

The Shining Star Above The Heaven

#Chapter 521: Approaching the Central Area - Read The Shining Star Above The Heaven Chapter 521: Approaching the Central Area

Chapter 521: Approaching the Central Area

Aldrian bitterly smiled as he could only say a few words to them before they disappeared. He did not even have time to say goodbye or anything like that, which made him feel bad. These people had left their wills here to wait for him for many years, just to see him return one last time before they vanished. They even tried to give him the little power they still had.

At that moment, the light entering his body gave him a warm sensation, and he could sense their power. Unfortunately, it did not raise his cultivation, but it gave him deeper comprehension in many elements.

He could also sense something else, which made his heart feel heavy and deeply touched. It was their hope in him—their hope for his glorious return and their trust that he would not abandon them, even though they were already gone. They were even happy just to see him one last time and to say those words full of hope and faith to him.

He sighed. Why were these people so loyal and faithful to him? What kind of man had he been in the past? What made them so loyal to him—to this extent? This kind of loyalty and faith was something difficult to achieve, and it made him wonder if he had truly been that good as a ruler in those days.

Although he had seen his past in those visions, he found only that he had already been respected and revered by many beings. He still did not know what had earned their loyalty to such an extent. There was no way it was because of his strength—strength alone could not make so many beings remain so faithful to him.

In the real world, the light shining from the obelisk had already dimmed, allowing the others to finally look at it. They saw that Aldrian was still touching it, which made them wonder what had just happened.

Aldrian's consciousness had already returned to the real world, where he stood with his hand still on the obelisk. He opened his eyes, looked at the obelisk in front of him, then raised his gaze to its tip. His face was calm, but within his heart, his resolve had become even stronger.

"The Monument of Eternal Faith. A monument that shows the faith of those who believed in me and waited all these years. Their faith remains strong, even now," Aldrian thought.

There was a moment of silence before Patriarch Xin spoke.

"Young Aldrian, are you okay? What happened just now?"

Aldrian turned his head toward the patriarch.

"This is truly a monument," he said, then looked up at the obelisk's tip again. "A monument that shows the faith of many beings from the past."

Patriarch Xin was confused by what Aldrian meant, but Aldrian did not seem intent on explaining further. Seeing that Aldrian appeared to be done inspecting the obelisk, the rest of the group also began examining it. However, none of them could trigger a reaction from the obelisk like Aldrian had.

They wondered how Aldrian had managed that. What did he gain from this monument? With a reaction like that, he must have received something, right? But no one asked him, as he clearly had no intention of explaining more.

After deciding there was nothing else to examine, they continued flying. More than an hour later, they came across another obelisk. This time, the others inspected it first, wanting to understand what made these monuments so special.

Aldrian simply let them try first, inwardly smiling at their efforts. There was no way these monuments would react or show anything for them—these monuments existed for him to trigger.

He let them try first because it was for the well-being of the group and out of his goodwill. He could already imagine that if he was always the first to touch the monument and trigger something from it, there would be unsatisfied hearts among some of these people. They would think he was taking all the benefits they did not understand, and that would cause a crack in the group's unity.

He did not want that, so he let them check for themselves first. This way, they would not have a problem later when only he could trigger the reaction from the obelisk. They would come to understand that these obelisks only reacted to his golden energy.

After they finished checking, Aldrian did the same thing as with the first obelisk, and it triggered the same reaction. The light shone and then dimmed, and that was it. The rest of the group could only sigh and lament that they did not possess energy like Aldrian.

As for Aldrian, what he experienced with this second obelisk was the same as the first. He met many beings from different races—new faces—who also showed their faith and hope in him. It made his resolve grow stronger.

Not long after that, they continued their journey. For a week, they kept exploring, flying deeper into the central area. Today, after flying through a grassland environment all this time, they finally came upon a new environment ahead.

Over the past week, they had found dozens of obelisks, all of which had been triggered by Aldrian. He encountered the wills of thousands of people, and they all carried the same message and resolve. Each of them tried to give him what little power remained in their will.

After encountering so many monuments, Aldrian began to think that they had been scattered throughout the core area for him to awaken.

He could only imagine what had happened in the past to lead to this—these thousands of people, seemingly long perished, could do nothing but wait for his return. He suspected that the parties mentioned by Long Leiyun were the ones responsible for their deaths.

For the first time, he felt anger toward those unknown parties. What had happened in the past, for so many to die—and even in death, to place their hope in him? His resolve to answer their hopes and expectations continued to grow.

How could it not? With so many placing their faith in him, there was no way he would simply turn away.

He would look into it. He would find out what had happened in the past, and then he would decide what he must do in the future.

The sun was still high when Aldrian's group finally arrived at the new environment—a dense forest filled with towering trees unlike any they had seen before. The trees had thick trunks, and their leaves were shaped like green diamonds. These trees exuded rich heaven and earth energy, and Aldrian thought that even an emperor-stage cultivator could break through easily in a place like this.

Although the entire core area was a cultivation sanctuary in itself, this forest was truly remarkable. They suspected that the abundance of energy in this place might actually stem from the forest itself.

They carefully flew past the dense forest with their senses heightened and not letting their guard down. This environment was different from the grassland, as the trees below obstructed their view of the ground, and they remained cautious of anything that might be hidden from sight.

However, even after flying for several hours, they did not encounter anything remarkable. They continued for a few more hours before deciding to land and take a rest. Slowly, they descended into the midst of the dense trees. Only after entering the forest fully did they begin to feel the richness of the energy directly.

Sensing that this was not an opportunity to be missed, they chose to cultivate while restoring their energy. After confirming the area was safe, they each picked a spot and began to cultivate. Patriarch Xin and Xin Haotian also took advantage of the opportunity.

Although the patriarch had already reached the peak emperor stage and couldn't progress beyond it due to the continent's strange situation, he could still solidify his cultivation foundation. He could also push his peak emperor stage cultivation to its limit, so that when the strange situation eventually disappeared, he might be able to break through to the next stage.

Aldrian did not disturb them. Instead, he walked alone to observe the surrounding area. He strolled leisurely, taking in the scenery of trees and bushes. After a few moments, finding nothing that piqued his interest on the ground, he teleported to the tip of the tallest tree he could find for a wider view.

Once he reached the top of the tallest tree in his vicinity, he looked toward the direction of the central area. The mountain range was growing closer, and the floating land was becoming clearer.

The palace has many towers that pierce the sky. The style of the building is also quite different from those on the continent, as it seems to combine the luxurious architecture of the northern empires with the elegant and cultural design of the eastern-style buildings from the Demon and Buddhist territories.

He appreciated the grandeur scenery for a moment before deciding to create another of his domains here. After he had created his domain, he continued to watch the scenery. But then, he saw something in the distance that he had missed earlier due to his focus on the floating land.

What he saw was a strange golden hue, creating a flat area amidst the forest. It was the only place where trees did not grow, which intrigued him.

Noticing that the others were still cultivating, Aldrian did not hesitate to approach the spot.

Chapter 522: His Energy in Another Being?

Aldrian quickly arrived at the golden spot where no trees grew. The area, stretching about 500 meters, was completely devoid of vegetation, as if the plants in the forest

were deliberately avoiding it. In the center of this barren expanse lay a puddle of golden liquid.

There was not much of the golden liquid, but it exuded an intense concentration of energy. Then Aldrian sensed something that made him astonished. The color of the puddle immediately reminded him of the liquefied divine energy stored in the secret chambers of the Doria and Vindas Empires.

If this had been normal divine energy, he wouldn't have found it so surprising. What truly made him astonished was the fact that the energy coming from this puddle felt exactly like his own golden energy! How was this possible?

He then teleported, appearing right in front of the puddle, and stared at it intently. Reaching out, he touched the golden liquid with his index finger and examined it more closely. But then he froze in shock—the energy within the droplet on his finger was suddenly being absorbed into his body.

Moments later, the aura of the golden liquid returned to that of ordinary divine energy.

What surprised him even more was that his cultivation had been affected. He could feel it—his cultivation had slightly risen, even if only by a small amount. Truly stunned, he stared at the puddle of golden liquid again. He activated his Eyes of the Heaven, trying to see if he could identify this liquid.

First Phoenix Ancestor's Divine Blood

Description: The divine blood of the first ancestor of the phoenix.

The description offered no further details, and even without it, he already knew what it was—making him want to facepalm. But—

"Blood? It's Feng Xuanyan's blood?" Aldrian thought, deactivating his Eyes of the Heaven and staring at the puddle again. He had already seen into the past of the Heavenly Scarf of the Divine Phoenix, where Feng Xuanyan appeared wounded when she arrived on this continent. Was this also from that injury?

Aldrian paused in thought for a moment before reaching out to touch the puddle again. As he expected, the energy within it began to be absorbed into his body. Before long, the golden blood lost his energy's aura completely. He could feel his cultivation increase once more—still small, but clearly there.

Up until now, the only way Aldrian knew to increase his cultivation was by expanding his domain. The rate of increase depended not only on the size of the domain but also on the karma he had with the place—at least, that was his understanding.

For example, the Heavenly Direction Church's territory wasn't as vast as the empires surrounding it, but when he made the church's territory his domain, he received the greatest boost to his cultivation from that place. He had been able to instantly break through from the low marquess stage to the low duke stage.

He believed the boost was due to the church's worship of the heavens, an entity unlike any other. The heavens also had strong karma with him, and he thought that was why his cultivation had increased so dramatically.

In comparison to other territories, which only provided boosts based on their vast size, the church's territory was far more "productive" for him.

He had already tried absorbing many things that could help other cultivators increase their cultivation, but his own cultivation still did not budge. Now, Feng Xuanyan's blood, which contained his energy, had actually increased his cultivation.

With this, he had to rethink his understanding of how to increase his cultivation.

Aldrian paused for a moment, and then something suddenly came to mind.

"Wait, why does Feng Xuanyan's blood contain the same energy as my golden energy in the first place? How can she have my kind of energy?"

As far as he knew, his energy was unique to him, and there was no doubt about it—this was also confirmed by that "figure."

All this time, the only place he had found his golden energy was within himself. There was no place that contained his energy, unlike other types of energy. If such a place did exist, perhaps he could raise his cultivation in a more conventional way, using cultivation techniques, rather than relying on expanding his domain.

Since he had never found a place with his energy, Aldrian had believed that nothing could increase his cultivation aside from expanding his domain. But why did Feng Xuanyan have his energy too?

"There's something I still don't remember from my past that might explain why she has my energy. Did I give her my energy, or something like that?" he thought.

He shook his head. Thinking like this wouldn't get him anywhere right now. He needed to talk to Feng Xuanyan, if she was still here, and make everything clear.

He then looked around his surroundings. Normally, with the richness of energy in this area, especially due to the aura of his golden energy, there should be many trees growing here, and they should be much bigger and stronger. They would likely absorb the residual energy from the blood.

However, the trees seemed to be avoiding this place, which intrigued him. He approached one of the trees and touched it. Being someone who could easily become one with nature, he could more or less "communicate" with its beings, and trees were no exception. He closed his eyes and sent his intent to the tree in front of him.

As if the tree recognized who he was, it reacted, with its branches and leaves moving as if swept by the wind. Aldrian smiled slightly as he sensed the tree's happiness. He sent his intent and asked about the matter on his mind, and the answer came instantly.

"So, because of my aura, no vegetation dares to get closer and grow here, as they think it would be too rude and even blasphemous," he thought.

His golden energy was indeed potent and sacred for nature-based beings, so it didn't surprise him that these trees took it to such an extreme—so much so that even his aura alone was something they dared not "sully."

He tapped the tree trunk a few times before looking at the puddle of golden liquid. Now that he had absorbed his energy from the puddle, this place would likely soon be covered with many trees. He then decided to return to the group, sensing that they seemed to be done with their cultivation session.

Once Aldrian returned, they continued their journey to the central area.

While Aldrian continued his journey deeper into the core area of the Everlasting Silent Forest, the situation outside the barrier was growing increasingly tense in certain parts of the continent. News of the assailant within the Buddhist sect territory had already spread, but that was not the only issue making the situation worse.

A few days ago, some devils suddenly appeared in several regions within the Ivory Empire, causing many deaths. This enraged Emperor Ladwin, who dispatched many of the Elven Knight Orders to hunt down the devils.

However, reports suggested that one particular devil was incredibly powerful, and despite the efforts of many elven soldiers, they were unable to contain it, with many losing their lives at its hands.

Though the Elven Knights dispatched by the imperial family had killed most of the devils that appeared inside the empire, they still could not kill this one particularly formidable devil, leaving the situation in the Ivory Empire tense.

However, the Ivory Empire is not the only one dealing with the devils. At the border between the two empires neighboring the devil territory, the devils seem to be wreaking havoc like mad dogs, attacking everything in sight without hesitation. They assaulted cities and towns near the border, killing countless people with no regard for their own lives, as if bent on suicide.

Many devils ended up dead, but the most disturbing part is the rumor that some of the Seven Deadly Sins were involved. They were the ones responsible for the greatest destruction, and after slaughtering many, they retreated back into the devil territory.

The situation is deeply frustrating. Unlike the war two years ago, when the devils seemed to have a plan for conquest, this time the devils appear to have no goal other than killing. Many are now speculating—what exactly are the devils planning?

At the Buddhist sect's territory, Sylphia and the others had already heard about what was happening in other parts of the continent, and they couldn't help but worry. This was especially true for Sylphia and Eleine, as their empires and families were the ones directly dealing with the devils.

Inside the Buddhist territory, the news of the assailant that slaughtered many people had become much clearer, and it appeared that a devil was the perpetrator. A few days ago, one of the monasteries under attack was near the location where some of the Seven Arhats were stationed, which led to a great battle.

It was said that the devil was strong enough to hold off three Arhats before managing to escape. This caused widespread tension, as it confirmed there was a devil within Buddhist territory who had been slaughtering many.

At this moment, Sylphia was in her room at the inn when, a few moments later, the Fifth Finger suddenly appeared behind her.

Sensing her presence, Sylphia turned to face her.

"So, what's the news?" she asked.

Chapter 523: The Situation Outside

"From our source, the Evergreen imperial family is having some difficulties capturing this particular devil. But based on the characteristics described by some witnesses, and considering how ferocious this devil is, there is a possibility that it is actually one of the Seven Deadly Sins—Wrath," the fifth finger said.

"Also, there is visual confirmation of the presence of other Seven Deadly Sins near the borders of the Devil territory with the two empires. The Sloth Devil is near the border of the Doria Empire, while Gluttony is near the border of the Vindas Empire."

Sylphia nodded.

"Alright. Thank you. You can return to your post," she said before the fifth finger disappeared.

After he vanished, Sylphia frowned at the information she had just received.

"Pride is in this territory, Wrath in the Ivory Empire, Sloth at the Doria Empire, and Gluttony at the Vindas Empire. The rest of the Seven Deadly Sins that Aldrian has not yet killed made their move at the same time. This is no coincidence. They are coordinating their attacks to create this chaos," she thought.

She had a bad feeling about it. The devils this time seemed to be recklessly slaughtering people without much regard. It was as if they had nothing to lose and had decided to do something reckless before they died—or something along those lines.

She pondered the situation. She needed to keep tracking how things developed, because it would help her decide what actions she and her group should take if anything went wrong in this territory. With Aldrian absent, she was the one leading the group here, and she needed to come up with preventive plans to keep them safe from danger.

So if something happened to this city and endangered their safety, they already had their escape route planned. For now, the safest route would be to return to the Atria Empire, Forgeheart Kingdom, or the Demon Territory, as there had been no reports of devil appearances in those territories.

Sylphia sighed.

"I'm still too weak to face those devils."

At a time like this, all she could do was hope to become strong enough—strong like Aldrian—so that she could stand against even the Seven Deadly Sins.

Her cultivation speed was already far beyond the continent's standards. She had reached the peak earl stage and was close to breaking through to the marquess stage, even though she had only been at the middle viscount stage four years ago.

That progress was largely thanks to the good cultivation environment Aldrian provided with his domain, and their dual cultivation—especially the latter, which had given her the greatest boost.

She could only smile bitterly. She must be crazy to even think about facing the Seven Deadly Sins. It seemed she had really been affected by Aldrian, who always faced strong opponents without hesitation. Being around him had pushed her to want the same strength—but she knew her limits, and she was not like him.

She also chose not to tell Aldrian anything about the current situation. She didn't want to disturb his business with the Xin family. He could do whatever he and the Xin family needed to do with peace of mind, and when he returned, he would learn everything himself.

She looked up at the ceiling and silently hoped that Aldrian was safe in the Everlasting Silent Forest.

While Sylphia thought about the current situation and how to keep her group safe, her father in the Ivory Empire was thinking about how to kill the devil. At that moment, he was inside his workroom with another elf.

"Yes, it's confirmed. That is the Wrath devil. We have visual confirmation," the other elf said. He was none other than one of the most respected figures in the Ivory Empire—the imperial teacher, Elthar.

Emperor Ladwin frowned upon hearing this. He stood not far from the imperial teacher, his back facing him as he looked out at the scenery outside. Then he turned toward Elthar.

"Now that it's confirmed, it's no wonder he's so strong and can escape so easily. If one of the Seven Deadly Sins intends to escape, it will be too difficult for our men to kill him," Emperor Ladwin said.

"He's also smart—he acted quickly and attacked outside the World Tree's influence, which means the World Tree couldn't do anything to stop him." He then touched his chin, deep in thought.

"But this is truly strange. Their sporadic attacks this time seem aimed only at creating chaos, with no real purpose beyond mindless slaughter. The devils' movements now are crude—more like suicide attacks. After Aldrian killed so many of them while he was staying in the empire, we thought that if any still remained and were in hiding, they would have to stay hidden for an indefinite time, or at least until the prophesied moment. But to think they'd resort to suicide tactics... this is concerning."

Imperial Teacher Elthar nodded.

"Yes, this is quite concerning—especially after Aldrian destroyed so many devils across the continent. I don't think it's a coincidence. It makes me think this might be part of their final plan... or the beginning of something bigger in the future."

A silence settled between them as they both pondered the situation.

After a few moments of silence, Emperor Ladwin parted his lips.

"Do you think the prophesied time is already nearing?"

After a brief pause, Imperial Teacher Elthar nodded.

"Yes, I believe so. And I think this chaos, which seems purposeless to the devils, is a sign that the prophesied time may be closer than we think. I worry that, perhaps, without even realizing it, we may already be in that time," he said, his tone slightly grim.

Emperor Ladwin sighed and looked at the scenery outside again.

"I hope we all can survive this ordeal," he said, but then he suddenly smiled. "But as long as Sylphia is safe, it doesn't matter."

Elthar smiled as well.

"Well, she is with the strongest and best man. He is the one prophesied to save this continent. Even if we don't survive, she will surely be safe beside him," he said.

Hearing all Aldrian's stories over the years since leaving the Ivory Empire made them feel more at ease, knowing Sylphia was in his care. His achievements were already etched in gold letters in the history of the continent. It was hard to imagine another young man like him in the future.

"As long as she's safe," Elthar murmured.

In the Doria Empire, the situation was equally tense as the Sloth Devil launched an attack on the border with some devils. At this time, in Ilyon Town, the first prince of the Doria Empire, Hector, was observing the condition of the town.

This town that located within the Rivas Grand Duchy and near the border with the Devil Territory, was in far worse shape than it had been during the war two years ago.

Half of the town had been destroyed, reduced to rubble. Many witnesses said that all of this devastation was caused by a single person: one of the Seven Deadly Sins, the Sloth Devil.

Her army of summons and undead were truly strong, wreaking havoc and causing massive destruction.

Although there was an outpost right on the border to monitor movements from the Devil Territory, it seemed that the power of the member of the Seven Deadly Sins was too overwhelming. Even before the warning could reach them, the town had already been attacked.

However, when reinforcements from the Rivas family arrived, the Sloth Devil seemed uninterested in continuing her attack and retreated. The assault had occurred in several places along the border, with many devils participating.

Ilyon Town was only one of the victims, with the Sloth Devil specifically targeting it. Many people had died, including some who had been saved by Aldrian in the past.

This left the imperial family frustrated, as it seemed the Sloth Devil was toying with them, using lives as her playthings. Hector had come here at his father's command to offer support.

The Rivas Grand Duchy was already considered an important noble family in the empire, but after the imperial family learned that Aldrian was the son of Irene Rivas, they placed the Rivas family on a pedestal higher than any other noble family in the empire. That is why Emperor Durand did not hesitate to send Hector here, to demonstrate how much the Rivas family was valued.

Hector, along with his guardian knight Lorenzo, observed the destruction of the town with furrowed expressions. Not far from them, Grand Duke Rivas appeared to be giving instructions to several people.

"None of this makes any sense, the devils seem to be planning something, but it's as if they're not planning at all. Besides the Seven Deadly Sins, it's like they just want to kill as many as possible before they die. Do they really have something in mind?" Lorenzo voiced his thoughts.

"That's what I want to know too," Hector replied. "The devils' movements this time are strange. It's as if they don't have any clear purpose, but I doubt they would do all this without something behind it. It's truly concerning and unsettling."

"The only thing that comes to mind, based on their patterns and the news from other empires, is that they seem intent on killing as many as possible, with the Seven Deadly Sins leading the operation," he added.

"Your Highness, do you think this has to do with the prophesized time?" Lorenzo suddenly asked.

There was a brief silence before Hector responded.

"Maybe. But whatever it is, it gives me a bad feeling. If this is indeed connected to the prophesized time, then we must prepare. I believe the time for all the leaders on this continent to meet and finally unite has come."

While Hector and his guardian knight discussed the situation, Grand Duke Rivas glanced at them briefly before looking elsewhere. Though he seemed indifferent, suspicion stirred in his heart.

Chapter 524: Grand Duke Rivas' Suspicion

Grand Duke Rivas had felt uneasy about the imperial family's treatment of his household since last year. He didn't know why, but ever since Aldrian left the empire, the imperial family seemed to be paying unusually special attention to the Rivas family.

For example, the emperor once sent many gifts to his daughter, Irene, without any clear reason. When Grand Duke Rivas asked about it, the emperor merely said that they were rewards for Irene's great contribution and merit to the empire.

Grand Duke Rivas knew this was bullshit—there was nothing Irene had done that would justify receiving so many lavish gifts from the imperial family.

He wanted to know what kind of contribution or merit the emperor was referring to, but the response remained vague. The emperor only said that she had already done something that would be written in the empire's history.

He really wanted to pull his hair because the imperial family refused to give him a clear answer, and their behavior was truly suspicious. Even now, the emperor had sent Prince Hector to assist them right after they were attacked by the Sloth Devil.

At first, he thought all those gestures were the imperial family's attempt to win his daughter's heart, hoping she would marry Prince Hector. But he set that possibility aside after noticing that the prince didn't seem interested in marriage, and Irene never cared to discuss any man other than Aldrian.

His intuition told him there was something only the imperial family and Irene knew—something they believed was better kept from him, even though he was the head of the family.

The imperial family's treatment of Irene, and the Rivas family as a whole, could not be ignored. He truly wondered what Irene and the imperial family were trying to hide.

The only thought that came to mind was that it had something to do with that man, Aldrian. That seemed to be the one subject where both Irene and the imperial family shared the same view. Even the way they spoke about Aldrian was similar.

From his observations, the imperial family seemed to place Aldrian on a pedestal above anyone else. The emperor himself spoke highly of the man whenever they happened to meet, even in front of him and Irene. Prince Hector and Prince Alderia also had nothing but praise whenever the topic of Aldrian came up in conversation.

All of them had good opinions about Aldrian, and they spoke to him as if he should know Aldrian's qualities directly. He knew that Aldrian was a powerful cultivator and undeniably famous now, but what made them so eager, as if they were trying to shove Aldrian's virtues down his throat?

It was as if they wanted him to know, or *must* know—how good Aldrian was as a person, when in fact, he didn't give a damn about that. Aldrian could be a powerful cultivator, and he still wouldn't care what kind of person he was, as long as he didn't harm his family.

Grand Duke Rivas walked through the rubble-strewn town, his thoughts occupied by the matter, as it appeared in his mind.

Aldrian.

What did the imperial family know about Aldrian and Irene?

His steps suddenly stopped, and his eyes narrowed. He tried to recall his past conversation with Aldrian—everything about the man during that first meeting.

What was the first thing that caught his attention about Aldrian? His handsome face? No. His overwhelming strength? No. It was his eyes. Eyes that felt strangely familiar, though he couldn't quite place why.

But now, as he remembered it again, didn't Aldrian's blue eyes—those calm gazes—seem somewhat like Irene's calm gaze? His expression turned serious as he recalled his conversation with Aldrian.

Aldrian had said that he was much closer to Irene, but not in a romantic way. What did *much closer* mean if not in a romantic sense? Best friends? No, he couldn't believe that bullshit. The way Irene spoke about him wasn't how "best friends" talked; it was far too *intimate* by his standards.

Closer, if not in a romantic way... Could it be family? But Aldrian wasn't family—

Suddenly, his thoughts halted, and his eyes flickered with a brief tremor. Something had just flashed into his mind. A possibility that seemed absurd given Aldrian's power, yet once the thought took root, he couldn't shake it.

He then remembered Aldrian's question to him.

"Your Excellency, between your daughter and your pride, which one is more important?"

At the time, he had answered that he would prioritize Irene. He hadn't thought much about the question, assuming it was just a casual remark about his daughter. But what if that wasn't the case?

What if the question had a deeper meaning? Aldrian had also said he hoped him would hold onto his answer, his mindset, in the future—but why? Why had Aldrian said that?

Of course, he would continue to prioritize his daughter, but for Aldrian to ask that question, it felt as though something in the future would test his resolve, something that would force him to choose between his daughter and his pride.

Such a situation could arise if something significant happened to his daughter. And that thought made him think if Irene had already done something that would force him to choose between those two options.

Something that might require him to sacrifice his pride.

The grand duke's mind was shaken as the possibility began to feel like reality, making him want to rush to Irene, ask her, and have her tell him the truth. His chest felt cold and tight.

The imperial family and Irene's opinions of Aldrian.

The familiar eyes and gaze.

Aldrian's question.

His own answer.

He felt as though he might collapse once the possibility fully sank in. His body went limp to the side, as if he might fall into the rubble.

"My lord!" Some of the people nearby rushed to help Grand Duke Rivas, who seemed on the verge of fainting. The grand duke silently signaled them that he was fine, which stopped them in their tracks. They could only watch as their lord continued walking away, his steps slow and heavy.

They couldn't help but worry for their lord, as he suddenly appeared exhausted and on the verge of fainting. They thought the devastation caused by the devils was weighing heavily on his mind, leaving him fatigued.

They felt compelled to urge him to rest, but the grand duke seemed as though he wouldn't hear any of their concerns. They could only hope that nothing was seriously wrong with their lord and continued with their duties.

Grand Duke Rivas walked for some time before finally arriving at the tent amidst the cleared rubble—a place where he would stay as long as he was in this town. After entering, he was greeted by his personal retainer, a man who had served him for many years. The retainer had a black mustache, neat hair, and wore a butler's attire.

"Welcome back, my lord—" The man stopped mid-sentence when he saw Grand Duke Rivas, who seemed like a lost person with a blank expression and a slightly pale face. No, it was more accurate to say that it was as if the grand duke had just received the shock of his life and didn't know how to express it, except through the signs of his body.

"My lord, are you okay?" he asked, stepping forward and attempting to support the grand duke, but Rivas didn't respond. Instead, he signaled for him to stop, which caused the retainer to halt in his tracks.

The grand duke then sat in the chair behind his desk, slumping his body against the backrest. His expression remained blank, as if he were still lost, which made his retainer even more concerned.

What had happened to make him like this? Wasn't he fine when he stepped out of the tent two hours ago? Did something happen outside that caused this change? Was the situation worse than expected, perhaps leaving his lord stressed or exhausted?

Before he could ask anything further, Grand Duke Rivas' voice suddenly broke the silence.

"Louis, ask the Alchemist Association for the highest-grade Ice's Maiden pill."

Hearing the order, Louis was stunned. This was not the request he had expected, and it seemed to come out of nowhere. Of course, he knew about the Ice's Maiden pill—it was a pill designed to help ice-element cultivators, especially women, by smoothing their comprehension of ice laws and enhancing their power.

However, the pill was only effective for women who were still virgins.

Yes, the unique thing about this pill is that it is only effective for virgin women who are ice-element cultivators. Louis didn't understand why the pill worked this way.

But if this pill was consumed too often, it could damage the cultivator's foundation, ultimately affecting their power. Lady Irene had consumed it once in the past, as she was an ice maiden cultivator. However, she had never taken it again, as she didn't want to rely on the pill and preferred to keep her cultivation foundation strong.

Had Grand Duke Rivas requested the pill for his daughter? It was possible—she could consume it again to aid her cultivation. But looking at his lord like this, something still seemed wrong. The request, combined with his expression, suggested there was more to it.

"Just don't ask anything and do it. I'll explain in the future," Grand Duke Rivas said, as if he knew exactly what was on his retainer's mind.

Louis could only inwardly sigh before stepping out of the tent to carry out the order, leaving the Grand Duke alone inside.

Alone, Grand Duke Rivas stared at the tent's ceiling and let out a deep sigh.

"Irene, my child... Did you actually do it?" he murmured.

Chapter 525: Already Prepared

While Grand Duke Rivas is facing one of the most intense moments of his life, the situation on the border between the Vindas Empire and the devil territory is just as tense as in other places attacked by the devils.

At this time, inside the Flamecrest Grand Duchy, near a town close to the border, a battle breaks out as the devils try to attack. Fortunately, the Flamecrest family's information network caught wind of devil movements at the border that seemed to be targeting this town, so they had already sent cultivators as support.

The devils had previously attacked several towns and villages near the border, prompting the Flamecrest family to strengthen their intelligence network to monitor any suspicious movement.

Before the devils could launch their surprise attack, they were already intercepted by the Flamecrest cultivators.

The battle is intense, as the devils seem to have no regard for their lives, attacking wildly.

Whoosh!

Rumble!

"Kill all these crazy bastards! Don't let a single one escape!"

The rumbling sound of battle, followed by the shouts of the Flamecrest cultivators, intensified the clash as the devils continued their attacks using powerful techniques. Many of them had already transformed into their devil forms, making each strike even more destructive.

At a glance, the devils seemed stronger in terms of firepower, but the Flamecrest cultivators had the advantage in numbers, overwhelming them with a coordinated assault. However, the devils, buried under a storm of attacks from all directions, showed no concern for their injuries. They continued to retaliate with even greater force.

Even with their bodies shredded, stabbed, or cut, they did not stop. They launched crazed attacks, even using their own bodies as weapons just to land a single blow. Like rabid dogs that felt no pain, the only way to stop them was to kill them instantly.

Amid the chaos, one figure stood out the most. His sword and strength were overwhelming. His flame technique, combined with his swordsmanship, cut down devils in a single strike—igniting cheers from the Flamecrest cultivators, who shouted with high spirit.

Aldrey's strength made any devil facing him seem like a child trying to fight an adult. No matter how they attacked, their blows could not reach him. The area around him had already become a field of fire—flames blazing so fiercely that any devil who tried to approach was burned even before the real fight began.

"Argh! You all will die! Glory to the Devil God!"

"The Devil God will descend! Hahaha!"

Their screams were mad and frenzied, but their bodies turned to ash moments later, consumed by Aldrey's flame technique. His expression remained calm as he watched them disintegrate, unfazed by their wild shouts.

Soon after, the battle ended. The devils were eliminated thanks to the Flamecrest cultivators' coordination and the surprise interception.

With the battle over, the Flamecrest cultivators began cleaning the battlefield, collecting anything useful from the devils before burning their corpses. Aldrey observed the process in silence, lost in thought as he reflected on the fight.

"They really acted like lunatics, throwing their lives away without hesitation. What made them like this? Has their god truly close to descending?"

"Is the prophesied time closer than we thought?"

His face turned solemn. He continued to observe the cleanup process when he noticed a silhouette—a lone figure in the distance. He narrowed his eyes, as the person was coming from the direction of the devil territory, which was a bad sign.

"All units, stop what you are doing and return to formation!" he shouted. He did not want to take any chances, whether the figure was truly alone or not, or whether it was a devil. The fact that this person came from the direction of the devil territory was already highly suspicious, enough for him to act with caution—even if it meant preparing the battle formation.

The figure kept approaching, and eventually everyone from the Flamecrest family could see him clearly. He was wearing a robe that covered his entire body, but they could still

see his neck and mouth. They heightened their guard and prepared to unleash their techniques in case he suddenly attacked, but then the figure stopped not far from them.

Aldrey could not sense the figure's cultivation, but his expression remained solemn. This figure might be hiding their power.

"State yourself! Who are you, and why are you in this area?!" he shouted at the figure.

But there was only silence, which made the situation even more tense. A few moments later, the figure slightly lifted his head and looked toward Aldrey and the others from the Flamecrest family. The moment Aldrey saw the man's face, his expression turned grim—his face even paled slightly. He recognized who this figure was.

The man had a youthful, unblemished face—not too handsome, not too ugly, simply ordinary. To those who didn't know him, he would appear to be just another passerby—unremarkable and easy to forget.

But to those who did know him, he was a nightmare. An abomination that should not exist. One of the most feared men on the continent.

"All of you, retreat! Escape!" Aldrey shouted to the others. But before anyone could move far, the man raised his hand and directed his open palm at the Flamecrest cultivators. A black matter suddenly formed in his palm.

In an instant, the space up to five kilometers in front of his hand began to sucked into the black mass.

The cultivators who tried to flee began to slow down, their movements strained. One by one, they were slowly pulled toward the man's palm. Many tried to hold onto anything they could to stop themselves from being dragged in, struggling desperately against the force.

The trees, rocks, and the land itself—everything was being sucked into the man's palm. It was as if his hand had become a black hole, devouring anything that came near.

Aldrey stabbed his sword into the ground, bracing himself as he stared at the man with a grim expression.

"The Gluttony Devil has appeared here!" he thought.

But Aldrey did not despair. He turned his gaze to the side, where, in the distance, a high hill stood. Suddenly, from behind the hill, a massive object emerged, soaring into the sky. Though it was shaped differently from those of the Atria Empire, but it was unmistakably a flying fortress.

Moments later, the flying fortress unleashed a beam of flame energy as powerful as a peak emperor-stage cultivator's attack, directing it straight at the Gluttony Devil.

Whoosh!

The Gluttony Devil merely glanced at the incoming attack and extended his other hand toward it. Another dark matter, like a black hole, appeared in his palm, sucking in everything in front of it. The moment the attack from the flying fortress reached him, it was absorbed into the Gluttony Devil's hand.

The attack, capable of obliterating everything, was sucked in as if it were nothing. Even the Gluttony Devil's expression showed no concern. But the assault didn't stop there. Another attack came from a different direction, aimed directly at Gluttony.

The sword slash, which carried the power of an emperor-stage attack, came at Gluttony. He instantly released his technique and jumped backward, narrowly evading the strike. The slash tore through the land where he had just stood, leaving a 15-kilometer-long trail of destruction in its wake.

Gluttony turned his gaze toward the man who had suddenly appeared and unleashed the attack. The man was clad in full armor, his face obscured, making it impossible to discern his identity. However, the divine grade of his armor and the sword in his hand revealed that he was from the imperial family.

A smirk spread across Gluttony's face as he looked at the armored figure.

"This is truly surprising—the emperor himself coming personally to face me. What an honor," he said, his tone dripping with sarcasm.

The man's helmet opened on its own, revealing Emperor Herman himself. He looked at Gluttony with a solemn expression.

"To think there's another rat trying to sneak in, and it's a big one at that. Fortunately, I came, so I can kill the big rat personally," the emperor said, his tone fierce.

Gluttony smiled and glanced at the incoming flying fortress and the few emperor-stage cultivators that accompanied it. They formed a formidable force, enough to crush the entire devil's forces stationed at the fortresses across the border with the Vindas Empire.

"You truly didn't hesitate to waste all that resource just to face me," Gluttony said, his gaze shifting toward Emperor Herman.

"But it's not yet time for us to face each other." Suddenly, his body vanished.

"Soon, when darkness engulfs the entire continent, that's when we'll face each other—when your despair arrives." His voice echoed one last time before silence fell.

"He's gone," Emperor Herman said, as Aldrey let out a sigh of relief. Aldrey looked at the emperor with gratitude and gave a slight bow.

"Thank you, Your Majesty, for lending your help. This is truly an honor," Aldrey said.

Emperor Herman turned to Aldrey, smiling at him.

"Aish, it's nothing, just a small thing," he said, waving his hand dismissively.

Aldrey could only manage a bitter smile. How could it be a small thing when the emperor himself and his army had helped the Flamecrest family thwart the devils?

And he knew that the emperor had done it all because of Aldrian.

Chapter 526: Grand Duke Flamecrest's Suspicion

A month ago, Aldrey received a summons from the imperial palace, which puzzled him at the time, as it was not a common occurrence. He felt he had done nothing to warrant such attention from the imperial family, but of course, he obeyed the order.

However, once he met the emperor in his private study and the topic turned to Aldrian—and how the emperor knew about him being Aldrian's father—he was immediately struck with fear. His face turned pale, and countless negative thoughts about the emperor's possible opinions filled his mind.

He couldn't help thinking that way, given his and Irene's family history, and the fact that they were from different empires.

Yet, to his surprise, the emperor seemed entirely unbothered by it. He even expressed support, going so far as to laugh and thank him for his great merit, simply because he was Aldrian's father.

He was then told that the emperor of the Doria Empire, Emperor Durand, also already knew about Aldrian's origin—something he had already known because Aldrian had told him.

Now it became clearer why Emperor Herman did not seem to mind that Aldrian had been born from a woman of another empire, even one from a rival family.

In the end, Emperor Herman clearly had his own interests, and they were not far from the benefit of keeping Aldrian on the empire's side. He could already imagine that the emperor did not want to lose Aldrian to the Doria Empire by letting him side with his mother's family and choose to inherit from them.

Because of that, Emperor Herman was actively prioritizing the Flamecrest family to show goodwill toward Aldrian.

On several occasions, the imperial family also deliberately brought up Aldrian in front of the grand duke and himself. It was an effort to let the Grand Duke of Flamecrest better understand Aldrian's character and qualities beyond just his powerful strength.

They then always portrayed Aldrey as a remarkable son who had brought great benefit to the empire by drawing Aldrian and the imperial family closer.

Aldrey sighed as he looked at how far the emperor was going to show his support for him and his family, all so that Aldrian might choose his father's side if he decided to inherit. Even the emperor himself had come to this battlefield—something that made the situation truly out of the ordinary, even with the appearance of the Gluttony Devil.

A day ago after the devils attacked some of the places near the border, the Flamecrest family planning to intercepted a group of devils that want to attack the town near this place. But they A day ago, after the devils attacked several locations near the border, the Flamecrest family began planning to intercept a group of devils targeting a nearby town. However, they did not expect the emperor himself to arrive, offering his help and stating that the appearance of Gluttony had to be taken seriously.

With him came a few of his generals and a flying fortress—an impressive show of force that would serve as a strong deterrent, enough to keep the Gluttony Devil from acting recklessly.

Grand Duke Flamecrest could not outright reject the emperor's offer, so he agreed to let the imperial forces participate as support. They would only intervene if the Gluttony Devil appeared on the battlefield.

If the Flamecrest relied on the imperial forces to handle every 'puny' devil, it would only damage the Flamecrest family's prestige.

Still, the emperor could have simply sent a few of his generals to assist them—but no, he came in person, bringing his family's divine-grade artifact. That alone was more than enough to show everyone that the Flamecrest family was truly important and viewed differently from other noble houses in the emperor's eyes. Aldrey was genuinely grateful for the emperor's support in this matter.

However, the problem was that it was too conspicuous. It was blatant favoritism, and his father sensed that there was more to it than met the eye. Aldrey knew then that his father had finally grown suspicious, as the imperial family's treatment had become too excessive, especially with the emperor's personal involvement in the battle.

Grand Duke Flamecrest arrived with a group of imperial generals, followed by the flying fortress, which landed beside the battlefield.

He then landed near his son and Emperor Herman, before gave the emperor a slight bow.

"Thank you, Your Majesty, for your assistance. We would have faced great difficulty confronting the Gluttony Devil without your help," Grand Duke Flamecrest said.

Emperor Herman smiled at the words and waved a hand.

"Aish, it's nothing. Isn't it also my duty to stop the devils' wicked plans? This is just my way of doing so. You don't need to feel burdened by it," he said.

Grand Duke Flamecrest nodded in understanding, but inwardly, he still had doubts about the emperor's treatment of the Flamecrest family. This had already gone far beyond what he considered normal—something many would clearly see as favoritism from the emperor. Other noble families would likely think the same and begin to question what was truly going through the emperor's mind.

After the incident involving the devils' scheme and the fall of Boraz Fortress, the Flamecrest family's name had risen sharply—even surpassing the imperial family. Normally, that would not be entirely favorable, as it was uncertain how the imperial family might react.

However, contrary to the assumptions of some high-ranking nobles, the imperial family had become even more supportive of the Flamecrest family. There was no indication of any move suggesting they would "not lose."

Instead, they appeared to draw even closer to the Flamecrest family—as if it was the imperial family that had stepped back, and they were the ones who needed the Flamecrest family. At least, that was how it looked from the perspective of some noble families and Grand Duke Flamecrest himself.

Grand Duke Flamecrest knew this treatment had something to do with Aldrian. That man seemed to have considerable influence within the imperial family.

Aldrian said the imperial family would not give the Flamecrest family trouble and would even reward them. That was exactly what happened, as the Flamecrest family received rewards for their "achievement," which were actually thanks to Aldrian.

Grand Duke Flamecrest knew his son had a close connection to Aldrian and because of that relationship, the Flamecrest family had also benefited.

If that connection could benefit the family, then he would also feel proud that his son had formed his own ties—especially with someone the imperial family truly placed on a pedestal and who could even influence them.

But for the emperor himself to appear with his forces to show support—that was beyond anything he had expected. Even if Aldrian could influence the imperial family's treatment of the Flamecrest family, this level of involvement was excessive.

Was it truly only because Aldrian and Aldrey were close?

Was it solely Aldrian's words that moved the imperial family?

No, he thought, there must be something deeper—something he did not yet know.

Grand Duke Flamecrest began to think about everything that had happened between his family and Aldrian, or more specifically, Aldrey's relationship with Aldrian.

If he thought about it, no matter how close Aldrian was to Aldrey, there was no need for Aldrian to do everything that caused the Flamecrest family's name to rise higher as it had. Aldrian was the one who destroyed Boraz Fortress, but the Flamecrest family was the one that got the credit.

That was not truly necessary, as even without that, the Flamecrest name would still have been high—and even though the devils had tried to smear it, it only revealed that it was a devil's ploy.

At one point, he had already asked his son about his closeness to Aldrian, which was even deeper than he had thought. Since when had he had someone like Aldrian as a friend? For him, Aldrian had appeared out of nowhere—suddenly close to his son, and he knew Aldrey was never truly close to anyone outside of his family.

As a noble and the son of the grand duke, Aldrey had never had a true friend because he felt those who tried to approach him were not sincere in their friendship. The grand duke knew this because Aldrey had told him in the past.

But his son's answer regarding Aldrian was that he met Aldrian not long after he got out of the Everlasting Silent Forest. He said it was because Aldrian had given him a helping hand after he was trapped inside the secret realm for so long. He felt grateful for that, and they became close since then, before he returned to the mansion.

Grand Duke Flamecrest accepted his son's answer as it was, even though he still felt something was lacking and strange. His son's explanation still felt vague and did not fully explain their closeness to this point.

"Come to think of it, did Aldrey really meet Aldrian after he came out of the Everlasting Silent Forest? We did not know his origin or anything about him, and his existence was unknown until the accident with the Hydra in Balin," the grand duke thought.

"Someone that powerful suddenly appearing is indeed strange. Is he a hermit who lived a secluded life before that? But from my observation of how Aldrian has acted all these

years, he is not someone who likes to lie low. He doesn't seem like someone who lived as a long-term hermit preferring a slow and peaceful life."

"It's as if he came out from his place after so long, showed the world his existence, and kept doing things without care—which in the end made him famous." Grand Duke Flamecrest narrowed his eyes.

"Hidden place," suddenly a possibility came to his mind.

"Don't tell me that Aldrian is actually from the same secret realm as Aldrey?"

Chapter 527: Remembering Aldrian's Request

Grand Duke Flamecrest narrowed his eyes as he looked at his son, who was speaking with Emperor Herman. The possibility that Aldrian came from the same place where Aldrey had been trapped was also high.

If, during those more than ten years Aldrey spent inside the secret realm, he built a friendship with Aldrian, then it was more believable than the idea that they had met outside the Everlasting Silent Forest and formed a bond there.

As the Grand Duke's mind became occupied by this possibility—which made much more sense to him—it became a starting point for him to consider many other possibilities regarding the truth about Aldrian.

He then recalled his conversation with Aldrian at that time. Aldrian had asked him for a favor concerning Aldrey: to give Aldrey a chance to explain himself and not jump to conclusions too quickly if Aldrey did something that might seem wrong.

Had Aldrian been implying something with that request? Had Aldrey done something that he, as his father considered wrong? But from his observations so far, he didn't think Aldrey had done anything wrong. Aldrey had been acting normally, staying true to his character, and there had been no reports of him doing anything that would cause concern.

But then he sighed, feeling that he had missed one part, and that was—

"During the time he was trapped inside the secret realm, I don't know what he did. He hasn't shared many details about what happened in that place over more than a decade."

That was the only time the Grand Duke had no knowledge of Aldrey's activities, and it was the only period he could think of when Aldrey might have done something wrong.

If Aldrian truly knew that Aldrey had made a mistake, then it would confirm his suspicion that Aldrian had also been trapped in the same place.

Now the next question was: what kind of mistake had Aldrey made for Aldrian to ask that kind of request?

While thinking about it, Grand Duke Flamecrest walked away in the opposite direction from Aldrey and the others, seeking a more secluded place to gather his thoughts. Aldrey glanced at his father, who seemed deep in thought, but since he was still speaking with Emperor Herman and sensed nothing wrong, he paid it no mind.

The Grand Duke continued to think about Aldrey's possible mistake. What kind of mistake could it be? He was not an unreasonable man. If there had been a mistake, he would not rush to judge. He needed to understand why someone made a mistake—and only then would he consider whether it truly was

a mistake.

Even more so for his son—if Aldrey had made a mistake, then he would first listen. He would want to know what kind of mistake it was, and why Aldrey had done it. His compassion for his son was far greater than what he felt toward others. So why would Aldrian need to ask for a favor like that, when he already knew he would not be unreasonable toward his own son?

He would not simply lose control after hearing of Aldrey's mistake.

Grand Duke Flamecrest gave a slight nod to himself, as if trying to convince himself that whatever his son had done would not be something that required his anger.

He told himself to believe that.

He *convinced* himself.

But in the end, the Grand Duke gritted his teeth, still unsatisfied. He was truly curious—what kind of mistake had Aldrey made inside that secret realm? Why did Aldrian need to make such a request? Why?

Was there any clue he could use?

He pushed his thoughts harder, knowing he was the only one who could uncover the truth. If Aldrey really had done something wrong, then he would surely not tell him—even if asked.

He thought again—and then, suddenly, something came to mind.

"Wait... wasn't that bastard's daughter also trapped inside the Everlasting Silent Forest at the same time as Aldrey? Could all of this be connected?"

The moment this possibility surfaced, his mind began working at full speed.

"I already asked about Irene Rivas, and Aldrey said he wasn't trapped in the same secret realm as her. He claimed he didn't know what happened to her. And he didn't show any particular concern toward Irene, so I wasn't suspicious at the time."

"But what if he lied to me—just like he lied about Aldrian? What if Irene was in the same secret realm as him? What if all three of them—Aldrey, Aldrian, and Irene—were trapped together for over a decade?"

"Could Aldrey's mistake be connected to Irene?"

The Grand Duke's thoughts trembled, and wild guesses began to flood his mind.

It couldn't be helped, as Irene came from a family that had long been their rival. Every time they met, the result was always curses and fighting—and in rare cases, someone could even be killed. This "not so amicable" relationship could be traced back millions of years, to the time of the great battle against the devils.

The Flamecrest and Rivas families, both located near the border, were among the few who had to face the mighty devil forces firsthand. Back then, the relationship between the Rivas and Flamecrest families was not as strained as it is now.

When the great war broke out, each family accused the other of failing to do their part in holding back the devils within their respective territories, allowing the enemy to flank their borders and attack their families from behind.

But many knew that the situation at that time was truly chaotic, and it was never simple to hold the devils at the border.

Many believed that the two families acted that way because they had lost so many people and were nearly destroyed. Flamecrest lost both their patriarch and young master, while the Rivas were left only with the patriarch's younger brother—who, fortunately, was able to rebuild the family.

They must have felt deep grievance and needed someone to take it out on. That just happened to be their neighboring family from a different empire. From that time on, the relationship between the two families became what people see today.

Many believe that the Flamecrest and Rivas should simply let go of the past, as it was never something they could truly blame each other for. It sounds petty to place blame on the other just because the devils happened to attack from each other's flanks during that chaotic time.

However, that was not something easy to do. Their strained relationship, which had long since turned into a rivalry, was already deeply embedded in the hearts of both families' members. Even if the leader of one family wished to move on from the past, the other would not necessarily feel the same.

To this day, Grand Duke Flamecrest shared the same stance as his predecessors. His family was not to be blamed by the Rivas, and they would uphold their dignity without letting the Rivas push them around. They would not lose.

But now, he wondered—what if the mistake Aldrey made was actually connected to the successor of the Rivas family?

What kind of mistake?

His thoughts raced, and he couldn't help but continue thinking in that direction.

How could he not?

Aldrey, a noble, handsome man full of charisma, had been trapped in the same secret realm as a woman who—though he hated to admit it—was both a rare beauty and a rare genius. Aside from Princess Loraine, the only woman he considered worthy of Aldrey was Irene.

That only showed how exceptional Irene was—as both a cultivator and a woman.

But the problem was that she was from the Rivas family—their rival family.

What if the mistake Aldrey made was that he was, he was..., he...with that woman?

Grand Duke Flamecrest tried to hold himself back from losing control and rushing toward Aldrey to interrogate him, especially since the emperor was still present. He inhaled and exhaled deeply several times before calming himself down.

"Relax, Carlos. All of this is still just your wild guess without any proof. You can't lose control just because of your imagination. Relax. Don't let your emotions control you. Relax," he repeated to himself several times until calm returned.

Still, his suspicion was not something he could ignore. He decided to investigate what truly happened to Aldrey inside the secret realm. Once again, he tried to think positively and not jump to conclusions without evidence.

But then—what if Aldrey's mistake really did have something to do with Irene?

"If Young Master Aldrey does something that you consider wrong, please don't get angry immediately. Give him a chance to explain himself and try not to jump to conclusions too quickly."

Once again, he remembered Aldrian's request, which he could not brush off after all that Aldrian had done for his family.

His eyes grew determined. If this involved the Rivas family, he would listen to Aldrey first. He wanted to hear what his son had to say—he would give him a chance.

But first, he needed to investigate thoroughly.

He then walked back to the emperor and Aldrey as if nothing was wrong.

Ten days later,

While the devils remained active in some parts of the continent, Aldrian and his group were still journeying deeper into the core of the Everlasting Silent Forest.

After more than a week flying through the forest, they were now nearing a new environment.

Chapter 528: The Statues

Aldrian and the others flew closer to the central area as a new scenery appeared before them. In recent days, while flying through the forest, they had found more of the obelisk structures hidden among the tall trees, each one triggered by Aldrian.

They also stopped from time to time to cultivate, as this place was unlike any other. Thanks to that, they had saved many years of cultivation, with their progress advancing at a speed never seen before. Some of them were already nearing their breakthrough points. For example, Xin Haotian was close to breaking through to the middle emperor stage.

While they kept moving toward the central area, they also wondered if this place truly had no danger. They had not encountered any traps or anything dangerous on their journey so far, which made them question whether there was any danger in this place at all.

Aldrian also found it strange that there were no traps or some kind of obstacle. With so many treasures possibly hidden here—and the entire area being a cultivation sanctuary—there had to be something in place to prevent just anyone from entering.

They also wondered about the fate of the people they had sent back then. Where were they? Had they already died? If they were still alive, then where were they now? That was the question they wanted answered, because they still had not found any trace of the groups the Xin family had sent at that time.

Now, after flying through the forest for days, they finally found another new scenery—and this time, they saw a river. With a width of a kilometre, the river contained still golden water that exuded thick divine energy.

All of them, including Aldrian, were truly shocked by what they saw, because the golden water stretched to the horizon, and all of it was pure divine energy. This was a liquefied form of divine energy, which meant the source of this river was so rich with divine energy that it had caused the energy to turn into liquid.

This followed the same concept as the pond created inside the Doria and Vindas Empires, which was full of divine energy. The crystal of divinity produced dense divine energy, and because there was no one who could absorb it, the energy became so rich that it liquefied and formed a pond.

But here, the dense divine energy had formed a river that stretched toward the horizon, leaving all of them agape. Just how rich was the source of the divine energy at its origin, to have turned it into a river?

If this rich energy could be absorbed, how much could a cultivator's cultivation be raised? They could not imagine it, because they did not fully understand the potential of divine energy within their bodies. They knew that they needed to reach a certain stage of cultivation before they could absorb divine energy.

The cultivation stages they currently had—from Beginner to Emperor—were still considered "mortal" compared to the higher stages. They could only dream of the day when the "restrictions" on this continent would be lifted, so they could continue their cultivation journey. They wanted to experience that before their lifespans caught up to them.

On the other side of the river, they saw a vast grassland with many large statues, all of them facing toward the palace on the floating land. These statues were shaped many kinds of living beings, which made them realize that the statues represented many races.

The statues were placed at a distance from one another and seemed to follow some kind of order. For some of the group, the placement of the statues looked scattered and without meaning. But for Aldrian, as he observed the scattered statues, he could see that they were not placed carelessly.

The statues stretched all the way to the horizon, and he saw that all of them faced the palace in the sky. Their heads were lifted to gaze at the palace itself, and their expressions were full of respect and worship.

They finally landed near one of the statues. The statue was enormous, reaching a height of a kilometer. The one they landed near was a statue of a human man wearing regal robes, with both hands resting on the hilt of a sword that was stabbed into the ground.

Even though it was only a statue, all of them could still see the handsomeness of the man in front of them. They also felt the charisma exuding from it. They did not know

why, but it felt as if the statue might be alive—perhaps because of how detailed it was. Aldrian felt the same, but he focused on something else. There was something about the man's face that felt familiar to him.

"What a magnificent statue. Is this a statue of a cultivator from the higher realm?" one of the elders said.

"I think so. All of the statues here must be of people with high status in the higher realms. That must be why they were built—to immortalize them."

"All of them are looking at the palace in the sky. I wonder what they saw, and what is inside that palace. For all of them to look at it with expressions like that... could it be a sign that the dragon and the phoenix are inside the palace?"

They continued discussing the statues while Aldrian was thinking about something else. He looked at the face of the statue and narrowed his eyes.

If it felt familiar, then he must have already seen the real man behind this statue in one of his visions. After a few moments of thought, he finally remembered seeing this face in some of his visions, although he still did not know who the person was.

He looked at the statue and activated his Eyes of the Heaven.

The Statue of the Daryl Harrison

Description: A statue of the fourth patriarch of the Harrison noble family, a noble family located in the Eighth Heaven.

"*Daryl Harrison?*" Aldrian thought, and after a few moments, he raised his eyebrows. Suddenly, memories from his visions of this man named Daryl replayed in his mind in a split second. He had already met this man a few times in his past life, and just like the others, Daryl was one of his followers.

Aldrian then looked at the other statues before turning to the rest of his group.

"You all can observe this statue. I'll check the other statues," Aldrian said to them.

Patriarch Xin looked at Aldrian and nodded.

"Be careful. Although we still have not faced anything dangerous, we cannot drop our guard," he said. Aldrian nodded and flew toward the other statues. Patriarch Xin

watched Aldrian as he flew farther away, then asked Xin Haotian beside him without looking at him.

"What do you think about him, son? Don't you feel curious about him with all of his strangeness?"

"Don't you feel that since we entered the core area, Aldrian seems more and more like a being separate from us? I mean, separate in the sense that he is not someone who belongs to this continent. More like he is from somewhere else, or maybe—just maybe—from the same place as the dragon and phoenix. It's really strange, considering he claims he was born inside the secret realm," the patriarch added.

Xin Haotian did not answer immediately but looked at Aldrian as well.

"I also have this feeling that Aldrian is someone who is not supposed to be here. Since we arrived, he seems to be the only one who can trigger something in this place, and his expression..." Xin Haotian paused, remembering Aldrian's expression here.

"He is like he knows this place."

Aldrian was calm, as if he knew exactly what he was doing inside this place. With the strangeness of the environment and Aldrian's behavior, and how the place seemed to react to him, Xin Haotian even began to think that this place was built with Aldrian in mind. It was as if this place was created just for him.

"Do you think the dragon and phoenix built this place to wait for someone like Aldrian to step in?" Xin Haotian asked his father.

Patriarch Xin remained silent and couldn't help but consider the possibility before letting out a sigh.

"This is getting stranger. But if the dragon and phoenix are actually waiting for someone like young Aldrian, then what is his real origin? Didn't you say his parents are nobles of this continent?" he asked.

Xin Haotian turned silent, unable to answer the question. Aldrian was an enigma to him. On one hand, he was someone born on this continent, but his very existence felt out of place here. Their journey inside the core area had only made him more convinced of that.

While Xin Haotian and Patriarch Xin were discussing him, Aldrian flew around observing some of the statues. Each of their faces made him remember his past visions, as he had seen each face at least once in those visions.

"Are these statues of those with a certain status in the higher realms? Maybe that would explain why they can meet me directly and appear in my visions," he thought.

He kept flying, and as time passed, he flew deeper into the central area. Then suddenly, he stopped as he saw a certain statue, and without hesitation, he approached it.

No data found.

Chapter 529: Almost Reach the Central Area

Aldrian then landed in front of the statue of a man. This man had dragon horns on his forehead, indicating that he was a human form of a dragon. What made Aldrian stop and land in front of this statue was the symbol on the man's robe—it was the symbol of the Silver Lightning Dragon Clan.

"Long Tianlei, the third patriarch of the Silver Lightning Dragon Clan," Aldrian thought after reading the statue's information using his Eyes of the Heaven. He looked at the statue again, observed it for a moment, and touched it before trying to inject his energy into it. However, he did not trigger anything like the awakening of a will. Instead, he felt a kind of stored divine energy inside the statue.

He raised his eyebrows as he sensed that the energy seemed to be connected somewhere through the ground. He tried to follow it, but stopped, as he realized the energy was actually connected to other statues, forming some kind of network.

He couldn't trace the full extent of the network, as it stretched all the way to the horizon where many more statues stood. The energy was also connected to the deeper part of the central area, where it seemed to link with something located in that place.

As he thought earlier, these statues were not arranged carelessly. They had been placed in designated positions to create some kind of formation. What kind of formation? He did not know, but it was truly complex—so much so that it amazed him.

He sighed, slightly disappointed. He had hoped he might be able to awaken some wills in this place so he could speak with them and ask for information. But it seemed these statues did not contain any will, and only served as foundations for the formation.

The divine energy connecting each statue was proof of that.

After concluding there was nothing more he needed to check, he released his hand from the statue and looked up at it. He wanted to know what had happened to the Silver Lightning Dragon Clan, but it seemed he would have to set that aside for now. He then flew off in another direction to observe the other statues.

After more than four hours of observing the statues, Aldrian returned to the rest of the group. They also seemed to be examining the statues, hoping to find something of value in this place, but they had found nothing.

Seeing that Aldrian had returned, they decided to continue their journey toward the deeper part of the core area. They were already close—almost beneath the shadow of the floating land.

From where they were, they could see just how massive the floating land was, and the sheer size of it made their hearts tremble in awe.

How could something that large float? Was it the work of some kind of formation? Just how big would such a formation have to be?

They moved closer to the central area and flew onward until the sun was about to set. By then, they were closer to the floating island than ever before. They now had to tilt their heads fully just to see the land floated above them.

The mountainous region was also near, as they had begun to see the base of the mountain. From where they were, the peaks that rose into the sky were already hidden behind the clouds.

It created the illusion that the staff-shaped mountain served as a foundation holding up the floating land. In reality, they knew the mountain stood beneath the floating land without ever touching its lowest part.

But as they continued to approach, they felt a sudden sensation unlike anything they had experienced since entering the core area. Their bodies grew slightly heavier, and their hearts were suddenly filled with a sense of reverence and worship.

Reverence and worship toward what? They did not know. It was as if the feeling emerged on its own—but they guessed it came from something within the palace. Their instincts and hearts pointed to that place. They believed it was an instinctual reaction from their souls, triggered by how close they were to the area where the dragon and the phoenix resided.

The feeling of submission grew even stronger. They even felt that simply coming to this place was an act of blasphemy.

All of their expressions turned serious. This might be the most dangerous part of their expedition, and their senses heightened. The atmosphere was tense—

Until Patriarch Xin glanced in Aldrian's direction and saw that he still wore that same calm expression. His body remained relaxed.

Xin smiled bitterly and couldn't help but ask him,

"Young Aldrian, did you not feel it?"

Aldrian turned his head toward Patriarch Xin.

"Feel what?" he asked, causing the rest of the group to look at him in confusion. Did he truly not feel the same sensation they did?

"The sensation of your body getting heavier," Xin Haotian answered, "and your heart filling with reverence, or something like that."

Aldrian shook his head.

"I don't feel anything like that. In fact, I feel good here," he said, leaving the others astonished.

Even as their hearts brimmed with piety and worship, just from nearing the place where the dragon and phoenix once resided—Aldrian felt none of it?

Xin Haotian narrowed his eyes at Aldrian. He was becoming more and more certain that Aldrian had some kind of connection to the dragon and the phoenix—or at least possessed something related to those two divine beings. The fact that he remained unaffected was already proof that his soul and body could withstand the divine presence.

That was not something that could be explained by strength alone, as it had to do with their very souls. The deepest part of the soul would instinctively worship a divine being—without exception.

For Aldrian to feel nothing, even when they were this close to the palace, could only mean one thing: he either shared the same status as the dragon and phoenix, or stood above them.

Xin Haotian then looked ahead again. He would go mad if he kept trying to make sense of Aldrian's existence. All he could do was wait—if an explanation ever came—for why someone like Aldrian existed on this continent.

The others had reached the same conclusion. Yet none of them spoke further on the matter. They simply continued flying in silence.

Aldrian just smile inwardly at their reaction but inside his heart, he actually felt anticipation. He felt a kind of nervous as he near the place where he might know some answers that still become mystery for him until now.

Aldrian just smiled inwardly at their reaction, but inside his heart, he actually felt anticipation. He felt a kind of nervousness as he neared the place where he might find some answers that had remained a mystery to him until now.

The calling that he could sense from the floating land was growing stronger, which made his heart beat faster. This made him really want to dash straight toward the floating land, but he also wanted to explore the place beneath it first. There might be things useful to him or something that would interest him.

The sun finally set, and the group decided that they needed to rest for the night. The night reduced their visibility here, which was quite dangerous, as they did not know what might lie beyond their vision. In this place, they did not dare to trust their senses entirely without being able to see their surroundings.

After a few moments, they finally landed. They were still in the vast grassland area, surrounded by many kind of beautiful flowers. The wind blew—not too strong, not too slow—just enough to make them all feel comfortable despite being out in the open. The only sound was the rustling of grass in the breeze, which made the atmosphere feel truly peaceful.

The moonlight that bathed the entire land added to the serenity, while the stars blanketing the sky provided a feast for the eyes.

The rest of the group did not need to sleep, as they were all high-level cultivators, so they took this chance to cultivate instead. They did not make a campfire since it was unnecessary and could be dangerous—it would reveal their position to any unknown beings nearby. They did not want to invite any trouble.

Aldrian did not want to disturb them, so he walked away. Patriarch Xin and Xin Haotian, who had also begun cultivating, sensed him leave, opened their eyes, and watched as he walked off, but they did not stop him. Aldrian walked quite far before finally stopping, thinking he would not disturb the group there.

He then sat on the ground and looked up at the night sky, full of stars. Gazing at the scenery, which brought his heart a soothing longing, he suddenly felt like playing his guqin—and so he did. He took out The Spirit of Great Path guqin from his storage ring and positioned himself to play. He closed his eyes and felt the serenity of his surroundings and the guqin before him.

Not long after, the sound of the guqin resounded, and beautiful music spread throughout the area. He concentrated on his playing without caring about his surroundings. His fingers plucked each string firmly yet softly, producing sounds that were just right—not too loud, not too weak.

He did not care if he attracted anything with the music. He felt safe here; nothing would harm him. He could feel it—this place was built by Feng Xuanyan and Long Shentian, and they would not allow it to bring him harm.

As he continued playing, unknown to him, the sound of his guqin began to spread over a vast area.

Chapter 530: At the Central Region

The sound of the guqin could initially only be heard in the area surrounding where Aldrian sat, but it soon began to spread everywhere. Aldrian will not expect this, he only wanted to play the guqin normally. Since he was outside of his domain, he believed his music would not spread into it like it had the last time.

But unknown to him, he still underestimated both his guqin skills and the place itself. This place, built by two of his followers in his past life, was bound to make everything he did extraordinary.

As if the nature of this place recognized the one playing the guqin, it responded in its own way. The sound that had only been audible near Aldrian began to spread, as if the wind carried the notes of the guqin—not just across the grassland, but throughout the entire core area.

Xin Haotian and the others, who were still cultivating, eventually heard the guqin's sound, causing them to pause. They opened their eyes and looked around, but could not see anyone playing the instrument. The music sounded so close, as if someone were performing it right beside them, which left them surprised.

This was clearly like one of the techniques of a sound-element cultivator, allowing listeners to hear the music clearly even when separated by great distances.

"This is Aldrian, so don't worry," Xin Haotian said, which made the others nod in understanding.

Of course, Xin Haotian knew this was Aldrian's style of playing. He looked toward the distance where Aldrian had walked. He could no longer see him,

as Aldrian had gone far beyond their line of sight, but he hadn't forgotten the guqin performance from last time—the beautiful music that carried a soothing yet longing sensation.

At this moment, the entire core area could hear Aldrian's guqin playing. Everything within the barrier seemed to recognize the one playing it. The trees rustled, as if showing their happiness. The flow of heaven and earth energy, and even divine energy, became much calmer—almost as if it had come to a halt just to listen to Aldrian's music.

Even the small creatures, like crickets, fell completely silent, as if giving way to the guqin's sound—as if they, too, did not wish to interrupt it.

The sound reached the floating land as well. Within a hall inside the palace, a golden hue illuminated the vast space. The grand hall was magnificently luxurious and imposing. But within this hall, there were only two things that would draw attention the moment anyone stepped inside.

The first is a single grand throne located near the end of the hall. Even though the throne is empty, it gives any onlooker a sense of the greatness of the one who sits upon it. The one who sits here is unlike other rulers.

The second is a golden matter floating high in the hall. It resembles gathered energy condensed into a solid form, exuding an aura that would compel anyone to bow before it. This golden matter is what illuminates the entire hall, making the place feel holy and sacred.

As the sound of the guqin entered the hall, the golden matter suddenly began to flicker, reacting to the music. It then shone more brightly, so intensely that it lit up the entire hall with a blinding radiance. If Aldrian had been atop the floating land, he would have seen golden light shining from a part of the palace.

The golden matter continued to shine for a few moments before dimming slightly, though it kept flickering.

Aldrian, still playing the guqin, remained unaware of any of this and simply continued his performance. Only when the sky in the eastern horizon turned a shade of purple did he finally stop. He opened his eyes and looked around. Nothing seemed out of place, so he stood up and returned to the group.

But once he arrived, he was stunned by the patriarch's remark.

"I didn't know you could play the guqin so well. Even as a peak Emperor Stage cultivator, my soul was affected by the sound."

"You could hear my guqin playing?" Aldrian asked.

"Of course. How could we not hear it when it was clearly audible here? Just ask the others," the patriarch replied, prompting Aldrian to look at Xin Haotian.

Xin Haotian simply nodded. Aldrian sighed.

"My apologies if my playing disturbed your cultivation," he said to the others.

"No, young master. Your guqin playing was truly wonderful. It actually stimulated my cultivation progress."

"Yes, young master. We didn't feel disturbed at all. In fact, I would love to hear your playing all day—it brought me a peace I haven't felt in a long time."

"Young master, you are truly talented—"

Voices of praise and admiration echoed from the elders, making Aldrian smile and nod in understanding. Not long after, they continued their journey toward the central area.

A few hours later, they finally arrived beneath the floating island. They were now in a mountainous region, where tall, staff-shaped peaks pierced the

clouds. The giant statues they had occasionally seen throughout their journey stopped right at the edge of the area beneath the floating land. There were no statues within the territory directly under it.

Once they entered the mountainous region, they finally noticed something they had not seen before.

The mountains were positioned in a circular formation around the central area. There were nine mountains in total, each one far apart from the others. The farthest mountains could be seen at the horizon. Beneath them stretched a landscape of dense forest and grassland, filled with hills and valleys, creating a spectacular natural view from Aldrian and the others' flight path.

They also saw a massive structure that they assumed marked the central area. It looked like another palace, though on a smaller scale compared to the one on the floating island. Still, it was grand, with towering buildings that reached into the sky, built in the same architectural style as those on the floating island.

They continued flying in that direction, and only after four hours did they arrive at the palace. The palace complex was circular in shape, with several buildings inside. The main building was the central palace, whose top pierced the clouds. Surrounding the palace was a beautiful artificial waterway, separating the palace grounds from the surrounding land.

Aldrian and the others landed before the waterway and looked at the clear blue water, which was exuding rich heaven and earth energy. They wondered what kind of water it was, but they did not dwell on it for long, as they decided to enter the palace area through the only bridge visible from where they stood.

Aldrian looked up at the palace. From one of his visions, he remembered visiting a palace like this. As far as he could recall, this palace was a place

where many of his followers used to stay or gather in the past. It also functioned as a place for teleportation to the floating island above.

Since the floating island was a flight-forbidden zone, anyone who wished to visit the palace above had to use the teleportation formation located here.

As Aldrian's group entered the palace grounds, they could see the clean buildings within the palace complex. There was no dirt or anything that would make one think of this as a neglected or dirty place. It felt as if the entire area was always being maintained—yet they saw no one around, and their senses detected no movement.

Considering how long this building must have stood in this place, the fact that it remains in good condition after all these years is truly amazing. They walked along the large path that connected to the main palace.

From time to time, they stopped to examine the buildings around them. They entered each one carefully, but all they found were empty spaces. This left them confused—what was the purpose of these grand buildings if there was nothing inside?

However, for Aldrian, the atmosphere felt nostalgic. It was the effect of his visions and the memories from past life, which had started resurfacing again. In those memories, in this very place, he could see many of his followers standing on his right and left along the path. They had greeted him with enthusiasm.

He had warmly returned their greetings and even spoken with them amicably.

Now, looking at the desolate and silent atmosphere around him, he couldn't help but feel a sense of emptiness and miss those people. Unfortunately, some of them might have already perished—for whatever reason.

They kept observing and checking the palace complex until they finally arrived at the huge and towering building—the main palace. To reach it, they had to

cross a vast open space, like a gathering ground capable of holding thousands of people.

Once they entered, they were greeted by a wide, empty hall. They looked around curiously, but their attention soon turned to Aldrian, who seemed unconcerned with his surroundings and was already walking alone toward the deeper part of the palace.

Wondering where Aldrian was going, they quickly followed him.

Aldrian did not mind them following and continued walking toward the inner part of the palace. That was because he could feel something waiting for him inside.