

The Shining Star Above The Heaven

Chapter 16 - Second Domain

"Why did it suddenly appear? All I did was a comprehension session, and now the World Tree is resonating and even integrating with me?" Aldrian pondered. The sudden resonance and integration of the World Tree baffled him. The World Tree, a token of blessing for elves and akin to a domain, resonating with a human like him was an anomaly.

"I'm tied to nature."

He recalled one of the lines he often repeated during his comprehension sessions. When the screen first appeared in front of him, it displayed words he couldn't fully comprehend. Since then, he had let nature take its course, believing that he would eventually solve the mystery surrounding the screen and himself. With this new development, he felt that it might reveal more about his abilities and his domain.

"My domain encompasses all things." he thought, reflecting on his domain. *"There is nothing that can escape my view, There is nothing that can escape my sense.* These abilities seem to relate to my domain, but *'There is nothing that can escape my will*. It sounds like the ability to impose my will on others or something else entirely?"

Aldrian wasn't sure because he had never tried to impose his will on anything. He didn't even know how to do it, and the ability itself sounded absurd. It's like—

"A God." He furrowed his brows.

"What am I?" he sighed, hoping whatever it was, he wouldn't bring trouble to his family, Unbeknownst to Aldrian, the domain in the secret realm was reacting to him.

Aldrian and Eleine arrived at the two-floor house within the mayor's mansion complex. The root house was surrounded by a flower garden, adding to its serene atmosphere. Upon entering, they were greeted by an interior similar to the main mansion. The maids dispersed to their respective posts inside the house, ensuring everything was in order. Aldrian and Eleine chose rooms on the second floor for themselves, and for obvious reasons, Eleine chose the room beside Aldrian's.

Looking inside the luxurious bedroom with its bathroom and veranda, Aldrian immediately lay down on the bed when he saw it. He felt he needed to rest and relax after the long journey, he could enjoy Balin later. He then closed his eyes to rest his mind.

The sun dove to the horizon in the west, giving Balin City a beautiful scene, but one person couldn't enjoy it because his eyes were still closed. When he opened his eyes, it was already dark outside, and the moon was shining beautifully in the sky. Aldrian felt his senses sharpen and his entire being more powerful. He looked at the screen to see the change.

Integrating with the world tree of Balin City....100%

The world tree of Balin city is your domain

Aldrian Aster

Domain : The secret realm and Balin city

Age : 12 years

Cultivation : High Viscount

Current energy : 253,190 (+1.4/15m)

Energy needed for the next stage : 270,001

Seeing his information, he felt satisfied that he could become stronger faster. Now that he was inside his domain, he felt more powerful than ever, as if his two domains were connected, amplifying his power. Although he still didn't know the exact reason for the world tree's reaction, it was enough for now. He could feel his other domain from here and focused on his secret realm domain, noticing a change.

"The secret realm domain has broken through space and is now in the outside world." he realized, sensing that the secret realm domain had a diameter of 500 meters from the cave he came from.

"Wait, if I can comprehend space and time enough, I can create a teleportation technique to my other domain." he thought seriously, considering its potential usefulness for the future.

"But now maybe I can enjoy this city first." Even though it was already dark, a big city like Balin would come alive with another wave of activity. The city never rested, always offering something for visitors and denizens. Aldrian got up from his bed, cleaned himself, and wore a new set of clothes from his storage ring.

"I need to buy new clothes. I don't have formal attire for meeting someone like the mayor or even the imperial family."

The clothes he had worn since birth were all made by his mother. She used any material available to make his clothes, and the results were never disappointing. He treasured those clothes, but now they were starting to feel too tight, and he needed something suitable for formal occasions.

He came out of his room and knocked on Eleine's door. She emerged wearing an elegant knee-length black dress, already in her disguise. He asked if she wanted to come along, to which she replied firmly, "Of course, young master."

They walked outside the mansion after informing the maids that they would return after their night walk.

The streetlights, made from some kind of illuminating crystal, lit up the roads of Balin City. They came in various sizes, adjusted for their specific functions. People walked in various places, each attending to their own business. Some were merchants, others were drinking and eating in taverns, while some were simply enjoying the night view, adding to the city's festive atmosphere.

Aldrian walked with Eleine by his side on one of the main roads, observing the hustle and bustle around them. The paved road in the middle allowed carriages to pass, while pedestrian paths on each side provided easier access for passersby. The street was full of people from various races, such as dwarves, humans, elves, and even humanoid beasts—a common sight in Balin City. Aldrian was in awe, amazed by the diversity. His plain clothes made him look like a country bumpkin, prompting some people to giggle and mock at his direction, even with his handsome disguise.

Aldrian then visited a clothing store to buy new clothes for himself and Eleine. At first, she refused, but in the end, she complied with her young master's insistence. They bought many clothes, leaving the owner satisfied. Aldrian now wore an elegant white long-sleeved shirt and black trousers, while Eleine still wore her black dress. They continued to walk until they arrived at the night market, the place where commerce activities were most bustling.

Located in the commerce district, it was where one could find various items such as artifacts, pills, techniques, and other supporting tools for cultivation and other fields of work. Aldrian looked at the various items but found nothing interesting until he noticed a green leaf falling right in front of his feet. When he looked at this leaf, he felt an enormous energy that shouldn't have been there.

He picked it up and looked at it intently.

"What kind of leaf is this?"

Eleine also looked at the leaf with curiosity, but because her senses were not as sharp as Aldrian's, especially inside his domain, she couldn't detect the energy within it. Aldrian felt a connection to the leaf and concentrated his focus on it. Suddenly, his entire being was transported to another place.

This place was a vast grassland mixed with many kinds of flowers. The sky was a dark blue, as if bordering outer space, with no moon or sun in sight. When he looked behind him, he was surprised by the sight of a giant tree. The tree was so huge and tall that its top seemed to pierce the heavens and was out of sight.

When he looked back down, he was stunned by the appearance of a woman looking at him, she was so close that he could describe every feature of her body in detail. She was so beautiful that he had to admit she was the most beautiful woman he had ever seen, even surpassing his mother. She wore a green dress that reached her knees, her pointy ears resembled those of an elf, her long legs were inviting to the opposite sex and her beautiful blue eyes that captivated him. At this moment, those eyes were moist with tears.

"Tears?" he wondered. He didn't know why the woman in front of him was crying, but he saw her move her lips. He couldn't hear her voice, but he could read her lips. Although he didn't understand her language from her lip movements, strangely enough, he understood what she was saying.

Suddenly, the woman in front of him kowtowed to him, and before he knew it, Aldrian was back at the night market. He was still holding the leaf and looked at it for a moment, confused by what had just happened. He asked Eleine,

"How long have I been holding this leaf?"

"No more than 10 seconds, young master." Eleine answered. She was confused as to why Aldrian asked something like that, but she let it slide because she was used to his bizarre actions.

Aldrian then put the leaf inside his storage ring and continued his night walk. However, he still remembered his vision and the woman's lips movement. She had said,

"Welcome back."

Chapter 17 - One of His Karma

A few minutes ago,

In the capital of the Ivory empire, Evergreen city, the center of the Ivory Imperial Family's governance, the heart of the Elves' empire and the most important city in the

empire. The city was more 'pure' than Balin City, with only a few brick structures visible. Most elves in this city were more conservative and disliked the idea of mixing nature with human culture.

Almost all buildings in this city adhered to a zero-human-culture policy. Despite the absence of luxurious human standards, the buildings were still elegant and neatly arranged. At the center of the city stood the imperial palace, located under a giant world tree even bigger and taller than the one in Balin.

At this moment, in the throne hall, many high-ranking nobles were gathered. From the ugly looks on their faces, it was clear they had been debating something for a long time.

"No, we still do not approve of his entrance!"

"What are you waiting for?! The imperial teacher himself guarantees that he is likely the one the spirit has been waiting for!"

"But still, we are not 100% sure about this human."

"Are you doubting the imperial teacher's judgment?"

"Don't twist my words!"

Each group had its own arguments and showed no signs of backing down. The elf sitting on the throne listened to their banter with an unamused expression, feeling increasingly annoyed.

"I'm also leaning towards Grand Duke Sylvaris' faction, but Grand Duke Maelis' faction also has valid points." he thought. The topic of their debate was crucial as it concerned their secrets and what they were about to do had never been done before.

The emperor of the Ivory Empire, Ladwin Evergreen, as their race leader, was the decision-maker. He didn't want to endanger his people because of a wrong decision. However, he trusted the imperial teacher who had just returned from Balin not long ago and was now standing behind him, watching the commotion.

"It will be tough to convince the conservative faction. From the looks of it, we need to bring 'him' here so they can see for themselves." the same man, who had acted as a butler when Aldrian met him in Balin, sent a voice transmission to the emperor.

"Yes, that should be the best for now, but we have to be careful of the extremists within the conservative side." Ladwin answered while still looking at the two groups. The group on his right was the liberal faction, led by Grand Duke Sylvaris.

The elf who had interrogated Aldrian in Balin stood closer to the emperor in silence. On the left side was the conservative faction, led by Grand Duke Maelis, an elf with a scar

under his left eye and a stoic expression. They only stared at each other while the nobles under them continued arguing.

"I don't doubt the imperial teacher's judgment about that human, but we need to ensure he is trustworthy enough to enter the 'Shrine of the Heavenly Tree.' We are talking about our holy place, which has never been stepped on by another race before," Grand Duke Maelis said.

"When the imperial teacher gave his evaluation about that human, I believed him. When I met him in person, I could feel something different from him, something hard to explain but inspiring reverence. I'm sure you will feel the same if you meet him," Grand Duke Sylvaris replied.

"Let's see if that is the case."

Their factions' debate continued for a few more moments until finally, Ladwin released his aura. The aura of a High Emperor stage made the atmosphere tense, and the entire hall fell silent.

"After listening to all of you, I acknowledge that you all have points worth considering regarding this issue. I have come to my decision: the human named Aldrian Aster will be brought to the capital so we can assess him ourselves. Grand Duke Maelis will also have the chance to assess him to ensure that Aldrian is trustworthy enough to enter our holy place."

Some of the nobles who heard the emperor's decision were quite displeased, especially those in the conservative faction. They believed that the holy place for elves should not be stepped in by outsiders at any cost, even if it was said to determine their future.

They thought it was blasphemy against the Heavenly Tree of the world and feared the emperor's decision would bring a curse upon the elves. Their only hope now was to ensure the human failed the assessment. As they collectively devised their plan, the entire palace suddenly trembled for a moment before stopping.

"What is that?! Is the palace under attack?!"

"On your guard!"

The entire palace panicked due to the sudden tremor, and not only the imperial palace but the entire capital felt it. Every living being in the capital fell into confusion and rushed out from their buildings. Emperor Ladwin and Imperial Teacher Elthar also rushed outside the palace to check, accompanied by imperial guards protecting the emperor.

"Father, what is going on? What caused the sudden tremor?" a beautiful elf in her gown asked as she rushed to Emperor Ladwin.

"Sylphia, go back to your room. Let the others check the situation first."

Outside the palace, Ladwin spread his senses across the entire capital with the support of the capital's world tree blessing, but he found something strange with the world tree.

"This—"

Suddenly, a voice, a beautiful voice, began speaking, but only a few could understand the language.

"This is...this is spirit language!" Emperor Ladwin exclaimed.

The voice formed a symphony and sang a song that no one had ever heard before. Emperor Ladwin looked at Elthar before sending a transmission.

"The voice of the world tree's spirit! And the content of the song is to welcome the return of someone or something!"

Their faces turned solemn as the entire capital listened to the song and the beautiful voice singing it. Unbeknownst to them, this phenomenon was not only happening in the capital but across the entire Ivory Empire, specifically at the world trees in each city, except the world tree in Balin city. The denizens of the Ivory Empire were left confused this night, and it would cause a sensation and rumors throughout the entire continent.

Aldrian's steps never stopped, but his pace was slow. He kept walking aimlessly, letting his feet lead him wherever they wished. After the vision he had not long ago, he felt a familiar sensation with the scenery and the woman, so he tried to contemplate what he had seen.

"Who is she? Welcome back? Me?" He kept walking, ignoring the surrounding people. Their voices blurred and grew smaller with each passing moment as his mind repeatedly replayed the vision of the woman until he stopped in the middle of a quiet road. There weren't many people passing through, and the activity here was minimal. Aldrian took out the leaf to look at it and then closed his eyes, trying to comprehend and sense the karma between him and the leaf.

He relaxed his mind, allowing his feelings to guide him toward the string of karma—the feeling of closeness between him and the woman, or even to that place. Before long, he saw a blurry string, so small that he would miss it if he lost concentration.

He saw the white string, which he thought represented his karma. It should have been impossible to see karma, even for someone who comprehended it. At most, people who comprehended karma could only sense its presence, not see its physical shape. He

followed the string. First, it connected to the Balin world tree, then it branched into two, three, and kept increasing beyond his domain.

"It's impossible for me right now, the karma is connected to so many things and is also too far away. I need to deepen my comprehension of karma and my connection to this leaf."

He opened his eyes and continued walking. While walking, he tried to adapt to his new domain to deepen his connection with the Balin world tree as the center of his second domain. He could sense the entire city and tried to feel each person individually, but—

"It's still too much for me to sense in such small details." He tried to implement the principle '*There is nothing that can escape my view, there is nothing that can escape my sense.*' but with more than 160 million people, it was overwhelming. It was different from his first domain, which had no more than sixty people.

"While scanning the entire city just now, I felt a few strange aura. The closest one is a kilometer from here in that direction." He looked in a particular direction.

At one of the buildings in Balin, a few cloaked figures gathered in a dark room. They surrounded a small circular altar with a red symbol in the middle and pouring their energy into it. The altar began to shine with a red light before a person appeared on it.

"Welcome to Balin. Let's move quickly and stop the summoning for now. Don't let the elves catch wind of our presence."

The newcomer only nodded, followed by the others. They covered the altar with more formation before leaving the building and dispersing, leaving no trace behind.

Chapter 18 - First Encounter

The dark alley was devoid of any passersby, giving Aldrian a desolate impression upon his arrival. He sensed a different kind of energy, even though it was minuscule. Walking toward the source of the energy, still followed by Eleine, he finally stopped at the quiet and dark alley, devoid of activity. Eleine also stopped beside him, feeling a strange sensation in the area. She looked around but saw nothing unusual, only the lack of activity. Aldrian then looked at a door on one of the buildings, where he felt a strange, sinister aura, and decided to investigate.

"Eleine, I feel a strange aura over there. It's sinister but also not at the same time. Let's go check it out." Aldrian said.

Eleine furrowed her brows upon hearing her young master. "Are you sure, young master?" Eleine couldn't sense Aldrian spreading his sense, but she didn't know that inside his domain, Aldrian didn't need to use his 'normal' senses.

"Yes, and it's only a residue left by someone."

"Don't you think it would be better to report it to the city guards? We don't need to involve ourselves in unnecessary trouble."

"You might be right, but since we're already here, shouldn't we at least see the situation first? Also, the energy is almost gone, and by the time the guards arrive, there might be no evidence left." Aldrian said.

Eleine looked at the door he mentioned and spread her sense towards it a few times, but she couldn't feel anything abnormal. She trusted Aldrian and nodded her head. She took out double daggers from her storage ring and readied herself for any sudden changes. They walked toward the door, and Aldrian tried to knock, but there was no answer from inside. He looked down at the doorknob.

"There's some kind of formation." Aldrian said, examining it.

"Please let me see, young master." Eleine examined it for a moment and was stunned.

"This is... it can't be!" Eleine's body trembled.

"It's one of the formations from the devils! It's a little altered from the original, but I'm sure it's the structure formation that the devils sometimes use!" Eleine found it unbelievable. How did the devils reach Balin City?! With those checkpoints and surveillance, how could the devils reach inside this city undetected?

Aldrian was also surprised and looked at the formation intently.

"This formation can send a signal to the formation maker if someone breaks the formation or, in this case, opens the door." Eleine said. Aldrian kept his focus on the structure of the formation, trying to comprehend it. He tried to remember every detail, every crook, and cranny of this little formation and decipher the process of making it.

He had never really learned about formations, but with this small formation, it was enough for him to try various ways to use this kind of devils' formation if he could decipher it. His mind was working at a very fast speed, doubled with his advantage in his domain, making his senses much more accurate.

He simulated in his head how this formation was made, even trying to use his comprehension of time to see how the formation was created. After a few moments, he touched the formation.

"Be careful, young master." Eleine worried if there was another trap placed by the devils. But not long after—

Click.

The formation opened in some parts. Eleine was surprised by her young master's actions; the formation itself was not broken but opened as if the one who made it had opened it.

"He can decipher the formation that he saw for the first time!" She once again noted how absurd his talent was.

They entered the house and met a dark room. Eleine heightened her senses and circulated her energy, preparing to unleash her technique. Aldrian, who had already sensed the entire building, didn't feel any presence, so they kept walking and checking every room they passed. Strangely, they couldn't find any oddity since they entered the house until they reached the last room, and Aldrian found something.

"The energy around here is distorted and flows toward this direction," Aldrian pointed out inside the room. But when Eleine looked inside, she only saw an empty room. He then used his energy to disrupt the energy flow and make the space wobbly. They were surprised that after the wobbly space disappeared, they could see a kind of circular artifact with diameter of 1 meter and some symbols on it.

"Illusion formation!" Eleine exclaimed, realizing she had been deceived by the formation. She wouldn't have noticed if not for Aldrian.

"No wonder this level of formation is enough to delude the senses of a duke-stage cultivator. This formation also masks the devil energy so that everyone who passes through this alley will not realize it." she said. And also—

"That is the devils teleportation artifact!" Eleine, who hailed from the Rivas family, which bordered Devils' territory and had engaged in battles with them, recognized the artifact immediately. It could teleports devils from different places instantly by using their energy. She remembered encountering similar artifact in previous clashes.

"Now with this, it's confirmed that the devils have already infiltrated Balin City, and their purpose is unknown." Eleine's face turned solemn; they needed to report this to the city guards and mayor to take precautions. Aldrian looked at the artifact, and as usual, he tried to decipher it, learning the concept and how it worked. He found several energy sources within it and observed the accumulation of energy and the artifact's concept.

The energies and the concept intertwined, forming one of the laws of the universe—specifically, this artifact contained space laws. The laws of the universe varied, depending on the cultivator's comprehension and their concept. Thus, even if two

people comprehended the same laws, like space laws, they would have different understandings and potentially different concepts for their usage.

He of course already comprehend his own laws and incorporate it to some of his techniques but never had a chance to used it in practical manner only in his training. Aldrian, who could grasp everything easier within his domain, quickly comprehended the space laws of this artifact.

"The concept this artifact uses is to move things through folds in space using the cultivator's energy. The greater the energy, the stronger the connection between two places, allowing the teleporting of stronger individuals or items."

Having grasped the laws of the artifact, Aldrian now tried to check the karma of the artifact. A few moments later, he found a white string connecting to several places within the city.

"They are either the ones who got teleported or the one who operated it, or at least someone connected to this artifact." Aldrian sensed many presences connected to the artifact, scattered throughout the city.

"It's not long since this artifact was used, maybe an hour ago." Aldrian said.

"Then they have already blended into the crowd. It will be difficult to force them out," Eleine gritted her teeth.

"Not necessarily. I can still feel their presence and connection from this artifact."

"Then we need to at least capture one of them as evidence that the devils have infiltrated Balin."

Aldrian nodded, sensing the closest presence was in a tavern beside the main road.

"It will cause panic if we catch them in a place full of people. They might also kill innocents if they are agitated." Despite this, Aldrian wasn't discouraged, he had many cards he could play to catch the devils.

"Let's go before they move further away." Aldrian said. They then dashed outside, moving swiftly toward one of the main roads in Balin.

Inside one of the tavern, six people in black cloaks sat and ate as if nothing was unusual. Many saw them, but there was nothing strange, so they only thought that this group of people were just some human cultivators. They weren't hiding their faces, so everyone could see they were human.

"How is the food? Is it good?" one of them asked. He had a middle-aged face and a black mustache.

"It's good," answered another, with a young and sleek face.

"The preparations can be hastened. At this rate, in Five years at most, we can deal a heavy blow to the Ivory Empire," the middle-aged man sent a voice transmission to the younger man.

"No worries, I'm here to ensure the preparations move smoothly."

They continued eating and talking when a couple entered the tavern. One was a young man with black hair and a handsome face, and the other was a black-haired woman. They walked in like usual visitors, but the man glanced at the group before looking away.

"Found you."

Chapter 19 - First Battle 1

Aldrian and Eleine picked their table and ordered their food while still monitoring the group's movements. Aldrian maintained a calm facade, but inside he was thinking and calculating.

"Two high Earl stage, three low Marquess, and one middle Marquess. That's quite a formidable group over there." The lineup of this group worried him. Not because of how he would face them, but because of their actual intent in infiltrating the Ivory Empire with such a force.

"They are too strong for us, young master! I think we need to report it to the city guard in the end." Eleine sent him via transmission.

"It will be a hassle to convince them for now. We can't just point out some people without clear evidence. Our biggest evidence now is the teleportation artifact, and as for the devils, they have truly covered themselves well. Even we cannot feel their devil energy from here." Aldrian replied to Eleine.

"If the others who infiltrate Balin are this strong, then they are planning something big! And that's just from one artifact that I can look into its karma." Aldrian thought to himself. From one artifact, he could see thousands of branches stemming from it. The energy from the artifact could teleport a Duke stage cultivator.

"If a Duke stage cultivator successfully infiltrates, then the situation is more dire than we can imagine." he frowned.

"Well, let's move one step at a time." he looked at Eleine. "Do you trust me, Eleine?" he asked through transmission, and Eleine looked at him.

"Of course I do, young master." she answered.

"Let me take care of all the Marquess, and you can handle the Earls. Can you do that?" Eleine widened her eyes.

"Young master, please reconsider your decision—" Eleine stopped her sentence when she saw his serious expression and determined eyes.

"Those eyes." Eleine thought, seeing the eyes full of authority that made her unable to refute his decision. It stemmed from her instinct and soul that she had to follow his plan. She lowered her head and sighed, then looked at Aldrian again.

"It's quite tough, but I believe I can hold them, young master."

she answered.

Aldrian smiled and sensed the entire kilometer around him, trying to plan his next move.

"There are too many people in this area, so it leaves us with a few choices. First, we wait for the right moment. Second, we create the right moment." he said.

"How do we create the right moment?" Eleine asked.

"I just need to move them to a place where we can fight them while they are caught off guard."

"How?! Don't tell me you just want to teleport us all!"

Aldrian smiled.

"Get ready. There is an open field outside the city. Once we arrive there, you have to attack the Earls instantly. Don't hold back." The range of his second domain extended more than inside the city walls, reaching a kilometer outside the wall and expanding each hour. Eleine wanted to pull her hair out because of his willfulness and her lack of understanding of his actions.

"On my mark..."

He circulated his energy and tried to implement his theory after his comprehension of the space laws of the artifact. However, his technique was more advanced and complicated than the artifact's formation. He locked his energy onto the six people and Eleine, tying their bodies to his. He then locked his energy on the field and created an "exit" for them.

"NOW!"

He instantly pulled them into the folded space he created and placed them on the field outside the western city wall. All of this happened very quickly, not more than a split second, and before they knew it, they were already on the field outside the city wall. The group of six people and Eleine were stunned, but not for long. Eleine instantly unleashed her technique and dashed into the group of six.

"Ice needle." Thousands of needles made from ice launched at very high speed toward the two Earl stage cultivators.

"What the—" The group, caught off guard when they were instantly moved outside, was shocked by the sudden attack. Before they knew it, two of them were already injured before Eleine slashed at them with her daggers. One of them had his head separated from his body, but before her dagger could reach the second person, a barrier suddenly erected before him.

Tack

The dagger couldn't penetrate the barrier and slightly bounced off.

"Defense talisman!" she thought. She continued her attack, focusing on him while the four Marquesses were placed 500 meters away.

The four Marquesses were already in a wary stance, but when they looked at the person in front of them, they were stunned.

"High Viscount stage?"

"I thought some big shots attacked us."

"What the hell is a mere Viscount stage doing here?"

Aldrian looked at the four of them and thought to himself.

"Still not enough." He wanted to test his full ability inside his domain, but he didn't feel the pressure.

"Maybe I need a Duke cultivator?" he kept thinking as he stared at one of them, the highest cultivation here. This one looked different from the others who underestimated him; he was still in his stance and looked at Aldrian warily.

"Who are you?" he asked. Aldrian then looked at his information again.

Arion Larv

Age : 10.450 years

Race : Human

Cultivation : Middle Marquess

Cultivation technique : The Curse of The Devil God

Attack techniques : The devil god's wrath, The last shadow, Devil abyss, Hell's shadow.

Defence technique

: Devil form

Movementtechnique : Shadow step

Supporting technique: Devil form

He looked at the person, whose youthful face contrasted sharply with his age. There were no signs that he was a devil cultivator; he looked just like a normal cultivator. Aldrian remained calm when suddenly one of the Marquesses attacked him without warning with blue fire. The fire, full of devil energy and powerful enough to obliterate a peak Earl stage, was momentarily stared at before Aldrian moved his energy to create a spatial crack in front of the attack. The fire fell into the crack, and another spatial crack appeared in front of the four Marquesses.

"Watch out!" the devil named Arion screamed. They did not expect the attack to be redirected to them like that by a Viscount stage cultivator! However, they were experienced Marquesses, so they quickly created a defense barrier. But when the attack touched their barrier—

Boom

The barrier broke, and a spatial crack slithered like a snake at instant speed toward them. They did not expect the barrier to break and the redirected attack to be more powerful than the original! It was an attack strong enough to kill a low Marquess and heavily injure a middle Marquess like Arion. The crack sliced toward one of the low Marquesses, cutting off his legs and immobilizing him, while another low Marquess was decapitated, ending his life.

"He can use spatial energy and space laws!" Arion said.

"Fuck! What is he?! There is no way he is just a Viscount! I'm afraid he is already a Duke!" the last low Marquess exclaimed.

"I will use Devil Form! We need to tell the others that we have been compromised! You return to the city to call for reinforcements!" Arion ordered. The devil energy inside his body churned and expanded, creating a suffocating aura around him. His body suddenly transformed, becoming bigger and bulkier. His eyes turned black, his skin turned red, and two protruding horns appeared on his forehead. His cultivation also rose by one minor level.

This was Devil Form, the last trump card of devil cultivators, but it had side effects. Their bodies, pushed to contain their sudden power-up, would be damaged, not only physically but also in their dantian, which acted as their energy container. The worst-case scenario was becoming crippled and unable to cultivate ever again if they didn't have strong bodies, while the least was that their cultivation potential would be affected in the future.

Aldrian observed the change, noting that Arion's appearance was now twice and a half his own height.

"So that is Devil Form. What an ominous aura and energy." he thought. He saw that the other devil was trying to run to the city while Arion stayed behind to hold him off.

"What an honorable intent."

But as the other devil dashed back to the city, the devils noticed something strange.

"Call for reinforcements? I'm afraid you can't do that." The devils were stunned and looked around before realizing what had happened.

"Barrier!"

Before they had arrived, Aldrian had already erected a transparent barrier with a diameter of one kilometer around their location.

"The strength of the barrier is enough to withstand a full attack from a Middle Duke! It can also block aura and energy from inside." Arion felt a chill from the strength he sensed from the barrier, but he didn't know the true complexity of the barrier and how Aldrian had made it.

"Hmm, the barrier's sturdiness is good, even though I created it in a rush when I sensed this place. With the illusion formation mixed into the barrier, anyone looking will see nothing except the usual scenery of the field." In other words, Aldrian had built this barrier from his seat when they were still in the tavern! With the power of his domain, he

could just put his energy anywhere and create something like unleashing techniques or formations wherever he wanted inside his domain. Suddenly, a line came to his mind,

"There is nothing that can escape my will.' Is this also a part of it?" He could imagine the potential of this power. For example, if he had an illusion technique, he could cast it wherever he wanted, on whoever he wanted, inside his domain, even when he was in bed. Or he could trap someone with his technique while taking a bath. He could kill someone while just sitting and eating. He saw many applications for this power in the future, and his imagination already formed many scenarios, but he stopped when he looked at the devils' ugly faces.

"I'm sorry for the wait. Let's continue, shall we?" Aldrian said with a smile.

Chapter 20 - First Battle 2

Clang, clang

The daggers and hands clashed against each other, leaving the ground around them riddled with holes from their fierce battle. One slim figure danced, dodging many attacks from the huge figure in front of her. The last earl-stage devil had already assumed his devil form, making it difficult for Eleine to evade his attacks. Even though she had used one of the secret techniques of the Rivas family to temporarily increase her power, her enemy was a devil who was already stronger in the same realm, and now he was even more formidable in his devil form.

Eleine was a genius picked up by the Rivas family as Irene's retainer and one of her 'hands' to support her in both daily activities and battles against enemies. She could fight opponents with higher cultivation levels than her own, having been trained for such encounters. But battling a stronger devil in his devil form was still a bit too much for her. A single mishap could cost her her life.

Sweat dripped from her pretty face as she unleashed a few techniques, her energy depleting with every passing second of the battle, raising the danger she was in. Strangely, even though the devil had the upper hand, his face looked tense.

"I need to get to the city, but this woman is a real pain in the ass. And that man—Viscount stage? Even if you kill me, I don't believe it!"

The devil thought about the man's skills, marveling at how seamlessly he utilized them, as if performing daily activities. He believed the man was at least at Duke stage cultivation, and a strong one at that.

"I need to figure out how to get out of here, or we'll be dead at this point!"

Eleine rushed to attack again with extreme agility, always dodging the devil's huge attacks by the smallest margins.

"I have to end this fast to help the young master." She glanced at Aldrian to check on his situation, but what she saw made her jaw drop. That split-second loss of concentration did not go unnoticed by the devil, who tried to deliver a fatal blow to her. Eleine, surprised for a moment, realized her mistake and hastily raised her defense with Water Wall to reduce the impact. However, before the devil's strike could touch her defense, a swooshing sound was heard, and the devil's head separated from his body, dropping dead in front of her.

Eleine stopped her defense technique and stared at the corpse for a moment before looking at Aldrian again.

"That was wind shaped like a blade." she thought. She could feel the power of that blade, strong enough to kill even a low Marquess stage opponent, so the result was decided the moment it touched the earl stage devil's neck.

When she saw four marquesses not moving—two dead, one immobilized, and the strongest on his knees with his arms chopped off in front of Aldrian—she knew that her young master had won with a tremendous gap in strength between them. Despite this, his handsome face remained calm and relaxed, without a drop of sweat, as if facing four Marquess stage cultivators while still at Viscount stage was no big deal. She hadn't realized Aldrian was this strong, and this display of power made her reassess her perception of his strength, unsure of his limits.

Aldrian looked at Arion, who was on his knees and back to his normal form, with a deadpan expression, his arms severed from the shoulders. He had sealed the devil's cultivation by blocking the dantian with his energy, making them unable to gather or release any energy, essentially rendering them like ordinary humans.

"I don't feel any sort of emotion, even after killing someone, even if that someone is a devil." he tried to evaluate himself. The experiences he had inside those visions over the years had truly changed his way of thinking and personality. He remained calm when facing strong opponents, or what might be considered strong by others, but he still did not feel trepidation. The way he faced something new was also strange because he felt he already knew about some of these things. He then looked at the screen displaying his information.

Aldrian Aster

Domain : The secret realm and Balin city

Age : 12 years

Cultivation : High Viscount

Current energy : 253,234 (+1.4/15m)

Energy needed for the next stage : 270,001

"As usual, my energy is not depleted after a few uses. As long as I'm inside my domain, I will never run out of energy" he thought. He then looked at Arion.

"I can experiment on him and the others for some of my technique theories." He glanced at the dead bodies, or rather, the things that had come out of their bodies a while ago and disappeared. "What are those things? They are so soft and fragile." Those things had emerged after he killed them.

"Their souls?" he thought.

"Are they returning to the underworld to reincarnate or something?"

There were a few new things for him to comprehend, so he looked at Eleine and said, "Eleine, I will teleport you back to the mayor's mansion. Report this to the mayor if you can meet him. Tell him about the teleportation artifact and bring just a small number of people to that place. Don't make the other devils who are already in the city suspicious."

"What about you, young master?" Eleine asked.

"I will stay here for a little while. I will be in that house with the devils' bodies before you arrive with the mayor's people."

Eleine nodded and suddenly disappeared, teleported by him. Aldrian had teleported her not far from the mayor's mansion to prevent confusion among the mayor's staff. Left alone, Aldrian looked at Arion.

"You see, I was quite surprised when I first met you all. I thought the devils would have difficulty maintaining their sanity with the way you cultivate, but from the looks of it, you guys are just fine. Can you tell me more about yourselves?"

Arion remained silent, but his eyes were resolute before he grinned. "Just kill me."

"That won't do, I still need you for my experiments. Let's see." Aldrian closed his eyes and touched Arion's forehead.

"First, let's see if my memory search technique works." But when he tried to access his memory, he found something inside Arion's brain, more precisely in the memory part of the brain. "A seal formation?" Aldrian carefully sensed the seal and tried to examine it.

"Hmm, quite a complex seal, but it still has little weaknesses in some parts. Let's see how to open it. Move this here...like this—" Aldrian continued deciphering the seal formation for two minutes until he successfully broke it. Without waiting any longer, he inserted his energy into Arion's memory part of the brain and dived into his memories as if he were Arion himself. Arion trembled as something invaded his brain.

"He broke the seal!" Arion wanted to scream but couldn't. The seal in his brain was a preventive measure against information leaks. When forcibly broken, it would destroy the host's brain and soul, ensuring secrecy. Yet, this man had broken the seal without triggering the deadly failsafe, which baffled him.

A few minutes later, Aldrian opened his eyes, frowning. *"Arion's memories are quite useful but still ambiguous. They plan to continue infiltrating for three years at most, after which the operation to attack the Ivory Empire will commence. The specific date will be announced later. So, they're infiltrating this place without a specific mission, just to gather as many forces as possible over the next three years."* He looked at Arion. *"Also, this guy is under the command of the Wrath Devil, one of the seven great devils."*

One of the great devils, the Devil of Wrath, cultivated the negative energy of wrath within living beings. Despite this, Aldrian just smiled.

"Looks like I will have a bothersome enemy, but I hope his power doesn't disappoint me." He then moved on to the next experiment.

"Next, the technique I created to read others minds and intent." Aldrian moved a few meters away and locked his energy onto Arion.

"To read one's mind and intent, I have to infiltrate their heart and brain. The simplest way is to use something inside the target as the medium, which is their own energy. The entire body of a being flows with energy. I can slip my own energy using my senses into their body, but the weakness is that if the target can protect their entire body, I can't read them." he thought. *"The more complex method involves using a combination of my senses, energy, and karma. I can force a connection with the target to read their mind and intent using a karma string."*

He tried to implement his theories, and the results were as he expected: satisfying.

"Oh, you feel rage and want to commit suicide to bring me down if possible? It's a pity, but your dantian is under my control. What can you do?"

Sometimes, a cultivator can make a desperate move by exploding their dantian. The explosion of condensed energy in the dantian of a high-level cultivator like a marquess cannot be underestimated, it can blow up everything within a 100-kilometer radius. It can kill cultivators of the same realm and severely injure stronger ones if they are not prepared.

Aldrian then shifted his focus to the immobilized marquess, giving him the same treatment as Arion, with more or less similar results.

"There are already more than 1.030.290 devil cultivators who have infiltrated Balin, and some of them are at the duke stage. Many are under the command of different great devils." he thought.

"Well, let's return first. Eleine has already brought some people to the teleportation artifact." He sensed her on her way. He instantly teleported all the bodies back, leaving only the aftermath of the battle, and followed soon after.

The barrier opened, and silence returned to the field, which had become a silent witness to Aldrian's first battle.