

The Shining Star Above The Heaven

#Chapter 441: Varuga Town - Read The Shining Star Above The Heaven Chapter 441: Varuga Town

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Inside the imperial palace, Prince Wilmar and Grand Duke Donovan sat at the dining table, seemingly enjoying the meal before them. Maids stood by at the edges of the room, ready to attend to their needs. For a few moments, only the sound of forks meeting plates filled the dining room, until the prince's voice broke the silence.

"The effect should take place today, right?" Wilmar asked.

"Yes, Your Highness. Based on my estimation, the Weilmars Barony, especially Caritas and Weilmars City should already be in chaos as the outbreak has begun," the grand duke replied.

Wilmar nodded before slicing another piece of meat and continuing the conversation.

"Now we have leeway while that bastard deals with his own problems. He'll be too preoccupied until everyone infected has died. I don't believe he can solve this crisis. However, even if he does find a solution, it will be too late for him to do anything. By then, our troops will have already conquered the north and west. After that, we can focus on the south, strike the Rosalind Barony again, and finally move east."

He put a piece of meat in his mouth and chewed.

"After that, we'll have even more power, and we'll use everything we have to crush that man!" he added after swallowing the meat.

Grand Duke Donovan nodded.

"The western side only needs a little more push before it falls. And although we encountered a hindrance in the south with the appearance of that mysterious swordsman, once he returns to Caritas, we can resume our offensive and regain momentum. We only need to maintain our pace for two weeks at most, and we'll be ready to conquer the eastern region," he said.

"Even the mysterious swordsman has his limits if we cut off his connections within the empire. Even if we can't kill him, we can drive him out of the empire that way. Well, that is—if he isn't too stubborn."

Wilmar took another bite and smiled.

"Good, good. But truly, we are fortunate to have 'that man's' Gu in our facility. With his help, we can continue our research and breed other kinds of Gu," he said.

"Yes, Your Highness. I am also truly amazed by these Gu. I doubt anyone could recognize them, as this type of Gu is unique. The first time I saw them, I never imagined they could be so small. Their effects are terrifying, and it will take some time for our enemies to even realize what hit them," he answered.

"Even if that man or anyone else discovers the cause of the outbreak, there won't be any evidence pointing to us. All traces have already been erased with the deaths of our subjects," he added.

Wilmar sliced another piece of meat and took a bite.

"It's a pity we don't have any scouts to report on the situation in the Weilmар Barony. I want to hear the panic of those people and that bastard's reaction. It would be a delightful thing to witness."

"Well, it can't be helped, Your Highness. Based on our assessment, Caritas and Weilmар will be in total lockdown, meaning they will cut off their teleportation station's connection to the outside. If we send scouts there, they will have difficulty transmitting information back. Using a communication artifact is also risky, as it can be detected when in use," the grand duke answered.

The prince maintained his satisfied smile as he thought over the situation.

"Let's see if you can escape from this."

They continued eating without issue, the atmosphere remaining upbeat. It was only natural—they already felt their plan had succeeded.

As for the main target of their operation, Aldrian was already elsewhere, far from Caritas. He had just stepped out of a teleportation portal in Varuga Town, the place where he could completely mess with Grand Duke Donovan.

The people spreading the Gu had come from here, meaning this town had something special about it. According to the information he received from Arson, this place was also a hotspot for shady activities. He wanted to find out exactly how 'special' this place was.

The moment he stepped out of the teleportation portal, he had already made himself invisible using a light-manipulation technique. He casually passed through the checkpoint station, where town soldiers were inspecting each traveler. Before making a move, he wanted to first observe the situation in the town.

Just like any other place in the empire, on the surface, this town appeared no different from the others. However, Aldrian could sense a strange atmosphere lingering over it.

Many people here were hiding their true faces and intentions behind fake expressions.

When he looked at the merchants offering their goods, they wore warm expressions full of generosity, but in reality, they were sinister traders with ill intent. There were also people offering various services, yet they harbored hidden agendas deep within their hearts. These individuals were experts at hiding their true intentions, and they seemed to understand each other's nature well. As a result, the town was shrouded in an odd tension, where everyone remained wary of one another.

When Aldrian expanded his senses to the maximum, he was stunned to discover numerous hidden strong cultivators throughout the town. There were even a few Emperor-stage cultivators within some establishments, an unusual occurrence for a town of this caliber, as individuals of that level were rarely found in such places.

He also sensed several shady locations concealed behind the town's ordinary façade. Although he couldn't determine what was inside those hidden places, their entrances were carefully obscured from outsiders, seemingly accessible only to a select few.

If he wanted to see more details inside the place, he would have to create his own domain here, something he had already planned to do next.

Without hesitation, he freely spread his senses, scanning everything without restraint. He knew that doing so would alert the hidden Emperor-stage and King-stage cultivators. Spreading one's senses so openly was considered disrespectful, and many would take offense to it.

Just as he had expected, the moment he spread his senses freely to the maximum, cultivators from various parts of the town immediately responded. Their own senses expanded outward, as if seeking to identify the one who dared to disrespect them.

Many of their senses swept past Aldrian's invisible body, and he was certain that some had already detected his hidden presence. The Emperor-stage and some King-stage cultivators even focused their attention in his direction.

Aldrian smirked at this. He then teleported onto a rooftop, making himself visible. He now wore a different mask from his usual one, along with a robe that concealed his features. Standing motionless, he closed his eyes for a few seconds before opening them again.

Suddenly, from his right side, a figure with peak King-stage cultivation appeared, his hand moving as if to choke Aldrian. However, just before it could reach his neck, a spatial crack opened in front of the hand, causing it to plunge into the void.

Without warning, the crack snapped shut at incredible speed, severing the man's hand before he could react. Blood instantly spurted in all directions as his severed hand vanished into the void.

"Argh! Nggh!"

The man was about to scream in pain, but Aldrian grabbed his mouth with one hand and instantly forced him to swallow a bolt of lightning. His body convulsed violently before Aldrian's other hand struck his dantian with a powerful punch, instantly shattering it. His cultivation dissipated at an alarming speed, but Aldrian paid no mind, he simply wanted to look the man's memories.

However, before Aldrian could begin, another figure appeared a few meters away. Then another. And another.

In moments, more than ten King-stage cultivators had surrounded him, all wearing deep frowns as they observed the scene. They turned their gaze to the King-stage cultivator in Aldrian's grasp, who was barely clinging to life. With his dantian shattered and his body scorched by lightning, he was already on the brink of death.

One of the King-stage cultivators then sneered as he glanced at the helpless man in Aldrian's grip.

"Serves him right. His own reckless nature led him to this. He never thinks before acting, always killing anyone who disrespects him without hesitation," the man said with a mocking tone before shifting his gaze to Aldrian.

All of them could sense that Aldrian was only at the low Duke stage, yet he had effortlessly subdued a peak King-stage cultivator. That could only mean one thing—this masked figure was concealing his true cultivation level.

"Who are you? How dare you—" The man's voice suddenly halted as recognition flashed across his face. His eyes narrowed as he took a closer look at Aldrian's masked figure.

He recalled something from the news he had read not long ago, a figure who had become a hot topic across the continent in recent years. According to the latest reports, this cultivator was at the Duke stage, as sensed by those who had encountered him.

More importantly, he was the one who dared to stand against the entire Second Prince's faction alone.

The mysterious swordsman.

Although sketches of his face had spread across the continent, he was known for wearing a mask. The mask before them was different from the one the swordsman usually wore, but it was still known that he preferred to conceal his face.

Some of the King-stage cultivators also seemed to realize something as they observed their colleague who had abruptly fallen silent.

Meanwhile, sweat had already begun rolling down the man's forehead.

"Shit!"

Finally, something clicked in their minds as they recalled the news. A chill ran down their spines, and without hesitation, they instinctively tried to flee, soaring into the air. The slower ones, still processing the situation, could only watch in confusion at their companions' sudden panic.

"HE IS—!"

But before they could finish their shout or escape, they felt their bodies freeze, locked in midair.

They were horrified to find that no matter how much strength they used, their bodies refused to move.

"Where are you going? Since you came to me voluntarily, you should stay a while."

Aldrian's voice sent a chill straight to their hearts.

Chapter 442: Wait...wait!

Although he spoke with a slightly joking tone, to these people, Aldrian's voice only brought a sense of impending doom, as if a nightmare had descended upon them.

Many of the senses that had locked onto this place vanished instantly, as if those who had been observing Aldrian hurriedly retracted their awareness to avoid being noticed. Some of the Emperor Stage and King Stage cultivators hidden in the shadows looked in Aldrian's direction solemnly. A few even began to leave their establishments, attempting to distance themselves from him.

Others remained in their places, fearing that any movement might draw Aldrian's attention. After all, given everything they had heard about this young man and what they had just witnessed, they worried that trying to escape would only make them stand out even more.

One of those who shared this mindset was the strongest cultivator in town. Inside a grand mansion on the northern side of the town, a man sat in his cultivation room, clearly agitated.

He was a middle-aged man at the middle Emperor Stage, someone who, under normal circumstances, should not have been in a place like this. He woke up from his cultivation state after feeling someone's sense sweep over him. When he checked who it was and witnessed what Aldrian had done, he immediately withdrew his sense.

Sweat dripped from his forehead as shock gripped him.

"He is here?! How could this be?!" His mind was in turmoil.

"Shouldn't he be in Caritas, dealing with the outbreak? Did he abandon the people of the Caritas? Does he not care about them?" he thought. Then, another possibility surfaced—one that sent a chill through his heart.

"Does he know where those subjects came from and came here? Does he know that we are the ones who sent them?"

"No, no, it's impossible for him to have found out that we are responsible for the outbreak this quickly. It's only been a few hours since the effects took hold, and by now, those subjects must already be dead. There's no way that man could know that the ones who spread it are dead among the others."

He kept trying to think positively, but the thought still gnawed at him.

"However, if he doesn't know the truth, then why did he come here?! Leaving so many infected people behind in his city."

Another confusing matter was—how had he entered this town without anyone noticing?

Ever since Aldrian's appearance and his involvement in the civil war, Grand Duke Donovan had already warned him about the threat Aldrian posed. He was unpredictable, completely outside the norm, so he had to remain cautious of his sudden movements.

He had ordered everyone from the teleportation station to the gate guards, to thoroughly check anyone coming from the western side of the empire, especially from Weimar Barony. If that man, known as the mysterious swordsman, appeared in town, he would be alerted immediately and could execute for his escape's plan.

He knew his limitations, fighting Aldrian with his current strength was no different from suicide. He did have something that might trap Aldrian, maybe even kill him. However, he preferred not to use it. If it failed, not only would he be doomed, but the Donovan Grand Duchy would also suffer the consequences.

He gritted his teeth. If the mysterious swordsman had indeed come because of the outbreak, then he had to prepare for it. He took out a communication artifact and spoke into it.

"Prepare for evacuation. We have company, and we must be ready in case our facility is discovered. I want everything done as soon as possible."

"What? What happened, my lord? Did someone strong enough to force an evacuation appear?" a voice responded from the artifact.

"The mysterious swordsman."

"..." There was silence for a few seconds before the other side responded.

"Alright."

Once the connection was cut off, the man stored his communication artifact and walked toward his treasure chamber. He didn't know if his decision was the right one, but he had no other choice if his life was at stake.

"I hope it's enough to kill him."

But then, he suddenly sensed someone approaching the mansion. The moment he realized who it was, shock gripped him. Panicked, he frantically rushed toward the treasure chamber, but before he could reach the room where it was located, someone appeared before him in an instant.

He was so stunned that he had no time to react before the figure seized him by the throat and pressed a hand against his abdomen.

He tried to attack the hand that was choking him, but suddenly, his body felt sluggish. A sudden wave of weakness washed over him, and to his horror, he realized he couldn't control the flow of energy inside his body. It was as if something had blocked his meridians and dantian!

Panic surged through him. Right now, he was no different from a mortal! It finally dawned on him—at the very moment this figure had grabbed his throat and touched his abdomen, he had sealed his cultivation and energy pathways.

He couldn't comprehend how this man had suddenly appeared inside the mansion, let alone right in front of him.

"Did he already take care of those fools?" he thought as he stared at the masked figure before him.

"You... who... are you?!" He feigned ignorance, pretending not to recognize the man in front of him. He struggled to speak, his words choked out with difficulty as Aldrian's grip tightened around his throat.

As for Aldrian, he smiled behind his mask, his blue eyes locking onto the man's gaze. Of course, he knew the turmoil raging inside the man's mind. Fortunately, this place was covered by his domain, allowing him to teleport inside without problem.

After gathering information from the King Stage cultivators earlier, those who had initially harbored ill intent toward him, he had killed them. From what he learned, this mansion housed the highest authority in town.

"Karl Donovan. With that surname and your level of cultivation, you must hold a high position within the Donovan family, huh?" Aldrian said, completely ignoring Karl's question. "To think that the Donovan family placed you in charge of this town... I wonder what Grand Duke Donovan is trying to hide."

Karl's eyes widened slightly. How does this man know? His connection to the Donovan family was confidential, only his family members were aware of his true identity here. The people in this town only knew him by an alias, believing he was an outsider appointed by the Donovan family to manage the town.

Too bad for him, Aldrian had easily seen his true name using his Eyes of the Heaven.

Despite his precarious situation, one that was already standing at the edge of a cliff, Karl still tried to salvage it.

"What are you talking—?"

"Shh," Aldrian interrupted. "There's no need to lie to me or pretend you don't know who I am. I'm here because of what your family has done—especially Grand Duke Donovan, you know?"

Hearing Aldrian's reason for coming here, Karl's heartbeat quickened, something Aldrian picked up on with ease. A smirk formed beneath his mask. It seemed he had hit the jackpot.

"I don't really understand—"

Slam!

Aldrian slammed Karl's body into the floor, forcing a mouthful of blood from his lips. The impact shook his internal organs, sending a wave of agony through him. With his energy flow completely blocked, he was powerless to defend himself. The floor cracked beneath him, along with several of his ribs.

"Well, whatever. I don't need you to talk anyway—I can find out what I need myself," Aldrian said, pressing a hand to Karl's forehead.

"Wait! WAIT!"

Aldrian ignored him and began to read his memories, but he suddenly paused as a group of guards rushed in his direction. The impact from slamming Karl into the ground must have alerted them, prompting their arrival.

He didn't mind their approach and simply let them come. However, the moment they saw him and Karl's condition, their expressions shifted to alarm.

"Intruder—"

Before one of them could finish shouting, the entire group suddenly collapsed to the ground, their bodies also convulsing. Their eyes turned red, and their faces contorted in sheer horror.

Aldrian had cast his illusion technique on them. Now, they were trapped inside their worst nightmares.

"Wait, wait! Please, let me talk. Don't—"

Before Karl could finish his words, Aldrian slammed him into the ground once more, his hand still gripping Karl's throat. His vision spun, a splitting headache overtaking him, while the internal wounds from the first impact worsened.

"Argh!" He finally cried out in pain as his organs trembled again, and more of his ribs fractured under the force.

Ignoring Karl's suffering, Aldrian pressed his hand against his forehead once more. Without hesitation, he dove into Karl's memories, sifting through them harshly and without care. The sheer force of it nearly shattered Karl's mind as Aldrian searched for what he needed, as well as anything he found interesting or important.

He maintained this position for over a minute until he was satisfied with what he had found.

What he discovered was quite unexpected, and he was glad he had come here. Now, he could pay a visit to the second prince, but before that, he had found something interesting within Karl's memories.

Aldrian grabbed Karl by the sleeve and dragged his limp body toward the treasure chamber hidden within one of the mansion's rooms.

Along the way, he encountered maids and butlers who trembled in fear, but he ignored them. They could do nothing but watch helplessly as their lord was dragged like a sack of wheat.

Occasionally, he came across guards, effortlessly rendering them unconscious with his illusions.

Before long, he arrived at the room where the treasure chamber was located. With ease, Aldrian cracked the sealing formation on the door's surface. As the heavy chamber door creaked open, its contents were finally revealed to him.

Chapter 443: Another Secret

Once the treasure chamber opened, Aldrian finally saw what was inside. There were many artifacts, but he paid them no mind. Dragging Karl along, he stepped inside. Karl couldn't resist—pain wracked his body, his cultivation was still sealed, and a sharp headache throbbed as Aldrian roughly looked through his memories without regard for his mind.

Aldrian walked to the far end of the chamber and stopped in front of the wall. At first glance, there was nothing unusual, just an ordinary surface. But then, he ran his fingers over it, as if searching for something.

"It's here," he murmured before pressing one part of the wall. Suddenly, a hidden mechanism activated, creating a cracking sound. A few seconds later, the wall in front of him shifted on its own, revealing a small hidden space. From behind the wall, an artifact emerged.

The moment the artifact appeared before Aldrian, he smiled in amusement as its aura swept across his face—a thick, ominous energy he was all too familiar with. He had encountered it many times before, and yet, it never failed to irritate him.

Before him stood a two-meter-long staff with a red, diamond-like stone at its tip. The ominous aura radiated from the gemstone, carrying a dense concentration of negative energy that was none other than devil energy.

He simply dropped Karl's body and reached for the staff. However, the moment he touched it, he felt the negative energy trying to consume him. A thick, oppressive force surged, attempting to invade his consciousness and dantian. The overwhelming negativity also tried to cloud his mind, and he could feel a sudden surge of dark emotions rising within him.

Aldrian scoffed at the artifact's feeble attempt to possess him. Without a second thought, he enveloped himself in golden energy. As soon as the negative energy sensed his power and aura, it dissipated instantly. With his mind now at ease, Aldrian could finally inspect the staff properly.

The Devil's Curse Domain Staff

Description:

A devil artifact that creates an artificial domain with a diameter of one kilometer. The domain has the ability to seal a person's cultivation and drive them into madness through negative energy. This particular artifact can affect low Emperor-stage cultivators, but it can grow stronger if provided with sufficient sacrifices. Everyone within the domain, except those bearing the curse staff insignia, will experience these effects. This is a one-time-use artifact.

Level: Peak Heaven Grade

Aldrian was astonished as he read the artifact's information. This was a growth-type artifact that became stronger through sacrifices. The more sacrifices it received, the more powerful it became, allowing it to affect cultivators at higher levels.

This artifact was similar to the unnamed divine sword in the Forgeheart Kingdom, which was also a growth-type artifact. However, the key difference was that the sword did not require sacrifices but something else. Although it had yet to be graded, as it was still waiting for him to name it, its base was already at the peak of the divine grade once he named it in the future.

With its extraordinary origin and the same materials as the Origin Sword, he knew that peak divine grade was not its limit. How did he know this? Because he had seen visions—visions of the Origin Sword in "his" grasp. He could feel its immense power, and he was certain that it surpassed even the peak divine grade.

Aldrian looked at the weakened Karl, who stared at him in shock, as if he had witnessed something unbelievable.

"How... how are you okay?" Karl asked weakly.

"How were you not consumed by that artifact?!"

Aldrian smiled and knelt down, bringing his face closer to Karl's.

"So, you really are working with the devils, huh? This artifact isn't something you should possess. Its effects and potential are quite terrifying. From your memories, I see that Grand Duke Donovan gave it to you—but where did he get it? I doubt an ordinary devil would hand over an artifact of this caliber."

Aldrian yanked Karl's hair, forcing him to meet his gaze.

"You were planning to rely on this thing to face me, weren't you? Well, too bad for you. I'll be taking it for now. But first—let's uncover another one of your secrets," he said.

Aldrian stored the staff inside his storage ring before dragging Karl out of the treasure chamber by his hair. He wanted to humiliate him as much as possible, ensuring that others would witness Karl being helplessly dragged everywhere.

Deep inside, Aldrian was suppressing a raging fury, caging it within his heart as tightly as possible. Since arriving in this city, he had kept his anger in check, knowing that if he let it show, it would affect his entire domain.

He understood that his domain was a place where the forces of nature, heaven, and earth were fully connected to him. If he showed his rage like he had in the past, the heavens and earth would resonate with his emotions, manifesting his wrath through natural phenomena, such as thunderstorms raging in response to their lord's fury.

The fury he felt right now was because someone had actually harmed Eleine. To think that someone dared to harm her right under his domain and had almost taken her life! He would make sure that everyone connected to it faced his judgment.

He needed to release the steam of his fury, and those poor King-stage cultivators who had blocked his path earlier were only the beginning.

After looking through Karl's memories, he finally found one of his main targets—the source of the Gu.

Once outside the mansion, he took to the sky, still gripping Karl by his hair, and flew toward the eastern side of the town, continuing until he passed beyond the town's walls.

Many people who had been keeping an eye on Aldrian's movements watched in astonishment as they saw him dragging Mr. Derick in such a humiliating manner. Mr. Derick was Karl's alias in this city, and no one knew his true identity. While some cultivators had long suspected that he was connected to the Donovan family, they lacked any concrete proof and thus had not looked too deeply into it.

Mr. Derik was someone with significant influence in this place and other territories, so no one dared to offend him by probing into his secrets. Yet now, they were witnessing the moment he was being carried off like a sack of rice, and it was happening right in front of so many people.

Many onlookers finally saw Aldrian dragging Karl in his grasp as he flew toward the eastern direction.

Some hesitated to follow, already aware of the masked figure's identity. They feared offending Aldrian in any way, even by simply trailing after him. However, like curious cats, some couldn't suppress their intrigue and decided to follow. Among them were King- and Emperor-stage cultivators who had earlier been observing Aldrian when he spread his senses. They kept their distance, careful not to draw his attention.

They followed Aldrian until he flew a kilometer beyond the city walls, deep into a dense forest. They wondered what he was doing here while still dragging Mr. Derik.

When they saw Aldrian land, they also descended. However, the thick forest obstructed their view, with the trees blocking a clear sight of him from afar. None of them dared to use their senses to probe what Aldrian was doing.

They had no choice but to be satisfied with what little they could see from a distance.

Suddenly, some of them caught sight of Aldrian striking the ground with his fist. In an instant, a deafening rumble echoed through the surroundings as the ground collapsed beneath him.

They were stunned by what they had just witnessed—Aldrian had disappeared into what seemed to be a hidden underground passage!

Many of them were astonished that such a place existed here. Had this been Aldrian's goal from the very beginning?

Aldrian kept walking down the secret passage. In front of him lay a few dead bodies, victims of the collapsing ground and the impact of his fist. This was another secret he had uncovered after looking into Karl's memories.

This was also a major secret of the Donovan Grand Duchy, known to no one in the empire except a few individuals and high-ranking members of the Donovan family. It was yet another secret that fueled his rising fury.

The underground passage was quite wide and illuminated by illumination crystals, ensuring good visibility. Occasionally, he noticed doors on one side of the passage, indicating the presence of rooms or additional pathways beyond them. However, he paid them no mind and continued walking past them.

Along the way, he encountered several figures multiple times, some clad in knight armor, others in black robes. He gave them no chance to react, not even for a split second, cutting them down instantly with a slash of sword energy from his hand.

Blood was spilled everywhere, and severed body parts lay scattered. It was as if he cared nothing for this place, slaughtering anyone in front of him like a psychopath, driven by nothing but the urge to kill.

The commotion had already drawn attention, as Aldrian could sense many figures moving toward his location.

He kept walking until he encountered another group. When they saw Aldrian holding Karl, one of them froze in shock, his eyes widening.

"My lord—"

Before he could finish, Aldrian struck without hesitation, unleashing a wave of sword energy.

Swish!

Chapter 444: The Cruelty Hidden Beneath the Surface

Swish!

Sword energy slashed through the air, hurtling toward the incoming group. The one leading them, who calls Karl "my lord," dodged instantly, but the others had no time to react and were struck by the attack. Their bodies were cut in various places—some died instantly, while others survived with their non-vital limbs severed.

"Argh!"

Agonized cries filled the air as the wounded clutched at their bleeding wounds, writhing in pain.

The leading man, who had successfully dodged, couldn't relax as he saw Aldrian suddenly teleport right in front of him. Already prepared for anything, he tried to cast his technique, his peak King-stage cultivation aura flaring. However, Aldrian simply used Spatial Lock to immobilize him before piercing his heart with sword energy.

Spurt!

Blood gushed from his lips as Aldrian slashed his hand sideways, creating a massive wound that caused the man to lose a large amount of blood before dropping dead instantly.

Aldrian did all of this with just one hand, while his other hand continued dragging Karl. This place, which had already become his domain before he entered it, was his hunting ground.

"Wait... wait—"

Slash!

"Spare—"

Slash!

He killed the remaining men who were still alive and continued walking in one direction for a few minutes until he finally arrived at a door. Without hesitation, he opened it, and what he saw made his expression twist in disgust.

Inside the room, numerous glass tubes contained various kinds of living Gu. Some were of normal size, while others were as small as the ones that had caused the outbreak in Weimar Barony. Because they were crammed together in a single tube and great in number, he could see them clearly with his naked eye.

He counted tens of different kinds of Gu inside the room, each stored in hundreds of glass tubes arranged neatly. A creepy sound—*chi... chi... chi*—echoed across the space, making the atmosphere even more unsettling. He could also sense traces of devil energy in some of the tubes, which meant that certain Gu had been developed with the help of devils.

Aldrian glanced at Karl in his grasp and smirked.

"If I show this to the outside world, the consequences won't just fall on the Donovan family. The second prince's faction will also suffer from the negative impact. I can already imagine the Buddhist Sect and the Vindas Empire, as neighboring territories, immediately siding with the opposition faction. They might even send their armies here."

Karl's heart shuddered, but he could neither resist nor speak. Aldrian was already dragging him to another place.

When he arrived at the next room and saw what was inside, his expression darkened, his fury intensifying.

Inside the room were several glass cages, neatly arranged like a display. The cages were quite large, capable of holding multiple humans inside. Within them lay the skeletal remains of past victims, and Aldrian could feel a strong presence of death laws lingering within, signifying the many deaths that had occurred there.

From Karl's memories, this room served as an experimental chamber for the practical application of Gu. The Donovan family using humans as test subjects, had developed their Gu with the help of the devils.

Aldrian choked Karl and forced him to look at the cages. He pressed Karl's face against the glass, making him stare directly at the bones and skulls of the victims. Some still had bits of rotting flesh clinging to them, a grotesque reminder of the horrors that had taken place.

"You like watching them suffer, huh? You enjoy listening to their screams for help, begging for it to stop? You like that?"

He then slammed Karl's face against the glass, shattering it instantly and wounding his face.

"Argh!" Karl cried out as shards of glass grazed his skin, drawing blood that dripped from the fresh wounds.

Aldrian dragged Karl toward another room, continuing to cut down any groups of people he encountered along the way. They all met their end under his techniques.

Eventually, he arrived at a massive chamber filled with cages, where hundreds of people were being held. Most of them appeared malnourished, their hands and feet bound in cuffs. Aldrian could sense that the restraints also functioned as sealing artifacts, preventing cultivators from circulating their energy.

Most of the prisoners looked in Aldrian's direction with terrified expressions, knowing all too well the fate that awaited those taken from this room. However, they were stunned when they saw Aldrian dragging a man in his left hand.

At first, they didn't recognize him, as his head hung low, obscuring his face. But when they noticed his noble attire, realization struck.

That man was the one the people here called Mr. Derik, a figure of high standing in this place, someone whose orders were obeyed without question. Seeing him in such a wretched state, being dragged by this masked figure, left them utterly astonished.

Aldrian then used his technique to heal everyone in the room, causing a sudden warmth to spread through their bodies, shocking them. Though most were still malnourished, they felt a newfound strength, enough to move their limbs despite their hands and feet being cuffed.

They gazed at the masked figure in wonder. Who is this person? Has he come to save us?

"All of you inside the cages, crouch! I will cut the cages!"

The prisoners immediately obeyed, crouching as instructed. Once Aldrian confirmed they were all in position, he made a slashing motion with his hand. A powerful slash released from it, infused with his overwhelming sword intent.

After that, the top half of the cages suddenly vanished as Aldrian teleported them elsewhere. The prisoners, astonished to see the cages sliced in half with their upper sections disappearing, slowly standing up and stepping out of the ruined cages carefully.

"All of you, form a line in front of me so I can destroy your cuffs," Aldrian's voice rang out, and the prisoners quickly obeyed.

As they lined up before him, murmurs spread among them as they whispered to one another.

"After I destroy your cuffs, wait outside this room for the others. Stay nearby and don't wander too far until I've freed everyone," Aldrian added.

Aldrian then began breaking the cuffs on each prisoner. Every time he broke a set, the next person stepped forward, and the process continued.

The prisoners watched Aldrian with varied expressions, uncertain of his identity or true intentions. Some remained wary of him despite their newfound freedom, while others felt grateful. There were also those who observed him with blank expressions.

Their gazes occasionally shifted to Karl, who lay motionless at Aldrian's feet in a pitiful state. Some felt a surge of rage, while others trembled with fear at the mere sight of him, even in his current condition.

Aldrian could tell they had been deeply traumatized. Just looking at Karl was enough to bring back painful memories.

Aldrian lamented the fate of these people, suffering until this very day. Among the prisoners were men and women, young and old—even children, some barely toddlers.

He had already seen the truth through Karl's memories, but witnessing it firsthand still left a deep impact.

At an age when they should have been playing with their families and friends, they had instead been subjected to cruel experiments, reduced to nothing more than test subjects.

From Karl's memories, Aldrian also learned the truth about the so-called "suicide squad" that he had assumed willingly spread the gu in Weilmor Barony. In reality, they were just prisoners following Karl's orders, believing his false promises.

These unfortunate souls were nothing more than disposable test subjects, already infected with gu, unknowingly carrying their own death sentence.

Trusting Karl's words, they obeyed his instructions without question, convinced that freedom awaited them once their task was complete. They didn't even realize they were spreading the gu—Karl had merely told them to open small tubes and walk around in cities and towns.

Some of them were mere children—children who truly believed that once their task was done, they would finally be free to play outside.

As the last prisoner was finally freed from all restraints, Aldrian turned his gaze toward the people waiting outside the room.

"Alright, all of you, wait here for a moment. I need to take care of something," Aldrian said before closing the door.

The freed prisoners didn't understand what he intended to do inside that nightmarish room. However, moments later, agonized screams echoed from behind the door.

"Arrghh!"

"Spare me!"

"Argh! Please!"

They instantly recognizing the voice, it was Mr. Derik.

Realization dawned upon them. The masked figure was torturing Karl, and for the first time, they felt a sense of relief settle in their hearts.

Many among them harbored deep grudges against Karl, and hearing his agonized screams was like music to their ears.

After a few minutes, Aldrian finally emerged from the room, dragging Karl by his leg. The people then saw Karl's worsening condition, some of his limbs were dislocated and bent at unnatural angles. They could only imagine the torment Aldrian had inflicted on him inside.

"I will send you all to Varuga Town. You can stay there for some time until you decide your next course of action," Aldrian said.

For a moment, everyone stood in stunned silence. Then, some began tearing up as the weight of his words sank in, they were finally free!

At first, many of them remained wary of Aldrian's true intentions. Their long imprisonment had conditioned them to expect nothing but cruelty or deception. But now, hearing that they would soon leave this place, a wave of joy and relief washed over them.

One of them, overwhelmed with gratitude, fell to his knees and kowtowed before Aldrian, his eyes brimming with tears.

"Oh, savior, thank you for rescuing us!"

Chapter 445: Lifting the Land

Some others also began to follow the kowtowing man, expressing their gratitude.

"Alright, I accept your gratitude. Raise your heads—I will send you there right now," Aldrian said.

"Savior, how did you—" Before the man could finish his question, he and the others suddenly disappeared, leaving only Aldrian and the broken Karl behind. Aldrian had sent hundreds of captives just outside the town's eastern walls.

The sudden appearance of so many people at once immediately caught the attention of the guards in the area. The captives were momentarily stunned by the abrupt change in their surroundings. But when they realized where they were, many of them erupted into cheers, overjoyed to have finally escaped that place!

Many shed tears of gratitude, offering their thanks to the heavens and to Aldrian.

Those trailing behind Aldrian were also stunned when they sensed multiple presences appearing all at once near the eastern walls. They turned toward the area, only to freeze in shock at the sight of a massive crowd of unfamiliar people who had seemingly teleported there.

The town's guards were already making their way toward the scene. Due to the sheer number of newcomers and the movement of the guards, they quickly drew the attention of the townspeople.

The town's guards were part of Karl's forces stationed there. Many had already rushed to the eastern side after witnessing their leader, Karl, being taken away by a mysterious figure. With their highest-ranking leader gone, command now fell to the town guard's chief commander—yet even he was at a loss over what had just transpired.

Moreover, after learning the identity of the mysterious person, he did not dare to pursue or confront him directly. Instead, he ordered the troops to stand by on the eastern side. The captain of the eastern wall shared the same sentiment and chose to wait and observe. For now, the most they could do was monitor Aldrian's movements.

The chief commander had no choice but to report the situation to the main family. Even if they gathered all the troops in the town, he doubted they could stop that masked man.

How could they possibly face someone capable of defeating tens of thousands of soldiers supported by flying fortresses? That would be nothing short of suicide!

They had already sent some men to trail Aldrian and see where he had taken Karl. However, not long after Aldrian entered the underground passage, a massive group of people suddenly appeared. Could this be connected to whatever Aldrian had done underground?

Back in the underground research facility, Aldrian sighed after teleporting the captives away. Although what happened next in their lives was no longer his responsibility, at least they were no longer trapped in this place.

After learning about this facility, Aldrian had not only wanted to see the place where they created the Gu, but he also felt a sense of responsibility to free those imprisoned in this hellish place.

Now, he felt there was nothing more worth looking at here. He had already eliminated everyone managing the facility, and it was clear they had begun preparations for evacuation before his arrival.

Once Karl learned the true identity of the masked figure, he had not hesitated to put an evacuation plan into motion as a failsafe in case the mysterious swordsman ever discovered this place.

They would take some things and destroy everything else, including the prisoners. Then, they would create a scapegoat to take the blame, making it seem like this was nothing more than a shady underground slave storage that had caught fire.

Aldrian deep in thought. After a moment, he finally decided to destroy this place. He couldn't trust the townspeople to handle the aftermath properly. If they saw some of the Gu here, they might hesitate, or worse, they might try to take advantage of the gu in his absence.

It was better to erase this place entirely, along with all the evidence inside, than to risk it falling into the wrong hands due to human greed.

Although he would lose a crucial piece of evidence linking the Donovan family to the devils, he had already achieved what he intended in this place. As for everything else, he didn't care about gaining the support of other territories or anything of the sort. The moment Eleine was harmed by their machinations, this matter became personal.

He would be swift, ruthless, and direct.

Aldrian then teleported, taking Karl with him, his feet still firmly grasped by Aldrian and reappeared outside the underground facility. They floated a few hundred meters from the secret passage, causing those who had been trailing them to freeze in shock at their sudden appearance.

These people wondered what had happened underground, but since they couldn't sense anything from the surface, they didn't dare to pursue Aldrian any further.

The worsening condition of Karl made them shudder, as he seemed on the brink of death, which only intensified their curiosity about what had really happened.

Aldrian floated motionlessly, closing his eyes as if concentrating, an act that made the onlookers wonder what he intended to do.

Suddenly, the ground around them trembled violently, and the tremor could be felt throughout the entire town. Many wild beasts fled frantically, scrambling to escape the sudden quake. Most of the townspeople staggered, with many falling to the ground. Even cultivators below the Earl stage slipped, demonstrating the immense power of the tremor.

Those trailing Aldrian felt tense from the sudden quake, but then they witnessed something mind-blowing.

Rumble! Rumble!

The vast land in front of them suddenly began to lift into the air slowly. An area as wide as more than two square kilometers rose higher and higher. Finally, the tremor ceased when the land was fully lifted, and the people in the town could stand again. But then, they were covered by a sudden shadow, as if something large was blocking the sunlight, prompting them all to look up at the sky.

Their eyes widened as they saw a massive piece of land floating in the air. It continued to rise until it finally stopped when it reached a height of one kilometer from the ground. The enormous mass of land resembled a floating island, visible from across the town. It was the first time anyone there had seen anything like it.

There was only silence as everyone stared at the massive floating land, which remained suspended for a moment before flames suddenly ignited from it. At first, the flames were small, but then, in an instant, the entire floating land was engulfed by fire.

The heat continued to rise, and soon the flames turned a brilliant blue. The people in the town could feel the intense heat radiating from the fire, and it made most of them shudder. They could sense that these flames could even harm cultivators at the Emperor stage!

Aldrian completely burned the massive land, which was actually the secret lab for breeding the Gu, to destroy everything inside. Every room, every secret passage, and every Gu—he didn't miss a single one.

In the Gu storage room, where many tubes containing the Gu were stored, the flames instantly destroyed all of them. The sound of "chi-chi-chi" echoed as the Gu in that room were obliterated by Aldrian's flames.

After the land had been "cooked" for more than three minutes, the flames slowly died out, revealing the blackened remains of the floating island. A few moments later, the land suddenly began to free-fall, crumbling bit by bit as the floating island collapsed.

The ones who had been trailing Aldrian were the closest to the floating island, and when they saw it start to crumble and fall, they frantically ran to escape the impact zone.

Rumble!

The pieces of land crashing to the ground created a deafening rumble and a tremor that rivaled the earlier quake. Chunks of land of all sizes continued to strike the earth, but when the largest piece hit, it caused the most violent tremor, even making some of the town's buildings collapse.

Luckily, no one was caught beneath the falling debris.

The air was thick with dust, and the wind from the impact slammed into the eastern wall, forcing everyone to cover their eyes and faces. The prisoners freed by Aldrian watched in shock, standing near ground zero of the impact. Despite being so close, they seemed protected by an invisible dome, as the debris and wind did not affect them.

This was Aldrian's way of protecting them.

After a few moments of silence, Aldrian opened his eyes and gazed toward the town. He then teleported higher and closer to the town, allowing many of the townspeople to see his figure clearly.

"Attention, all people of Varuga!" Aldrian's voice boomed across the town, and every single individual could hear it clearly.

"This man here," Aldrian said, lifting his hand that grasped Karl's leg to make him more visible to the crowd. "This is the man who has betrayed both the orthodox and unorthodox cultivators by working with the devils. In fact, his family has been involved as well."

"He is the Grand Elder of the Donovan family, Karl Donovan. The floating land you all just witnessed is where the Donovan family developed Gu with the help of the devils."

At Aldrian's words, the crowd was stunned. The Donovan family is connected with the devils?!

Chapter 446: You Can Redeem Your Worthless Lives

"The Donovan family created a secret facility to breed gu, which could harm many people they considered a threat. The gu stored in that place is enough to infect an entire vast region with a deadly plague," Aldrian continued.

"I have come here to enact justice and serve judgment for the harm they have caused with their gu. They crossed the line by using these things against me."

"What I did is my response to the Donovan family, especially Grand Duke Donovan for the harm they inflicted upon my people. The same applies to all of you." Aldrian swept his gaze over the people below.

"You know that I already have animosity with the second prince's faction, and this place is one of my target since this town is the source of the disaster. Even after destroying that underground facility, I am still considering whether to make this entire town experience what you all just witnessed."

Gasps filled the town as a wave of panic began to rise in the hearts of the people. Even now, they could not comprehend how Aldrian had lifted such a massive chunk of land into the air—yet now he claimed he could do the same to the entire town?!

"Have mercy, Your Excellency!"

"Please, Your Excellency, spare us! We had no knowledge of what the Donovan family was doing."

"Spare us, Your Excellency! We didn't take part in the war! Not a single one of us was sent to fight in the civil war!"

"Your Excellency, we had no choice but to obey Grand Duke Donovan!"

Countless pleas filled Aldrian's ears, but he merely scoffed at them. He knew these people were acting this way only because they feared his reputation and strength.

This town, just as Arson had described, was steeped in shady dealings, and its residents were no different. He had sensed it during his earlier stroll while assessing the situation.

Though he had not explored the entire town, what he had seen was astonishing. There was no peace here—only endless competition and conflict. Life in this place seemed cheap, shaped by the town's very nature. Even some children had already been corrupted by a twisted mindset, a sight that made him pity them.

During the civil war, these people cheered for their grand duchy's might and supported Grand Duke Donovan's decision to join the second prince's faction. They were driven by self-interest and greed, naturally siding with the victorious party.

Aldrian was certain that even if they had known the Grand Duke Donovan was responsible for using gu to spread the outbreak, they would have still supported him as long as it brought them victory and benefits.

But the moment they witnessed him wielding enough strength to crush their hopes and lives as easily as killing ants, they wavered, begged for mercy, and desperately tried to distance themselves from the Donovan family.

This was precisely why he had put on such a display when destroying the underground research facility. He had deliberately used an exaggerated method, using gravity laws and earth laws to lift an enormous chunk of land into the air. It was a warning—a deterrent to keep these people from doing anything foolish that might cross his line.

If any of them had believed the rumors about him were exaggerated, a mere stories meant to hype the reputation of the Mysterious Swordsman, then he would engrave the truth into their minds.

The truth that they now stood before a power so great it could crush them at any moment.

"Save your pitiful begging for yourselves. I don't want to hear it from those who live in this place, if I hear your pleas again, I will literally flip this entire town, and I won't let a single one of you escape. I am someone who keeps my word." Aldrian said, his voice carrying an undeniable threat.

The desperate cries for mercy fell silent in an instant. Fear gripped the townspeople, and none dared to make another sound, afraid that speaking further might provoke Aldrian into carrying out his threat. Beads of sweat rolled down their faces as the heavy silence was punctuated only by the sound of nervous gulps.

"However, you people can at least redeem your worthless lives by doing something useful for once," Aldrian continued.

"I have already rescued hundreds of prisoners who were held captive in that place and moved them outside of the eastern wall. I know some of you have already noticed their sudden appearance."

Aldrian then turned his gaze toward the town's guards and several townspeople who had approached the ex-captives. They had been interrogating some of the ex-captives before he lifted the underground facility, an event that had forced them to stop.

"What I want from you all is simple—you must return them to where they belong. I don't care how you do it, but I expect you to send these people back to their homes, to the places they were taken from before they were dragged into that underground facility," Aldrian said, his eyes sweeping over the crowd below.

Among them were several individuals at the Emperor and King stages who had been tailing him. As Aldrian's sharp gaze landed on them, they understood that they, too, were included in his command.

He also glanced at a few figures who remained inconspicuous in the shadows and among the crowd—cultivators at the Emperor and King stages who had not followed him but were still present.

"Or, you could give them a better life. Show them a way to live. That way, your existence would be more meaningful than simply being bandits, scourges, or parasites to others," Aldrian said, not particularly concerned with his words. He merely spoke whatever came to mind.

The people below clenched their teeth, swallowing their dissatisfaction. Under normal circumstances, if someone dared to speak to them with such disrespect, that person would not live to see another day. But before Aldrian? They were nothing more than children being scolded by their elders.

"Oh, I know many of you are displeased by what I just said," Aldrian continued, his gaze sweeping over them. "And I know exactly who each of you is."

His eyes locked onto several individuals, and their faces instantly paled. They hurriedly lowered their heads, some even falling to their knees in a desperate kowtow. Yet, none dared to beg for mercy, still haunted by Aldrian's earlier warning.

Aldrian then shifted his gaze to the rest of the crowd.

"After I'm done dealing with the second prince and his minions, I will return to this place to investigate what you've done to these prisoners. Don't even think about taking advantage of those I've already saved from that place. If I find out that you've neglected your duty or, worse, exploited these people—"

Aldrian swept his gaze over them once more.

"You'd better do whatever you can to escape from me, because once I catch you, you'll wish you were born a pig instead."

The people grew tense, fully aware that this meant they would live the rest of their lives under the constant fear of this man's pursuit. They had no idea how the Mysterious Swordsman would find them if they disobeyed him. The Barisan continent was vast, and finding them here would be like searching for a needle in a haystack.

They also had no knowledge of his influence among the powers of the continent. However, if he wielded significant influence across the territories of the empire, they would be forced to live in hiding underground for the rest of their lives.

Their eyes then shifted to the 'dying' Karl in Aldrian's grasp, still hanging upside down by his feet. Seeing his condition, they couldn't help but shudder once more.

The former prisoners who had heard Aldrian's words felt deeply moved. They had never imagined that they would be saved by someone not only powerful but also driven by such a strong sense of responsibility.

They hadn't expected much after their freedom—after all, they thought simply being freed was already more than they could have hoped for.

To think that their savior would go as far as ensuring they had a future to live on—this was truly a blessing after everything they had endured in the underground facility.

"Thank you, Savior! Thank you for your kindness!"

"Thank you, Your Excellency! Thank you."

"Thank you—"

Aldrian could feel the strong power of faith emanating from these people, and it made him smile inwardly. He could sense their deep gratitude and how they had already come to see him as someone they wanted to follow, someone they believed would always bring them salvation.

"You better remember what I said," Aldrian warned the people before disappearing, leaving them to sigh in relief. His presence had been suffocating, something they never wanted to experience again. Now, all they could do was follow his instructions.

Though they felt frustrated and wronged—having to take care of prisoners they hadn't even known existed until just now—they knew they had no choice but to comply with the Mysterious Swordsman's demands.

They didn't want to risk offending him.

Not long after, the former prisoners began to be cared for by many people in the town. As Aldrian had instructed, they did everything in their power to assist the freed prisoners with whatever they needed after being released from their nightmare.

Thirty seconds ago, in the imperial palace, Prince Wilmar stood before several leaders of noble families, discussing their war strategy. At this moment, he was confident that

Aldrian truly had his hands full with the outbreak problem, allowing them to advance with greater ease in other areas. The time bought by the outbreak is precious, and they need to take advantage of it as effectively as possible.

While the discussions continued, a soldier suddenly ran toward the prince, kneeling before him. He was gasping for breath, as though he had sprinted with all his might just to deliver the message.

"Your Majesty, I bring an urgent report!"

Chapter 447: Panic

The other noble family leaders also turn to look at the low-ranking soldier acting as a messenger.

"Impudent! How dare you barge in without regard for this room's decorum and His Majesty's presence?" one of the earls shouts at the kneeling soldier.

"My apologies, Your Excellency, but this is truly urgent news that requires His Majesty's immediate attention."

Everyone in the room frowns, their curiosity piqued by the soldier's desperate and panicked expression.

Prince Wilmar narrows his eyes at the soldier. The way he rushed in without any regard for formality suggests that something dire has happened.

"What is it?" he asked.

"He is coming!" the soldier gasped.

"Who is coming?" Prince Wilmar responded.

"The mysterious swordsman."

At the mention of the title, everyone's eyes widened in shock. Even Grand Duke Donovan, who stood close to the prince, showed a hint of surprise.

"How is that possible? Isn't the grand duke's plan already in full motion? Shouldn't he be in Caritas dealing with the outbreak? How could he be coming here instead? Does he not care about the fate of those people?" one of the noble leaders asked in astonishment.

After the "plague plan" took effect this morning, the nobles in the second prince's faction finally realized what it truly entailed, a scheme to make the people of Weilmor Barony

suffer from a plague caused by gu infection. It was said that the Donovan family had been secretly developing gu as a weapon for a long time.

They had been assured that this outbreak would force the mysterious swordsman to remain in the eastern regions of the empire to handle the crisis. Based on his past actions, he had always shown deep concern for the safety of the masses and a strong desire to uphold justice.

That was one of the reasons the name and reputation of the mysterious swordsman had become so popular among the masses on the continent. How could he not be? He was strong, constantly fighting devils, and always rescuing people from dire situations—like the Hydra incident and the strange beast attack. From their perspective, a man like him was easy to predict and could be manipulated with the right strategy.

Grand Duke Donovan had analyzed the mysterious swordsman's actions throughout history and devised a plan based on his patterns. With people dying from the gu infection, he would surely do everything in his power to help them.

But now, they were being told that he had abandoned those people and was instead continuing to strike at them?

"We don't know the details, but the mysterious swordsman suddenly appeared in Varuga Town, within the Donovan Grand Duchy, and even destroyed what he claimed to be the Donovan family's secret lab. After that, he declared that he would come for you, Your Majesty."

Hearing this, Prince Wilmar and Grand Duke Donovan were stunned, exchanging glances as if silently questioning each other.

"Did the mysterious swordsman discover the truth about the outbreak?"

Grand Duke Donovan frowned, his expression solemn as he considered the situation.

"Grand Duke Donovan, are you certain you ensured that those people did not leave any signs or proof linking you or your family to this matter?"

A voice transmission fell into Grand Duke Donovan's mind.

"I'm absolutely confident that there is nothing left in those subjects that could reveal even the slightest trace of our involvement. Once they're dead, the evidence dies with them, as they were the only ones who knew about our secret research facility. There is no way the mysterious swordsman could have discovered its existence through them alone," Grand Duke Donovan answered.

"We don't know how that man learned about the facility, but if he does, then it's safe to assume he has uncovered the truth somehow. However, he doesn't seem to care about

the people—despite the outbreak in his city, he continues to charge toward us. I think we're missing something here."

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

"Is there any problem with the connection to the teleportation portal linked to Caritas City or Weimar City?"

"Wait, my lord, let me check." The voice on the other side replied, and after a few moments, it spoke again.

"There is none, my lord. The connection to Caritas and Weimar is stable and without issue."

Hearing this, Grand Duke Donovan frowned. The prince also seemed to understand what Grand Duke Donovan was trying to verify with the teleportation portal's connection. Based on their assumption, the mysterious swordsman would likely impose a heavy quarantine on Caritas due to the outbreak.

Although the mysterious swordsman knew that the outbreak was caused by gu, logically, he would ensure the safety of the city's entry points to prevent any further subjects or outbreaks from spreading outside.

What the Grand Duke had just asked was to verify whether the connection to Caritas was still intact from the capital or not. If their teleportation portal could still connect to Caritas, it meant that Caritas was not under quarantine—and that meant...

"Did that man already contain the outbreak?"

That was the only thought that came to the Grand Duke's mind, and it caused his thoughts to momentarily short-circuit.

These were special gu developed based on the gu created by the devils, with slight modification. The gu was difficult to detect due to its microscopic size, and physicians missed it when attempting to treat the patients, assuming instead that they were suffering from a strange sickness.

But how could the mysterious swordsman know about it? How could he have contained the outbreak so quickly, just hours after it began? Could he be a divine physician, or something?!

His mind raced, trying to figure out how Aldrian did it. If Aldrian really had contained the outbreak, then everything would make sense. Aldrian hadn't abandoned the people of the city; he had simply already solved the problem and gone to strike at the source of the gu. Based on his actions, Grand Duke Donovan could already imagine what would happen next.

"Your Majesty, it looks like we still underestimated the ability of that man," Grand Duke Donovan said.

Prince Wilmar's frown deepened.

"What do you think, Grand Duke Donovan?" he asked.

The Grand Duke sighed and explained his guess about Aldrian's movements and why he seemed to disregard the fate of others. He had already solved the outbreak problem, and it was clear what his next course of action would be. With how decisive Aldrian was, and now that he seemed to know the truth behind the outbreak, it was no surprise he would come straight to their front door.

Prince Wilmar's face turned ugly as he clenched his fist. His options were limited, and the artifact he had used to trap his father and elder brother couldn't be used again for another week. If he had that artifact now, at least he would have something up his sleeve.

As for the legacy artifact of the imperial family, he still hadn't fully refined it, so he couldn't yet unleash its full power.

The leaders of the other noble families also turned ashen as they heard the Grand Duke's explanation. If what he said was true, then they had indeed greatly underestimated the abilities of the mysterious swordsman. Although Grand Duke Donovan's words sounded absurd, it was the only plausible scenario that could have unfolded in Caritas City.

Some of them began to blame Grand Duke Donovan for the reckless "plague plan," having launched it without fully understanding the mysterious swordsman's abilities. Now, this plan had backfired, and it only served to make that man target them directly.

Prince Wilmar touched his temple, feeling deeply frustrated by this turn of events.

"Damn it! How does that man manage to do everything? How the hell does he pull it off? What is he?!" Prince Wilmar thought to himself.

The future he had imagined, full of glory and victory, seemed to slip further away with every move the mysterious swordsman made.

"Damn you," his thoughts drifting to Aldrian's figure.

After a moment of silence, filled with contemplation, Prince Wilmar took out a communication artifact.

"Cut off the teleportation connection from his city and the surrounding city to all other places. Don't ask any questions, just do it," he said into the artifact.

The voice on the other side seemed stunned but still responded. "Understood."

Once the connection was severed, Prince Wilmar paused for a moment before turning to Carlson Harris, the patriarch of the Harris family and the leader of the Golden Swan Commerce, who was also among the nobles present.

"Prepare to hand over Carsius. We can't hold him much longer. If giving him to the mysterious swordsman will make him stop, then we have no choice. It's better than incurring more losses by fighting him," the prince sent in a voice transmission to Carlson.

Carlson was stunned, but he wasn't entirely surprised. He nodded in agreement.

"Yes, Your Majesty."

Although it was a risky move, he didn't see any better options in this situation.

Afterward, Prince Wilmar turned to look at the others.

"We made a mistake in our assessment of that man's abilities, which is why he came directly for us. Our plan has failed because of our lack of information about his capabilities, which has led us to find ourselves in a situation where he is attacking us more directly," he said to them.

"I still have one more option to make that man stop his actions within this empire. However, I'm not sure if it will be enough, so we'll need to prepare more. Since he seems to be coming here, it's better if we wait for him inside the city. We have more defenses and more options here than we would elsewhere."

The other nobles appeared nervous at the thought of having to face a man whose title had already shaken the continent. They could already imagine the massive losses they would incur.

A moment later, another soldier entered and kneeled.

"Your Majesty, there is a guest who wishes to meet you."

Prince Wilmar glanced at the soldier.

"Who?"

"It's—"

"It's me."

Before the soldier could finish, a man's voice cut him off.

Chapter 448: His Trump Card

A middle-aged man with blonde hair entered the room with steady steps. As he stepped inside, everyone widened their eyes, sensing the aura of a peak Emperor-stage expert! Prince Wilmar and Carlson were the most shocked by his appearance. How could they not be, when the man who had just walked in was none other than Cardinal Carsius himself?

If he was here, then he must have completed his seclusion and successfully refined the artifacts he stole from the church!

It seemed he had also made a breakthrough to the peak Emperor stage during his seclusion, making him the strongest cultivator in the empire! Coupled with the church artifacts he had stolen, Prince Wilmar thought that Cardinal Carsius had become a threat to anyone on the continent, including himself since no one could control him.

The others, initially shocked, soon changed their expressions to irritation, turning their heads away so that Cardinal Carsius wouldn't see them. They gritted their teeth inwardly, knowing that this man was the reason they had suffered great losses because of the mysterious swordsman. When they knew that the prince was actually harboring him, they thought he had made a hasty decision. Cardinal Carsius was a wanted man by the church, and this civil war was not the time to add another enemy.

Although they believed that the church would not involve itself in the civil war as long as it did not know the cardinal was here, they still worried about the consequences of hastily placing Cardinal Carsius under the prince's protection.

If the church somehow found out that the cardinal they were searching for was in the empire, and even under the protection of the second prince, it would not stand by idly and would surely involve itself in this conflict.

They still did not understand why the prince continued to protect him despite the heavy losses they had already suffered. Although they had been told that the cardinal could be a great asset in the future, the losses had already far outweighed the benefits at this time.

From their perspective, if the prince had handed this man over to the mysterious swordsman much earlier, they would not have had to make that enigmatic young man their ultimate enemy. They could have made peace more easily and even built a relationship with the mysterious swordsman.

Although Cardinal Carsius had already broken through to the peak Emperor stage, they still could not feel relieved or put their hearts at ease. Normally, they would congratulate him for reaching the peak Emperor stage, but not under the current circumstances.

Now that the mysterious swordsman seemed to be on his way here, it only made them more frustrated. Meanwhile, Cardinal Carsius hadn't done shit all this time—while they had already lost so many personnel and resources.

"Why are you here? Who told you to come out?" Carlson asked with a frown.

Cardinal Carsius smiled at Carlson.

"Why wouldn't I be? I've done what I intended to do, and I just wanted to check the situation after my seclusion."

He then looked toward Prince Wilmar.

"I heard what happened to you and your faction while I was in seclusion. It's truly devastating for you, and I'm very thankful that you kept me safe here."

Hearing Cardinal Carsius speak, everyone felt their anger burn even hotter. He knew their predicament was because of him, yet he didn't seem to care at all.

Cardinal Carsius still smiled, fully aware of their dissatisfaction, yet he continued.

"The involvement of the mysterious swordsman was unexpected, but worry not. Now that I've broken through to the peak Emperor stage, I can help you contain that man. You just need to focus on winning this civil war."

Prince Wilmar only snorted at him, as if he had just heard something amusing. Although the man in front of him was a peak Emperor stage existence, the prince showed no respect toward him. This only made it clear that he was truly pissed off and had little fear of Cardinal Carsius.

After all, the cardinal would not do something so reckless as to kill the prince and seize power for himself—doing so would only be detrimental to him.

"What makes you so confident in yourself? Don't get me wrong, but I wouldn't say something so arrogant if I had to face the mysterious swordsman. Even though you're a peak Emperor stage existence, that man is a monster in his own right. He can unleash the power of a peak Emperor stage cultivator, and he seems to have many cards up his sleeve," Prince Wilmar said.

However, Cardinal Carsius still smiled.

"Oh, of course, I wouldn't speak empty words. After all, I'm well aware of the mysterious swordsman's reputation and strength. Hearing what he did while I was in seclusion gave me a clear picture of just how formidable he is—his strength is not something to be underestimated. But I speak with such confidence because I already have something that can kill him."

Everyone in the room was stunned, and the prince's frown deepened. Something that could kill the mysterious swordsman? Did it have to do with the artifacts he had stolen from the church?

"As you know, I took several of the church's legacy artifacts, and I've already refined them so I can wield their power. After more than a year of refining, I finally succeeded—and in the process, I also broke through to the peak Emperor stage," Cardinal Carsius said as he walked closer to Prince Wilmar.

"Now, do you know which artifact I took from the church?"

The prince's expression remained unchanged as he thought about it. It was true that he didn't know what kind of artifact Cardinal Carsius had brought here. The cardinal had only mentioned stealing artifacts from the church when he first asked for protection.

From the way he spoke now, it seemed that the artifact was something capable of changing the tide of battle.

Too lazy to entertain this man because of his current mood, the prince waved his hand dismissively, as if uninterested in his theatrics.

"Enough with the nonsense. What exactly makes you so confident in facing the mysterious swordsman? What artifact did you bring here?" the prince asked.

Cardinal Carsius shrugged. "You're truly no fun. But I understand how you feel, so I'll show you myself."

After that, he took something out from his storage ring. The moment the artifact was revealed to the nobles, they were shocked by the overwhelming aura it exuded. A powerful wave of energy swept through the entire room and even beyond, reaching the entire imperial palace.

Everyone in the palace could sense the holy aura and the immense pressure of a high divine-grade artifact!

Without exception, everyone inside the room was utterly stunned. To think that the artifact Cardinal Carsius had stolen was a high divine-grade artifact—didn't that mean he had taken the church's main legacy artifact?

And from the artifact Cardinal Carsius now held before them, they finally recognized its identity.

Seeing their reactions, Cardinal Carsius displayed a satisfied smile.

In his grasp was a two-meter-long white-golden spear, its surface adorned with beautifully engraved runes. A symbol of the Heavenly Direction Church was etched onto

the spear's blade, and the sacred aura it exuded made anyone who laid eyes on it feel an instinctive sense of piety toward the heavens.

"I suppose you recognize this famous artifact—the very weapon known for annihilating a massive army of devils during the great war three million years ago," Cardinal Carsius said. "At that time, the main territory of the Heavenly Direction Church was one of the few strongholds that managed to resist the devil army when they nearly conquered the entire continent. And that was only possible thanks to the combination of this spear and... this."

With that, he took out another artifact, holding it in his other hand.

The others were shocked once again at the appearance of another divine-grade artifact, though this one was "only" of middle divine grade.

The newly revealed artifact was a white-golden staff, its tip adorned with a radiant blue crystal. It was equal in length to the spear, creating a striking pair.

"When the great war against the devils broke out, the 32nd Pope wielded these two artifacts together. Their combined power was said to have made even the massive devil army tremble, preventing them from recklessly sweeping through the church's territory.

Even though the devils seemed endless and overwhelmingly strong, none dared to face the Pope directly while he held these artifacts.

The staff that weakened the devils and the spear that annihilated everything in its path—two artifacts that perfectly complemented each other."

That was the story some of the nobles recalled when they thought about the great war from three million years ago.

The people in the room recalled the legend of the church's artifacts that powerful enough to withstand the massive devil armies during the great war. And now, as they laid eyes on the spear and staff before them, they finally understood what Cardinal Carsius had been implying.

"Ladies and gentlemen, I present to you—the Heaven's Punishment Spear and the Heavenly Sovereign Sanctuary Staff," Cardinal Carsius declared with pride.

Chapter 449: Slight Hindrance

At Varuga, the situation remained tense after Aldrian's threat. Many influential figures in the city had already arrived to see the hundreds of people Aldrian had rescued from the underground facility. They began assisting them, attending to their needs in order to fulfill Aldrian's command.

For some of the city's powerful individuals, helping these hundreds of people was not difficult—as long as they had the will to do so. And Aldrian had already instilled that will in them.

While the city still simmered with tension and its people rushed to carry out the task Aldrian had given them, the man himself was already standing in front of the teleportation station operator. The operator trembled in fear, and although Aldrian looked at him with a calm gaze, it only made the man more terrified.

The people nearby had already distanced themselves, too afraid to come close to Aldrian. After vanishing following his order and threat, he suddenly reappeared at the teleportation station, clearly intending to move on to his next destination.

Karl was still in Aldrian's grasp, though he looked close to death. Unconscious, his breathing was shallow, and his body was covered in blood and wounds. His limbs were bent at unnatural angles, causing many onlookers to flinch at the sight.

From their expressions, it was clear they believed Aldrian was keeping Karl barely alive—suspended between life and death—just to prolong his suffering.

"So, you can't connect the teleportation portal to the capital?" Aldrian asked calmly, his gaze fixed on the trembling station operator.

"Y-Yes... but please, believe me, Your Excellency," the operator stammered, his voice shaking with fear. "I didn't lie to you. I suddenly can't establish a connection to the capital city, Losaris. From what I can tell, the teleportation station there seems to have shut down its operations. Losaris is basically isolated now."

Aldrian could tell the operator wasn't lying. He already had a good idea why Prince Wilmar had decided to isolate the capital. After such a grand announcement and threat, it would be impossible for word not to reach the prince. Aldrian figured Wilmar had already heard of his arrival in Varuga and had begun preparing countermeasures—shutting down the teleportation station was likely the first of them.

Although it wouldn't completely stop him from reaching the capital, it would buy Prince Wilmar some time to come up with a solution, something Aldrian found amusing. He was curious to see what the prince or anyone in his faction had prepared for his arrival once he knocked on their door.

"Where is the closest location to Losaris that can still be connected from here?" Aldrian asked.

"W-Wait, Your Excellency. Let me check," the operator replied, before turning to the mechanical console in front of him, the control panel for the teleportation station. He worked in silence for several tense minutes before glancing up at Aldrian, his expression full of nervous tension.

"Your Excellency, my apologies, but it seems I can't connect to anywhere near the capital," the operator said, voice strained. "The closest available location is the city of Bermin, which lies in what used to be the Belany family's territory. It was once ruled by Marquess Belany, but since he sided with the rebel faction, the second prince's forces destroyed the family and executed their entire bloodline."

He hesitated before continuing.

"However, Bermin is still quite far from the central region where the capital is located. Even if you were to fly directly, it would take over a month to reach Losaris from there. That's the best option I can offer, sir."

Aldrian nodded. The second prince was indeed smart and decisive in his choice. Isolating the capital and the surrounding cities like that could be detrimental to the people in the affected areas, yet he still took the risk.

By cutting off all external connections, the prince had also made it difficult to receive reinforcements from outside the central region. If he needed support from distant territories, he would either have to wait much longer or rely on rare, expensive alternatives like a flying fortress to reach the capital quickly.

It was a double-edged decision, but the fact that the second prince was willing to take it only showed how desperate he had become in the face of the current situation.

"Alright, just send me there," Aldrian said. In the end, it didn't matter. He would reach the capital one way or another. A slight delay meant nothing—he would come for the second prince regardless.

"Understood, sir."

The operator adjusted the portal's destination, his fingers moving quickly over the control panel. Once it was ready, he looked up nervously.

"It's ready, sir."

Aldrian gave a slight nod and stepped closer to the portal. But before entering, he turned his head and glanced toward the onlookers watching him from a distance.

"Remember what I told you all," he said before stepping into the portal, leaving behind many tense gazes fixed on his back.

The area had remained silent the entire time, with only Aldrian's conversation with the station operator breaking the stillness. Once he vanished from sight, the tension in the air eased slightly, and quiet murmurs slowly returned to the crowd.

Even with a mask covering his face, his presence alone was overwhelming—commanding enough to make some feel as though they should revere him, even worship him. They didn't know what fate awaited the empire, but judging by the weight of what they had just witnessed and what he had said, they knew one thing for certain: news would soon come from the capital.

While the Atria Empire was engulfed in its own kind of "festivity," the atmosphere within the Church's main territory remained relatively calm. Nothing major had occurred since Aldrian left the main Church's territory.

The only topic that sparked widespread interest was the recent chaos unfolding within the Atria Empire. News from the empire had shaken the entire continent over the past week. It was confirmed that a mysterious swordsman was involved in the civil war, and even more shocking, the possible existence of the traitor from the Church, Cardinal Carsius hiding in Atria.

Even more troubling, it seemed that this traitor was under the protection of the second prince himself.

The news had yet to be fully verified, as it stemmed solely from the declaration of the mysterious swordsman. Even so, his words alone were enough to stir unrest within the Church's territory. Many were now pressuring the main Church to take action against the second prince.

Though they weren't sure whether the mysterious swordsman was truly acting in support of the Church, given that he was targeting the alleged traitor, they still believed his claim couldn't be ignored.

At the very least, they demanded the Church send someone to confront the second prince directly and seek confirmation. After all, the swordsman did not seem like the type to make baseless declarations, and if there was even a sliver of truth in his words, the Church needed to treat the matter with utmost seriousness.

Because of all this, many high-ranking members within the main Church began urging Pope Claudius to take action against the Atria Empire. Though the Church's territory was smaller in size compared to Atria, its forces were undoubtedly superior in quality.

If the second prince was truly harboring a traitor, then the civil war could no longer be considered merely an internal affair of the Atria Empire.

However, Pope Claudius maintained a composed stance. He assured the Church's upper ranks—and the broader public—that they need not worry about the traitor. He had his own plan in motion, one he claimed would guarantee the traitor's capture.

Reckless military intervention, would only lead to unnecessary loss of resources and ultimately harm their position.

Although some were dissatisfied with the pope's response, they still chose to place their trust in his words. After all, he remained their respected leader.

Currently, that very leader was inside the Paladins training hall, adjacent to the Paladin Knights' barracks. It was a space typically used by the Paladins for indoor training, offering a more private and comfortable setting than the open grounds outside.

The pope was not alone. Not far from him, a beautiful golden-haired woman was going through light training exercises. He watched her with pride and a touch of emotion in his eyes, clearly moved by how her movements had grown more fluid with each passing time.

Ever since Angelica expressed her desire to learn how to fight, she had been undergoing training directly supervised by him and occasionally by Arthur.

At first, he was concerned it might be too early for her. She had only just begun walking again, and he thought she should wait until her steps became steadier before attempting any kind of exercise.

But he saw with his own eyes just how determined Angelica was. Day after day, she pushed herself, practicing how to walk, doing small exercises on her own without even telling him.

Witnessing that kind of resolve touched his heart. In the end, he couldn't bring himself to stop her. Instead, he chose to personally oversee her training whenever possible, and entrusted Arthur to guide her in his place whenever his duties kept him away.

At this time, Angelica wore a tight training outfit that accentuated the graceful curves of her body. Her flawless proportions, along with the glistening sweat on her skin and face, made her a captivating sight, one that could easily steal the breath of any onlooker.

That was precisely why the pope insisted she train in private, allowing only his most trusted men like Arthur to supervise her training.

She moved with good agility as she worked on her motor coordination and reflexes through a specialized obstacle simulation. The platform beneath her feet functioned as a self-training system, designed to improve movement and reaction speed.

She was currently dodging movement of ball of light that shot across the floor at random intervals, each one increasing in speed and unpredictability.

However, after a few moments, a ball of light struck her leg, forcing her to stop. She let out a small sigh of disappointment just as all the lights on the training floor disappeared.

Clap, Clap!

"Good job. You've improved so much compared to yesterday, I have no doubt you'll clear this level in no time," Pope Claudius said, his voice filled with pride.

Chapter 450: Her Excessive worry

Pope Claudius handed a small towel to Angelica so she could wipe the sweat from her face. He offered her a warm smile, his eyes filled with pride as she gratefully accepted the towel. After dabbing her face once, she let out a soft sigh.

"I thought I could pass this level today, but it looks like I was too optimistic," she said, glancing toward the training platform.

"Don't be too hard on yourself. For someone who could barely walk not long ago, this is already far beyond my expectations," Pope Claudius replied with a smile.

Angelica continued to wipe her face and neck until the pope spoke again.

"It seems something happened in the Caritas city."

Angelica froze. Her expression quickly turned to worry.

"What happened, Father? Is he alright?"

The pope sighed. "Look at you—the first question you ask is about his well-being, not anyone else's. Poor people, you don't even spare a thought for them. Are you already—"

"Father!"

"Hahaha." Angelica blushed as the pope laughed. He truly enjoyed teasing this woman, whom he had long considered his daughter.

Since Aldrian left, she often asked about his situation and well-being. She sought out any news related to him, which made Pope Claudius sigh, she had never shown this much concern for anyone else, not even close, the way she did for Aldrian. Well, except him of course.

However, he neither blamed nor scolded her for focusing so much on Aldrian. After all, Aldrian had also done so much for their well-being and for the church as a whole. He was also the one who had given her the ability to walk and see again. It was only natural that her attention would be drawn to him, making his presence deeply etched in her mind.

When news of the mysterious swordsman's involvement in the civil war began to spread, Angelica couldn't help but worry. The pope felt worry as well, because in his heart, he believed Aldrian was doing all of this to pursue the traitor, Cardinal Carsius. After all, they were among the few who knew the truth, Aldrian was the mysterious swordsman.

His fame had grown ever since, and by now, many people across the continent were familiar with a sketch of his face. Although the drawing wasn't a perfect match, it still resembled him well enough. They still didn't understand what Aldrian intended by making himself the center of attention this time, but it seemed he no longer cared much about maintaining his air of mystery.

Pope Claudius suspected that Aldrian was nearly ready to reveal himself to the world—not as the "mysterious swordsman," but as *Aldrian*.

"Alright, alright. Here's the news I just received from that city. Of course Aldrian is fine—do you really think anyone could stop him with his strength?" the pope said. "I'm more worried about the fate of the second prince's faction. What if Aldrian goes too far and slaughters them all for refusing his demands? We'd lose a significant portion of Atria's human resources right when the time of the prophecy draws near."

"This morning, Caritas City was struck by a strange outbreak of illness, which turned out to be caused by a gu infection. They said the gu was unlike anything they'd seen before. Thousands have already died, and the number kept rising—until Aldrian finally managed to contain it."

Upon hearing that, Angelica felt a wave of relief. As long as Aldrian was safe, she could breathe easier. She couldn't help but think about him constantly. Ever since the first time they met, there had been something different about him—something she couldn't quite grasp. At first, she thought it was because Aldrian was the one mentioned in the prophecy, someone who naturally held a special place in her mind.

However, as time went on, she realized that her attention toward him wasn't normal anymore. She always wanted to know how he was doing, what he was working on, and what he wanted. It only grew worse after Aldrian healed her eyes and legs, sometimes, he even appeared in her dreams.

Sometimes, he appeared with the same face he had now. Other times, his face was different. And yet, she always knew it was still him. No matter the face, her heart would race whenever she saw him, even just in her mind. It made her feel shy and it was the first time she had ever felt that way.

"I'm glad he's alright and that the problem was resolved... but what if we went there?" Angelica asked, her tone tinged with worry. "Even if he managed to contain the outbreak, what if some of it still remains? It could still endanger people in the future and cause trouble for Aldrian."

Pope Claudius sighed at his daughter, who seemed overly worried about Aldrian.

"You want to go there in person? I don't think that's necessary. With his abilities, he can solved the problem without taking too much time. Many have even said that what he did in Caritas, where he healed so many people at once, was nothing short of a miracle."

"Our people at the church branch in Caritas described Aldrian as a divine being who descended to the mortal world to help the suffering. With his unfathomable abilities, he healed everyone at once. Many were completely recovered, and countless voices rose in praise. His presence in Caritas has become revered, to the point where some already see him as a god, especially among the mortal population."

The pope paused for a moment after recounting the report.

"With that kind of reputation, I don't think he needs our interference. I believe he knows his own limits. If he needs help, he'll ask for it. But if you suddenly show up in Caritas, we might end up causing unnecessary trouble for him. Remember your status, my dear. You are the Saintess of the Church. Your appearance in Caritas would cause an uproar—because a visit like that is far from ordinary."

"Aldrian would be implicated by it, as many rumors would arise about his connection to the Church as a whole and to you specifically. Heck, even now, many are already suspicious of his ties to us. If his connection to the Church were confirmed, it could disrupt every plan Aldrian has carefully laid out in his mind, because he would have to consider the Church's position in every action he takes."

The pope paused for a moment, letting Angelica take in his words.

"You don't want to give him trouble, do you?" he asked gently.

Angelica lowered her head and nodded.

Pope Claudius smiled as he gently stroked her head.

"Good. Just believe in him—he can overcome anything in his path. He is the Heaven's chosen one, after all."

Angelica could only sigh and turn her gaze toward the other presences in the hall. She and Pope Claudius weren't the only ones inside the training hall. Two other figures sat on the side of the platform, quietly observing their conversation.

One was a man with short black hair, and the other a woman with long black hair. Though they gave off no noticeable aura, Angelica knew better than to underestimate them. Both were emperor-stage beasts in human form.

The great Peng and the Phoenix, now in their human forms, sat quietly within the church grounds. These were the very creatures Aldrian had summoned through the Devil's Summoning Formation. Beings as powerful as they were carrying the devil energy inside them, had stepped into the heart of the Church and acted as if nothing were out of place. And yet, no one dared to stop them.

Their presence within the main church's ground was an event that had never occurred before.

There was a reason for that. To avoid suspicion, Pope Claudius had given them new identities. He informed the other church members that these two were beasts Aldrian had obtained during his raid on a devil's base hidden within church territory. Since that time, they had become Aldrian's mounts.

Most of the members accepted the explanation without question. After all, it involved Aldrian, and his position in the hearts of the Church's followers was so strong that no one dared to challenge it.

Even though there were many things suspicious about the two beasts, especially their overwhelming strength as emperor-stage beings, no one looked into it further. As long as Aldrian desired it, they would follow without hesitation.

Angelica was truly amazed that Aldrian had been able to summon beasts like these, since she already knew their true identities.

The great Peng and the Phoenix continued to gaze in her direction, their faces blank and expressionless, as if they were watching something uninteresting. In truth, they were always present whenever Angelica trained. They simply wished to pass the time and observe the activities of this woman who seemed to have a close connection with their master.

Since she knew their true identities and their connection to Aldrian, Angelica had already tried several times to speak with them, hoping to build some kind of conversation or relationship. However, their silent nature was incredibly difficult to break through. They never initiated conversation, which frustrated her deeply.

Forget about speaking to her— even the great Peng and the Phoenix rarely spoke to each other. Even when only the two of them alone, they still preferred silence.

But this time, something was different.

The Phoenix suddenly broke the silence and spoke first.

"Have you been experiencing strange visions since we heard the guqin sounds?" she asked the great Peng.

