harison unsheathed his sword and raised it high into the sky, his voice loud with fervor.

"Glory to His Majesty, Emperor Wilman! Glory to the Atria Empire!"

"Glory to His Majesty, Emperor Wilman! Glory to the Atria Empire!"

The troops roared in unison, their voices echoing across the land. The sheer force of their battle cry carried all the way to the city walls, striking fear into those who heard it.

With that, tens of thousands of soldiers began their march forward in disciplined formation. Above them, Harison floated, overseeing the vast army below. As his gaze fell upon the city, he couldn't help but feel a twinge of pity for that man and for anyone foolish enough to stand by his side.

"Blame yourself for being in the wrong place at the wrong time."

In his opinion, the amount of firepower they had brought was excessive just to capture a single person. But he understood the second prince's true intent.

This was a show of force.

A warning to anyone, anywhere, that meddling in the internal affairs of the Atria Empire would lead to the same fate. Even with this overwhelming army, it was still not the full might of the second prince's faction. The message was clear, and with so many eyes fixed on this city, it would undoubtedly spread far and wide.

When they were just seven kilometers from the city walls, the entire army came to a halt as a thunderous voice echoed from the lead flying fortress.

"To the one who has seized His Majesty's property and dared to challenge his authority—show yourself and surrender, and we will spare your life!"

"You have one minute to come forward and face me. Surrender now, or we will have no choice but to destroy you and the city."

Duke Alikin's voice echoed throughout the entire city, sending a wave of fear through the people. At that moment, they all understood—another battle was about to erupt.

Families rushed to hide inside their homes and establishments, praying to the heavens for their safety. Those who had first spotted the flying fortresses had already fled to the teleportation station, desperate to escape.

The people behind the city walls could now see the four massive flying fortresses hovering just seven kilometers away. Though the distance was considerable for mortals without cultivation or low-level cultivators, the sheer size of the fortresses made them visible even through the broken city walls, which had yet to be fully repaired.

"Mother, what's happening?" a child asked, nestled in his mother's embrace inside their home. Seeing the fear on her face, he couldn't help but wonder what was wrong.

The mother, though terrified of what might come, forced herself to remain strong for her child. She gave him a reassuring smile and gently stroked his head.

"It's nothing, dear," she said softly. "Just some people with bad intentions. But don't worry—I believe our new city lord will take care of everything."

The child, trusting his mother's words, smiled back and nodded innocently.

Scenes like this unfolded throughout the city as people clung to hope, praying to the heavens that the one they now considered their new city lord would emerge victorious in the coming battle.

They all waited for the person at the center of it all to step forward and they were not disappointed.

A figure suddenly appeared atop the city walls, his presence commanding immediate attention. He wore a mask and noble attire that enhanced his charisma, exuding an aura of mystery that left many wondering just who he truly was.

Standing tall, he gazed out at the vast formation of troops in the distance. His back was straight and unwavering. To the people watching, this scene appeared heroic, he was not just a leader, he was also their savior.

Many claimed that the new city lord was a young man, according to witnesses who had seen his face. However, this time, he chose to conceal it behind a mask.

Duke Alikin was momentarily stunned by the sudden appearance of a figure atop the city walls. From the flying fortress, he couldn't sense anything, but his confidence in his army and his own strength remained unshaken. Even if this man could defeat an entire army from Caritas City, could he truly stand against such an overwhelming force?

A single flying fortress was enough to contend with a mid-level Emperor-stage cultivator, and they had brought four. On top of that, both he and Harison were Emperor-stage cultivators themselves.

In Duke Alikin's eyes, this foolish man, ignorant of the immensity of heaven and earth, would be subdued in no time.

As he observed the masked figure standing there with nothing but a calm eyes in the face of such a massive army, he couldn't help but find his arrogance infuriating.

Then, a composed voice rang out, carrying across the area.

"Where is the traitor that I asked for?"

Aldrian's words resounded with an undeniable authority.

Chapter 394: The Opening Attack

"Where is the traitor I asked for?" Aldrian's calm yet authoritative voice resounded, reaching the approaching army.

Aldrian's calm voice could be heard by everyone in the area, but he focused it toward the distant army.

Baroness Weimar and her guardian knight hovered far from Aldrian, yet they could still see him. At this moment, their gazes fixed on the four massive flying fortresses and the overwhelming army before them. Their expressions wavered with disbelief. To think that the second prince would go to such lengths—deploying such a force just to capture one person and take this city.

This was beyond excessive. Even a single flying fortress would have been overwhelming, but he had sent four.

The city had yet to fully recover from the traces of the past battle. Many buildings and sections of the city walls remained broken, their repairs still unfinished. The city's defensive formation had already been destroyed in the previous battle when the second prince's faction seized control, forcing Baroness Weimar to retreat to Weimar City.

Right now, the city had no protective barrier to shield it. If the flying fortresses fired their lightning cannons, the devastation would be unimaginable.

However, Baroness Weimar noticed that Aldrian did not seem concerned at all. His calm voice resounded with unwavering authority. She did not know who this 'traitor' was, but it was clear that Aldrian had already sent the second prince his message—now, he was waiting for an answer. He did not care about the massive army sent against him; he only wanted what he demanded.

Her guardian knight looked at Aldrian's back, which now appeared heroic, and couldn't help but feel a sense of respect. However, he still thought Aldrian was too arrogant to face such a massive army alone. It was no different from standing against multiple emperor-stage cultivators by himself. Even if his master aided Aldrian, there was little they could do—they could only wait for their inevitable defeat.

Throughout the civil war, the second prince had rarely used flying fortresses. He only deployed them when attempting to breach the capital cities of one grand duchy and two dukedoms, and even then, he had never sent more than two at once.

Now, he wanted to see for himself whether Aldrian was merely an arrogant fool or if he truly possessed the strength to justify his confidence.

When Aldrian's voice reached the massive army seven kilometers away, they felt their hearts tremble and their eardrums ring. Even Duke Alikin, who was inside the flying

fortress, could sense the sheer power behind his voice. However, he merely frowned and sneered.

"Surrender yourself, and we will spare you and this city. Resist, and we will destroy you along with it," Duke Alikin's voice rang out once more.

Aldrian, ignoring his words, repeated in a calm tone, "Where is the traitor that I asked for?"

A vein bulged on Duke Alikin's forehead as he realized his words had fallen on deaf ears. His expression turned cold as he glared at Aldrian and replied,

"It seems you have chosen the path of destruction." Then, he turned to the crew behind him.

"Firing the lightning cannon process."

"Firing the lightning cannon process," the crew responded.

Duke Alikin then took out a communication artifact and spoke into it.

"Once the lightning cannon fires and I kill that bastard, you will attack the city immediately. I want you to kill anyone in sight."

Harison, who had been waiting for the signal, heard the command through his own communication artifact.

"Yes, my lord," he answered before letting out a sigh.

"Don't blame me, I'm just following orders," he thought to himself as he gazed at the city's scenery. Then, he looked up at the lead flying fortress.

Suddenly, the large white spherical structure embedded at the front of the flying fortress began to crackle with lightning. The sound of thunder followed, and the atmosphere grew heavy. The pressure was so immense that even the army below felt a chill, as if they were standing before an emperor-stage cultivator.

The people inside the city also heard the deafening thunder from the leading flying fortress. Fear gripped them as they scrambled to take cover.

Baroness Weimar and her guardian knight looked at the terrified people with pity. Their efforts were futile, once the lightning cannon fired, no amount of hiding would save them. The attack would instantly obliterate everything in its path.

For high-level cultivators like her and her guardian knight who were already at the king stage, survival was possible by swiftly taking to the sky.

They returned their focus to Aldrian, who had become the main target of this weapon of mass destruction.

Aldrian continued to watch everything with a calm expression behind his mask. There was no panic, no worry, no trace of fear at all. Instead, he simply found it interesting to finally witness a flying fortress in action firsthand.

He had already read about these war machines, which the empires typically used during wartime. Their numbers were limited due to the difficulty and cost of production and operation. The exact number of flying fortresses each empire possessed was known only to a select few, but many speculated that no empire had more than twenty of them over the years.

These war machines required an enormous number of peak-level energy stones just to remain airborne. And that was only for flight, as for activating their main weapon, the massive spherical structure embedded at the front of the fortress, demanded even more.

That structure served as the flying fortress's primary offensive weapon, capable of unleashing an attack on par with a mid-stage emperor cultivator. If they completely depleted their energy stone reserves inside the flying fortress, it could even reach the level of a high-stage emperor.

Typically, these war machines were deployed only in the most dire situations, when the imperial family deemed them one of the last resorts alongside their legacy artifacts. That was why he hadn't seen any flying fortresses during the war between the devils and the Doria Empire, the Doria imperial family had still believed they could handle the crisis without resorting to them.

The appearance of the flying fortresses—four of them, no less—was proof that the second prince was not joking about his sudden appearance and challenge. He had no qualms about destroying the city if necessary, using it as an example to warn others not to meddle in Atria Empire's affairs.

This was by far the most extravagant show of force Aldrian had ever witnessed, yet he remained calm even as one of the fortresses prepared to fire its main weapon.

The massive spherical structure at the front had finally fully charged, its power now reaching the level of a mid-stage emperor cultivator.

"Fire!" Duke Alikin shouted.

A deafening explosion of thunder erupted across the region, as if doomsday had arrived. Inside the city, people clung to one another, bracing themselves for the inevitable impact.

The massive beam of lightning shot directly toward Aldrian. Baroness Weilmar and her guardian knight had already raised their energy shields to protect themselves and the people nearby. Although their barriers would do nothing to stop the beam itself—well, the attack was clearly aimed at Aldrian anyway—they could at least shield the others from the resulting shockwave and flying debris.

The people who witnessed the incoming attack fell into despair. But just as the beam was about to hit, something opened in front of their city lord. Space itself split apart like a giant maw, revealing a dark void behind it. Before the lightning beam could reach Aldrian, it was swallowed by the spatial rift. A moment later, a thunderous rumbling echoed from another part of the sky above the city.

Everyone watched as another spatial crack appeared in the sky above the city, redirecting the lightning beam upward. The sight left the onlookers wide-eyed in shock—the devastating attack had been effortlessly diverted into the sky through the rift! The only effect that reached the city was the strong gusts of wind generated by the beam's sheer force.

Baroness Weilmar and her guardian knight stared in disbelief, their eyes wide with astonishment. Aldrian had blocked an attack from a flying fortress with ease—something they had never thought possible!

The massive army was equally stunned. None of them could believe that someone was capable of stopping the lightning beam in such a manner. Harison, who had been on the verge of ordering the attack, found his command stuck in his throat as he witnessed the unbelievable scene unfold.

What kind of person were they facing this time?! Was he a high emperor stage cultivator or even at the peak?! Impossible! Someone of that caliber would already be famous across the continent—high emperor stage cultivators were exceedingly rare. Yet this man was an unknown, and he was still young!

Duke Alikin and the others watching from the control room were equally shocked. The beam of lightning hadn't even touched Aldrian, instead, it had reappeared elsewhere and was redirected into the sky. Through the control room, he saw the massive pillar of lightning beam split the clouds before finally receding and vanishing. The cannon had completed its firing.

Silence engulfed both the city and the massive army, even after the lightning beam had disappeared. All eyes remained fixed on the sky as the spatial crack slowly closed itself. Then, Aldrian's voice echoed once more.

"It seems my warning was ignored, and you refuse to hand over the traitor. I see."

With that, he reached into his storage ring and drew out a peak heaven-grade sword. Unsheathing it, he pointed the blade toward the sky.

"Then, as I promised, from this moment forth, I will give the second prince his nightmare."

Suddenly, a pillar of golden light erupted from the sword's blade, shooting toward the heavens and splitting the clouds apart.

Chapter 395: Like a Hot Knife Slicing Through Butter

Once the pillar of golden light shot through the sky, everyone, no matter what they were doing, inevitably looked up. The clouds parted to make way for the golden pillar, its tip disappearing into the heavens as if piercing them. However, everyone knew that its height simply extended beyond their sight.

The power emanating from the golden pillar filled them with horror, exuding an even more overwhelming pressure than the lightning beam.

Baroness Weimar and her guardian knight widened their eyes in shock as they sensed that the golden pillar possessed strength far greater than the high emperor stage. They had never seen anyone at the peak emperor stage unleash their technique, but perhaps this was what it would feel like if someone of that caliber did.

Suddenly, she felt the sword inside her storage ring tremble. Her guardian knight, Dan, also sensed his sword shaking. This phenomenon spread throughout the entire city as swords everywhere began to tremble. Before anyone could react and grasp their swords to stop it, the swords across the city floated into the air, their tips all pointing toward Aldrian.

They felt as if they were witnessing a surreal scene, thousands of swords filling the sky, as though paying their respects to the arrival of a Sword God. The sheer intensity of the sword will radiating from the golden pillar was immense, and an unconscious sense of worship arose in their hearts.

At the mayor's mansion, Sylphia and the others also gazed at the golden pillar, finding its radiance beautiful. Xin Haotian observed the technique with a gaze reflecting both amazement and respect—something rare for him. Although he and Aldrian often joked and jabbed at each other, and Xin Haotian never wanted to lose to Aldrian in their exchanges, he had always held deep respect for him in moments like this.

Aldrian's techniques never failed to amaze him, which only strengthened his admiration.

While the people of the city gazed at the golden pillar with amazement and glimmering eyes, the opposite reaction unfolded within the massive army in the distance. Some soldiers struggled to hold onto their swords as they attempted to break free from their grasp. However, most had already lost their weapons, staring blankly at the golden pillar, making no effort to retrieve them.

Despair.

That was the only thing that filled their minds as they sensed the overwhelming power contained within the golden pillar. A sword will capable of affecting countless blades across a radius of kilometers—such a phenomenon could only be achieved by one person.

A man that still left many questioning his origins and true identity.

The mysterious swordsman.

They had heard many stories about him, and this phenomenon was one of them.

Duke Alikin felt as if he were dreaming as he stared at the golden pillar. Its power was beyond anything he could hope to defend against, and the title *The Mysterious Swordsman* surfaced in his mind. Fear finally took hold of him, a cold sensation creeping into his heart as he sensed the might of a peak emperor stage emanating from the pillar of light.

But then, he shouted to the crew behind him, who also looked terrified.

"Raise the fortress's defensive barrier!"

Hearing their commander's roar, they finally snapped out of their fear.

"Y-Yes! Raising the defensive barrier!"

Immediately after, a transparent spherical barrier formed around the flying fortress. The other flying fortresses followed suit, preparing for what was about to come. Firing the lightning cannon again at Aldrian was futile, they didn't have the time for a second shot. Their best option was to defend themselves, and that was the wisest choice they could make.

They watched in dread as the golden pillar finally descended toward them. Aldrian swung his sword downward, directing the attack at the rightmost flying fortress. The golden pillar instantly collided with its defensive barrier, causing the entire fortress to tremble violently. Inside, the crew lost their balance as the impact shook the structure.

They had already used most of their energy stone reserves to create this defensive barrier, one strong enough to withstand a high emperor stage attack.

However, the defensive barrier held for only a second before collapsing instantly, allowing the golden pillar to strike the flying fortress directly. What people witnessed was like a hot knife slicing through butter, the fortress was split apart in an instant as the golden pillar carved through it effortlessly. Even the fortress's main material, far harder than iron, proved meaningless before the overwhelming power of the golden pillar.

With its massive structure severed in two, the flying fortress lost all ability to remain airborne. The formations supporting it had been destroyed, causing both halves to plummet from the sky. Debris rained down like a rain, and many crew members fell with it.

Most of them were under duke stage, meaning they lacked the ability to fly entirely. They could do nothing but stare in despair, knowing their fate was inevitable. From such a great height, the fall alone would be deadly for many, while those who managed to survive would still suffer severe injuries.

As for those at the duke or grand duke stage, they struggled to remain afloat. Unlike king stage cultivators, they never relied on flight, as it drained their energy too quickly. However, with no other choice, the desperate situation forced them to push their limits.

They frantically tried to evade the massive remains of the flying fortress and the falling debris, but then horror filled their hearts.

The golden pillar suddenly shifted, moving horizontally.

Everyone caught in its path was obliterated in an instant, their bodies vanishing as they were engulfed by the blinding light. The golden pillar then continued forward, reaching the second flying fortress—the lead fortress, where Duke Alikin was located.

His scalp had already gone numb when he saw the flying fortress beside him being destroyed. He knew that his own fortress would meet the same fate. So, the moment he saw the golden pillar shift toward his flying fortress, he instantly crushed an escape talisman and vanished from the control room.

The golden pillar finally struck the second flying fortress, and as expected, it met the same fate as the first. The defensive barrier shattered, unable to withstand the overwhelming force. This time, however, the fortress was split horizontally. With its structure severed, the second flying fortress also fell.

In the next moment, the third and fourth flying fortresses met the same fate. The massive army below had already scattered in panic as the enormous structures plummeted toward them. For those at the king and emperor stages, evading the falling debris was easy, but the others could only run as fast as possible or desperately try to evade it.

However, how could they possibly outrun a falling fortress?

The moment the massive structures crashed into the ground, a powerful tremor shook the land, and a deafening rumble echoed through the area. Dust surged into the air, and many ground troops were crushed beneath the wreckage, their lives claimed in an instant.

Screams of terror resounded everywhere as countless troops were crushed beneath the heavy wreckage of the flying fortresses, while many others continued to flee in desperation. Harison and his king-stage subordinates had already taken to the skies, flying swiftly away from the crash site. They maneuvered skillfully to evade the falling debris, but all they could do was watch helplessly as their massive army fell into chaos, with soldiers being crushed under the weight of the giant fortresses.

The golden pillar finally disappeared, vanishing only after slicing through the last flying fortress. Most of the people in the city could hear the rumbling echoes of the falling fortresses, while some caught glimpses of the scene through the gaps in the broken city walls, a sight that made their hearts tremble—the destruction of the enormous army that had sought to attack them.

A few moments later, the entire area where the four flying fortresses had fallen was covered in debris and dust, obscuring visibility. Duke Alikin watched the aftermath, sweat rolling down his forehead as he felt true fear for the first time in a long while. Seeing the extent of their loss, he already knew that only a small number of their troops had survived.

Harison and the other king-stage cultivators gathered near Duke Alikin, who was positioned a fair distance away from the destruction. They could only watch helplessly, taking in the aftermath of their massive force being annihilated in an instant.

Then, their eyes turned toward the city walls, where Aldrian still stood. He had already sheathed his sword and stored it back inside his storage ring.

But a chilling sensation ran down their spines as Aldrian's gaze shifted toward them, making them feel as if they were the next targets.

"Escape!" Duke Alikin shouted as he instantly dashed in the opposite direction. They instantly scattered in multiple directions in an attempt to confuse the enemy, but Aldrian merely watched them flee, showing no intention of pursuit.

But then, he retrieved another artifact from his storage ring.

This time, it was a beautifully crafted bow that radiated the aura of a low divine-grade artifact.

It was the bow he had obtained from Emperor Thonias's inheritance in the Forest of Despair, within the Ivory Empire.

The Earth Shattering Bow.

He also took out a Wind Slasher Arrow and positioned himself to shoot. Drawing the bowstring, he aimed in the direction where Duke Alikin had fled. Even from this distance, he could still see him, now a tiny black dot frantically escaping.

After a few moments of intense concentration and energy circulation, he finally felt the perfect moment.

In an instant, he released the bowstring.

Swoosh!

Chapter 396: One Shot

Cak!

Swoosh!

When Aldrian released the bowstring, the seemingly ordinary movement created a powerful wind that swept through his surroundings. The arrow shot forward, breaking the sound barrier multiple times as it went supersonic toward the incredibly small black dot in the distance. Aldrian watched calmly, waiting for his arrow to hit the target.

"Fuck, fuck, fuck!" Duke Alikin cursed repeatedly in his mind as he fled. Right now, he couldn't think straight—fear consumed him, and all he wanted was to escape as far as possible.

"That was the mysterious swordsman?! How is that possible? From what I saw, he was just a young man!"

When the envoy from the second prince returned from Caritas, he reported that the bastard who acted presumptuously was a young man with tremendous power. Upon hearing that he had wiped out most of the forces in the city and unleashed flames that obliterated everything, Duke Alikin thought he had a rough idea of the young man's limits.

However, reality was cruel to him, as if fate itself were playing a joke on him. How could the legendary figure who had become the talk of the continent in recent years actually that bastard and the one opposing the second prince? Did that mean the mysterious swordsman was someone from the church?!

Impossible!

He didn't want to think anymore—his mind was consumed by the will to survive. He flew at his utmost speed without looking back, so fast that he could no longer see his surroundings. He could travel two kilometers per second, and even faster if he pushed himself beyond his limits, though it would harm his body.

But then, a sudden chill ran down his spine as his instincts kicked in. He glanced back slightly but saw nothing at first. The city was already far beyond his sight, and all he could see was a vast forest.

Then, he finally noticed something approaching at incredible speed, tiny in the distance. He could sense the immense power radiating from it and instinctively tried to raise his defenses.

But before he could even react, the arrow Aldrian had shot was already right in front of his face.

He felt nothing. He thought nothing. The arrow instantly blew his head apart, killing Duke Alikin instantly. His headless body plummeted from the sky, crashing into the ground at high velocity before sliding several kilometers and finally coming to a stop.

Even after obliterating Duke Alikin's head, the arrow still carried momentum. But then, it suddenly slowed down before coming to a complete stop in midair. A moment later, as if pulled by an unseen force, it flew back toward its origin.

Aldrian looked into the distance with a satisfied smile. It had been too long since he last practiced archery, and he was glad that he still retained his sharpness. With his ever-growing cultivation, his archery had also become more powerful.

He waited for a few moments before finally spotting the Wind Slasher Arrow. As it reached him, he caught it effortlessly. Gazing at the arrow, he couldn't help but feel amazed. As expected of a divine-grade artifact, its performance was truly satisfying. There was no way someone at the middle Emperor stage, like Duke Alikin, could have survived a direct hit.

Because of the arrow's masterful craftsmanship, it created minimal drag, to the point that even the wind itself could not affect its speed. In fact, the wind seemed to part in its wake, carving a path for the arrow as it flew, leaving behind sharp currents in its trail.

Aldrian stored the Earth-Shattering Bow and Wind Slashing Arrow inside his storage ring before turning his gaze to the aftermath of his handiwork. A few survivors remained among the enemy troops, most of them at the Duke or Grand Duke stage. As for the others, they were simply lucky enough to have avoided the falling flying fortress.

He decided not to kill any more of them for a few reasons.

First, his main objective was complete—he had successfully stopped the second prince's attempt to retake the city.

Second, he wanted them to continue spreading the news about him. Although the people of the city could do that, those who had experienced his power firsthand would leave a far greater impact.

But why had he done all of this?

After studying it for a few days, he finally understood something from his new power—

The power of faith.

As someone who could already gather the power of faith, he could feel it continuously flowing into him, further boosting his strength. With this power, he could keep growing stronger even outside his domain. And he had a bold idea—perhaps one day, if he amassed enough faith, he could fight with the same overwhelming strength anywhere, just as he did within his domain.

He could feel all kinds of faith towards him—adoration, worship, hope, respect, and even negative emotions like fear, which also counted as faith. The sheer intensity of it made him feel powerful, and he wondered if he might become intoxicated by this sensation as he continued to sense the growing faith directed toward him.

The strongest boost came from those who harbored positive feelings toward him, far more potent than the faith born from fear or negativity. He could only imagine that divine beings must constantly compete with one another, striving to gain the most followers in order to amass the power of faith.

Even though his name remained unknown and people only referred to him as the "mysterious person" or the "mysterious swordsman," the karma between him and those who placed their faith in him had already been established. He could feel the power continuously flowing to him from various places across the continent, especially from his own domain, where the faith directed toward him was particularly strong.

After glancing at the ruined landscape left in the wake of the fallen flying fortress, Aldrian turned his head to the side and looked Baroness Weimar and her guardian knight. They had finally gathered the courage to approach him, believing it was now safe.

Aldrian smiled behind his mask as he sensed the strong faith they now held for him. The way they looked at him was completely different from before.

Although Baroness Weimar had respected him since their first meeting, that was the extent of her feelings toward him. However, at this moment, she saw him as someone far above her, making her feel small in comparison. A deep sense of respect, admiration, and amazement welled up within her.

As for Dan, her guardian knight, his feelings had completely shifted, a complete 180-degree turn from earlier. There was no trace of doubt or negativity left in his heart. Instead, he felt overwhelming admiration, respect, and even worship.

Before Aldrian could say anything, Dan suddenly kowtowed, the sound of his forehead striking the ground echoing in the silence.

"I'm sorry for my impudence and ignorance! I did not recognize your greatness or your true identity. If you wish to punish me, I will gladly accept it—any punishment, even death," he said with complete sincerity.

Baroness Weimar was stunned, but she understood what he was feeling and did not blame him. If Aldrian truly wished to punish her guardian knight, who had been by her side even before she became a baroness, there was nothing she could do to stop it.

"Stand up. I am not offended by your words or your ignorance. You are a loyal knight who thinks of your master's well-being and gets angry on her behalf. I appreciate your loyalty," Aldrian's voice resounded.

Hearing that, Dan lifted his head and looked into Aldrian's eyes, which were still visible behind his mask. He saw approval in those eyes. He didn't know why, but a deep sense of pride welled up within him, and he kowtowed once more.

"Thank you."

Baroness Weimar watched this with a sigh of relief before bowing slightly.

"I thank you, Your Eminence, for your gracious heart in overlooking my knight's actions. I am truly grateful," she said before straightening her posture again.

Aldrian looked at Baroness Weimar.

"Baroness Weimar, do you know the real reason why I rejected your offer to help when you suggested coming if the second prince's force attacked this city?"

Baroness Weimar tilted her head in confusion.

"The real reason?"

From his question, it seemed he was implying something beyond just his own strength. Based on what they had witnessed, they could confidently say that this young man was more than capable of surviving on his own without their help—that was the obvious reason. But was there another reason besides that?

She thought about it but couldn't find the answer, so she shook her head.

"Would you enlighten me, Your Excellency, about your real reason?" she asked.

"That is because, even if you hadn't asked for cooperation, I would have helped you. Deep down, your true purpose was to bring me to your side in this war, wasn't it? Or, more specifically, to align me with the opposition faction. You wanted me to help you break the second prince's blockade on your city. Am I right?"

That was why Baroness Weilmар offered help if Caritas was attacked—because she hoped Aldrian would, in turn, assist them in reaching Weilmар to break the blockade. This was her way of asking for his help without sounding presumptuous or requesting something without offering him any benefit. If he had rejected her offer, there was nothing she could do except feel disappointed.

But right now—

Baroness Weilmар's eyes widened.

"You mean...?"

"Yes. Even if you hadn't come to ask for my help, I intended to involve myself in this civil war. Since the second prince chose to ignore my warning, he must now face the consequences. Besides, I have another reason to take part in this war," Aldrian replied.

Chapter 397: Next Target

Hearing Aldrian declare his intention to involve himself in the war, Baroness Weilmар felt a sudden light illuminating the darkness in her mind. Deep in her heart, she had already accepted that there was no way out of this civil war, as their forces were at their wits' end. Their faction was losing everywhere, and it was only a matter of time before they were completely wiped out by the second prince's forces.

However, Aldrian's declaration that he would take part in the war to face the second prince gave her hope for a better future—for the path to victory.

Her guardian knight was also ecstatic when he heard it and looked at his master beside him. He then saw his master bow deeply at a 90-degree angle as she spoke with heartfelt gratitude.

"Thank you, Your Excellency. Once again, thank you. I truly appreciate it, and I will do my best to repay your kindness toward me and my people."

Dan also bowed, following Baroness Weilmар. There was nothing that could make him happier than this moment. For more than a year, they had been continuously losing—losing their territory, their people, their families, their friends. They had already lost so much, and with the overwhelming power of the second prince's faction, they had long given up on seeking revenge.

But with Aldrian's power, maybe—just maybe—they could finally strike back! They could reclaim their territory and even avenge their losses!

"Alright, you can stop bowing. For the first step, let me help you clear the blockade of Weimar City," Aldrian said as he turned his head toward the mayor's mansion, where his group was also looking in his direction. Xin Haotian and the others stood in the front garden of the mansion.

"It's best if we do it as soon as possible to make a strong impact on the second prince."

Baroness Weimar was stunned for a moment before straightening her body.

"Of course! When do you plan to come to our city?" she asked in a spirited voice.

"Right now. This is a good time for me to get a little exercise, and those people are just the beginning," Aldrian said, slightly pointing with his thumb toward the destroyed remains of fallen flying fortresses in the distance.

Baroness Weimar and Dan were truly speechless when they heard him say "*slight exercise*." He had just killed tens of thousands of troops and destroyed four flying fortresses, yet he called that *slight exercise*?

Young Master, you are truly in a different league than us!

That was something even High Emperor-stage cultivators would have to exert considerable effort to accomplish, yet here he was, treating it as nothing more than a warm-up.

Still, they were overjoyed that Aldrian was coming to their city right away. With his power, their city's problem would be solved in no time!

"Let's go back to the mansion first," Aldrian said as he looked down, where he could see all the people below. Many of them gazed up at him with admiration and worship, and the moment his eyes met theirs, they voluntarily kowtowed.

The scene repeated everywhere—countless people bowing in reverence.

Aldrian could feel the strong power of faith surging toward him from these people. Some of them had already begun to see him as their god.

The god who had come to protect them.

"I'll inform my group before we depart," he added before vanishing.

Baroness Weimar sighed in admiration and turned to her guardian knight.

"Let's go. After this, we'll take back what's ours."

Dan nodded with determination before they took flight toward the mansion.

Aldrian appeared beside his group, who were still watching the city walls where he had been standing. They were slightly stunned when he suddenly materialized next to them.

Sylphia smiled as she looked at him.

"You really love showing off. Can't you do it more simply?"

Aldrian shrugged. "What can I do? They were the ones bothering me and ignoring my warning, so I had no choice but to give them what they wanted," he said while taking off his mask.

All of them smiled at his words. To them, there was never a dull moment when Aldrian was involved.

"By the way, why are you wearing a mask? Some people have already seen your face," Baek Jimin asked.

"Oh, I just don't want too many people recognizing me. It would be too troublesome if I had to go everywhere with people knowing who I am. I only let a few see me as a preparation for the future. Step by step, I'll allow rumors about my appearance to spread, so when the time comes, the masses won't be too shocked by my true identity."

Sylphia and the others slightly raised their eyebrows.

"You've already planned how you'll reveal yourself and your family across the continent?" Sylphia asked.

Aldrian nodded.

"Yes. With all of my achievements, I don't think anyone will dare to oppose me or my parents' union, so I believe it's finally okay for me to reveal myself in the near future."

Eleine, upon hearing this, felt nervous. That would be the moment of truth. Although she also believed Aldrian's words, a part of her still feared that the Rivas and Flamecrest families would find some fault in it.

But then, she tried to stay positive. *Maybe there won't be any problems. Maybe these two families will have nothing to say about her master's relationship and will instantly approve her relationship with Lord Aldrey.*

Not long after, Baroness Weimar and her guardian knight landed nearby. Aldrian looked at them before turning to Sylphia and the others.

"I'm going to Weimar City for a moment. I need to help them take care of the second prince's forces there. It won't take long, but does anyone want to come?"

"I'll go," Baek Jimin said.

"I'm not. I'll stay at the mansion," Sylphia said, glancing at Baek Jimin with a slight smile.

"I'll stay here too," Eleine added.

Xin Haotian remained silent, but Aldrian already knew his answer—he wanted to stay. Aldrian looked at Baek Jimin.

"Alright, we'll depart now," he said with a smile, to which Baek Jimin responded with a nod. Sylphia simply smiled at Baek Jimin, seeming pleased about this trip.

"I'm sorry it came to this, but after taking care of the problem in Weimar City, we can finally have some time to relax," Aldrian sent a voice transmission to Baek Jimin as they walked toward Baroness Weimar.

Baek Jimin's smile became even more radiant as she nodded. Aldrian smiled at her reaction before turning to Baroness Weimar.

"Let's go to Weimar City."

At one section of the city walls of Weimar City, a small group consisting of two soldiers stood guard, watching the distant camp where the second prince's faction had set up their blockade. Their faces looked tired, devoid of spirit.

"How long do you think we can hold out like this?" one of them asked his companion.

"I don't know... maybe two weeks at best. But if those bastards attack before then, it'll be even shorter since we'll have to use up more resources to defend," his friend replied with a sigh.

There was no hope in his voice—only exhaustion and resignation. They had already come to terms with the grim reality. Compared to the second prince's forces, they were outmatched in every way. This city was their last bastion, and deep down, they knew their chances of survival were slim.

If this city fell, all of them—the soldiers of Baroness Weilmarr—would die. As part of the opposition faction against the second prince, there would be no mercy for them.

"Well, I just hope for some miracle to get us out of this situation," one of them said with a slight joking tone.

"Yeah, I hope so too—"

"I'm sorry, but your hope won't come true."

A voice suddenly spoke from behind them. Before they could turn to see who it was, two daggers pierced their throats. Blood gushed from their wounds as they struggled to resist, but it was futile. Within moments, their bodies fell lifeless to the ground.

The person who had killed them was actually wearing the same armor and insignia as they were! He looked down at their lifeless bodies with a sneer before shifting his gaze toward the distance.

Reaching into his storage ring, he retrieved a small ball and threw it into the sky before quickly vanishing into the bustling crowd within the city.

Boom!

The ball exploded, releasing a thick cloud of green smoke that was visible from afar.

The soldiers guarding the city walls were startled by the sudden appearance of the smoke. They instinctively moved to investigate, but before they could fully assess the situation, they saw movement in the enemy camp.

The second prince's troops were advancing toward them!

Many of them were shocked by this sudden turn of events. They hadn't noticed any excessive movement from the enemy camp earlier, yet now, the second prince's troops were already in formation and advancing toward them.

"Ring the alarm! All troops, take your positions! Get ready!" one of the soldiers shouted, warning the others.

The sound of the alarm bell echoed across the city, sending a wave of urgency through its people. Everyone who heard it understood its meaning—another battle was upon them!

"Call Madam Charoline! The enemy is advancing!" a battalion commander ordered one of his men.

This battle might very well decide their fate!

No data found.

Chapter 398: Attacking While She Is Absent

Looking at the thousands of troops marching toward them, the soldiers of Weimar City stood in position, ready for battle. However, they soon realized something was wrong. Some posts were empty, and when they searched for their missing comrades, they discovered that many had already been killed!

That could only mean one thing—there were assassins among them, and one of them had sent the signal with green smoke to alert the enemy to attack.

The highest-ranking commander in the city at the moment was the commander of the city's guardians, a High King-stage expert. Right now, his expression had turned grim—the enemy had chosen the perfect time to attack.

Baroness Weimar's departure to Caritas was known only to him and a few others to avoid alerting enemies outside the walls. They had kept it a secret because if the enemy discovered that Baroness Weimar was gone, they would undoubtedly launch an attack.

This could only mean one thing—either there was a spy among them, or someone had betrayed them.

He did not have time to think about that now. The most important thing was to call the Baroness back to defend the city. He looked at the incoming army, gritted his teeth, and turned behind him.

"Why hasn't the city barrier activated?! What is the city formation operator doing?!" he roared.

A soldier ran up to him and reported urgently, "Commander, bad news! Our city formation operators are dead! Someone assassinated them!"

The commander widened his eyes, but he quickly forced himself to think of a solution. They had been completely caught off guard by the assassinations of key personnel, leaving them vulnerable.

"Find anyone who understands formations and have them activate it! I don't care how you do it—ask the civilians if necessary! Now go!" he finally ordered.

"Yes, sir!" The soldier ran back to carry out his command.

The commander turned his gaze back to the approaching army. Above the massive advancing troops, several figures hovered in the air. There were eight of them—one at the Low Emperor stage and seven at the King stage. They were the higher-ups of the Second Prince's army, tasked with leading the attack on Weimar City.

Sweat rolled down the forehead of the city's guardian commander as he looked at the enemy lineup. Without the Baroness, they were nothing more than lambs waiting to be slaughtered—especially with the presence of an Emperor-stage cultivator.

Baroness Weimar was a genius who could fight across levels, even holding her own against a Low Emperor-stage cultivator, something truly remarkable.

Combined with the city barrier, which could withstand attacks from a Middle Emperor-stage cultivator, Weimar City had managed to hold off the Second Prince's forces until now. However, maintaining the barrier continuously drained their resources, weakening them over time.

The leader of the enemy troops was a red-haired man with a burly build and short hair. His powerful, sturdy frame alone made for an intimidating sight, and his fierce aura made others hesitate to approach him. His Low Emperor-stage presence radiated outward, like a declaration of their arrival, an attempt to strike fear into the city's defenders.

"Su Long! You will die today! There is no hope left, stop your futile struggle and accept your fate!" he roared at the commander of the city guardians. He and his troops continued advancing, now drawing close to the city walls.

Su Long, the city guardian, looked at the man before him and soared into the sky.

"We will not surrender! Vasco! You will regret your decision to attack this city, and you will pay dearly for it!"

Vasco, the commander of the Second Prince's forces, sneered, already knowing what they were waiting for. According to their spy inside the city, the baroness had gone to Caritas to seek help from the one who had taken control of the city from their faction.

To him, that was a foolish decision. He doubted that the man who had recklessly challenged the Second Prince could even defend himself, let alone help others.

He had already received news that the forces sent to reclaim Caritas were incredibly formidable, and he thought it was too much of an exaggeration just to take back a single city. How could it not be, when they had even sent four flying fortresses? It was nothing more than a blatant display of power.

With such a powerful force, he doubted that even that unknown figure could escape Caritas alive, let alone provide any help to this city. This was the perfect chance to strike—after the baroness's departure and the spy's successful assassination of key figures in Weimar City, they would sweep through both Weimar and Caritas effortlessly.

Then, at last, the war in this region would end. He could already imagine the great rewards he would receive from the Second Prince, who now claimed the throne as emperor.

He looked behind him and gave the order.

"Fire the cannons! Destroy those walls!"

From behind the lines of troops, 50 cylindrical cannons, engraved with runes, roared as they fired. A deafening blast echoed through the battlefield as they launched their projectiles, which were massive cannonballs imbued with explosive powder and reinforced with energy through the runes within the barrels.

These artifacts were essential in siege warfare, as they were effective in breaking through city walls. However, their effectiveness still depended on the quality of the city's defensive barrier. If the protective formation was of a high level, like the one shielding this city, the cannons would only weaken its durability or drain the enemy's resources rather than cause significant damage.

But if the city walls lacked protection from the barrier, then breaking through would be an easy task.

"All soldiers, brace for impact! All King-stage cultivators, raise your defensive techniques!" the city guardian commander shouted before using his own technique to shield his sector from the incoming projectiles.

Earth Barrier!

Suddenly, another wall of earth rose in front of the city walls. Stretching over ten kilometers, it was a spectacular sight. However, even with this massive barrier, it could not cover every sector from the incoming bombardment. While there were a few King-stage cultivators among the city guardians, they were not enough to shield the entire city wall.

Boom!!!

The projectiles finally struck their targets. The earth wall was instantly destroyed! However, the explosions failed to reach the city walls directly,

which was a relief. But for those in areas left unprotected by the earth barrier, the outcome was just as expected.

Boom!

"Arrghh!"

"Medic! We need a medic here!"

The sections of the city wall that lacked protection from defensive techniques crumbled instantly, killing some of the soldiers who had been guarding them.

Su Long gritted his teeth. He was furious at his own weakness, but even more so at Vasco. That man had already taken the lives of many of his comrades. Even if facing him meant certain death, Su Long refused to let the city fall so easily.

Taking a deep breath, his expression hardened with determination. He looked at his soldiers and spoke firmly.

"All of you, I will hold off the enemy commander! You must maintain the battle formation at all times to minimize casualties. Do not act on your own, or it will be disastrous for us."

Hearing their commander's words, many soldiers widened their eyes in shock. They knew exactly what he intended to do. Holding off an enemy commander at the Low Emperor stage was no different from suicide—he had decided to sacrifice himself!

"Commander, please reconsider your decision!"

"Commander, don't act recklessly!"

"Commander—!"

Voices of protest echoed through the ranks, but Su Long silenced them with a firm shout.

"Silence! You are the proud soldiers of Baroness Weilmär! You are disciplined and loyal warriors who follow orders! Or do you wish to face a martial court when this is over?!"

The soldiers trembled, their hands clenched into fists. They knew their commander was only saying this to prevent them from interfering with his sacrifice. His voice and expression were filled with unwavering determination.

Despite the pain of watching their leader walk toward certain death, they understood—this was not the time to defy his command. There was still a war to fight!

However, the soldiers were also growing irritated. Where the hell was the baroness? The alarm bell had rung, the walls had been breached, yet she was still nowhere to be seen.

What the hell happened to her?!

They refused to believe she had fled—Baroness Weilmär was not the type to abandon her people. But if she had not escaped, then what was going on?

Vasco watched the scene unfold with an amused expression. He enjoyed moments like this—the sight of the weak clinging to survival, struggling against the inevitable. He had witnessed it countless times, yet it never failed to bring him satisfaction.

"Charge!"

"Uoooghhhh!"

At Vasco's command, the troops of the second prince's faction surged forward, rushing toward the shattered city walls with incredible speed. Meanwhile, Vasco and the other King-stage cultivators accelerated, closing in on Su Long and the defending King-stage warriors of Weilmär City.

Fire Avalanche!

Su Long unleashed his most powerful attack, channeling his energy into a wide-area technique that sent flames surging across the battlefield. However, before the fire could reach its target, Vasco casually swept his hand, extinguishing the flames in an instant.

Su Long had expected this, he knew there was no way he could match an Emperor-stage cultivator. He could only sigh inwardly at the overwhelming gap in power.

But then, he sensed another attack coming from behind him.

He turned just in time to see an energy slash past beside him, cutting through the air at incredible speed, heading straight for Vasco.

Vasco, also stunned by the sudden attack and the unexpected appearance of a figure, swiftly countered with his own sword slash. The two energy slashes clashed, canceling each other out.

After blocking the attack, he turned toward the attacker, and couldn't believe his eyes.

"You?! How could you be here?!"

Behind Su Long, Baroness Weimar hovered in the air, clad in armor. Her fierce gaze locked onto him as she raised her sword and pointed it at him.

"You will die today."

Chapter 399: Lightning Storm

"That is Madam Charoline!"

"Yes!"

"Uooohhhh!"

The soldiers guarding the walls cheered loudly. They truly saw her as the one who could stabilize the battlefield. Although they continued to lose territory but without her presence, their losses would have been much greater. She could

fight on par with a low Emperor-stage warrior, even though she was "only" at the peak King stage.

With her arrival, they could at least breathe a sigh of relief—Su Long no longer had to sacrifice himself to hold off Vasco. Now, they could fight without the fear of their higher-ups being slaughtered by an Emperor-stage cultivator like Vasco.

With their renewed spirit, the troops of Weimar City turned to face the advancing enemy army, which moved swiftly while maintaining its battle formation. They knew that in mere seconds, their forces would clash, and they were ready. Each soldier had already begun circulating their energy, preparing to unleash their techniques the moment the battle commenced.

While the morale of the ground troops soared, high above the battlefield, Vasco and his King-stage subordinates were filled with confusion. How was Baroness Weimar here when she was supposed to be in Caritas, facing a massive force from their faction? Had she escaped from Caritas and returned?

He suppressed his confusion and grinned at her. No matter the reason, it was already futile. Even if she had come back now, the city walls had already been breached, the city's barrier could not be activated because his spy had killed the formation operators, and his troops were advancing rapidly. There was no way she or her forces could withstand the might of his army.

"You're here? I thought you had already died in Caritas. But this is fortunate for me. If you had simply perished there, it would have been a shame. It would be better if you became my woman after this, a woman of your caliber is rare, and it would be a pity for our empire to lose you," Vasco said, his lustful gaze lingering on Baroness Weimar, making no effort to hide his desires.

"I can't wait to make you scream in ecstasy beneath me."

Rage burned inside Su Long's heart, and he was about to dash toward Vasco.

"You—"

But he stopped abruptly when the baroness suddenly raised her hand, blocking him. He looked at her, wanting to say something, but the words stopped in his throat when he saw her—smiling?

She didn't seem to take Vasco's words to heart. He could understand if she simply ignored him—but why was she smiling?

Vasco also found it strange. Although he had said all of that to taunt her, he did have a slight desire for her. If given the chance, he truly would take her

back to his home. However, he knew that a woman like her, one with such high pride would rather die than become his.

What made her smile? Why was she smiling?

"You said I would die. I'd like to see you make that a reality." He brushed aside his curiosity and pointed his sword at her.

Baroness Weimar continued to smile before finally speaking.

"Before we fight, why don't you take care of your troops first? If you don't pull them back now, you'll lose many of them."

Vasco frowned at her words and looked at his troops. They were advancing at high speed, with nothing hindering them. He then turned his gaze to the city walls, but no one there caught his attention.

Spreading his senses to detect anything suspicious, he kept expanding his reach, he could extend his sense for more than a thousand kilometers after all.

After a few seconds, he finally detected someone floating above the mayor's mansion inside the city. He focused on that direction, and although the figure was far from his current position, he could clearly see them hovering over the mansion.

He was astonished to sense that the figure was only at the low Duke stage!

Was this the person Baroness Weimar was relying on? Was that it?

He wanted to grin in ridicule, but he stopped himself when he suddenly felt something from that figure's body.

Crackling lightning began to appear around the figure, growing stronger and larger with each passing moment. When Vasco finally sensed the nature of the lightning emanating from him, his eyes widened in shock.

Even Baroness Weimar was stunned when she recognized the lightning surrounding Aldrian. She turned her head toward the sky above the mayor's mansion, her expression filled with disbelief.

By now, Aldrian's body was completely engulfed in crackling heavenly lightning, making it nearly impossible for those below to see him clearly.

A deafening thunderclap echoed through the entire city, resonating in every corner for all to hear.

Everyone in the city finally noticed the figure floating above the mayor's mansion, and a shudder ran through their hearts. They could feel the overwhelming pressure of the heavens radiating from the lightning.

They could feel the might of the heavenly lightning, as if a heavenly tribulation was about to descend upon them. Panic spread among the citizens, and those who had yet to find shelter scrambled to hide, seeking protection wherever they could.

Many began to pray, pleading for the heavens not to unleash their wrath. After all, a heavenly tribulation possessed the power to obliterate everything in its path.

The advancing army also came to an abrupt halt. Their eyes widened in shock as they beheld the crackling heavenly lightning above. Why had a heavenly tribulation suddenly appeared here?

They wondered why a heavenly tribulation had suddenly appeared here. None of them dared to move or act recklessly, fearing that any misstep might provoke the heavens to strike them down.

Aldrian resembled a thunder god as crackling lightning surged from his body, reaching into the sky and spreading across a kilometer around him.

He looked at the advancing troops of the Second Prince's forces and estimated their numbers to be around forty thousand. They were arranged in a neat formation, making any attack against them difficult, as they could defend effectively.

However, that same disciplined formation created a fatal weakness—if he unleashed a wide-area technique far more powerful than their defenses, the damage would be devastating.

Vasco had no idea what Aldrian was planning, but an ominous feeling gripped him. His instincts screamed danger, and without hesitation, he shouted to his troops.

"All troops, retreat! Retreat!" he roared, infusing his voice with energy so that it could be heard by every soldier on the battlefield.

Hearing their commander's order, the troops, who had paused due to the appearance of the heavenly lightning, began to retreat in an orderly manner. As they withdrew, they kept their eyes on the city walls, wary of the heavenly lightning.

However, before they could get far, the sky above the battlefield suddenly tore open with countless spatial cracks. The sheer number of them made it seem as though the sky itself was riddled with holes.

From within those cracks, they felt an overwhelming power—the same terrifying sensation as the heavenly lightning.

Baroness Weilmar and her knights wasted no time, immediately retreating to the safety of the city walls the moment they saw the holes in the sky.

Vasco's instincts screamed at him, and without hesitation, he turned and tried to escape, flying in the opposite direction. But before he could flee lightning erupted from the many spatial cracks!

Rumble! Rumble! Boom!

The heavenly lightning stormed down upon the Second Prince's faction like a torrential downpour. Each strike that hit the ground instantly created a deep crater, obliterating everything in its vicinity. The sheer power was overwhelming, nothing could withstand the might of the lightning.

And what of the living beings?

The once-neat formation of the mighty troops of the Second Prince's faction, a force that had stood like an impenetrable fortress. The same army that had spread fear and deterred every enemy they encountered, the same battle-hardened warriors who had emerged victorious from countless battles.

But now, they were nothing more than ants—scattered, trampled, and powerless against the wrath of heavens.

Each strike of heavenly lightning reduced them to nothingness—their bodies instantly evaporated, leaving no remains, only scorched and shattered land. Their once-disciplined formations became meaningless. There was nothing they could do.

Every bolt of lightning claimed dozens of lives at once, and the storm showed no signs of stopping. It was an unrelenting catastrophe, an endless downpour of destruction upon the battlefield.

"Arghhh!"

"Help!"

"Run! Scatter! Don't gather betwe—"

Boom! Rumble!

The deafening roar of thunder drowned out the screams of terror from the soldiers caught within the merciless lightning storm. The battlefield had become a storm-ravaged wasteland, where as far as the eye could see, bolts of lightning rained down without mercy.

Hundreds, thousands, tens of thousands—more and more fell, their bodies erased as the troops were relentlessly obliterated by the heavenly lightning.

Vasco, trapped within the storm of heavenly lightning, desperately tried to evade the relentless strikes, maneuvering around the spatial cracks in the sky. The lightning poured from those rifts, and he knew it was because of that figure.

Terror gripped his heart, if even a single bolt touched him, he would be instantly obliterated. The sheer power of this lightning had reached the high emperor stage! It was absurd and unbelievable that such a force could come from someone who was only at the low duke stage.

He continued dodging, narrowly avoiding bolt after bolt, weaving through the storm with every ounce of his skill. But he failed to notice a new spatial crack forming just behind him.

The moment he felt the cold grip of death creeping up his spine, his instincts screamed, and goosebumps ran across his skin. He spun around only to see a blinding flash of light.

And then—darkness.

The heavenly lightning struck Vasco directly, shocking him to death in an instant. Due to his artifact armor and the powerful physique of an emperor-stage cultivator, his body wasn't completely destroyed right away, only charred, with some of his limbs crumbling like charcoal.

But before his remains could even fall, another bolt of lightning struck him. This time, his body was completely obliterated, leaving not a single trace behind.

The relentless lightning storm continued for another thirty seconds before the spatial cracks in the sky slowly closed on their own.

The soldiers on the city walls, who had witnessed this destruction, felt a deep chill run down their spines. It was as if the wrath of the heavens had descended upon the battlefield and struck the enemy troops.

As the final echoes of thunder faded, all eyes turned toward the lone figure hovering above the mayor's mansion. The one who had unleashed such devastation.

Who was he, really?

Chapter 400: Trapped Between Rock and Hard Place

Aldrian looked at the destruction caused by his heavenly lightning and sighed as he felt the power of faith begin to gather from the city's populace. It was still not as strong as Caritas, but it had started pouring in. He could see a small number of the second prince's troops, perhaps a hundred or so, who had survived because they were quick to escape the lightning storm ground. After all, they had been positioned at the outermost area.

He watched as they frantically ran or even flew in the opposite direction of the city, trying to get as far away as possible. These people would also spread his fame, further increasing his power of faith.

Fortunately, he had arrived in time. If not, the city would have lost all of its high-ranking cultivators, as Vasco was practically unstoppable without Baroness Weimar here.

Earlier, they had intended to enter the teleportation portal to this city, but suddenly, a soldier emerged from it. The baroness immediately recognized him as someone from Weimar. That soldier was one of the few who knew about the baroness's departure and had gone to Caritas to call her back.

Long story short, they learned about the situation from the soldier and wasted no time stepping into the teleportation portal to this city. Upon arrival, he asked for the location of the mayor's mansion, where the city populace's faith or in Weimar city's case, possibly the faith of the entire barony was concentrated. Without hesitation, he established his domain. His first priority was to make the entire Weimar barony as his domain to make things easier.

The rest unfolded as everyone had witnessed, a figure who became their game-changer. No, it would be more accurate to say that he was their savior.

Aldrian slowly descended, before he came here, he already put on his mask to conceal his face. On the ground, Baek Jimin was waiting for him. She smiled at him, feeling an odd sense of pride. She wasn't sure why, but everything Aldrian did seemed to affect her ever since their conversation earlier. Even when he unleashed his terrifying heavenly lightning, it had appeared beautiful in her eyes.

Aldrian finally landed beside her. They were now within the mansion's grounds, where only a few people were present. Each one looked at Aldrian as if gazing upon a divine being, their eyes filled with reverence and worship.

Before long, Baroness Weimar and her guardian knight arrived. Without hesitation, they bowed deeply to him.

"Thank you, Your Excellency. We will never forget your help," she said.

Seeing their master bow to this figure, the few people nearby followed suit, lowering their heads in gratitude.

Aldrian smiled and gave a small nod.

"My purpose here is complete," he said, then turned to look at Baek Jimin.

"What do you think? Do you want to go back? Or...?"

"Let's stay here for a while. It would be a shame to leave without experiencing the city's entertainment," she replied.

Hearing Baek Jimin's response, the baroness's face lit up with a pleased expression.

"Yes, miss, you can definitely enjoy this city to the fullest. This is the capital of my barony. Even now, in the midst of war, the city still offers many attractions for travelers. This place is famous for—" The baroness began enthusiastically explaining Weimar City, sounding like a tour guide.

Baek Jimin listened attentively, taking note of the places she wanted to visit. Aldrian simply smiled at her, her curiosity about new places reminded him of Sylphia. It was no surprise, like Sylphia, she had never traveled far beyond her own territory. She had spent most of her time in the Thorny Flower Garden territory or within her sect.

Watching her enjoy the new surroundings gave him a sense of satisfaction. At the very least, this trip allowed him to indulge her curiosity while taking care of business.

For the next few hours, Aldrian and Baek Jimin strolled through the city, just the two of them. He had already changed his attire to avoid recognition. After all, some people had already seen what he was wearing, even though he had hidden his face.

Following Baroness Weimar's recommendations, they enjoyed everything the city had to offer.

Baek Jimin was truly enjoying her time with Aldrian, and he had never seen this side of her before. He also took this opportunity, while it was just the two of them to sort through his own feelings and consider his course of action for their relationship. Since he now understood how Baek Jimin felt, he would

start trying to develop his own feelings as well. However, he knew he still needed to talk to Sylphia once they returned to Caritas.

They continued enjoying their time together, filled with happiness. Their joy was also shared by the people of Weimar City, who were relieved that their home had been saved from destruction. Many celebrated, and the city took on a festive atmosphere, as if a grand festival were taking place. Almost everyone spoke about the mysterious figure who had become their savior—the being who wielded the power of heavenly lightning. He would remain the topic of conversation for a long time to come.

On the other side, while Weimar City was filled with happiness, the same could not be said for the opposition.

At the imperial palace in the capital city of Losaris, the atmosphere was tense. The second prince, Wilmar Losaris, had just received news that made his expression turn cold and dark.

Seated on his throne, he listened as his supporters from noble families gathered before him, discussing their next move. They needed to find a way to turn the situation around after hearing the latest report—a report so ridiculous and unbelievable that it was almost impossible to accept.

Yet, the evidence was undeniable.

The life sign of Duke Alikin had gone dark, meaning he was dead. Soon after, the life signs of several more figures vanished, each of them soldiers from the troops he had sent to Caritas and Weimar City.

Then came another blow. A report confirmed that the forces attacking both cities had been annihilated and only small number can escape. Even worse, the four flying fortresses he had deployed were destroyed.

Wilmar gritted his teeth. The most frustrating and unsettling thing was the identity of the person who had taken Caritas from him. That man was the mysterious swordsman, a figure shrouded in mystery and possessing overwhelming strength.

He had heard of him before, his many achievements in recent years making waves throughout the continent. But to think that this legendary figure was not only a young man but also someone standing in direct opposition to him?

Frustration boiled within him, and for the first time, a sliver of nervousness crept in. That man's appearance always sent shockwaves wherever he went,

and his strength was so great that even high Emperor-stage beasts were nothing more than playthings to him.

"So that's why he's so arrogant and dares to challenge the entire empire's factions," Wilmar thought.

Of all the times and all the people, why did it have to be now, just as he was assuming the throne? And why did it have to be that mysterious swordsman?

"And those devil bastards really cut off their connection with us. I will surely destroy you all in the future!"

He kept trying to contact them, but he had already come to terms with the fact that they had indeed severed ties with him.

He sighed inwardly, trying to calm himself down. Nervousness and anger swirled within him, making him desperate to place blame on everything. But he knew that wouldn't help.

He needed to turn this situation around. How could he face that monster? He struggled to come up with a plan, but then his thoughts drifted to Cardinal Carsius.

"He asked Cardinal Carsius to be handed over to him."

If that mysterious swordsman was truly from the church, why did he seem more like an adventurer, leaving his achievements scattered everywhere? It was as if he purposely left a legendary tale in nearly every territory.

What would the church even gain from this if he really was one of them? Even the populace didn't know his true origins, and they wouldn't be able to tell whether he was from the church or not. That was why Wilmar still doubted whether the mysterious swordsman was truly a member of the church.

He couldn't think of any solution other than giving the mysterious swordsman what he demanded—Cardinal Carsius, the traitor. However, the problem was that the bastard was in the same carriage as him. They were all accomplices of the devils, having built their own network in the shadows.

That traitor from the church had even threatened him, if he betrayed him and handed him over to the church, that church's traitor would expose his involvement with the devils.

That was something that could never happen. Although he still needed Cardinal Carsius for his strength, the most important thing was ensuring he kept his mouth shut and didn't expose the truth.

But now, with the appearance of the mysterious swordsman who could turn the tide in favor of the rebels, he had to make a difficult decision.

He was faced with a choice—betray Cardinal Carsius and risk tarnishing his name, or worse, be killed by unknown hands or even the mysterious swordsman himself.

Or he could fight until the end, resisting the swordsman at the cost of countless resources. But if the rebels won the war, he would still end up dead.

Calling upon the devils for support was no longer an option; their connection had been severed.

Trapped between a rock and a hard place, he searched for a solution.

After a few minutes of deep thought, he finally reached a decision. Looking at his supporters, he spoke.

"Ladies and gentlemen, I have made my