

Turning 761

Chapter 761

"I must confess, my understanding is a bit lacking here. Were there any among those the Cavalry apprehended who were caught due to a misunderstanding? Who exactly are you referring to?"

Kishiar laughed in a carefree manner as he responded.

Recently, he had slowly been revealing his true nature and started using his concealed powers. However, only a few, either enemies who had directly witnessed this or allies who had fought alongside him, truly knew of his capabilities. Baron Jacob, unaware of the exact role Duke Peletta played in the Cavalry's various accomplishments, smiled wryly.

"Ha-ha, I heard that a few young nobles from Charloin were mistakenly arrested at an illegal fighting ring they had stumbled upon."

"Ah, is that so?"

"Yes. I'm well acquainted with the parents and families of those young men. They all hail from longstanding noble houses in the south, people of duty. And the youths, whom I've observed since childhood, are not the sort to cause such trouble. From what I've heard, their arrest was merely a misunderstanding."

Baron Jacob lamented the unfortunate fate of these young nobles, caught at an illegal fighting ring. Essentially, he argued that these nobles were just innocent victims misled by the malicious criminal Nukijo and his gang, and it was unfair to treat them as criminals just because they were caught while fleeing.

"Since that day, those young men haven't even seen their families. The Cavalry, citing a thorough investigation, hasn't allowed any visitors. Such harsh treatment seems overly severe for those already weakened in body and spirit by the chaos. I earnestly implore Duke Peletta to show compassion and release them."

Kishiar observed Baron Jacob's earnest demeanor, which seemed far more genuine than when he had offered apologies and promised cooperation to the Cavalry.

"Such unfortunate souls, I had no idea. If what you say is true, it's only right to release them immediately. May I know their names?"

"Certainly."

Baron Jacob quickly listed several names, visibly relieved. After hearing them, Kishiar hummed thoughtfully and turned to Yuder.

"ASsistant."

"Yes."

"Bring me the visitor records of those arrested at the illegal fighting ring."

"Duke Peletta, visitor records?"

"If your words hold true, these wronged individuals wouldn't normally frequent a gambling den, right? Fortunately, Nukijo meticulously recorded details of his frequent guests at his fighting ring - names, visit frequencies, gambling wins and losses, even items pledged as collateral for debts."

As Kishiar continued with a sly tone, Baron Jacob's face involuntarily twitched, his muscles betraying his controlled exterior. He asked, with a look of disbelief,

"Is there really such a record? I've never heard of such a thing..."

"Oh, didn't you know? I instructed that this information be shared immediately with the knights of Charloin when they come to assist in the investigation. Seems they haven't received it."

It was an expected revelation. The Lord of Charloin had deliberately ignored all actions of the Cavalry and hadn't cooperated in their investigations. Naturally, he wouldn't have known about Nukijo's secret ledger discovered by the Cavalry.

Yuder immediately moved to retrieve a copy of the secret ledger of Nukijo from his office, where it was being stored. This clandestine record, unearthed by the Cavalry members based on the

information provided by Cyregina, bore a closer resemblance to a book of nobles' transgressions kept by Nukijo in case he was caught someday.

Upon seeing the enormous thickness of the document, Baron Jacob's face turned pale.

"How in the world did you come across such an item...? Is this truly an authentic record?"

"Ha, Baron, you are indeed meticulous. No need to worry. This ledger was discovered in a hidden safe within the fighting arena, revealed to us by one of Nukijo's subordinates. It's easy to verify, as it contains the signatures and evidence of the guests involved in the gambling house, as well as the collateral items left in exchange for the lost money and the outstanding amount."

"But... Your Highness, just a moment...!"

"Assistant, I'll call out the names. Make sure to check carefully. First, Eneska of the Abkachia family."

Ignoring Baron Jacob's words, Kishiar loudly called out the name. Yuder quickly found the first name on the guest list.

"Eneska Abkachia. You visited Nukijo's gambling house 79 times. You left a handwritten note and seal promising to repay a debt of about three thousand gold."

"Ah, 79 times. That's almost once or twice a week at the gambling house. Remarkable."

"Duke Peletta, Your Highness! There's a misunderstanding here...!"

"Second, Malone of O Brayna."

Kishiar, without losing his smile, called out the next name.

"You visited 132 times. Not just the second floor of the gambling house, but the first floor as well, sometimes twice a day. You left a swan-carved earring as collateral."

"It seems that person wasn't tricked into coming. Third then? Coles of Salmaka."

"32 visits with a debt of four thousand. And..."

"And? What is it? Your serious expression suggests some misunderstanding about that person?"

"No. I was thinking about whether to read the part where I made a 'small protest' because he did not show courtesy to the Commander, which was added to the additional investigation part of the Cavalry."

"Ah, I see. Not that person either? Then what about Giuseppe of Conkereme?"

"231 visits..."

"At that rate, it's like living at the gambling house rather than home. I would believe if you said that person lured others there. Next, Tashkin of Pantan?"

"58..."

"Nigel of Azulik?"

"61..."

Indeed, they were all worthy of being Nukijo's top guests. Not a single one to be excluded, each's visit count and past deeds were precious gems in their own right.

As Kishiar called out the names, Yuder would respond, and Yuder's response would be followed by Kishiar's seemingly regretful comments, after which he would call the next name. Their conversation flowed seamlessly, back and forth as if rehearsed. Listening to this, Baron Jacob's face turned bright red, then completely ashen.

What was this situation? Just listening was enough to make one's head spin and breath short. Yet Kishiar continued to recite the long list of names without pause.

Was this the same man who had laughed off not remembering things like a carefree idler?

Baron Jacob suddenly remembered the command he had received from Duke Herne before coming here.

"Go to the Cavalry and apologize for our mistake. There's no need to grovel excessively, but a show of sufficient politeness is necessary. Promise them our full cooperation going forward, and based on that, find out what they have in their possession. Especially remember, we must not let them continue to investigate the traitors of our house."

It was true that the Cavalry had handled various matters, won over the hearts of the Charloin people, and even discovered the traitors of the Herne family in the process. Left unaddressed, this would only expose the Herne family's skeletons to those who had just stumbled upon them. Duke Herne seemed to have decided that he could no longer afford to lose more to the Cavalry.

Reluctantly, but loyal to Duke Herne, Baron Jacob followed the command. His only problem was that he had underestimated the opponent and let his personal greed get the better of him before fully achieving his objective.

'I spoke too soon without even checking what cards the Cavalry held. How could I make such a foolish mistake...!'

He shouted, biting his lip.

"Please, that's enough, Your Highness!"

"Hm? We're not done yet. Didn't you say you came to find those who are wronged?"

"I think that's enough! I understand now."

"What do you mean?"

Kishiar asked, blinking his eyes. Baron Jacob had been somewhat excited to meet the notorious fool of the imperial family, famous for his handsome face, but seeing him make such expressions only sent shivers down his spine.

"I suppose I've been misled by listening only to close acquaintances. If there are those who deserve punishment, then they should certainly receive it. But there's no need to confirm anything beyond that."

"We're not finished yet."

"Please, I beg of you, stop..."

"That won't do, Baron. I made an effort to find the innocent ones, thinking that even though I caught them myself, my memory might have been wrong, and you're trying to end it with just one word that you were misled?"

"But...!"

Truth be told, Baron Jacob never thought the nobles caught at Nukijo's gambling house were innocent. Good and righteous? They were the fools who were famous even in Charloin's noble society.

Still, he had hoped to gain favor by standing up for the nobles he knew and thought releasing the young nobles from the Cavalry would earn their cooperation—a win-win situation.

Suddenly, to be caught off-guard and manipulated like this.

Though unjust, he had no choice. Not only had he failed to achieve his goal, but he was also unable to follow Duke Herne's command. All Baron Jacob could do was sweat profusely.

If Duke Peletta were to reveal his attempt at self-serving to Duke Herne, it would undoubtedly lead to unfavorable consequences. He had to prevent that at all costs.

"Absolutely not. I was wrong. My words were merely the result of my own stupidity, not in any way convergent from Duke Herne's intentions. Please, retract your anger. I, Jacob, will do my utmost to assist the Cavalry and Your Highness in all that you wish. So..."

Kishiar, looking at Baron Jacob, smiled and lay back half in his chair, laughing like a clueless fool.

"Alright. If you say so, I'll believe you. Now, let's go over our discussion again. It seems we have a lot to talk about."

Baron Jacob left, thoroughly shaken, after providing the 'full cooperation' details to the Cavalry. He left the traitors of the Herne family in their hands, fulfilling the very purpose he had set out to avoid.

Chapter 762

In the ensuing days, the hours passed in a blur, too quick to even catch one's breath. When night fell and Yuder arrived at Kishiar's lodging, an involuntary tension swelled within him. However, the man who had insisted on Yuder staying by his side simply smiled as usual.

"It was a tiring day, wasn't it?"

"Yes."

"Shall we rest first?"

"..."

He didn't press Yuder to speak about his dreams, as if he knew that Yuder wasn't yet ready to talk. Perhaps because of this consideration, that night Yuder dreamt of nothing.

The following days were much the same.

Yuder's mind gradually calmed. Watching the man issuing relentless commands to the Cavalry members, he thought to himself.

'Yes, I must have dreamt that due to the stress of the many battles we fought, and my worry about Kishiar's injury. Still, I can't be completely at ease yet... But, it's a relief not to be continually disturbed.'

"Yuder!"

Just then, someone called him from not too far away. Turning, he saw Yergin Schiller, a member from the southern branch. Since the recent major battle where she had assisted Yuder, she had become friendlier, but now she approached him with an unusually serious expression.

"I thought I recognized some faces outside. The ones who protested in front of our branch before are back, aren't they? They said they were summoned here this time. Is that true?"

"Yes, the Commander called them. Don't worry, just let them in."

Kishiar's reason for summoning them was straightforward. The branch alone couldn't handle both the monster aftermath and administrative tasks from the battle. The work had to be delegated, typically to those who owed the branch.

'And, I'm planning to assign some other tasks to the mages as well.'

Hearing Yuder's explanation, Yergin smiled slyly.

"I see. Got it. I was a little scared, thinking they might start a new dispute with polite lies, but there was no need for that."

Wind attribute Awakeners from his past life were known to be more mischievous than other attribute users, and Yergin Schiller fit this stereotype perfectly. Known for her antics within the Cavalry, if she had really 'slightly' intimidated them, there was a high chance that they would have been terrified enough to wet themselves. But Yuder simply said,

"Just bring them in cleanly."

"Aww, of course. Would I bring guests to the Cavalry in tears and snot? How could someone as delicate and weak as me do such a thing?"

"..."

"Ahh, that didn't work. As expected of the Baron."

What did his baronial title have to do with this? Seeing him not responding, Yergin shook her head and then lowered her voice, "Oh, and there's one more thing to report."

"The Southerners who were brought in unconscious are now awake. They've been fed and treated, so we can start the investigation."

"Really? How are their health and attitude?"

As Hern reported, the priests sent by Lady Herne said they were beaten up pretty badly but miraculously didn't suffer any life-threatening injuries, so they should be fine. The guys from Star of Nagran are noisy compared to the Southerners who are unpleasantly quiet. They're under close surveillance except for meal times, in case they decide to die on their own. That... Reneve? She's also been keeping a close eye on them."

Indeed, as Yergin described, the attitudes of the captives from the Star of Nagran and the Southern merchants, though captured in the same raid, were starkly different. The Awakeners from the Star of Nagran, mostly having followed without fully understanding why they were involved in this, were quite noisy and disorganized. Their only commonality was a stubborn silence when asked about who had hired them.

'Surely, this is the aftermath of brainwashing to protect the sage,' he thought.

On the other hand, the Southern merchants had been extremely quiet since regaining consciousness. Their silence, despite surely being curious about their situation, suggested they had some level of training and knew how to respond to such circumstances.

"It's good you made sure they didn't die. The Commander and I will start the interrogation later, so keep watching them until then. If you notice anything suspicious, let me know immediately."

"Understood. Finally, you and the Commander are stepping in. Those guys haven't said a word to us, which was really frustrating. It's a relief."

After saying this, Yergin didn't immediately leave but glanced somewhere else. Her gaze fell upon Kishiar La Orr, whom Yuder had just been observing. He was currently in conversation with the Captain of the Charloin security force, Kurga, Sunz, and Emon.

The Captain, possibly having heard something beforehand from Baron Jacob, was excessively polite, his eyes flitting between Kurga, Sunz, and Kishiar's waist. It was not hard to guess his thoughts.

'It seems that the security force is quite bothered by the fact that they didn't cooperate with Kurga's party. Plus, the divine sword Kishiar wielded seems to invoke both curiosity and fear.'

It appeared that fear was slightly more predominant. Fortunately, this made the conversation flow smoothly, which was a relief.

"People's hearts are as fickle as the wind," Yergin murmured, pouting her lips.

"When we tried to deal with them kindly, they took us lightly. But now, after demonstrating overwhelming power, they're scared and polite. Still, I don't understand why they are so reluctant to trust the Commander."

Yuder turned to look at her, and sensing his thoughts, Yergin waved her hand and added,

"Well, I wasn't entirely convinced at first either. I could accept the divine sword, but there hasn't been a case of a swordmaster Awakener. But how can I not believe it when the evidence is right in front of my eyes? Maybe it's more because of Sir Nathan Zuckerman? He used aura too, right?"

Her guess was somewhat accurate.

While Kishiar had fought using both the divine sword and aura, he wasn't the only one to use aura that day. The biggest reason people still looked at Kishiar's waist with expressions like that of the Captain was likely due to the confusion stemming from the rumors about Nathan Zuckerman.

Kishiar had already anticipated this turn of events and had shown a rather pleased reaction.

'If news of this battle spreads, the fact that both Nathan and I used aura will become known. If there was only one swordmaster, it might have been believable, but two appearing simultaneously seems too unrealistic, making people more likely to think it's a fabrication. On the other hand, they can't completely dismiss the possibility that it might be true, and this uncertainty will give us more freedom to operate.'

However, the rumor of two aura users emerging actually aided in quelling the existing rumors about Kishiar being the new owner of the divine sword. The prior debates over whether Kishiar was the rightful successor to the divine sword suddenly receded in the face of this more shocking revelation.

Of course, these rumors were still confined to the south and would take some time to reach the capital. Nonetheless, ultimately, they would contribute to proving that Kishiar indeed possessed the qualifications to be the owner of the divine sword.

Initially, Kishiar only revealed the divine sword to the public, and later, he demonstrated his own powerful mastery of the sword, thereby rendering the previous doubts relatively insignificant and factualizing the truth. This approach was much more cunning than revealing everything at once, piercing through people's petty minds and perceptions effectively.

Yuder, keeping all these thoughts to himself, quietly responded,

"...No need to worry. Eventually, everyone will understand what kind of person the Commander is, and what the Cavalry really stands for."

At this, Yergin's face brightened considerably.

"Is that so? Hearing your confirmation makes me feel better."

According to his memory, in his previous life, Yergin was one of many who left in disappointment when rumors spread that Yuder, after becoming the Commander, had killed Kishiar. However, this time, Kishiar successfully revealed his power to the world, and the Cavalry was doing the same, so such a situation was unlikely to occur again.

Yuder quietly gazed at Kishiar's retreating figure, exhaling deeply.

He then once again pushed away the lingering image of white gloves from his mind.

Chapter 763

"Earlier, you and Yergin Schiller seemed to be having an interesting conversation. Besides the news about the visitors and the Southerners, was there anything else?"

Kishiar casually asked, handing over a bundle of work to others and preparing to welcome new guests, while perusing some documents.

"The Cavalry might make people flinch with a little effort, but why does our swordmaster, now also the owner of the divine sword, pretend not to know about it? There were complaints about not understanding this," Yuder reported.

"Oh? And how did the assistant respond?"

"Just as you said, Commander. Eventually, everyone will know, so there's no need to worry. After all, whether others acknowledge it or not, what we have is real, not fake."

Kishiar's lips curved into a small smile. "Indeed," he mused.

After a moment of silence, he added, "Still, as the Commander, I feel a bit sorry that a member harbors such thoughts."

"There's no need for that. Isn't everything going according to your plan?"

Instead of agreeing verbally, Kishiar silently observed Yuder's face. Just as he seemed about to speak, a knock interrupted them, and the waiting guests entered.

The visitors were prominent figures: a seventh-rank official from Charloin, a representative of the Sapphire Mage Union, and a merchant of the Charloin Trading Union. They were the ones Yergin had mentioned, the protesters from the past incident in front of the branch office.

"Ah... Greetings, Duke Peletta... We didn't realize it was you last time and regret any disrespect. We heard you summoned us..."

The three guests were a stark contrast to their previously arrogant and haughty selves, now shrinking in their postures. Despite visible sweat, they were not in a state of tears or a runny nose, confirming Yergin hadn't lied.

Kishiar opened his mouth with a smile, seemingly unaware of their frightened state.

"No need for formalities. I had my reasons for not revealing my identity back then, and it pained me, but seeing you all healthy and well now brings me great joy."

"Ah... Yes. We feel the same..."

What joy is there in being bound by an oath? The official, hiding his grim expression, replied as their spokesperson. Kishiar grinned as he spoke.

"Let's keep the greetings brief. I believe you all have some idea why I've summoned you."

"Is it about the recent deeds of the Cavalry?"

"Yes. We've slain quite a few monsters, and we need help with the aftermath. This might not be such bad news for you."

Initially skeptical, their expressions slowly changed as Kishiar explained the situation regarding the monster corpses. They had braced for a disadvantageous proposition due to their previous intense encounter, but surprisingly, the deal offered by the Cavalry was reasonable and mutually beneficial.

'This incident in Charloin must be dealt with by someone. If we take charge, we can align ourselves with influential figures, including those from the Cavalry and His Majesty the Emperor. It's an opportune moment for a check, as our superiors are weary of always heeding Duke Herne and Baron Jacob,' The official thought.

The mage beside him was also deeply engrossed in evaluating the pros and cons of the situation, 'The might of the Cavalry we've just witnessed, and the power of Duke Peletta, the confirmed new owner of the divine sword. If these are indeed true, it would be advantageous to form ties now. With various powers, including the First Princess of the Herne family, already collaborating with the Cavalry, perhaps we could become the second Western Mage Union and gain fame...'

The merchant's expression was equally bright with optimism. 'This is a surefire business deal. Though we are not specialized in dealing with monster by-products, the sheer volume we're looking at could turn into a massive profit just by distribution. Even if the Cavalry and the Emperor's forces fall out of favor, we'd only be participating under the pretense of aiding Charloin in its time of crisis, so no loss there.'

This wasn't about immediately allying with the Cavalry, but rather about seizing an opportunity to gain profit while ostensibly helping their own organization. There was no reason to decline.

"This is good enough!"

Contrary to their initial worries, they were in high spirits as they agreed to the Cavalry's proposal and were about to leave when Kishiar interjected, "Wait, would the mage from the Sapphire Mage Union please stay behind a moment?"

The mage, startled and a mix of anxiety and curiosity, blinked rapidly as the others sneaked glances, equally curious. Once the others had left, Kishiar reopened the conversation, "Actually, there's another matter where we need the assistance of the mages."

"To us... you mean?" the mage asked.

"The specifics will be explained by my assistant. Actually, it's his request," Kishiar replied.

"The assistant...?"

"It's me."

Ah, no surprise there! The mage, who had been avoiding eye contact with Yuder, closed his eyes tightly upon hearing his voice.

Even though they were now somewhat on the same side for Charloin's sake, the prowess Yuder Aile had displayed was still a frequent nightmare for the mage. Rumors following their first encounter about the monstrous feats Yuder had accomplished only intensified this fear.

Like other Awakeners, Yuder was intimidating, but he was in a league of his own. The realization that this formidable being wanted to meet him sent a shiver down the mage's spine, wondering if he had done something wrong.

Yuder noticed the mage's anxious expression and trembling hands but remained indifferent, asking expressionlessly, "Could the members of the Sapphire Mage Union investigate the changes in the magic power flow in a specific area?"

"A specific area's magic power flow...? May I ask why this is needed?"

"It seems related to the monsters that appeared recently."

"The monsters and the magic power flow?"

The mage tilted his head, puzzled. Before he could ask further, Yuder pressed on firmly, "So, do you think it's possible?"

The mage hesitated, "We... our alliance doesn't focus on such tasks, but with the necessary magic tools, it might be feasible."

Monitoring a specific area's magic power was usually undertaken by mages focused on research or training. The Sapphire Mage Union, primarily a gathering of less skilled individuals creating profitable magic tools, was not usually involved in such tasks. However, it wasn't entirely out of their scope of capabilities.

Yuder, having heard that the task of monitoring magic power flow was considerably simpler than casting complex spells and wouldn't take much time given the right tools, nodded and turned his gaze towards Kishiar.

Sensing the intent in Yuder's look, Kishiar promptly responded, "Then that's settled. It would be good if you could start on the task right away."

"Understood. Should I focus on the area where the monsters appeared recently?" asked the mage.

"Yes, exactly. Around the Cavalry's southern branch building. We'll cover the cost of the necessary magic tools, so feel free to bill us. Doing a good job will benefit Charloin as well."

"I will do so," the mage agreed.

Although the details were sparse, if it was for the benefit of Charloin, it was not an impossible task. The mage left, promising to bring other mages from the union and begin the work immediately.

Once the mage's presence had completely faded, Kishiar, staring at the closed door, commented, "Needing magic tools to observe magic power flow. That's hardly becoming of a mage."

"It's not about being impressive, as long as they do their job properly," Yuder remarked.

The idea to have the mages investigate the area's magic power distribution had come to Yuder only the day before, while he was reading a letter from Enon. It was full of angry tirades, which reminded him of the hidden pages in the research journal of the first Duke Tain, which he was translating before coming here. He had not finished reading it before leaving and thought to bring it with him this time.

Perhaps thinking about that work after so long had triggered the memory. The contents of the journal, along with Lumas' research and related incidents, brought a sudden insight.

'Enon mentioned that the first Duke Tain discovered that areas with frequent monster appearances typically had distorted magic power flows. He wondered what would happen if one could deliberately distort the magic power in a specific space. Isn't that similar to the phenomenon in the Great Sarain Forest, where the magic power has been twisted and stagnated for a long time?'

The Great Sarain Forest, with its long-stagnant and distorted magic power, had fostered abnormal growth and frequent monster appearances, along with the observed strange cracks.

And now, the recent sightings of a new strange crack and the Southern merchants, suspected of summoning them with a magic conduit.

To prove the theory that the monsters were appearing due to artificial manipulation, Yuder suggested investigating the magic power flow. Kishiar agreed to this approach after hearing Yuder's explanation.

"Regardless of what the mages find, we should base our investigation on the assumption that the Southern merchants are behind this," Yuder proposed.

"That was my intention as well," Kishiar replied, standing up.

"But regarding the investigation into this Aton fellow, might I proceed with that alone first?" he added.

"That was my intention as well," Kishiar replied, standing up.

"But regarding the investigation into this Aton fellow, might I proceed with that alone first?" he added.

Yuder's eyes hardened slightly. His mind momentarily became cluttered. Though his rationality coldly assessed that there would be no particular issue with Kishiar investigating alone, the heart does not always follow reason.

He impulsively spoke up, "Why? Is it because of what I did before...?"

"If you're asking whether this is because you used excessive force against that person, then no," Kishiar interrupted before Yuder could fully articulate his concerns, effectively quelling his anxiety.

"I'll have Nathan behind me, so don't worry about my safety. Meanwhile, please take charge of investigating the others. With so much to do, wouldn't it be better to divide the tasks between two people?"

With a logical yet warm voice, Kishiar suggested they share their findings immediately after the investigation was concluded. Yuder, looking into Kishiar's eyes, nodded his agreement.

"I understand. I will do so."

Normally, he would not be overly concerned with such matters. It was common for them to move separately as needed.

Yet, the moment Kishiar seemed to be distancing him, a sharp anxiety pricked him. Was it because of the white gloves he had recalled again after hearing Yergin's words earlier?

It was a dream that surely had no bearing on the current reality. While the cause was unknown, he was managing his daily life well enough. He hadn't left meals unfinished or lacked sleep since then.

Still, there were moments when he fleetingly felt the sensation of that white leather caressing his skin, casting a shadow over his mind like the time he knelt before the guillotine.

'Is it that what I consciously think and what lies in my subconscious are different?'

Indeed, the fact that he had yet to speak to Kishiar about that dream was proof enough that he hadn't completely moved past its effects. It must be showing to Kishiar as well. Rubbing his temples, Yuder turned away.

'...When Enon comes, I should ask about that dream too.'

—

Yuder, accompanied by Kurga and Yergin, descended underground to investigate the Awakener members of the Star of Nagran. The first person he singled out for questioning was naturally Sera, the head of the southern base.

'The successful candidates from the Star of Nagran unanimously pointed to her as holding the most crucial information. My thoughts align with that.'

But there was another reason for choosing her.

Sitting in the makeshift interrogation room, Yuder waited. Soon, Sera was brought in by Kurga and Yergin. Despite having done nothing but recover from her injuries, her face appeared significantly worn from mental distress.

Yuder maintained silence even after she took the seat opposite him. Sera, terrified and anxious at being investigated by 'Yuder Aile,' couldn't endure the silence and spoke first.

"Kill me quickly if you're going to!"

'Exactly as I anticipated.'

Her guilt was clear. Regardless of who had ordered her, by attacking Kishiar, she could not escape the crime of attempting to harm a member of the imperial family. Knowing this, the unexpected silence must have been even more terrifying for her.

And that was exactly what Yuder had hoped for.

He finally spoke quietly, his fist clenched so tightly it turned white, to Sera, who glared at him with a fierce intensity.

"So, you think you've committed a crime worthy of death."

His voice was slow and cold, seemingly no different from his usual tone at first listen. However, the reaction of those present told a different story. Sera shuddered as if touched by ice, and even Kurga and Yergin, standing a bit behind, guarding her, momentarily tensed at his words.

It was dreadfully cold and frightening. Pure fear permeated the space.

With Reneve's suppression abilities spread throughout this underground level, it wasn't due to the use of power. But his voice, devoid of emotion, and his eyes, dark and alien even to his allies, were more than enough to instill fear in others.

This was the method used by Yudrain Aile, the Commander of the Cavalry in his previous life when interrogating criminals.

"You incited many comrades to ambush the Cavalry Commander's path, believing you could escape unidentified. When that failed, you attacked the Cavalry and the Imperial Army, leading to your current predicament."

His voice, suffocating even to listen to, flowed slowly.

"So, we have attempted regicide, obstruction of official duties. Colluding with suspicious Southerners causing monster outbreaks, thus threatening and harming the entire empire. In other words, treason against the state. Then there's assault, injury, fleeing, slander..."

With each charge listed, the tips of his fingers, wrapped in black gloves, tapped lightly on the desk. Even this seemingly meaningless action caused Sera to feel a tightening in her chest.

"If there's any part of this you'd like to deny, go ahead and speak."

Sera barely managed to open her trembling lips.

"I... It wasn't my idea. I was, just, deceived!"

"Deceived? By whom?"

"Southerners. Those Southerners, they tricked me, us. It's all their fault. We-we didn't even know who was inside. We were just supposed to attack and then retreat..."

No, she knew exactly who was inside. It was a choice born of greed, hoping to harm the Cavalry Commander, assist the Sage, and mutually benefit with the like-minded Southern merchants.

But those damned Southerners were already dead. So, was there any need to speak the truth? As she rambled, shifting all blame onto the Southerners, she suddenly met his abyss-like gaze and her voice involuntarily trailed off.

It was a look that didn't believe a word she said. From the start, her lies had never taken hold. He was just observing her reaction.

'...Could it be, he already knew everything?'

It was an absurd thought. Yet, the moment she saw those eyes, a certainty and fear enveloped her entirely. In the face of that terrifying presence, like a wave ready to engulf at any moment, she finally closed her mouth.

In the ensuing silence, Yuder spoke again.

"Why. Keep talking."

"..."

"Nothing more to say?"

"..."

"Don't think I know nothing. One lie was enough. There won't be a second chance. Look me in the eyes and speak the truth."

"I... I don't want this. Let me go. Let me go! I'll tell someone else!"

Sera abruptly stood up, attempting to flee. Thanks to Reneve's power, there was no need to physically restrain her, so her limbs were not bound. Kurga and Yergin moved to catch her, but Yuder stopped them with a gesture.

"Let me out! Save me!"

She pounded on the locked door in extreme terror, even though Yuder had not laid a hand on her. As his slow footsteps approached her, Sera felt a surge of emotion, as if she were about to cry.

His footsteps halted right behind her. Unwittingly, Sera slid to her knees and pleaded in a collapsed heap.

"Please... I'm telling the truth... I'm a victim too... Please! I just trusted the Southerners. We're all just poor, helpless people, wanting... just wanting to live..."

If shifting the blame to others didn't work, the next tactic was to reveal a pitiable state to elicit sympathy. But Yuder remained unmoved, no matter how pitifully she spun her tales or wept.

He maintained his silence until Sera, tired from crying, barely raised her head, and then he spoke just one sentence.

"So, is that all?"

"..."

"I want to know only one thing. What did the Southerners tell you, and what did they want you to do? Nothing else."

Sera looked up at him blankly.

In his deep, black eyes, which seemed to devour everything, an intense malice flickered like a river, making her wonder how she hadn't noticed it earlier.

He neither sympathized nor forgave her. No matter how much she begged or schemed, nothing would sway this man.

And if she continued to lie or refused to testify, then...

"..."

Sera felt a chilling sensation at the back of her head and tightly closed her eyes.

Even if she were to leave this place now, she couldn't fully escape that murderous intent. It was a certainty born from the instinctive will to live.

Finally, Sera collapsed to the floor, gasping for air, and bowed her head.

"...If I tell you just that, can I leave here?"

Yuder nodded.

After a while, a slow and proper confession began to emerge from Sera's lips.

It was a victory Yuder had secured without laying a finger on her.

Chapter 765

After Sara, exhausted from recounting her entire story, was taken away, Yuder remained seated in his place. He intended to wait for the next person, but from afar, the wary glances of Kurga and Yergin seemed suspicious.

‘Seems they're scared after all.’

In his previous life, those who had witnessed Yuder interrogate with determination had often recoiled in fear. Mostly, these were members of the Cavalry, bound to follow Yuder's orders, so he never paid much attention to their reactions.

There was one exception when Emperor Katchian had observed Yuder's interrogation and had a different reaction. But even then, the Emperor had simply concluded, "An unnecessarily prolonged affair that should have ended in torture," and left it at that.

Yuder understood why Kurga and Yergin might avoid him, especially considering that the subject of his investigation was linked to an attack on Kishiar. He was prepared to go to even greater lengths if necessary.

While Kishiar himself showed no anger, Yuder couldn't forget the sinking feeling in his heart when he first heard of the attack.

The current members of the Cavalry were not incapable of conducting investigations, but their lack of experience and the brainwashing of the sage limited their effectiveness in instilling deep-seated fear in the numerous and powerful opponents.

Those who attacked had to be prepared to face equivalent consequences. He was determined to teach them the gravity of their actions and the repercussions of meddling with someone like him.

It was fortunate that the subject of their discussion was not present.

"Yuder," Yergin called out hesitantly from a distance. Yuder shook off his thoughts and looked up to see her anxious face.

"Um... I've been thinking, and I'm not sure..."

"..."

"Do we not need to ask Sera about anything else related to the Star of Nagran? I thought you'd ask about that first since you suspected the sage's involvement, but you only inquired about the Southerners. I was curious."

Wasn't she apprehensive about speaking to Yuder?

A flicker of confusion briefly warmed his cold heart. Yuder gazed at her, assessing her intentions, before responding.

"The rest is either already known to the Commander and me, or we have ways to find out. However, the intentions of the Southerners remain uncertain," he explained.

Yergin nodded, seemingly understanding the priority.

"See, Kurga? They already knew everything."

"Uh..."

Kurga, always a man of few words, scratched his head and muttered, making it hard to discern if he was scared or not.

Yuder hesitated, then asked, "Is that all you wanted to say?"

"Yeah. Why?"

"..."

Was it really not a big deal to her? Slightly confused but with nothing more to say, Yuder gestured for her to leave.

"Understood. Send in the next person for interrogation."

Yuder continued his interrogations afterward.

The leader of the central base of the Star of Nagran tried to attack Yuder in a show of defiance but quickly found himself overwhelmed by Yuder's superior martial skills, unable to lay a finger on him.

Although the leader remained tight-lipped about who had ordered him to infiltrate the Cavalry, he couldn't deny his association with the organization and the fact that he had received orders.

In the next interrogation, Sir Radel of the Herne Family, confronted Yuder, causing a commotion right from the start, demanding to know why he was being questioned. Despite his decayed knightly honor, he was still strong, but not an Awakener, making it a challenging task for the Cavalry members who had interrogated him before Yuder.

Yuder watched his tantrum without moving a muscle. The moment a chair thrown by Radel grazed his hair, Yuder stood up, grabbed the back of Radel's head, and slammed his face into the desk. Since his hair was touched, Yuder could claim it as a rightful defense.

With his face turning beet red against the desk, Radel had to personally hear the dismissal message from the First Princess Myra, relayed through Yuder.

"First Princess Myra and Duke Herne have already discovered your betrayal within the family. The Herne Family has also nearly completed their investigation of Baron Conche's side. You are no longer a knight of the Herne, and no one will come to your aid. Do you want to leave here and face proper investigation? It might be worth reconsidering which side – ours or the Herne's – would be more favorable for your survival."

Despite Radel's cries of disbelief, fear was evident in his voice. He knew that leaving here might actually be to his disadvantage if the accusations were true.

Yuder continued the interrogation, relentlessly pressing down on the back of Radel's head until he apologized. Eventually, overwhelmed by humiliation and fear, Radel apologized to Yuder and the other Cavalry members and stutteringly divulged valuable information.

He confessed that a year ago, Baron Conche had proposed to make his son the new Duke Herne. Initially, Radel hadn't planned to get so deeply involved, but the investments he made with the Southern merchants, introduced by Baron Conche, were so successful that he found himself unable to withdraw.

This suggested that there were more in the Herne Family, like Radel, who had been bribed. Yuder informed him that the more names of other traitors he disclosed, the higher the chances that Lady Myra would spare his life. After getting the information, Yuder concluded the interrogation.

"That's the last one..."

"Yeah, that was the last person."

With Radel, the series of interrogations Yuder had to conduct came to an end. He rose from his seat and walked towards the door. Just as he was about to grab the doorknob, Yergin called out to him from behind.

"Yuder. I think someone like you is absolutely necessary for the Cavalry."

Yuder's hand, reaching for the doorknob, paused. As he turned his head, Yergin continued in a heavy, serious tone.

"It's not because you're a genius at devising devilish training methods, but because, when needed, you can be frightfully stern and decisive."

"..."

Yuder silently gazed at her face, unsure of how to respond. Wondering if he misunderstood, Yergin hesitantly added more explanation.

"What I mean is, honestly, I think it's a waste to even feed the ones who attacked our Commander. And criminals like that knight who pretend to be something they're not. Isn't it right to teach those who tried to disgrace our Commander and the Cavalry a proper lesson? You must have thought the same, hence your tougher approach today."

There was probably a significant difference between her pure respect for Kishiar and Yuder's feelings. Nevertheless, it seemed they both deeply regretted the attack on their Commander.

When Yuder silently affirmed her statement, Yergin smiled mischievously, her lips curling up triumphantly.

"Well... I think Kurga, lacking our level of loyalty, found it a bit excessive, but thanks to you, many have finally realized the gravity of their crimes. I'm quite pleased about that. Just saying."

"...When did I?"

Kurga muttered under his breath, his bear-like face filled with a sense of injustice.

"I just... It was my first time seeing an investigation like Yuder's, so I was a bit... nervous. I think the same about doing what needs to be done. Don't make it sound like a misunderstanding."

"Hmm, let's go with that then!"

"Yergin..."

"Anyway, you don't need to mind us. Just keep acting in the true nature of the Cavalry as you always have."

"It's not the nature of the Cavalry, but its spirit."

Kurga corrected her in a tiny voice from behind. Yergin quickly amended her statement with a brazen face.

"Right, spirit. But isn't nature also correct? You don't care about such things, do you?"

Whether it was nature or spirit, it didn't matter. Yuder didn't care what people called him. What caught his attention were the expressions of Yergin and Kurga. They looked completely different from when they were interrogating Sera. The fear and tension he had assumed they felt seemed like a lie now.

Or was it his mistake, a misconception born from recalling his past life and assuming they were afraid during the interrogation?

Yuder looked down after watching the two bickering lightly.

'The Cavalry needs someone like me.' It was a sentiment he had never heard in his previous life, leaving him with a strange feeling.

With that odd sentiment in his heart, Yuder pulled the doorknob. He stopped in his tracks upon seeing the tall shadow of Kishiar, leaning against the wall with crossed arms.

"...Commander."

He wanted to ask why Kishiar stood there instead of coming in, but was taken aback.

'Did he hear what was said earlier? Or has he been here since the interrogation?'

"I finished earlier and thought I'd come to fetch you."

"Ah, Commander? When did you get here?"

Yergin and Kurga, following Yuder, were startled to see Kishiar. The man smiled nonchalantly at them and greeted them casually.

"Just arrived. You've worked hard, so go up and rest once you're done. I'll head up first with my assistant."

"Ah, yes! Understood!"

"Then, we should leave."

Kishiar lightly touched Yuder's back before withdrawing his hand. Feeling the brief warmth, Yuder silently followed him upstairs. Once they were alone, Yuder finally spoke.

"...How did Aton's interrogation go?"

"It went well."

Kishiar replied calmly.

Chapter 766

"...How did Aton's interrogation go?"

"It went well."

Kishiar replied calmly, his demeanor so nonchalant one might have mistaken the topic for something as mundane as inquiring if he had eaten.

“Did you discover anything?”

“As much as the current situation allowed. Perhaps.”

Kishiar was known to be extraordinary, but Aton was no ordinary man either. What had they discussed, and what had been uncovered? Was there anything related to the strange crack in the information he had discovered? Amidst his anxiety and curiosity, Yuder managed to maintain his composure as he inquired.

“May I hear it right away?”

“Before that, I’d like to hear what my assistant has learned first. Cross-referencing our information will be necessary.”

Ah. Yuder slightly furrowed his brow. Asking for information sharing before reporting was an unusual oversight. Even his attempts at staying composed seemed futile the moment he thought of the abnormal crack.

“I apologize for not informing you first. There wasn’t much information beyond our expectations...”

“There’s no need for apologies. I am well aware of how much my assistant is on edge about this matter.”

Kishiar raised his hand, interrupting gently but firmly. Yuder looked into his eyes and nodded slowly.

“...Yes.”

Kishiar once again silently comforted Yuder with a reassuring touch, as steadfast as if it would never falter.

“So, what did you find out?”

Yuder, recalling those he had investigated, summarized the information gleaned from them.

“To start, Sir Radel’s involvement with Baron Conche and the Southerners began about a year ago, following a similar pattern to a previous incident. Now that he’s opened up, it’s likely he’ll soon start naming other sympathizers. As for the Star of Nagran, it seems they were indeed motivated by the sage’s influence, though the southern base’s involvement appears to be due to the Southerners’ reach.”

“So the southern base followed both the sage and the Southerners’ intentions?”

Kishiar asked with keen interest.

“Yes. According to the southern base, their initial aim was just to assist those infiltrating the Cavalry. It turned into this mess due to the Southerners’ temptations and requests.”

“Considering what the informants revealed, they probably said they had helped before and now it was their turn to receive aid. It made sense to harm the Cavalry, which the sage was targeting, so there was no reason to refuse.”

“Exactly that.”

Sera tried to conceal as much as she could about the sage and their own bases while discussing the Southerners. However, having already heard the stories of those who were in the Star of Nagran, filling in the gaps and drawing conclusions wasn’t too challenging.

Kishiar muttered with a slight smile, “After all the effort, to have everything ruined by an unexpected move and the variable of the Southerners... The sage returning home soon must be quite dismayed.”

Though he spoke of dismay, his tone lacked any semblance of sympathy.

“Considering those we captured attempting to attack us in the west, it won’t be difficult to link the sage, and further, to the forces of Duke Diarca and the Crown Prince. And...”

“And?”

"The leader of the southern base seemed genuinely unaware of the strange crack phenomenon. However, from what I gathered, the Southerners never intended to die from the start."

This was the crucial part Yuder had sought to uncover during his investigation.

"The southern base side was oblivious to the Southerners' possession of magic power medium, hearing only repeated assurances of a route for retreat after the attack. Even in moments of peril, they kept asking when the promised retreat would happen, only to be told 'soon'... right before the crack phenomenon occurred."

“So, you mean...”

“Yes. It seems they deliberately created the crack to escape amidst the chaos of monsters falling from it.”

Who would have thought that a persistent, bizarre crack would appear in the middle of the city, raining down giant monsters? If not for Yuder and Kishiar's presence, the perpetrators would have achieved their goal without any trouble.

'Even in my previous life, I never thought such an event could be orchestrated. Back then, I would have been too busy understanding the situation to pay attention to them.'

"If things got rough, they were planning to use the Star of Nagan as a shield to escape."

"Not just if things got rough; it's highly likely their plan was to push them into a corner from the start and escape alone."

"But it didn't go as planned."

Looking back, everything was overwhelmingly against the southern base. The Southerners had egged them on to collaborate but barely exerted any effort during the battle, cunningly observing the situation. It was a clear sign of betrayal.

“So... this is just my speculation, but...”

Yuder glanced around before continuing.

They had just emerged from underground, passing the place they had walked earlier. Nearby, Elpkins was clattering on a roof, fixing it. Everyone was busy with their own tasks, paying no mind to Yuder and Kishiar's presence.

The scene looked peaceful and bright, yet Yuder's eyes were drawn to the haunting afterimage of the dark crack that had ominously existed right in front of that roof.

Yuder traced the afterimage and whispered softly, audible only to Kishiar, “Their death occurred not just after realizing there was no escape when captured, but after hearing Aton’s words from me. Remember?”

“That’s right.”

Among the many thoughts he had over the past few days, a hypothesis had crystallized during today's investigation. This conversation was indeed the crux of today's matter.

“I always thought of those two as linked, but today’s investigation made me wonder if that might not be the case.”

Hearing Aton’s words from Yuder, and realizing they were already captured by the Cavalry, choosing death to protect their secrets seemed a natural course.

But why would they, capable of attempting death at any point after being subdued, choose that exact moment for their demise? Was there another reason?

Yuder recalled the Southerners chanting in their strange language before willingly ending their lives, his gaze dropping. His eyes, heavy with thought, seemed to emit dark smoke.

“The reason they chose to end their lives might have been to hide the truth about the crack, but perhaps... their deaths themselves served as a catalyst, drawing monsters from the crack.”

Indeed. At the moment the Southern merchants perished, monsters emerged from the previously inert crack.

To call it mere coincidence seemed too convenient. It was hard to consider this during the heat of battle against the monsters, but as today's investigation focused on the Southern merchants' behavior and actions, their significance became increasingly apparent.

Aton spoke of creating the land of the Black Moon through the aftermath of imbalance. If this land of the Black Moon was where the strange cracks and monsters appeared, then the imbalance must be the cause of their creation.

"In the Sarain Great Forest, where similar anomalies had occurred, the magic power was distorted and imbalanced, unable to circulate properly. What if the death of these merchants and the artifact they possessed were the necessary elements to replicate such a situation in the South?"

"..."

"Put simply, it's like a sacrificial offering needed to activate a magic circle."

Yuder remembered watching closely when the Western Mage Union was repairing a magic circle. Operating such a circle required immense magic power, necessitating various materials, including magic stones imbued with magic power.

If such preparations were needed to summon and use something, then those planning to create the 'land of the Black Moon' must have needed something as well.

From the beginning, the fact that the strange crack occurred intentionally by someone was something that could not even be imagined before. So no matter how excessive the thought, it was considered that the possibility should not be completely closed.

After hearing Yuder's words, Kishiar remained silent for a while. It was only after he entered his office and the door closed with a sound, that he finally spoke.

"I, too, had similar suspicions while investigating Aton."

Yuder looked up sharply. There was no trace of the softness that had been in Kishiar's eyes before.

"He said that all the conditions had been met and that it would be futile for me to do anything now."

"That means..."

"I took it to mean that a new strange crack and more monsters will soon appear in the South."

Yuder's blood ran cold. Kishiar's moving lips were the only thing he could see, everything else was a blur.

Chapter 767

"I took it to mean that a new strange crack and more monsters will soon appear in the South."

Yuder's blood ran cold. Kishiar's moving lips were the only thing he could see, everything else was a blur.

Even a scenario contemplated multiple times can still shock when it becomes reality. All the countermeasures he had considered swirled chaotically in his mind. Clenching his fists until they almost crushed, Yuder spoke.

"Did Aton say this after learning that we had vanquished the monsters?"

"No, quite the opposite."

"Excuse me?"

Kishiar's eyebrows drew together as he slightly smiled.

"Aton has been hiding his identity and skills for many years, infiltrating every corner of the empire. He seems to have been performing the role of a leader, capable of issuing orders and guiding others. This means he is likely someone of significant status. You guessed as much, didn't you?"

Spies sent to other countries come in two types. Usually, they are skilled in infiltration and transformation, blending unnoticed among the lower classes. However, this alone makes coordinated and systematic actions challenging.

Thus, leaders are selected to guide these spies, individuals who can prioritize missions even in danger, possess strength, and would never betray their homeland. In other words, only those of considerable status and background are chosen.

Kishiar was referring to the latter.

"Yes, I am aware."

"One might think of nobility when it comes to high status, but not in the southern lands. There, the roles equivalent to nobility are 'Masha' and 'Udaquan' - akin to knights and priests in our terms."

Yuder recalled hearing that Nathan Zuckerman's parents were 'Masha'. They were not merely knights but held a status akin to nobility in those lands.

"Then, was Aton a Masha?"

"No, Nathan believed he was Udaquan."

"Despite wielding a sword?"

"Southerner priests don't shy away from violence or arms like ours do. Rather, they are encouraged. The difference lies in whether they use weapons to protect their tribe or for their faith."

According to Kishiar, Udaquans pride themselves on being the chosen 'Children of the Moon'. They would rather die than mix with the people north of the desert - a form of extreme nationalism.

Yuder then remembered Aton referring to Nathan Zuckerman as 'Makunata' or something, a derogatory term.

'It meant 'fragment of a fallen star', didn't it?'

"And the Southern merchants who volunteered for battle, the phrase they shouted. It took a while to interpret, but it turns out to be a closing phrase from their sacred texts, akin to a refrain. Don't we sometimes repeat standardized closing phrases when reciting the Sun God's scriptures?"

"Ah..."

Though he seldom visited temples, Yuder was familiar with such practices due to forced attendance.

"Inia Kta Inia. In the South, they use this phrase to mean 'Everything will be as the Black Moon wishes'."

"When did you find this out?"

"Nathan came to me this dawn. He had a hard time uncovering it, even visiting places near where he used to live."

Come to think of it, Nathan Zuckerman's hometown was also in the South. He had been barely visible since the day after the battle ended, and it seemed that he had been away because of that.

Yuder newly appreciated Nathan Zuckerman's meticulous handling of matters. During his conversation with Aton, he had not only grasped the insulting undertones of the words but also surmised the man's background, deciphering the previously incomprehensible language to report to Kishiar.

Knowing he was best positioned to uncover information about the southern lands, Nathan's actions were calculated and deliberate. Despite the south being neither a fond homeland nor an object of deep emotional attachment to him.

"No matter how thoroughly a spy hides their true intentions, understanding their background and status reveals how to approach them. Scratching a priest is best done with theology, and provoking someone of high status with excessive confidence in their skills is best done with the name of the person who defeated them."

All was well, but something about the last part was odd. As Yuder listened intently, his eyes blinked and his eyebrows twitched, prompting Kishiar to reach out and gently stroke his cheek.

"Yes, the name of the one right here."

Yuder Aile. Even knowing the soft voice wasn't calling for him, Yuder couldn't help but react momentarily.

In Kishiar's eyes, reflecting back in their shared gaze, lay an unreadable expression.

"As soon as he heard about your significant role in dealing with the recent crack and monsters, he reacted strongly. That's why I heard such words earlier."

"Could it be... that's why you didn't take me with you?"

Kishiar's eyes widened, an unspoken affirmation.

"But I wasn't the only one who faced him..."

"Yes, he fought both me and Nathan. But when else has he been utterly overpowered and buried in the ground, if not during his fight with you?"

Indeed, it would be difficult to have such an experience twice. Yuder didn't usually use such great power to toy a single opponent.

"One more thing to remember. According to recent statements from Duke Tain, the first encounter with him was a few years ago during an attempt at maritime trade between the south and the empire. At that time, other merchants faced Duke Tain, and Aton was in the background. About a year ago, he became closely involved with Duke Tain while preparing for secret trade through the Great Sarain Forest. So, even if born of high status, he wasn't originally a leader of this caliber."

"...So you mean he rose in position within his homeland after becoming an Awakener."

"Yes. The staff of the southern trading company also changed significantly around the time Aton became a leader. Originally not of a position to lead other Awakeners, his awakening allowed him to do so. Imagine the deep pride someone would feel, gaining such power and a higher position through awakening, despite having a high status but not the corresponding responsibility."

Kishiar mumbled, lifting one corner of his lips.

"I understand the minds of such people well. That's why he couldn't help but react to the name of the person who toyed with his skills."

"..."

"And such things come bigger when they are not seen than when they are seen. Because memories are sometimes more painful than reality."

In the midst of uncertainty whether Kishiar was being self-deprecating or joking, his words about memories sometimes being more painful than reality resonated deeply within Yuder. As Yuder pondered this, Kishiar continued his explanation.

It seemed that upon hearing Yuder's name and his exploits, Aton couldn't hide his reaction, allowing Kishiar to easily manipulate him. If Yuder himself had been present, Aton's entire focus would have been on him, so their decision to act separately had been the right one.

"So from now on, we need to investigate where the next crack will appear and what the conditions will be. He won't tell us easily, but we have to dig out the information somehow."

"I will search as well," Yuder firmly responded.

"Even if the mages can't detect any anomalies in the flow of magic power, setting up a system to constantly monitor various regions will provide us with some means of response."

"Yes, and there are other methods as well. We need to start seeking cooperation from those around us and continue to prepare."

Of course, this was a necessary action. Given the magnitude of the situation, not a single person, be it nobility, knights, or ordinary imperial citizens, could be excluded from responding to this crisis.

However, despite borrowing the strength of others, no one could respond as effectively as Yuder, who had memories from a previous life. This meant that from now on, he must be ready to use his power to the fullest, whenever and wherever necessary.

For that, not a single moment could be wasted. Ideas for strengthening and using his power more frequently flashed through his mind.

With a renewed resolve in his heart, Yuder looked at Kishiar. He realized he should talk to him about the contents of his dream as soon as the mages' investigation was completed.

It was then that the sound of tapping at the window reached them.

Perched on the window was a messenger bird from the Cavalry, a message tied to its leg.

Chapter 768

It was then that the sound of tapping at the window reached them.

Perched on the window was a messenger bird from the Cavalry, a message tied to its leg.

The conversation they were having ended there. Yuder watched Kishiar as he approached the window, letting the messenger bird perch on his finger and retrieving the letter. After a brief moment, Kishiar, having quickly read through the letter, let out a small hum.

"Is it bad news, perhaps?"

"No. It's not particularly bad news for the Cavalry. Would you like to see it?"

Without hesitation, Yuder moved closer and took the letter from Kishiar. The contents were brief and to the point.

'We have completed all preparations to depart. So far, there are no issues. However, upon hearing about the sage and our departure to the south, Hosanna has fervently requested to accompany us, proposing a deal. Hence, I am sending this letter. After hearing about the events in the south and the news of the sage, his abilities seem to have significantly recovered. He claims that he can use his powers to reduce the Cavalry's travel time to just three days. From my assessment, he doesn't seem to be planning an escape. He appears to be filled with concern for Nahan and made this offer out of that sentiment. What should we do?'

The letter was written by Kanna. She had been responsible for investigating Hosanna, a close associate of Nahan, and had sent several reports in the absence of their leader.

According to her letters, Hosanna's health had improved enough for him to manage everyday activities without difficulty, but the return of his powers seemed still a distant possibility.

The news of his sudden recovery upon hearing about the south and the sage was surprising.

'It must have been a significant mental shock.'

Yuder folded the letter and spoke.

"The decision to leak this information to Hosanna must have been Commander's, right?"

"Yes. I had told Kanna that she could share any major news related to the Star of Nagran as she saw fit. But a recovery of powers and a request for a deal... I hadn't anticipated this."

"Do you plan to accept his offer?"

"What do you think would be the best course of action?"

Hosanna's abilities were invaluable, and currently, there was no one else who could replace him. If he could indeed reduce the travel time of the reinforcements, which could have taken up to a month, to just three days, there seemed no reason not to accept.

'Fortunately, we already have a power suppression device, and now there's Reneve as well. If Nahan is headed south, we are bound to encounter him soon, so keeping Hosanna here wouldn't be a bad idea.'

If they do end up facing or capturing Nahan, Hosanna could prove to be a useful asset in persuading or luring him. Of course, considering Nahan had abandoned Hosanna and fled alone, this might not be the case.

'If Hosanna had been difficult to manage or if the speedy joining of the reinforcement troops wasn't urgent, I would have reconsidered. But that's not the case.'

Yuder summed up his thoughts and replied succinctly.

"If he can truly increase the travel speed that much, then we should accept. The prompt arrival of our reinforcement troops is our top priority, after all."

"Right. It's best to use what we can when we can."

Kishiar gave a faint smile and took back the letter. As he began to write a letter of approval, the sound of tapping on the window was heard again. This time, it came from another window in the next room.

"...Hmm?"

As soon as Yuder opened the window, he blinked in surprise at the sight of two messenger birds flying in simultaneously. He wondered if someone had sent both at once, but that wasn't the case. The birds were from Herne's First Princess Myra and the Imperial Palace, respectively.

"What a coincidence, it's as if they had made an appointment. Please direct the letter from the Imperial Palace here, and let the assistant check the one from Lady Myra."

"Understood."

Caught in his astonishment, Yuder used a slight gust of wind to send the letter from the Imperial Palace to Kishiar and then unfolded Myra's letter. Although brief, the contents of Myra's letter were far from light.

"You look puzzled. Has something happened with the First Princess?"

"The Duke of Herne is coming to Charloin. The official reason is for the funeral of the Second Prince, but the First Princess believes there's more to it."

"That's interesting timing..."

"Excuse me?"

Kishiar, effortlessly reading one letter while writing another, chuckled and spoke.

"This one is from His Imperial Majesty. Apparently, Duke Diarca has suddenly expressed concern over the turmoil in the south and requested the deployment of the Imperial Knights. Interestingly, Kiolle Da Diarca, a member of the Imperial Knights and at the same time the Crown Prince's personal guard, is included as the leader of this mission."

Yuder doubted his ears for a moment.

"...Who did you say the leader was?"

"Kiolle Da Diarca."

Kishiar kindly repeated the name.

"Duke Diarca must be out of his mind."

"Unfortunately, it seems he hasn't gone mad yet. His Majesty mentioned that he has come to see his youngest son in a new light after the recent incident. He must have felt the need for a thorough investigation after hearing about my aura-encased divine sword."

To Duke Diarca, a sage remained an untrustworthy entity. Sending Kiolle would allow him to hear about the southern situation directly from his most trusted kin, and simultaneously keep an eye on the sage and the Cavalry while giving the impression that the Crown Prince was personally overseeing the welfare of his people by sending his own personal guard. It was a clever move, if not for the choice of Kiolle.

'Did Kiolle really leave such a deep impression at that time?'

Despite his doubts about Duke Diarca's judgment, Yuder calmly assessed the situation and responded.

"Ridiculous as it may seem... it appears to be a fortunate turn for us."

"Duke Diarca's decision to send Kiolle and the Duke of Herne's own visit. I wonder what else might be added to this mix."

"Could there be more?"

Surprisingly, there was.

Right after handling the two new letters, Sunz and Emon appeared at the office door, bringing news of a third visitor to Charloin.

"General Gino, upon receiving our report, has informed us of his plans to visit Charloin with the Southern Army to assist in maintaining order. Here, a letter for the Cavalry Commander!"

"..."

Staring at the forcefully presented letter, Yuder remained silent. Seeing his subtle expression, Sunz asked anxiously.

"...Um, why are you looking like that? Did we come at a bad time...?"

"No, not at all. It's reassuring to have General Gino and the Southern Army coming to help. We were going to need more assistance soon anyway. This saves us the trouble of asking."

Upon hearing Kishiar's response, delivered with a smile, Sunz and Emon relaxed their tension. After they had left, Yuder, looking at the several letters on Kishiar's desk, let out a small sigh.

"I had thought about requesting additional support from the Imperial Army, but I didn't expect General Gino to take the initiative to come."

"If it's General Gino, he must have taken the fact that the safe zone of the city where monsters don't appear has been broken more seriously than anything else. He's that kind of person."

A small smile played on the corners of Kishiar's lips. Yuder remembered how closely Kishiar had worked with General Gino when they had met in the mountains before.

"You seem to have a great deal of trust in General Gino."

"It's less about trust and more about... He's someone from whom I've learned a lot since my childhood. I suppose it would be more accurate to say that I have a strong sense of familiarity with him."

After saying this, Kishiar's eyebrows softened slightly as he smiled.

"General Gino doesn't know that I'm a swordmaster. Would you understand if I said that's the difference between trust and familiarity?"

General Gino was unaware of Kishiar being a swordmaster. This implied that he also didn't fully understand the other powers Kishiar possessed.

It was surprising, as Yuder had thought him likely to know. At the same time, it highlighted how crucial these secrets were to Kishiar, stirring an odd feeling in Yuder.

The fact that Kishiar had opened up and revealed these closely guarded secrets to Yuder alone, which he had even kept from a general he had known since childhood, made the responsibility feel even heavier.

The trust and confidence Kishiar extended to him often felt as weighty as love.

If Yuder were to say that this weight, at times seeming to almost crush him, was what kept him grounded and helped him regain his focus, who would truly understand that sentiment?

No one but the person in front of him.

"...Yes, I think I understand."

The man who heard this response gave a faint smile and then returned his focus to writing responses to the letters. Watching him, Yuder clenched his fist slightly and spoke up.

"Commander, may I step out for a while today?"

"Alone?"

"If you're worried, I could take others with me, but if possible, I'd prefer to handle this alone."

With the reinforcement troops from the capital arriving in three days, there was something Yuder urgently needed to do in the meantime.

Chapter 769

"Is it a matter too difficult to share with me beforehand?" he inquired.

"No, it's not that..." Yuder hesitated briefly before continuing. "I plan to tour the entire South and return."

"The entire South?" The quill in Kishiar's hand came to a halt. Yuder chose his words carefully to explain further.

"In the previous game, starting with Charloin, the entire southern region suffered equally. It's hard to be sure the same will happen this time, but just in case, I thought it best to check the areas in advance."

Yuder usually remembered well the battles and missions he partook in, but this case was different. The earthquakes and disasters he recalled in the South were years away from now. The landscape in his memories differed significantly from the current situation in the South, making it imperative to assess the area before any reinforcements arrived.

Kishiar tilted his head, listening to his explanation, and asked, "But is it something you can do 'briefly'?"

"It's not a detailed inspection, so with efficient use of my strength, it's entirely possible even before the day ends."

The day was already turning to dusk from his various tasks, but this was no issue for Yuder. His vision remained clear even at night, thanks to his Eye of Magic, and he had no fear of unexpected enemies or monsters.

The only problem was the decreased efficiency if he brought others along, as he would need to ensure their safety too. Realizing why he preferred to go alone, Kishiar slowly nodded.

However, this was not consent.

"I see. But it's not possible right now."

"I planned to finish as soon as possible, before the reinforcements arrive... Is there something else I need to do now?"

"No, but I still have some work left."

"Really?"

"Wait until I'm done, then let's go together. I have useful abilities that won't interfere with what you want to do, and I look so good, so why do you want to leave me behind?"

Kishiar blinked and smiled charmingly.

Yuder, taken aback by his words, struggled to respond.

"Shouldn't you stay and guard this place, Commander?"

Although it seemed unlikely that an emergency would arise, unforeseen delays could occur. The trip, which was expected to take about half a day, could be delayed a little more due to that.

In case such a situation occurs, there must be someone to support the Southern branch, so Yuder did not even think about going with Kishiar from the beginning. Kishiar also thought he would naturally judge that way, but his thoughts seemed to be different from Yuder's.

A depth of emotion rose on Kishiar's face in an instant. His exaggeratedly trembling eyelashes gave off a deliberately made-up vibe, but even knowing that, his appearance looked miserable like a daffodil soaked in water.

While Yuder was slightly doubting his eyes, the man who bowed his head and covered his cheek with one hand whispered in a seemingly sad voice.

"Incredible... Are the memories of that night, which seemed inseparable, left only here?" he whispered with feigned sadness, his hand gently touching his cheek.

"Really?"

"I feel the rising sun is meaningless without your breath, rooted in this land, while you, heartlessly, move forward without looking back."

"What?"

"Even if my roots wither away, please, do carry me on your waist. The place from which I am taken will one day sprout a new shoot, but nothing can suffice for the touch of your hands."

It was only after questioning twice that Yuder finally realized that Kishiar was reciting one of the most famous poems from the empire. It was the tale of a mage from ancient times and the spirit who loved him, so well-known that even children were familiar with it due to its frequent performances by jesters and bards in markets and taverns. Yuder, too, remembered it without much difficulty.

The issue, however, was that Kishiar was reciting lines typically spoken by the spirit, who is often portrayed as a delicate woman.

'The lines spoken by the spirit when offering its life-like golden apple to the mage, who needed to collect the greatest treasures to aid in guarding the king's land, yet couldn't bring himself to kill and take the spirit of the golden apple tree... Wasn't it?'

That golden apple was the last fruit borne by the tree. Knowing that taking the apple would cause the golden apple tree to wither and die, the mage intended to refuse the spirit's offer. However, the spirit, assuring that what seemed like death at the moment would not be so, cut itself off and dropped the apple into his hand.

As expected, the tree withered and died upon dropping the apple. But the dead tree became the nourishment for a beautiful forest. Later, when the mage returned to the king's land and planted the golden apple, a new sprout grew, fulfilling the spirit's words.

So... Kishiar's use of these lines now meant that, although it seemed necessary for him to remain here, it was not strictly so.

'...Is this what he means?'

Yuder was at a loss for words, struck by the brazen yet mournful way Kishiar recited the spirit's lines, yet also finding it strangely fitting.

And that was precisely Kishiar La Orr.

Yuder finally sighed and nodded his head.

"I understand. I will wait until you are finished."

"Much appreciated."

The spirit, who had seemed like a flower shaking the human heart, quickly returned to being Kishiar La Orr. He then began to write responses to the remaining letters and handle a few documents at twice his usual speed, speaking again.

"I thought you might not have heard this story, having lived in the mountains. I'm relieved."

"I know it well enough."

"Do you also know the story behind it, where the mage is speculated to be the Archmage Luma?"

Of course, Yuder didn't. Such old tales had never interested him, and this was completely new to him.

"...Is that so?"

"Yes, indeed. Recently, with the increase in events related to Archmage Ruma, I started looking into stories and documents about him. It's tough to find credible information on such a mysterious legendary figure, but this one seems quite accurate."

After saying this, Kishiar lowered his voice to explain the basis and reasoning.

"Do you remember the Hill of Abundance I took the foreign delegates to during the Harvest Festival?"

"Ah... Yes. It was related to Luma."

Kishiar nodded.

"Precisely. There's a legend that it all started from an apple tree planted by Luma himself. There's indeed a small apple tree there, though I'm not sure if you've seen it."

"I think I have seen it, but I didn't pay much attention."

Of course, the response Yuder gave was based on experiences from his previous life. The only occasion he would bother to visit such a hill was when entertaining foreign delegates, and Yuder seldom undertook such tasks. As he recalled, he only saw it from a distance when he was closely guarding Emperor Katchian.

"That apple tree is an extraordinary being that lives long, blossoming but never bearing fruit. According to the mages' investigation, instead of turning blossoms into fruits, it disperses its inherent magic power into the soil."

"Are you suggesting it's actually the golden apple tree?"

"We can't be sure since it never bore fruit. The mages speculate that the tree, due to its unique property of absorbing a significant amount of magic through its roots, was used by the Archmage Luma as a medium, possibly making it one of the foundation stones supporting the seven walls of the capital. This is, in fact, one of the Empire's secrets."

The idea that an apple tree on a hill, accessible to anyone in the capital, was actually a state secret of the empire seemed almost laughable under any other circumstance.

"Some say that the First Emperor simply planted it out of his fondness for apple trees. However, this story does show that not all legends are entirely baseless. There, all done."

As Kishiar finished speaking, he lightly set down his quill. Yuder blinked as if awakening from a dream.

"It didn't take as long as you thought, did it?"

"Did you tell me that story because you thought I wouldn't wait?"

"Not exactly, but I do enjoy your company, so it helps pass the time."

Kishiar rose from his seat and donned his outer garment.

"Shall we go now?"

They went to meet Nathan Zuckerman, Kurga, and Sunz, briefly explaining the situation before climbing to the top of the branch building, near the roof. Yuder, gazing at the moon in the sky, pondered over the stories Kishiar had shared.

He knew of the existence of dragons, fairies, and spirits in ancient times, but he had never imagined that such a well-known story, familiar even to children, was related to Luma. It seemed he had another topic to inquire about when Enon arrived.

Chapter 770

"Ah, we have climbed to the very top, but now, how shall we proceed?"

Standing atop the roof repaired by the Elpkins during the day, Kishiar brushed his wind-tousled hair aside and asked. Yuder opened his mouth with a trace of hesitation still lingering.

"First, we'll head to the temple's bell tower, from where we can overlook the entirety of Charloin. Then, we'll follow the path leading to the harbor, cross the southern gate, and ascend high into the sky. Our journey will take us through Mclara, Tuban, Sluban, and Alsara before circling back to Charloin."

These four regions had reported unusual cracks before the earthquake in his previous life. The calamity had hit them harder than other areas, and they were geographically well-positioned for travel to neighboring villages and towns without being too close to each other.

"Indeed. This way, we can swiftly survey the entire south without unnecessary interruptions."

Kishiar nodded his approval.

"Let's depart immediately."

"Are you sure this is wise? Even though you can levitate with your power, control might become difficult at higher speeds."

Kishiar possessed the ability to lift himself high into the air using a push-pull force. While walking through the air was feasible, moving at a flight-like speed was a different challenge. Merely pushing off the ground required immense strength, and increasing speed would only add to the strain.

However, Kishiar merely laughed with joy.

"Don't worry. Just think of me as a small pouch tied to your back, and move as you wish."

"That seems quite a large 'small pouch'..."

"Then consider it a large pouch."

There was nothing more to say when he put it that way.

'Really confident, isn't he? Since we've come this far, there's no turning back. I'll monitor the situation until we reach the temple bell tower. If he shows any sign of struggle, we'll slow down or find another way.'

"Understood. Then..."

Yuder looked down and exhaled. Simultaneously, a golden light flickered in one of his eyes, and the direction of the harsh wind that had been whipping around them shifted abruptly.

Surrounded by a swirling wind, as if an invisible hand was twisting the flow of nature, Yuder gazed at the distant temple roof, barely visible in the darkness.

Moments later, like an arrow released from a bow, his legs, which had been slightly bent, propelled him powerfully off the ground. He leaped out towards the roof's edge without hesitation. To an onlooker, it might have seemed like a suicidal jump, but a tightly whirling wind caught him, preventing his fall.

Yuder stepped on the wind beneath his feet and soared high. With each subsequent leap, his altitude visibly increased, quickly reaching a dizzying height.

Despite it being a not-so-cold day in the southern region, the wind was unusually fierce. This made it almost effortless for him to step on the wind and ascend swiftly.

As his soaring body reached its limit and seemed to slow down for a brief moment, he glanced back. The golden hair of Kishiar, following him rapidly, flashed into view.

Yuder stepped on the wind again and leaped forward. In the terrifying spectacle, fit to make anyone with acrophobia faint, no one noticed his quiet crossing through the air.

Effortlessly handling his power and instinctively finding the optimal route, he soon reached his intended destination. Skimming along the southern-style red-painted temple roof, the bell tower soon emerged from the darkness.

Yuder, who landed in front of the bell, which was only quiet because the bell ringer had left his post, turned his head while catching his breath. And at that exact moment, his eyes met with Kishiar, who was stepping into the bell tower. His red eyes sparkled with a smile.

"I expected as much, but you are indeed swift. How do you so effortlessly evade obstacles without making a sound?"

After landing and lightly brushing his long robe, he didn't look tired at all, as if he had been here before Yuder.

"So, does this prove that I'm a useful 'pouch' now?"

"..."

Yuder marveled anew at how Kishiar, who didn't train daily in handling the power of the Awakener like the Cavalry members, had progressed so far. It was as if he was born with incredible talent.

In terms of finely manipulating and controlling power, not even Ever Beck, who was always the best among the Cavalry members, could match this level. Kishiar's development, which seemed to leap not just one but ten steps at a time, was unbelievable unless witnessed firsthand.

"...I see. It seems I worried needlessly. From now on, I'll speed up without concern."

"Of course. As much as you like."

Yuder gazed down at the landscape beneath the bell tower, taking a breath. The city, sparkling with lanterns under the high, cold night sky, was beautiful enough to prevent memories of the ruins from his past life from resurfacing.

Fitting for a hub of maritime trade, the end of Charloin was all sea. In the night, the horizon roiled black, with ships of various sizes moored side by side.

While Yuder observed the ships, Kishiar approached from behind, standing in the same direction to observe at the same level. Unexpectedly, he spread his coat and enveloped Yuder's body in it. The long, thick coat instantly covered them both, spreading warmth and tickling Yuder's nose with Kishiar's distinctive scent.

As Yuder blinked and looked up, a nonchalant voice came from above.

"You're intently observing the port. Is there a reason?"

"...Charloin has low terrain. If it rains heavily or a typhoon hits, the waves can get too high and cause a lot of damage."

"Right. The reason this place has thrived so far is largely due to its warm southern location, which doesn't receive much rain."

Yuder continued, looking down at the arms wrapped around him.

"Appearance of monsters and strange cracks can be dealt with, but if they combine with natural disasters like in the previous game, that port will no longer be Charloin's treasure but a nightmare."

"A major earthquake, you mean."

"Yes. Earthquakes occur not just on land but also at sea. And those at sea... are far more ferocious and terrifying than those on land."

Yuder remembered the southern regions ravaged by a major earthquake. In the face of such insurmountable natural disasters, millennia of human civilization crumbled easily, like a mere sandcastle.

The city was destroyed, and corpses piled up in the cracked earth. However, the most horrifying were regions like Charloin, with low terrain, where massive waves from the earthquake's effects swept over.

Cities completely submerged were barely recognizable, virtually erased without a trace. Most lives were washed away, making it difficult to ascertain what happened.

The few survivors trembled as they recounted the moment the waves overflowed and engulfed the city. The negligence of lords and nobles, who failed to take precautions despite knowing such events could happen, resulted in so many deaths that assigning blame or responsibility became meaningless.

After the chaos was quelled, several regions, much like the vicinity of the Great Sarain Forest, became completely desolate, turning into areas where no one would ever live again. In such places, as if by some unspoken agreement, monsters teemed, further complicating the already difficult lives of the people.

The influence of the Herne Duchy, based in the south, also waned considerably. The then-heir to the Herne Duchy, already scorned as a country bumpkin, became even less visible in the capital.

However, this time, the situation would not repeat itself.

During the previous life, when the Great Southern Earthquake occurred, Yudrain Aile was at the height of his glory, commanding thousands of members. Now, with only a handful of helpers, the situation might seem overwhelming in comparison.

But unlike the past, where Yudrain could neither go to the site nor prepare for the earthquake, Yuder now had the advantage of assessing the terrain and situation in advance, backed by a presence that shared warmth with him.

This alone gave Yuder the confidence to stand resolutely before the dark, undulating sea.

'I must make it different this time. That's why I came.'

"It's definitely hard to imagine that a city could be buried by waves caused by an earthquake, but it's a terrible thing to hear. If you were to prepare, what would you prioritize?"

Yuder voiced a strategy he had long contemplated but never spoken aloud, feeling somewhat unfamiliar with the words as they left his mouth.

"First, we should build walls to block the waves and widely disseminate evacuation plans. We must also ensure the safety of ships, which could be in grave danger if they capsize or are swept away, by docking them in different ports. The cooperation of those Awakeners who can control earth and water, along with administrative support, will be more crucial than ever. We'll handle the former, while the latter will require assistance from First Princess Myra and the officials."

"Earth, water, and administration," Kisiar remarked with a gentle smile, as if he understood Yuder's thoughts from those words alone.

"It would be best if nothing happens, but if it does repeat, this time it will go as planned. I'll help ensure that."