

The Shining Star Above The Heaven

#Chapter 41: Temporary Goodbye - Read The Shining Star Above The Heaven Chapter 41: Temporary Goodbye

Chapter 41 - Temporary Goodbye

A month later

Inside the big tents outside the Forest of Despair, some of the elf nobles were still monitoring Aldrian's situation. Of course, not all of them stayed there for an entire month just to watch the red dot signifying Aldrian; they had their own duties after all. However, there were always nobles who took turns watching Aldrian and reporting any developments. Emperor Ladwin and the imperial teacher sometimes came to this place, and at this time, they are here to observe as the end of the test approaches.

"I don't know how he did it, but it's an amazing feat. No, it's a miracle he can survive in that place all this time," Emperor Ladwin said.

"Yes, I almost thought I was going crazy when he went to the core section, but how on earth did he do that? The spirits, what about them? And the beasts?" the imperial teacher sighed, but his eyes couldn't hide his amazement.

"Even I have never stepped inside the core section. *Sigh*, whatever happened inside, he has already won his bet. I can already see their ugly faces from here," Emperor Ladwin said, looking at the nobles from the conservative faction. Their expressions were unsightly, sweat rolling down their foreheads, and one of them, Marquess Andra, gritted his teeth.

"*How?! HOW IS THAT POSSIBLE?!*" he screamed inside his head. When he saw Aldrian go to the core section, he thought he had already won the bet. Although Aldrian's long survival in the inner section puzzled him, he was sure Aldrian would be dead once he entered the core section. But reality could not be more cruel, the bracelet on Aldrian's hand that detected his vitality still indicated he was alive and staying in the center of the core section.

He couldn't understand it. He was sure that the plan to send the human to his demise through official means was the most effective and appropriate strategy at the time. There was no way a human could survive in that place, he didn't know if Aldrian could do the same thing like he did in Balin, but the number and cultivation stages of those spirits and beasts would surely take care of that human boy.

While the conservative faction restlessly awaited their fate, one of its members looked at the map with undisguised amazement. It was the leader of this faction, Grand Duke

Maelis, who for the first time showed a little expression and sighed at Aldrian's survival. He crossed his arms and looked at Grand Duke Sylvaris, who had returned from Balin some time ago. Grand Duke Sylvaris, sensing his stare, looked back at him and smirked before looking at the map again. The test would conclude in a few hours.

At the core section of the Forest of Despair, Aldrian sat cross-legged on the hilltop where the cave entrance was located. He could see the vastness of the forest and the path he would take back. From here, he couldn't see the outer section, let alone beyond it, but he couldn't wait to return and watch the breakdown of some elves' faces.

The time he spent here was really advantageous and fruitful. At this time, he was reading his own information:

Aldrian Aster

Domain : The secret realm, Balin city, Forest of Despair

Age : 12 years

Cultivation : High Viscount

Current energy : 258,126 (+1.5,5/15m)

Energy needed for the next stage : 270.001

"Adding the Forest of Despair only gives an increase of 0.5? Well, that's okay, I guess," is what Aldrian had thought at that time after seeing the information following his integration with the Forest of Despair. But an increase is still an increase, so when he saw his information now and realized he was closer to the peak of Viscount faster than he had estimated, he felt thrilled and in a good mood.

He smiled, closed his Eyes of the Heaven, and lay down. Beside him was a lonely lush green tree, though short, which provided perfect shelter from the sunlight. The day was almost noon, but Aldrian was still here, relaxing without a care, letting the wind touch his handsome disguised face, thinking about his stay in this place.

Some of the things he gained over the past month were now clear. He knew how his existence really affected the spirits. Any kind of spirits, even those at the emperor stage, couldn't resist their innate instinct when they met him. It confirmed that he could affect all spirits without exception.

The beasts also had some reverence for him. Their innate instinct kicked in when they met him, but they could restrain themselves from worshipping him and force their bodies to hold back in his presence. However, they would still tremble if he released his energy and aura.

Another discovery was that his golden energy was like a high-level supplement for them. His energy encompassed all things and could be absorbed by all creatures in this forest. After testing it on some creatures, including emperor stage spirits, their cultivation became more robust and their cultivation speed doubled, shocking many spirits and beasts. Making their cultivation foundation stronger and accelerating their cultivation was better than cultivating and eating the spiritual herbs in this forest.

Since then, the creatures of the forest always tried to gain his favor in various ways. Aldrian became an entity they worshipped earnestly and a leader they were willing to follow. Aldrian, of course, accepted all of this happily. At least he could prove one of the benefits of accepting him as their leader, gaining their loyalty and trust.

In conclusion, the spirits were the most affected by him, followed by the beasts. He guessed it had to do with the spirits' connection to nature and its karma. His body, energy, and aura were all strange and mysterious, and that mystery had a connection to nature. Now he could start deducing the reasons.

"The thing tied to nature, the energy that is so good for their cultivation, the spirits feeling like worshipping, and just my presence causing them pressure—what is that?" He felt he was starting to open the door to the mystery of his power's origin, but he couldn't fully open it yet.

"They only worship nature itself or the heavens," he stopped thinking about that and started thinking about something else. "Fortunately, they are already accustomed to my presence. They can already talk without feeling too much pressure."

Aldrian then looked at the birds flying freely. "As for the beasts, they will develop their intelligence since childhood and can start to talk, though not perfectly, when they reach the king stage. There is no emperor stage beast here, but Tukan said the emperor stage can talk like a human and even change its body parts to human shapes."

Tukan is the strongest beast in this forest, a high king stage grey-furred gorilla with sharp bones along its spine. He was also there when they first saw Aldrian, and sometimes he follows Aldrian wherever he goes.

Aldrian watched a bird slowly grow larger and finally land beside him.

"Kwack kwack."

Aldrian smiled, looking at the bird, which stood 2 meters tall and had a wingspan of 4 meters.

Silver Tail Eagle

Age : 4.260 years

Race : Eagle (Beast)

Cultivation : High Earls

Techniques : Fast Speed, Sharp Wings, Sharp and Strong Talon Strike, Wind Outburst

"You really like to stop by here, huh? It's a pity I have to leave now."

"Kwack kwack."

The eagle waved its wings, as if wanting Aldrian to stay. Aldrian responded by stroking the eagle's head and back. A golden aura from his hands made the eagle feel comfortable, so it stayed still and allowed Aldrian to stroke it. A few minutes later, he let the eagle aside and walked to look at the cave entrance.

"It looks like they all have already arrived." He could see many kinds of spirits and beasts gathering in front of the entrance, just like when he first met them a month ago. He jumped in front of them, and when they saw him, they instantly knelt, and some even kowtowed to him.

"Greetings, young master," they said. Aldrian nodded at them.

"Well, I think you know why I called you all here?" Aldrian asked, and they responded with reluctant and sad nods.

"Young master, must you go? You can stay here for a long time, and no one can disturb you," said Farin, the strongest spirit.

"Unfortunately, I have my own business with the elves right now, and I have to go back to finish my business." Aldrian answered, making them really sad about their leader leaving them.

"Don't worry, I will come back here if I have free time and the situation allows. I will not abandon you all, mark my words!"

Hearing that, they felt relieved and looked at him with resolute gazes, bowing to him.

"We are waiting for your return, young master! May glory follow you wherever you go!"

Aldrian smiled at them and walked towards the mist formation, which was deactivated for now to make it easier for them to see him off. They opened a path for their leader and followed him to the edge of the valley, watching his back. Aldrian looked at them, still smiling.

"Goodbye, for now." And with that, Aldrian vanished from there, leaving behind many creatures that now adored him.

Chapter 42 - Return From The Forest of Despair

On the outskirts of the Forest of Despair, nobles from all factions awaited Aldrian's return. A red dot on the map indicated Aldrian was near and moving at a fast pace toward them. Emperor Ladwin and the imperial teacher felt glee at his success, as did the liberal faction. However, the conservative faction members had rigid and pale faces. For them, it was over when Aldrian crossed the border of the Forest of Despair.

The Oath of the Heavenly Tree of the World was absolute, and breaking it would have severe consequences. They regretted not giving him another test or agreeing to the oath, but now, there was nothing they could do. They had not anticipated that a human would have the means to complete this test.

They stood on the outskirts when they finally saw a young man walking toward them with a calm expression. Many elves applauded when Aldrian emerged from the forest, having accomplished what was thought to be an impossible task. As he stepped outside the border, everyone in the conservative faction who had sworn the oath felt the restriction in their souls. There was no visible change, but karmic bonds were now strictly placed in their souls.

Aldrian saw many familiar faces and smiled, walking first to Emperor Ladwin.

"Welcome back! You are truly amazing! No, that's still not enough to describe you—you are truly a singularity," Emperor Ladwin said.

"Thank you, Your Majesty. I'm just lucky to have passed this test; it truly taught me a lot," Aldrian replied.

"You don't have to be humble. Your feat will undoubtedly be recorded in our imperial archive. There's no way you could have relied solely on luck in there," Imperial Teacher Elthar said.

"Well, what can I say? It's an honor to be acknowledged by the imperial family. Maybe now the elves will acknowledge me too, esteemed nobles?" Aldrian looked at the nobles, especially those from the conservative faction.

"Of course, we acknowledge you. You are truly the chosen one."

"As expected, our imperial teacher was not wrong in his judgment."

"The rise of a legend is before our eyes."

Many nobles from the liberal faction praised Aldrian for his achievement, soothing their tense and nervous hearts, affirming that their choice was the right one. The conservative faction remained silent, their expressions calmer than earlier. Aldrian had thought they would display ugly faces or at least lash out, but they were surprisingly composed.

"The Oath of the Heavenly Tree of the World took effect when you stepped out of the Forest of Despair, so they will be careful not to harbor ill intent toward you anymore," the imperial teacher sent a voice transmission to him. Aldrian nodded in understanding.

"Well, that's good. I don't want their nagging or the trouble they might bring," he thought. He then looked at the woman watching him with a proud and relieved expression. It was Eleine, who had faithfully awaited his return, always watching his progress on the map. He smiled and walked toward her.

"Elder sis, I'm back."

"Thank heavens, you're back safely," Eleine said, suddenly hugging Aldrian with tears in her eyes. Her action astonished him, as he had never seen her like this. He sensed her chaotic emotions—worries and the imagination of the worst possible outcome. He smiled and hugged her back, comforting her. Despite his shorter height, their hug was not awkward.

Eleine's emotions had fluctuated greatly over the past month. She had constantly worried, imagining he was walking toward his death. She had blamed herself and the elves. She had accepted the request from her mistress to guard Aldrian, but he had always been on his own to resolve the problems that came his way. She felt sad, weak, and unworthy to be his guardian.

"I'm back," Aldrian said softly.

"Hmm." Perhaps realizing what she had done, she instantly backed away, wiping the tears from her eyes, and looked at him shyly.

"You did it. Congrats on your success," she said with a smile.

Aldrian wanted to talk more when he saw another golden-green imperial carriage approach and stop not far from them. Emperor Ladwin noticed the carriage, grinned, and stood beside Aldrian. Once the carriage stopped and the doors opened, a white leg draped in a beautiful green dress stepped out, revealing a stunning elf. Her tall, slender body and sharp facial features were a feast for those who saw her, enhanced by her

elegant dress that highlighted her curves, including her ample bosom. Her smooth, back-length golden hair sparkled under the sunlight.

Sylphia Evergreen

Age : 150 years

Race : Elf

Cultivation

: Middle Viscount

Cultivation technique : The blessing of the heavenly tree

Attack Techniques : Wooden dragon, Rain of acid, Earth spike, Silent arrow, Homing arrow.

Defense techniques : Earth wall, Roots wall

Movement technique : Wind path

Supporting technique : Blessing of the forest

Aldrian looked at the new face, seeing Emperor Ladwin beam with happiness as he approached her and took her hands.

"Where is he, Father? I want to see him myself," she said excitedly.

"He is here. Let me introduce you. This young man is Aldrian Aster." Emperor Ladwin smiled and brought her closer to Aldrian.

"Aldrian, let me introduce you to my daughter, Sylphia." Aldrian looked at Sylphia's beautiful and excited face and bowed his head.

"It's a pleasure to meet you, Your Highness."

"Aldrian, you are truly amazing! How did you do that? What did you do in that place? We're talking about the Forest of Despair!" Her enthusiasm stunned him. Her beautiful face moved closer to his, and he had to admit that her beauty was only surpassed by the unknown spirit in his vision.

"Please pardon her, Aldrian. She is always like this. When she heard of your bet with the nobles, she was shocked and thought you were walking to your death. But when she heard of your success, she came here immediately to meet you. She loves adventure and its stories." Emperor Ladwin sent a voice transmission to Aldrian. He nodded in understanding and then said to Sylphia,

"I can tell you the stories, Your Highness, but it will be long."

"I can listen to it all." She smiled.

"Before that," he looked at Emperor Ladwin, "Your Majesty, when I arrived at the core section, I stumbled upon the secret of Emperor Thonias. To make a long story short, I received his inheritance." Aldrian said. Emperor Ladwin and all the nobles were shocked, and the imperial teacher grabbed Aldrian's arm.

"What? Are you sure?" he asked solemnly. Aldrian nodded and took out the Earth-Shattering Bow. The bow's divine-level aura spread out, sweeping over the elves, making them shudder in shock.

"Is that the Earth-Shattering Bow?!"

"No way."

"What a powerful aura."

Their astonishment was justified because the divine weapon used by Emperor Thonias was lost with him in the Forest of Despair. After creating this forest and secluding himself there until his final breath, the elves never succeeded in bringing back the emperor's body and his divine weapon. Everyone was chased away without exception, as the number of spirits and beasts was so immense that if they decided to form a beast tide or attack outside, the northern part of the Ivory Empire would be devastated.

Additionally, there was an entity powerful enough to hold all high-level cultivators at bay, and it did not tolerate anyone seeking their own death. Over time, this forest came to be called the Forest of Despair because every being who entered it would face the despair of confronting numerous united opponents firm in their beliefs. Aldrian also felt that the forest was more like an autonomous kingdom within the Ivory Empire, with its own hierarchy.

"Can I touch it?" imperial teacher with trembling voice said to Aldrian. He silent for a moment before he try to give the bow to Elthar, but before the bow touch him, the bow release his aura fiercer and tremble showing it's reluctance to be touched by someone else. Aldrian who can sense it's reluctance show bitter smile,

"I'm sorry your excellency, it looks like it doesn't like to be touched by others."

Elthar who saw the bow trembling only sigh,

"The bow really consider you as the true master. Another unprecedented event from you." The other nobles shocked again. There are too many time they shocked today by this human. The divine weapon of elves consider human as it's master? What the hell?

"Not only the bow, Emperor Thonias' inheritance also includes his wealth, and I will return it to the Ivory Empire." Aldrian said, handing the storage ring he had obtained from the underground place to the imperial teacher. When the teacher looked inside the storage ring with his senses, he was shocked once again. He even thought his heart couldn't hold on any longer and that he might become the first cultivator to die from a heart attack.

The ring contained mountains of peak-level energy stones, including some peak-level energy stone cores, and many artifacts ranging from peak sky grade to middle heaven grade. It was enough wealth to sustain the Ivory Empire for five years.

Aldrian, who saw all their shocked expressions, smiled. This was part of his plan to show them what he had obtained from the Forest of Despair. Initially, he felt he needed to hide his divine bow and privately give Emperor Thonias' wealth to the imperial teacher or Emperor Ladwin. However, after further consideration, he decided to present everything in public, including the divine bow used by their past emperor.

This would demonstrate that he had gained acknowledgment from their past emperor, even from his divine weapon, and would deepen his influence among the nobles. By successfully passing the test and bringing back what the elves had long desired, he would gain absolute credibility and win their hearts more effectively. After all, it was better to earn their genuine acknowledgment rather than just an oath.

Aldrian felt satisfied and did not feel bad about giving them the wealth, as what he gave them was only a quarter of what he had in the underground place. Now that his mission was complete, he sighed in relief. Amidst their astonishment, he could feel the princess's sparkling eyes looking at him with adoration. He could only smile and sigh when he looked at those eyes.

"Ah right, Your Highness, like I said, it will be a long story."

Chapter 43 - Emperor Ladwin's Plan

Golden-horned horses moved swiftly toward Thonias City, the line of imperial carriages and their guards creating a grand spectacle in every place they passed. Inside one of those carriages, Aldrian was telling his stories to Princess Sylphia, with Eleine sitting beside him, listening as well. Not all the truth could be told, but he shared the interesting parts.

Sylphia listened intently, her beautiful face sometimes expressing astonishment, sometimes sadness, and sometimes happiness. Aldrian thought the princess was truly passionate about adventure. People might assume that Princess Sylphia was just an ordinary princess from a great empire, with her refined, beautiful face, back-length golden hair, and slender body.

But she had told him that she sometimes ventured around the empire and even beyond its borders to gain experience. Her father supported these activities because it allowed her to experience the outside world, not just the palace or the capital.

She used her own disguise, so only a few people knew that she also liked to venture outside. To him, she was a rather unusual princess. Initially, he had thought princess Sylphia would avoid such activities and prefer to hear about adventures rather than partake in them, but Sylphia was truly an adventurer at heart.

In another carriage, Emperor Ladwin and Imperial Teacher Elthar sat face to face. Elthar watched the emperor with doubtful eyes because the expression on Ladwin's face could only be described as stupid.

"You've been grinning like a fool since we left the Forest of Despair. What's on your mind?" Elthar asked.

Emperor Ladwin kept his grin and responded, "Not much, I'm just in a good mood, Teacher."

Elthar narrowed his eyes, thinking. Suddenly, he realized something he had missed earlier. He hadn't paid much attention because what Aldrian had shown them was truly shocking, but now that he thought about it, there was something else significant that had never happened before.

The emperor's happiness about introducing his daughter to Aldrian was unusual. He had never seen Ladwin act this way before. Heck, even when princes and noble young masters from within and outside the empire were captivated by Sylphia's beauty and tried to approach her, her father would always drive them away with countless excuses.

Aldrian was also allowed to enter Sylphia's carriage, something no other male, aside from Ladwin, had ever done—let alone a human. For Emperor Ladwin to let Aldrian enter her carriage clearly had strategic implications.

"Are you trying to tie Aldrian to this empire through Sylphia?" Elthar asked. Emperor Ladwin merely smiled and not answering.

"Gosh, Ladwin, are you seriously considering that? Aldrian is only twelve, twelve! Are you planning to groom him into her groom? We don't even know what he thinks of this kind of relationship."

Ladwin frowned at the imperial teacher. "Why does Teacher speak as if I'm some kind of predator targeting young boys? Listen, we've already seen what he's capable of, correct?" Elthar nodded in response.

"Then, aside from his unknown origin, his qualities in everything seem flawless. Think about it, Teacher—he's only twelve! And he's already accomplished so much that even the nobles can't do anything to him. If we can tie him to our empire—no, to our family—it would be the best outcome for us! With time, his name will be known across the continent. Well, His unknown name has already become a rumor because of Balin, so I have to try to tie him here, even if it means offering him my daughter," Ladwin said.

"You're still not addressing the real issue. We don't know what Aldrian thinks or how he'll react," Elthar replied.

"We don't need to tell him! We can make him feel at home here, and one way to do that is with a beauty trap. Despite all the abilities he's shown and how mature he seems for his age, he's still a male. With his looks and talent, it's only a matter of time before many ladies from all over flock to him. I'm afraid Sylphia will have many rivals, so we should try to hook him now. With patience, Sylphia might make him fall for her. Who knows? Better to try than do nothing, right?" Emperor Ladwin explained.

Elthar found the reasoning plausible and somewhat agreed with it. He also felt it would be a shame if Aldrian went elsewhere to settle after his business here was done. It was better to take every chance to form a solid tie with him, and what better tie than family? However, he was impressed with Emperor Ladwin's determination, even willing to offer his precious daughter to Aldrian.

Emperor Ladwin had six children with his only wife, the empress—five sons and one daughter, Sylphia. As his youngest child and only daughter, it was easy to imagine how much Emperor Ladwin doted on her. For him to finally relent and consider a relationship between Sylphia and Aldrian was significant.

"Sigh, well, I hope this turns out well. Even now, I feel Aldrian is too perfect, and Sylphia is not enough to be his partner," Elthar thought.

The entourage maintained their speed and finally reached the teleportation station in Thonias City an hour later. After bidding farewell to Duke Miralis, the ruler of the territory, they moved to the teleportation station to instantly travel to the imperial family's private teleportation station. The imperial family had a private teleportation station used only by them, so they were already within the palace complex when they stepped out of the teleportation formation.

Aldrian could still be seen talking with the princess, and their interaction raised the elves' eyebrows. They knew how Emperor Ladwin protected and doted on her, limiting her interactions with the opposite sex. Now, seeing the princess talk happily with Aldrian and the emperor not seeming to mind, they could sense a scheme brewing. They more

or less knew what Emperor Ladwin was thinking and could only wait to see how it would play out.

Aldrian didn't seem to mind the surroundings and kept talking with the princess until they reached the throne hall, where they finally assumed a more formal demeanor.

"Aldrian Aster, as our chosen one who will help us in the uncertain future, I extend my gratitude and also apologize to you for undergoing even unreasonable tests to convince some of us, even though we were the ones who invited you here. As compensation, I, Emperor Ladwin Evergreen, grant you full access to the entire empire, including our most sacred ground, the Shrine of the Heavenly Tree. We will also provide you with every convenience and accommodation during your stay. You are our empire's special guest, so please enjoy your time here." Emperor Ladwin said from his throne while Imperial Teacher Elthar and Princess Sylphia, who were smiling at Aldrian, stood behind him.

"I, Aldrian Aster, give my gratitude for Your Majesty's generosity. I also express my gratitude to the esteemed nobles who gave me the test. Because of that, I gained many valuable things." Aldrian said, bowing his head. The nobles who had initially made things difficult for him could only take a deep breath and exhale without showing much expression. Aldrian looked at them, wanting to tease them, but it seemed they were very cautious due to the oath.

"Your character is truly commendable. And now, this marks the end of our assessment period of our special guest. Dismissed!" With that, the nobles began to leave the throne hall, but one of them stood in front of Aldrian. Aldrian looked at him.

"Do you need something from me, Grand Duke Maelis?" he asked.

All the nobles looked on, waiting to see what Grand Duke Maelis was up to. They then watched as the grand duke extended his hand to invite a handshake.

"Congratulations on your success, you truly deserve it," Grand Duke Maelis said.

Aldrian looked at the hand and accepted the handshake. "Thank you for your words, Grand Duke Maelis."

Grand Duke Maelis simply nodded and left the throne hall, followed by the other nobles. A handshake? Even Grand Duke Maelis had to admit Aldrian's capability, but the others did not blame him for it, as they also felt Aldrian deserved the recognition.

When the throne hall was empty, leaving only Aldrian, Eleine, Emperor Ladwin, Imperial Teacher Elthar, and Princess Sylphia, the atmosphere finally relaxed, and Aldrian sighed in relief.

"It's really done now," he thought.

"Aldrian, can you come with me? There's someone who wants to see you," Emperor Ladwin suddenly asked him.

"*Someone who wants to see me?*" Aldrian thought, puzzled, but he accepted the invitation and followed Emperor Ladwin to a deeper part of the palace. The five of them walked for some time, passing through several large doors, until Aldrian saw a vast space he was sure lay beneath the World Tree. In the middle of it was a beautiful wooden structure surrounded by a flower garden and a water pond.

"Aldrian, welcome to our most sacred place, the Shrine of the Heavenly Tree." Ladwin said.

Chapter 44 - Clearing Some of His Doubts

A structure with four rock pillars embedded in the ground at the corners formed a cube-shaped building. There were no walls, so the interior was visible from the outside. The roof was a congregation of leaves and roots connected to the main body of the World Tree. Surrounding flowers added a sweet fragrance, and the water pond had a calming effect on the mind. Aldrian looked at the surroundings and the majesty of the World Tree's center with a serene expression.

"This... I can sense a stronger karma connected to me here," he thought. He then focused his senses and vision until he saw a small string stemming from him. "I can see it. I can see stronger karma connected to me there," he observed, and he saw the little string connected to the structure. He felt an inexplicable closeness, so he waited to see what he might discover.

"This place is the first structure we built before we established the capital and the Ivory Empire as a whole. It holds great importance to us. We dare say that it is because of this place that the Ivory Empire still stands today. This is where the blessing is strongest and spreads across the entire Ivory Empire territory, the place where we can feel the presence of the Heavenly Tree of the World. You can even cultivate faster here because the energy is the thickest in the entire Ivory Empire," Imperial Teacher Elthar explained, to which Aldrian nodded.

"Now, this is where we must leave you. You can stay at the shrine by yourself; we will wait from afar."

Aldrian nodded and walked toward the shrine, following the karma string, curious about what this place meant to him. Elthar and the others watched him walk toward the shrine, then began to walk back the way they came when they could no longer see Aldrian.

Aldrian crossed the root bridge over the water pond and arrived at the shrine's interior. At the end, there was an altar with a picture depicting the World Tree and a small natural fountain in front of it. Aldrian felt the serenity of the place and couldn't resist sitting to meditate. He closed his eyes and immersed himself in the surrounding energy.

As Imperial Teacher Elthar had said, the concentration of energy here was so thick that, if he were an ordinary cultivator, his cultivation speed would have doubled. He savored the calm atmosphere, taking the time for comprehension and self-introspection. This was also an opportunity to test one of his hypotheses about his domain.

He repeated the lines and immersed himself in becoming one with the universe, one with nature. That's when he felt something, something that made him want to burst out laughing, but he held it in. He kept his eyes closed, thoroughly enjoying this feeling of unity with the universe and nature. He didn't know why, but it felt like this should be his ultimate goal: to truly become one with the universe and nature.

Time passed, but Aldrian didn't care. He remained immersed in cultivation. However, since earlier, he had sensed an entity in front of him. He could tell the entity was a woman, sitting in a seiza position without making a sound, just watching him.

"Lady, I'm really shy if you keep looking at me like that. I can feel your stare on me since earlier. Is there something wrong with me?" Aldrian then opened his eyes to see a beautiful woman with the appearance of an elf. She had long green hair that touched the ground, a green dress that blended with the surrounding nature, ample bosom, and a slender body with a beautiful, mature face that gave her a motherly appearance.

The Evergreen World Tree's Spirit

Race : World Tree (Spirit)

Age : 6,000,012 years (The world tree), 6,000,012 years (Spirit)

Cultivation : Peak Emperor

Techniques : The Blessing of the World Tree, the whip of her root already enough to destroy everything.

"I didn't want to disturb your cultivation, Your Excellency. I apologize if my gaze caused you any discomfort," she said, bowing to him. Aldrian looked at the spirit for a moment.

"Not at all. I'm just curious. For the things you've done in the past, I have some questions. Can you satisfy my curiosity, Lady Spirit?"

The spirit didn't seem shocked that he knew her identity. She simply straightened her back and looked into Aldrian's eyes.

"Please ask, Your Excellency. I will answer to the best of my ability."

"Lady Spirit, I want to know the details of how you received your prophecy. I was told you suddenly had a revelation at one point. Maybe with your answer, I can find more clues about future events," he asked.

"And maybe I'll find new clues about the origin of my powers," he thought.

"It started after the phenomenon 12 years ago when the dragon and the phoenix revealed themselves to the entire continent. After that, something inside me awakened and showed me a vision. I believe it came from the Heavenly Tree of the World itself—a vision where darkness began to cover the continent, chaos spread everywhere, people ran to save themselves, and the power of emperor-stage cultivators clashed across the land."

"Amidst all this, a higher 'being' appeared, and only with this 'being's' presence could the continent have a chance to be saved. The 'being' would become a light that would bring judgment to the darkness and the being will return to the place where he belongs, to his high place," she said.

"Then what do you think of me? Why are you so sure I'm that 'being'?" Aldrian asked.

"I have been on this continent since before the empires were fully established. I have seen and sensed many things. I can even feel the change in energy across the entire continent, except for one place—the Everlasting Silent Forest. After the phenomenon 12 years ago, the energy from the entire continent reacted strongly to the Everlasting Silent Forest, as if responding to a call. I told Elthar about my vision at that time."

"There was also this energy that made me shudder, even though it only appeared for a split second. The unknown energy of an unknown being appeared, and I couldn't help but connect it to the prophecy. I couldn't sense it anymore because it hid itself after that brief moment. At the same time, the Everlasting Silent Forest also began to change its characteristics; it is no longer as dangerous or as closed as it used to be."

"I kept my focus on the forest until one day, I felt that energy again. Although it was minuscule, I sensed it coming out of the forest and moving toward this empire. I couldn't see it, but I could sense it. After that being entered this empire and displayed its energy, I sensed it clearly—the being had arrived. I told Elthar about it, and the next sequence of events unfolded as you experienced them," the spirit explained.

Aldrian, listening to the spirit's answer, understood something and cleared some of his doubts.

"That's why, the first time we met, Grand Duke Sylvaris asked my age and what I did when I came out of the secret realm. They were matching the time she sensed the energy to ensure I was the one she mentioned," he thought.

"I'm 100% sure you are the being mentioned in the prophecy. Your existence itself is beyond my comprehension. Even now, I can feel you integrating your unknown ability with my true body, making my area of blessing also yours. This is absolutely impossible. I am the first World Tree on this continent, and I have the strongest karma to the Heavenly Tree of the World. My area of blessing is blessed by the Heavenly Tree itself, so it can't be disturbed or altered. That leaves only some unknown method of yours, which can only be done by a higher being," she said.

Aldrian felt bad for 'infiltrating' her area of blessing. He knew the spirit in front of him would feel it too, just as Olivia had felt the integration.

"I apologize for the inconvenience, but it's truly a special ability and trait of mine that I can't shake off. So, once again, I'm sorry, but this will be inevitable if I cultivate here."

"No, it's my honor to be a part of you and to be useful to you. You can use me however you wish," she said with a serene expression.

Aldrian nearly slipped, even while sitting. The way she said that line, with such a serene face, was...

"No, Lady Spirit, please don't talk like that. I'm afraid it will cause misunderstandings. But rest assured, I only use your area of blessing and won't take it from you. Oh, and by the way, can you let the World Tree spirit of Balin come to this place? She wants to visit."

The World Tree spirit finally revealed a slight smile and said to him, "That child really likes you. I can sense her spirit waiting outside Evergreen City."

"Is that so? Then can you—" Before he finished his sentence, particles of light formed a silhouette, and the silhouette transformed into Olivia beside the Lady Spirit, smiling at him.

"Oh, you're already here? That was fast," Aldrian said.

"You're truly enjoying your time this time, your exc—"

"Aldrian, I already told you to just call me that. Aren't we already close now? You too, Lady Spirit. You can call me by my name."

Olivia only showed a sheepish smile, and the Lady Spirit bowed her head. They continued talking without any concern for the outside world. From this conversation, Aldrian would learn that his feats in Balin had already spread across the entire continent, and Balin had become the hotspot for this, with some powerhouses coming to check it out.

Chapter 45 - The Ten Great Swordmasters of the Continent

The Ivory Empire has three cities close to the Everlasting Silent Forest, with Balin being the closest. Balin has always been a destination for people from other empires who wish to enjoy the entertainment in Elven territory, conduct trade, or simply take a break from their journey along the Great Belt Road. Following the events of a month ago, Balin's attraction has only grown. While the initial frenzy has died down, the aftermath of the battle still draws many to witness it.

At the site where Aldrian battled the devils and the Hydra, the Hydra's corpse is no longer present. The elves have already moved it to a secure location in the capital city of Evergreen, where it is being studied. Its various body parts can be dissected for numerous purposes, including the creation of useful artifacts and medicinal pills. For example, the Hydra's claws can be crafted into weapons like arrows or swords, its skin into armor or shields, and its meat can be used to enhance vitality.

Although the Hydra is gone, this spot has become a new attraction for cultivators. The lingering remnants of Aldrian's sword will can still be felt, even a month after he unleashed the 'Slash of the End'. What Aldrian doesn't know is that when he unleashed the 'Slash of the End', every sword on the continent trembled for a split second, except in Balin of course. Sword cultivators from across the continent have come to this place to experience the lingering sword will and try to comprehend it. Many find that it increases their understanding and advances their sword mastery.

Currently, many sword cultivators are meditating around the devastated ground, especially near the spot where Aldrian unleashed his technique. They can't get too close because the remnants of the sword will are still too strong for them. The sword will itself gives them the sensation of being slashed if they get too near, and lower-level cultivators might even injure themselves because they can't withstand the powerful sword will.

However, the closer one is to the source where the technique was unleashed, the more insight they can gain from it. This is the case for a few people present. Some individuals meditate very close to the source, within just two meters of ground zero. Onlookers are not surprised by their presence and can only sigh in admiration.

"As expected of those who are members of the Ten Great Swordmasters of the Continent—they can get closer to the source."

"They're the Ten Great Swordmasters?" a passerby asked the sword cultivator who just made the remark.

"Yes, haven't you seen any of them before?"

"Never."

The swordmaster looked at the man with astonishment. "Which part of the continent are you from, bumpkin? Alright, listen up. The one with black hair and two swords at his waist is Bourdin Smith, famous for his dual sword technique. The man with the longsword is Adel Schwertwächter, his sword can even split the sea. The blonde over there is Gideon Tsavaris from the Tsavaris family of sword cultivators, his sword technique combined with his illusion laws is a nightmare for his opponents. The one with the headband is Kenshi Yamada, his sword technique is fast and precise. And the last one is Gin Wolfram, his sword movements are unpredictable and difficult to counter."

"Wow, I've only heard their names before. I'm really lucky to have come to Balin this time," the man said.

"Yes, it's truly special. We still don't know who unleashed this technique, but there's speculation that it was one of the top five of the Ten Great Swordmasters."

"Wait, there are rankings among them?"

"Well, it's not official because they haven't fought each other—at least not openly—but people like to rank their power based on their achievements. The title of being one of the Ten Great Swordmasters of the Continent is an honor. Many have challenged them, but the title hasn't changed in a long time."

"Hey, who's that with the huge sword on his back?"

Suddenly, someone shouted and pointed in a direction, and the crowd turned to look at the newcomer emerging from the forest. His muscular physique, emphasized by the tight clothes he wore, radiated explosive power. The large broadsword on his back looked intimidating, and his aura caused people to instinctively avoid him. His middle-aged face, framed by red hair, made him resemble someone from the Flamecrest family, but he was not.

"Sword demon!" someone shouted,

People began to scatter when they heard the title of this demonic cultivator. The Sword Demon, a demonic cultivator with a passion for swordsmanship, is known for pursuing the way of the Demonic Sword of Pure Annihilation. He trained like a maniac and sought challenges in the most dangerous places on the continent, including the Everlasting Silent Forest, where he was trapped for 500 years.

"Shit, I knew he would come here too," the sword cultivator said.

"Is that really the Sword Demon? He's scarier than I thought," the man said.

"Of course he's scary, even the Piercing Heaven Sect can't control him!"

The Sword Demon walked forward, ignoring the murmurs of the crowd. As he approached the source of the sword will, he stopped. Now he stood as close as the other great swordmasters, but he didn't stop there. He continued walking, eventually halting just a meter away from the source. He stood there with his eyes closed, but those watching could see cuts forming on his skin, with blood beginning to seep out.

The onlookers were shocked, both by the sight of the Sword Demon and by the power of the sword will itself. If the remnant of it could injure even the Sword Demon, how much stronger must the person who unleashed this technique have been?

As people focused on the Sword Demon, a group of knights in white robes rode in from the city. The symbol of a sword and a light shining from an eye on their robes made it clear where they were from.

"The paladins from the Church of the Heavenly Direction! And leading them is the Paladin Leader, Arthur Maximilian!"

With his blonde hair, blue eyes, and handsome face, Arthur Maximilian led the entourage from the Church of the Heavenly Direction. His aura felt holy and soothing as he passed by. He stopped not far from the source of the sword will, dismounted his horse, and examined the source for a moment before beginning to walk toward it. The crowd parted to make way for him, but before he could get any closer, he stopped and looked up at the sky. From afar, a black dot in the sky grew larger as it approached with great speed.

As the dot neared, the crowd realized it was a flying giant sword with someone standing on top of it.

"That's Wang Weijian! The Sword Sage of the Heavenly Path!"

The crowd shuddered as a middle-aged man in white robes leaped off the giant sword, which then shrank and returned to his pocket. He landed not far from the source of the sword will, closed his eyes, and stood still, seemingly just enjoying the scene. But everyone knew that wasn't the case.

Not long after, the fragrance of flowers filled the air as flower petals began to drift down. Many turned their gaze toward the opposite side of the paladins, where the silhouette of a woman suddenly appeared.

"That's the only woman among the Ten Great Swordmasters, Elena Rosalind! Is she using her movement technique, the 'Thousand Petals Step'?" the sword cultivator remarked.

A mature-looking woman with a beautiful face and long black hair tied into a ponytail appeared. Her black, tight-fitting robe accentuated her curves, making men stare, and

the stockings visible between her robes further fueled their imaginations. The black sword at her waist made her look like a thorny rose—beautiful but deadly.

Her serene eyes scanned the surroundings for a moment before she, too, walked closer to the source of the sword will. Her every movement was elegant, attracting many eyes. She stopped two meters from the source, then moved a little closer, almost reaching the same range as the Sword Demon, before finally sitting down to meditate.

Arthur didn't want to be left out, so he also walked closer, reaching almost the same range as the Sword Demon. He closed his eyes and sat down to meditate. Up until now, they hadn't spoken to each other and were simply minding their own business. Comprehension was more important than mere conversation.

The crowd thought the show was over for the day, with nine of the Ten Great Swordmasters of the Continent present in the same place. But a few hours later, a giant white crane appeared on the horizon, flying towards the same spot. The people, who had distanced themselves from these swordmaster monsters to cultivate further away from the source, turned their attention back again.

The giant crane landed not far from the source, and a man in a white robe with a conical hat dismounted. Tension and shock rippled through the crowd as they recognized him.

"No way—that's the Sword Saint Xin Haotian!"

The atmosphere, which had begun to settle, became lively again. Excited whispers spread through the crowd as the Sword Saint arrived. The other great swordmasters opened their eyes and looked in Xin Haotian's direction, their expressions solemn for the first time.

There were reasons for this reaction. The Sword Saint Xin Haotian was the strongest of the great swordmasters! The ranks from ten to six might fluctuate, and those from five to two might also change. But the number one, who had never been displaced from his position, was the Sword Saint Xin Haotian. Even the other great swordmasters acknowledged this.

Xin Haotian stroked the giant crane's neck before turning to the crowd and taking his sword from the crane's back. He then walked towards the source of the sword will.

"Is he the one who unleashed this technique? I heard he's almost completed creating a divine technique and just needs a little more insight. Maybe he's already mastered it?"

"Why is he coming here then?"

"I don't know."

Murmurs filled the crowd, but Xin Haotian remained focused solely on the source of the sword will. People watched his every move, and the other great swordmasters paused their comprehension sessions. When the Sword Saint passed the one-meter mark from the source, everyone gasped, convinced now that he was the one who had unleashed the technique and was simply here to show off his power.

But they were confused when they saw Xin Haotian reach out towards something in the air. It looked like he was trying to feel the air in front of him, and they were shocked when they saw one of his fingers start to bleed. Xin Haotian looked at his bleeding index finger with a serene expression, then gazed at the spot in front of him before turning his eyes towards the distant mountain.

Though others couldn't feel it, Xin Haotian could sense the true power of the technique. He could even imagine how the person standing in this little crater had unleashed it. Without hesitation, he walked away from the site and headed towards the city.

People were stunned to see the Sword Saint leave with just a little bleeding on his index finger. The other nine great swordmasters became even more solemn. There was only one explanation for this: since the owner of the sword will cannot be harmed by their own sword will, this sword will must belong to someone else. Could it be that there is an unknown eleventh great swordmaster, someone even stronger than the Sword Saint?