

The Shining Star Above The Heaven

#Chapter 51:60

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Chapter 51 - Duel Against One of The Great Swordmasters

"Fight me."

The moment those words left Arthur's mouth, the church delegation felt a shiver run down their spines. They tried to reason with Aldrian, but the smile that never left his face only deepened their unease. Even Arthur, as he looked at Aldrian's smiling face, wondered what the young viscount was hiding.

When Arthur had studied the sword will on Balin, he had sensed a lingering holy energy, the same kind that Aldrian had displayed. But how could this viscount-stage 'boy' wield such a formidable sword will? Was there someone else with that kind of holy energy? Arthur felt he needed proof—something tangible to make him believe that Aldrian could truly be their savior. Until then, his doubts would remain. As for Aldrian, he was thoroughly enjoying the turn of events.

"Now I have a sparring partner to test my comprehension and newfound power," he thought.

"Fight you? I'm afraid the result will be devastating for you. I'm only warning you because this junior is concerned about Sir Knight's well-being," Aldrian said. Although it sounded arrogant, he truly meant what he said.

The delegation was stunned by his remark. None of them were sword cultivators capable of understanding the complexities of the sword will on Balin. Though Aldrian was the one who had defeated the Hydra, he was about to face one of their paladins and one of the ten great swordmasters of the continent. They didn't fully grasp Aldrian's capabilities, but they feared he was making a grave mistake by equating the mid-king stage Hydra with Arthur.

Arthur, who heard Aldrian's arrogant warning, narrowed his eyes. He felt underestimated, and there was no one who could talk to him like that since he became a Paladin, moreover after he became one of the ten great swordmasters of the continent. Becoming a Paladin required passing the church's demanding and difficult parameters.

You have to be a weapon-specialized cultivator with a minimum cultivation level of the duke stage. In addition to that, you must be highly proficient with your weapon. For example, a sword cultivator who wants to become a Paladin must possess sword intent. You also need to have a high purity of holy energy, something that has become increasingly difficult in recent years within the church.

With all these requirements, it's no wonder the Paladin Knights have never had more than 20 members. Arthur has been a Paladin for more than 10,000 years, during which time he has gained extensive battle experience.

He earned his title as one of the ten great swordmasters when he used a large-scale destruction technique with his sword to kill numerous devils during a mission in the northern territory. Since then, he was revered, even placed among the top five of the ten great swordmasters. Even demonic cultivators admitted that he was nearly strong enough to fight toe-to-toe with the Sword Demon.

"You don't have to worry about that. Do you want to do it or not?" Arthur asked, his tone irritated as he dropped his politeness.

"Sure, why not? At least I already warned you. This is also a good opportunity for me to fight one of the paladins knight," Aldrian said, glancing at Princess Sylphia behind him. She still looked confused about why this had escalated into a challenge, but when she met Aldrian's blue eyes, she sighed and reluctantly accepted the situation.

She left the room to meet her father and inform him of what had transpired in the meeting.

Back to Archbishop Ravin, he blankly watched as the two men prepared to duel each other. The others from the church shared more or less the same opinion as the Archbishop.

"How did we end up like this?" he thought. He only wanted to negotiate with the man who possessed the golden energy and bring him to their side. Now, how had this meeting turned into a duel? Archbishop Ravin noticed Arthur's intense stare toward Aldrian. He knew how passionate Arthur was about swordsmanship, and after sensing the sword will left by Aldrian, it was clear that Arthur wanted to meet the person behind it.

"Why did you suddenly come up with the idea of a duel? Isn't there a more civilized way to prove he created that sword will?" he wondered. Then, he redirected his gaze toward Aldrian.

"And why did you so readily accept his nonsense?"

Aldrian's face was full of smiles, while Arthur's expression was anything but amused. After feeling underestimated, Arthur felt an overwhelming urge to punch Aldrian in the face multiple times. The calm smile and relaxed demeanor really irritated him. But aside from all that, this was also a proving ground for Arthur. If this 'boy' was truly the one, then Arthur could measure how he fared against someone of that caliber.

After waiting for a while, Princess Sylphia returned to the room and said to Aldrian, "It's ready."

Without further ado, they were escorted to another training ground, one far more expansive than the one Aldrian usually used for his practice. This place was located outside the main imperial palace complex and was accessible to elves outside the imperial family for training. Due to its vastness, it was also used to train the elven army.

When they arrived, many elves were already seated around the training ground, eager to watch the duel. Among the spectators were princes of the Ivory Empire, Arion Evergreen, Aran Evergreen, and two others, Trian Evergreen and Alaris Evergreen, the third and second sons of Emperor Ladwin. They were just as eager to witness the capabilities of Aldrian and one of the great swordmasters.

The training ground had suddenly become the center of attention, with more spectators still arriving. Aldrian noticed the princes smiling and giving him a thumbs-up, and then he saw Emperor Ladwin and Empress Elaria, who were also eagerly anticipating the duel.

The church members were also shocked by the number of elves that had gathered. The level of enthusiasm to watch what they considered 'only' a spar was beyond their expectations. Almost all members of the imperial family were present, including the Emperor and Empress. There was no way all these important figures were here just because of Arthur's appearance—Aldrian must have already built a strong relationship with the elves.

This clearly showed that Aldrian's position among the elves was already high, meaning the imperial family was well aware of his existence when they arrived and likely wanted to keep him for themselves!

Aldrian stood on one side of the platform, holding an ordinary mid-sky grade sword he had borrowed. He had already asked Princess Sylphia to bring him a sword to use because, for a specific reason, he couldn't bring out his own.

They entered the square-shaped platform and stood facing each other from a distance of about 100 meters—a distance at which their cultivation levels would cause them to clash instantly once the duel began.

"Do you want me to lower my cultivation to make it fairer?" Arthur asked.

"No, Sir Knight. I'd prefer you keep your original cultivation. I want it that way," Aldrian answered.

"You will regret this," Arthur warned.

Arthur unsheathed his sword from its beautifully crafted golden scabbard, revealing it in all its glory. The longsword, with its golden hand guard and intricate craftsmanship, radiated a sacred aura, amplified by the holy energy it emitted. This was the sword that had made him famous, the "Heaven's Judgment Sword."

Aldrian, with his ordinary mid-sky grade sword, also unsheathed his weapon and coated it with his energy to make it sturdier. When both were ready, the referee—who, surprisingly, was the emperor himself, addressed them.

"This duel is meant to be a proving ground. The winner will be declared when his opponent either surrenders or is unable to continue the fight. Killing is prohibited." The emperor then looked at both combatants and, seeing their nods, finally shouted,

"Begin!"

The platform was already covered by an invisible shield capable of withstanding the power of a mid-stage emperor, allowing the duelists to go all out if they wished. The moment the emperor's voice dropped, Arthur moved with such speed that he seemed to disappear, slashing his sword toward Aldrian. Aldrian, who saw the movement, quickly blocked the incoming attack with his own sword.

Clang!

Their swords met, but Arthur was surprised that Aldrian blocked it with ease. Although Arthur hadn't yet unleashed his full power, the way Aldrian deflected the attack made it seem like child's play. Determined, Arthur increased his speed and power for the next strike, slashing toward the other side of Aldrian's neck—only to have it blocked again. They continued clashing for a few moments, but Arthur still couldn't break through.

This truly astonished him, as he could clearly sense that the man before him was only at the Viscount stage. When their swords met, Arthur could feel that Aldrian was only at the peak of the Viscount stage. The strange thing was, even though Arthur was sure he had more power in their clashes, it felt like his strikes were hitting solid metal, making their strength seem more or less equal.

Another thing Arthur noted was that the power of the energy coating Aldrian's sword was sufficient to block his Heaven's Judgment Sword. The notion that a peak heaven-grade sword could be blocked by a mid-sky grade sword seemed ridiculous, yet it was the reality before him.

"How did he do it? Is that golden energy really that powerful?" Arthur wondered as he continued attacking Aldrian from all sides, while Aldrian merely dodged or occasionally blocked his strikes. What Arthur didn't realize was that each time their swords clashed, Aldrian was doubling his sword's defense with space laws to reduce the impact. It was impossible for a mid-sky grade sword to block a peak heaven-grade sword with just its golden energy coating.

His golden energy, which carried stronger holy power that coated his sword also blurred Arthur's senses toward it, preventing him from realizing that space laws were at work. Confused, Arthur finally stopped his attack. With a swift movement, he jumped away from Aldrian and prepared to release his first technique. He activated his sword intent and performed a slashing move:

Heavenly Slash

The golden energy slash flew toward Aldrian at high speed, and Arthur moved behind it to execute a stabbing motion.

Heavenly Stab

The attack created another energy strike in the shape of a line, further amplifying the power of his assault. Aldrian smiled as he observed the technique.

"Finally, he's released his technique," he thought.

He released his sword intent, making a swift upward slash that split the incoming technique into two. Arthur was stunned when he sensed Aldrian's sword intent and noticed his Heaven's Judgment Sword trembling in his hand.

"His sword intent is stronger than mine, even making the Heaven's Judgment Sword react."

Finally, he adopted his most solemn expression. The intensity and sharpness of Aldrian's sword intent were so great that Arthur felt he would be cut if he got too close. Of course, this was only an illusion, as sword intent reflects a cultivator's comprehension of their power and the sword power, as well as their connection with the sword. With his own sword trembling, Arthur realized that Aldrian's sword intent was stronger.

"No, it won't do." With Aldrian showing his sword intent he finally knows that his sword will most likely also monstrous that he think of that sword will outside Balin.

"If you are truly the one who can unleash that technique..." Arthur took a steady position.

Heavenly Aura!

The Light of Guardian!

Sword Will!

His aura and pressure suddenly surged, creating a blaring force that swept over the onlookers, causing their faces to be buffeted by the wind. His body shone with a golden light, giving him a holy aura. He then raised his sword with both hands above his head. Nearby, swords within a kilometer of the platform trembled and began to float from their scabbards, pointing toward the training ground, shocking both the onlookers and those carrying the swords.

The church members, witnessing the imposing stance and the rising aura and pressure, were astonished by the technique Arthur was about to unleash.

"Arthur, what are you doing?!" Archbishop Ravin shouted, standing up from his seat, fearful that this could escalate into something they did not want.

Emperor Ladwin and a few others, familiar with the legend of this technique, were also shocked and looked at Aldrian with concern. The technique that earned Arthur his fame was first unleashed when he was still a high Grand Duke, capable of killing low Emperor stage devils in their devil forms.

"Father, stop the duel!" Princess Sylphia cried out from her seat.

Emperor Ladwin wanted to stop the duel but hesitated when he saw Aldrian staring at him with a smile before turning his gaze back to Arthur. Ladwin wanted to trust Aldrian, but this technique was something else. The technique that defeated the Hydra was powerful, but Arthur's technique could kill that Hydra many times over. The sword in Arthur's hand was now enveloped in a massive pillar of light that rose to the sky, breaking through the shield ceiling, which could no longer contain the power.

"So you're unleashing your ultimate technique after seeing my sword intent, huh?" Aldrian thought. Despite the immense pressure that made his body feel heavy, he maintained his smile, as if it were no big deal.

"I have to admit you are strong, stronger than that Hydra," Aldrian said, "so I have to respond in kind, right?"

The onlookers were tense as the duel escalated to a life-or-death confrontation. Many wanted to intervene, but suddenly they saw Aldrian sheathing his sword and closing his eyes. They were puzzled by his action and wondered if Aldrian was about to surrender.

Arthur also observed Aldrian's actions and initially thought he was about to surrender. However, he was suddenly jolted by the intense trembling of his sword, which almost caused him to lose control of his technique. The surrounding flying swords also quivered, pointing toward Aldrian, and the pressure became overwhelmingly heavy.

Unbeknownst to them, the entire Evergreen city felt the pressure, though it was less intense than at the training ground. Swords throughout the city flew into the air, pointing toward the training ground.

The onlookers were shocked by this phenomenon, their expressions filled with horror as they gazed at Aldrian. Emperor Ladwin and the elders of the Evergreen family quickly raised barriers around the onlookers to protect them, astonished by the sheer power emanating from Aldrian. They had never witnessed the true power of their chosen one firsthand, but they could finally see it now.

Arthur, who had seen Aldrian close his eyes, was also struggling under the immense pressure. He was barely able to maintain his technique, gritting his teeth as sweat streamed down his face.

"This sword will! Then it's now or never!" Arthur then making a downward slash to unleash his technique.

Heavenly Sword of Destruction

At the same moment, Aldrian opened his eyes and unsheathed his sword, executing a horizontal slash.

Slash of The End

Chapter 52 - The Chaos (Again)

The giant golden energy slash met the light pillar, and the result was undeniable. The pillar instantly split in two and collapsed, accompanied by the sound of shattering glass. Arthur widened his eyes and quickly raised his barrier, but as he watched the golden slash move at an incredible speed towards him, the pressure rooted him in place. He felt as if death was already knocking at his door. However, he then saw the golden slash pass 50 meters above his head.

He realized that Aldrian had directed his technique upwards, towards the sky, and he could only stand there blankly. The energy continued traveling east across the continent, heading towards the sea, destined to keep flying who knows where. The training ground was in ruins, and the people who had braced themselves for the impact were stunned by the overwhelming power that they believed would have destroyed the eastern region.

But the problem didn't end there. A crack in space appeared in its wake, unfortunately triggering spatial storms that threatened to suck in anything nearby. Aldrian's strike, far stronger than when he used it against the Hydra, caused the space to collapse more severely, creating a chaotic void and unleashing spatial storms that wreaked havoc on the surroundings.

Aldrian quickly manipulated the surrounding energy, especially the spatial energy supported by his mastery of spatial laws, to close the crack as fast as possible and prevent any casualties. Arthur, who was closest, had already reinforced his feet and body with energy to keep from being sucked into the spatial storm. The crack closed rapidly and disappeared completely a few seconds later.

Emperor Ladwin had already activated the defense mechanism to protect the people, aided by the blessing of the Evergreen World Tree. He had braced himself to witness the destruction of part of his city, but fortunately, Aldrian directed his attack towards the sky and demonstrated exceptional control over spatial energy. The Emperor was truly astounded by the power of Aldrian's technique.

"What prophecy? Darkness crouching the land? What darkness could stand before such absolute power?!" he thought.

If that strike had been aimed at him, he was certain he would be dead, and even the true body of the World Tree would have been severed.

"It must be a divine technique—it has to be! There's no way that kind of power is merely a heaven technique. But according to the records, divine techniques invoke phenomena from both heaven and earth. So why didn't this one?"

Divine techniques had not appeared on this continent for a very long time—not because such techniques didn't exist, but because no one had been able to comprehend and master them. They didn't know why, but whenever they tried to grasp a divine technique, they were blocked by an invisible force that prevented them from understanding it.

Every imperial family possesses such a technique in their arsenal, but no matter how brilliant the person who attempts to comprehend it, they never succeed. In the end, these techniques remain stored in their treasuries, waiting for the day someone can finally use them.

For everyone here, it wasn't an exaggeration to consider Aldrian's technique a divine one. They didn't know that the power he unleashed was that of his Ivory Empire's domain. If he had added the secret realm domain to this technique, the result would have been even more catastrophic. To those who had never experienced power like this, it was undeniably a divine technique.

Aldrian looked at the crumbling sword in his hand, unable to withstand the power of his technique, and sighed.

"Well, that was a good fight, and the result is good too," he said, glancing at Arthur and the surrounding area. He had really made a mess of this place, and the looks people were giving him were, to say the least, expected from those who had never witnessed such power.

Arthur dropped to the ground, sitting and gasping for breath, his blonde hair disheveled. His energy was more than half depleted after using all those techniques. He looked at Aldrian, who had just unleashed a technique that made him feel something he had long forgotten—fear. The power of that slash, the feeling of helplessness and despair that enveloped his heart, aroused fear in anyone who dared to stand before this singularity.

He smiled, but it could only be seen as a mocking smile, directed at his own ignorance and foolishness. Was he supposed to block that thing? He feared he would have been dead even before the technique touched him. The onlookers finally began to assess their surroundings, stilling their racing hearts. Today was an unexpected day for them—they had witnessed another divine technique.

A few minutes earlier,

The sun was already in the western sky, moving toward her place of sinking. The sky had taken on a slight orange hue, signaling that the day was nearly over and night was preparing to take its place.

Balin City operated as usual; nothing significant had happened in the past few months, aside from the occasional visit from high-level cultivators, but nothing particularly noteworthy. Inside Balin's mayoral mansion, Livrin was working as usual in his office. The chaotic aftermath of the Hydra incident had passed, and in recent days, he had been able to rest his mind. He closed his eyes to take a nap after reviewing some documents in front of him, as it was nearly sunset.

Suddenly, he opened his eyes. He could hear people outside talking in a noisy, agitated manner. Looking out his window, he saw the confused expressions on several faces. Sensing that something was amiss, he left his mansion and flew into the sky over Balin. He could sense that many people in the city were confused as they discussed their swords. Spotting a particular person below, he descended toward them.

"Sorry to disturb you, but what's going on? Why is everyone so confused?" Livrin asked.

The person he addressed was stunned by the sudden appearance of the elf but quickly responded.

"My sword trembled violently for a few seconds. I don't know where the source is, but we're sure it's a strong sword will—like the one outside the city! It seems like the entire city felt it."

Livrin fell silent, thinking. *"Sword will? But I can't sense any major fight in the city, it should be—"* He then remembered someone. *"Did he do something again? Why is he always affecting so many people?"* he sighed.

"Alright, thank you," he said, before flying up to a point where he could see beyond the city walls in the direction of the residual sword will. He noticed that the people who had been meditating had stopped and were now standing, talking amongst themselves. The remaining ten great swordmasters, who were still there, were also standing, seemingly deep in thought.

"Well, whatever. If they move out, it'll be good! I'll have more peace of mind."

Without much further inspection, Livrin returned to his mansion.

In a tavern in Thonias City, many customers were enjoying their drinks and food. Among them was a man in a black robe, wearing a conical straw hat that covered his face. He seemed to be content, quietly sipping his drink with his sword resting beside him, not engaging with the people around him.

Suddenly, his sword trembled. Without hesitating for even a split second, he vanished from his seat, surprising the people nearby.

He reappeared on the rooftop of a building in Thonias, staring intently in one direction. Then, he glanced around at the people below, who were already in a state of confusion about what had just happened.

"Found you," he murmured before disappearing once again.

The forest covers 85% of the Ivory Empire, a testament to how the elves have been blessed with power over this land. Many parts of the empire are left as natural forests, untouched by elves or humans. In a region where the forest stretches unbroken to the horizon, a man with a giant axe on his back moved swiftly, using his movement technique.

His speed was so great that he seemed like a passing sound, and his large build didn't hinder his movement in the slightest. Even his fierce face remained unaffected by the wind blowing past due to his velocity. He continued at this rapid pace for several minutes when, suddenly, he noticed a slight movement in his peripheral vision. Without hesitation, he changed direction and approached the spot, only to find a group of elves setting up camp.

"The elves? What are they doing here?" he wondered.

He concealed himself as best he could before moving closer to hear what they were saying.

"It's really strange—my sword suddenly trembled for no reason."

"Is that so? Maybe it's a sign that we're about to catch something big."

Their laughter followed, but the man who heard it couldn't shake his thought.

"A trembling sword? Without any apparent cause? I can't sense anything unusual nearby," he mused.

Deciding to confront them, he mustered the best smile he could manage, though it only made his fierce face appear even more intimidating. Then, he approached them openly. The elves were startled by the sudden appearance of the large human, especially since they hadn't sensed his presence, and they immediately became wary.

"Hello there, sorry to disturb you," he said. "I'm just a vagabond cultivator. May I take a moment of your time? I have a few questions."

Chapter 53 - What legacy? I created it

In the middle of the ruined training ground, Aldrian walked towards Arthur, who looked at him blankly. What Arthur saw in Aldrian was a towering wall, one so high that it felt impossible to surpass. This wall of power forced him to accept his inferiority before the young-looking man at the 'Viscount' stage, he could no longer regard him as a mere 'boy.'

Aldrian stood before Arthur and stretched out his hand, offering to help him up. Arthur sighed, took Aldrian's offer, and stood. His height was much greater than Aldrian's, from the onlookers' perspective, it was a striking contrast. But after what they had just witnessed, there was not a single doubt that the shorter young man could wipe the floor with any of them.

In the end, strength is what matters most. Even if you were a toddler, if you could do what Aldrian did, they would respect you.

"So, what do you think, Sir Knight?" Aldrian asked with a smile. Arthur looked into Aldrian's beautiful blue eyes and bowed his head.

"It was my ignorance and arrogance to doubt you, but you have truly opened my eyes. This will be an invaluable experience for my future. I, Arthur Maximilian, am honored to stand before someone destined for greatness. I hope you don't hold my earlier actions against me."

Aldrian was slightly surprised by Arthur's actions. Arthur was decisive and unashamed to admit his wrongs in front of others. For one of the ten great swordmasters to bow his head was truly a sight to behold. Perhaps it was due to Arthur's principles and

upbringing, but it was still remarkable for a man of his status to bow and admit his wrongs in front of others, especially to someone much younger.

"No worries. I never took your actions to heart. After all, your way of thinking was justified," Aldrian replied.

Emperor Ladwin descended and landed before them, his smile bright as he looked at Aldrian. He was thoroughly satisfied with this display of power.

"Now we have reached the conclusion of the duel. The winner is Aldrian Aster!"

Following the emperor's announcement, the elves gave a standing ovation for the duel, not just as entertainment, but also for the insight it provided into the nature of absolute destructive power. They couldn't help but compare it to 'The Wrath of the Forest Spirit,' which could also destroy landscapes. Yet, they felt that perhaps Aldrian's slash was stronger, able to cut through everything in its path and even cause a spatial storm.

Aldrian and Arthur shook hands and descended from the destroyed platform, greeted by cheers from the crowd. Aldrian was also welcomed by Eleine and others from the imperial family, who were once again reassured of his status and power as the chosen one.

The delegation from the church approached him.

"We truly apologize for our knight's behavior," Archbishop Ravin said, slightly bowing his head, followed by the others from the church. "We didn't intend to instigate or escalate the situation into a duel, forcing you to entertain his request. Given the result, as representatives of the church, we will also offer compensation to young master Aldrian, and even to the Ivory Empire if necessary. Once again, we sincerely apologize."

Aldrian waved his hand dismissively. "I've already said not to worry about it, Your Excellency. There's no need for concern."

The church delegation looked at this young man with newfound respect.

"It seems he also has a gracious heart," Archbishop Ravin thought.

"Ah, right. It's better if you communicate directly with His Majesty about our matter, to determine the appropriate course of action," Aldrian suggested.

"We will do that," Archbishop Ravin nodded with a determined expression. They had to bring Aldrian to their church! Now they needed to find a way to convince the Evergreen Imperial Family to allow Aldrian to also be their 'savior.'

Aldrian glanced at the remnants of his sword will on the ruined training ground. He had learned from his experience with Balin that while his sword will could aid cultivators in

comprehension and insight, the land where he unleashed the Slash of The End would become a danger zone.

He had left the remnants of his sword will outside Balin without erasing them because he knew they could be beneficial for many sword cultivators in their cultivation. He allowed them to remain, also serving as a deterrent to the devils, forcing them to stay low.

However, not wanting to cause difficulties for the elves, he planned to erase the sword will here. But as he was about to do so, Emperor Ladwin stopped him.

"You don't have to erase your remaining sword will," Emperor Ladwin said. "Let it stay. I'll turn this place into a comprehension site for the elves. Even though we aren't sword cultivators, your sword will might still be very useful to us."

Aldrian simply nodded. If that was the emperor's request, what could he do? They returned inside the palace, walking together, but there was a pair of eyes watching him as if he were a monster.

"How the hell is he not tired at all? He still looks fresh after unleashing that kind of technique, and it doesn't seem to have taken any toll on his body. He doesn't even care about his feat, as if that divine technique was just another ordinary move for him, and it hardly depleted his energy," Arthur thought. Unable to contain his curiosity, he asked Aldrian directly about it.

Aldrian's answer? "Well, it's because of my body constitution. It's my uniqueness, so I can't really explain it myself."

Arthur nodded—it made sense, but that capability was incredibly advantageous in prolonged battles. Still, it made him jealous.

"If I may ask, where did this technique come from? Which legacy does it belong to?" Archbishop Ravin inquired. Emperor Ladwin and the others were also curious about the origin of the technique that had gained fame for killing the Hydra. After witnessing its power, they assumed it must be a legacy of some past cultivator with high attainment in swordsmanship.

"Legacy? What legacy? I created it," Aldrian said, as if it were no big deal.

Silence.

They all stopped walking and looked at Aldrian simultaneously.

"What?" they asked in unison. Aldrian glanced at them and shrugged his shoulders.

"It's true. I created this technique when I needed to kill that Hydra. I had to act quickly, and fortunately, the Hydra's attack took time to execute, so it gave me the opportunity to create this technique."

"What do you mean, 'it gave you time to create the technique'?" Arthur asked, incredulous.

"What do I mean? Of course, I created this technique on the spot as fast as possible. I didn't have any technique that could kill a Hydra at the time, so doesn't it make sense to create one?" Aldrian replied.

"..."

They were stunned, beginning to wonder if there was something fundamentally different about the way Aldrian thought. The way he spoke made it sound like creating a technique was as simple as making a sandwich—no, they realized, even a sandwich would take longer to make than the time it took for the Hydra to attack. They started to believe there was no way he was just human; he must be the reincarnation of a higher being or something beyond their comprehension. His mindset was too far removed from their understanding, too complex, too otherworldly.

"Don't tell me all of your techniques are also your own creation?" asked Prince Arion Evergreen. Until now, they had assumed someone had taught this young man those techniques. If he could create a technique capable of destroying a vast area, what about the less complex ones?

"Not all of them, but most of them are my own creations," Aldrian replied truthfully. There were a few techniques he had learned from his father and mother, but he hadn't used them in practical combat yet. He had always relied more on his own techniques.

After hearing Aldrian's answer, they thought it best to remain silent and stop asking questions to preserve their sanity. They soon arrived at the throne hall, where Emperor Ladwin addressed the church delegation.

"So, I heard you wanted to discuss something regarding Aldrian? How about we talk about it tomorrow? I'm sure you're all tired. I'll send you my invitation tomorrow to discuss it further, as long as Aldrian agrees."

"That's perfectly fine. We're pleased to hear that we can talk and come to an understanding," Archbishop Ravin replied.

"Good, it's decided then."

The church delegation excused themselves from the imperial palace to return to their lodgings in the outsiders' district. As for Aldrian, he returned to his room within the imperial palace complex, accompanied by Eleine.

The sun had already set, and the sky had turned dark. The activity in the capital had decreased significantly compared to the bustling day. Unlike Balin, where there were always activities at all hours, most of the elves had returned to their homes to rest after a long day.

At the teleportation station in Evergreen City, elves and occasionally humans could be seen entering and exiting the portals. At that moment, a man wearing a conical straw hat and a black robe stepped out of the portal, a sword at his waist. His eyes scanned his surroundings before he closed them.

"I can feel it. It's much closer now," he murmured.

Chapter 54 - A Threat?

5 months later,

Aldrian sat inside the Shrine of the Heavenly Tree with his eyes closed. He liked to cultivate his mind here, the serenity he felt was unlike anything he experienced elsewhere. Here, he could also experience visions more frequently, and they felt more real—like forgotten memories resurfacing within him, though he felt he never actually lived the scenes in those visions.

Now, he was in a state where he had cut off all connection to the outside world. His senses and instincts had stopped functioning, at this moment, he was in his most vulnerable state. In his vision, he was walking while wearing a white robe. He had a tall stature, his skin like jade, smooth and without blemish.

Surrounding him was a beautiful scenery of flying islands in the sky, various kinds of vegetation, and vast lands that stretched towards the horizon. The distant mountains pierced the heavens with their peaks, the blue sky resembling a sea, with clouds adding a dynamic element to the scene before 'him'.

He then stopped on top of a hill where there were no trees, except for a lone plum blossom tree under which he stood, gazing at the scenery. The sweet scent of the blossoms filled his nostrils. Sunlight shone upon the tree, casting shadows that protected him from the heat, while a gentle breeze swept through his long white hair, which he could see in his vision.

Not long after, he looked behind him. A young girl, in her early teens, approached him with a joyful expression. She ran barefoot, yet her feet remained clean and smooth as if she were walking on porcelain.

"Your Majesty! I created this butterfly for you. Do you like it?" The young girl offered him the butterfly she had made from some kind of diamond. She had crafted it so beautifully

that the diamond reflected the sunlight, sparkling like stars in the night sky. He took the butterfly-shaped diamond from the young girl and smiled. Although he couldn't see his own face, Aldrian knew that 'he' was smiling.

"This is beautiful; I like it so much," 'he' said, his voice soft and pleasant to the ears of those who heard it. He patted the young girl's head, causing her to blush and smile sheepishly at his compliment. He looked at the crafted butterfly in his hand and covered it with both hands. When he opened them, the diamond butterfly suddenly took flight on its own, fluttering around him and the girl. Seeing her crafted butterfly come to life and fly, she was overjoyed and tried to touch it.

He watched her happy face and smiled. Suddenly, from the corner of his eye, he noticed some figures approaching them. Though he had never seen them before, they felt familiar to him. Two men and two women, who appeared human in their features, approached and bowed to him.

"Greetings, Your Majesty."

"At ease. You don't have to greet me; I am only taking a stroll to enjoy the scenery," he said.

"No way, Your Majesty. Even if you wish it, we wouldn't feel right if we didn't greet you when you came down here by yourself," one of the men said.

"Yes, Your Majesty, after all, you are our #####."

Before Aldrian could hear and see what happened next, he found himself back in the Shrine of the Heavenly Tree. His senses returned to him, and he felt as if he had just woken up from a dream. The dream felt so close, yet so distant at the same time. He still remembered their faces and voices, but they also felt like just some random dream figures. Yet, he couldn't shake the feeling of closeness he had felt within that dream.

These kinds of visions sometimes appeared to him, whether he was in the middle of cultivation or even while he slept. He still felt disoriented and confused, but he believed these visions had a meaning that was waiting for him to uncover. With a sigh, he stood up and looked at the spirit who had been faithfully watching over him during his cultivation.

"Alice, thank you for today. It must be tiring for you to keep guarding me."

Due to their closeness and how often he visited this place, Aldrian had given the spirit of the Evergreen World Tree a name.

"It's my pleasure, young master," she replied.

"Then I will take my leave first," he said, walking outside the Imperial Palace. It was still noon, so he thought he would take a walk to stay in touch with the elven folk in the city. The elves, who were already familiar with Aldrian, greeted him happily when they saw him. His presence provided the surrounding elves with a positive experience of living alongside a human—a good human.

With a smile always on his face, he greeted them back. If someone needed help, he would assist them; if there were elven children, he would play with them. With all these traits, how could the elves not accept him after all this time?

While Aldrian was in the middle of his usual walk, he suddenly encountered a lone man standing in the middle of his path. He took in the man's appearance: a black robe, a conical straw hat that nearly covered his face, and a sword at his waist sheathed in a white scabbard adorned with golden eastern dragon carvings. The man simply stood there, but Aldrian could sense that he was being watched—or more accurately, assessed—with a calm expression.

Xin Haotian

Age : 10.135 years

Race : Human

Cultivation : Low Emperor

Cultivation technique : The Illumination of The God of Light

Attack techniques : Swift Slash, Swift Stab, Dance of the Sword of Light, 12 Moves of the Illumination Sword Dance, The God of Light's Descent.

Defence technique : His combination of sword and light laws

Movement technique : Speed of Light movement

Supporting technique : None

"10.000 years low emperor stage? He's truly the cream of the crop, a genius among geniuses! Xin Haotian? The one they call the strongest of the Ten Great Swordmasters?"

Aldrian thought after reading his information. The sword at his waist was also a significant indicator, confirming that he was indeed the real deal.

The Illumination Sword

The jian sword that had always accompanied Xin Haotian in his adventures. Aldrian looked at Xin Haotian curiously, wondering why he was blocking his path and assessing him. Just as he considered trying to read his mind, Xin Haotian spoke.

"Are you really the one?" Xin Haotian asked, his tone calm but probing.

Aldrian was puzzled by the question. "What? I don't understand what you mean—"

Suddenly, a sword strike almost stabbed Aldrian in the head. The tip of the blade was mere inches from his forehead when he teleported behind Xin Haotian, aiming a kick at him. Xin Haotian blocked the kick with the hand holding his scabbard and followed up with another strike from his Illumination Sword. Realizing the situation had escalated, Aldrian didn't hesitate to teleport them both outside the city. As they reappeared in a place devoid of people, Aldrian quickly grabbed a sword from a passerby just before they teleported.

"Sorry, let me borrow your sword," he said.

Xin Haotian was surprised by Aldrian's ability to force a change of location so effortlessly. He looked at Aldrian with a curious expression and spoke, "You've truly surprised me. A teleportation technique? you can utilizing space Laws."

"Now, can you tell me why the strongest of the Ten Great Swordmasters suddenly shows up and gives me a surprise—not exactly the kind I like, though," Aldrian asked, his annoyance evident. Xin Haotian observed Aldrian's expression, there was no panic or fear, only irritation.

"I just wanted to meet the person who made that sword's will outside of Balin."

"What are you talking about? What does that have to do with me?" Aldrian responded, feigning ignorance.

"You don't have to hide it. I've already investigated the movements of the person who killed the hydra. Even though the elves tried to cover for you, I have my own ways of tracking your journey from Balin," Xin Haotian said. Aldrian fell silent.

"Then what are you going to do now that you've found me?" he asked.

"I had to see for myself if the one who could create such a powerful sword will also had the capability to back it up. And I have to say, you're truly exceptional, evading my Swift Stab even with the element of surprise."

In truth, Xin Haotian was quite impressed by Aldrian's ability to teleport with such rapid activation. Many could use teleportation, but his Swift Stab usually reached them before they could complete the move.

That's because Xin Haotian's sword technique was rooted in the energy he was most proficient with: light energy. Combined with his mastery of light laws, his sword technique became so fast that it was nearly impossible to evade. His strikes always reached his target, no matter what they tried—escaping the speed of light was futile.

However, thanks to Aldrian's ability to perceive the flow of energy and his heightened senses, which were even sharper within his domain, he could anticipate Xin Haotian's attack and predict his moves.

"Then, after you've confirmed my capability is worthy of my achievement, what are you going to do?" Aldrian asked.

Without warning, Xin Haotian took up a stance with his sword.

"I'll kill you."

Chapter 55 - Xin Haotian's True Intention

Aldrian dodged the continuous slashes and stabs coming at him. He tried to gain distance by teleporting to different locations, but Xin Haotian seemed to anticipate his movements, knowing exactly where he would go. Xin Haotian wielded his sword with seamless precision, aiming for fatal points with minimal but deadly efficient movements.

Aldrian didn't always block the incoming attacks with his borrowed sword because he knew its limitations, and the Illumination Sword in Xin Haotian's hand was on a completely different level.

Illumination Sword

Description: The sword hails from the God of Light realm and has become a legacy weapon of the Xin clan. It now always accompanies Xin Haotian and is known as his famous sword.

Level: Middle Divine.

Aldrian was truly flabbergasted by the quality of Xin Haotian's sword. Where could he have obtained a sword of such quality? And what is the God of Light realm? Where is it? He was curious, but he saved those questions for later. Every time the Illumination

Sword touched his own, he could feel the durability of his borrowed weapon diminish, even though he had already coated it with his golden energy and spatial energy, utilizing space laws.

The power Xin Haotian exuded was strong enough to make Aldrian's hand tremble and destabilize the energy coating his sword. Aldrian quickly realized that this man was an extremely dangerous opponent, one who could threaten his life if they met outside of his domain. With Xin Haotian's powerful attacks and incredible speed, Aldrian needed his full concentration just to track his movements. He couldn't afford to lose focus for even a split second against such speed.

"If he can follow me in every direction I take, then..."

Aldrian thought to himself.

Suddenly, Xin Haotian felt an immense pressure, his body growing heavy, and his movements becoming sluggish. Aldrian didn't waste this opportunity; he slashed toward Xin Haotian's neck. However, sensing something at the last moment, Xin Haotian tilted his head, narrowly avoiding the full force of the attack. The tip of Aldrian's sword grazed Xin Haotian's conical straw hat, knocking it off his head, just as Xin Haotian countered with a slashing motion aimed at Aldrian's head. The pressure vanished, and Xin Haotian dashed forward to attack again.

"You can control gravity too? It looks like you've got quite a few tricks up your sleeve. But my light is strong enough to cut through your space of gravity!" Xin Haotian exclaimed.

Aldrian was genuinely impressed by Xin Haotian's mastery of light energy and the light laws. This battle was giving him valuable insights into how to fight fast and powerful opponents like Xin Haotian. If his opponent primarily relying on speed, then his technique, the 'Slash of The End,' could prove effective.

The pressure from this technique, enhanced by gravity laws, would lock the target in place, preventing them from moving. However, Aldrian wasn't sure if that would be enough to subdue Xin Haotian, after all, he could slash through space without even causing a spatial crack. Given his speed, Aldrian doubted Xin Haotian would allow him to unleash 'Slash of The End.' He needed to find an opening.

"What marvelous control of power," Aldrian thought, but he quickly formed another plan.

"If slowing you down isn't possible, then what about this?"

Xin Haotian attacked once more with his technique, but suddenly he found it difficult to control his energy. The flow of energy became unstable, reducing the power of his

attack. Sensing his surroundings, he was shocked to discover that the energy flow around him was in chaos, preventing him from maximizing his output power.

Aldrian's control over the energy within his domain proved invaluable in this situation, even though it could only reduce Xin Haotian's power due to the significant gap in their cultivation stages. If their cultivation levels were closer, as with Eleine, Aldrian could have even canceled his opponent's technique activation entirely. Aldrian blocked Xin Haotian's diminished attack with his sword and attempted to deliver a punch to his body. However, Xin Haotian, with his nimble movements, evaded the punch and leaped back, creating distance between them.

Now, they stood facing each other, 50 meters apart.

"I have to admit, it's been a long time since I've had a fight this good. Are you really only at the Viscount stage? From your appearance, you seem like an early teen, but I can sense you're using a disguise," Xin Haotian observed.

"Well, what if I am? And what if I'm not? But I do wonder about your true motive for meeting me. Care to explain?" Aldrian replied.

"Didn't you hear what I said? I want to kill you."

"No, you're not emitting any killing intent, and your mind is as clear as water. If you truly wanted to kill me, there would be at least some trace of killing intent, even in your thoughts," Aldrian countered.

Xin Haotian fell silent after hearing Aldrian's words. This was also one of the reasons Aldrian had refrained from using the 'Slash of The End.' He didn't need to kill someone who had approached him without murderous intent. The other reason was that he didn't want to unleash such a powerful technique carelessly.

The situation in the Ivory Empire had already become hectic again after his duel with Arthur. The technique's effects were felt across the continent, and now people knew there was someone with swordsmanship as strong as, if not stronger than, Xin Haotian in the Ivory Empire. They were even calling him the eleventh great swordsman of the continent.

Although the identity of this mysterious swordsman remained uncertain, some were already investigating traces of him within the Ivory Empire, with many having arrived in Evergreen City, waiting. Aldrian couldn't afford to draw more attention to himself. He felt guilty for causing chaos and having the Evergreen family cover for him.

On the positive side, the devils had completely halted their movements. It seemed they had ceased operations in the cities they had infiltrated. However, Aldrian couldn't pinpoint every single one of them due to the limitations of his cultivation, which was inversely proportional to the size of his domain.

"It looks like I need to move to another territory for the time being, to divert attention from the Ivory Empire," Aldrian thought, still eyeing Xin Haotian.

"Amazing. In all my life, I've never fought like this. You are truly an opponent full of tricks, with strong power and sharp instincts. It's like you have no weakness," Xin Haotian finally said.

"Well, thanks for the compliment. Now, can you answer my question?" Aldrian replied, trying to avoid further trouble. He could simply teleport Xin Haotian to a faraway place as long as it was within his domain, but he didn't want to deal with the annoyance of Xin Haotian continually returning. Killing him without reason wasn't Aldrian's style, and it would require considerable effort to do so.

"I need your help," Xin Haotian said, his words leaving Aldrian stunned.

"You need my help? If it's something even the strongest of the great swordmasters of the continent can't solve, I'm afraid I won't be much help," Aldrian replied.

"No, I know you didn't use your full power in our battle just now. This is something I'm sure only you can do," Xin Haotian said as he sheathed his sword. Aldrian followed suit, returning his own sword to its sheath before asking again.

"Something that only I can do? Can you tell me what it is?"

"We can discuss that later. I'm sure the elves already know about our situation and have probably dispatched teams to search for you. You can come to me at this place and time." Xin Haotian threw a piece of paper to Aldrian, who caught it between his fingers. He unfolded the paper to read its contents before looking back at Xin Haotian.

"And why should I help you?" Aldrian asked.

"I'm certain you'll gain something from this. It involves the God of Light's inheritance, but obtaining it will depend on your own ability," Xin Haotian replied as he retrieved his conical straw hat from the ground, dusted it off, and put it back on.

Now Aldrian was genuinely intrigued. This might also be the opportunity he needed to divert attention away from the Ivory Empire.

"Now you've piqued my interest. Alright, I'll listen to what you have to say." With that, Aldrian teleported them back to the spot where he first met Xin Haotian. Without waiting long, Xin Haotian vanished, leaving the surrounding elves stunned by Aldrian's sudden appearance.

A few of them recognized him from earlier when he was attacked and disappeared, so they quickly reported the incident to the imperial family. Aldrian reassured them not to worry and informed the imperial family that he was safe using a long-distance

communication device shaped like a pentagon crystal. Now that he had an appointment later, he knew he needed to speak with the imperial family directly.

He returned the borrowed sword to the elf, who had brought his sword as secondary weapon, and gave him a few high-level energy stones as compensation and for the sword's repair. He needed to return to the Imperial Palace immediately to inform Emperor Ladwin of his plan to leave the Ivory Empire for the time being.

Chapter 56 - Xin Haotian's Origin

Inside Emperor Ladwin's workroom, Aldrian sat on the sofa in front of the emperor. He had already informed Emperor Ladwin about his encounter with Xin Haotian and his intention to venture outside the Ivory Empire for the time being. Emperor Ladwin sighed,

"It's surprising that he's in the capital. Do you think Xin Haotian is trustworthy? Does he truly mean you no harm? From your story, he seems like someone difficult to deal with. I've only met him a few times, so I can't really tell what kind of person he is." Emperor Ladwin said.

"I'll find out for myself, but during my interaction with him, he seemed sincere in asking for my help—at least for now." Aldrian replied.

"What do you think? Are you truly interested in this endeavor? You can refuse his request if you want. Even though he's the strongest of the great swordmasters, he still has to consider the Evergreen Imperial Family. He won't recklessly cause trouble."

"Well, when he suddenly attacked me, he already caused trouble." Aldrian thought.

"I'll hear him out first, Your Majesty. If there's nothing wrong, I think I can help with his business. Also, this could be beneficial for the Ivory Empire. The empire is gaining too much attention lately, and sooner or later, someone will discover my identity, which wouldn't be good for the empire."

Two incidents involving the mysterious swordsman, the involvement of the devils, and the changes in the Forest of Despair. As for the last point, not long after he left the Forest of Despair, Aldrian created a thick mist wall around the entire outer perimeter of the forest. It was the least he could do to prevent any humans or other races from entering the forest.

This was further reinforced by the decree from the Evergreen Imperial Family, raising the status of the Forest of Despair to a forbidden place. Anyone who dares to violate this decree will have to face the imperial family themselves. This sudden development intrigued many parties, leading them to suspect that the Evergreen Imperial Family might be hiding something in the Forest of Despair.

They speculated that all these events might be interconnected and could reveal the secrets of what the Ivory Empire was trying to hide, including the identity of the mysterious swordmaster or perhaps the swordmaster himself was the secret. With many speculations swirling, Aldrian knew he needed to devise a plan to divert their attention, and he thought that a journey outside the Ivory Empire might do the trick while waiting for the situation to cool down.

"Then I'll support your decision, and—" Emperor Ladwin paused, a thoughtful expression crossing his face before he smiled at Aldrian. "—and you can do what you need to do. This might also be a good way for those searching for you to lose your trail. Perhaps if you make another achievement outside the empire, it will further distract them?"

"That could work, but as I mentioned, I'll first hear what Xin Haotian has to say. Now, I'll take my leave, Your Majesty."

"Go ahead." With that, Aldrian left the workroom and made his way out of the imperial palace. His pace was neither fast nor slow, just enough for him to enjoy the bustling activities of the elves around him.

In the Outsiders' District, people from various races walked to and fro, though the streets were not as bustling as in other parts of Evergreen City. The contrast between this district and the others was stark, with the mix of races adding to its unique atmosphere. Aldrian now stood in front of a luxurious restaurant in one part of the district. The three-story establishment boasted many ornaments adorning its front door.

Without hesitation, he entered the restaurant and was promptly greeted by a suited waiter.

"Welcome to The Heavenly Taste. Do you have a reservation?"

"I'm here to meet an acquaintance, under the name Mr. Tiandi."

"Please wait for a moment, esteemed guest. I'll check the guest list," the waiter replied as he opened a guest list on the table beside him. After a few moments, he looked up.

"Alright, esteemed guest, let me escort you to the table."

Aldrian was then led to the third floor and into a private room with luxurious decorations. As he entered, he saw Xin Haotian already there, sipping tea in his disguised form. He was still wearing his black robe, and in front of him was a square table with a vacant chair facing him. Aldrian took the empty seat and glanced at the window beside them, offering a view of the street below and the World Tree. Not long after he sat down, the waiters brought in the food and then left shortly after.

"I hope you enjoy the food here. I've heard that The Heavenly Taste's red tail fish with their original spice blend is quite famous." Xin Haotian remarked. Aldrian glanced at Xin Haotian before taking a bite, he savored the taste for a moment before responding.

"I must commend your boldness. Attacking me in the middle of the street inside Evergreen City, are you not afraid of the imperial family's authority here?"

"Well, my initial plan was to test you briefly before the imperial guards arrived, but you unexpectedly teleported us to another location. That turned out to be beneficial, I now know for certain that you are the perfect person to help."

"I haven't agreed to anything yet."

"Oh, but you will."

"So, what exactly are you going to tell me now?" Aldrian asked as he continued eating.

"All this time, the people of the continent have no idea where I came from. They only know me as a vagabond cultivator without any affiliation. But the quality of my sword and my rapid cultivation have raised many doubts about my origin. What they don't know is that the place I come from isn't what they would expect," Xin Haotian explained.

"Do you know why the Everlasting Silent Forest is called that?" Xin Haotian asked.

"Because everything that enters disappears and never returns, lost without a trace, making the forest a silent place, even the beasts are no exception," Aldrian replied.

"Yes, that's true. And only in recent years has the mystery of the Everlasting Silent Forest begun to unravel. It turns out that the people who disappeared were actually trapped in secret realms within the forest."

"Yes, I've heard that. But why—wait, don't tell me...!" Aldrian's eyes widened in realization, while Xin Haotian nodded.

"Yes, I came from one of those secret realms."

Aldrian was stunned by the revelation. "Wait, how many years have you been roaming the continent? People have only been able to exit that forest in the last decade or so."

"What if I told you that I can enter and exit the secret realms whenever I want?" Xin Haotian replied.

Aldrian was shocked once again. "How is that possible? Are you saying you have a mechanism to manually open a space crack to secret realm?"

Xin Haotian nodded again.

"Well, in fact, I'm indigenous to this secret realm—the Xin Secret Realm, as we call it. It's where my family, the Xin clan, resides. We live inside most of the time, so no one knows of our existence. We only come out occasionally to check on the outside world and to buy materials that can't be found in our realm." Aldrian listened intently as Xin Haotian continued.

"Our ancestors were among the original inhabitants of this continent, long before the Everlasting Silent Forest was created and even before the empires as they exist today."

Xin Haotian took a sip of his tea before continuing.

"One day, a giant golden dragon and a phoenix appeared on this land. According to our family's records, the dragon was so immense that its body covered the sky, and the power it exuded was unmatched by any cultivator in history. The phoenix was equally colossal, her wings spanning the sky and emitting golden flames. Both of them could transform into human form."

Suddenly, Aldrian felt a strange sensation within his soul and dantian. A tremor coursed through him, and his emotions became turbulent.

"The feeling of being called has resurfaced!" Aldrian thought, as the intense pull from the place where the giant bones lay began to surge within him once more. He had suppressed this sensation for so long, thinking it had faded over time. It had been manageable since leaving the secret realm and even within the Everlasting Silent Forest. But now, after hearing Xin Haotian's story, that same powerful feeling surged back, overwhelming his soul and dantian with tremors.

He couldn't fully grasp why this was happening, but one thing was clear, the dragon or the phoenix in Xin Haotian's tale seemed intricately connected to the energy and soul within him, bound by a strong karma. The mere mention of their existence triggered a profound reaction inside him, indicating just how deep that connection ran.

He tried to suppress it by closing his eyes to calm his mind and when he opened his eyes for a brief moment, he saw a giant golden dragon and a phoenix staring directly at him. He stunned before the vision faded in an instant, returning him to the restaurant where he sat across from Xin Haotian.

In front of him, Xin Haotian's face was more expressive than he had ever seen it when they fought, revealing shock as he looked at Aldrian with trembling eyes.

"Who are you?"

Chapter 57 - The Secret in The Everlasting Silent Forest

Xin Haotian's heart raced as he processed what had just happened with Aldrian.

"What happened? Why are you acting like that?" Aldrian asked.

"You don't realize what you did?" Xin Haotian replied, his voice tinged with disbelief.

"What?" Aldrian inquired, his brow furrowing.

"You suddenly closed your eyes, and your aura transformed into something entirely different. It was suffocating, unlike anything I've sensed before. Even the energy around us and in my dantian was affected. I can't describe it, but it felt like I was standing before a divine being." Xin Haotian explained.

Aldrian sensed the chaotic energy swirling around them and sighed.

"My name is Aldrian Aster. You can just call me Aldrian," he said.

"Yes, I know, but that's not the answer I'm looking for." Xin Haotian persisted.

"Who am I? Well, I'm just an ordinary human. Anyway, let's get back to your story. You can forget about what just happened." Aldrian said dismissively.

"I don't think what happened can be dismissed so casually." Xin Haotian thought, feeling there was more to this young man than met the eye. Despite his suspicion, he returned to his calm demeanor and continued the story.

"Where were we? Ah, yes, the dragon and the phoenix. They came to this continent, but we don't know what happened to them. They seemed to be injured."

"Injured?"

"Yes, they had wounds on their bodies. We thought they came to this continent to recuperate, but their injuries were so severe that they remained here, and their fate is unknown."

As Aldrian listened, the chaotic feeling inside him fluctuated once more. More than anything, he felt anger rising within him. He disliked how easily his emotions were swayed by these stories, but he sensed that this was a clue to the origin of his power. So, he continued to listen to Xin Haotian.

"During their stay, they did something, we don't know what exactly, but whatever it was, it caused the energy of the entire continent to be drawn into one specific territory. We couldn't approach them because of a barrier we couldn't break. Besides, we didn't want to offend them. And where do you think they did this mysterious thing?" Xin Haotian asked, his eyes intently locking onto Aldrian's blue eyes.

Aldrian pondered for a moment before his eyes widened in realization.

"The Everlasting Silent Forest!"

"That's right, the Everlasting Silent Forest that everyone fears and avoids! They did something, and it's somewhere in the central part of this continent! At that point, the Everlasting Silent Forest didn't even exist yet. A few months later, the dragon and the phoenix emerged from the barrier and made a trade with our ancestors before returning to the core area," Xin Haotian explained, taking a sip of his tea.

"The trade was for power, they offered us strength in exchange for our family's duty to guard the area surrounding the core region. The dragon and the phoenix provided us with cultivation techniques and artifacts. Additionally, the dragon, using its power, created many secret realms. We were tasked with guarding the western side of the Everlasting Silent Forest, so we relocated our entire family to one of these secret realms on the western side. This relocation was also to protect us from outside disturbances. Moreover, the Everlasting Forest and its secret realms are rich in the energy of heaven and earth," Xin Haotian continued.

Hearing this, Aldrian recalled something.

"Wait, are there any other families aside from yours?" Aldrian asked.

"Yes, there are others besides ours, and they also accepted the offer."

Aldrian suddenly thought about the indigenous people of the secret realm he came from.

"How many families accepted the offer?"

"Four. They guard the four directions surrounding the Everlasting Silent Forest, and each of them has its own power given by the dragon and the phoenix."

"So what happened to the other families? Why have we never heard of them?" Aldrian asked. Xin Haotian fell silent, but then he sighed.

"They... they're gone."

"What?"

"The Great War 3 million years ago, you've heard of it, right? The war that engulfed the entire continent, when the devils launched a surprise attack across the land. We still don't know why, but the devils suddenly became incredibly strong, strong enough to bypass the spatial traps the dragon created around the Everlasting Silent Forest. They tried to infiltrate the forest with all their powerhouses and higher-ups. I don't know what they were after, but they attempted to breach the barrier in the core region," Xin Haotian explained.

"The great battle erupted within the Everlasting Silent Forest. The four families defended the core region with everything we had, but the devils were overwhelmingly powerful, even against our strong cultivation and the artifacts granted by the dragon and the phoenix. At the most critical moment, a mighty power surged from the core region, a power belonging to the dragon and the phoenix. It wiped out nearly all the devils in the forest, forcing them to retreat," Xin Haotian continued, his gaze drifting to the street below.

Aldrian astonished at this revelation.

"Is this the real reason the devils retreated 3 million years ago?" Aldrian thought.

"Unfortunately, the Great War devastated us. Three of the four families fell, and my family, the Xin family, was on the brink of collapse. But, luckily, not all our high-level cultivators perished. Over time, our family regained some of its vitality. Though we're not as strong as we once were, we've managed to survive until today," Xin Haotian said.

"But the situation changed drastically after the Great War. As the sole surviving guardian family of the core region, we had to establish relationships with the outside world. I'm one of those who ventured out from the secret realm."

"So that's the story. You must hold a high position in your family to carry a middle divine-grade artifact like the Illumination Sword. And your cultivation technique must be divine-grade as well for you to be this 'young' and have reached the Low Emperor stage," Aldrian said, to which Xin Haotian nodded in response.

"You don't seem surprised," Xin Haotian observed.

"Well, there are too many strange things about me, and believe me, something like divine grade isn't enough to shock me. In fact, your story has cleared up a few mysteries from my past. To be honest, I'm from one of the secret realms in the north," Aldrian revealed, causing Xin Haotian's eyes to widen in surprise.

"Then, are you a survivor of—"

"No, I'm not a survivor of those families you mentioned. My parents came from outside and were trapped in the secret realm for a while, but there were indigenous people living there when they arrived," Aldrian explained.

"Oh, I thought you might be one of them. When the Great War happened, most of the survivors from their side were mortals without cultivation. They couldn't leave the secret realm because they never understood the mechanisms all this time," Xin Haotian said.

"Are there any survivors from those families in other realms?" Aldrian asked.

"Yes, but they are so few, and it's been so long since we had contact with them. They might already be dead, leaving only the memory of their families' past glory," Xin Haotian responded.

"If the four families were so strong, why are there no remnants of their past? I mean, all the time I spent in the secret realm, I didn't see any signs of the mighty Yan family or anything like that," Aldrian questioned.

"That's because we erased their remnants, all traces of their past glory. We didn't want the legacy that the dragon and the phoenix gave us to be discovered by the outside world or, worse, the devils. We actually wanted to bring those survivors into our family so they could live more comfortably, but they refused. They chose to remain in their secret realm, trapping themselves on what used to be their family's land for millions of years," Xin Haotian explained.

"And that's what the records in my family tell me," he added.

Aldrian finally had answers to some of the questions that had been plaguing his mind. Everything seemed connected, and there was something he had to investigate further.

"The thing in the central part of the Everlasting Silent Forest... Whatever the dragon or the phoenix did there, it must hold the key to the truth about myself." Aldrian thought.

Aldrian looked at Xin Haotian and asked,

"After all this interesting history, what do you need me for? Why me?"

"When I sensed your sword will during the battle with the Hydra, I was curious. I wanted to see the person who could create a phenomenon that spread across the entire continent. At first, I had no intention of asking for your help, but when I witnessed your sword will and sensed it with my own hand, I started to think 'This is the person who can help the Xin family' and let me explain why. My family's cultivation technique, given by the dragon, is The Illumination of The God of Light. It's a divine technique meant for those compatible with light energy. Fortunately, light energy is our family's forte." Xin Haotian began.

"But here's the thing, the Illumination of The God of Light can make our light energy and light laws the strongest force of destruction and fastest speed. I don't mean to sound arrogant, but behind the scene, none of those so called great swordmasters can defeat me because of this, they can't even catch or hurt me.

When I tried to touch your sword will, I covered my hand with light laws with the intent of destruction just to test the power of your unique sword will. And the result? My hand was hurt by it, hurt by only a remnant of your sword will, it's truly astonishing! Even more surprising, The Illumination of The God of Light reacted to the remnant energy in your

sword will! For a divine cultivation technique to react like that is unheard of." Xin Haotian said, his gaze locking intensely with Aldrian's.

"Now, back to you. Until a few decades ago, we couldn't get close to the central region because of the barrier. Even the cultivators from my clan can't comprehend it, and it still covers a large part of the core region. But then, 13 years ago, after the phenomenon of the dragon and phoenix's appearance, the barrier began to weaken, and there are even some holes in it now.

No one knows this yet, but once the entire continent learns about it, even the devils, who I'm sure have been waiting for this, it will be chaos. I've also heard about the prophecy from the Heavenly Direction Church. I'm afraid this could escalate into another Great War." Xin Haotian continued.

He then stood up, walked closer to Aldrian, and extended his hand for a handshake.

"Aldrian Aster, as a representative of the Xin family, I invite you to our secret realm to uncover the true mystery of the Everlasting Silent Forest, something even our families have not been able to discover!"

Chapter 58 - Time to Leave

Aldrian looked at Xin Haotian's hand, then into his eyes.

"I'm not done yet. If you chose me just because I'm strong, you could have chosen others with stronger cultivation than mine," Aldrian said.

"No, they are not stronger. I trust my own eyes; you are the strongest. Even now, while you're still at the Low Earl stage, that alone is an impossibility at your age, even with divine techniques. But even if someone stronger than you exists, I would still choose you."

"You're quite the optimist. What if I refuse to help you and simply tell others what you've shared with me? Is it okay if others find out about this? You're taking quite the risk," Aldrian replied.

"No, you won't refuse my offer. Even if you tell others, you won't tell anyone you don't trust. I can see it in your eyes, in your mannerisms, you're just like me," Xin Haotian responded.

"You're certainly confident in yourself."

"Aren't you?" They stared into each other's eyes before Aldrian showed a small smile.

"You're truly an annoying person, I see. Fine, I'm quite interested in this mystery of the Everlasting Silent Forest. Maybe I should take a trip to your secret realm." Aldrian then accepted Xin Haotian's handshake, making Xin Haotian smile.

"I welcome you in advance."

"Now, I need to speak with His Majesty about my journey. You'll have to wait until I come to visit you," Aldrian said, to which Xin Haotian responded with a shrug.

"Fine by me. You can find me at the luxury inn at the end of this road," Xin Haotian said, pointing in the direction of the inn. Aldrian simply nodded and sipped the tea in front of him before replying,

"Thank you for inviting me here. Now, I'll take my leave. See you soon." With that, he disappeared from the private room, leaving a stunned Xin Haotian behind.

"What a mysterious man. Is he really just a young man? Why do I feel as though I'm in the presence of someone far wiser and more mature?" Xin Haotian pondered, staring at the now-empty seat.

Back at the imperial palace, Aldrian immediately met with Emperor Ladwin. After Aldrian relayed the details of his conversation with Xin Haotian, the emperor was shocked.

"Unbelievable! He's from the secret realm within the Everlasting Silent Forest? The devils retreated because of the power of the dragon and phoenix within it?" Emperor Ladwin exclaimed.

"So, you've already decided to venture into his secret realm?" the emperor asked, and Aldrian responded with a nod.

"This is also my opportunity to visit the dwarves to repair my sword." Aldrian said as he take out his sword from his storage ring.

Fire Dragon Sword (Broken)

Description: The sword is created from a mix of rare materials compatible with the fire element, the durability of the material can hold techniques beyond its grade. It was once wielded by Aldrey Flamecrest as his personal sword.

Grade: Middle Heaven.

He didn't realize that after killing the Hydra, the sword's durability had dropped significantly. Though it was on the brink of crumbling, it still retained its shape, with only minor cracks visible, thanks to the strength of the mixed materials. Aldrian knew he needed a blacksmith to repair it, or perhaps even upgrade it, so he could use his techniques without risking the sword breaking.

When Aldrian first read the sword's description, he finally uncovered a hint about his parentage, the Flamecrest family. He learned that his father's family held high-ranking noble status in the Vindas Empire and resided in the northern part of the empire. He wondered what kind of trouble had forced his parents to leave the secret realm in such a rush.

Emperor Ladwin looked at the sword and sighed. Unfortunately, forging was not the elves' forte, and they were not well-suited to it. It was rare for an elf to delve deeply into forging and smithing, which is why the elves relied on the dwarves for their artifacts. The emperor had already recommended Aldrian to one of the best blacksmiths in the Forgeheart Kingdom to repair a sword of this grade.

"But this sword... why does it seem familiar? Where have I seen it before?" the emperor thought. The shape and craftsmanship of the sword reminds him as something he'd seen somewhere before, but he couldn't quite place it, so he brushed it off.

"And maybe this is also my opportunity to visit a few places on this continent, including the church," Aldrian said.

Not long after his duel with Arthur, the church and the Ivory Empire reached a secret agreement concerning Aldrian. Aldrian also agreed to the terms, which stated that he would visit the church no later than six years from the agreement's approval.

For Aldrian, six years was the time he estimated it would take him to reach the Marquess stage at his current cultivation speed, assuming he didn't add another domain to accelerate his progress. Six years is not a long time for a cultivator; it can pass quickly, especially for those in seclusion.

He also considered the devils' plans, certain that they would be put on hold as they waited for the right moment. Aldrian planned to confuse the devils about the mysterious person and his whereabouts, and Xin Haotian's invitation only accelerated his strategy.

The devils would likely have to keep postponing their plans if there was uncertainty about a powerful being roaming the continent, that's what he believed.

"Alright, I can only support you," Emperor Ladwin said.

"But I hope you don't forget the Ivory Empire after you go out there." Emperor Ladwin added.

"Of course not, Your Majesty. The elves have done so much for me during my time here. The imperial teacher was the one who brought me here and trusted me, even though we didn't know each other. I also have friends here, and believe me, this place has already become my second home," Aldrian replied with a smile.

Hearing this, Emperor Ladwin felt relieved and smiled back at him.

"In the end, we were only able to keep him here for 11 months," he thought.

His experience with Aldrian had shown him that this young man couldn't be confined to one place unless there was enough power to protect him. Wherever Aldrian went, whatever he did, he always attracted attention. Without the power to protect him, it could spell trouble even for the empire.

The emperor could only hope for the best for both Aldrian and his empire in the future.

"So, when are you leaving?" he asked.

"Tomorrow. I need to talk to some people first before I go," Aldrian answered.

"Okay."

After that, Aldrian went to Eleine and told her they would be leaving the empire the next day. He explained his plan and what had transpired earlier with Xin Haotian. She only sighed, knowing that their peaceful life would end once they left the Ivory Empire, but she resolved to follow her young master's decision.

He first went to the Shrine of the Heavenly Tree to meet Alice and Olivia after asking Alice to invite Olivia.

"I hope you can take care of yourselves while I'm gone, and don't be sad, Olivia. It's not like I'll be gone forever," Aldrian said to them after explaining his departure. Olivia, of course, felt sad, but there was nothing she could do.

"We wish you a safe journey, and may glory always follow you, young master," Alice and Olivia said in unison, kowtowing to him.

"You two..." Aldrian sighed at their behavior. Sometimes their instincts still kicked in, so he just let them be and smiled.

"Take care," he added, before leaving the shrine to meet others. Next, he met with the imperial teacher in the palace garden to discuss his departure.

"So, you're leaving already," the imperial teacher said with a sigh.

"Thank you for bringing me here, Your Excellency. I'll never forget my experiences in this empire, and I will always remember what the Ivory Empire has done for me. I will support the empire whenever you need it," Aldrian said, bowing his head. Imperial Teacher Elthar smiled warmly at Aldrian and replied,

"I know. I already understand your character, and I believe what you say. It's your destiny to shine wherever you go. Our empire simply cannot contain your blinding light. Many will be drawn to you, and your light will only grow brighter."

"You're exaggerating, Your Excellency. I'm just an ordinary young man seeking new experiences," Aldrian replied.

The imperial teacher nodded in satisfaction at Aldrian's humility. "Strong, but with a humble heart, not arrogant."

After meeting with the imperial teacher, Aldrian went to see Princess Sylphia to inform her of his departure. Her reaction was—

"Oh, you're leaving the empire for a while? Sure, I hope you stay safe on your journey," she said with a bland expression.

Her reaction stunned him. Given how close they had become, he expected a more emotional response. He didn't want to read her mind because he felt it was inappropriate to always peek into others' thoughts, especially without a valid reason, and he felt it would be disrespectful to intrude on Sylphia's mind.

"All right. I'm sorry if I disturbed you, Your Highness," he said.

He sighed and bowed to her, puzzled by her indifferent reaction. But he accepted it and left to speak with other members of the imperial family. Unbeknownst to him, Sylphia grinned after he left.

The next morning, before the sun had fully risen and while the roads were still relatively quiet, Aldrian and Eleine stood in front of the imperial palace gates with some members of the imperial family. Present were the emperor, the empress, the imperial teacher, and four of the imperial brothers, all there to see him off. He noticed that Princess Sylphia was missing, which made him feel a pang of sadness. Did she not see him as a friend? Did she consider him unimportant?

He sighed and addressed those present with a smile, "Then we will take our leave for now, Your Majesties, Your Excellency, brothers!"

"Take care, child. Stay safe. If you ever feel tired, you can come back anytime," said the empress.

"Safe travels, brother. I hope the blessings of the Heavenly Tree will always accompany you," said Arion Evergreen. Each of the brothers gave him a hug and their farewell wishes.

He then bowed to them and turned around but was stunned to see the beautiful elf standing behind him. Her tall, slender body was covered by a green robe that concealed her curves, including her ample bosom. Her smooth, back-length golden hair was styled into a ponytail, and her beautiful smile, as radiant as sunshine, was directed at him. Aldrian, seeing her, could only manage a resigned smile.

"So why are you here in adventurer's clothes, Your Highness?" he asked.

"What do you mean? How dare you leave without inviting me! Of course, I will come with you," she replied.

Chapter 59 - Dual Horns Peak City

"Are you serious, Your Highness?" Aldrian asked.

"What do you think?" Sylphia replied with a smile.

Aldrian could only smile back and glance at the emperor behind him.

"Your Maj—"

"Aldrian, we hope you can take care of my daughter. She can be your support," Emperor Ladwin said.

"Please take care of Sylphia. She's quite excited, and this will be her first time traveling to the western side of the continent," added the empress.

"Look after our little sister, Brother Aldrian," said Aran Evergreen.

Aldrian was stunned as he looked at them.

"They already knew about this! Heck, maybe they even planned it," he thought. But he felt relieved that Sylphia was just playing a prank, pretending not to care. He then bowed to them.

"I will take care of her. Don't worry."

"Now go. Be careful once you're out there, you are on your own" Emperor Ladwin said with smile, *"and I believe the continent will be in for another shock,"* he added in his mind.

Aldrian bowed once again and walked away, leaving his back view to the imperial family. Imperial Teacher Elthar watched him go.

"We were too naive to think we could hide him from the world. Even if he tries to remain hidden, he will shine brightly and attract the masses. I wonder what stories he will create in the future?" he mused.

Aldrian walked away, followed by Eleine and Sylphia, heading toward the outsiders' area. Their destination was the luxury inn that Xin Haotian had pointed out the day before. As they approached, Aldrian was surprised to see Xin Haotian already waiting outside the inn.

"You've been waiting? Have you been standing here since yesterday?" Aldrian asked as he walked closer.

"Of course not," Xin Haotian replied with a smile. "I sensed you as soon as you entered the outsiders' district. I must say, your relationship with the Evergreen imperial family is quite close, especially if the emperor trusts you enough to let his daughter follow you."

Xin Haotian looked at Sylphia, who was in disguise, with interest. She, in turn, observed him with curiosity.

"So, this is Xin Haotian, the strongest of the great swordmasters," she thought.

"You could say that," Aldrian responded. "Are we ready to go, or is there something else we need to wait?"

"No, let's get going. We need to transit through several cities before reaching the nearest one to my secret realm in the western region," Xin Haotian answered.

They then headed to the teleportation station in Evergreen. Upon arrival, they needed to provide their destination city to the operators. Aldrian was jolted back to reality, after being pampered by the Evergreen imperial family for so long, he had always used the teleportation station with their accompaniment. This was his first experience as an ordinary citizen navigating the process on his own.

Now, without the privilege, Aldrian had to follow the standard procedures for using the teleportation station. First, they had to tell the operator the destination city. After that, they paid the required amount of energy stones, depending on the distance, and then waited for their turn. When their turn came, the operator directed the teleportation formation to the destination city. All that was left was to enter the portal, step onto the formation, and done!

Their destination was a city within Demon territory, near the border of the Ivory Empire. They couldn't simply teleport directly to the western region of the continent because the teleportation formations couldn't accommodate all the cities across the continent. The

formations weren't designed to handle too many destinations, which was why they needed to transit through several cities before reaching their final destination.

Each teleportation station provided a list of cities it could connect to, making it easier for them to plan their journey. After securing their place in the queue number, they found a bench near the portal and sat down to wait. While they waited, Xin Haotian turned to Aldrian and outlined their route.

"We'll first transit through Dual Horns Peak City in Demon territory, then continue to Thorny Flower Garden, also in Demon territory. After that, we'll head to the capital of the Dwarf Kingdom, Forgeheart City. The last stop will be in the Buddhist sect territory before we travel on foot to the secret realm."

Aldrian nodded as he listened to the journey plan.

"Can we stop in the Forgeheart Kingdom for a while? I need to get my sword fixed," Aldrian said.

"So, you didn't use your sword against me because it's damaged? Let me take a look at it," Xin Haotian responded.

Aldrian handed him the sword, and Xin Haotian carefully inspected it, unsheathing it to examine its condition.

"It's really broken," Xin Haotian said, examining the sword. "Though it looks like it only needs minor repairs on the outside, it actually requires major work. I'm surprised it hasn't crumbled yet. How did you come by a sword of this quality? Did the Evergreen imperial family give it to you?"

"No, it was my father who gave it to me," Aldrian replied.

"Who is your father?"

"Not telling."

"Acting mysterious, I see. What about your mother?"

"You're quite the curious cat, aren't you?" Aldrian said, looking at Xin Haotian.

"You're quite rude to your elder."

"The elder who suddenly attacked me with his sword?"

"Do you still hold a grudge about that? Are you still taking it to heart?"

"No, I never felt it was an offense."

The two ladies observed the bickering between the two men, a young man and a middle-aged looking man, though they knew these appearances were mere disguises. Although they appeared compatible with their calm faces, their interaction revealed underlying tension. After a while, they fell silent as they waited for their turn. Aldrian, meanwhile, reviewed his own information.

Aldrian Aster

Domain : The secret realm, The Ivory empire

Age : 13 years

Cultivation : Low Earl

Current energy : 321,702 (+2 /15m)

Energy needed for the next stage : 420.001

He had broken through to the Low Earl stage over a week ago, and he felt the control of his domain had become smoother. He felt much stronger, with a clearer and sharper mind. With this newfound confidence, he eagerly anticipated what his journey would bring. They continued to wait until their turn finally came, and they were ushered into the portal.

After stepping onto the teleportation formation, the scenery remained the same, but they knew they had entered demon territory. Sylphia quickly pulled a hood over her head to conceal her elven features. Since they were no longer in the Ivory Empire, she needed to be cautious. When they emerged from the portal, they were greeted by the plaza of the teleportation station and buildings with architecture distinct from that of the Ivory Empire.

The area around them had fewer trees and featured buildings with an Eastern architectural style. Aldrian noted that he couldn't see any elves here, making the environment quite unfamiliar to him. Having spent most of his time surrounded by elves and trees after emerging from the secret realm, the predominantly human presence felt strange.

Not only was the racial composition new, but Aldrian also sensed something different in the atmosphere. This was the first time he encountered such a thick concentration of demonic energy in one place. Though the people around him were not actively emitting their demonic energy, his sharp senses picked up the presence of it. The energy felt less violent than that of the devils but still carried a certain ominousness.

But still, the most striking feature after emerging from the portal was the twin peaks in the distance, their height reaching the clouds and shaped like horns from his vantage point. The scenery was so breathtaking that any newcomer stepping out of the portal would likely be stunned by the view.

"Let's move on if we don't have any business here," Xin Haotian said. He approached the operator to state his next destination and paid the required energy stones.

"You'll need to wait approximately 4 hours. You can either stay here in the plaza or explore the city. However, if you're not back in time for your turn, we'll consider your trip canceled and your energy stones will not be refunded," one of the operators informed them.

For Aldrian, of course he chose to wander outside the plaza and explore the city. He felt it would be a waste to simply wait and not take the opportunity to enjoy the new surroundings. His choice was supported by the two ladies, so Xin Haotian agreed to join them in exploring the city. They strolled leisurely, observing the various stalls lining the streets. The bustling atmosphere, filled with many demonic cultivators, revealed that these people were much like those in the orthodox cultivation world.

As they continued walking, Aldrian suddenly sensed a young boy, much younger than himself, approaching from the side of the street. Curious about the boy's intentions, Aldrian watched as the boy collided with him.

Thud!

Chapter 60 - Aldrian's Way to Fill The Time

Thud!

A young boy slammed into Aldrian and fell on his butt, but Aldrian didn't budge. He only stared at the boy, who looked about nine years old, dressed in tattered clothes. His dirt-smudged face and messy black hair made him appear more like a beggar. The boy rubbed his backside from the fall before looking up at Aldrian.

"I'm sorry for bumping into you, young master. I hope you don't take it to heart," he said, trying to stand while dusting off the dirt from his pants. Aldrian just smiled.

"It's okay. Be careful next time."

The young boy only bowed to him before running off, disappearing into the crowd. Xin Haotian, who had witnessed the scene, walked over and stood beside Aldrian.

"You know he pickpocketed you, right?" he asked. Aldrian responded with a simple nod.

"You're quite calm for someone who just got their stuff stolen."

"I just wanted to see what he'd do and where he'd go. It's more interesting here, more dynamic than when I'm with the elves." Aldrian said.

What he saw during this short walk could be described as 'wilder' than what he was used to in the Ivory Empire. He could sometimes sense people being beaten up in dark alleys for no reason. He also passed through the red-light district, where worldly pleasures were offered to guests. The artifact vendors occasionally sold fake items. It was truly a new experience for him, as it was very different from the elven cities, but he wasn't surprised. The elves were more disciplined and organized than the demon cultivators, after all.

Aldrian looked down at his waist, where his pouch should have been, a pouch containing defense and escape talismans given to him by Emperor Ladwin. It was more practical to keep some essential talismans outside rather than in a storage ring. He watched as the young boy stole his pouch. From where he stood, Aldrian could still sense the boy's movements and decided to follow his trail.

Xin Haotian merely shrugged and followed him, with their entire group trailing behind the boy, passing through several dark alleys before arriving at a dilapidated building. Aldrian used his camouflage technique to conceal himself and the two ladies, while Xin Haotian employed his own method of hiding. They were so well-hidden that even someone at the grand duke stage wouldn't have realized they were standing there.

They sharpened their senses, listening in on the conversation inside the building.

"Here's the thing from that person. Now can I go?" the boy asked the man in front of him, who had a thin frame and wore a bandana on his head. The boy handed over the pouch he had stolen from Aldrian.

"No, not yet. You still have one more to fulfill your quota," the man replied.

"But I've already stolen five since this morning! I have to take care of my mother. Can't you just ask someone else?" the boy pleaded.

Slap!

The man struck the boy, sending him sprawling to the side. The boy's cheek reddened, and his nose began to bleed.

"You dare talk back now, huh? If I say you have one more, then you'll do it! I don't care about your mother, you should just say 'yes' when I tell you something!" the man shouted.

The boy touched his cheek, trying to hold back his tears.

"I didn't hear an answer!" the man yelled again.

"Ye...yes," the boy stammered. He then stood up and walked towards the door, eager to escape this nightmare. But as he opened the door, he froze, stunned to see someone already standing there.

When he recognized the face of the person in front of him, he was shocked—it was the man whose pouch he had stolen earlier. The boy stumbled and fell on his butt, leaving the man behind him equally stunned.

"Who are you?" the man demanded. He couldn't sense how this young man had appeared in front of the door, as if he had materialized out of nowhere.

"It seems I've lost something here. Care to give it back? I'd prefer not to make my first trip here a bloody one," the young man said calmly.

Despite his wariness, the man burst out laughing. "Hahaha, I don't know what you're talking about, but kid, you shouldn't have stepped in here."

Suddenly, six men emerged from behind the darkness, each at varying cultivation stages, the weakest being a low Viscount, and the strongest a high Earl. They wielded various weapons, but all shared one common feature: a skull tattoo on their upper arms. The man sitting there grinned at Aldrian, as if he were looking at a treasure.

"It's a pity, but you should've been more careful about sticking your nose into other people's business," the man said.

"Boss, he looks rich and has plenty of artifacts on him. We've caught a big fish today," one of the thugs remarked.

"We could even sell this young boy to a slave trader. Look at his smooth face—there'll be plenty of buyers for him," another chimed in.

As the thugs made their comments, Aldrian ignored their words, instead observing his surroundings. His gaze then fell to his feet, where he noticed a small twig fragment. He picked it up, holding it between his thumb and index finger.

"This one is good," he said, causing the thugs to exchange confused glances.

"Is he crazy?"

"I think he's lost it after coming here."

"Whatever, get him! We don't want any mishaps, just don't—"

Before the man could finish his sentence, a sharp slash of energy cut through the air above him, followed by the sickening splash of blood. The sound of bodies dropping echoed through the room, and the smell of iron filled the air. The man's eyes widened in

shock as he realized the deadly sharpness that had enveloped the small twig in Aldrian's hand.

"Sword will!" the man trembled, finally realizing that the young man in front of him wasn't just an ordinary rich kid from some orthodox family, but an expert sword cultivator. He glanced at the boy trembling in fear just a short distance away and rushed to grab him, intending to take him hostage. But before he could reach him, another slash cut through the air, severing his hand.

"Arrghh!" he screamed as his hand was sliced off, blood pouring from the wound, adding to the already gruesome scene.

"How dare you touch me! You'll—" He froze mid-sentence when the young man appeared in front of him, pressing his thumb against the man's forehead. Suddenly, he couldn't speak or move; his body felt frozen, as if he had become a living statue.

"How is this possible?! I'm at the peak Earl stage, how can he be so powerful when he's only at the low stage?!" he screamed internally. After a few moments, Aldrian released his forehead, allowing him to move and speak again.

"You...you will regret—" His head was severed to the side before he could finish the classic threat he had prepared for dangerous situations. The head rolled away, marking the end of the bloody spectacle in the room. The boy watched in terror, even more so when Aldrian's serene, emotionless eyes turned towards him. He feared he was about to be killed as Aldrian walked closer.

"No, please forgive me. It wasn't my intention to steal your stuff," he said as he dragged his body backward.

When Aldrian reached him, the boy raised his arms to cover his head and squeezed his eyes shut, crying. But he was stunned when nothing happened. Opening his eyes, he saw that a pouch had been placed beside him. He looked up at Aldrian's face and saw him smiling.

"I didn't know you had a sadistic side, not even sparing a child from your teasing." Xin Haotian remarked from the doorway, followed by Eleine and Sylphia. Sylphia quickly rushed to the boy and used her technique to heal his injuries, her expression filled with pity for the child.

Aldrian shrugged. "It wasn't my intention." He then looked down at the boy. "Inside that pouch are some medium energy stones. Use them to make a better life for yourself and your mother. Stop doing what you did."

The boy was stunned, thinking Aldrian must be joking, but the warm smile on Aldrian's face told him it was real. He then kowtowed deeply.

"Thank you for your gracious heart, young master. I will surely use your gift for the best for me and my mother, but I don't think—"

"You don't have to worry about these thugs group," Aldrian interrupted. "You just have to live better. I've given you enough to start anew."

The boy, brimming with tears once again, kowtowed deeply before excusing himself. The group watched as he walked away, disappearing from sight, then turned their attention to the mess Aldrian had caused.

"What if you got scammed by that kid? What if he lied to you?" Xin Haotian asked.

"He didn't. He's as honest as he seems," Aldrian replied calmly.

"Well, whatever you want. So, what now? Are you suddenly the hero of justice? Do you want to track down the rest of these thugs?"

"We still have an hour before the estimated time, right? Let's make use of it with some productive activities. It's also good for training our bodies."

"You really have a bizarre mindset, and you're quite daring, especially in someone else's territory, not caring about the consequences." Xin Haotian said.

"Well, that's just who I am. Are you coming or not? If not, I'll visit them myself," Aldrian responded.

"Of course I'm in. It's a good chance to loosen up a bit."